

# **Elisa Asenbaum: Dream figures in philosophical crises**

Excerpts from the review by Julia Grillmayr, Der Standard, 2017-04-21

## **The story “AUGUSTINAselbst” tackles great scientific concepts in a humorous way**

In the school of thinking which quite generally is called Western, the first step if one wants to investigate a thing or phenomenon is to divide it into small and ever smaller parts. This analytical approach is deeply anchored in our concept of science, but is by no means undisputed – not least because it also presupposes a certain rigidity of the object of investigation.

AUGUSTINAselbst partly questions the strategy of analytical dismembering. The story around the protagonist Augustina is a literary-philosophical investigation of identity and entity; with the relationship between consciousness and subconsciousness, dream and reality, subject and object, between the self and its environment. AUGUSTINAselbst is the literary debut of the Berlin and Vienna based artist Elisa Asenbaum.

## **Play with concepts**

Asenbaum calls her story a play with concepts. To achieve this, she goes back in the history of philosophy; next to atomism, she was especially inspired by Zeno's arrow paradox: the distance a flying arrow covers between A and B can always be divided by half – however, the apparently logical thought experiment results in the arrow never actually reaching B.

For her philosophical discussions the artist chooses a location which has always eluded logics: the world of dream. The book's first part recounts in alternating chapters what Augustina, a parking enforcement officer, experiences during her waking and sleeping hours.

The dream world is “alive, is animal vegetable mountainous spiritual oceanic, material and unconditional in one, subject to constant change, therefore there are no primary fixations”, as the dream figures Iris and Auris explain.

There is no trusting in unity of place and time, not to speak of fixed identities, shapes, and roles of the dream protagonists. On the other hand, from the perspective of the dreamer it is not easy at all to describe the laws, rules, and mechanisms of the rational waking world.

## **Dream worlds**

The book's second part consists of a long dream of Augustina's which is becoming increasingly lucid; she gains consciousness via her situation as a dreamer. However, it can be dangerous if the real world breaks into the dream world, resulting in “causal chains and concatenations that are hard to resolve again”. With the help of Iris and Auris Augustina tries to free her dreams again from causality and logic. Ironically, the cure temporarily is effected through quantum physical experiments which completely confound not only the lucid dreamer but also her dream counterparts.

In the story Augustina's dreams are presented as witty, abstruse stories which, though, always remain communicable. Asenbaum finds a fitting voice for the madness of dreaming, consisting of everyday motifs taking on absurd forms, being placed in strange locations, or charging up with unintentional eroticism.

### **Hypertext**

[currently only available in German]

Several terms and motifs of the narration refer to concrete philosophical ideas, physical experiments and mathematical theorems – sometimes in an explicit way, sometimes more covertly. The reader wanting to get more in-depth information is referred to the “contextual traces on the web”. These contain a map of the story which also is printed on the cover and centrefold of the book, but really unfolds its potential as hypertext on the website provided. This, while not imperative in order to enjoy reading *AUGUSTINAselbst*, provides an insight into the complex discourse embedded in the story.