

Ursula Frohne / Christian Katti in *Baltic Drift*, published by the GAK-Satellit, Bremen, 5/2006

In her video projections Astrid Nippoldt confronts the “reality of experience” within the media landscape of our world. While the general public was following the presidential elections over satellite TV, the artist directed her view from within her studio during a fellowship in Paris to the Webcam-documentation of Mount St. Helen at the west coast of the American continent. These images, received from the Internet, developed a remarkable melancholy in anticipation of the predicted volcano eruption. This effect might take us by surprise as such a sublime intensity of images is commonly rather attributed to paintings of the passed centuries than to the live-feed media impressions coming from the Internet. It is characteristic for Astrid Nippoldt’s appropriative strategies that she succeeds to extract an unexpectedly aesthetic dimension from the functional optics of operative and technologically produced images – in this case from surveillance camera shots. In contrast to this she uses most suggestive editing techniques that obscure the origin of the images. By means of zoom, slow motion, and acoustic modulations, she accentuates the inherent strangeness of a world-view brought about by filmic images to reveal the denied entropy of their reality content. Her work “Concorde” shows how also actual events and locations transform in the camera perspective. It records the stands and “media architectures” installed for the celebration of the national holiday at the Place de la Concorde on July 14, revealing their sham-like artificiality as a spectacle staged for the media in the first place.

The “reality of experience” via media images of different origin and quality is playfully contested in these analytical and likewise poetical works. At the same time they are transformed into expanded moments of an almost epic and sometimes ironical-romantic intensity. Sound elements from commercial movie genres like Westerner, thrillers or general suspense, seduce the viewer to search for a narrative meaning in Nippoldt's editing. Whereas the visual scale leaning towards abstraction denies such concrete references, the acoustic dimension emphatically motivates these references and pushes for a recognition of the stereotypical interpretation patterns conditioned by the cinema experience. These methods of a sometimes concealing pretence and then again revealing dis-illusion of the supposed immediacy of images confirms the illusionary character, but also the magic of medial appearances.

“What urges us to go east on desert roads?” – Annemarie Schwarzenbach

Art often operates as a translation medium between cultural common grounds and peculiarities. Images function like a lingua franca, favoring the exchange of ideas and concepts across cultural and linguistic borders. Particularly in times of political change, art and artists have acquired the role of cultural ambassadors, making blind spots in the mutual outlook visible, respectively developing new dimensions in the perceptions we share. Under the title *BALTIC D R I F T*, the here presented project was conceptualized as a tour with two stages in Riga and Vilnius where the artists responded flexibly to the situation they discovered on site. While their contributions in Riga were presented in public space, the exhibition in Vilnius concentrated on a gallery show, assembling diverse artistic positions with a shared orientation reflecting thematically the representational functions of images and the pictorial characteristics of cultural practices. In discursive installations with video, works on paper, documented performance and spatial concepts, these contributions were dedicated to the medial cross-over of analogue and digital image configurations and their connected “drifts” of meaning and perceptual overlaps in an increasingly visually defined culture.

Long-distance collaborations always have the adventurous character of an expedition into the “unknown.” The preliminaries of *Baltic D R I F T* were stimulated by the interest to explore the cultural significance of Riga, as well as that of Vilnius, and to relate the emerging works to the historical and contemporary constellations of the two cities’ context. Under these premises, already at an early stage, all artists of the project decided to develop concepts that rather openly interact with the urban and cultural context and would be accessible for everyone in public space or likewise in the gallery. The transition of the exhibition concept *Baltic D R I F T* from an integrated station in the video festival *Water Pieces* with its event character in public space to an autonomous show in an art gallery set transforming qualities in motion. But already the motion and travelling to the first station of the “satellite” venues was transformed into a collaborative work. Movement, travel, mobility, and drifting in the widest sense were the basic inspiration and point of departure of this exhibition concept.

The most obvious attempt to initiate a dialogue among the visiting artists and the Latvian people was the café that Reinhard Fichtner and Christian Meyer established between their personal automobiles that brought them to Riga on a one-week road tour through different countries. They emphasized the open structure of their work, by offering a drink, a chat, and a few video works flickering on monitors and screens inside their improvised gastronomy. Instead of featuring their videos as autonomous contributions, the real character of their work emerged from the process of traveling to Latvia and the idea to communicate this experience in an ongoing exchange. The provisionary structure of their installation made their work accessible and expressed their interest to meet the people of Riga in a leisurely café situation that invited every one to participate. It was a welcome surprise that a new video emerged at this station from the artists’ cooperation, which then premiered in Vilnius.

Stefan Demming responded to a historical milestone of Latvian film that he had researched at the local film archive and then conceptually altered. In Vilnius he showed in addition to his videos large photographic works.

Astrid Nippoldt placed small slips of paper with disturbing questions on the pedestal of the Roland in Riga — a replica of Bremen's city symbol — while she projected her videos onto the facade of a building that resists the historicizing reconstruction of the old city center. As projection screen, the architectural traces of history thus became part of the installation.

Art is related in a strange way with the motive of travelling. Both are not only able to show us something new. The specific experience in which we face the new requires the always exchangeable, but hardly translatable personal participation. It does not enough to read travelogues and to hear reports about world tours. Nor is it sufficient to categorize aesthetic experiences under preconditioned rubrics in the hope that such tracing would meet the state of the art. However, in an over-explored world by tourism traveling is not so easy anymore, especially, and more so with the increase of biennial- and art-tourism. You can go nearly everywhere. Nothing easier than that, but you hardly escape yourself and your own perspective including that of the art- and culture-bustle. The lamentation that authentic travelling and being on the way falls short belongs to the zenith of backpack tourism with all its rituals at the latest since the 1970s that fights against the fading of blank areas on the map. In the wish for exoticism and an unaltered experience of foreignness a romantic motive of yearning reappears which already seductively surfaced at the beginning of modernity opposing its ethos of rationality. Even if the expectations and dreams of our late modern world have cooled down, and neither the South Sea, nor the Orient are as enticing anymore, as the post-soviet new territories, it is still the historical and cultural shift that challenges our abilities of understanding. The continents seem to be connected in a strange manner all of a sudden. And the continental drift that made this happen must have been overlooked in the comfortable view of a seemingly available world, before we began to criticize it under the headline of "globalization." Not only continents have grown together. Also, contemporary art is moved across cultural borders and is made increasingly available. The unspectacular still holds bigger surprises on the contrary. To let oneself in for this experience was the declared aim of the exhibition project. Under the title "Baltic D R I F T" installations, videos, and works on paper have been presented in Riga and Vilnius, making different artistic positions meet in a inter-media cross-over of analog and digital image practices.

"D R I F T" stands for mobility and fluctuating processes of movement, pointing into different directions. Within a cultural perspective the term D R I F T can also be understood as an impulse favoring the formation of new tendencies. At the same time D R I F T is an expression of letting oneself carry along in a dynamic relation of forces and a widely networked field of flowing trends within an increasingly globally orientated practice of art. Beyond a topographical reading, in a more figurative way, D R I F T can be understood as a shift, a deviation and re-orientation. In the concrete exhibition context these levels of meaning converge in a mutual exchange of cultural influences and values which artists continue to perceive at the fringes of world political events and often emphasize through (self-)ironical perspectives.