NOTRE DAME – A Scenario

Gerd Borkelmann, in *Astrid Nippoldt*, Essen, 6/2003

Notre Dame, Astrid Nippoldt's three-channel video installation from 2002, is based on a situation in the artist's own life whose fascinating peculiarity delivered the idea for this work. High above the city of Marseille, 160metres above sea-level, the pilgrimage church Notre Dame de la Garde stands on a massive rock. The building is floodlit every evening and appears as a striking and shining attraction in the cityscape of Marseille. However, if visited at night, the pilgrimage church which promises salvation during daytime and its golden Madonna may be reinterpreted in rather an ambiguous way. Unsecured and without any demarcation offering protection, there is a rock face directly behind the church which is more than 40 metres high and falls steeply down to the city. The sign indicating danger can hardly be made out in the floodlight. Thus, visitors at night must unexpectedly find themselves in a precarious and dangerous situation. One careless step may mean falling into the depths and a sudden death.

By means of three video projections Astrid Nippoldt creates an extensive scenic ambience. Impressively silent pictures emerge which come across as vague and strange but also have a certain hypnotic effect. Movement develops into a near-standstill, becomes static and pictorial. The disparate and mostly synthetic sound coming from the background lends a sense of tension, danger and subtle threat to the scenario while the dream-like pictures occasionally appear almost silent.

The situation is marked by instability, even weakness, and seems to be threatened by a sudden change which might occur at any moment. Suggestive moments of tension condense into a scenario which seems tormentingly uneventful. Moreover, the work oscillates between being close to and detached from what is shown. The picture sequences remain indistinct and are slowed down extremely, thus creating a strange vacuum beyond time and place, a mysterious universe which neither has a beginning nor an end. (…)