

Eva Schmidt in *Astrid Nippoldt*, Essen, 6/2003

The first impression when seeing *Heroic Turn*: Fast and hectic pictures, direct frontal confrontation, circling movements or reversals upside down. The artist is the object of the camera and the central point of a series of events that cannot be grasped immediately. She is the one wielding the camera, a function which usually remains hidden in the making of a film. In this case, however, the camerawoman is in the centre of the picture, instead of the camera she herself acts, with it and because of it. A collapse of functions, hierarchies, causes and effects. The positions, the artist's movements are always caused by the way she carries the camera on the tripod, by the way she balances, turns and wields the gadget. Simultaneously, this movement also determines how the camera views the artist. She fights, breathes hard, her facial expression is concentrated and strained, the muscles of her whole body are tense. Her blue clothes merge with the sky above the broad artificial sandy landscape and the inserted cuts which are all one colour and separate the twelve chapters from each other. The experimental design is just as simple, symbiotic and logical as the pictures emerging are complex and chaotic. Observers are asked to employ their ability to perceive and take in what is offered but at the same time the tension can be enjoyed and the mystery be left open. In this kind of film one's gaze blends into the view of the camera in a process of successful identification. In this case, identification is made an exciting subject by both luring and refusing. At any moment, one is conscious of what the camera does not show.

*Familie Lieutaud*: Two video images are projected from within onto two windows of a small house. We are in front of the house. The heads of a girl and a young man can be seen in the narrow part of the picture. Hardly ever one has looked into eyes so concentrated. The facial expression is disarming. What brings about these strange expressions in eyes looking directly into the camera? The task of carrying the camera on its tripod through the small and narrow house requires concentration. Dexterity and care are demanded, after all the camera is a precious piece of equipment. By the anxious looks one is reminded of the legendary film *Peeping Tom* in which the voyeuristic photographer wanted to capture the facial expression indicating mortal agony and – at the moment of taking the photo – makes a knife shoot out of the tripod killing the victim. *Familie Lieutaud* is completely silent. One has the impression of the house being an aquarium. We are outside the house and stay there – remaining voyeurs. The silent language of the faces thus becomes all the more impressive – behind the windows.

*Sielwalleck (Schnick Schnack Schnuck)*, too, is silent and also a projection on a window, this time in the middle of a diffuse situation taking place in the street. At close quarters one can see a person offering the well-known play with stones, scissors and paper to the observer. The person's gestures are expressive, tense, aggressive, even ready to fight, they correspond to the atmosphere at this street corner. The counterpart of the play is missing; the observer is easily prepared to accept the challenge. After all, one knows that the gestures are reproduced and are repeated in certain intervals. If one saw the film often enough, it would be possible to keep in mind the sequence of the gestures and to beat the opponent in the film. A naive fantasy. The cinematic image provokes the observer to give up the passivity of just watching but the wish comes to nothing.

Having spoken about two films without sound, it has to be emphasized at this point that the complete lack of any sound is extremely rare in Astrid Nippoldt's works. Like in every professional Hollywood movie, sound plays a crucial role if tension is supposed to be built up and if additional information about things taking place outside the range of the camera is to be delivered. *wy o ming* is a prime example for the way this can be achieved. Satirizing the popular genre of the western and its stereotyped mythical stories, the film shows in 90 seconds almost nothing in the actual picture but everything that happens in our minds: It confronts us with the fact that we are conditioned concerning the narrative structures of the genre-movie. Eventually, the dramatic climax is followed by the final credits whose music indicates a joyous happy ending making us feel good in a childish way.

Image and sound in Astrid Nippoldt's video installations are suggestive, witty and enlightening. Observers are confronted with their wish for symbiosis, their wish for integration in narrative sequences, their wish for submission to the authority of the camera in the production of meaning. Although these wishes are played with and observers are denied omnipotence, they are not left back in frustration in the end.