

BEFORE I KNOW WHERE I AM I MUST GET THERE

Interview between Astrid Nippoldt and Susanne Pfeffer, in *Tryingtoland*, Revolver Archiv für Aktuelle Kunst, Frankfurt/Main, translated by George Frederick Takis

SP A fundamental theme in all your works concerns space and time. Where do you see yourself and your works in this continuum?

AN My works are mostly based on an event which directly stimulates or upsets me. In this sense, I would replace “space” and “time” with “phenomenon.” That can be an encounter, for example, or a notice in the newspaper, as in the case of the volcano Mount St. Helens, about whose expected eruption I read by chance. I began to follow the natural spectacle by webcam. Over time it became clear that the mountain would not erupt. I remained seated in front of the screen and took pleasure in each cloud that passed by. For weeks. Sometimes the only attraction lay in the color shifts of monochromatic fog-images from a dim lilac to a warm morning gray. At first that wasn't planned as a work but was simply a sort of innocent interest with an addictive aspect. In the context of the American presidential election, which was occurring at the same time, the waiting for the volcano acquired a dreadfully significant dimension. Action and context took on such a density that they generated a type of authentic *mise-en-scène*, as the outcome of a combination of the “innocence” of passion with the aspect of reflection. Actually each of my works touches upon some point like this.

When one views such works of yours as *Heroic Turn* or *Afrika*, then there as well the site – the innocent point – seems to function, in the truest sense of the phrase, as a *genius loci*.

“Before I know where I am I must get there,” says the Lone Tramp in Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*. In accordance with this brilliant situational description of the complications of existence, I think in terms of totalities in which all things occur simultaneously and are mutually dependent. So when I develop a scene, I conceive of it as a unity. In this sense, it is not films I make, but instead images.

You say that your point of departure is the individual image; how did you arrive at the medium of film?

My entry into art occurred through drawing. It was only near the end of my studies that I got involved with video. The advantage here is that it is possible to bring out the complexity of events in a highly differentiated manner by means of depths or sudden shifts. One has a great deal of latitude for inventing things. In addition, the acoustic dimension allows the establishment of atmospheric, narrative and disruptive elements. Nevertheless, I see no fundamental differences between the artistic media. The proximity to painting, to film or to performance is quite apparent in my works. When editing I often feel like a classical sculptor chiseling away at her block of marble. I experience video in each phase of the production as something very physical. What is so exciting is that it mediates between the artistic genres, in other words is an authentic medium.

An authentic medium that nonetheless never loses sight of the viewer as well. Though you respond to the viewer in various ways, include him in specific contexts. Whereas *Prolog* presents itself like the opening scene of a feature film, with the visitors directly opposite the screen, in *Heroic Turn* you seem to be fully immersed in the relationship between yourself and your camera. What role do you assign to the viewer?

In cases such as *Heroic Turn*, which was truly a bodily sensation during filming, I try to allow the event to occur a second time in the realization, in other words to make it comprehensible not only on the conceptual level, but also in sensual and emotional terms. It is necessary for the aspects of playfulness, laboriousness or obsessive-

ness to become visible in the composition and editing. This is just as true for **Heroic Turn** as for the observation of a volcano in **Fog on Nov 2** or for **Prolog**, where the world seems to be created through the breath upon a camera lens.

What is particularly evident in videos such as Heroic Turn is that in your works the viewer's perspective always seems to be somewhat displaced. On the one hand, this often has to do with the angle of vision, and on the other hand with the speed. How do you achieve harmony between the triad of viewer's perspective – angle of vision – speed? What meaning lies there for you in the speed which is mirrored in your filmings?

Just as is the case with the immediacy of perception, so the perception of tempo is also extremely subjective. Many people consider **The Serendip Stadium**, for example, to be a work in slow motion, whereas in fact there are entire sequences which, on the contrary, run much faster. The falling of the snow and the melancholic heaviness of the pictures have a slowing-down effect. The accelerated movements impart to **Afrika**, on the other hand, the atmosphere of a silent film, even though it is not silent but simply faster. In addition, there are such interventions as gaps in the sequence of movements (missing film images) and the reduction in the color, which creates the suggestive effect of aging.

The German verb “Wahrnehmen” (to perceive) in fact means “für wahr nehmen” (to take something to be true), so that changing perception (Wahrnehmung) means exercising an influence upon the view of reality, in a certain sense means changing reality itself.

Dürrenmatt impressed me with the sentence that – in general terms – that is real which you are capable of thinking. Then there is my experience of not being able to make an unambiguous statement, because in most cases the opposite is also acceptable as truth. For a time that made me furious. I was never able to track down the predictable, the systematic, the unambiguous, but instead always foundered upon the contradiction, the catch to things, the dilemma. In my videos I try to put this in a positive light by simultaneously representing things which seem to be opposites. The military parade on the French national holiday at the Place de la Concorde has at one and the same time seductive and ideologically repugnant aspects. The nighttime illumination of a church can be transformed from a worldly to a truly spiritual state of affairs when the brightness of the floodlights in fact lures into a deathtrap. *wy o ming* is perhaps the best example of how easy it is to manipulate perception. There is scarcely more to be seen in the picture than a vast sky, a little bit of landscape and several jolting movements. Solely by means of deliberate allusions in the soundtrack is it possible in only ninety seconds to generate an epic narration, in this case a Western. The trick lies in activating the cinematographic memory and building the dramaturgy upon it.