

THE HEROIC TURN IN THE VIDEO WORKS BY ASTRID NIPPOLDT

Sabine Maria Schmidt in *CASA BLANCA*, Casablanca/Bremen, 9/2003

The world appears at first to be standing on end. Thunder sounds as if a storm was nearing. The camera switches up to a blue sky, everything is upside down, backwards, spinning, going off balance, put out of use. A woman figure appears. Her navy sweater is a marked contrast to the light blue summer sky. Her physical exertions appear in the picture – both visually and acoustically: breathing, panting, running; with all of protagonist's exertions, all remains vague and it's hard to decipher what is actually happening.

What kind of struggle is going on here? Is it a fight? An athletic exercise? A dance? The basis of this experimental endeavour is the camera, mounted on a tall pole, that captures every gesture, every detail. The apparatus, the photographer and the object all stand in symbiotic assemblage. They never appear in their entirety in the picture. It's actually discovering the constellations with a camera that's thinking along side but it's never actually shown in the picture; the viewer is launched into a discovery and is inspired to reflect on the fundamental, medial determination of moving pictures through the eyes of an omnipresent, never-visible apparatus. The camera's view is a voyeuristic one, the video comes to an end by revealing the camera itself mercilessly and relentlessly in its own light. The physical twists, the stifled facial expression, the physical distortions of the photographer through movement create an unusual portrait of things unseen before, things to be seen through the eye of a camera.

The choreography is divided into twelve chapters, a strange, playful and utterly senseless dance; alternating dance movements, an obligatory and freestyle program, render them indistinguishable: sometimes the camera turns on its axis, sometimes the protagonist winds herself around the camera. Sometimes the young lady appears in front of the camera followed by the camera, sometimes she runs after the camera. A dramatic dance in a dialectical alteration between motion and standing still, balance and control, acquires an energy of its own.

The stimulating quality of the pictures is fascinating. A strange dialogue takes place far from any audiences, their weird locality reminds one of a video recording of a land project. The fine blue of the sky is in stark contrast to the sandy browns of the earth. What's missing in this world is horizons, the dramatic movements of the landscape shaken to an earthquake are finalized in color symbolic. This is the moment of a „heroic turn“ in the video. In fact, it was filmed on a former port bassin, now filled up with sand, an empty city space at warehouse XI in Bremen, a more mundane spot than anything resembling heroic. The heroic turning point meant here is a role reversal that stirs up memories and photographic traditions reminding us of the irreversible.

Everything is „backward“ in this video work – it's reminiscent of the recorded artistic self-experiments of the 70s. The act of producing the video – apparatic photographing – brings on potent physical energy. This doesn't only happen in front of the camera. For example, in Bruce Nauman's experimental designs, the weight of pictures defines themselves mutually and presses down hard on the photographer. This hard, erotically laden pictures aren't manipulated, and most certainly aren't staged camera recordings. What's new about these pictures is the total absence of pretences. The absence of the pretences reins the heroic and frees the erotic.

The mutual determination of the camera and motive could be read as a „closed circuit“ structure. In the context of „interactivity“, it's not the interactive relationship between the works and the audience.

The camera (image production) and the object (motive of the camera) have come into a scene, but these roles could be reversed into subject (photographer) and object (the partial view of the tripod).

Astrid Nippoldt always seeks out strange places for her video works, creates absurd scenes or atmospherically loaded, in-between moments. One of her latest works can be attributed to chance, something she herself describes with great irony. She received a grant from the Kunsthaus in Essen for a concept she developed for a media mega-show at the „Auf Schalke“ stadium. After visiting the stadium several times, the project proved to be senseless: „One thing is for certain: I greatly overestimated myself with these grandiose announcements. What else could I do but bravely, secretly shoot down my own silly ideas of a monumental interventions?“ (Short text in the catalogue: Astrid Nippoldt, Kunsthaus Essen, 2003)

On her way home from the stadium one day she came across a horse race track during a sudden infernal thunderstorm. The banality of this everyday sporting event took a turn to the heroic: the video camera simply showed the unswaying course of the horse racers that were not phased by the hail storm. In her depictions and adhesion to the fleeing moments, the ephemeral, she stands in the long-standing traditions of discovering new temporal perspectives as William Turner, Edouard Manet (*The Horserace of Longchamp, 1865/72*) and the cloud painters did. She automatically places the self-referring media reflections in the images, as if a snowstorm appears to transform itself into a video frenzy.

Her parody on Westerns, *wy o ming*, is a heroic turn in a musical form. While the picture on the television has slid down to the lower section of the monitor and in fact only shows the tops of the trees fleeing by, the music and sound track lets us hear what is happening in our heads. The stereotypical Western story is told merely through the music since our recollections of the images is recalled and conditioned through the music.

Another determination of a „heroic turn“: one thing must not only be set in the right light, but also be set in the correct time and place. The good luck in finding the right moment took place during a walk in Marseille. The crusades church of the city, „Notre Dame à la Garde“, is illuminated by dark and becomes a magnetic place of attraction. The artificial lighting that illuminates the church transfigures even more so the surrounding. Without any protective barriers there is a steep stonewall behind the church with a drop off, the warning signs cannot be seen in the back light, a wrong step could be deadly. In the three-channel video installation *Notre Dame*, Astrid Nippoldt stages this drama in the reflective light of a spatial, scenic ambience.

The video *Heroic Turn* comes to life with a simple, compelling image idea that allows for many different readings. It stands in the traditions of the landscape paintings that have replaced the struggle against nature with the struggle against cultural images.