

A cow, a slit and a rabbit

The work of Yvonne Leinfelder

Trivial is the initial point of Leinfelder's work: a cow standing on a lawn, a slit in a concrete wall or a rabbit in front of a monitor.

The result is mysterious; like a set upon a stage. Suspension, displacement, formal super-elevation and fragmentary narration give daily things an artificial appearance. The known, but seen as never before, becomes magic. Everything seems so foreign and odd, yet so near.

'Leazes Park' is produced with only one static camera position. The viewer sees a horizontal scene divided into three parts – lawn, sky and leaves, which is symmetrically and vertically structured by two trunks. This strange setting placed in no-man's land between urban space and nature is amplified by a trivial fragment of a building in the background. Trimmed trees and streetlights conduct the viewer through the scene. There are chirping birds and an indefinable noisy background (rather like a rumour). The eight-minute piece is divided into three parts:

First act: presentation of the scene and the rumour.

Second act: streetlights begin to shine in reddish light. To the right, a cow appears on the scene.

Third act: the cow steps into the foreground. It seems to be looking on the beholder for a while, and then turns away (to the right).

Later we find that the indefinable rumour is, in fact, the chewing cow. But this gives fewer answers than questions: what is the cow doing in this surrealistic environment? Why do the streetlights turn on while the sky is still blue? What is that strange modern house in the background?

It seems impossible to localize the scene because there is no logical narration. The scene reminds the visual world of Magritte.

Leinfelder's setting is an artificial hybrid whose single elements won't combine each other into a logically conclusive picture. The beholder is waiting for the meaningful 'Big Bang', which ultimately does not materialize. The tension is created only by the increasing expectations of the observer. Rather like a David Lynch effect, but without copying his unkindness and decomposition. The creation of a secret through triviality is the method of how this video is made. The video seems to be the prologue for a big story. But the canon of the narration is not fulfilled. In 'Leazes Park' there is no solution in the empiric sense, only the increasing accumulation of questions. It is a surrealistic sleight of hand in a severe and hardly minimal form.

'Slit' seems also mysterious. What is that light moving with different intensity and velocity from the left to the right in the middle of the screen? Is it an oscillograph? Is it maybe a weld?

But the obvious implication of the picture is distracted by an acoustic "déjà-vu". Could that be rain?

At the end of the first third I can hear within the noise a big car passing by - possibly a lorry or a bus. The sound describes the place: the actors are the headlights; the setting is the motorway or an express road. Only the title 'slit' makes the scenery

accessible. Obviously the inferno is filmed through a narrow “slit” in a wall. The ‘piece’ shows a transitory situation; an infinite repetition of an individual action. And, like in ‘Leazes Park,’ the position of the camera remains unchanged to intensify the impersonal and physical velocity behind the wall. And again the essence is trivial: cars by night.

Out of this typical film scene Leinfelder creates an abstract reality of grand beauty that doesn’t lose its mystery even after the explanation is given.

‘Yoma’ is the most simple and at the same time the most complex video of Yvonne Leinfelder. The video is beamed on a big free-attached projection surface. A large white rabbit is occupying the left half of the video picture. Medial noise - obviously radio or TV, accompanies this picture acoustically. The white rabbit is moving with irregular intervals, convulsed and fast and then persists with calm. Again and again its white coat changes colour.

At once you recognize the reflection of a monitor in an eye of the rabbit which switches in quick alteration. The rabbits’ coat is the projection surface for the colours of the film that is played in a monitor on the side of the camera.

The film is accompanied by dramatic music and changes scenes in a staccato fashion to give the appearance of a comic. The obvious Japanese language intensifies the impression that it could be a Manga comic. The rabbit, actually a flight animal that would normally run away from every kind of excitement, seems to be fascinated. Throughout the quick and striking colour changes and the agitated music it becomes a monstrous figure itself. With the video largely projected the rabbit loses its cuddly soft innocence and its sweetness of a child’s glimpse and becomes the projection surface of wickedness like a ‘Gremlin’ or a monster in the films from Miyazaki. The rabbit is acting and reacting at the same time. The rabbits’ typical context - the lawn or the cage, becomes an untypical mediumistic context. On a white screen another white screen is manifested - exactly the body of the rabbit. So, in a very simple way, Leinfelder turns the emotional relation with a pet into a latent menace by laying an artificial reality over its exterior.

The static camera in Leinfelders’ work assumes the position of a play-goer and creates a stage presence. The camera is never involved in the play, but a voyeuristic observer that keeps the distance, or in Gottfried Benn’s words: “the artists’ material seems to stay indifferent”.

There are no ‘Nouvelle-Vague’ or ‘Dogma’ camera movements to disturb the pictures. Leinfelders videos rely more on theatre than film. She presents enigmatic stages or a show case that captures the viewer with absurd narration, trivial base material and simple productive aesthetics in a poignant tension of expectation that never gets fulfilled.

It’s in this “non-effect” where the excitement and quality of Leinfelders conceptual hybrids between documentary and narration are found.

Stephan Huber