

Bernhart Schwenk

Detour to conclusion

The artwork of Yvonne Leinfelder

It was a white rabbit that intrigued the girl Alice and took her to wonderland in Lewis Carroll's renowned book, "Alice in wonderland", 1865. Alice entered the rabbit's den and discovered an absent-minded reality – a reality different to the only one she knew. What seemed big before was small here. What seemed to be dangerous emerged as safe and vice versa.

"In wonderland everything is contrary", reported Alice to her cat Dinah when she returned. One could say that nothing seems like it appears straight away.

As in Lewis Carroll's book it is a white rabbit that plays the leading role In Yvonne Leinfelder's video "Yoma". Almost half of the principally dark screen is occupied by the innocent white silhouette of the little animal with its big dark eye looking truthfully on the beholder. The rabbit jerks and sometimes seems to turn away when background voices and rumours randomly collide and grow louder. It would seem that the occurring drama is somehow reflected in its little face. Certainly this is sheer projection, but perfectly observed at the same time.

Carroll's "Wonderland" and "Yoma" ask the same question: what is the true meaning of the rabbit's role? Is it really the protagonist of the events or is it in fact a catalyst for the events, a medium perhaps? Doesn't the real and proper meaning have an effect on another level?

In "Yoma" the answer is obvious. The set of the noisy event surprisingly turns out as the dark and circular iris of the rabbit. Here reflects the plot of a second film, with fast cuts, strong colour contrast reduced to a minimum and all displayed in a natural convex shape. While Carroll's rabbit renders the adventure of Alice possible, the rabbit in "Yoma" is the medium for the access into another reality. For the beholder the rabbit's eye is not an organ of sight anymore, but turns into an instrument of image formation. It forces the viewer's habitual seeing to change, while the reflection becomes the base for a new perception. The detouring glance leads to a new conclusion.

Like in Plato's Cave Allegory the angle of the beholder is fixed, he is standing with his back to the light source, believing that the origin of all images are obtained from there. For Plato every sensuously perceivable object is only a bare copy of an original image. Whatever we see, it is always an imperfect and indirect extraction from a picture, the shadow of a world which for the ancient philosopher represents the true and genuine world. So the only possible path to approach the non-visible is to gaze at the dimly lit wall of the Cave.

In "Yoma" the rabbit's coat is the path which gradually leads to a vague understanding of what is happening. In addition, the scattered light reflecting richly on the dazzling whiteness of the coat and suggesting different impressions has importance. The iris is the first perceptive level and the second is the surface with its different screen and colour changes that the eye of the beholder digests willingly. It is also the indicator for mood changes, motion and dramatic art.

"Yoma" is the title of Yvonne Leinfelder's video. "Yoma" is also the name of the Japanese animated cartoon that the beholder can circuitously see and hear – a so called "Animé". Often, "Animés" originate from drawn "Mangas" that literally

translated means “unreliable pictures”. Leinfelder’s “Yoma” also contains image levels that are “unreliable” or oddly complex. The sensory perception gives only a vague explanation of what is going on, but exactly this is the new and unique quality of images. It’s an individual imagination.

Unlike the extremely impermanent cartoon reflecting in the rabbit’s eye the camera position is permanent. The video is neutral, uncut and done without any manipulation. This apparent objective time level is combined with nested and dramatised episodes of the cartoon and shows (within the parallel conducted narration) the fictional qualities of a documentary as well as a reliable artificiality. Here, the light has a pivotal function, because it’s not important which object is apparent, but in what light it appears.

As in “Leazes Park”, a former video of Yvonne Leinfelder, where light and time have the main function. The scene shows a lawn with trees on an evening in spring and is composed like a classic landscape tableau, but at the same time the colours seem to refer to the principles of painting. In “Yoma” the medium of film is placed “against the rules” to display a freeze frame – but not really; the picture is changing very slowly, to some extent in real time. The darkness declines on the lawn, before one by one of the violet lamps along a way turn on. Quiet rumours accompany the suggestive picture of an otherwise pacific stillness. Now and again you hear a bird and the rustling of leaves. A strange crackling and a rhythmic mill irritates the viewer, but during the film the secret of this rumour gets disclosed: it is a grass-eating cow on the right of the picture, remains standing and then looking into the camera. Out of this looking grows a feeling (for the beholder) of “being recognized”. It’s almost an odd feeling of mutual identification. Therefore, the cow resembles the classic reflection figure used in art since the Renaissance to merge the sphere of the picture with reality. In this fashion, the look of the beholder on the picture and the look in the mirror is equivalent.

Ultimately the unexpected appearance of the cow raises the question of how much in this film is produced and how much is coincidental. A simple view on the video won’t explain that plainly. But also in this case it’s to suppose that the “plot” is a complex netting of artificiality and naturalness where the real, unreal, unaltered and the manipulated is indistinguishable.

For centuries the symbolism of light and darkness determined the process that measured the development status of the cultures. Called “Enlightenment”, this process took root in the philosophy of the Renaissance and peaked out in the cogitations around 1800. Only the 20th century began to doubt the unambiguousness of the term and to focus its dialectics. The critical analysis of the modern social circumstances was enriched by metaphors like dusk and eclipse. Consequently, in “Leazes Park” the constant decrease of the natural light and the simultaneously increase of the artificial light is metaphorical. However, the clear contrast between darkness and elucidation, presumption and conclusion, expectation and disappointment starts to fade. This polyvalent, post-modern exposure to the light and its imagery is present in another artwork of Yvonne Leinfelder where the perceptive scene is reduced to a section – a horizontal “slit”, as the title of this video bluntly states.

It is dark, the view is obstructed and the scenario is impenetrable and unpredictable. No wonder the first associations of the beholder relate to objective, non illusive

phenomena, or, for example, the line on a cardiograph. It could be also compared to effects (defective effects) of a fragmented row or to experimental films of the 60ies. But in "slit", like in mostly all artworks of Yvonne Leinfelder, the honest voyeuristic view is captured on film as it develops and becomes the foundation. The rumours in the background show that the slit is actually a margin wall on a motorway where, through its opening, the light from headlights of cars quickly passing by enters. Nevertheless, other light effects remain enigmatic and a satisfying explanation for them will possibly be missing.

The imaginary world of Yvonne Leinfelder seems withdrawn from everything that is familiar. Sometimes the beholder feels like he is put in the "land behind the mirrors" in which Lewis Carroll sends his Alice on her second journey to show her how it is when the known order of space and time is put up-side-down. But in this hermetical parallel world there are always signs that guide you back to the alleged first world – like Ariadne's Thread.

This brings us to the latest artwork of Yvonne Leinfelder, the photo, entitled "Ferrari". In an almost mystical way the sports car of all longings is presented in its legendary red. The eye is seduced to the sphere of the elegant luxury and perfectly shining surface and gets high on speed fantasies. Only the red rims anticipate that this impression could be faked. The picture or its fabulous colour is a false impression and leads the beholder up the garden path.

Nonetheless, this is no digital manipulation – as in Yvonne Leinfelder's early photo serial "Häuser und Pferde" ("Houses and Horses"), where she makes windows and animals disappear. The charisma of the 'red' car is based on a completely analogue trick. The actual colour of the Ferrari is silver, but the surrounding lighting is red and impregnates the complete scenario and engrosses it in a very simple way. Although knowing this, the picture is suddenly unreliable; the first world and Alice are no longer the same, even after leaving the dark den of the white rabbit.

Bernhart Schwenk

1960	Born in Wiesbaden, Germany
1982 -1991	Studied Art History, History and Archaeology in Mainz, Cologne and Bonn. Dissertation about Blinky Palermo
1991- 1993	Research associate at Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main
1993 -2001	Curator at Haus der Kunst München
Since 2002	Conservator for Contemporary Art at Pinakothek der Moderne, München