

## Playing with the appearance of reality

Young Swiss Video Art

*Be what you would seem to be – or if you'd like it put more simply – Never imagine yourself not to be otherwise than what it might appear to others that what you were or might have been was not otherwise than what you had been would have appeared to them to be otherwise.*

It's a tricky advice the Duchess gives Alice in Lewis Carroll classic youth-novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Probably it wasn't a very good thing always to be honest and true in the conventional society of Victorian England. Even more irritating becomes this advice in the dreamlike Wonderland Alice dropped in, where the rules of normal life seemed to be expanded and twisted.

Video art is a Wonderland everyone of us may enter in. In some videos at first glance it seems to be similar to reality but often it shows real things in an distorting mirror. That can be very funny, like posing in front of a convex looking glass, but it can also be illuminative.

When photography was invented in 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was thought to be a technique, that could produce objective pictures of the world. But no sooner Nicéphore Niépce had successfully taken his first photos, than artists started playing with the new technique. But not only artists discovered the rich potential in the new technique. As Gisèle Freund describes in her Study *Photographie und Gesellschaft*, the new technique of photography owed their success the middle class that consolidated its economical and political power during the 19th century and warmed for photo-technique as a cheaper and nearly for everyone available alternative for painted portraits. The photo became the middle classes medium to take a picture of himself and to document ones view on the world.

In this case video is more closely related to photography than film. The video-technique isn't only cheaper, first of all it's much easier to handle than film, that's what made video quickly become a everybody's technique during the 1980s. In the same time video became very important in the music industry. To promote a new song, every band needed a video, as extravagant and eye-catching as possible. Mean time video clips turned into an important medium of advertisement, private people turned into stars in their own party- or holiday-videos.

Artists like Nam June Paik started already in the 1960s with using video as an art medium in a critical reaction on the expanding TV, music video and advertisement-culture. Until today art videos are a fine medium to critically analyse modern use and influence of media. That means the picture we consume in front of a tv screen as well as the pictures we take as tourists. Rudolf Steiner uses in *Tom & Jerry Revisited* the typical music from the American Tom & Jerry comic films that had been popular for generations of young kids all over Europe. Steiner combines the funny and innocent sound of the animation episodes of a never ending fight between cat and mouse with pictures from dead mice, killed by a cat.

Elodie Pongs video *Post Scriptum* also alludes to famous films. Two teenagers re-enact the final scenes of several films. As stage they use a little vintage store. The a surrounding underlines that the two youngsters slip into roles already played (or lived) by others. Like an intimate play appears Lena Maria Thürings video *The Big Brother, The Brother, The Sister, The Little Sister* shows a family conflict. The plain and clear aesthetic showing the four figures alternately speaking in front of a black background, the concentration on the spoken words, reminding more of film- or theatre traditions.

Other videos play with the role of video and photo as all-day life media. In *Souvenir* Diana Dodson shows tourists in England posing for photos besides the motionless guards of a palace. In her video Dodson accents the moment the picture is taken by using an oversized flash light effect. This effect shows that here something special is happening, a moment of staged reality turns into a document of memory.

Marc Mouis video *Home* refers to the lots of erotic videos produced by professional filmmakers as well as by private aficionados of pornography. The artist poses on a bed, stripping of his white underpants. But under the underpants just some new underpants appears. Mouis awakens the viewers voyeuristic interest to disappoint it and to awaken it again the same moment and uses here a system we all know well from the world of advertisements. Media analysis in a traditional meaning shows Yan Duyvendak in *Oeil pour Oeil*. In the video the artist himself turns into the screen for alternate TV-pictures. The news world envelopes him bright and lucent and inescapably.

In Switzerland video art has a rich tradition. The choice of contemporary video art in this exhibition shows short clips playing with the appearance of reality and the power of fantasy and

creating this way distorting mirrors which reflect a enlightening, fascinating and en-richening view on reality.

Some of the videos use a documentary style to point out their closely connection with the real world. Anna-Katharina Scheideggers video *Single Speed Floating Action* shows male adolescents running up a screen filling wall. The red brick wall represents the region of Roubaix, a town in the north of France with a great history in textile-industries. In the 1970s lots of the weaving mills closed, Roubaix became a insecure region. The young men running up the red brick wall try to get off of the grey and hopeless everyday life.

Christoph Draeger constructs in *Subterranean Doomsday Vendor* an artificial reality that comments social problems by caricaturing them. The artist puts himself in the place of a street vendor in Mexico City. In European cities often black people selling things in the street. In the Mexican surrounding Draeger catches every-bodies eyes with his pale skin. His video works like a negativ copy of real situations and playfully abuses our special trust in media-pictures: even if it's obvious a situation shown in a picture or video can't be real, our eyes will believe in what they see for the very first moment.

Adela Picón uses a special form of compacting reality. In her video *Locutorio* three call boxes are arranged in a line. They built stage for communication. Like in a theatre play people go in and come out and we hear them talking. 11 artists talk in 10 languages about news and problems connecting with art. Who will be part of the traditional Christmas art show in Berne? What's up in the art critics at the moment? And while they talk about art, they are part of the art world and also of a special art work.

In her video *She loves me she loves me not* Anne Lorenz describes the vital rhythms of some inhabitants of Bangalore and her own vulnerability. In the sober space of a film-studio she constitutes sleeping, eating, working people. By transforming their all-day life activities into the neutral space of a film-studio she pays more attention to the hidden patterns of movements.

Video art is able to handle traditional themes and questions of art in a new original way. So Chantal Michels video *Sorry Guys* can be read as a video variation on one of the great topics of sculpture art: how figures perform in space. As her own sculpture, Chantal Michel acts in a closed room, that reminds at Edgar Allan Poe. In silvery pumps and a cocktail dress Chantal Michel explores the locked room with contorted movements. In Simone Zauggs video *Fear For Fascination* the exploration of space has a political connotation. Wearing a blindfold Simone Zaugg cycles past an immense building. It's Prora, a seaside resort on the island of Rügen, built by the National Socialists as a place where workers and soldiers could recreate.

Pervaded with allusions to the art history especially the period of romanticism appears the landscape Andrea Loux shows us in *Nebelwelten*. Reminding at motifs of the famous German painter Caspar David Friedrich the video takes the viewer for a ride through a misty landscape where mysterious things might be possible.

In Michael Spahrs video *Götzen fallen* the exceptional isn't only possible. It's just happening. And shows us in a funny and intelligent way how the construction of social rules by religious or ideological systems works. The gods raining down on earth in Spahrs video turn into traffic signs. How absurd quite normal activities like sports or dancing could look like shows Christian Gonzenbach in *Gherkinsports*. Gonzenbach just replaces humans by gherkins and a football game or a night in a disco turns into a bizarre scene.

In a similar way Roberto de Luca turns something well known into something slightly bizarre. In *Der goldene Käfig* he shows a nightingale singing loud. But de Luca prepared the soundtrack of the video and the nightingale isn't singing a typical bird's melody but the national anthems of the member states of the European Union.

Less funny but very intelligent and impressive is Myriam Thyges video *Dépression Marquis*, that clothes apocalyptic thoughts into a long elevator ride starting in the luxurious atmosphere of a high class hotel. Reminding at Friedrich Dürrenmatt famous narration *Der Tunnel* this ride with a glass elevator ends in glacier ice.

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