

Is there something else I've lost? A reading

In “Is there something else I've lost?” the camera does not function as an instrument that illustrates a narrative. Instead, this film is a portrait of a character. The reality of this character is organized both through the camera movements and the editing process. However, who or what is “I” mentioned in the title?

The film starts in the dark, in a sound studio. The audible dialogue is fragmented: Somebody called Elke left for Shanghai. The conditions for farming are changing. Somebody speaks in English, someone else speaks in Chinese. Somebody is translating. A filmmaker without a movie camera?

Scene No. 2: The appearance of the cinematic eye, observing something. Two calm tripod shots after another. A garden in Wuhan, China. Farming is going on, city farming. An encounter in the light.

Scene No. 3: Once again a black screen and dialogue. Subtitles in English and Chinese. An encounter in the dark.

The alternating scenes of dialogue in the dark and the pan-shots create a strange effect. It is neither a realistic, nor a fictional effect, but rather an effect of montage. As a result the experience of both the size of the garden as well as the dialogue is intensified. The panorama-shot with a dusty black frame makes the garden look huge, while at the same time possible to take-over.

It almost seems as if the viewer is getting very close to the gaze associated with the workers who are responsible for measuring the land in order to transform it into capital. I got a similar impression from the image of two women having a conversation in the street. We do not hear what they are talking about. The camera's gaze feels empathic, while at the same time close to something very violent.

There are almost solely women in the movie. Women who deal with changes, small changes within the big economical transformations. The feeling that the movie is gendered probably has to do with the way authorship is distributed as a part of the drama but then it comes down to Elke Marhöfer, whose name I read in the closing credits.

However, is this really what is happening? Well, my first impression is that the main character is the “otherness” of the filmmaker. A kind of drifting otherness from a student to a youth, to a partner, to a friend, to an artist, to somebody who is measuring, to someone who left for Shanghai, leaving

someone else behind. From this perspective Elke Marhöfer, the filmmaker, is characterised as somebody becoming someone else through the encounters with a range of others within different cinematic conventions.

The “I” and the “lost” in the title would then stand for some western European subjectivity. However, this movie is neither subjecting anything to the power of a master narrative, nor to a central eye or ear. To me this movie seems to dismiss the visual dominance, as well as the dominance of noise and voice. Neither does the sound dominate the image, nor does the image dominate the sound. There is no “super power” of sound and image in this movie.

At first I thought the subtitle had the function of keeping it all together. However, if this was really the case, it only happens temporarily: during the dialogue (in the dark) as an echo in my head and while overlooking the gardenlike cityscape of a fast forward urbanisation. The dialogue simulates a kind of autoethnography of the movie’s main character while visiting a garden – a form of autobiographical narrative that explores the filmmaker’s experience of life, encountering characters living in the area.

The dark screen makes me really focused on the dialogue. It is almost as if I remembered the words, even though I usually tend to forget dialogues and only remember images:

French? German? You don’t understand what I am saying. Do you go outside by yourself? You need partners, you should go together. The scenery is good here, shoot a picture here. Do you come here to plant or to buy vegetables? Just peanuts.... She is taking up film. What are you measuring here?...

The images, on the other hand, challenge the notion of the human self. I have got the feeling that if the film has to do with ethnography or self-ethnography at all, this self is not a human, but rather the moving camera itself. I don’t think we should look for any hidden truth behind the appearance of the subtext, the sound and the images of this movie. The “lost” thing indicated in the title is nothing but a promise: that we don’t know yet what a movie can do.

At the end a man is washing flowers on top of a roof. The light in the camera lens creates a rainbow. The sound is ambient and the experience SUBLIME.