

Ludwig Seyfarth, *Universal Pictures* – Astrid Nippoldt and Martina Schumacher
Galerie Olaf Stüber, Berlin, 11/2004

In the past the road led "from the closed world into the infinite universe," as the French historian of science Alexandre Koyré wrote in 1957. Koyré was examining the development from the Middle Ages to the Baroque, a development which was determined in optical terms through the invention of artistic perspective and of new astronomical instruments. A gaze into the distance, which on earth always ends at the horizon, could be expanded through a telescope to reach to the farthest stars.

But where is the observer? Is he located "inside" and does he look through an "open window" into the picture before him? Or is it the picture that lies within, and does the observer gaze into it from the outside? This separation of observer and image (at least within one and the same universe) is already problematic when the image is conceived of not as a window, but - as in Dutch painting — as a mirror. In this case the space visible within the image becomes a duplicate of the area in front of the image in which the observer finds himself.

New theories regarding cognition have more closely analysed the complex and nearly paradoxical relationship between perceiving and being perceived. Heinz von Foerster, a pioneer of radical constructivism, formulated the question as follows: "Am I separate from the universe (in other words, do I look through a peephole at the universe – unfolding before me) or am I a part of the universe (in other words, whenever I speak of the universe, am I also talking about myself)?"

Von Foerster considered a final answer to this question to be an impossibility. However, unanswerable questions bearing on perception are the domain not only of scientists, but above all of artists. In very different ways, Astrid Nippoldt and Martina Schumacher demonstrate that the instruments used to perceive and record visible phenomena cannot be separated from perception itself.

Astrid Nippoldts video "The Serendip Stadium" shows scenes from a racetrack during a snowstorm. The image becomes less and less clear whenever the camera draws closer. Snowflakes become long glittering streaks, a horse's coat and tack appear to be the body and strings of a violin. The moving images of the film "transport" us to various levels of visibility. The sequences have an almost impressionistic affect and recall the period during which still images "learned to move" – not the least because they depict horses, whose course of movement was first made visible through Muybridge's sequential photographs.

"Bloop" presents a universe in which all movements seem slowed, as if under water. An arm is supported as if on the edge of a basin, yet the spatial context for the images become increasingly unclear. What in the next case first appears to be the surface of the moon reveals itself to be sand, on which the artist herself is running. Was the blue in the foreground the sky all along?

In "Heroic Turn" the artist performs convolutions ranging from remarkable to obscene with a stand-mounted camera. An exterior force seems to draw her out of the picture. Likewise, the camera achieves no detachment, no independent position for observation. Instead, something constantly seems to be wrestling for control over it.

(...)

The universe of images, which flows over us day after day, seems to be infinite and to include everything that can possibly be captured visibly. It is easy to forget that clear visibility only emerges as a result of certain exterior and subjective circumstances. What is more probable is that we see things indistinctly, unclearly, only partially or not at all.

What holds true for the world of images is also the case for our perception of the cosmic. The visible universe is only a small part of a much larger one, which is not (or not yet) available to our perceptive capacities. In the end, as one comes closer, perception leads back to one doing the perceiving. If you stand close to a picture by Martina Schumacher and direct your gaze to a single sequin, you will see the reflection of your own eye.