

## HOW CAN YOU KILL ME? (I'M ALREADY DEAD) Artist Statement

Lori Hersberger, 2002

### EMPTINESS

There is the feeling of emptiness after a movie. Everything, one and a half hours long, was a little too well regulated. Even the senseless seemed in the end to make sense. Little was symbolic; hardly a picture was proclaimed as exemplary; hardly a sentence spoken as typical. The pictures were what the pictures are. They were worth looking at. No new narrative styles were attempted, but were rigorously played through variations of rules and conventions. The result was stillness and breadth, fullness and density. One had the leisure to take in everything the picture proposed to its very last morsel. It was a good time, a restful time, in the cinema.

### FULLNESS

There is the feeling of fullness after a movie. One-and-a-half hours of senselessness; even the sensible seemed to be forced and so embarrassingly affected that afterwards the real world seemed infinitely concrete and meaningful.

Hardly a picture was what it is. Hardly anything typical or exemplary is recognizable, yet the pictures point beyond themselves, namely to the intention of their maker. Little is said, but that little is so loud that attentive listening is not called for. The picture is hardly worth the trouble, because it is so cheaply made that careful looking will hardly reveal anything that a fleeting glance would not. There is neither a search for new narrative styles, nor a play through the tried-and-true. Everything is optional, crude, geared to an insensitive audience. The construct used is calculatingly forced onto the enlightened spectator: a gross, rousing time in the cinema. Cinema offers no safe haven. What are lacking are role models as guides: personages, consciences, responsibility. Instead of personages: constellations; instead of conscience: mercenariness; instead of responsibility: calculation.

### NO PERSONAGES

The heroes of action movies are defined more by their appearance, typification and function within a framework than by their character. The American western's supra-individual powers, which otherwise determine the working dramaturgy as destiny, conscience or storyline, are reduced to a simple code of honor. The European western (the spaghetti western) goes a step further. The characters are exclusively defined by their function. They lack any motive that the American model would accept as a natural prerequisite, i.e., the defense of property, of law, of the white race. The dramatization, which runs through a chain of brutalities, sadistic acts, shoot-outs and massacres, does not allow the characters to become individuals.

### NO LANDSCAPES

Just as the figures do not become personages, the landscape remains strangely anonymous. When, for instance in a spaghetti western, mud plays a large role, it is not as an attribute of a certain landscape, but is simply dirt that could be anywhere.

### NO CONSCIENCE

The unscrupulousness of the cinema hero is of a quite specific kind. His mercenariness is that of the specialist who goes about his business under the assured protection of a higher power, indifferent to whether it benefits his fellow human beings, the powerful or merely himself. The indignant critical observer, who believes that the killers shoot up everything senselessly, overlooks the essential point: specialists kill systematically and with intention.

#### NO RESPONSIBILITY

For the characters with no recognizable individuality, carrying out inhuman deeds without scruple, responsibility has no meaning. The question is whether perverted perfection, with the last bit of individuality squeezed out of it, has a relationship to organized mass murder on another level than that of association and whether more humanity is found, for example, in an art film than in primitive action cinema.

#### WHERE AM I?

Plato, in his parable of the cave, describes humans as prisoners living chained up in a cave. Everything we see is shadows thrown onto the wall in front of us by the fire burning behind our backs. Plato's language-game of shadows in a cave formulates for the first time the possibility of an image-transfer by means of projection onto a wall. We of the 20th and 21st centuries also live in "caves", only we have since made them comfy cozy: in the cinema, in the television room; even the automobile can be seen as a Platonic cave on wheels, from whose safe and protected depth we can answer to the concept of world. The world is thus a dream, something that evades us, or that can never become visible in its entirety; which is why we can (dis)-regard the world as illusion.

The layout of my installation is formally related to these caves. The bales of hay, used in motor sports to safeguard the racing track and protect the spectators, embody artificial forms of domesticated nature and, finally, serve the "prisoners" in their cells as seats. The silvery curtain of tinsel suggests that the area is a stage of illusion. The complex nature of the mirrors proverbially break up what is shown while the refracting of the images, robs the pictures of their potency. Thus the symbolic content of the pictures is accordingly escalated to absurdity, or completely deconstructed. The same is true of the film material that, extracted from diverse commercial movie productions, was chosen on the basis of its mythic film content: preferably scenes of violence, masculinity, of overcoming and eliminating whatever threatens us. The interfaces were set up where a certain poetic quality could be achieved acoustically, or musically, by looping. The repetition of single film sequences suggests an effectuation of the respective scene itself, up to its dissolution. In all, the three video sources together form a new dramaturgy wrenched from their actual filmic content.

How can you kill me? (I'm Already Dead), the title of the video installation – taken from a song lyrics of the avant-garde country protest musician, Eugene Chadbourne – is a commentary on the phenomenon of media pictures in general. What is meant here is the

constant use and eternal re-use of pictorial stereotypes as "the undead" (or living dead) in our daily lives, where – in an exercise to tame adversity – the boundary lines between reality and entertainment seem to have long become blurred. Just because good and evil seem to be so indivisibly linked, what underlies the title is the ironic idea that gives expression to the vain attempt to domesticate doom, and even to the invincibility of evil.

LH, 2002, (trans. Jeanne Haunschild)