

Tibet Revisited

In the context of Manfred Neuwirth's work, *Tibetische Erinnerungen*, the travel journal realised in the mid-Nineties, has a central place. On the one hand the film forms the first part of a trilogy which made Neuwirth internationally known and, one could argue, with which he redefined the aesthetics of his filmic work. With parts 2 and 3 of the trilogy— *manga train*, 1998 and *magic hour*, 1999 - he continued this logical development. On the other hand they were “cinematographic reminiscences,” the results of years of personal engagement with the Tibetan people and culture which was certainly profoundly formative of Neuwirth's self-understanding of his position as a filmmaker and thus his way of looking at the world.

Ten years after *Tibetische Erinnerungen*, in summer 2004, Neuwirth returned once again to Tibet with his camera. He is in Lhasa and the surrounding area and remains true to his method of the “filmic flaneur.” *Tibet Revisited* shows 28 selected scenes, each shot with a static camera; each individual “picture“ being a “narrative” in its own right lasting a number of minutes. The 28 views (in wide-screen format with surround sound) form an open kaleidoscope of Tibetan everyday life in which it is always clear that what is shown is a document of a personal encounter.

The title *Tibet Revisited* allows a number of interpretations: it obviously refers to Neuwirth's first filmic visit to Tibet; it makes the confrontation between the radically subjective process and the big label “Tibet” clear and it indicates the moment of self-reflection which is a central quality of documentary cinema. As with all of Neuwirth's work, *Tibet Revisited* meanders freely between documentary and experimental cinema and the new media in a wonderful way (one can easily imagine the 28 scenes as a never ending installation as well).

In *Tibet Revisited* the spectrum of what is shown is rich: it runs from numerous scenes that congregate around the themes of trade and craft (pieces of jewellery are skilfully made in a workshop; urban life is reflected in the window of a department store), leisure time activities (games with dice, a dance event) and religious rituals (praying women in front of the former palace of the Dalai Lama, an offering of incense, monks engaged in spiritual exercises) through to images of pure cinematographic movement (an apparently “archaic” wheel grinding corn; flowing water).

Neuwirth's montage emphasises the conflict between a way of life significantly influenced by tradition and the obvious invasion of Tibet by modernism even more clearly than *Tibetische Erinnerungen* – whether this is due to Chinese occupation or the presence of the globalised world of goods. Using alternating scenes in a systematic way the structure of the film depicts this conflict: a view of a woman in a trance singing a song precedes a curious image of a loudspeaker standing on a street vibrating; a scene of a traditional celebration follows a look at the staff of a Chinese company who listlessly go through prescribed gymnastic exercises.

As with his trilogy, sound in *Tibet Revisited* takes on an essential meaning (the rhythmic structure of the film is also oriented on it): the inner core of the pictures can usually be experienced through the rich soundtrack first of all (many narrative layers take place outside the framed image) and in almost every scene various forms of music can be heard. Neuwirth's filmic ethnography is perhaps more acoustic in nature than visual: the consistently reduced, static images contrast with the grandiose spectrum of sound consisting of multifarious music, noises and sounds which help, as Paradshanov put it, "to build up dynamism in a static picture through emotion." *Tibet Revisited* is a grandiose panorama of everyday life: a lesson in filmic concentration.

(Constantin Wulff)