



OUR DAILY BREAD by Nikolaus Geyrhalter

Interview with Wolfgang Widerhofer, editing

You've worked with Nikolaus Geyrhalter since his first film (*WASHED ASHORE*, 1994), having edited all of them. *OUR DAILY BREAD* is in one respect quite different from his previous films: There aren't any interviews or portraits, which were important elements in the others.

That was an exciting experience, when we discovered during the production process that that's the most suitable form for the images and the subject. The fact that places, as Nikolaus shows them, have a fictitious, utopian quality and are quite impressive and significant on their own. On the other hand the production process, the industrial architecture, the timetables and the amount of human labor which can be obtained before exhaustion sets in all determine the role played by men and women at these places. The images themselves already say all that, so no explanations or commentary in the form of interviews are needed. On the contrary: An interview would be an attempt to re-individualize the industrial process, which removes all individuality. You could say we chose the horror vacui of silence.

The film isn't held together by people or places, it follows a different logic.

It's more of an episodic kind of thinking, an inspection, in both a spatial and temporal sense. An inspection that also comprises various cycles. The film includes themes without mentioning them explicitly: repetitive labor, automation, industrial production, and the brutality that it involves, the morality which comes into play when animals are killed, and so on. A number of discourses and approaches are set up in the film, but not so that the audience can leave the theater and say, "I learned this and that and this is what I have to do." I find films that give instructions on how to act boring and presumptuous. I tend to be careful with analogies or concepts, and I try to edit so as to create an open space that a great many things can be projected onto. In that sense it's a risky film.

Which doesn't offer any simple answers.

No, it's about experience, a look which deals with the people first and then the machines, which can demonstrate enthusiasm and at the same time be critical, which doesn't differentiate into good and evil, but which can also be swept along in its astonishment. It would be wrong to say that *OUR DAILY BREAD* is just about the horror and spectacle of industrial food production. I think it's also a positive film about human existence: We like to invent and build machines that we can look at in wonder, or which suddenly pose a threat. I think there's something childlike about the whole thing, with surreal moments, almost like in a dream: an unnerving stream of images.

And how does sound fit in?

Each image has sound, I kept that in mind when selecting them. And, that, apart from the simple contrast of loud and soft, certain contrasts and patterns in sounds and acoustic atmospheres encourage association. The fact that the thump of a machine can at times resemble something organic, living. Or that sound can

indicate something outside the image: When an airplane lands in the asparagus field in the background, this brings in the larger outside world, something more global. At the film's beginning for example a claustrophobic atmosphere is created and, for some time, nothing outside, no sky is visible, but the humming and roaring tells us about the internal spaces.

And then this space suddenly opens up: Windmills become visible, and gradually you notice that they're standing in a potato field. An abrupt change from inside to out, a daring break, a number of associations...

The cut has to block off thought about the image and open up a new line of thinking. In my opinion you always have to consider what a certain cut might involve. Was that a link, an analogy, a total contrast, a contradiction? I think that must be an issue with every cut.

The many protracted shots of individuals having lunch represent extremely distinct, contrasting cuts.

Those are extremely important moments: Someone's just sitting there, eating. And that takes the viewer back to him or herself. In two senses: Not just because a person's sitting there and I'm looking into his face, and I can wonder what he's thinking and what he's doing and what role he plays in this system, but also in a filmic sense, that the narrative flow has been stopped during this break. And I have time to think. Without some information keeping me from it. These breaks, this peace makes something even clearer: the extent to which people are locked into this kind of repetitive work, how exhausting, loud, fast it is, like on an assembly line. That creates an important contrast.

You weren't there during shooting: Do you consider that a disadvantage, that you aren't familiar with the actual place, and how much freedom does that give you to tell a story with these images?

I don't consider it a disadvantage; I take as clear a look as possible at what's in the images and what I need for the story and the film, what's best for it. I, and later the audience, we must be able to orient ourselves in the images. We have to understand the point of view, where the camera's standing, how the image is composed, and the composition of Nikolaus' images is always clear and complex at the same time. But we don't necessarily have to understand what's happening. With this film I think it's very important that you don't understand a lot of things, so that associations are possible, you have your own thoughts and experiences and avoid preconceived, spoon-fed ideas and information about the world. I think that's one of the film's strengths: That it has plenty of moments which provide an opportunity for associations.

The film doesn't explain the world...

I would consider that a questionable intention anyway. I see this film as a place, a utopian place which we enter at the beginning and leave at the end - and the fact that this utopian place is our current reality becomes clear again and again in the course of the film. The fact that it provides the basis of our society's standard of living, with all the consequences. The fact that, as a viewer, you're at the mercy of the sequence of images and the ideas they trigger, and aren't taken by the hand, which I think is good. And this isn't meant to be educational, or moralistic or puristic, but an open encounter with the film and the possibilities and criteria it offers.

Wolfgang Widerhofer in an interview with Silvia Burner