

In Stanley Kubrick's noir "Killer's Kiss", a boxing promoter is hustled into a dark courtyard and beaten to death. Later the man who put out the contract for the murder gets his just deserts in a warehouse. The walls inside the warehouse are gaunt, distempered white, while those in the yard are black like a grotto; the windows and doors have been nailed shut with rusty sheet metal, the fire escapes have been raised. The scene takes place in an enormous storeroom. The sort of store room that is the world to which Annette Kisling takes us.

I was astonished that she ventured into this world unarmed. Although like Kubrick she did have her camera with her. The camera is her compass in this quarter. Here in this eerie world the camera inscribes surveying lines, paces the distance. Even before the crime happens the scene of the crime has been staked out. That might take the sting out of the terror, for what we have measured can be surveyed. Yet this is certainly not the case here, and the reason is quite simple: nowhere does space manifest as a whole.

One moment we are looking at a hinge, a tangle of solids, the zero or source point of a labyrinth of seemingly burgeoning partial spaces. These are the spatial networks of "Barricades", "Movables", "verplaatsen" or "House behind Hedge". Then a moment later we see sections of a uniform space extending, it seems, uniformly into infinity. These are the surfaces of "Garden", "Fence", "Dune Park" and "Hoogstraat".

Kisling's quarters have been quartered and quartered yet again. It is impossible to piece the segments back together, or to find one's bearings. On one occasion we get lost in the interfolded buildings and furnishings. On another we are walking along a long road that knows no end, between the ever-same houses and bushes.

We can picture all these photographs as film stills, as freeze frames, each a part of its own sequence. And it was the sequence that tempted us to construct a complete space from these pieces that perhaps don't even belong together. It is the sequence, too, that reminds us of pans and tracking shots and thus of the search routine by which the movie camera orients itself and feels its way through space. But the more we look around, the less we know where we are. And the photographs know as much. They express it in their windows.

The Renaissance viewed the painting as an open window. Here it is not merely a closed window, but speaks forthrightly of how it is closed: almost all the windows we see on the photographs are closed, barred, curtained, sealed with heavy steel shutters. Curtains, shutters and blinds are barricades that block the view inside. And if nothing bars our gaze, the blank glass simply mirrors the grey of the sky. If windows are eyes, then these eyes are closed, are as blind as we are. We see that we see nothing.

Of all the arts, film alone could do justice to this seeing blindness. Of all the arts it is the least mimetic, writes Alain Badiou. While the painting attains fulfilment through being seen, the film image is always one that has already been seen. No sooner is it recognised than it is already past: it is always an after-image. Even when the camera takes in a room in a long shot, it comes into being as something that has been travelled across and is thus bygone, lost. These photos have undergone the cinematic experience. They lose space inasmuch as they cross it. They lose it by repeating it.

The freeze frame dispenses with everything which in the panel painting claims to be autonomous and present. A glorious one-off cannot be teased out of a series. It would be foolish to give a prize for the most beautiful garden of all. The individual photographs pass on from one to the next in a play of fleeting, ever-mingling shadows. And Kisling actually heightens this ghostly effect by avoiding a montage based on contrasts. Instead of montaging she transforms.

This can be seen in her tracking shots. We pass by the fence, taking in minimal changes. Posters had once been pinned to the slats, but now they've been torn off leaving mere tatters. We need no longer to feel surprised at the blind windows, the blocked exits, or that we can no longer recognise any of the pictures or script on the posters. This barricade is also impervious to sight.

What do these "signs" point to? What transactions are being done in these buildings? What is transpiring on the street that passes in front of the house? Where are the people? Will it ever be day again? – None of these questions poses itself. Quite subtly the certainty grows that nothing whatsoever had been posted on the signboards, that the houses are abandoned and the factory has been shut down. The inhabitants of the allotment sheds won't return this summer, the sea beyond the dunes is at low tide. We are in a stage-set landscape.

Like Kubrick, Kisling hands us a backstage pass. The set is deserted; we look down from the flies onto an empty stage. The prop room has been piled high, we see wooden supports and slats all hastily nailed together. A partition of orchard trees extends across the middle of a meadow.

Some of the trees form comb or grid patterns, others interlock like the fingers of two hands. Space has lost its horizon. We are struck by just how organically the buildings are depicted and how geometrically the plants. It is as if the buildings had grown, and all that grows been constructed. Surfaces join with tracteries in their tendency to despatialise.

An endpoint to this anti-perspectival development is reached in "Dune Park". The bewildered eye tries to find its way into the thicket, find a way out, but sees no further than blocks of opaque black. Once again this is not a unique, overwhelming moment filled with pathos, but an observation in a sequence, in the freeze shots. We observe the way space dissolves.

The blind man's world may not perhaps be black. It could be a shadowless world of shades – as in Annette Kisling's photographs, a sealed up world. Or more precisely, a world that knows it is free of all of vision's illusions. Not that what is photographed might get lost in its construction. The figures are not sacrificed to abstraction. We see after all houses, trees, and furniture. But everything we see is simultaneously a barrier and sightscreen. Seeing, as we learn here, is always a matter of masking out, dimming out, sealing off. Seeing is being blind to the nothingness behind. Kisling risks a glimpse behind the scenes.

Stefan Ripplinger in the artist's book „Quartier“, 2007