

## THE CURTAINS, THE FOREST

PRINT

LISA HINTERREITHNER, ROTRAUD KERN AND NILS OLGER'S "TREE ME TREE" AT TANZQUARTIER WIEN

By Satu Herrala

Studio space surrounded by black curtains. Four TV-like screens on wheels with abstract images of views through windows on them. Sounds of nature in the room. Enter the audience.

"Tree me tree", an installation-performance by Lisa Hinterreithner, Rotraud Kern and Nils Olger begins as a gallery situation in the studio of Tanzquartier Wien. The audience walks around from one screen to another. The three artists start moving the TV sets, and the members of the audience respond by repositioning themselves in the space. Rotraud Kern, now wearing a wolf mask, continues to re-arrange the sets until the audience is gathered on one side. Lisa Hinterreithner appears on the screens - Little Red Riding Hood walks into the forest.

**Transformation of the space** The wolf opens the curtain slightly to reveal another space: the stairs. The studio has become a landscape. She invites us for a walk uphill onto the tribune. The wandering audience turns into the sitting and waiting audience with a closed curtain between us. The space we left behind now has become a stage.

**Narrating the gaze** The curtain opens and the narration continues on the screens. The two women appear in the film, one dressed in a red hood and the other in a maid's costume. Those figures appear on stage too, as kind of assistants, triggering images and sounds, presenting and organizing the screens. The stage becomes an editing table, the excerpts of the film being laid in front of us to form a kind of quasi-narrative. Red Hood finds a caravan in the forest with a mysterious maid inside it. The camera looks into the caravan and out through its windows. There is a voyeuristic tension in the gaze of the viewer. The camera peeps from both sides of the glass, sometimes between the curtains, taking turns to observe the inhabitant inside and the intruder outside. But who is the voyeur here in the theatre? The screens face the audience like lights in the dark, or like glowing eyes, staring at us. The performers, who are invisible to our eyes, move the screens into lines and rows and patterns that appear out of the darkness, controlling our gaze. The sounds accompanying the images are suggestive, ominous. The window of the caravan is being painted red from inside.

**Wild forests** I was in my early teens when *Twin Peaks* came out. It was perhaps the most popular TV series of our generation. If a dark forest was not scary before David Lynch created those legendary 30 episodes then afterwards it certainly was. High school queen Laura Palmer is found dead on the riverbank by the woods. FBI agent Dale Cooper is sent to investigate the case and he discovers the secrets of this small borderland town and the secrets of the collective psyche. In *Twin Peaks* the forest is a place where the characters are possessed by madness, violence and evil spirits. In the fairy tale *Little Red Riding Hood*, particularly in the moralistic versions of Perrault and the brothers Grimm, the forest is a dangerous place where you should never talk to strangers and always follow the right path. There are many other versions of this old folklore, and most of them emphasize its rich sexual symbolism. For instance, the red hood has been seen as a symbol for the menstruation cycle and entering puberty, and the forest as womanhood ahead. Over the years the tale has been retold to suit the current social and sexual conventions, from the promiscuous courts of Louis XIV past Victorian moralists, through Freudian analysis to the critical feminist and queer discourse of our times. However, "Tree

me tree" does not seem to put emphasis on the symbolism around the red hood and the wolf. The sexual connotations go unnoticed or untouched here. Rather the piece focuses on deconstructing and reconstructing the temporal and spatial coordinates of the film through live interventions as well as guiding the viewer's gaze through various landscapes, viewpoints and locations.

**The beginning** When the curtain closes again and we return to the space behind it, we find the stage and the performers gone and the gallery situation with the four screens back in the studio. We discover the final scene that seems like the beginning of the whole work: the ruins of the abandoned caravan found in the forest. There is no mystery or fantasy left but the documentation of an individual tragedy, or what is left of it in the woods. The wind blows through this lonely forgotten space which emanates isolation and poverty.

No more curtain.