



—— A film is not a spectacle, it is in the first place a style. *Robert Bresson*

Beneath the surface of hidden despair

—— It is not only the words of Carolina Hellsgård's protagonists that seem to be coming from the off-screen space in her films. The tone of the language itself seems strangely off and imposed, even robotic. Instead emotions are mainly conveyed by the actors movement in space, and in their actions both toward each other and in between each other.

The three short films *Karaoke* 2008, *Hunger* 2009 and *Heroes* 2012 are all parts of a trilogy. The films paint a clinically unerring and precise study of the protagonists' social milieu and marginalized life situation. Thematically the films deal with individuals who seek to belong, but often end up utterly alone.

In *Karaoke* the struggle of the aged actress Liselotte Lang is depicted through her encounter with the brutal reality of acting. She embarks on a series of auditions marked by indifference and failure, ultimately leading to loneliness and isolation. The viewer follows her struggle through the use of static shots, while the protagonist Liselotte, who is frequently shown from behind or from the side, remains strangely anonymous. Her expressive face is contrasted with her darkly clothed body, and she often appears pushed to the side of the film frame, as if she will be swallowed by the surroundings.

In *Hunger* the children Roland and Paul witness their immigrant neighbors being deported by the police. Marked by their own poverty and actual hunger, they decide to enter the empty flat of the neighbors, which reveals a world of magic and warmth. In this film Hellsgård once more chooses

to show her protagonists from behind, and in combination with a special feel for details, »a peek through the keyhole« aesthetic is being created. In contrast to *Karaoke* the viewer is allowed to dive into the phantasmagorical world of the protagonists – a world shaped by a child's naive view of a tragic situation.

Hellsgård concludes her short film trilogy with *Heroes*, a coming-of-age-story about two young girls – Linnea and Jenny – living in a poor suburb of Stockholm. The two girls take their refuge to a horse stable, where they spend time on a daily basis. The harmony is shaken by the pubescent behavior of one of the girls, fueled by the encounters of the opposite sex and consumption of alcohol. The visual aesthetics of *Heroes* is vivid and dynamic, and the atmosphere and photography of the film are shaped by the natural environment – the sounds of horses, the street noise, and the clarity of daylight.

All three movies share a great love for detail, and center on the unspoken rather than the spoken. The atmosphere is often so thick that it can be cut with a knife. At times it becomes almost unbearable to witness the burden of these characters, who exist at the edge of society, and whose marginalized existence will indefinitely remain overlooked. Through the precise staging of these existences the viewer has a chance to identify with the protagonists, and learn that beneath the surface of hidden despair lays our every day life. *Min-young Jeon, 2011*