AVANT-GARDE FILM IN AUSTRIA: CURRENT ACTIVITIES

Peter Weibel

SHORT HISTORY
Since 1945 Austria has produced two generations of artists concerned with experimental cinema. The first generation consisted of the following major figures: Curt Sturz, Ferry Radax, Peter Kubela, Kurt Kren and Marc Adriaan. These film-makers did not form a group, but they shared the understanding that their work was the basis for the second generation of Austrian film-makers. The term 'Avant-garde' was introduced to commercial TV and film productions. The works of Kubela and Kren alone had an influence on the next generation of film-makers (1964-71) who have co-operated in a spirit more politically in keeping with the times. In 1968 Ernst Schmidt Jr., Hans Schaecl, Peter Weibel, Kurt Kren, Waltraut Schramm, and Gottfried Schlemmer founded the Austrian film-makers' co-operative, which joined one year later with the Berlin Film Co-operative and Dusseldorf, Gottfried Beichhold and Hermann Hendrich also formed the Free Film Co-operative of independent film-makers. Kren linked these two generations. The first culminates in the end of the fifties, the second at the end of the sixties. The third generation is the 70s, the forum for the new 'Neue Österreichische Film' on a broader basis, but after some trials on grounds of objectivity: the exhaustion of several film-makers; the general decline of the revolutionary culture movement; and the dissolution of the Künstlerfilm Studio, the film scene became very calm at the beginning of the seventies. Since there was no financial or other support, and no opportunity to show films, a retreat into theory took place.


In 1972 Peter Kubela got 500,000 Austrian Schillings from the Ministry of Education and Art for his work in progress, Monument for the Old World. Since then in the Ministry, under the socialist minister Sinowatz, has formed a film jury which declared its support for projects which show film art as the basis of society. This jury did not give all its money to dull cultural or commercial products as was the custom in the past, but generously supported those who have used film art for the true future of the art system, for an art medium. Out of 19 million Austrian schillings, 2.6 million were given to the avant-garde. This seems to be a unique step in Europe and worthy of imitation. It is to be hoped that this attitude towards film will continue. Ammut Raifer, analysing the combination of these four elements, the eight possible

appearance of a time structure articulated by light, darkness, source and objective; a structure articulated by light, negative of light; pure, structure articulated by sound, negative of light, light meets sound, light structure meets negative of sound structure, etc.

Adriaan already had a graphic notation (vide the analysis by Export) that could be mistaken for a musical score. Rainier has a score like a musical one. Defining the film not in the way it can be read by anyone without possible error: the true machine film, Kubela called Adiaan, Schwegel and Ammut Raifer's 'metrical' films because the forms and serial methods his films became countable. This conception of film as a concept of music time which derives from Hegel, who defined tones as 'time points' and musical time as countable, and which fervently counts and counts the film music. Methods of editing derived from all sorts of numerical techniques like counterpoint, permutation, variable vertex points, and metrics and intervals. Repetition prepared the ground for his theory of film articulation or relationships between image and sound, the interval between two frames and the spool-second sync sound-image event. Kubela perceives these structures as sound images because they have no reference to outside events, so he could make a point of this in relation to the world, neglecting the referential aspect of the image. But the moment he had images with a strong representative quality, as in Vereinigtes Arbeiten, 1966, his could no longer avoid meaning and had to build up a grammar. The interval between two frames in his Metric films became the sync event between two images or image and sound (before or after or synchronous with the image). Like Electronic Music, he had created a collision of image and sound and sound the meaning of expression, but with him it is more than music. In his music film event is the unit of his film grammar, and it seems to me that his theory of articulation built on frame-sound relations is the first non-visual interpretation of visual music which achieved a long time ago. The possible limits and problems of picture processing raised by such a theory will be discussed in detail.

In his 1973 exhibition at the gallery group exhibition Projektionen 1975, Vienna, Kubela displayed the scores and the filmstrips of his metrical films. The strips were arranged in the form of pictures, so that the combinative and serial character of his compositional method stood out especially. At the moment he is working on two films: Music for a painting, 1975, 20 minutes; and Painting for a music, 1975, long, which will be finished probably by 1976 and seems to be concerned with the representational aspect of painting the articulation of his theory of articulation. The other film has the preliminary title Body Language, and is on the theme of sound and gesture. A book of the shooting material has been published.

The young generation has extended the cinema of structure and space to the cinema of the environment, the cinema itself expanded cinema. Not a new conception of cinema, but a cinema of structure and space an art of song and music as a model but painting and sculpture. As a result of the disregard for consolidation, all sorts of limits and frontiers have been broken down. The system has strict limits and rules, eg for deciding when an art work is finished or not. But as one word leads to another, so any fiml can be finished and reinterpreted for itself. The limit even the difference between a good image and a bad one, when the light is faulty - such frontiers were abolished. The emancipation of many parts of the camera system went on to include the spectator as a Third Eye. Last year Schmidt published in many of his films, eg in the film with the proper title Film footage, 1967 (16mm), 10 minutes, a consequently montage of sound and image as a result of several different shots. Schlegel made another film but with a reduced view. The moment of this is included in many ways, especially the filmstrip and the projection situation. Weibel put his fingerprints on a blank filmstrip, making an otherworldly image which punched holes in the blank strip, White, 1968 (16mm, 2min.) where through failures in the projector the strip becomes more
strip. Welbe filmed a film without a film: no camera and no strip, only the noise of a camera and Welbe himself as the image before the screening (Vive, 1967). Export operated with different screen material and rejected the natural skin.

By using new technology and creating new sensory experiences through the extension of formal film into material film, the second generation found a lot of methods of avoiding narration and at the same time retaining representation. New non-narrative structures were discovered, environmental pieces, film sculptures, film installations and all sorts of expanded movies were created. The material film included structural films, conceptual films and project films. In 1968 Welbe/ Export made one of the first literary films, Eine Reise ist eine Reise went (8 mm, 8 min), where during a journey from Kiel to Vienna all signs on the street as a spatial parameter were filmed. Welbe and Export wanted to emphasize the shift from the theatre situation to the gallery to emphasize the exhibition part characteristic of these films.

STATE OF AFFAIRS

From the second generation only Export, Schmidt and Welbe are still working in the field of experimental cinema. Schmidt has remained in his country in the production of his books. Muehl and Bauer are shooting documentaries on life in their commune. These films evidently lie in areas other than the avant-garde cinema.

Ernst Schmidt Jr. is a devotee of the very difficult art of ageing clay. He is now accumulating his experiences in a very large project that will be a multiple projection, one part a long film on Vienna and the second part 23 short films on the 23 districts of Vienna. His old method, the slow shift from one projection to the other, will be used. But different formal methods will be employed. As the traditional zoom goes from too close to the face to a close up, Schmidt will proceed from documentary techniques to minimal structures. Archive material involving historical reminiscences will be filmed on a 360° camera attached to a bike.

127/7 126/5 125/3 124/1 123/7 122/5 121/3 120/1

Along with Vienna, Schmidt is writing the script for a commercial production called The Total Family, after Heimito von Doderer's novel Die Merowinger oder Die totale Familie.

Valie Export: The Semi-narrative and local subjects are also among the features of Valie Export's work in progress called Invisible Adversaries (approximately 1 hour long). The film will be a collection of narrative fiction and documentary, as well as conceptual and formal parts along the lines of the last film. Remote, Remote. 1973 (16mm, 12 min) is concerned with parasite — the memory that is the key to present behaviour. Human behaviour (not alone) is influenced by events of the past. No matter how remote these experiences are, they form a psychological parasitic running parallel to object time.

Man & Woman: Animal 1973 (16mm, colour)

10 min is an investigation of body communication with an emaciation point of feminist art: what joins man and woman is natural history.

Peter Weibel: Work is progress is Kennodifikatia (kernal calculation). Since 1967 he has defined cinema as a conjunction of calculation, and his efforts have been directed towards the extension of these calculi. Kennodifikatia will be an investigation of the calculus of cinematography. He uses the word cinematography in a broader sense than film. It encompasses video, lasers, slide projector, photography, polariod etc. all devices of pre-cinema, para-cinema, post-cinema. Film for him is cinematography reduced to its barest form, the production of an object. Narrative cinema and commercial cinema offer messages that can be represented in other media and are therefore seldom transmogorous, but frequently filmic adaptations. Narrative cinema works with codes which already exist outside the cinema and have developed over the last thousand years. These are codes with fixed meanings like body language, clothes, music, etc. 90% of cinema has been in nitre since the beginning and only 10% with pure filmic codes. Hence it is possible to communicate so much in a frame, retaining a picture still, coded after non-filmic codes. Because the problem of pattern recognition and picture semantics is not referred to, it is possible to purify this great amount in two hours or less. He wants to reverse the ratio: 90% filmic codes and 10% other codes. Naturally these films

Ernst Schmidt Jr. Wien in Namen 1975

Interact with sections of commercial movies, interviews with living persons and old newreel. The short films (especially symbols of Vienna) are being filmed with a red filter. The incongruence of language and image has interested Schmidt from the start. So Colour film, 1987

Filmed in the writing in such a way that some letters were covered and finally the name of the film-maker appeared on the frames.

Mutter over 230 cars: a car park was filmed in very short shots. The camera view shows only the numbers of the places. The minimal content (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) corresponds to the film structure (addition of the shots), but the ciphers are variable in colour, size, shape, in shadow, in sun, partially covered by cars, etc. Reality offers such a great formal richness. The endless variations which the subject of this film affords, makes for a practically infinite film. Therefore the result can only be a selection. To show this, the film shows this own grammar.

In 1974 Schmidt made Eine Subjegraphie des Films (1.5 min). The film consists of 127 × 16 frames of the book of the same title. Each photograph of this book was filmed 4 times as follows: 1/4 × 1/4, then 3, then 1 × 16 frames. The book has 127 images. The following is the score of the film (the left cipher is the number of the photograph, the right cipher the number of the frames)

1/7 2/7 3/7 4/7 5/7 6/7 7/7 8/7 9/7 10/7

Valie Export: "The Semi-narrative and local subjects are also among the features of Valie Export's work in progress called Invisible Adversaries (approximately 1 hour long). The film will be a collection of narrative fiction and documentary, as well as conceptual and formal parts along the lines of the last film. Remote, Remote. 1973 (16mm, 12 min) is concerned with parasite — the memory that is the key to present behaviour. Human behaviour (not alone) is influenced by events of the past. No matter how remote these experiences are, they form a psychological parasitic running parallel to object time."

Man & Woman: Animal 1973 (16mm, colour, recorded how she did it. The projection system was: the two 8mm films each above the other, the 16mm film beside, so you see her standing in the 16mm film and, on the 8mm film the ground and sky. Through the contrary position of the cameras the film makes the total spatial environment possible and visible. The film shows the method and the result, the operator and the operations simultaneously: the exploration of the environment, the exploration of the body and the exploration of the environmental body.

Export organized a big European exhibition with paintings, films, video, photographs and a symposium on ‘Feminism – Art and Creativity’. In the gallery: St. Stefan, Vienna, in the Spring of 1975. An excellent catalogue was published on that occasion. Much feminist art seems also to be in the projected move on how a woman’s character changes, unremarked by the forces of the political system: in the film the individual loses his autonomy. With Welbe she is at present shooting a script of 1988 World Cinema (this is not an error, it’s a wordplay with word and world), a language film where verbal communication arises from eating words and other plastic implementations of verbal phrases.

Valie Export: "Work is progress is Kennodifikatia (kernal calculation). Since 1967 he has defined cinema as a conjunction of calculation, and his efforts have been directed towards the extension of these calculi. Kennodifikatia will be an investigation of the calculus of cinematography. He uses the word cinematography in a broader sense than film. It encompasses video, lasers, slide projector, photography, polariod etc. all devices of pre-cinema, para-cinema, post-cinema. Film for him is cinematography reduced to its barest form, the production of an object. Narrative cinema and commercial cinema offer messages that can be represented in other media and are therefore seldom transmogorous, but frequently filmic adaptations. Narrative cinema works with codes which already exist outside the cinema and have developed over the last thousand years. These are codes with fixed meanings like body language, clothes, music, etc. 90% of cinema has been in nitre since the beginning and only 10% with pure filmic codes. Hence it is possible to communicate so much in a frame, retaining a picture still, coded after non-filmic codes. Because the problem of pattern recognition and picture semantics is not referred to, it is possible to purify this great amount in two hours or less. He wants to reverse the ratio: 90% filmic codes and 10% other codes. Naturally these films
will not be understood easily. What are the specific filmic codes? That is the question of Kernkodifikate.

Obviously you must not bring these with you into the cinema, but learn from text itself. Like chess, where the moves seem nonsensical if you do not know the rules. So the sans signs and valued elements of film (the basis of operation) are filmstrip, camera, projector, signs, patterns, etc., from which the language of film (deduction and transformation rules) is devised. Kernkodifikate, probably lasting about three hours, will be an investigation of the codes of cinema in three parts: a) "Mobilis strip" after the Mobilis paradox, a projector installation piece, geometrical films, about 10 copies of 1 strip laid together as a base on which patterns are drawn and transformed in time sequences; and b) "W-frames", visual communication after structures of modal logic. Each person as a possible word and communication as the transition between possible worlds: this is the possible combination of images. Shot from several perspectives with several cameras simultaneously, he tackles the frame as the frozen concept of image because such a concept seems to him to hide the problem of meaning between the frames.

AFFECTS OF ART

What is the danger of films which are too close to music? That they encounter the problems of the dodecaphonists and of musique concrete or music generally. Cage was dissatisfied because music was becoming too instructive through the incosynicity between the score and the performance. He dissolved this incosynicity by chance composition — an easy way, but the problems remain. Music is a language of tones without notation — but as Baudelaire remained — this also effects different minds. Concrete music uses sounds with notation (the waltz of a locomotive, the noise of a broken glass). The paradigm of concrete music is just this: it not uses to tone but sounds. These sounds should not, however, refer to their source; they are treated as tones, they should be tones, they are used as tones in a musical composition (not as sounds in a notation). This applies to film: images are used that refer to outside objects, but the reference should not be apparent, it will be treated as abstract elements in the filmic composition. Kubelka, for example, used representative images in Adalbert and Schreiberhaut, but by repetition, negative images, frozen stills and other musical techniques he almost eliminated these references and used the images as abstract elements in an absolute film. In Rainer he had no representative image at all, and this film therefore has a complete score and is his most musical structure.

But film images do have references, and they are unavoidable. You have total freedom only in the interval between two frames: you can choose the frame composition and impose the meaning you want. The paradox of compositional music is the limit — it seems to me — for film as musical score, because film language exists (unlike music) in a double embodiment, in phone and logical sound. But poetic technique has shown, the limits are very far away, where you lose the series. He realized the paradigmatic character of the signs by seeing that the signs, morphemes, elements of meaning, are constructed of phonemes, elements of meaning without meaning. In this contradictory shift from meaninglessness to meaning, is the filmic frame an escape exit.

The dodecaphonistic composers were intrigued by the reproach that the ear could not grasp the structure: the score of the total work did not correspond to the performance, the received opus. The solution is not to learn by heart. It's more problematical than that. If you learn a poem by heart, you do not learn its structure. Even worse, it seems that Baudelaire did not even know the structural bases of Rossini's and Berlioz's Jakobson discovered in his poem "Les chants". Saussure also discovered that the old (Latin, Greek, German) poetic conceit of the duet is a burden to us, but that the poets themselves did not talk of them, nor could he prove that the poet had been conscious of these analogies. If there are structures that even the creator is unconscious of, how is the receiver expected to understand? As dodecaphonist and serial music used a method of codid, "illigible structures, which nobody cares for. The systems, the relationship between music and heater, score and performance collapsed — especially in electronic music where the structures on paper are often very different from the structures perceived by the ear. The anagrammatic faculty of language is a dead end. The founder of lingustics could not solve it to discover words within words, sense within sense, is just as much of a limitation for theories of filmic expression built on musical scores, frame films etc, because if it can happen that the relationship of meaning to image breaks down, that the score of meaning is not all congruent with the "performed" meaning — which means that, unlike music, the effect of a film is different in different minds, and sometimes produces no response at all.


Men: Adrian Isherwood, the film of a concept of concrete poetry film, sometimes concept made:

Filles: (1933-45, sound):

1957-63 black movie, colour, 188 Sec.
1962-63 black movie, 186 Sec.
1963-64 orange, bw, 188 Sec.
1963-64 social, bw, 180 Sec.
1966 black, bw, 184 Sec.
1966 black, bw, 183 Sec.
1968 black, bw, 204 Sec.
1968 black, bw, 200 Sec.
1969-70 total, bw, 284 Sec.
1969-70 total, bw, 260 Sec.
1970-71 total, colour, 35 Min.
1970-71 black, bw, 284 Sec.
Kubelka's Filmography:

1966-68 Monik in Vertrauen (Moses in Confidence), bw, sound, 1966-68, 131 minutes.
1967 Adalbert, bw, sound, 13 minutes.
1968 Adalbert, bw, sound, 13 minutes.
1968 Arnold Ramler, bw, sound, 10 minutes.

1968 Schubert's first film was made in 1968.

The initial film material for this structure was shot in August 1976 on a motor fishing vessel while she was fishing out of Eyemouth.

The boat was a platform for myself and the camera. A screen of films were shot, in order to be projected from a bank of projectors at the New 57 Gallery, Edinburgh.

The boat becomes my work space for a week, with a basic setup of equipment to shoot the ship, process, print and project it, starting with the material shot on the boat. The whole of this activity is contained within the gallery.

This is the start of the project, and an end is not necessarily completed. As some of my former work, this structure is expected to continue and develop at other venues. Every transition or new presentation of the structure will be a new, formed idea. One idea will precipitate the next. Daily performances of the work will be open to visitors for come and go as they wish, as well as offering them the opportunity to enter into discussions about the work. The material shot on the boat has been kept very brief. Each performance of the material projection is about 40 seconds, but we have 6 loops running simultaneously, and each 40 seconds of film is composed of 969 photographs, there is a vast amount of material to deal with.

The presence of still photography as a component of film, together with the building as a place of performance, represents a new and thought-provoking tension between the static and the dynamic, the fixed and the flowing. The boat is a mobile stage, a setting for building, day by day, an extension of still frame-breaks on the walls. These will indicate the history of the structures that have already been projected.

The structure attempts to describe 2 states, a constant and its extensions.

In the construction that occurs as a scan across all the objects, the form of the boat is continually being defined and redefined by the constantly changing, ever-shifting composite whole, but this is disrupted by screen images briefly and independently. These are used to define and return. During the period of taking off, other aspects that appear across the field of vision are retained. The new images can be translated into other forms, and the independent exclusions out of it are brief. The corner of the rolling horizon and the fully immersed independently behind the composite form of the boat.

Throughout performance programs, the boat structure remains, but the building changes, the structure is an inherent part of the building.