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A Scene Near Schenec-Tady

From the beginning to the middle of the seventies, I produced a series of films containing a complicated interplay between abstract temporal compositions—that is, film movements—and selected urban and rural landscapes.

The films—ARROWPLANE, TIDE, and three episodes of SCHENEC-TADY—range in time from 19 to 40 minutes and consist of thousands of photographs, taken frame-by-frame with a Bolex camera on 16mm film according to a previously established score. The camera's position was precisely chosen. Markings on the tripod and on the camera's zoom lens allowed me to determine all the possible shots from this position in a system of coordinates. Before shooting the films, scores were written into this system—compositions for images to be photographed individually, which would then create a particular film event when they were projected later. I take the following description of the score from a letter to Birgit Hein from January 31, 1977, which I wrote in preparation for an installation of my films at *documenta 6*:

“Only a fraction of the 5,760 possible shots generated by the schema were used in the film; and these were all those that lay on a particular elliptical course around the center of the tripod...Continued in a linear fashion, this creates a figure in which the course of images returns to its starting point after six 360 degree cycles. On these six linear horizontal cycles there are simultaneously five complete successions of zooms...The decision for this course of images does not yet have any immediate effect on the formations of movement that will later become manifest in the film. The only decisive factor for the film composition is the active sequence of individual images. They do place everything into the flow of images, but they do not follow it in a linear fashion. The active succession of images in SCHENEC-TADY III: The score, alongside the individual image as the smallest unit, is based on distinct units of six images. This six image rhythm remains unchanged over the entire film: every six connected positive individual images are followed by six connected negative images...”

A compositional method analogous to musical notation was thus made possible by taking the filming process apart into various and controlled compositional parameters. Linear processes of time and movement, as they appear, for example, in any pan shot, were analyzed so that a complex structure of film time and movement could be artificially produced. The scores of the films exist on paper, that is, they could be filmed in identical ways at any time in various landscapes. Real landscapes thereby become a medium, used almost as a matrix.

ARROWPLANE, for example, is the reaction of three very different landscapes to the previously established composition.

I wrote the score for the project that was later called SCHENEC-TADY after a long experimental phase in the autumn of 1972. Three films came out of this score. Two of them – SCHENEC-TADY I and III – were filmed in black-and-white between March 28 and April 2, 1973 at a clearing on the Hasenkopf in the Taunus region of mountains. The third film, SCHENEC-TADY II, was shot in color in a dune landscape near Oksboel in Denmark, probably in the autumn of 1973. Two other films, ARROWPLANE and TIDE, whose scores deal directly with the horizontal pan as a sub-theme of the SCHENEC-TADY series, were created in the first half of 1974 in Hamburg and Denmark.

The series got the title SCHENEC-TADY in February 1973. I had found a stack of American postcards from the thirties on the street in Hamburg. These cards, manufactured by the Curt Teich & Co Inc. in Chicago, reproduce landscapes in the USA, retouched in gaudy colors. Some of them bore the caption, A Scene Near Schenectady, N.Y. The name's awkward sound – as I found out much later, an Indian word for *beautiful view* – was as convincing to me as the absolute artificiality of how the landscape was presented. I had been through a course in photo retouching and the screaming non-authenticity of the cards appealed to me as a kind of constructive enlightenment.

In my notebooks from the time of shooting the SCHENEC-TADY project, there are no names of filmmakers other than Buster Keaton, Jack Smith, and Josef von Sternberg. Of artists only Francis Picabia, Giovanni Fattori, and El Lissitzky. Instead, many works by writers were cited, as if literature contained a greater resource of models for solving the virulently logical problems of representing simultaneous events in film as well. Flaubert, Philip K. Dick, Rimbaud, Edgar Poe – “I have graven it within the hills, and my vengeance upon the dust within the rock” – and time and again Proust, the most precise film theorist to date – “There are optical illusions in time as well as in space.” What I found most moving at the time was a couple of verses from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Act IV, Scene I, Apparition of Child Crowned: “Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsianhill shall come against him.” One of the most refined prophecies that was ever spoken and fulfilled in relation to a human spirit sunk into megalomania. For this reason the series bears the dedication, “For Great Birnam Wood.”

The film was edited in camera. Every individual image represents a visual angle on a particular point in time. What gets lost between these individual images is a stretch of real time, however long it might be. At the same time, the individual shots represent points on a line of movement that is recomposed in the projection into one or more simultaneously existing film movements. Speed and rhythm therefore arise only through the sequence of individual images and not through the temporal lengths of the shots. The landscapes were photographed from one fixed point in every detail. But what was not depicted or represented in these films was the sluggish real time of the human gaze. In its place, a sequence of images appeared as the product of a machine that isolated and saved the individual images, reconfiguring them in the projection in the context of an artificially created sequence of movement.

This process simultaneously marked and solved several problems that arise from the possible representation of time in the technical media of images. We would here mention only that of the simultaneity of different systems of time and movement in the film image. To describe the paradoxes and problems that arise from this more precisely, we must determine on which level of film – its production and consumption – time appears at all as matter, that is, as reworked material.

In the production of films, we distinguish between *Live Action* and *Animation*. For the individual shot, *live action* refers to the recording and documentation of a sequence in real time by deploying a technique that the temporal reproduction of this event makes possible at a

1:1 ratio. If, for example, 24 individual images are recorded in a second, which are meant to mirror a real, performed, or documented movement, the spectator's brain will configure these 24 projected images within a second into a continuous image of the original sequence of movement. Fictional films and documentaries assemble clusters of such shots into narrative constructs. But this 1:1 relation between recording and reproduction, which is used in most films, is logically only a special case, for the speeds of recording and reproduction are technically freely determinable parameters. All possible processes of *animation*, that is, of the free formation of an artificial relation between the time of recording and reproducing, can be imagined and produced in machines. Temporal sequences can be stretched out, expanded, inverted, and shifted into one another. The linearity or continuity of a real place, which is already broken up by editing in every fictional film, can be broken down into individual images on the strips of film – and on the computer down to the last pixel. There are logically no boundaries to artificiality. The *live action* of the spectator remains his only relation to the world of real time, and he relates his perception and his world of thoughts to the product of the *animation* being projected in his lifetime. But even this level is further divisible through interactive processes.

Film representation therefore creates a system of times of various orders, which run contradictorily, but simultaneously. The real time of events versus the artistic time of created sequences of images versus the living time of the viewer. The medium of film lives from these paradoxes of a linear sequence of images in which “time,” cut up in terms of material, is reprocessed. A sharp analogue to thinking therefore is formed that also exists linearly in time, but in its movements also non-linearly. The equation of movement and time is only plausible as the static average of an unhurried observation. Chains of images, like those of the SCHENEC-TADY films, that do not feel themselves bound to this ideal case, correspond to thinking on the physical level of complex spaces of association, in which linear time collapses. My desire to represent simultaneity – the concurrence of different movement and temporal systems up to and including inversion – in the medium of film also had the motive of animating the viewer on the psychological level, and not just on the representative level of thinking. For the filmed object – the landscape – this has the consequence that it is transformed in its naturalness into an artificial system. As *imaginary architecture in time*, the film thus forms the seam between the internal and external landscape. It represents time and it is time. It treats landscape as an object and at the same time is its object. It thereby substantiates the particular place in a time that existed, but in a way that never existed. It makes points of the past and future accessible within a projection in the present. And at the same time it forms a correlate to a complex way of thinking that is seldom recovered in the linear gaps formed by fiction films. Its inadequacies were the major motives for the development of the SCHENEC-TADY scores.

As an analysis of formations of movement in film, the SCHENEC-TADY series is set up like an encyclopedia. All of the individual themes – panning, simultaneity, speed, superimposition, inversion of light values, directions, and temporal sequences – were isolated in the film and solved by compositional arrangements. But every encyclopedic process is, in its core – the insistence that human awareness can meaningfully exist under the conditions of isolation – also a naïve undertaking. Music can no doubt be produced from these preconditions. And just as music can be heard, but not retold, these films can only be watched. They do not contain any repeatable story that could itself exist alongside this perception. But even the assumption

of such repeatability had to be challenged; indeed, the recording techniques themselves, in their relation to what is recorded, make certain adjustments to the world, which already accounts for the majority of any *story* or even *history*.

The SCHENEC-TADY series arose from the insight that we must first explain the fundamentals of representing time by analyzing film movements before we can then turn to the questions of the meaning of any particular cinematic representation. SCHENEC-TADY III in 1975 completed the possible grand opera in this framework, and for me the chapter of *animation* was shut for a long time. What came afterwards was *live action*. Today I am more interested in film representation and narration than ever before. But this preoccupation is only imaginable after having isolated and reconstructed time as material in film processes. It is therefore insignificant what sorts of images are used to represent time. They only need first to be recognized themselves as material in order to be shaped.