Talk between Stefan Grissemann and Heinz Emigholz
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Stefan Grissemann: Mr. Emigholz, your first body of film work stretches from 1972 until 1977. Seven works in all. Can you still put yourself in the shoes of the young filmmaker who made these films? How do you look back on them? Or is it rather the films that look with strangeness back at you when you view them today?

Heinz Emigholz: There's a lovely saying: every seven years people reassemble themselves. I have a few ideas about what was driving me then. The films themselves aren't alien to me. Maybe they look very different from what I'm doing now. But I see strong connections. Those were films that I made for my own use. I was a nervous person back then, and not really on the ball verbally. I discovered them for myself as a mode for making things that would tranquilize me. At first glance, these films appear very fast or even chaotic. But they aren't. When I watched them, something like tranquility would set in.

SG: Is that so.

HE: Yes. It may sound odd, but that's what happened.

SG: So the films had a certain therapeutic function.

HE: Maybe art does have this kind of function. One makes something that one would enjoy looking at, some output that one can engage with. These are compositions. You can't imagine in your head what will emerge. You simply have to make it, and then—and only then— you do have the output. It's experimental in that respect. It's not like I have a great idea, I have a story, now it needs to be realized adequately. I have a score here with a large amount of codes for individual frames. But how it's going to look in the end, that remains to be seen.

SG: So you were occasionally surprised by the sensory effects which developed there?

HE: Definitely. The films were the output of many tryouts and tests to find out what speeds and movement-illusions consist of. They're all illusions, because in the first five films I was only shooting single frames. One has to experiment quite a lot to find out what actually makes up one's pool of instruments.

SG: You began, so to speak, your film career with studies of the single frame in film. One could call this the primal cell of cinema. It seems you've started your career with a very basic foundation. Was your goal to investigate the essentials of your medium?

HE: Yes, I had also made films before that, starting around 1968. It all started with a film about the painter Caspar David Friedrich. I found it ghastly how he painted representative poster landscapes.

SG: You disliked Caspar David Friedrich or just the film about him?

HE: The painter. The film was a sort of rebellion against his romantic depiction of nature. I don't know how old I was, maybe 18 or 20. It was a naïve venture that originated from the feeling that something needed to be set in opposition. I just don't grasp nature that way, and I found the idea appalling to find oneself anew in this postcard realm.
That was with two friends at school. Both also became filmmakers, Rüdiger Neumann and Walter Uka. We had similar ideas, and then we made films on the theme. We didn't work together after that. At that time I also made a lot of super-8 films that were screened at the *Hamburger Filmschau*. But at the end of the day, none of this really moved me. And then I just began very strictly to study philosophy and linguistics.

SG: The films that you've mentioned, they came before the *Schenec-Tady* series?

HE: Yes.

SG: So for you, they don't count.

HE: In fact I do have them lying around somewhere, but for me, they don't count. I found it much more important to study Hegel than to make films. But this culminated in near-insanity. Filmmaking was something like the anchor that brought me back to reality. It wasn't the single frame that was important, but rather the construction of filmic movement. What is this actually? I had an extreme aversion to narrative films that immediately think, we can represent something here, we can illustrate something, we can transpose a story. I had zero interest in theater. But what did interest me was movement itself. What is it about film that moves me, what puts my thoughts into motion, and what excites me. And then it came down to these compositions, in order to start with an analysis of how a filmic movement is even arrived at. Sure we all know that single frames create this illusion. What actually happens when I stop comprehending the film strip as a linear chain and start understanding single frames as representatives of different movements that I can interweave.

HE: To accomplish this, I had to write a score that made it possible to produce single frames that are related to this score. These first five films arose from these scores. There were themes like the pan, the zoom, changes in focal length, 180º or 360º movement, and how the whole is assembled into a big opera of possibilities. I think this was fulfilled in the film *Schenec-Tady III*. Starting at that point, I could have made those kinds of films endlessly.

SG: As well as continuously new variations.

HE: Yes. One could do that in different landscapes. But for me, the program was complete at that point. Then came *Hotel*, which is a reference to actual movements or actual movement sequences with people—live action.

SG: I've wanted to get to that too. Before you came to the films *Hotel* and *Demon* in 1975/76, you made these films that were practically devoid of people. There are

hardly any traces of civilization in them. Every now and then a car skimming the horizon.

HE: Or people walk through the shot.

SG: Yes, but relatively seldom. Okay, sure, in *Tide* ships are sailing by. But was it also about formulating a kind of archaic thought, saying 'This is how the world could have looked before humans …'

HE: No.

SG: … that cinema was there before the human being? There are people who claim that the history of cinema predates human history.

HE: That's right, because the ways one reflects on perception, also in terms of film, these ways precede technical media. Media archaeology demonstrates this. But it wasn't like I said, 'I want to show a world devoid of people.' The neutron bomb was a big theme back then. But it wasn't at all my intention. Working with single frames only, and getting live action in front of the camera, I of course end up with the time-lapse effect. You can see it in the film *Tide*. There is ebb and flow, the ships sail by. One can sometimes also see how fast or how slow I worked. One can also see, in the way the space bends, how the movement warps into the space. I always sought out the locations with great care. In *Schenec-Tady*, for other reasons. I needed a landscape with a cleared foreground. A low foreground and then a backdrop, which is the forest. That was in the Taunus Mountains on Hasenkopf Hill. They had cleared the woods there for a waterworks. I searched a long time for such a place. It was possible there to position myself exactly in the center of this cleared area. And then it gives rise to this structure. For me it was about the structure of the image content. By then I had already gained enough experience to know that these structures largely dictate the film's outcome. The film *Arrowplane*, for example, makes the same composition with three different landscapes. One can see how the landscape messes up the structure or the composition, this interplay between landscape and composition.

SG: You call the film *Tide* and not *Tide* as in the English term?

HE: *Tide* is a North German term for ebb and flow. In America it's called *Tide*. An American laundry detergent had the same name.

SG: And of course *Arrowplane* is not the term for airplane.

HE: That's a play on words related to 'arrow'.

SG: But there's never an airplane appearing in the film.

HE: It's an arrow, and thus an arrow-like back and forth. One could probably be critical
here—what kind of a funny, concocted title is this?

SG: I definitely don't want to criticize. It's a riddle. And it remains a riddle.

HE: Yes, this action of flying across, or this illusion of flying across that occurs there.

SG: You've already travelled to America with these earlier non-sound films and shown them there.

HE: *Schenec-Tady*, the first film, had its world premiere in 1973 in London at the Festival of Independent Avant-garde Film. And shortly thereafter at the *Hamburger Filmschau*. I found the title *Schenec-Tady* on a postcard. I thought this hacked-apart word was so good in relation to the film's composition. I had no idea what it meant. I found the postcard in Hamburg on the street, a color image, completely retouched. On it was written *A Scene Near Schenec-Tady*, and I thought it was a great name. I had been trained as a photo retoucher and constantly did full retouchings of photos, like for merchandise catalogues, airbrushing black and white photos into color photos. There wasn't a single millimeter left of the original photo, but it had to look like a photo. And this kind of activity taught me quite early that photos prove nothing, or that they don't necessarily represent reality. Because I was constantly busy retouching photos for a newspaper so that you couldn't see that they had been retouched. My work was always the most successful when it was unrecognizable.

SG: That's the commonly accepted meaning of retouching.

HE: But this led me to strike a completely different path and to say: artificiality is anyway the premise of technical imaging. So I'll go ahead and make it with super-artificiality, and I won't place any value in the fact that it acts like it's realistic.

SG: I asked about your travels to America because you also showed the films there in conjunction with live performances. Or how was it? You produced situations that were at least similar to concerts or happenings there.

HE: I have to give some background information here. With *Schenec-Tady* it was like this: the American filmmaker Larry Gottheim came to a *Hamburger Filmschau* and watched the film only because Schenectady is a city in New York state, not far away from Binghamton, where he taught. Within the literature department there, he built up one of the first film schools as a filmmaker, a very good film school. He brought Ken Jacobs and Nicholas Ray there. It started during the First Wave, in which the New American Cinema people founded schools. Larry showed *Barn Rushes* at the *Hamburger Filmschau*, along with other films that I thought were very good. I saw them there for the first time. And it was there that he went to the *Schenec-Tady* show and spoke to me. Even then I had already had an absolute urge to leave Germany. And when one has this urge, one looks for the first and best chance that turns up and says: Larry saw the film, he lives in Binghamton, I've made a film that's called *Schenec-Tady*. Now I have to try to get to America through these channels. And he invited me to come. And so I ended up there in 1974.

SG: And how long did you stay?

HE: Around 15 years. Well, I filmed here and there, flew back and forth, but really with an apartment and everything that goes with it, I stayed into the 90s. But now about the performances that you asked about. Around that time there was a group of writers, filmmakers, painters, I'll name a few: Hilka Nordhausen, Silke Grossmann, Klaus Wyborny, Marcia Bronstein, Kiev Stingl, Christoph Derscha We produced little

magazines back then, literary magazines, one of them was called *Boa Vista*, another was *Henry*. That continued in America. I had works published in *The Paris Review* and in others, *Ideolects* or *No Rose*, with small independent presses, in self-published literary magazines. I had a little set of acts, performances. Slides were also shown, and sometimes these films too.

SG: Those were also readings that you made yourself.

HE: Readings and shows with slides, also with these films, which appeared in between.

SG: It was reviewed in newspapers, right? There was an interest in these types of spectacles there.

HE: I also did some of them at the Berlinale, back when it was still possible to do those kinds of more performative things there. I can remember shows at the Berlinale in the 70s where slides were mixed with films and so on.

SG: You mentioned Ken Jacobs. Was the New American Cinema, which had a strong structuralist side in the early 70s, Hollis Frampton, Michael Snow, etc., was that a model for you? Surely you must have seen those films then. Hollis Frampton's *Zorns Lemma*, for example? It's a film about language. It could be compared very well with *Demon*. It's a totally different film, but both films are interested in syntax, semantics, linguistics. Michael Snow could be taken as a model comparison for some of your films. Was this the case, that you were influenced by these people and films?

HE: The New American Cinema movement and the Filmmakers Coop were definitely significant role models for the Hamburger Filmmakers Coop. That kind of self-organization, forming a production troupe, trying to find a way to distribute the group's work, finding possibilities to produce something. You must know that these seven films which we're discussing, they didn't have a penny of public arts funding. They were all financed privately, or through mutual support systems …

SG: Or through photo retouching jobs.

HE: For example. Yes. The shows in America brought a little bit of money. Since the beginning, I've always gotten a little bit of money when films were shown. It was very little, but it made it possible to continue. Getting to the role models. The Coop movement, also the London Film Coop made their presence known. The person who made a big impression on me at the beginning of the 70s was Michael Snow.

SG: He was Canadian, but he was known in New York.

HE: His films were an absolute installment in the New American Cinema and the New Yorker Film Coop. But in a certain sense, the films of Michael Snow were even the motif for doing something new. Michael Snow—now I'm thinking of *Back and Forth* or *La Région Centrale*—always worked with live action. He always worked with a camera that realistically records 24 pictures and plays them back. And then there are these blurrings which happen through speeds. But he never got into pixelation. In contrast to that, it was important for me to say, 'I want these movements in my composition to analyze themselves.' Like in *Arrowplane*, for example, where a pan

sort of dissolves into itself by multiplying with itself all the stations that it runs through from A to B. This leads to the visual result that one has not only one pan, but at least two pans, and they diverge from one another and converge anew. This is something completely different than when I work with live action or a realistic camera. And these differences were extremely important to me then. I first got to know *Zorns Lemma* and Hollis Frampton when I was in America, through shows at the Museum of Modern Art or at the Anthology.

HE: Someone who was really important to me and many of us in Hamburg was Kurt Kren. Because I saw such a materialist position in his work, and I thought, 'This is the way further.' My reflections were on film on the material level, rather than on representations. I wasn't interested in what something means. Instead, I wanted something to be created afresh in my brain through filmed action or film products. I didn't want a literary quote to become transposed. I wanted energy to be created. It was about energy. That's a good term for it. A filmic energy that crosses over to the viewer and ignites the brain.

SG: You said somewhere that you really got addicted to the energy that came from these films.

HE: Yes, that's what I meant earlier with "tranquilized". I thought what I saw around me was totally stultifying, with this aloofness that one naturally has as a youth. But simultaneously, the university was on the verge of nonsense with these communist splinter cells. I was really happy to be able to leave this country. America rescued me then. I would have gone crazy in Germany. Over there, one could reflect on things, one could put things into space, there were cinemas there … even if the group only consisted of 50 people. That's so much more than if you have to hang around somewhere alone and slowly go crazy. That was extremely important to me. As well as these beginnings which you just cited, of going back to the origins of film. Of course one can also say, how can someone get such an idea into their heads, to want to put these movements back together once again? Now we're advanced enough to make narrative films, and this idiot is making single frame films again. One can surely also imagine history as an eternal progression towards narrative film. When I look at myself these days, it seems like the world is populated by actors exclusively.

SG: It took you years to thematize sound in your cinema. Why did you wait so long to work on sound? Because it would have complicated things further and you wanted to keep it simple? Or was it about something else?

HE: At first, sound was absolutely not an issue. I didn't at all comprehend this as an exclusion. On the contrary, it was only about pictures and what they are composed of. And what movement is composed of.

SG: But that's a further indication that you in fact wanted to go back to early cinema, where sound was also not an issue. Actually, you're going back to Muybridge or Marey, to serial photography, to these single frames before Lumière.

HE: Yes, what is movement composed of. To speak of sound with single frames is of course nonsense. Single frames don't have any. Fischinger, and so on, they put music over them. But this didn't interest me at all. Making analogue music or

somehow atmospherically corresponding music to add to these films, that was out of the question. I thought this kind of synchronicity was really bad.

SG: But then came *Hotel*, produced in 1975/76, in which you indeed use sound in a quite good and sensory, drastic way. How did this come about? Were you unsure at first if you wanted it at all, or was it clear that it would become a film with sound.

HE: The film *Hotel* is for me a transition in two respects. Firstly because it deals with realistic movement. Someone walks down the street in San Diego with a camera. And it gives rise to something like a triangle. Two people are walking and the camera is walking too. And this is filmed from A to B. And then there are views of the street from my apartment on Hudson Street in New York, and with my telephoto lens I follow the cars that are driving in the street below. Then there's the wide shot of Hudson Street with the little hot dog stand. And then there's a scene in Hamburg in the Zippelhaus. Something with sound has always seemed odd to me: When I film, for example, a room with a window. Outside there's a lot of traffic, super loud, and we're sitting there eating breakfast. Outside is sound, inside is sound. What should I now choose? What would be the truth? I thought I would set the focus to the outside, record the sound from the outside, and do a ten-minute take. In the second take I set the focus to the inside and do the sound inside. And then comes a passage of transformation in the film: how do I go from the realistic recording to the analysis? I begin to interleave the inner and outer scenery more and more. Even a weird zoom effect arises there, because the focal length was changed a bit. So I begin to interleave the outer and inner recordings by leaving the time that is shown in A out of B. And I shorten it increasingly, and afterwards I suddenly see a space which negotiates two simultaneous times like in science fiction.

SG: Yes, yes. It's a kind of accelerating parallel flow of time layers that takes place there.

HE: Time grows together. It's rough and nevertheless liquid, because the movement continues fluidly. Then I'm suddenly in a world where time is analyzed. Then this wide shot comes out of the first part and is positively and negatively interleaved. The cars on Hudson Street are inverted and interleaved. And then there's the long San Diego passage, where the time from A to B occurs simultaneous to the time from B to A. And when you ask me where the role models are, I would have to say they come very strongly from literature, at least then. Rimbaud or also Proust, and Philip K. Dick. Those were people that in some way negotiated time, in a manner I actually hadn't seen in film.

SG: Not memory? Memory, is that maybe the key word?

HE: Yes, but also constructions of simultaneity. Take *Martian Time-Slip* by Philip K. Dick. I read several novels of his then, novels he had written in the 60s. They are fantastical meditations on how one can think time differently. What happens if a crack in time exists? What happens if there are alternative present times? It was clear to me that in film, since film represents chunks of time, I can work with time like I would with matter. I can interleave it. In any case, I could think very well on this level back then. Dick was later adapted for film, *Blade Runner* and so on. How could they be so complacent to think they could elucidate his thoughts? Back then I thought one can

do it much better through the medium. But then it certainly doesn't have the realistic look.

SG: I find it beautiful in *Hotel* how basically everything that one sees actually fell into the category of things unworthy of being filmed. A breakfast table where hardly anything happens. You don't speak to each other at all. There are hardly any actions worth mentioning. The street scene too, two people simply walk down the street, each in the sun, unto themselves, anonymous people. In itself a minor thing which doesn't make any sense until it's processed. It becomes worthy of filming through the mode of presentation.

HE: Yes, and then you see what happens, for example at the breakfast table. After ten minutes the margarine is lying somewhere completely different, the egg cups, and all hell breaks loose. Or the toast keeps flying all over the place. Thus, when you interleave just two pieces of time, you get a totally energetic result, without having to stage something gigantic.

SG: An action film.

HE: Simply by interleaving two different times. I slaved away to avoid getting the World Trade Center into the picture, because I thought, I don't want to have such a representative bullshit like the World Trade Center in my film. It completely filled the view framed by my bedroom window. That's why there's always this angle downwards, looking at the people walking across the street. It is of course great with the shadows, and the way the cars speed into the window railing. Those were phenomena that interested me extremely. I never thought that it wasn't filmic. It wasn't an *anti* venture. It was more *for* something.

SG: I thought of something during the kitchen scene, something that has a lot to do with photography. Especially with early photography, the long exposure times, where moving things aren't in the picture. And the question this brings up is, What has not moved for ten minutes? And what was moved during these ten minutes? It all seems, again and again, to make associations back to photography.

HE: The film is important to me in two ways. It's a turning point. On the one hand, it shows an interest again in realistic movement. But on the other hand, I start framing completely different than usual. The landscape films before that are obediently set up in the horizontal. With *Hotel*, this is over.

SG: That already begins with this first tilt effect.

HE: It starts in *Hotel*. This has, if you ask me about role models, more to do with Russian photography of the 20s than with other films. I worked together intensively with the photographer Silke Grossman. We were then fascinated by their kind of photography. It immediately made clear to us that you have to do this, because it sets something free, something in perception, also something in time.

SG: It's a dynamization of composition.

HE: You can also put things into relation with other things like never before. But this really starts with this film. If one lives in a skyscraper, one looks down and no longer

has a horizon. It has to do with the fact that one lives under conditions that are different. One doesn't go into the landscape like Caspar David Friedrich and make a straight horizon. That wouldn't have had anything to do with our life.

SG: This beautiful first shot in *Hotel*, the one you shot in San Diego, it's almost found footage, isn't it? Of course you did shoot it yourself, but you shot it in an off-the-wall manner, and you didn't look through the viewfinder.

HE: That was my Nizo. I had this super-8 camera for years. I wanted to get really close to the wall. And I can't be stuck there with my head behind the camera. I walked this way, and it was clear to me, what's happening here is crazy. The wall's corner is also like a geometric system. You have a horizontal and then an axis going into time, thus a three axle system. And you move inside it. Then there are two other objects there. They stand in relation to one another and also move inside the system. You have a completely disintegrated, moving system, which, however, exists in real time. And that was it, that was the way to come into this world again where real relations and real movements take place. Because the other program, the five films, represents abstract time. You can build an artistic career on this and say, that's the guy with the single frames, and now he's making one composition after the other. But that didn't interest me anymore, because these actual movements, this system of coordinates that moves along, for me was the solution.

SG: One could suppose that it's possible to recognize in your first five films a bit of desire for a temporal stretching of the act of playing with forms. Was there also a desire there to make the viewer work, to even torture the viewer a bit through the sometimes considerable length of these early films?

HE: Duration is definitely an issue, because one is only able to act out such things when there's duration. But I have to say very clearly, the viewer played no role. Not even if the films were received mercifully or not. Of course there was often scandal and yelling in the audience. But I didn't care. I wanted to try something out, and it would only work in a certain length of time. The gaze onto the audience was nonexistent. More the feeling that the thing has to chime on its own, and the discourse that is made there needs time if any result whatsoever is to appear. One can comprehend it or not. At first glance, one can think that it's the same thing over and over. Which it isn't. There's not one single repetition in all of these films, because ultimately they were filmed chronologically, even though they are abstract compositions. For example, In *Schenec-Tady* I stood on one point for two weeks. I remember, it snowed, it rained, the sun shone. That's all still inside of these films. Or day broke, and night fell again. Change is in there. You only have to watch on a level that allows the changes to get close to you. But I didn't size up the audience in terms of 'I have to do something here which they'll either like or not.'

SG: But according to which criteria were the film's lengths determined? *Schenec-Tady II* is, for example, significantly shorter. You could have also said 'We could have kept this system going longer'. But you decided to end after about 19 minutes.

HE: *Schenec-Tady* was a particular composition that was carried out. I cut it up differently in three films.

SG: Yes, like music pieces that last sometimes for 12 minutes, sometimes for 18.

HE: That's how it is. But it's not that these three films realize the same composition.

SG: If they did, they would all have the same length.

HE: The one starts in the middle of a movement, for example, then becomes slow and accelerates again. Or on occasion a mirror-inverted, or a temporally inverted copying takes place, and the result becomes increasingly graphic. So for me—and this is still the same way for me with films, even if I am occupying myself with narrative-film-like constructs or architecture documentations—for me the object is important. The object here was an abstract composition, that thoroughly analyses something in time. And this needs time.

SG: It really didn't make you uncomfortable when viewers vehemently rebelled against it?

HE: At that time this was the normal condition.

SG: Was it more a kind of affirmation that the conformist bourgeois was against it?

HE: I wouldn't see it so psychologically. Of course one prefers having friends and people who understand what one is doing. But ultimately it was also an obsessive program on my part, going through the motions bit by bit. If there were a few people who saw a sense in it, then that was already enough. It was naturally good for me then to receive affirmation from America. In Germany there was only the immediate environment in Hamburg. There was a fixed artist's group there who also understood themselves as the audience. That didn't broaden until I left Germany. Then I noticed that I wasn't at all as isolated as I had thought.

SG: With the transition from the single-frame films to thelive action films, meaning *Hotel* and *Demon*, something like an astounding entertainment value enters into your films. This was also precipitated by the invitation to *documenta 6*. *Hotel* screened there. How was the film received there?

HE: That was in the *Fridericianum*. We also did shows there. We were totally isolated, to tell the truth. It came much later that art engaged with film. There was, as Birgit Hein told me, not a single review of the films at *documenta*. Pretty astounding, since good things were shown, things that are now recognized. But the art world didn't know what to do with films back then.

SG: With the film *Demon*, you moved on to a concrete analysis or deconstruction of a text. It was about a prose poem by Mallarmé, *Le Démon de l'Analogie*. As part of a score, once again almost mathematically, you broke it apart and arranged it. You notated it, almost like music, and then filmed it like this. One shot per word. But three speech tracks running parallel, two translations and the original version of the text. Can you say how you worked on that, and how you got the idea to make this deconstruction of language?

HE: It was the text itself that gave me the idea. The text talks about someone who leaves the house with certain thoughts in his brain. He looks into a shop window and suddenly sees an equivalent: I just now had this thought and now I see it in the shop

window. A weird process that brings inner mental processes into a relation with the outside world. This is the demon of analogy. Something happens in the head, and something similar happens in reality, and suddenly I ask myself: Which system am I operating in? I found this absolutely fascinating. And then I thought to myself: Do you want to realize the text like a literary text, or what else is there? I was very interested at that point in translation and its inadequacy. Between German and English, and in that case also French. And then I thought, I'll make a film about the differences between these languages. And these languages will occur simultaneously. If one is shrewd, then one can follow one language. But one can never follow three languages simultaneously.

SG: That's a challenge for concentration.

HE: And then you notice that the English translation has four sentences more than the French original. Hence a digression is built into the film. I interleave these languages and even attempt to find filmic equivalents for punctuation marks, for commas and periods. As for the endings of sentences, the performers have to do something. They have to act out grammar instead of roles. The text does indeed take place, but this film's principle of construction is dictated by its grammar, namely by three different grammars that take place simultaneously. This begins lightly, they alternate. Then you notice: the English part has many more words, or less than the French. Thus a new system was invented, sentence for sentence. At the end, the dice are thrown to decide which language is next. And then the actors leave the room where they were before, just like in the text, and they go outside and end up in front of a tool shop. That was around the corner from us, where I had this experience: I think of a hammer, and then I see a hammer in a tool shop.

SG: It's three other women outside, isn't it?

HE: Yes, and exchange processes take place there between the speakers. It's a film about equivalents and analogy formations, but ones that don't occur on a representative, acted-out or actorly level. Though actually the film is about a void, about the difference between the languages. That was my theme at the time.

SG: That is, of course, the main theme. Which role do the six silent men in the background play, the ones who are positioned in constantly shifting choreographies behind the women while indoors.

HE: Each person has a certain movement until the sentence ends. The last words of the sentences were written on the wall. They didn't know the text before that and therefore had to listen. When this word came up in the speech, they had to do something. Like some kind of ballet that is based on working, or concentration, listening, getting a cue and doing something.

SG: If one doesn't know this rule, then the thing isn't accessible. The film needed a footnote to explain this level.

HE: But why should one even make this accessible in the first place? There are so many things happening there which one anyway sees. When a palm branch is being talked about, then airplanes come. Then there's also the digression set off by three airplanes. They're interleaved like three languages and three different stations of

departure. The situation is pretty much off the hook. That was my idea then, to do something that blows apart the context. Those are all films made before computerization, and they had to be stuck together by hand. It would be significantly easier to make such films through computer programs. Except that one doesn't have to make them anymore. Well, I would never make them again. But I find it interesting that it was an anticipation of certain processes of computerization: one can break something down into the smallest pieces and assemble it anew. Well, it's like reassembling the analogue again and again through atomization.

SG: You could, of course, reconstruct the film digitally. But then it would have a completely different aesthetic. Again, this is due to the material.

HE: Yes, that would really be a waste of time.

SG: Also because it would be clear that this would result in a different film. Even if one tried to redo it exactly the same, I don't believe that one could reconstruct this rawness that the film has.

HE: There was no money for this film. The original is stuck together with Scotch Tape. I just heard that one can't copy the original sound tape because the sound heads get clogged after every meter. Now one has to extract the sound from the film's magnetic striping. A very difficult process, even just restoring and digitizing these films. There are some related myths too. These films were made at that time to be projected at 16 or 18 frames. You absolutely cannot do this with video.

SG: Why not? Because it starts flickering?

HE: Normally it's done like this: if you have a silent film that runs at 16 frames, then you just double some frames in order to reach 24. But how are you supposed to do this with a film in which every single frame is composed differently?

SG: Right.

HE: Then you destroy the composition. After much consideration, we found a possibility to show the films on DVDs with 15 fps. Like this, they come much closer to the originals than the videos that you've seen. It's really interesting how one always thinks digital makes everything possible. But it doesn't at all.

SG: The strict composition of these films—*Demon* is very strictly built—you pry it open in this film by, for example, revealing the production process. You're the one off-camera who sets and says the words that are to be repeated. This comes up more and more around the end. This fourth voice.

HE: Yes, I get myself mixed up in it. That's how we recorded it. They didn't learn it by heart. Instead, I always spoke the word, and then they repeated it.

SG: As soon as one hears the off-camera voice, it becomes clear that it was obviously produced that way. And then there's the moment when the three women suddenly burst into laughter. This little mistake that you leave in on purpose. It was about revealing or illuminating the production process? Or simply about a small absurdity that one allows oneself at some point?

HE: That was an event. I had a cat at the time, and she was totally addicted to being on camera. If there was a photo being taken somewhere, she would walk right through the middle of the picture. And this happened during these shoots as well. And that's why the people are laughing. Cats apparently seem to know where the concentration is focused, and that's where they go.

SG: When one hears you speak about your early structuralist work, the question arises, why, in fact, did you have such a trust in numbers, in mathematics, or in geometry? Where does this come from?

HE: I don't have this trust at all. Those were simply utilities. I had to develop a system of notation in order to be able to implement it. I had to set myself some points on the tripod and on the zoom lens. These two numbers yield a small code with which I can call up a certain camera position. Only this enables me to compose something. There wasn't any spontaneous panning back and forth. Nothing is panned. There's always one picture after another, shot with extreme clarity. The point was exactly defined from where it was shot, at which angle it lay and the focal length. Thus, the point was able to be called up again. Like in music, the way a note can be written down, and the instrument hits it precisely once again. But then you can have this note played by different instruments. Sometimes I think that in these compositions, the landscapes are the instruments that affect the composition.

SG: A somewhat more general question: you gave the name *Architecture As Autobiography* to a sub-category of your *Photography and beyond* series. You're assuming that architects write their autobiographies, so to speak, through their buildings and styles. Do you also assume that your films are autobiographical in this sense? Is cinema as autobiography conceivable for you?

HE: The fact that one stands there in the forest for weeks and shoots this kind of film points, of course, in that direction. I remember exactly, that was back in 1972 in Frankfurt. My friends were defending some squatted houses. And in the morning they drove me into the forest and then picked me up in the evening. It was important to me to go through this kind of catharsis in order to reach something that really interested me.

SG: You were shooting this film there for weeks.

HE: *Schenec-Tady* for weeks, the others maybe not so long.

SG: Didn't this ever push you to the edge of psychic ruination? Or did you think: Okay, I'll leave it alone. I'm spent.

HE: No, because there's something cleansing about it, like meditation.

SG: That was your way of meditating back then.

HE: You could say that. Stupefying working process, but at the same time you're getting fresh air. It's interesting that stupefying works sometimes release more thoughts than when you have to write an intelligent article for a newspaper. Creating scenarios for digressions is also an interesting story. At some point you once wrote

this composition, you made tests. And then of course you realize: in order to be able to see the whole, I unfortunately have to stand there for three weeks from morning to evening and shoot frame after frame.

SG: Now you have a strong interest in narrative film. In the early 70s this wasn't yet quite so distinct. It developed over the years. Could one say that from the *Schenec-Tady* films up until *Hotel* and *Demon* a small shift is indicated, that the narrative, theatrical element is already a little stronger there, and that this has intensified over the years?

HE: It started with *Normalsatz*, which I set out to do right after *Demon*. These films enjoyed a prestige within a certain avant-garde experimental film scene. But when I made *Normalsatz*, things got problematic. Because the scene didn't accept this step towards psychological, or unresolved psychological situations. I was obsessed then with collecting scenes that didn't narratively lead anywhere, as far as I could see. Working with an openness similar to the films before, but with a different kind of acting. The films were then recognized by completely different people, Frieda Grafe, for example. It helped me a lot that there indeed was a response in Germany. They were extraordinarily unpopular in the avant-garde experimental scene, these films. Somehow they stepped across boundaries, but within a scene that had entrenched itself.

SG: So these films were about a reaction from the audience, different than with the *Schenec-Tady* films.

HE: That would once again be going a bit too far for me. It was about negotiating something else. Staging situations that I still don't really comprehend. A completely different way of posing a question. It was about body, it was also about sexuality. Something came into play which was no longer merely pure tenet. The time from the end of the 70s to the end of the 80s was quite a difficult one for me. Though I did win new allies, the old ones broke away.

SG: Thank you for this conversation. If you don't have any more things to comment on, things we haven't touched upon…

HE: Could be, but if there's nothing more you want to know, then that's okay.

SG: Dankeschön.