

för *This is Today!*. En trailer till *This is Today!* visades i Köln hösten 1993. Projektet kommer att genomföras i Kunstverein i Ludwigsburg/Stuttgart.

² I boken till *Last Paradise* finns en annan version av texten på detta tema, men den överlappar i ringa mån den föreliggande texten.

³ Liam Gillick, intervjuad på videon *This is Today!*, Köln och Wien 1993.

⁴ Denis, *Sexe Dancing*, London 1993, s. 7.

⁵ Erasmus Darwin, Masuma Ibuka, Harriet Matineau, Elsie McLuhan, Murry Wilson och McNamara var allesammans "parallella individer". Ingen av dem befann sig i maktens topp, men alla var delaktiga i makten.

⁶ Vanessa Beecroft, *A blond-haired dream*, koncept, Schipper & Krome, Köln 1994.

⁷ Denis, intervju i ibid.

⁸ Denna performance uppfördes i samband med ett utställningsprojekt på Liechtensteinstraße 18/10 i Wien 1993.

⁹ Oliver Hangl, intervju.

¹⁰ Man kan här notera att framför allt Philippe Parreno och Oliver Hangl också gör film.

¹¹ Peter Wuss, *Die Tiefenstruktur des Filmkunstwerks. Zur Analyse von Spielfilmen mit offener Komposition*, Berlin 1990.

¹² Under produktionen av *Samske*, en annan film av Wayne Wang som utspelar sig i samma tobaksaffär, blev en del material över som kunde användas i *Blue in the Face*. Andra scener spelades snabbt in på plats.



BARBARA STEINER

Film as a Method of Thinking and Working¹

"I am very much interested in the idea of pre-production, production and postproduction which is well known in the field of film," Liam Gillick said in an interview I made with him for *Trailer/This is Today!*² Oliver Hangl is fascinated by the option of "thinking in images, thinking in terms of cutting and editing". In his performances, he tries to link theatrical and cinematographic elements. Vanessa Beecroft is specially interested in the time factor inherent to film. In her performances, she uses motion to expand painting. All these artists have in common that they do not make movies, but use film as a method of thinking and working. Their approach to film is not thematic, it does not reflect on the medium; they use cinematographic methods. To them, using film primarily means to expand the notion of what it means to be an artist and the notion of art itself while a number of other aspects in their works are of a non-cinematographic nature.

The basis of Parreno's project *Sexe Dancing* for the Consortium in Dijon was "film-making without camera". A book of the same title, written in cooperation with Liam Gillick and Jack Wendler, was translated into reality in analogy to a film script. The book centers on a building that originally had various functions, but is no longer clearly defined. "...we are in a big building and an event is taking place. You can find this form of architecture in many cities. Its original function has been forgotten but the structure retains a certain aura... When you move around the different floors of the building you can see traces of the past".³ On the evening of the exhibition opening, Parreno arranged a party at the Consortium, integrating various remnants of (fictitious) earlier uses of the building: shoemaker, key-cutting service, hairdresser, sockets, cables, partition walls etc. As a matter of fact, the Consortium had been a warehouse, like so many other art institutions. The individual "islands" were built in such a way as if they were (film) sets for something that had happened earlier or would happen later on. Visitors going to the exhibition

after the party were inspired by the fragments of pictures they had seen and developed their own images, following a pattern of non-linear, branching associations. Parreno offered a script, various locations, actors and extras, but the actual movie evolved inside the visitors' heads.

In 1993 Liam Gillick worked on a musical comedy in three acts entitled *Ibuka!*, which was shown in Paris, Stuttgart and New York at various stages of development. It was based on another book by Liam Gillick, *Erasmus is Late*, which revolved around a dinner in London at which several "parallel individuals" meet across the boundaries of time and space. Gillick developed several possible set decorations, thus visualising points of departure for thought about *Ibuka!*, which never fully materialised. A sophisticated system of references connected limits of time and space with the storyline of the book. Elements in the exhibition spaces skirted around the story, but were never to the point. This fits in with the content of the play — Erasmus never arrives for dinner — and with the characters of the play who could be described as marginal figures of history. The *What If Scenario* — Gillick's follow-up project — only describes the potentials of options: in analogy to the preproduction phase known from the movie industry, various ideas are played through, but none of them is finalised. The "What If" is a fiction as well as a driving force behind considerations that remain unspecified. While *Ibuka!* was still based on a specific storyline, the *What If Scenario* is unlimited potentiality from the very beginning. The stage is there, but it has to be filled, thus inspiring various ideas which may, but do not necessarily have to take a more precise shape.

Vanessa Beecroft refers directly to certain films which form the basis of her performances. She adapts the originals and quasi turns existing movies into scripts of her own. The characters are always extreme — as underscored by the unusual colours of the wigs she uses — and she takes these extreme characters (a juvenile killer and suicide, a female Leninist and revolutionary)

out of the movies and multiplies them. Her favourite performers are young girls, who Beecroft considers as correspondences to the heroes in the movies. "I watch girls in the street and I try to imagine them as possible interpreters for roles they don't know of, but which they reveal through their somatic traits or their position in space while walking: sometimes I feel as if I had already seen them in some paintings or movies... Young girls are the mediating term I feel the closest to, for the time being."⁴ Using yellow or red wigs corresponding to the movie protagonists' colours of hair, and specially selected clothes, Beecroft emphasises certain features predetermined by the movies. The spaces in which her performances take place are usually closed to the visitors, who may only follow the action through a window, as if it were a sequence from a movie. Beecroft's works expand, they literally have to be regarded as "moving pictures". This is also something the artist herself underscores; she has repeatedly referred to her interest in painting,⁵ even though she considers the classical notion of painting as too one-dimensional for her purposes. Two-dimensionality and motion are the decisive parameters for Beecroft's work. Cinematography has the atmosphere and motion manifesting itself in the passage of time, which is what she finds useful. Even though the performances take place in three-dimensional space, the viewers are deliberately deprived of this aspect. They are placed in a position outside the action, which in turn eventually seems two-dimensional again, which constitutes the central criterion of painting for the artist.

Oliver Hangl tries to link elements of film and theatre with each other in his works. While cinematography allows for more concentration on visual details as well as jumps back and forth in time and location through cutting and editing, the theatre relies on the expressivity of gestures, immediacy and unrepeatability. Tom Scoppard's film *Romanticism and Guillotines are Dead* can be seen as paradigmatic for Hangl: stage action

recorded on film, cutting and editing in the stage performances, murders performed on three occasions, twice on stage, once "in reality", and theatrical expressivity in the details combine in a highly complex whole doing justice to both theatre and film. Before the live performance *Eat!* Hangl and his colleague Gergely rehearsed the piece in front of a video camera, repeating passages that went wrong and improving on certain points, but the actual performance was shown only once and not documented. Hangl tries to integrate cinematographic elements into live performances by placing great emphasis on visual details and striving to be close to the audience. The performance took place in a spot selected to enhance the position of the audience, giving the viewers the impression that they were movie-goers. "Thinking in such a way that you do not need editing," is what is interesting to him, and this goes for films and performances alike.⁸ In all the cases described here, no film was made.⁹ First of all, the interest in film—to put it simply—comes from a certain uneasiness about giving an artistic idea final shape in an immovable object. The cinematographic inspiration lends dynamism to a static notion of art and the time factor is placed in the focus of attention.

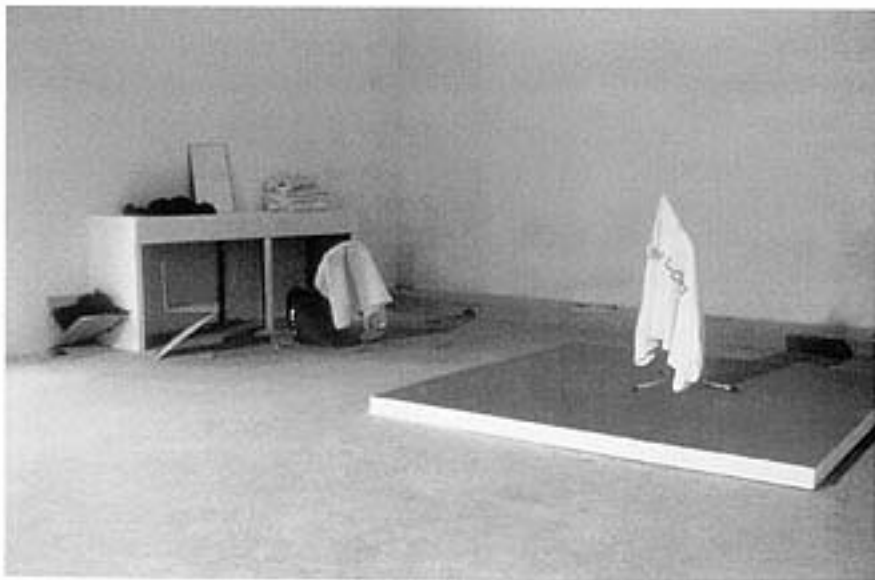
The main characteristic of films is that they consist of individual frames which can no longer be identified during presentation because of the speed at which they are shown and due to time passing. Of course, this does not apply to the works described above because the individual parts always remain discernible. However, there is one point that accounts for a comparable phenomenon: while the individual aesthetic element is important, it is not dealt with as independent, but as part of a complex referential system. A more or less sophisticated structure of references forms the basis of works which "temporalise" or "spatialise". The components are

added up by the recipient, which makes it possible for him/her to follow the course of events. However, at no point of time are we in a position to perceive the entire work at once—to have a complete overview.

Film also does away with the necessity to show everything. Splits, gaps (in terms of time and place) are linked up by the storyline. On the basis of every-day experiences and a certain pre-existing knowledge in the audience, certain shots can be dispensed with while the overall line remains clear nonetheless. Art is not all as simple as that, but still, the reception of works by the artists mentioned here may take place under similar circumstances. Various shots are linked with one another: Parreno's diversity of "sets" and paraphernalia, Gillick's partial set decorations in scattered locations, Beecroft's and Hangl's props and plots. In combination, all these things allow for a conclusion to be drawn about an underlying intention, even though in some cases it may seem partly incomprehensible or inconsistent due to the grammar of the work. The works cannot be understood in terms of self-contained and obvious sets of relations enabling unequivocal interpretation. Rather, they formulate an "in-between" situation. We touch upon a bundle of complicated interactions that can only be deciphered step by step. The works start somewhere, continue, branch off, form networks, take up contingencies (in the form of encounters, reactions of other performers); all things considered, the projects take a course that cannot be subjected to any advance planning, even though all the works are based on a sort of "script". The works presented here can be read as films with an "open composition" (Wuss).¹⁰ Indeterminacy can be seen as the most important basic element in terms of "action, evocation and cultural intention", to say it in cinematographic terms. "Indeterminacy of action" is taken to mean that it is very difficult to define what

is being told or if a consistent narrative is actually aimed at. "Evocation" means the effect caused in the viewer, which is also ambiguous in this case. "Cultural intention" asks for the repository, the category of cultural phenomena the work is to be attributed to. All this is true of the artists reviewed here. Their works cannot be read as self-contained and obvious sets of relations enabling unequivocal interpretation. It is difficult to associate the artists' intentions with any known cultural category because they transcend traditional notions of the artwork and formulate an "in-between" situation. We touch upon a system of complex interaction that can only be deciphered gradually.

In Wayne Wang's film *Blue in the Face*, various storylines about a juvenile thief, a tobaccoconnoisseur, his employee, his friends and total stranger passing by are linked with one another. The credits clearly state that the film deals with "situations". The movie is ultimately an assemblage involving various types of characters and dialogues we know from numerous other movies. No individual sequence in the film has more weight than the others. Instead, we find a multiplicity of stories referring to one another, thread crossing. The temporal sequence is linear, but it is clearly a patchwork of scenes which seem to have been assembled in an arbitrary manner in the editing.¹¹ The tobaccoconnoisseur's store is in the centre of events. The typology of the movie is open—individual stories, motifs, elements are added to one another, but do not blend; the gap can be seen all along. Here, too, incongruity remains a programmatic feature. Film is not only an inspiration with a view to questioning a traditional notion of the artwork, it also supplies a model for the artist to explore his/her position in the figure of the director. Parreno, Gillick, Beecroft and Hangl act like directors, first mapping out a framework for the work to develop within, then selecting the material/content. The "script" plays an important role for all of them; if it does not already exist, it is written for the purpose or commissioned. Subsequently "actors/actresses" are chosen in a kind of "casting": lay actors or professionals, type-cast people or versatile performers, depending on the artistic intention. The staging itself can take different shapes: sometimes it is rather strict and defines a major number of components, sometimes everything develops freely from a certain "point of departure". The tension emerging between script and realisation, which involves many people, not only stands for continuous shifts in the initial concept, but also for a reification of one's own aesthetic standards. The artists delegate some of their responsibility in shaping the work to others like film directors do. The interest the artists concerned take in the figure of the director is thus closely related to the question for artistic identity. Division of labour undermines the myth of the genius working on his/her own. Artistic work defined as the complex interaction of many makes you a cog in the machine even though you do not give up the idea that someone has to remain in charge of the "artistic direc-



PHILIPPE PARRENO: SNOW DANCING, LE CONSORTIUM, DUCN 1995



OLIVER HANZL & ANDREA GERGELY: EAT, PERFORMANCE, LICHTENSTEINERSTR. 58, 1090 WIEN, 1995

tion". In respect of the question for identity, movies also have other aspects: actors/actresses play a diversity of parts. Identity in the movies can be considered a temporary matter, a provisional, non-final factor, and in any event it is a construct. Transposed to society and the artist's situation, it means that his/her role, his/her character is "negotiable" and variable, that it has not been determined for once and for all. In his work Liam Gillick furnishes to us an impressive model of open potential: a lot is possible and thinkable, the point is how to funnel or structure things, not how to give them an unchangeable shape or to prevent them from happening. Any such venture would ultimately be doomed to failure.

NOTES:

¹I first dealt with this topic when I curated the

exhibition *Last Paradise* at the Kunstraum Wien in December 1994. At the end of the project, film as a major source of inspiration for artists' methods came up and became the basis of *This is Today!*. A trailer for *This is Today!* was shown in Cologne in autumn 1995. The project will be realised at the Kunstverein in Ludwigsburg/ Stuttgart, Germany 1997.

A text on the same topic can be found in the book on *Last Paradise*; a few passages are identical with the present text.

²Liam Gillick, in an interview for the videotape *This is Today!*, Cologne, Vienna 1995.

³Idem, *Snow Dancing*, London 1995, p. 7.

⁴Erasmus Darwin, Masura Ibuka, Harriet Martineau, Elsie McLuhan, Murray Wilson and McNamara were all "parallel individuals". None of them was in the centre of power, but they all participated in it.

⁵Vanessa Beecroft, *A blond-haired dream*, draft, Schipper & Krome, Cologne 1994.

⁶Vanessa Beecroft, Interview, loc. cit.

⁷The performance was shown on the occasion of an exhibition project at Liechtensteinstrasse 58/10, Vienna 1995.

⁸Oliver Hanzl.

⁹However, it should be noted that the artists, especially Philippe Parreno and Oliver Hanzl, are also film-makers.

¹⁰Peter Wuss: *Die Tiefenstruktur des Filmkunstwerks. Zur Analyse von Spielfilmen mit offener Komposition*, Berlin 1990.

¹¹Unused material shot during the production of *Smoke*, another movie by Wayne Wang, set at the same tobacconist's store, was used for *Blue in the Face*. Additional scenes were shot on location without much ado.