

The Narrative – Approaches

by Maike Mia Höhne

cinematographic clusterlady

I.

A water lily opens to classical music. Time lapse images. Everything entices one to wholly surrender to the homage of beauty. In a bare exhibition space, in which the image occupies the entire wall and viewers linger on a bench at a fitting distance, in order to reflect upon the short, almost ten-minute film, or simply let their thoughts roam. In the synopsis for her film *VICTORIA*¹ Salla Tykkä writes: “A nightly blossoming of the giant water lily is depicted. The plant tells the story of European colonialism in the 19th century, and hides within its beauty the human need for power and domination.”

“The inexplicable”, incomparable to anything, things never before seen. A naked baby is encircled with cotton balls by a boy, is spat upon with chewing gum and then computer-controlled from a desk chair, a man with a speech disorder gives a lecture on phobias, a girl with a wig is exposed to the sexual tension between her mother and a man, a woman at an airport, played by Miranda July, gets talking to a girl with a hair band in her mouth. Everything appears as if in a dream, although it is probably more aptly described as a nightmare. While all the people act normally, their actions are full of abnormalities. There are no boundaries in this short film. It is absolutely free. ...Everything is possible².” *NEST OF TENS* by Miranda July, from the year 2000. 27 minutes.

The Japanese animation artist Mirai Mizue, says that at the beginning of his career he always wanted to tell stories, just as everyone wants to tell stories, and so he too began to tell stories. He imposed the structure of storytelling upon his images and came to terms with this logic. He then realised that this approach to the story was not his. He does not want to tell a story, he wants to paint. Now he paints pictures, animates them, works with musicians, in order to find a rhythm and tempo appropriate for the pictures and leaves the audience to discover the stories in his images for themselves. Nevertheless, his rhythm and the tempo of his cells still pursue a certain logic, a certain plot.

It is different plots that tell the story. Within itself, each plot contains the famous three acts, whereby it is clear that the boundaries are fluent and that the omitting, augmenting or telling of a story in its entirety in one act, that is, the artistic approach of one individual act does not ignore the other acts, to the contrary. Thus it is the individual strands of the narratives that differ from one another. One strand. Many strands. No strand.

II.

Film and art. Art and film. Cinema and gallery. Cinema and museum. It is always about the juxtaposition. In view of the other. As if perceived from the corner of one’s eye. From further away. An eyeing of the self. Conjectures are pronounced. Why one is well received in the cinema, the other in the cube. Why one is not there

and vice versa. Theories are put forward. Usually, in reference to the works themselves. Which short film is shown where.

Over the years, my observation has been that it also involves the profoundly human, that it is about the people themselves who have produced the works. “Types” you could call them, but that doesn’t have to be the case. But what is true, is that there are certain entities who, with their work have always felt comfortable in the visual arts; comfortable, because understood.

The same is true the other way round: There are those who have always understood the cinema and the film as film, who wanted to make film. In my opinion, it is this stance that constitutes the fine line of difference. Of course, there will always be “Grenzgänger”, those who blur the boundaries. There are always those with a lust and an urge for the other – that is, those who have been successful in one space and wish to be in the other and vice versa. The exception provides room for speculation.

The other is the secret.

III.

Telling a story in film, predominantly means telling a secret. The desire to watch a film and become involved, stay involved, go along, directly depends upon the force of the film to convey this secret, this dark power. The thrill lies within, wishing to know how it continues. Similar to how there are one million variations for the structure of the narrative, the same is true for the secret. The method, in which the secret is exposed from the outset, is one possibility in the narrative. That boredom may eventuate in one or another case – is obvious.

An audience’s encroaching feeling of boredom, often accompanied by a certain physical agitation, is better intercepted in the cube. As an active viewer I can move about, without my actions disturbing anyone else. (Kant’s imperative). In the cinema, I am, ideally, not alone – the cinema experience is at best a collective one and the power of cinema reveals itself in the communal. In a cinema space therefore, one deals differently with boredom that is triggered by a film’s narrative, in order to comply with Kant’s imperative. That doesn’t always succeed. Falling asleep, talking, standing up, bottling up, frowning, groaning, are ways in which to affect others and involve them in one’s own emotional experience. There are various ways to handle such involvement, without having wished for it. From sympathy to a furious, “Be quiet!” everything is possible. I have never experienced emotional outbursts such as that in the cube. And even when a viewer acts annoyed, it never takes more than a sideways glance – the first one leaves, and the second is left to discuss the departure with their potential accessories, or not. But the extent of the disturbance is not comparable to the magnitude it would develop if the outburst had taken place in a cinema.

What does the possibility of continual departure mean to the narrative. The average viewer’s length of stay in an open exhibition space amounts to less than half the duration of the projected piece. Behaviour that is known to the artists and gallery owners, the business. Does the viewer and potential buyer’s behaviour have an influence on the narrative? Influence on the artist’s work? And when will work shown in cubes ever be seen in its entirety, from beginning to end? Is that even the aim of work in cubes or merely one form of reception?

It is predominantly short films that are shown in galleries. Does the length of the work hold any significance at all, when the viewer can determine at any time, when and how long they will watch the piece? In regular cinema programming, short films can be seen as the short screened before a feature and sometimes in an entire program of shorts. Aside from that, there is an incredible amount of short film and festivals in general. The pursuit of many filmmakers, to find a premier festival for their short work, an “A” film festival for features, is related to the attention given to shorts and others within the framework of such big festivals, but also that which comes after. The Bear, the Palms on a poster generate incomparably more for a film’s exploitation than a small festival in the middle of nowhere that simply serves as an “end game”. Immensely important and great, but not really helpful in terms of the future and financing of the next project. By the same token, ranking for galleries and museums also applies, to position one’s own work. Beyond the matter of the experience, it is also about an afterwards.

The wish of filmmakers, artists to be recognized should be understood absolutely. The longing of filmmakers and artists to solely rule the cinema space with their work, within the short form, is difficult to fulfil. Owing to democratic and economic circumstances it is about a “together”. For the short film that means that in a festival context, a film will often be shown alongside those from other filmmakers, whereas in the context of visual arts, sole screenings do occur. For me personally, I see the collective showing as a chance. The length of a work is incomparable to its narrative, or: It is collective thinking that leads the way inside the story.

All stories require time.

EPILOGUE.

Marina Abramovic said: “Art is about energy”.³ In her work, *THE ONION* (2012), a tear-streaked Marina Abramovic bites into an onion and recites a text in the voice over, where she says: “I am tired of changing planes so often. Waiting in the bus stations, train stations, airports. I am so tired of waiting for endless passport controls. ... I want to go away - somewhere so far away that I am unreachable by fax or telephone. I want to get old, really, really old so that nothing matters anymore. I want to understand and see clearly what is behind all of this. I want to not want anymore.”

To not want anything anymore. Simply show. In the cinema. In the cube. To enter into discussion, with the others. In an imagined or concrete dialogue. That is film. That is art.

Translated by Monica Koshka-Stein
Biographies: See introduction

Notes

1 sallatykka.com

2 Sarah Drath schreibt diese Gedanken in dem Seminar, “Der Avantgarde die Leinwand”, daß ich im letzten Jahr an der Hochschule für bildende Künste in Hamburg gegeben habe.

3 Abramovic on Performance 2012: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0qR-RrVfFmY>