

## Nina Kurtela

### TRANSFORMANCE

an experimental film, 6'

text by Boris Greiner

The word *transformance* is a portmanteau word comprising transform and performance. In this case, I would not interpret this coinage as *change the performance* but rather as *execute a change*. However, right at the beginning of the film it is clear that the author is not carrying out a change; rather, she is documenting a situation in which she puts on her performance, while change takes place all around her. And yet, this performance could well be called an anti-performance, because she in fact performs nothing except to take up a position at a building site at which an existing derelict depot for the repairs of trams and buses is being turned into a contemporary dance centre. She is there during the whole of the construction process, visibly getting in the way of the works. The disturbance clearly takes place in agreement with those organising the change of purpose, the clients, for the contractors are quite considerate to the form of her presence on-site. The artist carries out her several-months-long performance photographing herself in the same position. She then edits the photographs taken into the experimental film that is the conclusion of her artistic intentions.

The basic determinants of the experimental film as genre category would be non-linearity, or the absence of the usual dramaturgical line; the uncommon interventions into the production process with the use of the basic element – the film stock – as subject, which is for example, settled by determining the length of the take by a length of stock set in advance; the use of already exposed film as actor at the object being filmed; and colouring, writing on or scraping the actual stock. In recent time, this latter effect, with the appearance of the electronic medium, has been taken over by digital processing of the footage, including numerous effects. The

advantages of such treatment are the outstanding optical situations, the most common problem being the absence of point arising from over-reliance on the visual atmosphere.

Leaving aside arguments about the sustainability of the actual label of this kind of film (thinking here of the possible anachronism because it was arrived at by taking for granted experimentation on the actual vehicle of the visual message), today it could be designated a form that is nevertheless characterised by some kind of experimentation, or, that what is the basic signifier of such a film does not belong to any existing or classic category. The idea for such a film is above and beyond the currently valid genres, or else it takes on some hybrid form among them. To this, in my opinion, might be joined various conceptual ideas that nevertheless do find their final form in the film medium or that in the essential dimension for the presentation of such ideas make use of characteristic film elements.

Applying such assumptions of the medium to the film *Transformance*, it can be seen that it corresponds to some of the principles listed.

On the one hand, in this case the film medium is used for the documentation of the construction process. On the other, the artist set out on the action with the idea that it should be a film. Her intervention consists of placing herself in the centre of the film and taking herself with self-timer. That this dimension is important to her is shown by the title poster that has the same frame as the whole of the film, with the proviso that instead of her, now on the final platform of the completed stage there are her shoes and a self-timer with wire.

Without her presence, not only would there be no experimental film, or even a documentary, or a film at all, but by her action she does not appropriate the construction process that is going on anyway. Rather, she uses it as a backdrop for a conceptual idea the objective of which is the production of a film. This objective, this authorial idea is analysed and accomplished at several levels. In the first place, her procedure demystifies production - it at once broadcasts how it came about, that she

is both actor and camera operator and editor and director. All these roles are intertwined and also active because of the basic idea of change and performance. For having won the central position as performer, as director, she at once downgrades it, becoming with her immobility in fact stage setting, while the building activity in the middle ground become content, the film thus taking on a documentary tone, giving information about changes that have occurred.

Similarly, the role of camera operator is also that of a performer, but it indicates, or involves the form of editing, as principle of the structuration of the film. At the theoretical level the sequencing of little images tests out one of the key dimensions – and that is time – the medium of film includes time, unlike the medium of photography, which excludes it, and presents a scene at a halted moment. This essential difference is in this case used with optimal symbolism considering the theme, for it represents the building process that (considering the slowness of change) is most precise and can be followed actually by the rapid sequencing (several in a second) of numerous portraits of the given phases. For it is impossible to shoot a month-long take and then speed it up. Hence this kind of form of film is at the same time an ideal tool for visualising the first concept of the coinage of the title.

The second, performative, part is also integrated into the essence of the change, because actually anyway the comprehensiveness of the change around us can only be observed if we set up an unchanging point. It will then become a mirror of change; through it the surrounding is reflected. It, then, is not a witness, but a medium, through which we, the viewers, become the witnesses. But not only witnesses of concrete events, but of the developing consciousness of the process of change. In other words, this point becomes a signpost through which we bear witness to the establishment of the relation. For if there were no small, there would be no big. And so just as the interloper at the building site postulates the building site, so the stable position of the artist points up the passage of time.

Expanding the frame outside the frame of the film, which is to say making use of information that we did not acquire watching the film, the particular interest of the author becomes illuminated.

The derelict depot becomes an effective theatre. Effective with respect to her, who uses it as performing artist for her possible future appearances. And what, then, does she, at some personal and universally comparable symbolic level do during her performance? She is waiting for the emplacement of the context of her future activity, bringing us once again to the initial neologism, for the objective *transform* precedes her personal *perform*. However, with her performance during the transformation of the space, she puts the authorial role at the service or in the frame of the whole process, which once again is documented by the poster mentioned earlier, on which she leaves only traces, as proof of a performance produced even before the official opening of the centre.

In a transferred sense, this dimension illustrates one of, I would say, the more innovative dimensions of the experimental film, for it presents a content that in a formative sense unfolds within its principles, shifting its mainstay outside.