

## ALIAS YEDERBECK – WORK ON THE MYTH OF THE ARTIST

*“The artist is the central mythical figure of Western civilization. He has been venerated for thousands of years in ever new shapes: as Prometheus, prophet, genius, or Overman. No other cult figure reveals so powerfully the history of the European spirit as a drama of the eternal struggle between reality and insanity, heaven and hell, fate and free self-determination.”<sup>1</sup>*

*Alias Yederbeck* is a cinematographic installation with which Frank Geßner’s artistic project *Towards the Image: 1. Satz\_ Teste sans fin* at the boundary between cinema and multimedia event is transformed into an open “work of art in motion”.<sup>2</sup> In a scenic architecture conceived as a virtual exhibition, Geßner and his team stage a “fiction of art”<sup>3</sup> that playfully (de)constructs the myth of the artist genius: the Berlin-Brandenburg *Teste Foundation* preserves and cultivates the extensive artistic legacy of Paul Yederbeck. For the tenth anniversary of Yederbeck’s death, this legacy is being prepared in connection with “Potsdam 2011 – Stadt des Films” and will be presented to the public for the first time. Who is this painter who, shortly after the fall of the Wall, appears in Berlin as if from nowhere and, at the zenith of his fame in 2001, dies in Venice in a plane crash?

*Alias Yederbeck* tells the story of the life and opinions of Paul Yederbeck, the artist born in the mid-1960s, as a picture puzzle fragmented into particles of memory. This is to be understood as a multiple attempt at an ultimately failing reconstruction: as a trailblazer of a “Nouvelle Vague” in painting, Yederbeck was the shooting star of his generation. He rapidly grew out of his initial idealism; the art market recognized him early and entangled him in the production of commodities. Yederbeck’s addiction to success, self-importance, and hubris are tied to growing alienation. He lived his last years shy and withdrawn in his studio in the midst of his

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<sup>1</sup> From the announcement of the exhibition cycle: *Der Kult des Künstlers*, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, 2008. See in this context: Szeemann, Harald (ed.), *Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800*, Aarau und Frankfurt a. M.: Sauerländer, 1983, (exh. cat. Kunsthaus Zürich 11.02.1983–30.04.1983).

<sup>2</sup> In the sense of Umberto Eco’s “open work”.

<sup>3</sup> See: Kunstforum International, Vol. 202, May 2010, *Fiktion der Kunst der Fiktion*, and Vol. 204, October 2010, *Kunst der Fiktion der Kunst*, both ed. by Thomas Wulffen.

pictures, books, and a collection of archive material from all over the world. After his early death, thousands of sketches, drawings, and pictures, countless photos and sound, film, and video recordings, as well as notes, letters, and a gigantic accumulation of research and context material were found in his studio. The archive material also contains precise designs and plans as well as instructions for playing, constructing, and acting to realize his multimedia representation.

*Alias Yederbeck* is a hybrid “auto-(author-)construction” [“Auto(r)-konstruktion”] whose goal is to make it possible to sensually experience the conceptual and processual structures of the genesis of an artistic work. According to the postmodern theory of the death of the subject, there is nothing but objective structures with mutual dependencies and/or networked systems of meaning.<sup>4</sup> To transform these nonlinear contexts into a cinematographic installation is the rigorous logical conclusion of the project *Towards the Image*. This also makes a theme out of the site of the postmodern artist in the operating system of the current media culture. The first movement *Teste sans fin*, which has been stylized as an artistic legacy, refers loosely to the fictional character “Monsieur Teste”<sup>5</sup> of Paul Valéry (“Teste” = neologism: Fr. tête “head”, Lat. testis “witness” or “test”) and, as the ideational history of an artistic castle-in-the-air, displays an ironical pathos of identity: once again, a Western “self” is to develop, but under pseudonym and in the adaptation of foreign languages – authentic only in potentiated role play. Bit by bit, the construct is erected out of personal feelings and memories and describes the territory of the alter ego with its changing contacts and relations. The personality of the artist appears as a specific form of the anonymous and collective process of transmitting tradition and, as the subject of the genre-spanning story, is like the object of its manifold considerations. In search of its own identity, the “auto-(author-)construction” slips into the fictional roles of its autobiographical figures and quotations. This research is simultaneously a search for possible ways to still tell stories today and a journey into the self as a “distant interior”: the “Other” in the net of relationships becomes a mirror whose fractal surface not only reflects an image, but also opens up a rambling personal world of multifaceted perspectives on and reflections about one’s own person.

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<sup>4</sup> See: Pierre Bourdieu, “Anhang 1, Die biographische Illusion“, in: *Praktische Vernunft: Zur Theorie des Handelns*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1998, pp. 75–83.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1990.

*Alias Yederbeck* is an intermedia interface project for “built attempts to connect what is separate”.<sup>6</sup> In the autobiographically motivated investigation of high and low culture in the broad history-of-pictures context, the traditional media are transformed into something digital in order to subject them to a productive artistic “bastardization”. This not only reactivates the principle of the panorama as one of the most popular manifestations of pre-cinema; it also further develops the supposedly obsolete media for a hybrid “Future Cinema”.<sup>7</sup> This experimental exploration of the potential of motion, time, and sound serves to expand cinematographic experience and questions the basic cinematic building blocks under new conditions. By means of shot scales geared to the viewer and of the principles of open and concealed montage, film – in its function as a leading medium of Modernism – takes on special significance in this project; the structure of the content, by contrast, is more comparable to that of an essay or a coming-of-age or artist’s-life novel. The unfolding of the author’s staged world is not only simulated through the idea of the film or novel as Gesamtkunstwerk, the modern equivalent of a cathedral, but also made bodily experientiable as an “image as construction”.<sup>8</sup>

*Alias Yederbeck* is organized like a “temple of memory” in several rooms: foyer, panorama, and video lounge (expandable by means of exhibition rooms and the lecture hall). In the foyer, as is customary in museum exhibitions, Paul Yederbeck’s curriculum vitae is staged. In the large, 12-sided, 360° panorama, the viewer is plunged into a dark, collective bath of space. A selection of 252 digitalized panel pictures from *Teste sans fin*, arranged in 12 blocks of 21 pictures each, is projected onto 12 screens. Each of the 12 blocks or screens in this cinema represents one of the author’s imaginary spaces of thinking, remembering, and acting. In a time-based environment, the connection between panel picture and various sorts of images, sounds, music, and text is displayed by means of hybrid possibilities of shaping. The respective “auto-(author-)construction” of a block is the key image and is presented as a “tableaux

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<sup>6</sup> Siegfried Zielinski’s interesting definition of media, in: *Archäologie der Medien: Zur Tiefenzeit des technischen Hörens und Sehens*, Reinbek near Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2002, pp. 16–17.

<sup>7</sup> See: Jeffrey Shaw and Peter Weibel (eds.): *Future Cinema: The Cinematic Imaginary after Film*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 2003, (exhibition catalog, ZKM / Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Germany and Massachusetts Institute of Technology Nov. 16, 2002–Mar. 30, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Among others the author was inspired to “media transformation” by Hans Belting, *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft*, Munich 2001, and Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge, Mass. and London: MIT Press, 1985.

vivant” – in a way, as an exit from the picture onto the naked studio stage as an “actor of itself”. Yederbeck’s decisive ideas are the moving element of the story; they lead the viewer into contexts and processes behind the pictures. With this “auto-focus” of the media representative, the story expands multiperspectively to up to twelve screens in the 360° panorama. The heterogeneous starting material is staged exemplarily by representing structural and substantive levels in twelve nonlinear episodes, which unfold a fragmentary overall image of the protagonist between poetry, truth, and absurd media theater. Another standpoint can be viewed in the video lounge: the artist’s video *Qu’est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* (What is Monsieur Teste?)<sup>9</sup> is offered at the end like a reversed “opening film” that counteracts the self-depiction as an ingenious game between reality and fiction about fame and disappearance, truth and forgery; imitation and reproduction are revealed to the viewer as a principle of art and can be explored in their relationship to the genuine.

This aesthetic procedure for producing works of art, borrowed from romantic irony, reflects the production conditions of art in the work of art itself, holds the work in suspension in an interchange between self-creation and self-destruction, and itself depicts “what produces with the product”.<sup>10</sup> The project thereby shows what Theodor W. Adorno called the pleasurable “efforts of the subject to penetrate into what conceals itself as objectivity behind the façade” and is, not least, an artistic research attempt to conduct a “discourse mediating between view and concept, picture and sign”.<sup>11</sup> But with its multiplicity, the “Expanded Animation Cinema” experiment *Alias Yederbeck* resists unambiguous explanations and poses the ever-current questions: What is film? What is cinema? – *Qu’est-ce le cinéma?*<sup>12</sup>

Frank Geßner, “Alias Yederbeck: Arbeit am Künstlermythos”, overworked and translated version, 2012, first published, in: *Moderne in Brandenburg: LICHT/SPIEL/HAUS. Film, Kunst und Baukultur*, ed. by Kulturland Brandenburg e.V., Potsdam, Berlin: Koehler & Amelang, 2011, pp. 80–83, German.

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<sup>9</sup> *Qu’est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* – loosely based on André Bazin, *Qu’est-ce le cinéma?*, Paul Valéry, *Monsieur Teste* and, Gottfried Boehm, *Was ist ein Bild?* (What is an image?)

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Schlegel: “Athenäums-Fragment Nr. 238”, in: *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. by Ernst Behler, 2 vols., Vol. 2: Friedrich Schlegel, Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796–1801), Paderborn: Schöningh, 1967, p. 204.

<sup>11</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: “Der Essay als Form”, in: *Noten zur Literatur*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Bazin, André, *Was ist Kino? Bausteine zur Theorie des Films*, Cologne: DuMont, 1975.

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