

TESTE FOUNDATION

QU'EST-CE QUE MONSIEUR TESTE? (WHAT IS M. TESTE?)

By Paul Jederbeck - Work In Progress

The postmodern "digital (compositing) film" *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* is a playful "fake docufiction" about a mysterious rising star of the art world around the turn of the century with the pseudonym "Monsieur Teste"; at the same time, it is an ironic "film essay" on the true and the merchandising value of art. It thus distinguishes itself radically from more or less didactic films about art and from all problematical cinematic portraits of artists. With the themes of the manipulation of image, text, and identity in digital "compositing times", real and virtual components are joined in a filmic site between being and nonbeing and thereby have something to say about the art of filmmaking as well as about the art of painting.

Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?, like its great role model, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le mystère Picasso*, does not want to explain anything. But the author and leading actor Paul Jederbeck does not seem to believe that, today, merely seeing the pictures (in the enchanting middle part) will satisfy the viewer. That's why he presents this processual multi-field picture in the middle of a nonlinear, hybrid construct consisting of 5 acts that interlocks beginning and end by means of an open "inverted argument", so to speak.

If, as André Bazin says, *Le mystère Picasso* is the second revolution in film about art, then, if the signs are not all deceptions, *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* could show a possible third approach to the further development of this genre: "The first revolution consisted in the abolition of the frame, whose disappearance united the universe of the picture with the universe at large. Once the camera had penetrated 'into' the painting, it could lead us around

there for a certain descriptive and dramatic time; yet, the actual innovation was not temporal, but solely spatial in nature. (...) Was *Le mystère Picasso* shows us is not what we already knew - how long the creation takes - but that this time can be an integral component of the work itself, an additional dimension that is stupidly ignored in its end state. More precisely: until today, we knew only 'pictures', vertical slices of the creative stream, more or less arbitrarily carved out by the creator himself by chance or due to disease or death. What Clouzot finally holds up to our eyes is 'the act of painting', that is, an image that exists in time and that has its duration, its life, and sometimes - as at the end of the film - its death." (*A Bergsonian Film: Le mystère Picasso*, André Bazin).

But what happens if - as is in the offing in a third "revolution" (in film about art), for example in *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* - this painting and possibly its creator do not really exist at all because, having been produced in mixed media as the auto(-author)construct of a hybrid, poly-focal projection, it cannot die a death at all?

Then this lie turns painting into a true film: the loss of aura becomes time-based, made good through the simultaneous synoptic view in the pathos-laden formula of the triptych as a "film within a film", and pictorially manipulates the open and concealed montage; and it opens up a free, playful space of production and reception, motifically visualized as a balance between intellectual capacity, animal drives, and the artistic genesis of the work itself - as a wrestling match between reason and feeling - that, within the picture, splinters the picture into different time zones. For the first time, digital compositing makes it possible to show how these simultaneous painterly processes can be changed and declined in case, number, and gender in the specific timeframe of cinematography.

At the beginning of the 21st century, a new type of director thus emerges: the "hybrid film auteur".

The time has finally come: moving images can now be freely and independently drawn, painted, modeled, and collaged.

In an era that has bid farewell to boundless optimism about progress and is once again prepared to turn to myth, the visionary-artistic hybrid auteur film that Paul Jederbeck and his colleagues Benjamin Dickmann and Alexej Tchernyi have experimentally devoted themselves to in *Qu'est-ce que Monsieur Teste?* seems to contradict itself - after all, its potential is based precisely in the supposedly infinitely developable new digital technologies. Thanks to the intuitive manageability of new hardware and software and their relatively reasonable prices, it has become possible to turn a different kind of film into an artistic laboratory in which reality and imagination, world and idea convene, so that art and life begin to play a leading role again.

With this, nothing more stands in the way of a renewal of the auteur film on uncultivated hybrid terrain; the postmodern film, as medium, need not be more anonymous than traditional forms of depiction like music, literature, theater, or visual arts.

Auteur cinema, as Jean-Luc Godard reportedly once said, is like life: there are no rules.

But one should keep a cool head. "So let's not blame human weaknesses and sins on cinema. When the nimbus of surprise and discover is over, the films on painting will be as good as those who make them." (*Painting and Film*, André Bazin).

"THE MOUNTED TEXT" by Frank Geßner, artist and cineaste, with an homage to French film criticism and Orson Welles' *F for Fake*, 2006, first published, in: Juliane Dummmler, *Das montierte Bild: Digitales Compositing für Film und Fernsehen*, UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, Constance: 2010, pp. 20-21.