

DIALOGUE (OR MONOLOGUE) LIST OF "13 OR 14"

A text by
Jan Peters

Okay, I'm now 39. Another 2 times 365 then, another 700 plus two times 15... 30 then, 730 in all... Another 730 rotations on this record-deck and I'll be 40, a round sum: forty.

To differentiate between me and this clock - or any other clock for that matter as they all do pretty much the same: turn in uniform cycles—and as someone who essentially always does exactly the same thing: make a film every year... I have decided to do something entirely different, hence this circle.

But to be honest, it's only a different format; apart from that, the content is much as usual. It still bothers me that I haven't been able to explain the universe or to grasp the meaning of my existence. Sometimes I think a minor detail must have evaded me, a tiny insight that would suddenly shed light on the matter and render it all transparent. Maybe I lack a particular cerebral faculty which prevents me from thinking differently or maybe it's a question of perception and all would become apparent, if I could somehow approach it from a different angle.

This afternoon for instance, well it's after midnight now so it was actually yesterday afternoon, I was visiting the place where the INA, the biggest French television



All photos: Jan Peters, 13 or 14, film, 2004.



and radio archive, store all their material: film rolls, video tapes and that kind of stuff, I was filming one of their employees, who I have been editing ever since, and it struck me as odd that he was busy chucking film material into a skip. The purpose of a film archive is surely to save film material. It had never really occurred to me before, although it's perfectly logical, that it's the place where films end up, in a terminal sense: because they're too old, scratched or otherwise damaged. It looks pretty

impressive as well. It certainly filled me with the desire to bathe in all those old pictures, to go diving for memories, to thrash around in all those chronologically dislocated frames.

As I was editing all this material, it suddenly occurred to me that my inability to comprehend the universe, and my own personal coordinates within its framework, might have something to do with time. Maybe something would click, if I could just think of time as something other than a successive progression.

Well, I could start by using the return button. As far as it's possible for me to ignore the forward context, events and associations appear to have an entirely different meaning going backwards. A film is flying out of a container full of single frames, on which pictures from the future will be seen. The film not yet ripe, so to speak, the quality is still rather poor so it will have to be put on a shelf where it will continually improve over the years. Now and again, someone will come and inspect its progress, decide that it needs a bit more time and put it back on the shelf. One day it will be brought to the lab. Here it will be chemically processed in preparation for its *raison d'être*. The film will be sensitised to light and installed in a camera where the pictures from the future will conspire to produce the events of the present.

Of course, the question is: what happens when I relate this experiment to my own life and, furthermore, to my own films.

Every year I create a subjective review of my life on celluloid. 38 37 36 35 34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26 25 24, but after that it's all black. I'll never be younger than 24, at least not on film because I didn't start making them until I was 24.

Which, of course, is no reason for time to stop moving, in this case: backwards.

A few days ago, I went to the French television and radio archive in Paris, the INA, not to where they store the films; I was there yesterday, but to the main building where you can use a computer to search for film and sound material from the last 60 years. However, there is so much material that nobody can possibly watch all of it; even if they spend their entire lives doing nothing else.

To get to the INA, I had to take the metro line 14 to the last station; the archive lies just beyond that.

To deal with the mountain of material, I decided to use 14 as search criterion. I mean, I wanted to know what was actually going on when I was 14.

In 1980 I went to France for the first, with my parents: I was 14. We drove there in our car and just missed an accident outside Kassel. Our destination was the Atlantic coast. That was the 8th July, the day before I had been to the cinema on my own for the first time. That was in Kassel where we had started our journey by visiting an Aunty; in the evening we watched the News and discovered that V. Giscard d'Estaing was in Germany.

We spent most of the following day in French traffic jams. In the evening I saw French television news for the first time. I didn't understand a word but even the "trailer" looked promising, colourful, perhaps for 1980 not really "state of the art" but compared with the conservative presentations of *Der Tagesschau*, the seminal German news programme of the time and compulsory viewing, they were positively avant-garde.

Giscard, in the mean time, had arrived at our point of departure: Kassel. I had the feeling the cameraman was deliberately conveying surreptitious messages: during a walkabout, Giscard was filmed in front of a poster advertising the film "Flat Foot on the Nile" starring Bud Spencer, which I had just been to see in Kassel.

We arrived at the coast on the 9th July and were astonished to find that our chalet was in the middle of a nudist colony; my parents' grasp of the French language was apparently comparable to mine. This was not what we had expected from Catholic France. There was no way around it, nudity was obligatory.

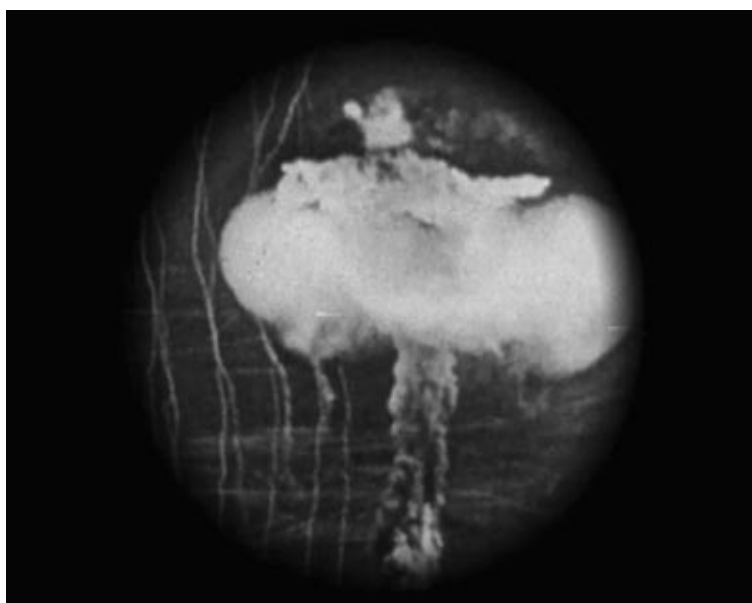
The fact that my family originally came from the coast, albeit the Baltic coast, did not prepare us for the possibility that our problem would eventually be solved by the force of nature: on that very first evening, as my mother was taking her first dip, she was suddenly engulfed by a huge wave which, after a putting her through an entire wash programme, delivered her to shore. She was alive and there was no need to send for a helicopter, however, she was stark naked: the sea had claimed her swimming costume.



As I said, I was 14 and, naturally, not that keen on taking my own clothes off in public. I was, however, inordinately more enthusiastic about other people's nudity and took part in various nudist activities, the biggest of which was the international naked swimming competition.

Wait a minute, when stop talking and concentrate on the material, I notice a small defect on every cut. Here, this little black stripe at the top of the frame, and

if I go back two frames, it's at the bottom. They are the spliced edges of the film and hidden testimony to an almost forgotten aspect of television history. I thought about this yesterday, while I was in the film archive. To explain, I'll have to go back a bit, back on the timeline. Prior to watching the man throw films away, I had explored the entire archive and, in doing so, it occurred to me that up until the early 1980s most television reports were shot on film stock, on so called



reversal film, not on video.

The people at the archive, having the ambition to save everything state television has ever transmitted, have not only accumulated a multitude of different film and video formats but also the corresponding technical apparatus needed to view them, most of which is now obsolete. This necessitates inordinately complicated maintenance work on machines that have long since landed on the scrap heap of television history. Due to this, and the fact that earlier video tapes have already started to disintegrate into meaningless electronic signals, they have started to digitalize everything. The problem with contemporary digital technology however, despite the huge data-transfer-rates and storage capacity, is the durability of the storage media. This can be circumvented to an extent by continuous copying; however, this only applies as long as someone makes the effort to do so. This means there is no guarantee that our data will be preserved for prosperity. As far as future generations are concerned, we are probably living in a forgotten century. Of course, a lot of research is going into this problem at the moment. Ironically, the most promising approach is reminiscent of a time at least 2000 years before the first computer was invented: a graphite ball, about the same size as a football, would be used to store data “chiselled” into its structure, in numerous layers, by a nanometre precise laser beam—in three different languages, I hope, and with as many back-ups. And preferably to be buried somewhere next to the Rosetta’s Garden.

In the darkest corner of the archive I discover the filing system. Maybe they are saving that because they don't quite trust the computer. I must mention however, as I type the next word into the search engine and watch it spit out pictures of helicopter search and rescue operations, that I'm pretty glad they've got a computer.

Apart from the nudity, the rescue operations predominantly held my fascination in France. At least once a day a helicopter came to fish a swimmer from the sea. I've been passionate about helicopters since my early childhood. My favourite helicopter is the one the Americans used to spray napalm in Vietnam. This has been an inescapable paradox since my conversion to pacifism.

Television was again responsible for my inauguration. I was 13, maybe 14 at the time and just beginning to negotiate puberty as I witnessed a programme about the equally adolescent neutron bomb. I learned that the idea behind the bomb was to kill people but to leave the infrastructure i.e. roads, buildings, military hardware and so on, unscathed. They showed a diagram and explained how the bomb exploded before impact. That was quite a shock for me and, riddled with fear, I started examining the night sky wondering whether tonight would be the night. This became a ritual, in the same way other people turn to God before they go to sleep, I was praying with the same kind of fervour to the neutron bomb.

Silence. No day, no night. Neither inside nor outside, just a big, deep black. If my memory serves me correctly, that's how I imagined the world after the bomb. But how does memory work? Well, that's something I've always wanted to put under scrutiny. In my case, I believe my memory functions akin to my perception. According to my own theory, my perception does not serve to construct a realistic image of existing objects but creates the framework that allows me to move through the world... so that I can find this exit for instance.

When I remember, I am using an older version of the framework as my point of reference, although I am obviously updating it with fresh information, creating a revised version.

This means that the memory changes every time it's remembered, and it also implies that it's impossible to forget, unless of course your brain's turned off, by an exploding neutron bomb, for instance.

If I could make the past as indeterminate as the future seems to be, maybe I could succeed in erasing this memory altogether: by using the return button, for instance. I would just have to go back to the time before the neutron bomb was invented, thus rendering the danger of its explosion negligible, due to its lack of existence. Having said that, I suppose I could go the whole hog and go back to the time before the axe was invented. I won't make it that far back today though, but I could probably reach the stationing of mid-range rockets in West Germany.

I mean, that was the high point of the Reagan era, the



decisive cold war battle was about to be waged. It was time to get your cock out and show them what you'd got. I was 13 or 14 at the time and I didn't really know how to deal with it. I went to every peace demonstration and every blockade. Absurdly, my fear grew stronger every time. The fear was that the terrible military plan would at some stage be put into practice and Europe would become centre stage in an atomic war. My biggest fear however, was that the world would disintegrate before I had lost my virginity. I could have possibly solved this problem without becoming a pacifist but the idea of asking a girl to go to bed with me was as terrifying as the neutron bomb. I had somehow grasped the complexity of the predicament and filed it under the heading: LOVE AND PEACE. For this reason, I felt more attracted to the hippie movement than the punks, who were actually more present in my generation.

I mean, the punk slogan: NO FUTURE, pretty much hit the nail on the head. The projections for forthcoming generations were all pretty bleak, at the time.

Now, instead of going backwards all the time, I'm going to undertake an attempt to move forward along the time axis.

However, I don't intend to use the present as my starting point, that would be too difficult, and apart from not wanting to know what I'll be like when I'm

40, 41 etcetera, I'm not that keen on seeing anything else that will happen in the future either.

I'm going to start from the present of then, and go off on a historical tangent, not the path that led me to the present as it is now, but a parallel path; the one on which the red button is pressed and NO FUTURE becomes reality: The "Back to the Future Bypass", so to speak.

Thankfully, I can emerge from this nightmare future and get back on the other path; the one that leads to where I am now. Not that it really looks any better here but at least I can find my way home. Sure, I remember, and I can't forget. And I'm going to celebrate my 39th birthday anyway.

Jan Peters is a filmmaker, associate artist of the Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers in 2004. He lives in Paris (France) and Hamburg (Germany). He was invited at the Laboratoires to realise the film *13 or 14*, from which the text, here published, is taken. This film continues a series of short autobiographical films, produced once a year, starting in 1994 with *I am 24*. *13 or 14* was presented as a video installation set up in front of the Laboratoires from 10th September to 31st October 2004 and projected during a retrospective of these autobiographical films on the 24th September 2004. Coproduction Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers, le Parc de la Villette and the Institut national de l'audiovisuel.