

Romeo Grünfelder

film-cut accidents or the Virtual of time

Even if the term experimental film is extraordinarily encumbered, it seems to me that your film Rallye has an experimental dimension. So, what's the tale of the film; does the film recount anything at all; what's actually the aim of your experiment?

If it's an experiment at all, then at most about how something like narration develops in film. There are two shots in *Rallye* forming the smallest relational unit of narration. Out of this interval of two shots, innumerable relations and thus narratives arise resisting an original author's name or even a single narrative. Why? The first shot shows the perspective out of a speeding car, the second, a Porsche in a garage. From the Porsche's car radio a live report about an accident at some car race can be heard. Now, is the first shot related to the second or not? Was the Porsche just in the race and now parked in the garage? Did it crash or will it crash in the near future or is it a completely different car, etc.? So, *Rallye* is about the innumerable possibilities with which to link the interval of these two images; it's about a multiplicity of "uncanny" relations, which are exposed only by the juxtaposition of the two shots. In short: The montage of *Rallye* is reduced to two shots, which cause the narrative to explode and shatter, and that forces the story to move.

So, the film actually withdraws itself from the narration, the narrative arises – so to speak – in the mind of the viewer, or what?

Perhaps I have to formulate it another way, perhaps the narrative explodes, precisely because right then when the question emerges, which car were we riding in during the first shot, which car had an accident, whether it was an

accident at all or whether only a voice on the radio is talking about it – right then, the two shots have possibly already collided. Then it would have less to do with the mind of the viewer than with an explicitly cinematic power to produce narratives.

Thus, one could say, that it is about an accident, not which befalls the car, but which befalls the film, when it splinters into a variety of possible narrative connections without being fixed in a conclusive or predetermined narration.

Exactly. The irritation consists of the fact that the promise of the first shot is not fulfilled in the second shot, but is instead destroyed. And that's because the car doesn't drive into a wall, from which an incident would develop. I am operating rather with a concept of "accident", which is definitely not an incident¹. It cannot be described as a continuum, in which a first is followed by a second, then a third and so on. In other words, a steering mistake, then screeching tires, then an object like, for example, a wall and finally a banged-up car or a battered driver. In *Rallye* the accident is shifted into the cut itself and that poses the question: Isn't each narration already battered in and of itself? In the two shots nothing but this destruction of certain narrative structures takes place. To that extent I agree with you, when you say that the accident will be multiplied into innumerable incidents. But none of these can be explicitly seen in the film. At best, there are many narratives, which are circulating virtually.

If Rallye doesn't consist of two determined elements of narration – the hero enters a house, cut, the house from inside, the hero goes up the stairs – in other words, of a particularly ordered sequence of actions, but instead consists of strange counter-movements, that meet in the middle of the cut between these two shots and cause this short film to splinter into a multiplicity of possible narrations – how would you then describe this splintering? Wouldn't it also be the dissolution of the continuity called film?

¹ Translator's note: The original German uses the word "Un-Fall", which is normally translated as "accident", but in this case the author is trying to stress the occurrence of "Un" at the beginning of the word, which in both German and English indicates the antonym to what follows. "Fall" can be translated as "case", i.e. "Un-Fall" = non-case. However, the use of "incident" seems to more appropriately portray the word play and sense the author intended.

I don't think that the term "continuum" would sufficiently describe the Cinematic. Actually, I do agree, that in the first shot the possibility exists to follow the continuous motion in the movie. The first image could be interpreted as "subjective camera", in other words as if the spectator were sitting beside the driver and riding along with him. This first image is also present as a memory in the second shot, although there's a drastic break. Within this second shot I work with two counter-movements, which also regard the memory of the first shot. Technically, I let that which I filmed in the forward direction for the second shot, run in reverse, or what was shot backwards, turns and unwinds gradually in the forward direction off of the film projector, the hard disk or whatever. In this respect we are confronted at the same time with two counter-movements, which appear incompatible and are unable to dissolve into one unique narrative. These two possibilities result from a certain temporality, which can in fact no longer simply be "followed".

Which "temporality" do you mean? In a certain way this problem connects to a variety of discussions and works or experiments, which have taken place – and continue to be advanced – not only within film or the cinematic field, but also in fine arts, in literature, in philosophy. These forums concern themselves with the problem of the splintering of every type of continuity. History is supposedly splintered; it may not even exist anymore; it has supposedly dissolved into different stories. In all these speeches about splintering – about this accident that continuity suffers from – the problem of time emerges in a unique way. And that's also how I see your experiment with Rallye. Could one say that in a certain way time becomes the subject of this experiment, but simultaneously the introduction of time also in a certain way breaks with the Cinematic?

The film should first be thought of independently as a variable arrangement of images and not as an illustration of a thought process or a movement, which an author invented as a gradual succession of shots, i.e., to paraphrase Muybridge: The horse runs or gallops only because I have attached one image after another. I think it is not fair to the film, and in particular to the cut and the

montage to reduce them to this dictate of motion. The Cinematic doesn't end there. Rather it generates multiple temporalities. At each moment, in which the film is running, these temporalities set a certain menace free, which threatens to tear each narration into pieces. All stories are suddenly and simultaneously present. Not I, the "author", but this multiplicity of stories drive the film. In that, a possibility is found in the horizon of time, a possibility that has developed in the Cinematic and is not fixed by a logic of motion.

Could one apply the term "the Virtual" to this concept or to this experimental horizon?

The concept of the Virtual plays a very strong role, even where it's assumed that only a forward movement is concerned. Naturally the car is going somewhere in the first shot – a goal announces itself in the vanishing point, which in the first shot is naturally still thought of in the sense of the race car driver, who naturally wants to reach the finish line. However, in the second shot we have something else that happens now but at the same time has already come to pass. We still remember the first shot when we, precisely in that moment, see the presence of the past in the second shot. In other words: because the second shot runs backwards, the past is permanently before us, and we pass it with each step backwards. So the Virtual emerges in two counter-movements, which open from the present to the past and vice versa. With that, something reveals itself, which infects the entire film and is at the same time present and nevertheless already past.

Nevertheless, one could have the opinion, that precisely because of that, the medium of film is strained. It's no coincidence that a voice, the voice of the radio reporter, situates this temporal paradox in a way that allows both shots to relate to one another, but also splinters both shots into a multiplicity of possible narratives. Thus, the voice, something non-figurative, seems to clip the film together as well as blast it into pieces. What status does this voice have, and isn't there anything in this voice which refers to something beyond the film? Or to ask another way: don't you leave the Cinematic, if the voice organizes or structures the film from within?

Well, the radio voice is a female voice. That's perhaps not completely unimportant. She speaks about an accident which took place precisely at that moment in which she wasn't on the air. The accident already took place, thus her voice comes too late. The voice can only report something which has already occurred. It's no different with the film cut. To that extent the two shots are not at all autonomous and then interconnected by a cut. Like an irruption of the Virtual, The cut is itself just as late as the voice of the female reporter. Everything emanates from this late arrival. And that's why this late arrival is paradoxically "earlier" than everything which follows it. And all those are very immanent, precisely typical film possibilities, and that's what's important to me.

That's why I return again to the concept of the Experimental, even though you rejected it at the beginning of our discussion. For some reason it seems to me that your film wants to investigate microstructures of the relationship of images. Such a microstructure is extremely reduced to itself with regard to its elements as well as its conception of time. Which status do you believe a cinematic work has, a cinematic work, which is experimental in this sense? I'm referring also to commercial film or the situation of film in general...

I actually believe that the question of shots, sequences, screen sequences raises the question of time within elementary structures. The seriousness of cinematic techniques must be proven. I'm not interested in following a certain logic or a dramaturgy of motion, that always consists of an escalation and discharges itself in a solution of accumulated conflicts and plots, in other words, in what Gilles Deleuze called the "action image". The control which dramaturgy exerts on the market is proportional to its ignorance. There are attempts – for example with digital techniques – to drive the escalation more and more to an extreme, as a form of worshipping a would-be cinematic progress. But the symptoms of exhaustion and boredom which emerge are nevertheless obvious. Above all, that's because of the association with a certain relationship, in which movement and time are taped to each other. Time is subjected to movement. The "Virtual" is perverted into a technical phenomenon and is taken to

be a collection of special effects clichés. That has hardly anything to do with the problems of film. Moreover: to continue to believe this means not only to stage but also to exploit the showdown of film. That's because time not action is virtual. And if there actually are inquiries into the Cinematic, I don't understand "independent filmmakers", who refuse to expose themselves to such inquiries. So the point is neither to subject oneself to an economic dictate with a certain type of narration nor to refuse to do so. Concepts of time itself must become virulent, in order to let various narrations explode and force a cinematic development out of itself. That this doesn't have to mean you can't make a living is attested to by films such as *All about Eve* by Mankiewicz, *Mulholland Drive* by Lynch, *8 1/2* by Fellini, *Marienbad* by Resnais or *Salvatore Giuliano* by Rosi...

Yes, that naturally brings up the question of money. Now, there's new hope among filmmakers, that this dictate of money will be disrupted by the new, digital technologies, simply due to lower-priced production methods and conditions. Do you also connect such hopes with the Digital?

That's not completely right, HD 25P for example, a digital format, is still very expensive and will become cheaper, if the current trend continues. But the achievement of economic and consequently cinematic independence thanks to a technology is in my opinion an elementary misunderstanding. If filmmakers grab a digital camera due to this misunderstanding, then the so-called art-house movie, documentary film, experimental film and all that other crap which attaches itself to the "independent" label can no longer be taken seriously. Because where does the confrontation lie? It's only conditional upon certain expectations, and thus no one could say anything about a confrontation anymore. From an art-house filmmaker we expect an essay, from an experimental filmmaker an experiment and so on – the concepts have degenerated to an empty shell. But what then is an experiment, a cinematic confrontation? Thus I ask myself, what happens in an image, why is something like bi-location, for example, in each image possible, in which certain transmissions take place. So, I believe that I am rather close to something, which by all means can be comprehended with the Digital. But at the same time I'm no longer the

master of the event in the misunderstood sense of an "author" or a producer, who would use any techniques available and force banal narrative linkages within an image or between images. The problems of the digital age are thus not problems of technical progress. It's not just about the use of digital media such as the DV camera, DV technology, CD Rom or DVD. It's about something, which lets technology emerge from questions of a non-technology. For example, it's about the discrete distinction of bi-location, which was already effective in the difference of two shots, but also in the difference of one object to another within an image that in and of itself was distinct. To that extent the analog conception in *Rallye* is extremely digital assuming one does not approach the term "Digital" in a naive way. Firstly, it's not a technical term meant to be lined and illustrated technically, even if some filmmakers believe to have invented "digital cinema" if they shoot on DV.

Are there any plans for the future?

Of course. After *Rallye* two other short projects are in the pipeline, which both similarly revolve around the Boundless, a concept which can only be localized in the Cinematic. For one of the two projects, "Examination Task", we're about to start shooting, the other one, *Desiderat*, is still in the preparation phase. However, because money is the rival of film, some projects are difficult to realize, because grant institutions already get off, just then where I try to get on. All that aside, I'm working on a feature film project, in which these questions will be formulated no longer explicitly just in short, but also in long format. That'll then be rather arduous for the viewer, who'll have to hold out between 90 to 120 minutes. But whoever makes it, will hopefully understand what digital cinema is.

Hans Joachim Lenger posed the questions
English translation by Juan R. Marchini

further information about the film:
<http://www.felderfilm.de/rallye>