

Klaus Lutz: Performances for Screens

BFI Southbank (London) – 10 March 2020

Pavilion (Leeds) – 11 March 2020

Tyneside Cinema (Newcastle upon Tyne) – 12 March 2020

organised by Projections (www.projections.org.uk)

Program

Arabia 1+2, Klaus Lutz, 1991, 2 x 16mm, color, silent, twin projection, 28 min. (18 fps)

Titan, Klaus Lutz, 2008, 16mm black-and-white, silent, 13½ min. (18 fps)

Klaus Lutz: 'Weltbild' – Cycles of thought as drawings and films, talk by Hannes Schüpbach

The Beauty of My Island – Shooting Klaus Lutz, Frank Matter, 1999, digital video (orig.

Betacam SP), 33 min.

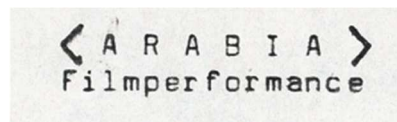
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Hannes Schüpbach

Klaus Lutz: 'Weltbild' – Cycles of thought as drawings and films

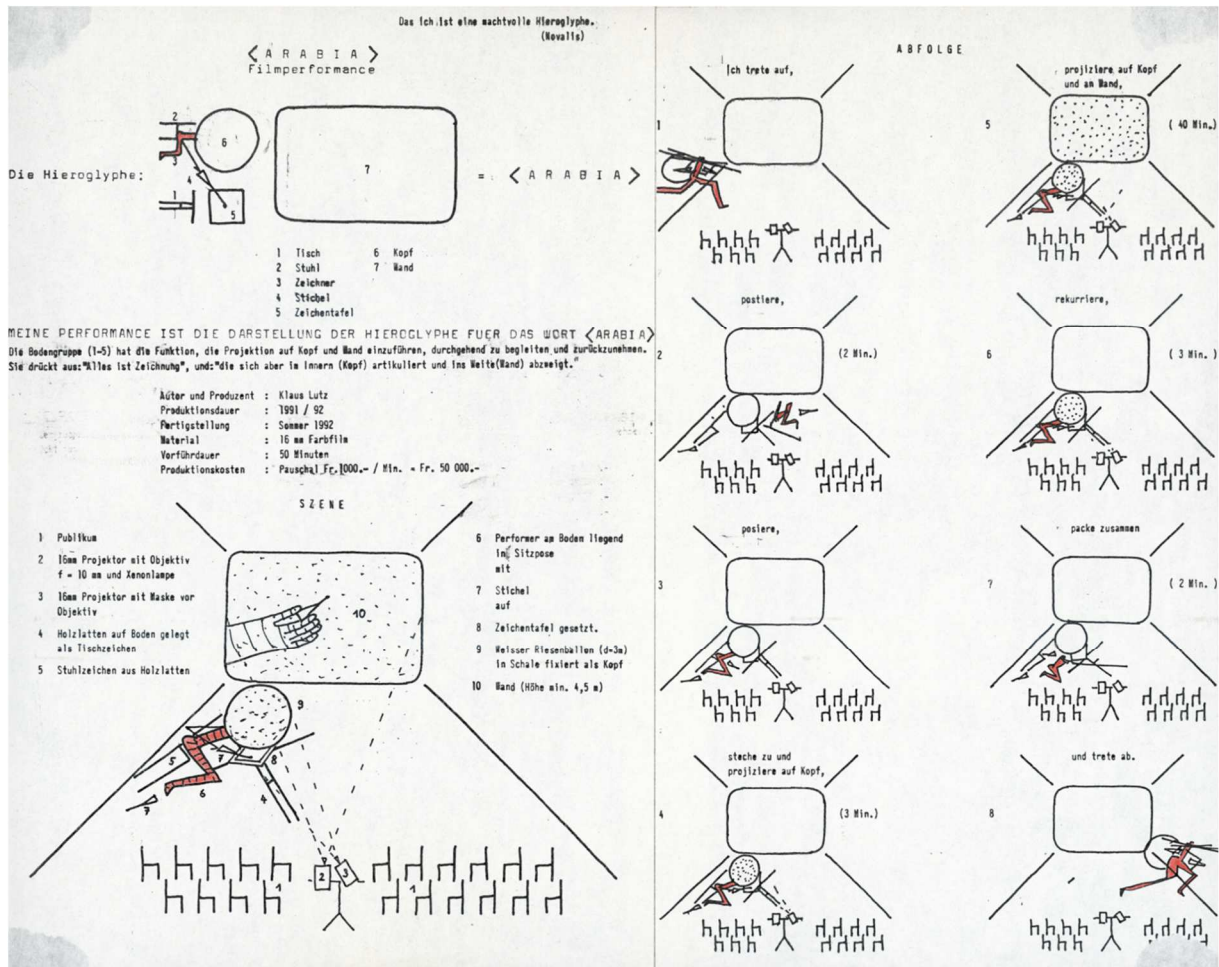
Arabia

In its original setting, Klaus Lutz's *Arabia* was a 'Filmperformance' or performance with film, as can be seen in the chart drawn and typed by the artist at the time.



On the right hand page there is a flow chart showing the sequence ('Abfolge') step by step: 'I enter the scene' (1), 'position myself' (2), 'pose' (3), 'start to point and project onto head' (4), 'project onto head and onto wall' (5), 'revert' (6), 'pack up' (7) and 'leave the stage' (8). The performer in *Arabia* was to 'lie on the floor', as can be seen in the lower part of the left hand page, 'in a sitting pose' (number 6 of the key) accompanied by a 'table' and 'chair' sign (numbers 4 and 5 of the explanatory key) 'made from wooden slats'. Number 7 is his 'needle' or pointing device and 8 his 'drawing board'. 9 is a 'giant white balloon (d = 3m) as a head'.

The same elements are rendered in the upper part of that page as the artist's 'hieroglyph'. About this entire set of elements, Lutz writes 'My performance is the rendering of the hieroglyph for the word <ARABIA>', and he adds, 'the grouping on the floor (numbers 1 to 5) has the function of introducing, accompanying and taking



(ARABIA), Filmperformance ('Arabia Film Performance'), ca. 1991, flow chart.

back the projection onto head and wall. It expresses: "Everything is drawing", and "but it is a drawing that is articulated inside the head (or mind) and branches out into the distance (the wall)."

Early works related to Robert Walser

Most of Lutz's early cycles of pictures start from themes found in the work of Swiss writer Robert Walser (1878–1956). They already reflect his basic engagement with the world at hand, including oneself, formalised into absurdist scenery, and also already deploy the incessant intertwining of oneself and the world that Lutz will continue to explore throughout his oeuvre, in drawing and later in film. From the very start, there are two different tendencies in Lutz's work: to depict a course of events either as a story told in pictures or as a notation using a variable set of signs.



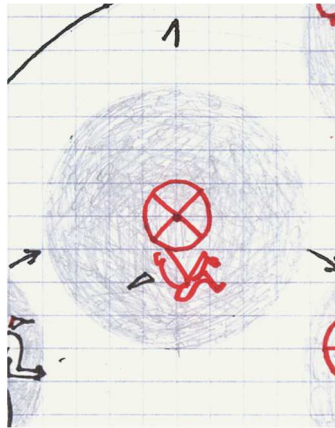
Das Götzenbild ('The Idol'), 1972, and *Zimmerstück* ('The Room Piece'), 1974, in the exhibition *Klaus Lutz: Selected Stories*, at The Kitchen, New York, 2014.



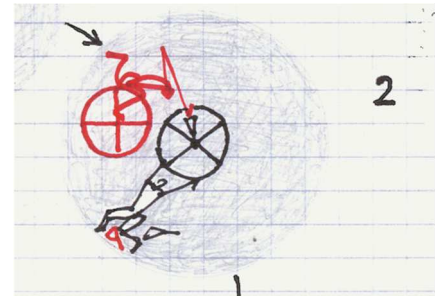
Lebendes Bild (nach R. Walser) ('Tableau vivant'), 1976, and *Jakob von Gunten* (nach R. Walser), *Vorspiel Nr. 1*, 1976, in the same exhibition. Photographs: Jason Mandella.

Cycles of invention

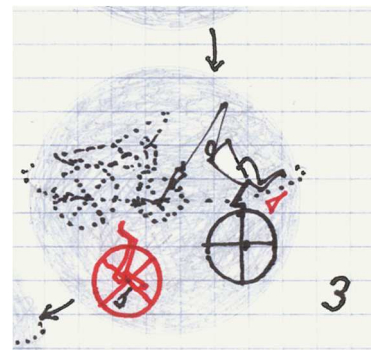
In the films he produces from 1987 onwards, he is able to go a decisive step further; by following the lines of his schemes drawn in white on a black background, as a small white figure, he can show how thinking is a movement that draws the one thinking into himself and into the trajectories of his own invention. These trajectories build up to form a structure that will define the course of thought for a certain period, before it breaks up and gives way to a leap, leading to a subsequent new cycle. On a chart drawn and typed as a proposal for his later film *Vulcan* (2004), Lutz describes the functions of such a pictorial project advancing in circles or spirals. In the text on the right he says: ‘Key to the basic structure of a loop:’



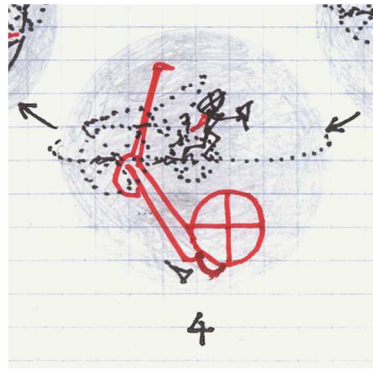
‘(1) VULCAN with a wheel and white cone at the base of the sphere.’



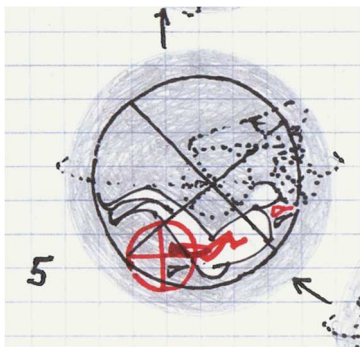
‘(2) Vulcan generates himself and his wheel onto the sphere by means of the cone.’



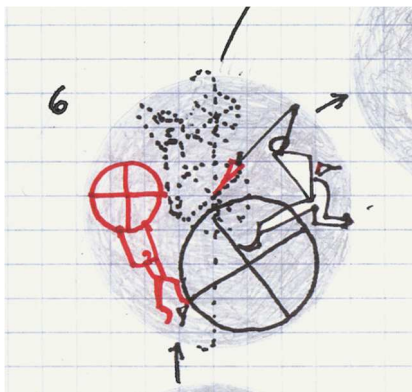
‘(3) The white Vulcan generates a drawing around the sphere, wherein the set of elements is doubled and folded and where it appears as an ideogram.’ (see the dotted lines)



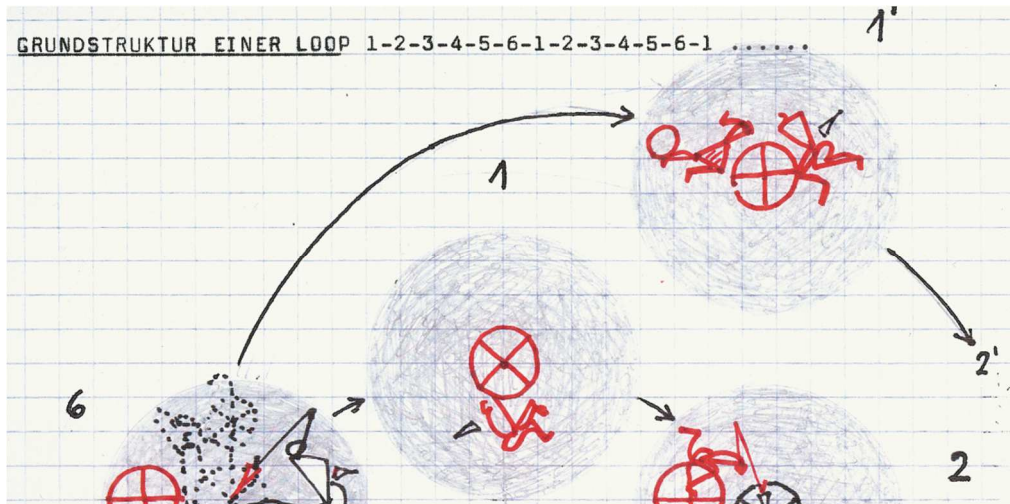
‘(4) Concurrent with the release of the drawing, Vulcan “jumps” into the drawing with his set, appears at the point of release and begins to grapple with the drawing.’



‘(5) Vulcan acts himself out according to the meaning of the drawing.’



‘(6) Out of the scene he generates himself [back] to the base of the sphere.’
Then a new cycle can start, on the same or another level:



‘Vulcan could now release a different set as well (...) by way of mutation so to speak, and later a drawing with those elements (...). That’s how the loops in the sequence of the film are concatenated, or glued together.’ Lutz concludes by saying, ‘The film for the performance could then consist in a sequence of ten loops (20 minutes of film time).’

VULCAN PROJECT

GRUNDSTRUKTUR EINER LOOP 1-2-3-4-5-6-1-2-3-4-5-6-1

VULCAN PROJECT

LEGENDE ZUR GRUNDSTRUKTUR EINER LOOP:

Zur Verdeutlichung habe ich nur die Elemente :VULCAN, RAD und KEGEL gezeichnet. Was schwarz gezeichnet, ist im Film weiss, was gepunktet, ist eine Kreidezeichnung.

- 1 VULCAN mit Rad und weissem Kegel im Grund der Kugel.
- 2 VULCAN generiert sich mit seinem Rad mittels Kegel weiss auf die Kugel.
- 3 Der weisse Vulcan erzeugt eine Zeichnung um die Kugel, worin das Set der Elemente gedoppelt und gefaltet ist und als Ideogramm erscheint.
- 4 Gleichzeitig mit der Auslösung der Zeichnung 'hüpft' Vulcan mit seinem Set in die Zeichnung, erscheint am Auslösepunkt und beginnt sich mit der Zeichnung auseinanderzusetzen.
- 5 Vulcan setzt sich nach dem Sinn der Zeichnung in Szene.
- 6 Aus einer Szene generiert er sich mit dem roten Kegel in den Grund der Kugel.

1 VULCAN mit Rad usw.

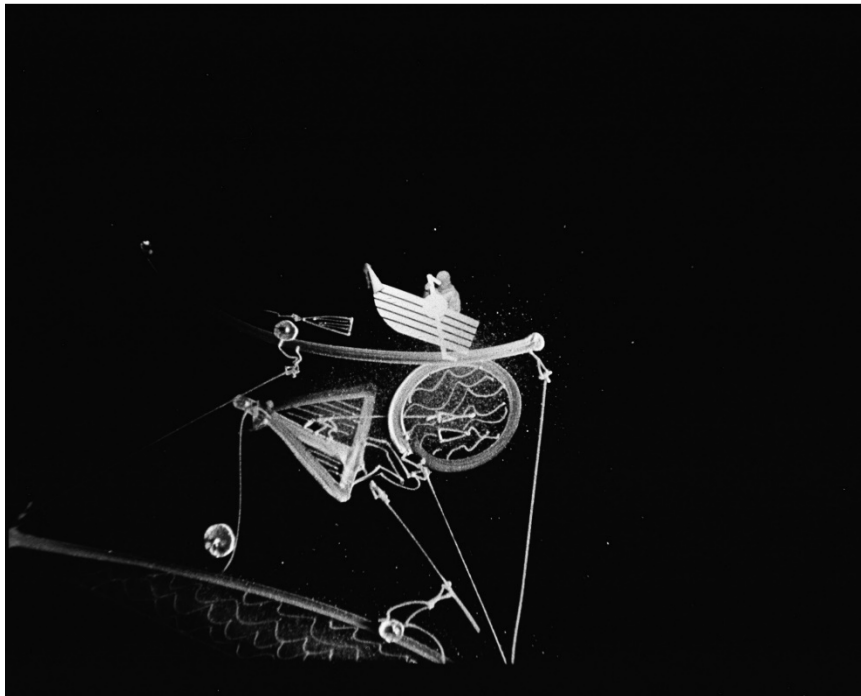
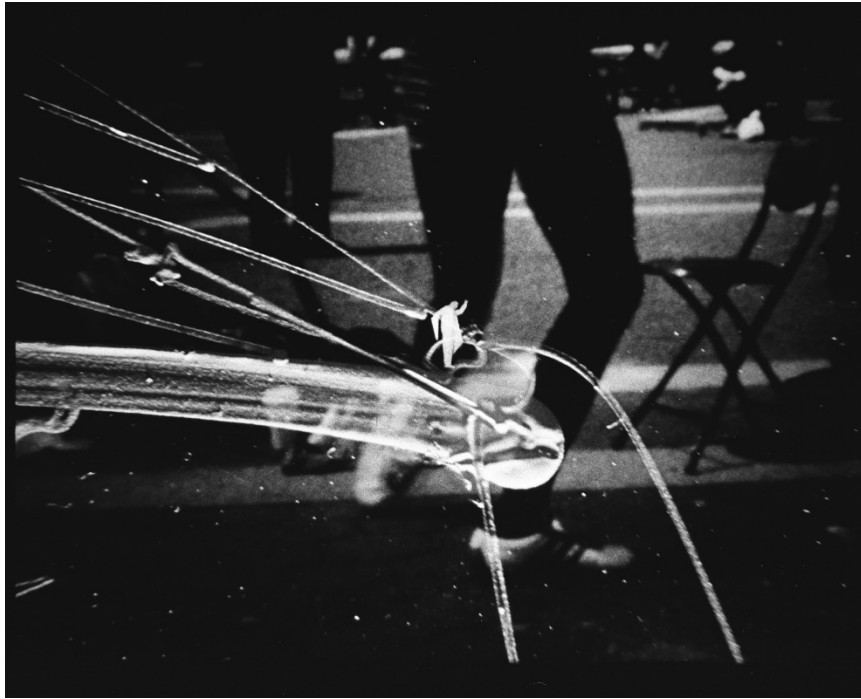
1' Aus 6 könnte Vulcan aber auch im Grund der Kugel mit dem roten Kegel ein anderes Set, hier VULCAN, RAD, PUPPE, KUGEL und KEGEL quasi per Mutation auslösen, später die Zeichnung mit diesen Elementen, anderem Sinn...

Dort sind die Loops der Filmfolge aneinander gekettet bzw. geklebt. Der Film für die Performance könnte so eine Folge von zehn Loops (20 Minuten Filmlauf) sein.

Vulcan Project, 2004 (film proposal).

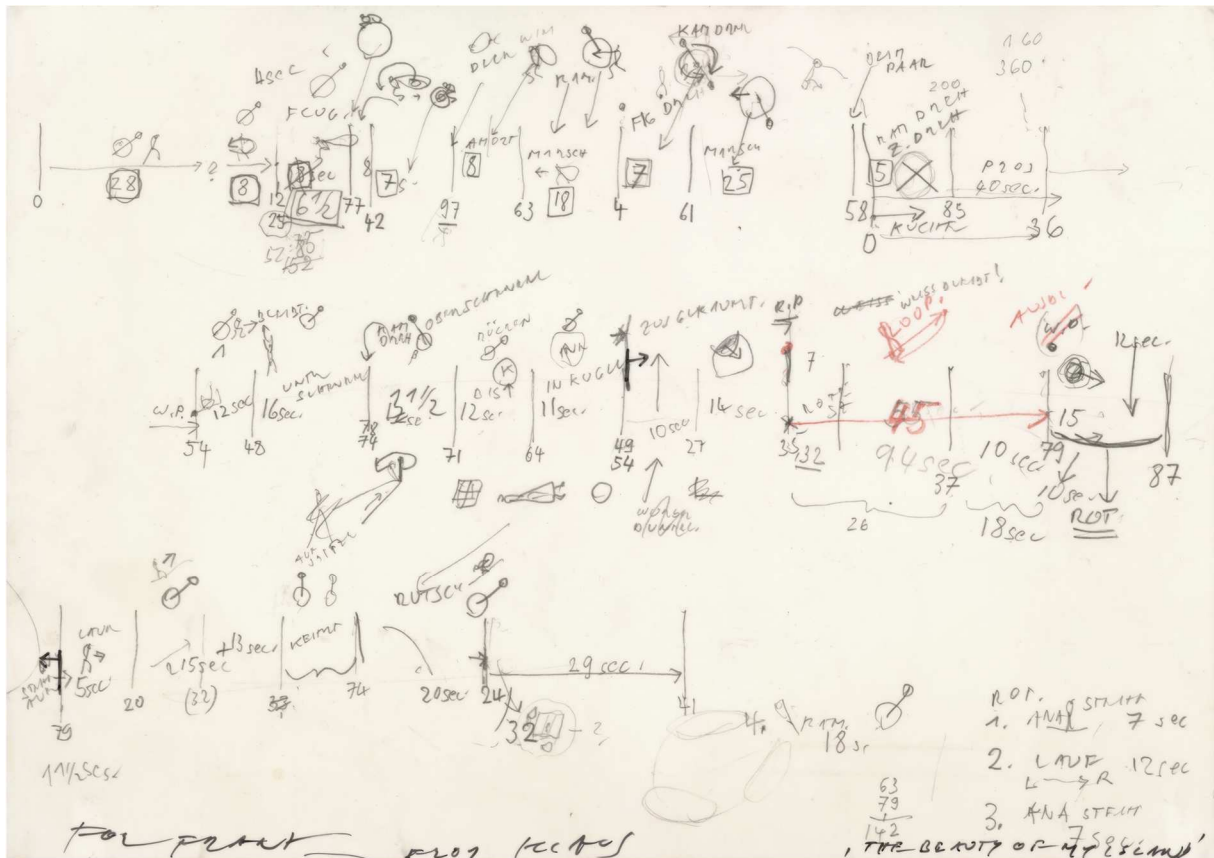
Working in the studio

That's how in the films, the performative and expansive dynamics of drawing come to the fore, often combining an impulsive gesture of the body with parallel imaginings that defy a fixed proportion, as can be seen, for example, in the film *Titan* (2009).



Film stills from *Titan* ('beginning' and 'boat'), c. 2008. Black-and-white photographs realized by the artist from 16mm film projection.

The medium of film – this light sensitive strip of pictures – carries the trace of these thought trajectories in the drawing, and simultaneously shows how they are performed by the protagonist. These intimate performances take place in the protected environment of the artist’s studio, first in Zurich – the film pair *Arabia* was still made and shown while Lutz lived in Switzerland – and after 1993 in the front room of his apartment on 7th Street in Manhattan. The filming is accompanied, on one hand, by preliminary sketches on paper, and on the other hand, by notes documenting every consecutive step of the filming, as can be seen in the shooting log for Lutz’s *The Beauty of My Island*, a short film made in 1999.



Film log for the film ‘The Beauty of My Island’, 1999.

The only existing document of the actual production process of one of Klaus Lutz’s films is the documentary by Frank Matter, called *The Beauty of My Island – Shooting Klaus Lutz*, from that same year. In general, his was a very private process. The artist, without access to the Internet at the time, would not respond to the phone for a couple of weeks, as long as work on the shooting of a film (or the production of a suite of drypoints) lasted. Frank Matter, a filmmaker himself, at that time also a journalist, and today a film producer and the president of the ‘Association for the Preservation of the Work of Klaus Lutz’, met Lutz in February 1994, shortly after moving to New York. His fascination, as he has said, with Lutz’ ‘style and artistic

quality (...) led to the idea of making a film about him and his work. I was highly amazed that Klaus agreed, because up until then, he had not allowed anyone to look over his shoulder while he was filming.’ In the same interview from 2012, Frank Matter goes on explaining that originally, he had also wanted Lutz to speak about his work in the film, but that he refused: ‘He said that if he had something to say in words, he would write books instead of making films. So we agreed that I would simply observe him working.’¹

Ideograms and the ‘Weltbild’

Since the 1970s Klaus Lutz was fascinated by the bone engravings of the Inuit, later by the ideogrammatic signs of Old Egypt and Ancient Mexico, and even later, by the different styles of Chinese writing, in other words, in writing systems that keep the sign alive as an image and link images according to certain rules. Amongst the fifty plus carefully chosen books in Klaus Lutz’s possession when he died in New York, in 2009, were four on picture writing in Ancient Mexico, ten on Egyptian culture, mythology and language, and thirteen on Chinese language and characters, including numerous dictionaries. When I visited him in New York he once told me that he was practicing Chinese writing every morning. He was particularly interested in the compound ideographs.



Bone engraving, Alaska, 19th Century. Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts, Norwich.

Lutz took a keen interest in the connections between perception and thought that are present in the term ‘Weltbild’ which at the same time means an image or a view and conception of the world.

¹ ‘An Interview with Frank Matter about Klaus Lutz’, in *Klaus Lutz: Im Universum/In the Universe*, ed. Dorothea Strauss (Zurich: Museum Haus Konstruktiv / Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2012), p. 83.

VULCAN PROJECT

ZUM TITEL 'VULCAN PROJECT':

VULCAN war der Feuergott der Alten Römer und wurde mit HEPHAISTOS der Alten Griechen identifiziert. Dort erscheint er als Waffen- und Kunstschmied für die Götter und Helden.

Im Epos ILIAS von Homer (Buch XVIII) schmiedet HEPHAISTOS/VULCAN den Schild für Achilles. Die Beschreibung zeigt sich dort als

W E L T B I L D.

ZUR ARBEIT 'VULCAN PROJECT':

Die hier im Folgenden vorgestellte Arbeit ist ein 16mm-Film als unabsehbare Folge von Endlosschleifen (1-3 Min.), wobei die Aktion das 'endlos' ausmacht. Eine oder mehrere Schleifen zeigen sich als Circuits der Aktion ohne Anfang und Ende, präsentiert als

- INSTALLATION MIT FILM (endlos Projektion auf Riesenballon)
- PERFORMANCE MIT FILM (Livepart mit Projektion auf Ballon)

Im Film stelle ich als VULCAN den Schild als Kugel her und diese, wie Homer, als Weltbild aber aus meiner Sicht, an meinem Ort und zu meiner Zeit.

ZUM ARBEITSPLATZ von VULCAN:

Den Arbeitsplatz von VULCAN zeige ich anhand folgenden Modells:

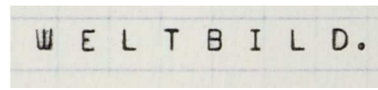
DATEN und ihre RELATIONEN  DATEN vor dem Auge
hinter dem Auge

Der BRENNPUNKT der beiden Kegel ist der Ort wo VULCAN seine Welt 'schmiedet' als Schutz und Wehr für die verborgenen, sich verborgenden 'Helden', die sich lautlos sagen:

"Ah miserable me!" (Ilias Book XVIII)

Vulcan Project, 2004 (film proposal).

Lutz used this term very prominently – written on the typewriter in spaced capitals – in his film proposal *Vulcan Project* (2004).



In the *Iliad*, the shield forged by Vulcan for Achilles is a complex relief in the making, developed by Homer over more than a hundred verses.² On the shield surges – along the description – a vast and detailed world, a true ‘Weltbild’, beginning with the earth, the sea, and the sky, with sun, moon, and the constellations, then – zooming in – one sees, still in the description of the shield, two cities and their inhabitants, the surrounding landscape, a dance of young people. A shield here is at once protection and display – it condenses the world and summarizes an imagination –, carried by its owner as a sign of power. Just as Klaus Lutz displays in front of him his films on the surface of a balloon. This ‘Weltbild’ on the shield or the balloon has the power to appear instantly to the viewer, as a mighty totality, and to draw him or her into what occurs there.

Expanded drawing and the film space

What is at stake with the artist’s use of drawing in film? – Klaus Lutz obviously used film as a field for expanded drawing. In film, movement and the layering of time could be explored as in no other medium. The continuity represented by the line finds a decisive counterpoint in the setting-out and breakthrough into the next space, which is a space for further movement and thought, based on the previous one. This mirrors the basic elements of film, which are the shot and the cut. Only that Klaus Lutz’s films integrate these elements into their narration, as a mechanism manifest in both a physical and pictorial gesture. Already during the artist’s lifetime, the films could also be exhibited as simple installations, without the live performance. Today, without the artist present, we can only resort to a partial, and simplified re-staging.

A ‘text’ between drawing and photograph

As for Klaus Lutz’s variant of the ‘Weltbild’, in his films, we find in them a striking fusion of drawing and photography. This fusion certainly stands in direct relation to the ambivalent conception of the term ‘Weltbild’. Whereas photography and film are techniques and media conceived as a parallel to perception, rendering the world via sensory or physical impression, drawing can be understood as a performative trace

² *Iliad*, Book XVIII: 468–617; Hephaestus forges Achilles’ armor. The *Iliad* was also among the fifty books found in Klaus Lutz’s apartment in 2009.

led on by the gestures of an inner image. The loop-like circling between these two domains is one of the core inventions of Klaus Lutz's art. His films convey the sensation of actually witnessing a process between perception and thought, image and language. The logic of this language *in statu nascendi* is not one that can be grasped and fixed once and for all. It has to be searched for and gone through time and again. As in all great art, an attempt to analyse or 'read' the artist's 'text' doesn't replace and thereby dissolve this text. On the contrary, the impression that Lutz's texts possess the mysterious ability to resist such a definitive reading is confirmed, thus making them resistant to translation. They emerge all the stronger as the very text they are: the one that the artist has written down, not as a sequence of signs to be deciphered, but as a singular trace of very intimate as well as stupendous processes of artistic production.

Many thanks to Adam Pugh and 'Projections' for organising the first presentation of Klaus Lutz's work in Great Britain, to Tess Denman-Cleaver for organising the many details of this tour, to the crew at the BFI Southbank, led by curator William Fowler, to curator Will Rose at Pavilion, Leeds, to filmmaker and projectionist Chris Bate in Newcastle upon Tyne, and many thanks to Herb Shellenberger for his text (www.projections.org.uk/the-magnanimal-world-of-klaus-lutz) on a first experience of Klaus Lutz's films and how words and ideas branched out from there.

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Talk by Hannes Schüpbach for *Klaus Lutz: Performances for Screens* at the BFI Southbank in London on March 10th, at Pavilion in Leeds on March 11th and at Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle upon Tyne on March 12th, organised by Adam Pugh and 'Projections'. The text is based in part on the introduction written for the opening at Aalto University on August 17th, 2017, of the exhibition 'Klaus Lutz: Weltbild', curated by Rebecca Squires for the School of Arts, Design and Architecture's 'Beta Space', August 18th – October 13th, 2017.

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