

La Habana

A Video by Michael Pilz
and Gabriele Hochleitner
The Netherlands/Austria 2001, 72'

Rotterdam, 20 July 2000.

Dear Nathalie Alonso Casale, Laura Waddington, Chris Petit, Jon Jost, Michael Pilz, Garin Nugroho, Lou Ye, Mahaem-Saleh Haroun and Jem Cohen!

First I would like to thank you (again) for your enthusiastic response to our request to participate in the port project.

Up until now you have been approached individually by either Simon Field or me. With this e-letter, a kind of newsletter rather than a personal one, I would like to make sure that you all have all the same information. So part of it will be a repetition of previous information, but please read on because there will be some new elements and some useful practical information.

Secondly I would like to remind you about the initial idea of the project:

The concept was conceived in connection to the fact that Rotterdam (together with Porto in Portugal) will be the European cultural capital in 2001. So we thought of a program that will focus on films in which harbour cities play an essential role. You all know the festival well enough to realise that we are not after harbour city promotion. Harbour cities in cinema are mythical and legendary locations. Exotic and adventurous places where fortunes are made and lost. Places of hope and despair. Places where since ancient times the wasted people of the most divers origin washed ashore. Places of transit, contraband, corrupt labour unions, all powerful mafia gangs, dockside bars and red light districts. In short a dark and romantic world that served as a background for great cinema. We named the program On the Waterfront after the classic harbour city film by Elia Kazan. We will program this and a few other historical examples.

Thirdly, and now you come in, there will be a special program consisting of a series of commissioned digital video diaries shot in harbour cities. We have asked about ten filmmakers who have given proof of their ability to make interesting work on digital video to make a video diary in a port city of their choice. The productions should be extremely lean, basic and low budget since we have very little money to offer. In fact just 5000 Euro for each filmmaker. On the other hand we offer you great freedom in the making of your contribution. Basically the film should at least be 5 minutes long, but can be any length. We would need it to be ready ideally around the middle of December.

We are working with two Rotterdam producers Rene Goosens and Annemieke van Gorp. They will contact you about the practical matters – the delivery of materials, make clear that we will cover the cost of making the final screen Beta version, offer production help that you might need, possibly suggest postproduction possibilities in Rotterdam if you are interested, discuss a very simple contractual agreement (which will be very hands-off) and the

payment schedule and so on. They are very sympathetic and involved in this project because they love the idea and the possibility of working with such a group of filmmakers.

The project is now in a stage that we would like to firm up the commitments. We are convinced that we have a very good list of filmmakers that want to take part. We are beginning to get pretty excited about the project and we hope you will be too. In the upcoming period we would like you to make a choice of a port. Just to avoid that two people will go to the same place.

We will, of course, invite you to Rotterdam to present the finished film at the upcoming festival (January 24 - February 4, 2001).

Best regards, Gertjan Zuilhof, programmer, International Film Festival Rotterdam.

Autumn 1999, for the first time Gertjan tells me about the seaport project and asks if I would be interested. I answer in the affirmative, the money will suffice. I visualize a small and intimate film against the backdrop of Triest, a man and a woman, outwardly cool, the truth is found between the images. Back from India I see Gabriele's new film of Rome, loosely based on Calvino and Ingeborg Bachmann, on the editing table (*The City and Memory*), beautiful, precious, cinematographic images. I invite her to make the seaport film with me, two cameras, a man's and a woman's view. And in Habana. And fair play. No anticipations, just seeing, what will happen.

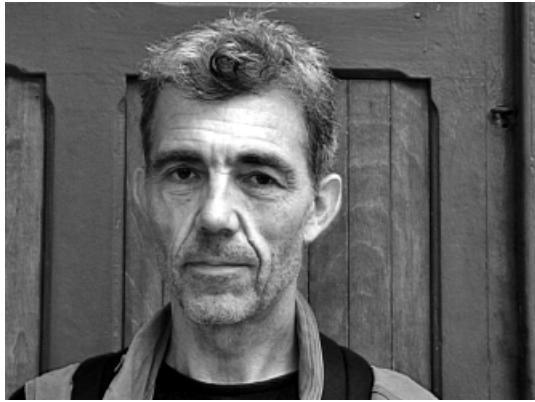
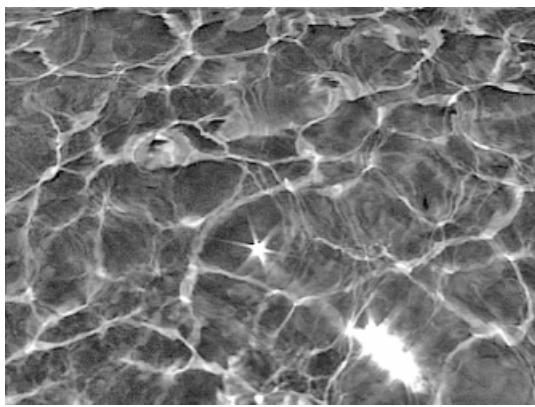
*Michael Pilz,
January 2001*

Looking with curiosity at a foreign city. Looking inward at a friendship.

*Gabriele Hochleitner,
January 2001*

Everyday impressions of life in the capital of a poor, yet joyous and musical Cuba. Two filmmakers are surprised about everyday life in the city of Havana where there is so much happiness, despite the material wants of today's Cuba. They look around candidly, like curious tourists without any specific plan. They enjoy the care with which their cocktail is prepared, and have an open eye for the music that sounds everywhere and seems to be created by everyone live. Like everyone else, they look at the waves as they crash over Malecón Boulevard, but hang around longer than ordinary tourists and are suddenly treated to spontaneous musical improvisations. In their filming, Pilz & Hochleitner chose more for duo-directing than co-directing, which can for instance mean that the long close-up of Pilz is not a selfportrait, but a portrait by parallel director Hochleitner.

*30th International Filmfestival Rotterdam,
January 2001*



(...) The Austrian Michael Pilz, born in Gmuend, Lower Austria, in 1943, has since the early 1960's worked on around 50 films, for most of which he himself performed all the necessary functions. His engagement with the cinematographic image could be described as a gradual retreat into privacy: at first he used 8 mm film, later he switched to 16 mm film, even working for the Austrian Television in the 1970's, but now he confines himself to working with videotape, which allows him complete creative freedom.

Pilz' work is known today to only a small circle of initiates, probably because he strictly spurns the market and avoids established documentary formats: for example PRISJADIM NA DOROZKU, a travel film that took him all the way to Siberia, is no less than ten hours long. In addition, Pilz's documentary work often includes experimental elements: already in the second part of HEAVEN AND EARTH the form becomes more elliptic, scenes reappear in slow motion, daily tasks are interspersed with lyrical images of the landscape.

His most recent works, quite consistently, continue the same reductionist course. In PIECES OF DREAMS Pilz observes the theatre director Jack Garfein as he ruminates in a hotel room over *Ohio Impromptu*, a late Beckett play, and thereby makes use of every possibility offered by a specific space quite like that playwright himself. The travel films INDIAN DIARY and **La Habana** consist of meditative impressions of foreign countries that go on for several minutes and superficially might appear to be insignificant – but in Pilz' works everything is important, wherever he looks, there is something to be seen.

Dominik Kamalzadeh,
How Things Happen. A Notorious Outsider:
A Portrait of the Filmmaker Michael Pilz
DER STANDARD, Vienna, 10/11 February 2001

Travelling requires time. In the films by Michael Pilz, the great maverick among Austria's documentary filmmakers, there is always plenty of it. His images develop their intensity over time: these are the proper preconditions for his two most recent films, INDIAN DIARY and **La Habana**, both of which take us into foreign countries. The former begins where every arrival ends, in a room from where we then discover – in long shots – the surroundings, a kind of lodge somewhere in India.

In Pilz's films everything is of equal importance. There seems to be no hierarchy of images: an elephant is feeding himself with his trunk, the sun is setting behind a palm tree, men are dancing around glowing coals. Gradually the filmmaker himself moves into the picture, or rather his body which becomes the object of massages and ablutions. Without taking recourse to off-screen commentary or "staged" conversations Pilz creates the chronology of his stay in India and his medical treatment there in INDIAN DIARY:

one recognizes the same people and places, participates in everyday life and excursions, and at some point the radio croaks "What a difference a day makes".

La Habana, part of a series of films on seaports, continues this principle at the other end of the world. Together with Gabriele Hochleitner Pilz records impressions of Cuba – and is not afraid to show clichés. But despite mojitos, music and the waves of the ocean everything is different – even if it is just the reflection of sunshine on someone's shoulder.

It is precisely in such impressions that Pilz's minimalism is most captivating.

*Diagonale, Festival of Austrian Film, Graz,
19-25 March 2001*

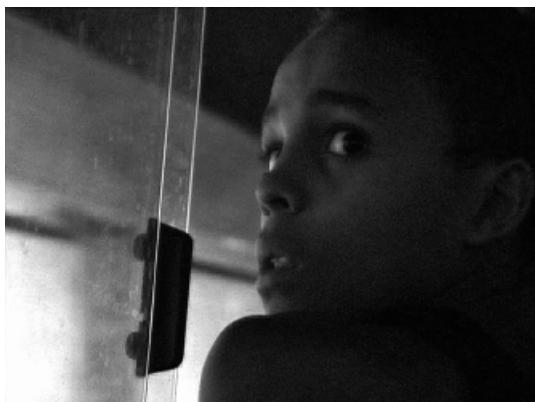
Taking its cue from the fact that the ports of Rotterdam and Porto are European cultural capitals this year, the International Film Festival Rotterdam has put together a special program entitled *On The Waterfront* which celebrates port, decaying, thriving and in some cases razed to the ground around the world.

A central feature of the programme was a set of ten especially commissioned, port-inspired video diaries from a diverse set of directors. "The filmmakers were given a very small production sum of Euro 5,000, but a maximum freedom. In fact, they were given carte blanche, although the card did have to be played in a port," explained programmer Gertjan Zuilhof. The low budget meant that all of the diaries were filmed with digital camera's. „The small digital camera provided the film-makers with a lot of freedom, which gave them the opportunity to approach their subject in a very personal manner.“

All of the films were completed just in time for the festival. Among them, last year's VPRO Tiger Award winner Lou Ye presented a very personal and much admired view of his home city IN SHANGHAI; Pablo Trapero showed up with a wonderful 40 minute mini-feature, while Rotterdam based Nathalie Alonso Casale's 11 NOVEMBER SAINT PETERSBURG was a favourite among Dutch critics.

Laura Waddington, meanwhile, spent a month on a container ship which stopped off in several Middle Eastern ports before heading for Venice for her work CARGO. Further afield, while directing duo Gabriele Hochleitner and Michael Pilz looked at Havana in LA HABANA. The festival's first ever commissions, the video diaries were extremely well received and have already received interest from Turin and many other film festivals.

*On the Waterfront,
International Filmfestival Rotterdam, Bulletin No. 18,
Spring 2001*



Original title
 English title
 Country of origin
 Shooting time
 Shooting location
 Date of completion

Producer
 Executive producers
 Idea

Concept
 Realization
 Cinematography
 Original sound
 Editing
 Music

Original format
 Tape format
 Running time
 Sound system
 Language of dialogues
 Subtitles

Featuring

Financial support

First screening

Festivals, special events

Contact

La Habana

La Habana
 The Netherlands, Austria
 18 October – 17 November 2000
 La Habana, Guanabo/Cuba
 14 December 2000

Simon Field and Sandra de Hamer for the
 30th International Filmfestival Rotterdam
 René Goosens and Annemiek van Gorp for De Productie
 Rotterdam and Michael Pilz for Michael Pilz Film Vienna
 Gertjan Zuijhof Rotterdam *On the Waterfront*

Michael Pilz
 Michael Pilz and Gabriele Hochleitner
 Suprema Ley, Orishas, anonymous

DV Video, PAL, colour, 4:3
 Beta, DV, PAL, colour, 4:3
 72 minutes
 Stereo
 Spanish, English
 English subtitles

Gabriele Hochleitner, Michael Pilz, Olga Silva Dominguez,
 Aida Maria Disotuar, Berta Isabel Gonzales
 Feliz Martinez Borrero, Carlos, Rodolfo, Umberto, a.o.

International Film Festival Rotterdam,
 Hubert Bals Fund Rotterdam,
 Rotterdam 2001 - Cultural Capital of Europe,
 Eurimages,
 Austrian Federal Chancellery – Department for the Arts,
 Cultural Department of the Land Government of Lower
 Austria

1 February 2001, 30th International Film Festival Rotterdam

Rotterdam, 30th International Film Festival, February 2001
 Graz, *Diagonale*, Festival of Austrian Films, March 2001

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