

Introduction

Notes on a Certain Kind of Austrian Cinema

By Gertjan Zuilhof

It was the year when Michael Pilz released *Feldberg* that I first came to Austria on behalf of the Rotterdam Film Festival. I seem to remember that the film had its première in Wels during the Austrian Film Days, but a beautiful old cinema in Vienna was rented for the visitor from Rotterdam. All that in order to do justice to the radiant 35mm image and the minimal yet meticulous soundtrack. I was impressed by the craftsmanship and the visual and audio purism, even though I could not know at the time that Pilz was soon to abandon working with classical film techniques and was to become a pioneer in the field of filming using handy video formats.

This year, a film was presented that took me back to the early 1990s. To 1990 itself, to be precise. To the year of *Feldberg*. We're talking about the stunning *Bellavista* by Peter Schreiner. Beautiful, calm and self-assured in black and white and shot in one location, a forgotten German-speaking enclave in the Italian Alps, the kind I thought no longer existed. Schreiner deliberately allowed a lot to pass him by. He filmed his small archaic community as it were with archaic means. He has picked up where he left off in his closely related film *I Cimbri* (1991) after having not filmed for a long time. The power of his work has remained equally strong. Beautifully captured light in the endless grey tones between black and white may well have something timeless.

During the absence of Schreiner, Pilz has built up an imposing video oeuvre, focusing on personal perspective and lengthy meditations. His recent film *Windows, Dogs and Horses* (2006) is a very short film by his standards: only 40 minutes. It's almost a commercial in which many of his themes, characters and locations throughout the world pass review.

Pilz and Schreiner of course only form an exceptional fringe within Austrian documentary, that with names such as Ulrich Seidl, Michael Glawogger and Nikolaus Geyrhalter is itself exceptional enough to have a clear profile in an international sense. Characteristic for the Austrian situation is that the exceptional fringe (Seidl, Glawogger and Geyrhalter certainly don't make television) has its own fringe.