

Abstract in English:

Economy of details. Rationalization and contingency in Austrian industrial and advertising films 1915-1965

Building on an extensive body of film theory and film history writing, I argue for film's deep connection to the history of efforts at economic rationalization in the 19th and 20th centuries. Most recently, film scholar Mary Ann Doane has made the case for counting film among a number of technologies of representation and forms of knowledge that have contributed as well as reacted to the standardization and rationalization of time in the context of capitalist modernization since the end of the 19th century: On the one hand, film assisted the conception of time as divisible into discrete units, on the other hand it proved exceptionally adept at capturing aspects of contingency, chance and the ephemeral. *Rationalization* and *contingency* – two concepts that account for vital quandaries of 19th and 20th century industrial modernity in their tension as well as interconnection – are the key concepts of my dissertation.

The dissertation's subjects are industrial and advertising films that have been produced or shown in Austria between 1915 and 1965 – media objects that bear out this connection in ways both obvious and subtle. Contingency is relevant to an examination of those films in three regards: *First*, contingency in the sense of chance and the unforeseen – in the film image, in the sequence of images as well as in the usage of films. *Second*, contingency as a liminal concept of that which a presentation of modern industrial culture aiming for efficiency and overview must block out – the danger of illegibility or confusion that the editing patterns of many industrial films are designed to ward off. *Third*, the appearance of contingency as fullness and potentiality, as part of a conscious cultivation of the film image's affinity to contingency – for instance via the ostentatious presentation of an only loosely ordered abundance of details.

The bulk of the examined films were found and viewed in archives (Austrian Film Museum, Wirtschaftskammer Österreich, and Film Archive of the City of Vienna media wien, among others) in the course of extensive research between 2010 and 2013. The predominant method is the close reading of particular films and groups of films in their historical context of use and their formal and aesthetic specificity. The films have been grouped according to thematic focus areas – shaping, measuring and testing, planning, collecting and ordering – in which their entrepreneurial purpose and formal dynamics intersect.

This constellation of films and concepts is grounded in three methodic assumptions: *First*: The specific modernity of the medium of film can instructively be captured via the concept of contingency. As the examined films amply demonstrate, contingency does not only indicate an affinity to chance and the ephemeral, but also to (filmic as well as economic) processes of planning. *Second*: Industrial and advertising films are designed as instruments to serve an economic purpose. But the aims that companies used films for, the tasks they assigned to films and how they were fulfilled by them can't be detached from specific capacities that the medium of film was perceived to have and that were thus flaunted by industrial and advertising films. Those sketches of filmic mediality that are contained within industrial and advertising films can be traced via a mixture of microanalysis and historical contextualization. *Third*: Within the economy of details that is at work in those advertising and industrial films, the macroeconomic development towards an economy of mass consumption in Austria manifests itself. It does so not in the sense of a system of recurring formal elements that solidify into a ‚Fordist Aesthetic‘ with capital letters, but rather via translations, gradations and tactical dodges which themselves remain contingent on their specific occasions. In that respect, the analyzed films and their contexts of presentation highlight a history of economic modernization in 20th century Austria that still remains underexposed.