

## **ENCOUNTERS IN COLUMBUS, OHIO**

Klaus Wyborny

From September 1978 to June 1979, I was a professor in the cinema department in Columbus and also met Skip two or three times. But it was little more than brief small talk because I had never met him in Germany and his name only indistinctly meant something to me (per Helmut Herbst). My memory, at least, is extremely vague. In any case, he never came into the bar where I would go in the evening. And I'd also say that he was not studying film at the time, but English (or something else?). Can that be? It seems very unlikely to me that he was doing a PhD in the cinema department. I think they didn't have a PhD program. Although there was enough intellectual potential going around with Ron Green and Thom Andersen, with whom I spent a lot of time back then, and also later with Noël Burch, who I helped get in the door for my job when I left—since one year in Ohio was enough for me. Most of the students were likely undergraduates.

Be that as it may: we weren't so close as in the video that Gerd Conradt made with him on Cyprus (and that I just watched). Which I now regret because I also got to know Holger Meins for a few weeks in his early phase and Skip's description of Holger's openheartedness is accurate. He was obviously very observant and could describe things with nuance.

I can now recall how I first encountered him in Columbus. It was at the school and, in fact, at one of those dull meet-and-greet events. Yeah, he was sitting there. Which is why I initially thought he had an assistant teaching position in the documentary film section. Since it had extremely luxurious facilities: The entire department lived off of college football. College football: At Ohio State, that meant 100,000 spectators every

week and there was a lot of money in it. Therefore, all of the games and all of the training sessions were filmed with 16mm cameras so that the trainer could optimize the plays using an analytic projector. To this end, a small film lab was even constructed where 16mm reversal could be processed night and day. Good for our students. There were 15 or more professors in the department, some with a misty Hollywood past—Robert Redford stopped by once when he was shooting *Brubaker* (1980) nearby. But also an Egyptian who, because I shared an office with him, at some point offered me a job in Tripoli under Gaddafi, although he had never seen any of my films. Well, with the rise of video, all of this probably disappeared. But in 1978, it was still going strong.

At this get-together, I joked around with Skip—Helmut Herbst, Bitomsky, Farocki, etc. etc.—and it consequently took me completely by surprise when he said that he didn't have a job there but was in Columbus—to study! And I—this is why I remember this so well now—simply did not get why someone who had finished at the dffb and already directed multiple films, was then pursuing a silly BA in a subject that still sounded like nonsense to me at the time. Well, since then I've changed my opinion about visual anthropology, but I still remember that—shock. That someone who was over forty would begin such a degree. I myself was only 33 and did not yet have any feeling for urgently necessary strategies to ensure one's existence.

Today, I think that he had understood that the dffb was useless for him in America, that it had led him down a one-way street, as nice as it had been. And that he saw more realistic chances in a new degree. Its admirable, then, that he even managed to finance it all the way to a PhD.

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*Translated by Ted Fendt.*

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