

FILM AS SUBVERSION

Amos Vogel – the First Century

“Seeing films is not a passive experience, but a way of thinking.”

With his provocative assertion of film as a subversive art, Amos Vogel violently challenged the common understanding of film, championing a cinematic cosmos rich with disapproved, forgotten, defiant and censored works. In 2021, this figurehead of curatorial rebelliousness would have celebrated his centenary.

“In the last analysis, every work of art, to the extent that it is original and breaks with the past instead of repeating it, is subversive.”

The Austrian Film Museum pays tribute to the Vienna-born Vogel through a series of events taking place throughout the year: The *Amos Vogel Atlas* charts a map of Vogel’s notion of subversiveness through screenings, exhibitions, talks and performances. In autumn, an extensive film retrospective will explore the outer limits of the *Amos Vogel Cosmos*, interrogating the political, the social and the aesthetic potential of the last five decades of film and audiovisual practices.

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“Subversion in cinema starts when the theater darkens and the screen lights up.”

Amos Vogel was born on April 18, 1921 in Vienna as Amos Vogelbaum. He had to flee from Austria in 1938 and reached New York via Havana. He lived in New York City until his death on April 24, 2012. Vogel was the founder and curator of *Cinema 16* (1947–1963), one of the most significant film societies in the USA focusing on independent cinema. Together with Richard Roud, he founded and programmed the *New York Film Festival* (1963–1968) emphasizing contemporary avant-garde cinema. Vogel is the author of the provocative book *Film as a Subversive Art* (1974) and was professor of Film Studies at the *Annenberg School for Communication* at the University of Pennsylvania for more than two decades. Until his old age he remained active as a lecturer, critic and consultant for numerous international film festivals.

“The more I upset the audience, the happier I am.”

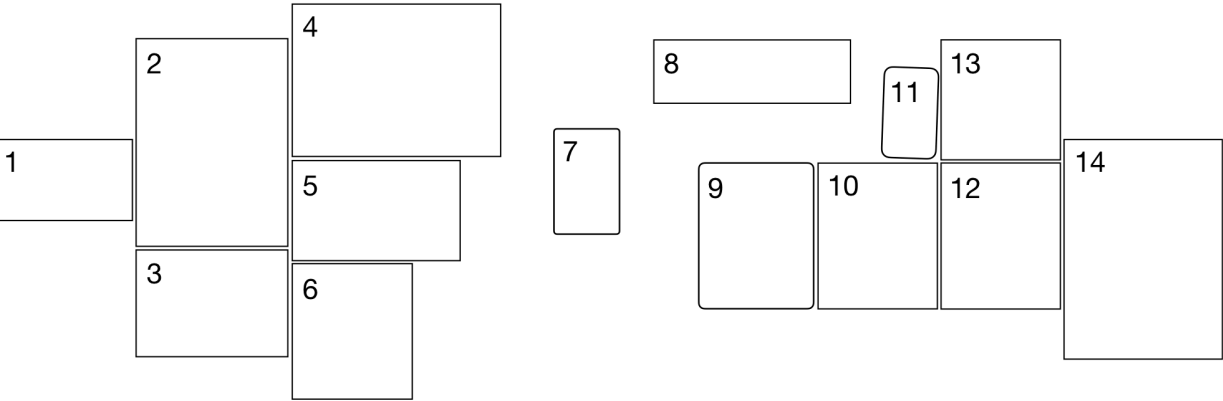
It was not until 1993 that Amos Vogel was officially invited back to his native Vienna on the occasion of the symposium *Departure into Uncertainty*, organized by SYNEMA as part of the *Viennale Film Festival* headed by Alexander Horwath and Wolfgang Ainberger. The Austrian Film Museum has committed to explore Vogel’s crucial role in the comprehension of our audiovisual present and has opened his private library to the public.

1. Yes I want to join CINEMA 16

Susan Sontag’s Membership Application (New York 1960/61)
“Commercial cinema aims to entertain; the film club aims to promote understanding of film and new experiments within the medium. Commercial cinema avoids controversy, the film club welcomes it.” Archie Winston experienced the following: “Vogel’s programs achieve a scatter-gun coverage that stimulates approval and criticism in wholesale quantities.”

2. Cinema 16 Pamphlet One

How to solve the mystery of Rashomon (New York 1952)
“Here cinema approaches the subtleties of Dostoevski, the insights of the Cubists, Futurists, and Freudians into the nature of reality as a multiplicity of overlapping, conflicting, converging strands and layers, each contributing to the ‘truth’ of the whole – a truth that remains ‘subjective’ and, in terms of certainty, inevitably elusive.”



3. Amos and Marcia Vogel

at Cinema 16 (New York 1955)
“At a certain point I said to Marcia, ‘Listen. You know what I think maybe we could do? Why don’t we rent this place for two nights. I’ll go to various distributors and try to find some films I think might make up a good program, and we’ll show a program of a selection of shorts.’”

4. Switchman in NIGHT MAIL

D: Harry Watt and Basil Wright (GB 1936)
“One film I remember specifically and very strongly is NIGHT MAIL. The whole notion of documentary became important to me because of that film. And simultaneously I realized that this was really a poetic film, and I was amazed that such a boring subject – the workings of the British mail system – could be made interesting.”

5. Eiko Matsuda and Tatsuya Fuji in Ai no Korida (In the Realm of the Senses) D: Nagisa Oshima (Japan 1976)
“This film is a historical event; praised by intellectuals and artists, condemned by a large part of the press, confiscated by customs, banned by censorship, it may not even be shown in its original version in its country of origin.”

6. Dear Amos

Greeting card from Nagisa Oshima (1990/91)
Best Wishes for A Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year

7. For my friends Pa and Ma

Amos Vogel, December 1940 (New York)
“So, much to my sadness I decided that I did not want to go to Palestine, and decided to stay in the United States.”

8. You Have to Survive Even If It Kills You

Amos Vogel in Film Comment March/April 1994
“In Vienna in 1939, my girl and I were prevented from sitting on our beloved bench along the Danube because it sported a newly printed sign: Dogs and Jews are not allowed to sit here”

9. Viennese Children 1st Book

Schoolbook of Amos Vogelbaum (Vienna 1927)
This book is dedicated to you by the municipality of Vienna in memory of your first school year.

10. Tim and Tom in the Cinema

Diabolo Verlag, Amos Vogelbaum (Vienna ca. 1930)
“At age of seven or so, I got a Magic Lantern, complete with color slides – just like Ingmar Bergman. I was entranced. Later (I must have been ten or eleven) my father bought me a home movie projector, 9.5mm.”

11. Vienna Ice Skating Club Season 1930/31

Amos Vogelbaum’s membership card.

12. Teddi in the Cinema

Diabolo Verlag, Amos Vogelbaum (Vienna ca. 1930)
“I enjoyed running the films backward as well – the magic of transforming, subverting reality.”

13. Written by Amos Vogelbaum

Children’s drawing (Vienna ca. 1928)

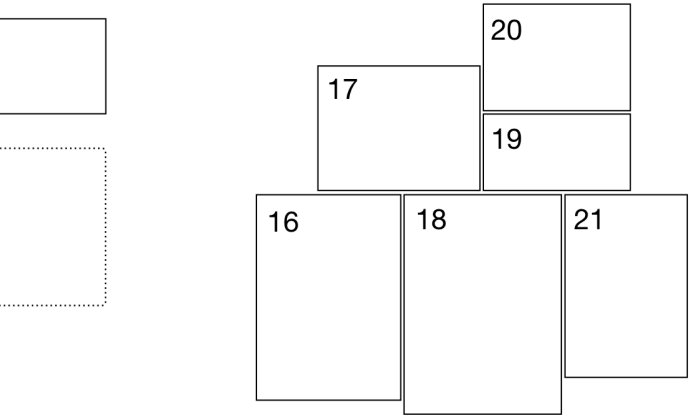
14. Inge Landgut and the shadow of Peter Lorre in M – Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder (M – A City Searches for a Murderer) D: Fritz Lang (D 1931)
“Peter Lorre, as a child murderer, is chased by both police and underworld, each for its own reasons.”

15. How Little Lori Visited Times Square

Amos Vogel and Maurice Sendak, Harper Collins 1963
Poor little Lori. All he wants to do is visit Times Square, but somehow he just can’t seem to get there!

16. Jitka Cerhová and Ivana Karbanová in Sedmikrásky (Daisies)

D: Věra Chytilová (ČSSR 1966)
“Visually and structurally perhaps the most sensational film of the Czech film renaissance, this is a mad, stylish, dadaist comedy, long banned by the censors. It is an orgy of spectacular visual delights, sensuous decor, and magnificent color experiments, making a philosophical statement in the guise of a grotesque farce.”



17. David Hemmings in Blow Up

D: Michelangelo Antonioni (USA 1966)
“Reality can no longer be apprehended by the ‘naked eye’; the truth hides in the shadows.”

18. Film as a Subversive Art

Amos Vogel, Random House 1974
Luis Buñuel about the book: “An invaluable book, a dense garden that lures with long forbidden fruits.”

19. Be uncomfortable, be sand

not oil in the machinery of the world!
Passage from the poem Wacht auf (Wake Up) by Günter Eich (1950). Amos Vogel: “Don’t trust the state. We all believe, almost automatically, that the state exists to protect us. I found out that it can also exist to exterminate us.”

20. Amos Vogel and Alexander Horwath at the symposium ‘Departure into Uncertainty’ in the context of the Viennale Film Festival 1993
“In October 1993, I was honored by the Vienna Ministry of Culture at a glittering City Hall reception. Life is full of surrealist moments.”

21. Alfred Hitchcock and Amos Vogel

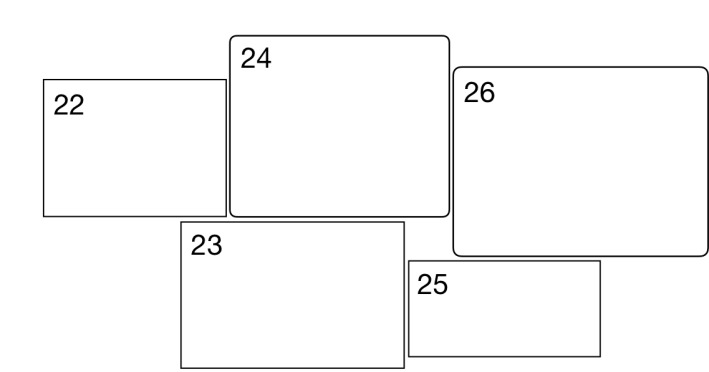
visiting Cinema 16 (New York 1956)
“Oh, Hitchcock. Of course, that’s the only time I heard of any public appearance of Hitchcock’s for a general audience, in New York.”

22. Simone Mareuil in Un Chien Andalou

(An Andalusian Dog) D: Luis Buñuel (F 1929)
“One of the most shocking moments of world cinema... we fear what might happen; and, for once in cinema, it does.”

23. James Stewart in Vertigo

D: Alfred Hitchcock (USA 1958)
“Our unease – even when we know it is make-believe – centers on the man’s eyes staring at death; the entire film pivots on this universal, primitive anxiety.”



24. The New Radicals. A Report with Documents

P. Jacobs and S. Landau, Vintage Books 1966
“While two-thirds of mankind suffers undernourishment, our own upper classes revel amidst superfluous abundance.”

25. Bogdan Tirnanić in Rani Radovi (Early Works)

D: Želimir Žilnik (YU 1969)
“Filled with black humor, frank sex, and bizarre tableaux, the film becomes a revolutionary allegory of the European New Left.”

26. Camilo Cienfuegos and Ernesto Che Guevara in Hasta la Victoria Siempre

D: Santiago Álvarez (Cuba 1967)
“The ‘subversive’ Cuban cinema, perhaps surprisingly, is primarily found in the propaganda films by Santiago Álvarez who today is one of the world’s most prolific and notable political filmmakers.”