

EMPTY SPACES IN THE SKY

Peter Malinski

By Wolfgang Schimmelpfennig

On September 5, 1993 Peter Malinski died of cancer at the age of 43. This sad news caused dismay and sorrow in his family, friends, colleagues and kitefliers all over the world.

In spite of serious illness, in his last weeks Peter never lost hope of recovering and being able to fly kites in good health for at least another couple of years. With his death the kite world has lost one of its most creative and committed kitemakers.

Peter was born in Bremerhaven, Germany in 1950. As a student at the Bremer High School for the Arts, he learned to create with colors and forms, laying the foundation for a life full of art. Afterwards he specialized in silk-screening, something that he used later in printing his logo on his kites.

Peter also played guitar with several musicians from Bremerhaven. But the quality of commercial guitars wasn't good enough for him, so his hands crafted wonderful electric guitars from which he drew shrill avant-garde tones.

Stimulated by a friend, he turned his attention to kitemaking in 1980 and was immediately seized by kite fever. He started making unusual, complex kites on a scale that hadn't been seen in the sky until then.

Peter never spared any time and effort as he continued building more and more elaborate kites. He made his 88-square-meter (950 square foot) parafoil in 1982. Kites with a wingspan up to 12 meters (13 yards) followed.

New kites in a variety of forms and colors originated from him almost overnight, kites of which others could only dream: his Expansible Box, in the style of Eiji Ohashi but larger, with 12,480 pieces, was completed in 1986. His inspiring tridimensional star kites appeared in the mid-'80s.

With his series of big Japanese *tosa*, *rokkaku* and *kerori* kites, Peter realized a new context between the Asiatic and European arts of kitemaking.

In recent years, it was his modular compound systems, patterned after the kites of Bell and Hargrave, that were prominent in his work. These cellular/modular kites could be varied to such an extent in their form and dimensions that after each assembly a new kite stood on the field. For these kites he manufactured special connecting pieces—



Peter Malinski, 1950 - 1993

WOLFGANG SCHIMMELPFENNIG

later modified by a kite friend—as well as universal sails and spars.

With every new kite, Peter beamed and looked uplifted, and no one would imagine that he was already thinking of his next kite.

Peter often provided tips and practical help to other kitemakers. At times a few manipulations were enough to exactly trim a parafoil and make it capable of flying. He would explain difficult sewing techniques—and his suggestions could be trusted.

Through continuous construction and flying of always extraordinary kites, his experience grew. He particularly loved to fly his kites in Fanø, off the Danish coast. This rough landscape with its windy weather suited him and his kites well. He attended the kite meetings there from the very beginning, never missing a year, declining other kite events and encouraging other kite people to attend the meeting on the island.

Peter and his kites were at home everywhere in the world. Whether Japan or New Zealand, China or North America, his kites were a major asset to the big festivals.

Peter wrote about his perception of kites in a letter of 1990:

“As an academic artist, I want to enjoy my creative potential, realize my ideas, build continuity in my aesthetic development, and create flying objects, space-sculptures which temporarily change the shining blue and sometimes cloud-laden, haunting infinity above us. I want to create fixed points which redirect our horizontal patterns of thinking to vertical ones.

“After the festivals, when everything is packed again, the space above us shows itself again in its brutal infinity.

“Then suddenly a new idea for a kite comes up. How could I realize this idea without my hands, my best tools?

“While building a kite, you feel the joy which builds up continually until the moment of the first attempt to fly it. Then the joy turns into hesitation, anxiety: Is it going to fly, is anything going to break, what are the others going to say about it, are they going to like it or not? Whatever . . . get on with it, a new kite is already in the making.

“. . . How happy I am having met kitemakers from all over the world, being exposed to different points of view, opinions and handcrafts, and experiencing how others approach what I have chosen. How happy I am to contribute, that others look at what I do. It is an interaction which forms me and gives me the energy to create ideas.

“Kites are peaceful, put you in a good mood, demand your strength and make you breathe deeply with exhaustion—and if you are lucky, you breathe clean, pure salty air.

“Then I met Bruno [Homan], over 80 years old. He built and flew kites when my parents were children. Today he looks at our kites and notices lots of things they did not have in his time. It excites me to think of all these things that will fly when I am 80 years old and standing on the beach pondering the things that did not exist in my time.”

It is difficult to imagine what Peter's hands would have produced in the future.

Peter Malinski set a standard with his kites, and set inspiration spinning throughout the kite world. He will find his last peace in Fanø, where his ashes are to be buried. We will not forget him. ◇