

Trading Zones



Camera Work in Artistic and Ethnographic Research

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It's the drums that get the attention. Their rhythm provides the soundtrack for this video clip that does without singing, but uses off-screen voices. These voices tell of the lives of the young people seen in the video. In changing formations, they perform dance-like choreographies in front of the camera, punctuated with making-of scenes: mutual applying of make-up, camera work in the background, rehearsal situations. The life stories begin in early childhood and end in the adolescents' future. They are about weddings, families, illnesses, and causes of death. The voices speak in the past tense. We find ourselves in Lena Thüring's video work *Future Me*, in illuminated white rooms that have been converted into a stage by adding a few spotlights, boxes, and neon lights. It is increasingly unclear what kind of filmic work we are dealing with here: is something being rehearsed or presented here? Are we in front of the stage or behind it? Not that it really makes a difference. What is being documented is staged from the outset — by the youngsters themselves who practice choreographies and dances to their favorite songs and occasionally work behind the camera themselves. The camera is much more than a recording medium. Its constant presence, even during rehearsals, transforms everything that takes place in the encounter between young people, artist, and camera crew into a theater play. As a shared tool, the camera does not show the artist's gaze at the young people, nor the young actors' biographical, introspective gaze at themselves. The camera acts as a kind of third eye. It forces the human players to decenter their own point of view. The camera doesn't just record, but also reflects back onto those who are recorded and perform for it. It calls for negotiating one's own image and perhaps also for reflecting on the fictional parts of biographical narratives.

Given the extensive field invoked by the title of this volume, we may be raising expectations in our readers that can hardly be fulfilled. The artistic and ethnographic approaches — or their intersections — will not be defined here in terms of how they are shaped by the particular disciplines. *Trading Zones: Camera Work in Artistic and Ethnographic Research* asks in a selectively methodical manner about a convergence of different practices:¹ What happens when researchers act in interaction with the camera? How do the possibilities for action and reflection expand when artists, anthropologists, and documentary filmmakers together discuss

1 As customary in anthropology, we use ethnography as a collective term for methods like fieldwork and participant observation. To us, a critical examination of concrete actions and testing practices of unlearning and unworking of disciplinary traditions and hierarchical power relations seems to be more fruitful than a discussion about a new conceptual revision of ethnography, as currently discussed, for example, by Tim Ingold. Daniel Miller describes ethnography as "the humiliation of the anthropologist" in the most positive sense, because actual field work constantly thwarts the researcher's expectations, producing the unexpected and thus forcing the discipline to constantly question itself. See Daniel Miller, "Anthropology Is the Discipline but the Goal Is Ethnography," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7, no.1 (2017): 27–28; Okwui Enwezor, "Reformulating the landscape of quick judgements," *Le Journal de La Triennale* 1 (2012): 50, www.cnap.fr/sites/default/files/import_destination/document/123910_le-journal-de-la-triennale--1--unlearning--clairestaebler_eng.pdf; Tim Ingold, "That's enough about ethnography!," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 4, no.1 (2014), <https://doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.021>.

their experiences in the field? In images and texts, such practitioners think out loud about the practical side of their camera work, about the pitfalls and potentialities occurring before and during recordings in the field, in post-production and presentation.² What is of interest here is not so much the fact that they all employ the methods of ethnographic field research, such as participant observation and interviews, nor that they use a photo or video camera; what interests us more is that in the works discussed here the camera wants to be more than a recording and documentation instrument, more than a means to an end, a data collection, visual field note, or means of representation. What the contributions to this volume have in common is a mistrust of the widely nurtured hope that the camera would have little effect on the field and the protagonists if it was only used with sufficient reflection and consideration. The authors of this book do not hide the camera. On the contrary, they bring it into play as an agent. The inevitable presence of one's own media-based means of production becomes part of the negotiation.

How exactly does the camera help shape the field and subjects of research? How can attention, perception and actions be directed? To what extent does the camera shift the relationship to the field and the other agents? In this publication we ask about the social side of the camera, about its possibilities for establishing relationships. As a tool, the camera has agency insofar as it directs the gaze and enables, enforces, and determines some actions, doing so at all levels of production. Part of this is that aspects of camera work such as montage, sound, and camera operation are done by dividing up the work and opening up space for other shared forms of authorship. Post-production, editing and montage in particular offer a wide range of possibilities to break the conventions of linear narrative styles, for instance in asynchronous arrangements of audio and video tracks.³ The presentation of film and photography offers further creative scope. Decisions about whether to use screens or projections, about their number and size and the way they are arranged in space not only have important effects on the "narratives," but also place viewers in very different relationships to what is shown. Instead of discussing

2 This volume is the materialization of an event series held in 2018–20 at the Institute for Contemporary Art Research of the Zurich University of the Arts. Its thematic focus arose from a practical need: Many research-based artists around us reflect on how knowledge about ways of living together can be produced based on research, observation, oral history, and by means of a camera. The possibility of a common subject of debate emerging here was not fully recognized because the topics of the various projects were so diverse. The event series was intended not only to encourage debate among the researchers, but also to follow the methodological rather than thematic issues beyond the boundaries of art and seek a dialogue with researchers in ethnography and visual anthropology. Kris Rutten, An van. Dienderen, and Ronald Soetaert, "The Rhetorical Turn in Contemporary Art and Ethnography," *Critical Arts* 27, no. 6 (2013): 627–40, provided major impulses for the conception of the event series.

3 Techniques of asynchronous montage go beyond the juxtaposition of "sync and non-sync ear-eye techniques or representations" by moving in between: "While the synchronized ear-eye depends upon 'clock time' and 'coeval presence,' the non-synchronous presumes to clearly separate ear and eye, placing them in distinct temporal and spatial zones, creating a relation of action-reaction, of randomness or commentary. In contrast, the asynchronous moves *in between* these two modalities, offering an ear-eye sometimes 'in sync,' sometimes not. Aporetic gaps, uncertainties, disruptions, and durations are crucial." Jennifer L. Heuson and Kevin T. Allen, "Asynchronicity: Rethinking the Relation of Ear and Eye in Ethnographic Practice," in *Experimental Film and Anthropology* (London and New York: Bloomsbury 2014), 114.

the technical or visual production methods of the camera we therefore try, with an intentional naivety, to grasp events one encounters in the field as a performative event between filmmaker, what is filmed, location and viewers, rather than assuming they semiotically mean, represent, or exemplify something else.⁴

Unlike what is suggested by many recent posthumanist theories, we do not believe that a distinction of filming subject and filmed object can be completely dissolved in camera work (still, we reach for these stars). The camera interacts with the person operating it. It is intentional, directed, determined by interests. The author cannot absolve her responsibility for her images, just as the camera image cannot shake off its representational part.⁵ This very awareness of the power of representation and one's own situatedness shape the use of the camera in many of the contributions assembled here. It is the starting point for the authors' attempt to speak with — rather than about — the other, to try out forms of representation that are more dialogical and less hierarchical, hegemonic, or masterful.⁶ Can the camera encourage negotiations on the issue of who is representing — and is allowed to represent — whom? Does camera work enable new forms of collective authorship and collaboration?

Trading Zones: Camera Work in Artistic and Ethnographic Research doesn't offer a theory of the camera or discussions about when camera work would be regarded more as artistic or as ethnographic practice. Even if the title of our volume might suggest it, we are not gauging the interdisciplinary field of art and (visual) anthropology. That has been done before.⁷ The desire to reflect on what we tentatively call "trading zones" arose

4 We are looking for practices that broaden the view of the field, like for example discussed in Amiria Henare, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, *Thinking Through Things: Theorizing Artefacts Ethnographically* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 2, 4; Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, eds., *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 8. And we do not define do's and don'ts of camera work, unlike for example Ton Otto, et al., "Camera, Intervention and Cultural Critique: An Introduction," *Visual Anthropology* 31, no. 4–5 (2018): 307–317; Rutten, Dienderen, and Soetaert, "The Rhetorical Turn"; Hal Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer?," *The traffic in culture. Refiguring art and anthropology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 302–309.

5 "Who is speaking to whom turns out to be as important for meaning and truth as what is said; in fact, what is said turns out to change according to who is speaking and who is listening." Linda Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (1991–1992), 7.

6 *Ibid.*, 16–17; see also Uriel Orlow, "Rituals of filming and the dialogic camera," *Moving Image Review & Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (2013): 104.

7 The majority of existing publications on this topic are written by anthropologists seeking to define a common interdisciplinary research area. See for example Arndt Schneider and Christopher Wright, *Between Art and Anthropology: Contemporary Ethnographic Practice* (Oxford: Berg, 2010); Arndt Schneider and Christopher Wright, *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (London: Routledge, 2005); Lucian Taylor, "Iconophobia," *Transition* 69 (1996), 64–88. A survey of the existing literature is provided by Anna Laine, *Practicing Art and Anthropology: A Transdisciplinary Journey* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1–22. What these publications have in common is a macroscopic view of the disciplines (and their intersections) and a methodological interest in them. As a result, what is addressed is primarily a methodological dispute being conducted within anthropology. In these publications, art at times takes on the strategic role of an advocate for a more visually oriented anthropology. Art stands for all subtle (emotional, sensual, subjective) and not easily objectifiable aspects of ethnographic research. See also footnote 11 for this. So far, research-based artists hardly have expressed an interest in cross-disciplinary cooperation or a hope of expanding their own methodological research repertoire, which may be due to the widespread skepticism in art about academic methodology.

from a different insight: in recent camera and field research-based work, it is just as impossible to abide by the boundaries between documentation, ethnography, and art as it is to deny their overlaps. At least since the 1960, artists have been focusing on different social formations, practices, forms of knowledge, and material cultures. They broke with restrictive definitions of art and artwork and adopted procedures previously reserved for sciences such as anthropology or sociology.⁸ Since then, the artistic intersections with anthropology have shifted again and again. Unlike artistic practices of the 1960s, social art and institutional critique in the 1990s were not interested as much in a detached documentary description of social contexts as in collaborations with agents outside the art context. A growing and ongoing artistic interest in non-Western contexts can be observed since the aughts — while the globalization of the (art) world has also been advancing. In often collaborative and camera-based processes, artists engage in interdisciplinary discourses, such as Writing Culture (a topic discussed in anthropology since as early as the 1980s), postcolonial studies, and the recently intensifying debate on decolonizing museums and their collections. Many artistic projects focus on post-colonial entanglements, through which the artists' self-positioning is put up for negotiation as well. They take up aspects of a paradigm shift in the humanities and social sciences that leads away from big narratives to questions of translocal entanglements. At the same time, the artists also reflect on their own artistic activities within a highly globalized art establishment. In today's globalized exhibition world, artists are invited to widely different places to realize contributions to biennials or entire exhibitions. It is not uncommon for those invitations to come with the expectation that the contribution relate to the place where the exhibition is held. The invitations themselves are then often the reason for initiating or adapting projects. They offer the opportunity to conduct field research on the ground and cooperate with local agents.⁹

The discussions about an ethnographic turn in art history is paralleled by the discussions about a sensory turn in anthropology. Visual anthropology asks about the “multisensoriality of experience, perception, knowing and practice” — in the way people live, in the work of researchers and in the approach to communicating findings.¹⁰ The use of photography and film generates its own dynamics in recording, post-processing, and

8 Such dissolutions of the art field's boundaries and an associated artistic self-image form the backdrop against which art-historical literature has predominantly dealt with art and anthropology to date. Hal Foster's essay "The Artist as Ethnographer" has shaped the art-historical debate to this day. Foster traces the "ethnographical turn" back to the new constitution of the artist's role and the artwork, to Minimal Art being displayed by Performance Art, Conceptual Art, Body Art and Contextual Art in the 1970s. See Hal Foster, "The artist as ethnographer?," in *The Traffic in Culture. Refiguring Art and Anthropology*, ed. G. Marcus and F. Myers (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1995), 302–309. For the history of the connection between ethnographic and artistic practices in contemporary art see Alex Coles, *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn* (London: Black Dog, 2000); Rutten, Dienderen, and Soetaert, "The Rhetorical Turn", 459–460.

9 Uriel Orlow, Ines Kleesattel and knowbotiq have reflected on such issues in a set of cards that grew out of their research project *Aesthetics of the Translocal*. See Ines Kleesattel, knowbotiq, Uriel Orlow, "untooling," knowbotiq.net: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6344282>, accessed March 25, 2022.

10 See Sarah Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 2015), xii.

presenting the findings, which often go beyond the usual conventions of scientific verifiability and objectivity.¹¹ An “ethnography through the senses”¹² thus continues what in the wake of the Writing Culture debate was initiated as a fundamental self-questioning of the discipline: the call for a decentering of cultural representations and power relations of the discipline.

... the space of cultural representations is populated by differently situated authorities, producers, not simply conduits, of self-reflexive “cultural” knowledge. For there is no longer a standpoint from which one can claim to definitively administer, or orchestrate, the textualization of “identity,” “tradition,” or “history.” A heteroglot, overlapping and contested public culture — including indigenous writers, readers, and performers — characterizes the post-/neo-colonial context which the self-critical work of the late '70s was beginning to reflect, in Western academic contexts. By the late 1980s it was inescapable that anthropological fieldwork would never again be a matter of an outsider scholar interrogating insider natives and emerging with neutral, authoritative knowledge.¹³

How do audiovisual practices enable reflexive, participatory, embodied forms of knowledge and perception about social contexts that might otherwise be difficult to access or remain invisible? This question, pursued by numerous visual anthropologists, is at the heart of the contributions assembled here. What sets the perspective of our book apart is this: first, our focus is media-specific because we don't believe that there is such a thing as visuality in itself. Camera work and what it produces are subject to technical codes that create different relationalities than other imaging processes. Second, from the perspective of artistic research, an interdisciplinary field characterized by a broad concept of knowledge opens up.¹⁴ Artists do not worry too much about the scientific validity of their findings. Also, they have no problem giving up the distance to the field and entering into complicity with individuals whom a classic ethnographic study might have wanted to describe with a certain analytical distance. The trading zones of film and photography (between documentation, fiction, and art) are more likely to inspire speculative narratives: What is the documentary value of fiction? What does the camera see that the camerawoman does not see? Can it push the boundaries of the expected insights the researcher has set as her

11 Michalea Schäuble, "Visual Anthropology," *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (October 2018): 2; David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006); Anna Grimshaw, *The Ethnographer's Eye. Ways of Seeing in Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

12 Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, xii.

13 James Clifford, *On the Edges of Anthropology (Interviews)* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 29.

14 Unlike visual anthropologists, we are not as much concerned with the question of what the visual can achieve versus the discursive (see, for example, MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image*, 271). The epistemological potential of the visual is always presupposed in art and understood as an interplay with discursive means such as analysis, theory formation, and interpretation.

objective? How do video installations circumvent linear narrations and forms of representation? The projects assembled here are themselves trading zones. They are places where dealing with the camera also enables negotiation: about common issues of artistic and ethnographic research; about the interests and expectations of filmmakers, filmmakers, viewers; about different speaker positions; and about translocal entanglements.¹⁵ In order to better understand this space of joint action and negotiation, we go into the field with the makers, while accepting the possibility of getting lost in it at times.

How can the camera as an instrument of observation expand human perception? For all three contributions to the chapter “Observe and Show,” the camera reaches far beyond its function as a recording device in the field. As an instrument of perception, it goes where discursive means reach their limits. Laura Coppens, Bina Elisabeth Mohn, and Anette Rose all examine elusive phenomena, situations, and processes rather than materially visible objects — invisible power relations, norms, and affects: the hope of the workers in a self-managed factory for better production conditions (Laura Coppens), the development of self-awareness in small children in the digital environment (Bina E. Mohn), the implicit knowledge of manual work (Anette Rose). Such processes between human and machine are associated with historically grown, socioeconomic contexts. The challenge is to bring to light these complex dimensions¹⁶ which the three authors explore in their specific filmic investigations by creating montages of selected excerpts of manufacturing processes.

In what ways does the camera allow an extended bearing of contemporary witness? The locations of the projects in the second chapter, “Witness and Tell,” do not stake out a field that could be secured and freely explored. The unused Martyrs’ Square in Beirut (Daniel Kötter, Rani al Raji, Amira Solh), everyday life under the repressive government in Iran (Shirin Barghnavard, Sepideh Abtahi, Mina Keshavarz, Nahid Rezaei, Sahar Salahshoori), letters from a prison in Japan (Heidrun Holzfeind): the public and political spaces in and from which these projects emerge are shaped by a conflict-ridden past and state control. The camera seeks out these contested and sometimes inaccessible places to gather evidence, layers, and voices. For the artists, the micro-stories narrated by multiple voices are associated with the hope of being able to get closer

15 Following Marie Louise Pratt, we understand these sites as contact zones, “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power.” See Marie Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 33–40, see p. 34 for the cited passage. One attribute of contact zones is transculturation: a process in which members of a subordinate or marginalized group appropriate, reinterpret and formulate counter-readings of material from a dominant culture.

16 The challenge of making visible “complicated realities” like production conditions in a factory was what prompted Bertolt Brecht to say that this requires art (in terms of something “contrived” or “staged”). But unlike the distancing effect he developed for the theater, all three filmmakers included here use their cameras for immersive close-ups. The potential for knowledge arises from the combination and interrelation of the camera shots, thus allowing the viewers to become active observers. For Brecht’s issue with realism see Bernd Stiegler, “Die eigentliche Realität ist in die Funktionale gerutscht,” in *Montagen des Realen* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2009), 241–254, https://doi.org/10.30965/9783846747957_017.

to the present in its historicity and thereby reinforce the sense of other possible presents. Bearing witness is a subjective place of imagination and speculation where reflections on past and present encourage projections into the future.¹⁷

How does the camera create a documentary value of fiction? In the third chapter, “Stage and Perform,” the camera becomes pivotal when it comes to questions of identity and representation. The conditions of production, often ignored by a camera, are presented here in such a way that unequal speaker positions are put on stage. Who speaks for whom here? Who stages whom? On these stages, those standing “behind the camera” — authors, artists, and the viewers, in a way, too — are thrown back onto their (privileged) position and confronted with their own projections. The protagonists are overdrawn, staged, and fictionalized. How do those creating the stage impact the agency of the staged performers in narrating themselves? In Lena Maria Thüring’s installation, young people act their imagined future lives which, however, do not reveal ideals in life as much as question the expectations of social attributions. Authenticity only exists in fiction here.¹⁸ The difficulty of clearly distinguishing between role and person even in “real life” becomes evident in the exposed game of staging or fictionalization. Zheng Maler use interactive, immersive digital VR technologies in order to document the life of a Cambodian farmer, which questions both the stage as such, as well as authorship, as it is the contributors of the work who place the cameras themselves.

How can the camera redistribute agency? The fourth chapter, “Hand Over,” assembles contributions by two artists who in their filmic practices employ the camera to critically negotiate subject positions and authorship in order to create new forms of collective, dialogical production. These artists are interested in processes in which material and immaterial goods circulate between different cultural contexts and agents. Uriel Orlow travels to Nigeria to be asked questions about the responsibility for looted cultural objects and their restitution and Louis Henderson initiates, together with Olivier Marboeuf, a collective translation process of Edouard Glissant’s *Monsieur Toussaint* in Haiti, which was translated into, and performed in, Creole with local artists. From the outset, the cultural difference is not negated, nor conclusively explained. On the contrary, an opacity and strangeness of the other is assumed and becomes the driving force of the encounter. The way the camera is used in the particular projects to decenter classical authorship differs greatly.

17 This understanding of bearing witness differs for instance, from Hito Steyerl’s, “Can Witnesses Speak?,” *transversal texts* 5 (2008): <https://transversal.at/transversal/0408/steyerl/en>. The way photography raises the hope of bearing contemporary witness (“That-has-been”) is described by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 77 as well as by Walter Benjamin in “Little History of Photography,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2: part 2 (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 510.

18 Jean Rouch has described this filmic state of producing reality as ciné-transe: “The way of shooting influences whatever you’re filming. ... I think that to hide a camera is disgusting and dishonest. ... When I have a camera and a microphone, I’m not my usual self, I’m in a strange state, in a ciné-transe. This is the objectivity that one can expect, being perfectly conscious that the camera is there and that people know it.” See Dan Yakir, “Ciné-Transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch. An Interview,” in *Film Quarterly* 31, no.3 (1978): 7.

While Uriel Orlow has the camera quasi taken from his hands and handed over to a cameraman assigned by the Benin king, Louis Henderson realizes that his camera has to give up all control within the eleven-person ensemble of Haitian musicians and poets and improvise in moving in the midst of bodies, spirits, and rhythms. Getting involved in such experimental processes also means taking the risk of failure, immersing yourself without knowing where it may lead.

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Laura Coppens's essay "The Aesthetics of Accountability" revisits the discourses on the filmic medium since the sensory turn from the perspective of visual anthropology. Coppens takes her film *Taste of Hope* as a starting point to reflect on how physical, sensory, and personal experiences can be used as moments of knowledge. Her film about a self-managed tea factory shows the daily struggle for the cooperative's economic and moral survival. Rather than depicting this reality, Coppens is primarily interested in investigating the hope for alternative, new employment relationships. What aspects of hope can be captured and created on film that cannot be put into words? And how does the film itself become an object of hope for the workers — the hope for publicity and a promotional effect? Coppens is deliberately interested in the political, social, and historical requirements and consequences a filmic reflection involves. In Coppens's work, the art of observation operates with the involved attention of the camera-woman and viewer. Through framing and montage, she tries to create an immersive "mosaic effect": from the first minute of the film, the viewers have to find their own way within the film's action. Cognition can only take place performatively, as it were: the film acts through framing, uncut sequences or repetitiveness; but the observation it contains only becomes apparent when the viewers themselves, with alert senses, make the observation. When describing her camera as a listener, Coppens points to the silent pattern of facial expressions, gestures, and movements that reveal something of the workers' inner conflicts and hopes.

Bina Elisabeth Mohn explores the (as yet) invisible in the visible. As she sees it, the task of camera ethnography is to create an image of something that has never been seen as an image before: to see something "as something" and maybe "as something else" as well. This implies that the researcher can only develop an interest in "something" at all owing to the camera. Mohn discusses how this open examination with the camera positions itself as situated and selective by reflecting on its methods: as "sightlines" through which the perspective of the (looking) researcher is deliberately included and made present. For Mohn, physicality is key not only in front of the camera — as she focuses, say, on the subtle processes in a child's face when it looks at a screen — but also in the performative process of arrangement throughout the various stages of the work: from the filming situation, to the editing process in which the material is cut into selected, short fragments that in different situations result in variable arrangements, to the moment of reception, which is not conceived as the completion of research, but rather as its extension and expansion in that it addresses the visitors of the installation/exhibition as fellow researchers.

In the practices of Anette Rose, the camera is used quite explicitly to expand human perception: recording techniques such as high-speed and motion capture render visible movement sequences that are not discernible to the naked eye. But "slow motion as the microscope of time" is only one of the components of filmic temporality potentials. What Rose has developed in her comprehensive long-term research

is a method of observation by means of simultaneities. Thus, one camera films the hands while another camera simultaneously focuses on the face. The implicit knowledge Rose seeks to track down in manual, mechanized, and automated work processes is made visible by dividing attention: instead of the usual image of an "overall impression" or focus on the action (hands for activity, face for speaking, etc.), divided vision reveals unusual aspects. Subtle interplay and discrepancies between expression and action bring embodied forms of knowledge to light. This synchronous observation is made possible through the mode of presentation in spatial constellations. As Rose points out in conversation with Christoph Schenker, the art field offers the option to conceive filmic modules as installations. The size, orientation, and media of the videos in the room cause observation to be a physical experience for viewers.

In their multi-part *state-theater* project, Daniel Kötter and Constanze Fischbeck examine six case studies of public gathering places that are currently no longer able to fulfill this function. In each of the six cities, Kötter and Fischbeck seek out these abandoned, vacant, or converted places and look at them as theaters. The camera is used as a performer on these stages. In politically unstable, civil war-ravaged Beirut, where the film *state-theater #5* was made, the camera roams around the district and is dependent on comments by accompanying locals. Like a curious visitor, she lets herself be guided around the empty, unspectacular Martyrs' Square where at one time a state theater was supposed to have been built. The images are not particularly informative for outsiders, but the uncut, real-time city walk is accompanied by different voices that change the view of the surroundings. The banality and inconspicuousness of the images gives space for reflection and imagination. Precisely by "not showing anything," the site of the wasteland can become a "projection space for the unfinished future," as Kötter explains in conversation with Jürgen Krusche.

Speculative moments are central to the collective film project *Profession: Documentarist* that is the focus of the essay "On Longing, Belonging and a Poetry of Resistance." As female filmmakers living in Iran under the conservative-repressive Islamic government, Shirin Barghnavard, Firouzeh Khosrovani, Farahnaz Sharifi, Mina Keshavarz, Sepideh Abtahi, Sahar Salahshoori, and Nahid Rezaei have to deal with fear, prohibitions and (self-)censorship on a daily basis. A camera in public is a problem here; storing film material becomes a constant risk, as it can be confiscated as incriminating evidence. For this reason, certain films can only be made in the imagination, Farahnaz says at one point in the film, so they would have to tell them to each other. And that is exactly what they do together, in seven personal stories, seven voices. The camera becomes a secret accomplice and companion in resistance. It holds the promise of escaping private space and looking for possibilities for action in a collaborative project. In the urgency and immediacy of current events, the filmmakers gather evidence. The episodes are sent out into the future, into the world as time capsules. In its polyphonic, fragmentary form, the essay mirrors the collective

film process and, looking back ten years later, it reflects on the significance of the autobiographical format — with its emotionality and its subconscious and imaginary components — for historiography.

Heidrun Holzfeind's contribution, "The 49th Year," doesn't discuss an existing film, but rather creates a kind of storyboard for a not yet realized film. The collage is made up of photos she took during location scouting in Tokyo and the Fukushima region, as well as collected archival materials documenting politically motivated attacks in Japan and excerpts from letters dated between 1999 and 2017 that were written by Toshihiko Kamata from prison where he has spent more than forty years, after having been found guilty of a bomb attack on a police station in 1971, among other counts. In the matching and superimposing of letters and images, the "case of Kamata" is not the central concern. Instead, Holzfeind's filmic research explores the significance of radical protest and resistance movements over the course of time. The camera is investigative: it visits places and collects found material. It is the link and vector between the letters and images, between prison and the outside world, between memories of a militant past and observations on the present. It is as if the camera were putting the recorded everyday scenes to the test. As in the other contributions in the "Witness and Tell" chapter, the camera broadens the view of seemingly ordinary everyday scenes in public space through the voices of secret, discredited, suppressed, and forbidden thoughts and wishes.

In her conversation on *Future Me*, Lena Thüring emphasizes how important the search for identity and the trying out of different roles is in adolescence. Based on their biographies to date, a group of youngsters fabricated individual narratives of their future lives for the music video-like film. These fictional "memoirs" became the script for the polyphonic, fragmentary voice-over; at the same time choreographies were created. The dissociation of voice and body — that is of the registers of image and language — is one of the methods Thüring discusses as a means of distancing in her contribution. In her work *How to decide what to do with your life* she proceeded in a similar way, making it impossible to assign and identify individual narratives. In this case, too, the script arose from very intimate stories she collected in her personal network of culture professionals in order to question role models, self-expectations, and social structures: How do people in their mid-thirties situate their life stories between the opposite poles of self-determination and conditionality? In Thüring's work the camera already sets the framework in the development of the performative setting. Offstage scenes interrupt the staged representation and reveal another version of (self-)representation in the documentary gesture. Thus, the camera repeatedly produces reflexive moments and holds a mirror up to the actors both in and outside the picture.

In their essay "From Ethnographic to Virtual World Making," Zheng Mahler describe on basis of three of the duo's projects their development from intersubjective film experiences in the field to a virtual camera through immersive digital media. In *Debt and the Making of the Khmer Working Class*, Zheng Mahler use VR technology as a means

to distribute the positions and decisions in the collaborative filming in a more horizontal way. Thus, the protagonist, a Cambodian farmer, decides for himself how to position the 360° camera. Zheng Mahler explain how the panoramic view frees the camera from fundamental cinematic conventions, while at the same time offering new creative possibilities that are still unfamiliar to our viewing habits. By abandoning the camera in the traditional sense, Zheng Mahler can create environments by means of the virtual lens that others help shape and that the recipients discover by themselves. Instead of retelling the subjective experience of the research process, Zheng Mahler rather see it as their task to create an experience that may come close to their own, but, first and foremost, creates space and openness to share diverse subjective experiences.

Incompatible perspectives are the point of the matter in Uriel Orlow's video/photo essay *The Visitor*. Part of the multimedia series *The Benin Project*, the film recounts the audience the artist received with the King of Benin to talk about the looted cultural objects and their cultural significance. Orlow had to hand over his camera during the audience. On top of that, the king unceremoniously made him a representative from London, entrusting him with the restitution of the cultural objects. As Orlow reveals in "Camera Dialogues," his discussion with Bärbel Küster and Barbara Preisig, he sees the enforced shift in power in retrospect as the only chance to be able to make a film at all. For it is only as a result of this mediatization of the reception that the expectations, interests, and the actual failure of communication come into focus. The misunderstandings are what turn this exchange into a dialogue. The artist's speaker position is questioned not only by the king, but also in the voice-over. It is spoken by a Nigerian actress who provides varying voices for all characters from the narrator's perspective. Orlow, too, is narrated in the third person and remains an outsider in the palace. Certain doors are to remain closed to him and the camera.

When Louis Henderson took on the Haiti project together with Olivier Marboeuf, it was already clear to them that the point had to be to dissolve the author's voice in a choral form. The camera should no longer have a directing function, but rather become an incidental element of filmmaking. From the beginning, the focus was on group work and discussion. The workshops for the translation of Glissant's play *Monsieur Toussaint* about the last days in the life of the leader of the Haitian Revolution and the rehearsals for the performance of the play in Port-au-Prince led to the forming of The Living and the Dead Ensemble. "Notes toward a Free Improvisational Cinema," Henderson's contribution to this volume, reflects on the collaborative composition of the film on the basis of cacophonous and orchestrated spaces. The group's objective was to test Glissantian concepts like Opacity, Relation, and Creolization in practice. As collective narratives are broken up through processes of orality, speculative fiction and improvisation, new methods are invented, such as discerning the bodies sedimented into landscapes, "echo-translating" with slang and dubbing, including ghosts in the play and having the multidimensionality of a group scene unfold by means of circular movement.

Observe and Show

Through
the Camera

The Aesthetics of Accountability

For many decades, visual anthropologists have paid particular attention to the aesthetic dimensions of so-called ethnographic filmmaking. Thus, the idea of producing objective and unbiased “records” of a particular society has long been discarded in favor of the idea of numerous artistic experiments. At least since the successes of Harvard’s Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL), ethnographic filmmaking has come back to the forefront of documentary practice as a whole. Celebrated in film and art for their formal experimentation and “deep immersion,” “sensory ethnography” films are, however, viewed critically in the academic discipline of social anthropology. The principal concern is that the focus on aesthetics comes at the expense of the political and the ethical.¹ This interest underlines the general view within visual anthropology that ethnographic documentaries should never be made only for art’s sake, but should instead consider the ethical obligations toward those represented in such films foremost. Media anthropologist Faye Ginsburg embraces the SEL’s “vibrant formal interest and capacious commitment to the world’s messiness,” only to observe in a more critical tone:

What all this work neglects to stress, however, is any sense of accountability for the ethical/political relationships that ethnographic and other documentary filmmakers co-construct with the subjects whose lives are central to their films. I think of this relational documentary practice as the fundamental act for visual/audio nonfiction media makers who take seriously the accountability that, ideally, accompanies the privilege of making films about other people’s lives.²

In this contribution, I want to focus on what Ginsburg terms the “aesthetics of accountability” by taking my documentary *Taste of Hope*,³ about a workers’ self-managed tea packaging plant in the South of France, as an example. I argue that the film constitutes a form of “relational documentary”⁴ as it consciously builds on the idea of *anthropologie partagée* (shared anthropology) developed by Jean Rouch in the 1950s. Before I explore the possibilities of an “aesthetics of accountability,” I discuss the role of the camera as an instrument of anthropological knowledge production.

1 Christopher Pavsek, “Leviathan and the experience of sensory ethnography,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 31, no. 1 (2015): 4–11. See also Faye Ginsburg, “Decolonizing documentary on-screen and off: Sensory ethnography and the aesthetics of accountability,” *Film Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2018): 39–49.

2 Ginsburg, “Decolonizing documentary on-screen and off,” 42.

3 See further: www.tasteofhope-film.com

4 Ginsburg, “Decolonizing documentary on-screen and off,” 42.

Although ethnographic fieldwork is hardly conceivable today without a sound recorder, a smartphone, and a photo or video camera, mainstream anthropology remains skeptical of audiovisual works. Visual anthropology's mother discipline is first and foremost a "discipline of words," as Margaret Mead once famously described it.⁵ Consequently, ethnographic documentary is still considered not theoretical enough, too thin and too specific, yet at the same time too open-ended. For a while, this view was even adopted by visual anthropologists like Jay Ruby and Karl Heider, who argued for filmmaking by attempting to "linguify" it.⁶

In his widely discussed article "Iconophobia," Lucien Castaing-Taylor critiques this logocentrism very boldly: "(S)o long as anthropologists continue to hold that language is paradigmatic for anthropology, then a 'pictorial-visual' mode of anthropology can only come into being by divesting itself of its distinguishing features. And if that is the case, then why bother?"⁷ He then asks rather provocatively: "What if film does not say but show? What if film does not just describe, but depicts? What, then, if it offers not only 'thin descriptions' but also 'thick depictions'?"⁸ Fortunately, help was already on its way: the idea that sound and images could do things that words could not soon became widespread. This happened when the "sensory turn" took hold and reinstated the body in the discipline. Anthropologists like Paul Stoller and his "sensuous scholarship" were finally delivering the theoretical arguments that have allowed ethnographic filmmakers to self-consciously reject the supposed inferiority of images to text.⁹ Film was freed from the burden of merely complementing the written word. It now became possible to emphasize what is unique to this medium: namely, that it "uses experience to express experience."¹⁰

The filmmaker David MacDougall has always been the most prolific and outspoken proponent of this position. In *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*, he demands new principles for visual anthropology and argues for a new understanding of how audiovisual images create knowledge. MacDougall proposes that we should (1) "utilize the distinctive expressive structures of the visual media rather than those derived from expository prose," (2) "develop forms of anthropological knowledge that do not depend upon the principles of scientific method for their validity," and (3) "explore areas of social experience for which visual media have a demonstrated expressive affinity — in particular (a) the topographic, (b) the temporal, (c) the corporeal, and (d) the personal."¹¹

5 Margaret Mead, "Visual anthropology in a discipline of words," *Principles of Visual Anthropology*, ed. Paul Hockings (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1995), 3–10.

6 Lucien Castaing-Taylor, "Iconophobia: How anthropology lost it at the movies," *Transition* 69 (1996): 83.

7 *Ibid.*, 85.

8 *Ibid.*, 86.

9 Paul Stoller, *Sensuous Scholarship* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

10 Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Castaing-Taylor, *Cross-Cultural Filmmaking: A Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Videos* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 1.

11 David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 271.

Quite some time has passed since MacDougall demanded these new principles. The audiovisual tribe now widely trusts the unique capacities of film and sound despite the ongoing dismissal by more mainstream anthropological ways of knowing. Given the continuous skepticism, however, it remains more necessary than ever that visual anthropologists themselves scrutinize the use and appropriateness of images and sound as a research method. Before starting a new research project, we should always ask what exactly audiovisual images convey about a theme that a text could not also convey. To what extent is employing audiovisual media useful for answering the respective research questions? It makes no sense to make a film if a topic or research field is unsuited to this approach. I should perhaps emphasize that I am writing as a filmmaker practicing within the subdiscipline of visual anthropology.

In my particular case, I created the ethnographic documentary *Taste of Hope* as part of a postdoctoral research project entitled "Economy of Hope: Recuperated Factories and Workers' Self-Management in Contemporary France." I aim to make a critical contribution to academic debates on alternative economies, adding new insights into the established fields of political and economic anthropology. More specifically, by bringing together hope and the economy in a unified analytical approach, I want to contribute to the anthropology of morality and utopian studies. During my preliminary research, I came across the story of the Fralib factory, which had been closed by Unilever in 2012 despite being profitable. The workers, however, did not let this happen to them and, after 1,336 days of resistance, they celebrated their victory against the giant multinational and became the new owners of the factory. The takeover and placing production under workers' control initiated a new struggle. *Taste of Hope* observes the factory workers as they face inevitable challenges. Amid general assemblies, cash flow problems, and negotiations with potential clients, both deception and conflict emerge. Ultimately, the documentary poses the question: How do we need to work today to live in a better world tomorrow?

From the beginning, I conceived the project as practice-based research, combining classical ethnographic fieldwork with filmmaking. I use the medium of film as a research method to explore and capture the processes and social interactions through which political subjects come into being affectively and hope is materialized. The medium of film lends itself to exploring, understanding, and analyzing social life as experience and practice, as it can create images that transcend the cognitive realm and center on the affective.¹² Through sound and image, I aim to convey the hopes and imaginations of the workers and to demonstrate how affect opens new emancipatory possibilities in workers' self-management. In this sense, I understand visual anthropology as an important field, one capable of providing new knowledge to mainstream anthropological discourses.

Following an inductive approach to ethnographic research, I went into the field with an open question. In this case, it was as simple as understanding the workings and processes of a workers' self-managed factory

12 David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

and the main challenges they were facing in a capitalistic global market economy. Through participant observation, I wanted to learn about the social relationships between the workers and their attitude toward work. Besides, I was interested in tea bag production, whose main steps I wanted to show in the film. Therefore, I observed how tea was processed, fed into the machines, filled into bags, and packed into cartons. During the first three months of my research, I helped in all departments of the factory to learn more about the process. Before I unpacked my camera for the first time, I worked at the assembly line or assisted the tea tasters in the laboratory.

My main preparatory task involved considering how to investigate hope cinematically without resorting to verbal statements. Which situations and forms of non-verbal expression were suited to making hope tangible in all its facets? How might image and sound be consciously used to convey workers' sensual experiences? During this initial participant observation at the factory, I decided to shoot in the observational style, as I found this mode of phenomenological anthropology particularly well suited to recreating the rich texture of lived experience and the factory workers' material world.¹³ But the camera was not a "fly on the wall." My presence was always palpable. Sometimes I reveal my involvement directly by capturing commentaries and moments that acknowledge the camera. I deliberately chose not to interview the workers because the factory had attracted much media attention in France. I was aware of the discourses entailed by over-mediatization. The workers tended to paint a predominantly positive picture of their situation when interviewed by journalists, and thereby masked the actual difficulties they encountered on a daily basis. As an anthropologist, I am particularly interested in complexity and hence wanted to avoid such a one-sided picture under all circumstances. This example shows how cinematic style often emerges in the course of field research due to the situation found on location. Consequently, different subjects and situations require distinct techniques and forms of representation.

My observational approach was inspired by Frederick Wiseman, his movies about institutions and his signature: the documentation of meetings, committee work, and processes more generally. Wiseman's ethnographic sensibility captures people's individuality in specific places, and thereby gives insight into institutional rituals. His films demonstrate the workings of politics, knowledge, and power, and shed light on the mystery of human behavior. I was also inspired by the work of the Swiss feminist filmmaker Carole Roussopoulos and her dedication to documenting social liberation movements and workers' struggles.¹⁴ Roussopoulos's intuitive camerawork reflects her dedication to her protagonists. In a similar vein, the films by Chris Marker and The Medvedkin Group have portrayed and participated in workers' struggles in France. In the spirit of these documentary pioneers, *Taste of Hope* lets the action and discussions unfold in front of the camera and creates a sense of place through intercut montages depicting the factory and the work taking place there.

13 Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, *Observational Cinema: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Social Life* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009).

14 See, for instance, *LIP (1973–1976)*, a six-part video series about the occupation of the LIP watch factory in Besançon, France.

Laura Coppens,
Taste of Hope, 2019,
still from a montage
depicting workers
cleaning the factory



Feelings, emotions, and experiences often remain unarticulated or play out nonverbally in facial expressions and gestures and are therefore hard to convey through textual communication alone. In my project, I was interested precisely in those more-than-representational possibilities of ethnographic inquiry. The workers' imagination and hopes about their work can be unearthed on different levels as they manifest themselves in choreographed rituals or embodied experiences, thereby "providing insights into how the moving body and the faculty of imagination are intertwined."¹⁵ Furthermore, showing the repeated actions of industrial production conveys a sense of the factory's regular rhythms. Viewers not only learn about the daily life of workers in an informative way but are also able to experience the sensory and affective aspects of the workers' existence.

In the opening scene, which I shot by placing a small action camera in a tea carton to depict the long distance traveled by the boxes on the assembly line, I played with the strategy of decontextualization. I wanted viewers to be thrust into the film immediately and be forced to orient themselves in time and space. The idea was to make them feel as I did when I first stepped into the vast factory. I had no sense of direction and got lost several times. I always call the opening scene a "roller coaster," because it symbolizes the ups and downs of the factory, that is, the numerous problems it needs to overcome. As a filmmaking strategy, decontextualization also represents an alternative to the classic establishing shots that we know from many conventional documentaries. In *Cinema and Sensation*, Martine Beugnet described this effect as follows: "Denied the distancing effect of explanatory introductions and establishing shots, the viewer is left to experience the powerful, perplexing affect of the imagery."¹⁶ In a way, this method activates viewers by encouraging them to search for knowledge themselves and to understand the world with the help of their senses.

15 Michaela Schäuble, "Mining imagination: Ethnographic approaches beyond the written word," *Anthrovision* 4, no. 2 (2016): 5.

16 Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 7.



Still from the opening scene



Still from one of the many meetings of the working groups



Workers during an assembly

Since *Taste of Hope* is about a cooperative, I worked with a multitude of voices and a large cast in diverse, yet limited social situations rather than following one or two protagonists through a large number of interactions. *Taste of Hope* oscillates between workers at work, situations, and interactions outside the factory, and weaves multiple storylines into a multilayered whole. This creates a mosaic effect that feels both immersive and immediate. At the same time, it allows for a complex exploration of the factory environment as it focuses on the constraints, customs, and assumptions of the institution rather than on individuals. Depicting various meetings is also important because workers' grassroots, democratic organization, and direct participation are the main differentiators from conventional enterprises. At their meetings, the workers hold meaningful discussions about the self-definition of the cooperative and their attitude toward self-management. My camera does not explain but listens to the workers. What is said in these meetings is just as telling as what is not said. Accordingly, the camera also focuses on facial expressions and gestures. It is precisely in such affective moments that observation becomes art.

Besides the importance of visual images and pictorial storytelling, an equally crucial facet of conveying workers' sensory experiences is sound, an often-neglected storytelling element in ethnographic films. While shooting, I collected different ambient and machine sounds and gave them

to Azadeh Zandieh, a professional sound designer. She crafted powerful soundscapes and machine soundtracks, with the latter supposed to reflect the mood of the preceding scene. At the same time, the machines assume their individual narrative character. Creating an immersive auditory experience adds to our understanding of work and the workers' economy in different, yet essential ways.

Finally, further anthropological knowledge emerges and materializes during editing, when concepts, ideas, and hypotheses are tested, revised, and discarded. Theories begin to form through repeatedly viewing the material and through developing new perspectives on people and situations in the field. Furthermore, as Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev have suggested, montage is a powerful technique to "evoke the invisible through the orchestration of different perspectives, encroaching upon one another."¹⁷ They argue for greater attention to, and the use of, montage to make visible the fact that what is seen through the camera is never a direct (re)presentation of "reality." Another way of evoking the invisible is juxtaposition.



Robots doing automated work



Workers doing manual work

17 Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev, "Can film show the invisible? The work of montage in ethnographic filmmaking," *Current Anthropology* 53, no.3 (2012): 298.

In one sequence of the film, I juxtaposed robots and workers, or automated work and manual work. Placing these two scenes side by side raises a meta-question that pervades the whole film: How do we want to work in the future? By posing a question and not giving an answer at the end of the film, I want viewers to consider how far cooperatives can be part of the solution or not. As I have tried to demonstrate here, at the heart of any examination of audiovisual methods lie several questions: Which forms of knowledge do images and sounds generate? How and under which conditions is this knowledge constructed and conveyed? Especially the last question stresses a crucial aspect of most visual anthropology work: an overall ethnographic sensibility with a sense of accountability toward one's subjects. The next section explores the possibilities for experimentation and creativity that emerge from ethical ethnographic encounters.

Toward Relational Aesthetics

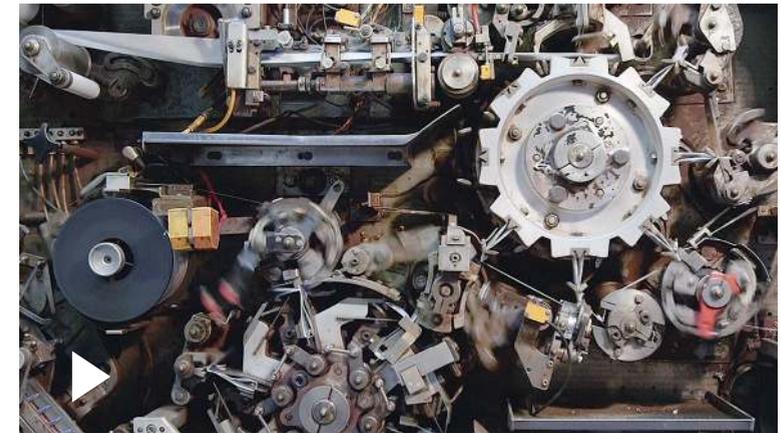
Although anthropologists working with audiovisual media usually have their particular methods and techniques, their stylistic choices should always be based on what is happening in front of the camera. The possible target audience also influences what kind of film will be made. *Taste of Hope* is based on a reciprocal relationship, and I consider the factory workers my main target audience. The cooperative opened the factory gates to a documentary filmmaker solely because the workers hoped this would result in a film they could later reuse for their own purposes. This circumstance alone limited the possibility of cinematic realization. If I had made an experimental film, it might have been interesting from an artistic perspective, yet of little use to the workers.

Coming from a school of filmmaking that embraces the Rouchian legacy, my main concern when making films is the ethics of ethnographic encounter. Accordingly, for *Taste of Hope* I looked for possibilities to include workers in the creation process despite their heavy workloads. However, collaborating on such a longitudinal project requires a lot of time, a very scarce resource for workers racing against the clock to make their utopian project of self-management feasible. Including workers from the cooperative in producing the film would have meant interrupting their work and thus accepting financial losses. Therefore, I asked retired workers, who were nevertheless still members of the workers' cooperative, if they were willing to participate in the filming process. As a result, I struck up a particularly fruitful association with René Fiquet, who later became my camera assistant. René constantly came up with new suggestions about how best to represent the workers' experiences and their relationship with their means of production.

Seeking to create an "aesthetics of accountability,"¹⁸ *Taste of Hope* forms what Ruby calls a "third voice," which is "an amalgam of the maker's voice and the voice of the subject, blended in such a manner as to make it impossible to discern which voice dominates the work."¹⁹ Unlike most

18 Ginsburg, "Decolonizing documentary on-screen and off."
19 Jay Ruby, "Speaking for, speaking about, speaking with, or speaking alongside. An anthropological and documentary dilemma," *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, no.2 (1991): 62.

Harvard "sensory ethnography" films, whose formal experimentations seemingly leave unconsidered how these relate to the people depicted, "relational documentaries"²⁰ derive their aesthetic innovation from the ethnographic encounter and collaboration with others. Christopher Wright therefore argues "for the productive conjunction of formal creativity and relational strategies as a newly expanded art of ethnographic filmmaking."²¹ The aesthetics of *Taste of Hope* grew directly from the collaborative engagements with the workers involved in its making. The laconic opening scene exemplifies the potential for formal experimentation and aesthetic creativity that results from co-creation. Similarly, the numerous scenes depicting machines in great detail arose from thick observation, as well as from direct conversation and engagement with workers. What we see in the final film is therefore a collaborative aesthetics that connects different perspectives on work and labor and allows us to enter a world of multiple experiences.



One of the tea packaging machines in the factory

Let me close by joining Wright and Ginsburg in their calls for ethnographic films that consciously embrace an aesthetics of accountability and that share an artistic and political commitment to the people appearing in documentaries. As visual anthropologists, we have a responsibility to push forward the important project of decolonizing documentary on- and off-screen. Therefore, we should not only ask ourselves whether our work is legible for those who appear in it. Rather, we also need to consider our subjects as our first audience and be aware of how their off-screen lives are affected.

20 Ginsburg, "Decolonizing documentary on-screen and off."
21 Chris Wright, "The new art of ethnographic filmmaking," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Film and Video*, ed. P. Vannini (London and New York: Routledge, 2020), 53.

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Camera Ethnography

Learning to see something
"as something" and maybe
"as something else" as well

Over the past 20 years, *camera ethnography*¹ has evolved into an independent strand of performative ethnography. *Camera ethnography* uses camerawork, cutting, and montage to bring forth, shape, and communicate processes of ethnographic experience and knowledge about situated practices. Since the 1990s, I have been developing *camera ethnography* as a methodology, independently as well as within different ethnographic research collectives in contexts including laboratory studies, theater studies, and studies in schools and in early childhood. Together with a small team of camera ethnographers,² I am currently experimenting with the structured arrangement of filmic miniatures and fragments, drawing on Wittgenstein's (1989–1993) notion of "perspicuous representation."³ This contribution outlines the methodological potential of an ethnography that *shows* rather than *tells*, and introduces a performative analysis that unfolds as much *between* as *within* images, sounds, and audiences' gazes.

1

The Premise of Non-Visibility – Epistemic Things

Camera ethnography starts from the premise that the epistemic things⁴ investigated in research are not necessarily visible, since they have yet to be discovered. It follows that such things cannot simply be "recorded" with a camera. This understanding corresponds to insights gained from "ethnographic laboratory studies" conducted in physics and biology laboratories in the 1980s and '90s within the sociology of scientific knowledge (SSK), which paid particular attention to interaction and to the social aspects of seeing and not seeing, knowing and not knowing.⁵ Based upon his historical studies of scientific experimental systems, Rheinberger

1 See www.cameraethnography.com.

2 Since 2016, I have been working together with Astrid Vogelpohl and Pip Hare to conduct collaborative camera ethnographic research within the project Early Childhood and Smartphone. Family Interaction Order, Learning Processes and Cooperation (Principal Investigator: Jutta Wiesemann), part of the Collaborative Research Centre Media of Cooperation (University of Siegen, Germany, 2016–2023), funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) – Project-ID 262513311 – SFB 1187).

3 Wittgenstein's *Übersichtliche Darstellung* has been variously translated as, among others, "surveyable representation," "perspicuous representation," or "synoptic view." I follow "perspicuous representation." See Beth Savickey, "Wittgenstein and Hacker: Übersichtliche Darstellung," *Nordic Wittgenstein Review* 3, no. 2 (2014): 99–123.

4 See Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things. Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 28.

also notes that he finds the notion of "making visible" more fruitful and theoretically interesting than the concept of representation.⁶ Visibility and seeing represent a particular challenge in laboratory contexts — but also in social and cultural anthropological research contexts. Actually, in any context, what has yet to be discovered is never immediately visible: epistemic things only begin to take shape as research progresses. The premise of non-visibility in ethnographic filming has been a fundamental guiding principle in my development of *camera ethnography* as a methodological approach that aims to bring forth rather than to document. This means using the camera as a tool for discovery; a tool that itself contributes to the perceptibility, observability, and visibility of phenomena and practices. In ethnographic writing:

... something is put into language that didn't exist as language before. In order to shift the limits of articulation in this way, description has to leave the logic of the record to become a theoretically-oriented research practice, which is not to be evaluated for its capacity to document, but for its analytical capacity.⁷

With similar aims to those expressed in the call for a specific approach to sociological ethnography outlined by Amann and Hirschauer,⁸ I propose conceptualizing ethnographic filming, like ethnographic writing, as an epistemic rather than documentary practice. *Camera ethnography* thus aims to produce images of something that has never before been seen as an image. Ethnographic use of a camera is most likely to reveal new aspects of knowledge when it is posited not as a recording process, but as an analytical one. This is a marked departure from camerawork strategies that assume visibility exists a priori.

Camera ethnography does ethnography within a visual culture of knowledge production. As I have elaborated elsewhere,⁹ this is most effective when the apparent paradoxes of documentation versus visualization, not (yet) knowing versus always having known, and perception versus projection are held in a generative tension that is shaped creatively according to the dynamics of the respective research situation.

5 See Karin Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures. How the Sciences make Knowledge* (Cambridge, London: Harvard, 1999); Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar, *Laboratory Life. The Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1979); among others.

6 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things. Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford, CT: Stanford University Press, 1997), 28.

7 Stefan Hirschauer, "Ethnographisches Schreiben und die Schweigsamkeit des Sozialen. Zu einer Methodologie der Beschreibung," *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 30, no. 6 (2001): 429–451. Hirschauer's quote and all other non-English quotations in this contribution have been translated by Pip Hare, who I thank for her careful and dedicated translation of this text from German to English; with a number of improvements gained in the process.

8 Klaus Amann and Stefan Hirschauer, "Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Ein Programm," in *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur. Zur ethnografischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie*, Stefan Hirschauer and Klaus Amann, eds. (Frankfurt, DE: Suhrkamp, 1997), 7–25.

9 For more on the "four ways of playing documentation" (*vier Spielarten des Dokumentierens*) see Bina E. Mohn, *Filming Culture. Spielarten des Dokumentierens nach der Repräsentationskrise* (Stuttgart: Lucius & Lucius 2002), and Bina E. Mohn, "Methodologie des forschenden Blicks: Die vier Spielarten des Dokumentierens beim ethnographischen Forschen," in *Kindliches Tun beobachten und dokumentieren*, Peter Cloos and Marc Schulz, eds. (Weinheim: Juventa, 2011), 79–98.

Rather than distinguishing separate phases of data collection and its interpretation, *camera ethnography* is conceptualized as a continuous, self-reflexive process of working on visibility and the possibility of seeing something as something. Ethnographic research practices are — like the practices they study — *situated practices*. Fieldwork and laboratory phases, publication and reception phases, and phases of application and self-reflection are part of all research processes and can each be seen as research situations with their own particular kinds of challenges. Practices when filming, for example, might be oriented towards focusing concentration on a certain element, when editing the aim could be to further develop an experimental exploration. Publication requires taking a particular stance or position, and reception should open dialogue and debate. Fields of application may be shaped and/or researched anew, while on other occasions it may be appropriate to reflect on one's own methodology and how it could be improved. Such considerations form the basis of a pragmatic "situated methodology."¹⁰ Situated practices in the field are studied by means of research practices that are also situated — but differently.

2 Neither Objective nor Subjective –
Research Collectives

Social situations cannot simply be captured by a camera and inscribed onto film, or digitized, even if common sense ideas about documentation suggest otherwise. There is never a single position from which a complete event may be viewed, nor is it ever possible to "record" a school lesson, a day in kindergarten, a person, or a child. What is possible, however, is to take a camera into a social situation and to make observations from a particular position within it: observations that are necessarily selective.

"How" Questions and
Sightlines (*Blickschneisen*)

The concept of camera ethnographic "sightlines" (*Blickschneisen*)¹¹ takes account of two significant positionings: not just the target, or focus of observation, but also the position from which it is directed, its perspective. The target and point of origin are connected by an imaginary line. Conceptually, a camera ethnographic sightline is a way of actively acknowledging and working with the distinctiveness of researchers' specific perspectives. If *camera ethnography* is seen as analogous to research that conducts experiments in order to expose new phenomena, then sightlines offer possible interfaces within the field of potential discovery. This contrasts starkly with the ways that cameras are used by empirical social scientists who strive to "document" situations or record data.

10 See Bina E. Mohn, "Differenzen zeigender Ethnographie. Blickschneisen und Schnittstellen der Kamera-Ethnographie," *Themenheft Visuelle Soziologie, Soziale Welt* 1, no. 2 (2013): 186.

11 Ibid 171.

Observing with a camera is not (initially) a matter of "seeing" or "showing," but about allowing a developing interest in "something" to take on a filmic form, vague at first, with the potential to become more clearly defined, shaped, and to be discovered as an epistemic thing as the process progresses. This wordless featuring of a subject can best be described as concentrating on what has yet to be defined. Crucial here is the formulation of how questions, which guide the researcher in seeking sightlines that can afford an open yet directed investigation with the camera. The methodological basis of "how" questions is the assumed reflexivity of everyday actions. According to this central premise of ethnomethodology, it is the "hows" of doing that enable all the participants within a situation to show and be shown what it is that matters in what is currently being done.¹² After following "how" questions, "what" questions may lead to unexpected new answers.

As a medium of observation, the camera lends itself particularly well to the study of socio-material, bodily, and nonverbal or even passive practices. A number of camera ethnographic research films make use of this medium-inherent capacity, for example, the video *Standby*,¹³ in which all but motionless bodies of students not asked to contribute in a "chalk and talk" lesson are shown in such a way that complex interactions among and between students and teacher become observable. The experiences I made working on that study contributed to my developing interest in practices that show "not getting a turn" as a topic of camera ethnography. Similarly, practices of watching and looking may appear passive at first glance, but further study reveals them to be highly complex and engaging, as testified in the research films *Kinder als Beobachter (Children as Observers)* and *Zeit zum Gucken (Time to Look)*,¹⁴ *Perzeption Hand haben (Embodied Spectatorship)* and *Kollektives Zuschauen (Watching Together)*,¹⁵ *Kinderpublikum (Audience of Children)*, and *Krisenexperiment: Blind Date und Kontroverse (Breaching Experiment: Blind Date and Controversy)*,¹⁶ as well as *Sich sehen (Seeing Oneself)*.¹⁷

Studying practices of looking, watching, or observing can be challenging, since it requires taking perspectives that counter the dominant orientation of gazes in a situation. Rather than following the gazes of those observed to see what they were looking at, sightlines were taken that enabled the

12 "This characteristic reflexivity of one's own actions, which enables members to make the rationality of their own actions recognizable to others, is taken for granted; it is never questioned, and in that sense it is 'uninteresting.'" Elmar Weingarten and Fritz Sack, "Ethnomethodologie. Die methodische Konstruktion der Realität," in *Ethnomethodologie. Beiträge zu einer Soziologie des Alltagshandelns*, F. Sack, J. Schenkein, and E. Weingarten, eds. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1976/79), 7–26.

13 Bina E. Mohn, "Standby," in *Lernkörper*, Bina E. Mohn and Klaus Amann, *Lernkörper* (2006).

14 Bina E. Mohn, "Kinder als Beobachter" and "Zeit zum Gucken," in: *Kindern auf der Spur. Kita-Pädagogik als Blickschule*, Bina E. Mohn and Sabine Hebenstreit-Müller (2007).

15 Bina E. Mohn, "Perzeption Hand haben" and "Kollektives Zuschauen," in *Rezeption machen* (2011).

16 Bina E. Mohn and Geesche Wartemann, "Kinderpublikum" and "Krisenexperiment: Blind Date und Kontroverse," in *Wechselspiele im Experimentierfeld Kindertheater* (2009).

17 Bina E. Mohn, "Sich sehen," in *Face to Face – Face to Screen: Early Childhood and Media. 24 camera ethnographic miniatures*, Pip Hare et al., LIT Book Series *Camera Ethnography*, vol. 1. (Berlin, Münster: LIT, 2019).

gazes themselves to be examined more closely. Camera ethnographers need to choose perspectives that acknowledge and consciously work with the multiple viewing directions encountered, including their own.



On doing becoming an audience, video still from *Wechselspiele*, 2009

Camera ethnographic observations arise at intersections of unpredictable events as they unfold, the research interests of the respective discipline and project, the ethnographer's capacity to empathically engage with both, and the particular affordances of the chosen audiovisual technology and genre. The result is a hybrid form of data that bears traces of field, research context, and medium. The selection of particular sightlines is neither objective nor subjective, but is guided by relevancies within a specific research process and the discipline within which it operates. As "disciplinary subjects," camera ethnographers work with the styles and modes of thinking characteristic of the academic communities and "thought collectives"¹⁸ that they belong to. Even within the field referred to as "artistic research," it is important to remember that research is never conducted solely by an individual artist, but is always, at least in part, brought about by collectives, which propose and support certain research goals, aesthetics, poetics, and politics.¹⁹

3

Arrangement as a Research Strategy – Performative Analysis

The camera ethnographic discovery process continues in the editing suite. Here, the two fundamental practices of film editing, cutting and montage, can be used most productively if they are understood as epistemic practices. Cutting is a situated data practice that involves selecting and extracting sequences and reflecting on their relevancies while doing so. As researchers review, cut, and sort audiovisual material, certain practices can be identified and made visible in the process of isolating them for

18 See Ludwik Fleck, *Erfahrung und Tatsache. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, eds. L. Schäfer and T. Schnelle (Frankfurt, DE: Suhrkamp, 1983): 108.

19 An allusion to the seminal work credited with having launched endless debates on the ethnographic crisis of representation: eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press, 1986).

further exploration, enabling study of how they vary when undertaken in differently situated contexts. Montage allows cut elements to be juxtaposed and combined experimentally. This facilitates the identification and shaping of potential interrelations and contrasts, as the researcher explores congruence, relatedness, and difference. Significantly, at this stage neither cutting nor montage are undertaken in order to merely illustrate the results of analyses: they are analytical practices in themselves. Understanding audiovisual material as situated data²⁰ means recognizing that data are always about and for something/someone and do not inherently document or represent something else. Their capacity to do so must be generated by means of situated data practices.

Short Forms

Cutting enables the production of short forms or fragments of observations. The idea to use the "short form" as a research format resonates with the tendency of everyday digital communication formats to become ever shorter, more iconographic, and easily shareable. Moreover, it facilitates cooperation: not only can short film fragments be brought into cooperative relationships with one another, short forms also enable teams of researchers to each contribute their own work in the form of observational film fragments, miniatures, and still images for collaborative compilation, ordering, and arranging. Research undertaken in this way — by means of arranging, rather than reconstructing or deriving — utilizes the benefits of a "language game" approach or "perspicuous representation."²¹

Packed into concise short forms, filmic observations of situated practices can be set in specific relation to differently situated practices by arranging them alongside one another in space and/or consecutively in time. This makes it possible for practices to be directly distinguished, compared, and contrasted with one another. The investigation of situations and their practices thus leads to a study of practices and how they are situated. Working together as a team of camera ethnographic researchers in the *Early Childhood and Smartphones* project, we use editing techniques experimentally as research tools. We cut our footage to concentrate on specific foci and to identify particular practices, and then arrange the resulting fragments analytically to generate further observability and comparability, and to explore possible interrelations:

Sutures are the conditions of possibility of things becoming objects of science, and they are the visible signs of a mutilation. Sutures are the lines along which dissections were tried, and at the same time they are the never healing traces of their failure. They make up the experience of *versäumen* in the double sense of the old-fashioned German word: to patch and miss.²²

20 See Harold Garfinkel, *Studien zur Ethnomethodologie [Studies in Ethnomethodology]* (Frankfurt: Campus; Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 2020 [1967]): 38.

21 From 1936, Wittgenstein's writing underwent a turn "from book to album," whereby the book became fragmented and was superseded by a new, polyphonic way of writing books and thinking. See Alois Pichler, *Wittgensteins Philosophische Untersuchungen. Vom Buch zum Album* (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2004), 142.

22 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Toward a History of Epistemic Things. Synthesizing Proteins in the Test Tube* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 226.



Looking towards digital screens, video stills
from *Face to Face – Face to Screen*, 2018

The processes of cutting and montage are a valuable experience for us as researchers, through which we bring forth and discover more in and between our footage. For example, we have discovered that as showing practices (incorporating showing, being shown, having something to show, and more) come to the fore in digitalized childhoods, so does their complementary relation: the reception of what is shown.

The images here on the left show fragments of observations filmed by different camera ethnographers on different occasions. Children can be seen looking towards digital screens. Neither the various different types of screens, nor their content, nor much of the context of their viewing can be seen in the video stills. The earnestness and intensity of the children's watching, together with a research interest in nonverbal practices such as looking, watching, and observing in digital childhood had led the respective camera ethnographers to choose framings that reveal the tiniest movements of captivated faces. The filmed observations were then cut to produce short, condensed extracts. These were subsequently juxtaposed with other fragments to make trial comparisons possible. From a multitude of potential combinations, the video fragments (abbreviated here as three still images) were selected to be presented simultaneously alongside one another in a three-channel installation, making it possible for audiences to observe the diversity of ways in which "looking" can be situated and carried out as a media practice in early childhood. The result invites viewers — including the research team — to examine "looking and watching" as differently situated yet related practices.

Working with short forms is nonetheless challenging: intense concentration is required to define research questions and strategies, to follow them when observing, and to identify and extract suitable fragments for further analytical arrangement. Audiovisual material can be resistant and does not always immediately give way to attempts made to re-form it. But such attempts, and especially those that involve struggles, can be immensely rewarding in terms of camera ethnographic experience. What idiosyncratic temporalities of the observed practices emerge if we try out different durations and timings? What becomes visible, and what is hidden, if we decide, for example, to focus on the iconographic or even figurative aspects of the observed practices, or on their choreographies in space and time, or on the soundtrack alone? The affordances of the editing suite enable experimentation that can generate new ways of experiencing and discovering the filmed observations.

On the one hand, complexity has to be reduced in an experiment: that means certain parameters have to be kept constant so that others can be varied and attributed significance. On the other hand, the experimenter knows, at least implicitly, that such reduction potentially obscures things that it would be better not to obscure. This is why, in the wider experimental context of a laboratory, the ontic reduction that takes place in an individual

experiment is epistemically compensated for by the diversity of experiments and recording modes that, in combination, constitute such an experimental space.²³

Stills and the Shapes of Practices

Individual frames are the shortest of all the possible forms that can be generated from time-based video material. Stripped of temporal developments and audio, figures and socio-material configurations come to the fore.



Video still from the
research project
*Early Childhood and
Smartphone*, 2017

In the video footage from which the still shown above was extracted, parents' voices can be heard saying "Look, that's you!" Watching family videos together is a widespread media practice. Familiar people are pointed out and named, in the same way that objects such as diggers, animals, or a pilot might be identified when looking at picture books. But there is a significant difference: naming family members who are visible in photos and videos is about one's own (collective) identity: that's not just "a child," "It's you!" or, perhaps, "Granddad!"

The positioning and interest of the camera ethnographer can be traced in the perspective and focus of the still image: in this case, I was interested in socio-technical constellations and therefore chose a framing that staged the child facing its own mediated representation. Rather than "That's you!" my stance at this point was, "There could be something there!" In the scene from which the still image was selected, a specific phenomenon becomes visible: a performance of "double figures" (the child and its mediated representation), acting together on a single stage, each making different kinds of noises as they engage gazes in various ways, provoking different reactions, and being addressed in different manners. Having identified this phenomenon once, we discovered further variations of it within our compiled footage, which led us to formulate further questions: How are data practices and identity practices interrelated? How do the

23 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Experimentalität. Im Gespräch über Labor, Atelier und Archiv*. (Berlin, DE: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2018), 30f.

embodied self and the (latently public) self-as-image interact with one another? How does a person become a self in a digitalized world?

Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look.²⁴

Like Blumer's "sensitizing concepts," iconographic figures and formations (such as double figures or triangles of gazes) can have a sensitizing effect by enabling us to identify and differentiate different incarnations of a particular element. By shifting the emphasis of research from discursivity to performativity and from reconstruction to arrangement, *camera ethnography* goes beyond the limits of research methodologies that restrict their focus to language, text, and the reconstruction of (conversation) sequences. Putting into filmic images what other methodologies put into words, *camera ethnography* is particularly adept in "figuring out" the embodied, material, and sensory aspects of nonverbal practices as well as their shapes, spatiotemporal choreographies, and socio-material or sociotechnical constellations in the digitalized environments of everyday lifeworlds.

Wordless Language Games

Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all — but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all "language."²⁵

Drawing inspiration from Wittgenstein's proposed "language games" (*Sprachspiele*) and "perspicuous representation" (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) to conceptualize research (at least in part) as a process of arranging rather than deduction, we are currently developing an interactive application that enables researchers and "audiences as co-researchers" alike to explore the astounding diversity of practices and their situated meanings and relationships.²⁶

As a first attempt to produce such an interactive research tool, our *Wordless Language Game 01: Frühe Kindheit digital (Wordless Language Game 01: Early Childhood Goes Digital)*²⁷ was shown within an exhibition

24 Herbert Blumer, "What is Wrong with Social Theory?" *American Sociological Review* 19, no. 1 (February 1954): 7.

25 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), PU 65.

26 Bina E. Mohn, Pip Hare, Astrid Vogelpohl, and Jutta Wiesemann, "Cooperation and Difference. Camera Ethnography in the Research Project 'Early Childhood and Smartphone,'" *Media in Action: An Interdisciplinary Journal on Cooperative Media* 1 (2019): 81–104; and Bina E. Mohn, "Unterscheiden, verbinden und teilen. Zur Resonanz und Differenz (digitaler) Medienpraktiken in der Frühen Kindheit und beim Forschen," *Digitale Kindheiten*, J. Wiesemann, C. Eisenmann, I. Fürtig, J. Lange and B. E. Mohn, eds. (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020): 169–195.

27 Bina E. Mohn, Pip Hare, and Astrid Vogelpohl, "Wordless Language Game 01: Frühe Kindheit digital" (interactive application on tablets, exhibition "Das bist du!" *Frühe Kindheit digital*, 2018).

in Siegen, Germany, from September 2018 to January 2019. On three tablets, exhibition visitors were able to select from a range of terms — 22 practices and 13 media — that could be used to filter the application’s 178 film fragments. Filtering resulted in individual selections and ensembles of film fragments, which viewers could then watch and study. The filter terms functioned as heuristic tools that could be used to establish intersections of doings, devices, and viewers’ interests.



Filtering options in *Wordless Language Game 01: Early Childhood Goes Digital*, 2018

When (mostly nonverbal) practices in film fragments are shown in this way, and are observed more closely, the terms they are arranged by prove to be fuzzy, in need of further specification, or even on the brink of dissolution. This tension between words and audiovisual language sparks researchers and/or exhibition visitors to observe, compare, discover, rename, and ultimately to better understand the diverse cooperative practices featured in an ensemble of camera ethnographic fragments.

A perspicuous representation produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing connexions’. Hence the importance of finding and inventing *intermediate cases*. The concept of a perspicuous representation is of fundamental significance for us. It earmarks the form of account we give, the way we look at things. (Is this a ‘Weltanschauung?’)²⁸

Approaching perspicuous representations creates an opportunity for ever closer examination, word-seeking, and attempts to rearrange and describe. Our *Wordless Language Game 01: Early Childhood Goes Digital* was created in order to inspire descriptive word-generating processes and call upon those that “play” the game to discern how similar doings undertaken in differently situated contexts can reveal themselves to be far more complex and diverse than they might have seemed at first glance. This first attempt to create such an interactive research tool indicated the

28 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), PU 122.

potential wealth of experiences to be gained from further systematic ethnographic examination, interrogation, and rearrangements in the spirit of Wittgenstein’s “perspicuous representation.”

Such camera ethnographic arrangements have net-like structures that can be extended, with interconnections that are modifiable. They do not attempt to reconstruct the order of a situation. Instead, ordering and arranging as research practices carve out and curate the constitutive differences and interrelations of practices within a particular (wordless) language game. Our first *Wordless Language Game* brought together some of our diverse camera ethnographic observations of media practices in early childhood. In the spirit of Wittgenstein, the field could be opened up to seek out and explore practices and their interrelations in far more diverse contexts. The fundamental question underlying such analytical arrangements would be: “How are certain practices done — or even how *could* they be done — differently (elsewhere)?” This simple question hints at the potential for camera ethnographic research to explore further and to expand upon the minimal and maximal contrasts among practices discovered so far, for example, by comparing practices among and between different generations, vocational, or technological fields, geopolitical regions, lifeworlds, or historical eras. This would involve using montage to place situated practices alongside (very) differently situated ones in order to distinguish and delineate their respective characteristics, aspects, and relationships. When might the limits of one game have been breached and a practice assert its affiliation to another?



Exhibition visitors working with the *Wordless Language Game 01*, 2018

4

Audiences as Co-Researchers – Viewing Laboratories

The experiences camera ethnographers make when observing in the “field” as well as in the editing suite are the fruits of a *performative analysis* that generates distinguishability and explores and evaluates possible inter-relationships. Placing one particular observed fragment next to or after another inspires the viewer of an analytically structured presentation to

discover, compare, and combine; discerning similarities, differences, and interrelations that only become visible within the arrangement — when it is viewed by a specific viewer, from a specific position (within time and space as well as within society). These kinds of arrangements of observational fragments — whether in the form of installations in temporary exhibitions or publications that can be experienced again and again — invite those that perceive them to immerse themselves in analytically structured perceptive realms.

Whether published in the form of texts, books, films, or video installations, research findings do not exist independently as fixed statements but are always co-constructed within the social events of their articulation and reception.²⁹ Reception involves practices such as observing, listening, feeling, comparing, distinguishing, naming, alienating, (inter)relating, pausing, questioning, writing, thinking, sharing, evaluating, and communicating. Camera ethnographic installations in exhibition spaces afford physical movement, offering audiences the space to move around, perhaps pausing or reviewing before moving on again. Visitors can thus take different positions and view video installations from different perspectives.

As they perceive the work and interpret its meanings, audiences become co-authors, just as the ethnographer becomes part of the work's audiences.³⁰ It follows that the definition and the dissemination of results cannot be seen as discrete phases; reception events are necessarily an integral part of the research program with audiences incorporated into processes of ethnographic perception, observation, and discovery. Embracing this, camera ethnographic “viewing laboratories” are conceptualized as research situations in their own right.

That which has gradually been seen and made visible over the course of circular fieldwork phases and laboratory phases is exposed to further gazes in public reception contexts. The challenge to “see something as something” is met by viewers with their own ways of perceiving and viewing, who do not necessarily share the same (academic or other) interests as the authors of what is presented.³¹ Reception is yet another situation in which situated data practices take place. The different perspectives that emerge may stimulate teams of ethnographers to see their work in new ways; the quintessential quality of the ethnographic gaze lies nonetheless in its self-reflexive positioning, which has its roots in its disciplinary trends and traditions. Camera ethnographic productions are not primarily presented publicly in order to confirm or validate the chosen points of view but to instigate perception, interaction, and debate, inviting audiences to participate in the ongoing research by contributing further perspectives and yet other ways of seeing.

Any act of viewing is contingent: upon the belongings, relationships, identifications, and interests of viewers and on the social situation within which it takes place, as well as on the material viewed. Recognizing this can help one discover more about one's own positionings, which in turn can facilitate exploration of other contexts and perspectives. All this contributes to a deeper understanding of gazes as gazes. Acknowledging what characterizes an ethnographic gaze as a disciplinary (and disciplined)

gaze enables it to be located, questioned, and recast. A self-reflexive, practice-oriented ethnography is able to take account of alternative positionings as well as of variations and alternatives in social practices, which can be brought into view by means of research that differentiates, interrelates, and (re)arranges.

29 See Heiko Hausendorf, Wolfgang Kesselheim, Hiloko Kato, and Martina Breitholz, *Text-Kommunikation. Ein textlinguistischer Neuansatz zur Theorie und Empirie der Kommunikation mit und durch Schrift* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017); see also Dieter Mersch, *Ereignis und Aura. Untersuchungen zu einer Ästhetik des Performativen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002).

30 See Volker Pantenburg, referring to Godard and Farocki, *Film als Theorie. Bildforschung bei Harun Farocki und Jean-Luc Godard* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006), 49.

31 See Pip Hare, “Bilder hier und dort. Affektive und ethische Dimensionen meiner Forschung mit Kindern und Kameras,” *Digitale Kindheiten*, edited by J. Wiesemann, C. Eisenmann, I. Fürtig, J. Lange and B. E. Mohn (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020): 217–230.

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Capture, Record, Play

Christoph Schenker

Central to our conversation is your long-term project *Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen* (*Encyclopaedia of Manual Operations*)¹ which comprises 29 modules to date. It mainly involves film footage of hands and faces during the manual operation of machines and devices in a work context, footage of automated operations, and of coverbal gestures. How do you as an artist outline your field of interest?

Anette Rose

In my body of work titled *Encyclopaedia of Manual Operations* I examine implicit knowledge embodied in hand movements and in machines that I record using various methods, such as video, high-speed, and motion capture. Since 2006, I have been filming processes of manual and industrial production as well as scientific practices. I have developed modes to render implicit knowledge visible: I film with several cameras simultaneously, thus breaking down what I see into synchronous units of observation and frames, which I then re-synchronize — and re-relate to one another — as multi-channel installations in the exhibition space.



Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen,
Setphoto #2, 2009

¹ Anette Rose, *Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen. 2006–2010* (*Encyclopaedia of Manual Operations, 2006–2010*) (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2011); Anette Rose, *Captured Motion* (Berlin, 2017); Ines Linder, "Captured Motion. Bewegungsnotationen im Raum," in *Gesten*, Jana Bressemer and Ellen Fricke, eds. (Chemnitz: Universitätsverlag Chemnitz, 2019), 150–157; Anette Rose, www.anetterose.de, accessed March 25, 2022.



Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen,
Modul #4, 2006,
Modul #15, 2008,
installation view,
Bauhaus-Archiv,
Berlin, Germany,
2013

CS You mean the synchronous recordings of face and hands at work?

AR Exactly. I am interested in hand-eye coordination, the way the eyes guide or coordinate the hands. I developed the method of synchronous observation with multiple cameras in order to not only focus on the face of a person telling a story or on the hands of a person doing work. I wanted to highlight the interplay of hand and eye, to interrelate facial expression and gesture. In 1997, I already filmed with multiple cameras simultaneously to be able to capture the language of gestures, the coverbal gestures in interviews and during the telling of stories. And the year before that I had created the film *What you lose on the swings you gain on the roundabouts* for which I interviewed passersby on the street in London about "losing" and "finding." That's when I noticed that the people gestured a lot in responding, and that this non-verbal form of expression constituted an important part — the visual part — of their stories. To be able to capture the expressive gestures, I filmed with four cameras synchronously for my first installation, *Telling Tales* (1998), and with three cameras for the film *16 Traumstücke* (*16 Dream Fragments*, 2001). As a result, I ended up with synchronous image sequences that are combined into a consecutive montage in the film. Reportages or documentaries for TV often involve editing asynchronous recordings between talking heads. What was special about this early film project is that, having only synchronous recordings, I could decide in postproduction what to focus on: the facial expressions or the body language.

From 2006 on, I again used this method for my *Encyclopaedia of Manual Operations*. I was amazed to see to what extent the camera with its focus on hands and face can be a research tool. One can observe how the concentration in the face changes depending on the complexity of the work. It's also possible to see involuntary movements of the facial muscles relative to the energy the body expends while working. I have used the technique of synchronous observation not only for the face and hand, but also for the

coordination of the right and left hands.² The interplay of movements is particularly evident in teamwork, as when the bakers' hands interlock while working the dough.³ After the bakery, the Kahla porcelain factory was the second company where I filmed.⁴ Besides other machinery and equipment, they used a plate robot there that I was particularly interested in. In buffing the edges of the plates, it interestingly didn't simply copy the hand movements, but did it a different way.

CS In outlining your interests, you effectively describe the shift from coverbal gestures to work gestures and, in a further step, from handcraft to the manual operation of machines.

AR To the automation of manual operations.

CS And the human hand no longer plays a role in the production process?

AR From the start, my focus was on manual and mechanized processes; only the emphasis shifts. In a way, implicit knowledge is also embodied in machines. This concerns the coordination of the senses, especially sight, tactile sense, and hearing. Two-handedness and the mirroring of the hands are some of the factors involved in forming this embodied knowledge. A lot of production machinery exhibits the principle of two-handedness: for example, the toilet brush robot I filmed picks up not just one or as many as three blanks with its grippers, but precisely two.⁵ The mechanization of grasping hands is particularly evident here. It's striking how often machines are



16 Traumstücke,
2001, film stills,
ZDF–Das kleine
Fernsehspiel

obviously conceived with the body in mind. And of course, the knowledge of the various stages of automation is incorporated in the construction of the next machine.

CS One is tempted to say that the human “gesture of making,” as Vilém Flusser calls it,⁶ is adopted by the machine.

AR It is incorporated in the construction of the machine as cumulative knowledge, I would say. Practicing and imitating is essential in learning an activity, yet one-to-one imitation is not common in the construction of machines. Such translations apply not just to single movements, but to entire movement sequences. The shaving brush machine is a good example of how the manual work has been divided into a sequence of individual processes and translated into the machine sequence.⁷ The translation remains obvious. At the Osram company, in turn, there is a machine that folds cardboard packaging for light bulbs.⁸ A very different feat of engineering, a different production logic is at work here. It looks very clever when the flap is guided along a metal rail and the box closes. A beautiful description of such phenomena is provided by the artist and system-icist Heiner Büld. In my interview modules of 2007 and 2008, he and the designer and cabinetmaker Axel Kufus reference, among other things, the handle of a hammer, seizing on different aspects of the interaction between body and tool.⁹ In those two interviews I also used two cameras to film face and hands separately. But I nevertheless ended up editing the synchronous material consecutively. If the sequences were shown synchronously, viewers would likely focus on the face all the time. I wanted to draw attention to the body language as well, which adds emphasis to speech; I wanted to show how the search for — and the finding of — words and descriptions motivates coverbal gestures.

CS Following Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, instruments and machines can be understood as “sedimentation products” of work and knowledge traditions.¹⁰

2 Modul #6. prägen, stempeln, stanzen, binden (Module #6. embossing, stamping, die-cutting, tying), 2006–2007. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 120.

3 Modul #1. Teig wirken, in Saaten wälzen (Module #1. working dough, rolling in seeds), 2006. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 64–65, 120.

4 Modul #4. entgraten, schleifen, verputzen – automatisiert (Module #4. deburring, grinding, cleaning – automated), 2006. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 72–73, 120.

5 Modul #10. bohren, stopfen, entnehmen, abscheren – automatisiert (Module #10. drilling, stuffing, removing, cutting off – automated), 2007–2008. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 121.

6 Vilém Flusser, “The Gesture of Making,” in *Gestures*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 32–47.

7 Modul #8. abteilen, greifen, umstülpen, klopfen, auskämmen, rütteln, beschneiden, ringen – automatisiert (Module #8. dividing, gripping, turning over, tapping, combing, shaking, cutting off, bundling – automated), 2007–2008. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 44–45, 120.

8 Modul #9. ansaugen, auffalten, einknicken, umklappen, einschieben, zufalten – automatisiert (Module #9. suctioning, unfolding, creasing, turning around, pushing in, folding up – automated), 2007. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 121.

9 Modul #11. Interview #1 (Module #11. Interview #1), 2007–2008. Modul #13. Interview #3 (Module #13. Interview #3), 2008. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 48–55, 121.

10 Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, *Experimentalsystem und epistemische Dinge: Eine Geschichte der Proteinsynthese im Reagenzglas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2001), 25.



Captured Motion, 2016, installation view,
Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art, Oldenburg, Germany

AR Yes, stocks of knowledge obtained through the observations and practices of different periods are sedimented into the machines. Individual engineers are less concerned with the technological history of machines. They have their very specific issues, and that's what they are guided by. The machines have already been designed, after all, and automation is now taken a step further each time. But at some point, it comes to an end, even if only temporarily. In the case of the radial braider, for instance, the bobbins must be unclamped by hand in order to wind new yarn onto the bobbins. It's not like everything is automated. At the Kahla porcelain factory, the edges of the plates are clean finished by a robot, whereas those of the bowls are done by hand. Plates are produced in large numbers so that automation pays off.

CS With the radial braider, in particular, it feels like you can still see where it comes from.

AR Yes, it's not always as obvious as in the case of the radial braider. Which makes it a particularly fine example: it shows that practical knowledge as stored in bodily movements also underlies the machines. Central to the 2016 installation *Captured Motion*¹¹ is the production of three-dimensional weaves. The radial braider turns out to be an automated realization of the traditional braiding movements that occur in a maypole dance. In Provence, this same sequence of movements has been preserved in the ropemakers' guild dance. The bobbins rotate around one another and around the axle of the rotor, just as the dancers rotate around their partners and the tree.



Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen, Modul #22 flechten – Maibaumtanz, 2016, Archive photo, 1920

11 Modul #20.1–20.2 flechten – automatisiert (Module #20.1–20.2 braiding – automated), 2016. Modul #22 flechten – Maibaumtanz (Module #22 braiding – maypole dance), 2016. See Rose, *Captured Motion*, 2–5, www.anetterose.de/publications, accessed March 25, 2022.

CS How did the *Captured Motion* project come about?

AR On the recommendation of the gesture researcher Irene Mittelberg, I was invited as 2011–12 artist-in-residence by the Excellence Cluster of RWTH Aachen University. My *Encyclopaedia of Manual Operations* had just been published. I gladly accepted the invitation to produce a new body of *Encyclopaedia* work, not least because Irene Mittelberg runs an amazing motion-capture-based gesture research laboratory, the Natural Media Lab, at her school. After visiting multiple technical institutes, I then opted for a collaboration with the Institute of Textile Engineering, because the mechanical processes of the machines are clearly visible here. I also found it fascinating that they didn't just produce any textiles there, but rather lightweight construction textiles, meaning high-tech fabrics: carbon fibers used to make bicycles and fiberglass meshes used to develop car crash absorbers. Such meshes can be produced by a radial braider. In architecture it is now possible to use weaves rather than steel to reinforce. The small narrow fabric loom I filmed as part of my *Captured Motion* series can produce fabric ribbons that in the future can be used for medicinal purposes.¹²

CS The far-reaching significance of such machines and textiles for our everyday lives barely registers in public awareness.

AR For my projects I especially selected production facilities where I could render implicit knowledge visible. In addition, I am interested in highlighting and appreciating work and in recording social realities. Such work in companies is hardly ever shown; it is barely present in cultural memory.

CS In a recorded conversation with the coppersmith and writer Georg Glaser, Harun Farocki asks: “How do you explain that society today is so focused on having work hidden behind walls?” To which Glaser responds, “Because it has turned into something that must not be shown.”¹³

AR It's also important to me to make the processes publicly accessible and create a kind of archive of work, though not, of course, in the comprehensive way of Denis Diderot, in whose encyclopedia many authors were involved.

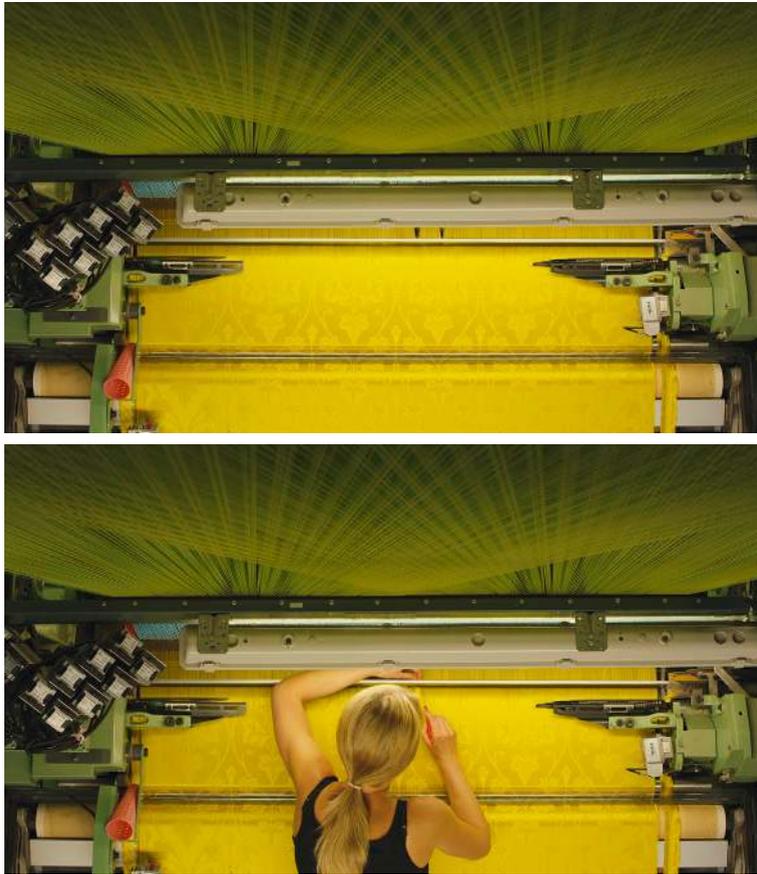
The Industrial Revolution was closely related to the development of the textile industry where the automation process can be easily understood. Automation can be witnessed and seen especially clearly in one of my works, *Pattern in Motion* (2017).¹⁴ The filmed Jacquard

12 Modul #21. weben – automatisiert (Module #21. weaving – automated), 2016. See Rose, *Captured Motion*, 9, www.anetterose.de/work/modul-21, accessed March 25, 2022.

13 Harun Farocki, Georg K. Glaser, *Schriftsteller und Schmied*, in *Filme 1967–2005* (Berlin: Absolut Medien, 2009; original 1988), digitized 16 mm film, color, sound, 44 min, DVD.

14 Modul #29.1–29.2 seidenweben – automatisiert (Modules #29.1–29.2 silk weaving – automated), 2017. See Rose, www.anetterose.de/work/modul-29, accessed March 25, 2022.

loom is not only an important part of industrialization, but also at the root of the digital code of ones and zeroes. What interests me about the loom is precisely this digital principle on which punch card technology is based. One can follow beautifully how the programmed heddles pull the warp threads up and down and, in doing so, produce complicated patterns. In filmic terms, I presented the digital code of the computer-operated loom as an abstract motion diagram of individual operations, while the projection on the opposite wall simultaneously shows an actual, floral pattern being created.

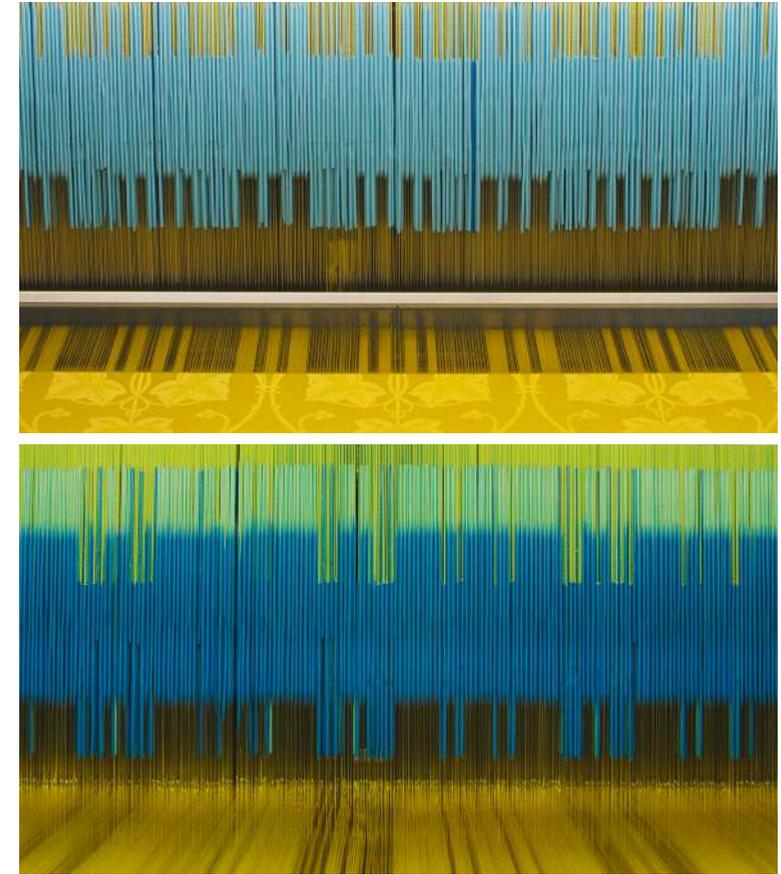


Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen, Modul #29.1, 2017, video stills

CS Over the years, your projects have focused on manual and mechanical, automated work and, eventually, the digital field as well. You wanted to show knowledge that is sedimented in instruments, tools, and machines and that presents itself as skill in manual operations. These skills are especially evident in the double projections where hand movement and facial expression are related to one another on separate walls. It is impossible to say precisely how expression and work gesture are interrelated, but you see that they are connected. What filmic means do you use to create this impression?

AR It's the framing that is absolutely essential. In my installations there is no spoken word, no voiceover; I create clarity solely through the visual. I choose the camera positions, break down the

movement sequences into multiple camera frames and determine the pace and duration of the shots. The sequences of facial expressions and manual work, respectively, are edited into a linear and synchronous two-channel montage which I then project on walls on either side of a corner in the exhibition space. In the installation I relate them spatially, re-synchronizing, as it were, what had been filmed simultaneously. Ultimately, I was only able to develop this methodical instrument because I work in the field of art and not TV.



Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen, Modul #29.2, 2017, video stills

CS Recently, I watched a 2010 DVD titled *China's Potters at Work (Abgedreht! China töpft bodennah)*,¹⁵ which looks at Chinese pottery from the perspective of the anthropology of technology and aims to show how the body's knowledge informs the way Chinese potters do their work. While there is no commentary — the films were conceived as part of an exhibition — it is the gesture of explanation that prevails here. The skin of the potters' hands stretches under the pressure exerted on the wall of the earthenware vessel, and you come to understand why this happens; you also feel you understand why this detail is shown. Your films, by contrast, are not didactic.

15 *Abgedreht! China töpft bodennah* (Zurich: Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich, 2010), DVD, color, silent, 51 min.

AR I limit myself to showing. I am interested in patterns. As an artist, I bring out the visual incisiveness of the processes.

CS In the synchronous projection of face and hand, I as a viewer appreciate the dexterity of the hands, and I notice that the eye monitors this intuitive activity. The eye follows the practical knowledge.

AR There are gradual differences, though. In fact, I also filmed a module focusing on the monitoring activity. The moment it's about monitoring, the focus of the work shifts from the hands to the eyes. At the Osram company I filmed a mirror and microscope inspection in 2006.¹⁶ Here the eye has considerably more work to do, while the hand just provides support.

CS In *Module #15*¹⁷ there's the one and only scene when the gaze of the working woman turns away from the machine, the object and the hand, wanders into the room and returns again. Obviously, there are moments in the activity sequence that do not require control.

AR Yes, indeed, that applies to *Module #15*. The designer of Kahla porcelain, Barbara Schmidt, deliberately decided to not have the machine apply an even glaze. She wanted to allow for something irregular, something adding a handcrafted touch, and had these plates glazed by hand. No inexperienced person can do this work because you need to have developed a feeling for it. Since the movement should be slightly different each time, experience and well-practiced skills are even more important here.

CS You have repeatedly made reference to the research work of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth.¹⁸ The motion studies they conducted in the 1910s using film and photography served, among other things, to optimize production processes. In the course of their research, they also refined their own recording technique. In our context, I would like to draw attention to two films by Harun Farocki, the 1988 film *Georg K. Glaser – Writer and Smith* (*Georg K. Glaser – Schriftsteller und Schmied*), from which I cited earlier, and *The Expression of Hands* (*Der Ausdruck der Hände*) from 1997.¹⁹

AR Farocki's film about Georg Glaser is a really beautiful work. It's powerful when Glaser describes how much time he needed to put the momentary, single blow of the hammer into words. He talks about the polar coordinate and the correct angle of wrist, elbow, and shoulder, and he talks about how, rather than a matter of coincidence, everything is precisely calculated for the blow to hit. Georg

16 *Modul #7. kontrollieren und sortieren* (*Module #7. controlling and sorting*), 2006–2007. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 106–107, 120.

17 *Modul #15. verputzen, beischleifen, stanzen, stempeln, ketteln, einziehen, tauchen, ringen, walzen, eindrehen, schleifen* (*Module #15. cleaning, fine grinding, die-cutting, stamping, linking, pulling in, dipping, bundling, pressing, winding, sanding*), 2008. See Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 14–15, 122.

18 Rose, *Encyclopaedia*, 95–101, 114–117; Rose, *Captured Motion*, 11.

19 Harun Farocki, *Der Ausdruck der Hände*, in *Filme 1967–2005*, DVD (Berlin: Absolut Medien, 2009). 1997. Video BetaSp, color, sound, 30 min.

Glaser is a writer as well and possesses the skills to describe his own actions in detail. It's really implicit knowledge he is talking about.

CS If every blow is calculated anew, then tacit knowledge doesn't mean it just happens automatically. Tacit knowledge is developed knowledge; it is acquired intuition, the result of work and increasing precision, of the interaction of brain, hands, and eyes. Glaser talks about the "body's knowledge" and about "thinking hands." It is a form of calculating based on the movements of the body. In this way, "the body makes an accord with things that goes over and above our heads," as Walter Benjamin writes.²⁰

AR Yes, this is also the subject of an article by Hans-Arthur Marsiske about embodied intelligence I came across in 2013. As the author writes, "There is a growing awareness that thinking happens not just in the mind, but throughout the body. To date however, the relevant research has been lacking a theoretical approach — this is now supposed to change."²¹ But to get back to Harun Farocki: As a filmmaker who later went on to exhibit in an art context, he developed interesting formats. As an artist, I have long been concerned with filmmakers who don't focus primarily on the subject of work, but who were interesting to me in terms of the genre. I studied the use of the camera and the visual language in documentary-style films. Jean Rouch, Frederick Wiseman, Johan van der Keuken, Claire Denis, and Chantal Akerman are very important to me. Akerman's work *Bordering on Fiction* (1995), for instance, was conceived as an installation. Still, she first realized it as a film, called *D'Est* (*From the East*), in 1993.²² I was particularly impressed with the segmenting of moving images in the film and the installation.

CS Harun Farocki's other film, *The Expression of Hands*, is analytical and equally interesting in our context. In it the director sits at the editing desk and presents short scenes from the history of film showing isolated hand gestures. In the process, Farocki ponders what conditions would have had to exist for a distinct repertoire of cinematic gestures — that is, an authoritative sign language of film — to develop. He begins his analysis with a clip from a film where the hand does something different from what the face suggests: in a crowded subway car a man quietly opens the purse of a young woman standing right in front of him and robs her, while multiple intercut shots of his and her facial expressions suggest a flirtation. The pickpocket's face and hand, shown in alternating close-ups, do not seem to relate to one another.

20 Walter Benjamin, "The Lucky Hand: A Conversation about Gambling," trans. Esther Leslie, in *The Storyteller: Tales Out of Loneliness* (London, New York: Verso, 2016), 193.

21 Hans-Arthur Marsiske, "Verkörperte Intelligenz. Dem Denken auf der Spur" ["Embodied Intelligence. On the Trail of Thought"], *c't Magazin für Computertechnik* 11 (2013): 84–87, <https://docplayer.org/49507595-Magazin-fuer-computer-technik.html>.

22 Chantal Akerman, *D'Est* (Brussels: Paradise Films, 1993), 16 mm, color, 110 min.; *Bordering on Fiction: Chantal Akerman's D'Est* (San Francisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 1995; Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 1996) u.a.

AR You are probably referring to the great Robert Bresson film *Pickpocket* (1959).²³

CS It's from *Pickup on South Street* (1953) by Samuel Fuller.²⁴

AR The discrepancy of expression and gesture is interesting. What is important is that the scene involves double acting. For the pickpocket in this fictional film that discrepancy is part of the job, and his job is acting. An experiment on lying led to my first installation project, *Telling Tales* (1998). There I worked with four cameras. I had asked the subjects to lie to me in order to find out whether it would show in the recording. A certain agitation could be observed, but it didn't allow me to infer that they were lying. Credibility in storytelling was also a subject in *16 Dream Fragments*, a film project featuring various individuals talking about dreams. There I drew attention to the difficulty of translating the non-narrative structure of nightly dreams into a narrative. Facial expressions and gestures play an important role in this process. The hands circumscribe what a person would like to express.

CS In *The Expression of Hands* Harun Farocki asserts a certain autonomy of the hand. In a way, you do the same when you accord the hand tacit knowledge in its actions. In the previously cited examples, the films perform various functions. *China's Potters at Work* is primarily a techno-anthropological documentation or description of skills. The work of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth was, among other things, about testing and demonstrating the optimization of work processes. And Farocki, in *The Expression of Hands*, explores the different meanings of hands in the context of film, as if seeking to create an archive of expressive gestures in film. How would you succinctly define your research interest?

AR My work is about rendering visible. My approach is conceptual and my form is minimalist. I stopped saying a long time ago that I work in a documentary manner. The documentary principle is powerfully seductive. The term itself implies a presupposed reality, but every gaze is, of course, constructed. There are different ways of directing the gaze and employing language. I limit myself to rendering something visible. There's no didactic aim. The aforementioned filmmakers developed different ways to tell and show something. It's wonderful to see those forms side by side. It allows you to more consciously develop your own strategies. Films like those of Jean Rouch were important to me during my studies. But as an artist I do not share his references to reality and his objectives; to me, art is a completely free field. But to learn about the rules imposed on filmmakers and the forms and formats they work through — that does train the eye, of course.

CS What prompted you as an artist to assemble your research in a book?

23 Robert Bresson, *Pickpocket* (France, 1959), black-and-white, 75 min.

24 Samuel Fuller, *Pickup on South Street* (US, 1953), black-and-white, 80 min.



Anette Rose,
*Enzyklopädie der
Handhabungen.*
2006–2010,
Bildmontage, Kerber,
2011, 96–97

AR Doing a book made it possible for me to publish my research and the compiled archival material without blurring the clarity of my video works and without disrupting their mode of showing. In addition, I created a montage and a picture index²⁵ with extensive metadata, such as titles, captions, quotes, descriptions, source, and location references. It includes material from the fields of medicine, anthropology, and work science. Frank and Lillian Gilbreth are quoted repeatedly because, among other things, they compiled a vocabulary of gestures for surgeons — calling it a “manual signal system” — that was to be used for communication during medical procedures.

CS The Gilbreths play an important role in this chapter.

AR As opposed to other scientists of work, they have accomplished amazing things at the visual level. Sometimes it doesn't seem entirely clear to me whether they were merely interested in the optimization of work processes or whether there wasn't also an aesthetic delight in coming up with visual forms. Frank and Lillian Gilbreth developed a really astonishing range of visualization formats. They worked, among other things, with stereoscopic cameras and with a grid to be able to identify points in space for curves of work movements. And they used a microchronometer to find out why a worker had found the optimal form of movement and how they could render it visible. In this sense, the Gilbreths can be considered actual pioneers of motion capture. They were very important for automation as well, even though it was not necessarily an objective they pursued. They divided individual processes of physical work into different categories of motion and created iconic signs for them which they called “therbligs” by spelling the name Gilbreth backwards. They were highly analytical and at the same time very

25 Anette Rose, “Bildmontage” (“Montage”) and “Bildindex” (“Picture Index”) in *Encyclopaedia*, 76–119. www.anetterose.de/work/montage.

visually oriented. Based on the identified points in space, they created three-dimensional wire models to make motion traces tangible and propagate the “one best way” as a model. Their work should not be seen only in connection with economization, however, as they also made significant contributions to ergonomics. For me, this was the background when I came into contact with the motion capture lab in Aachen. Motion capture is typically used for film animation. To adapt it to the needs of gesture research is not easy, but rewarding and fascinating.



Captured Motion, Module #25, 2016–2017, installation view, Museum of Industry, Chemnitz, Germany, 2017

CS And in Aachen you had access to this laboratory, if I understand correctly?

AR Yes, that was a great gift, especially in combination with the textile institute of RWTH Aachen University. While the institute operates with linear structures of threads, the motion capture lab operates with linear structures of graphic representation. It quickly became clear to me that I wanted to invite an engineer to describe the textile machines I had filmed. Using motion capture, I was able to record the hand gestures he made while describing. This then led on to *Modul #25. flechten, wirken, weben – motion capturing (Module #25. braiding, warp knitting, weaving – motion capturing, 2016)*.²⁶

CS As a result, actual motion drawings were created. And because you captured those gestures synchronously from three different sides — frontally, from the side, and vertically — the graphic recordings together create a spatial dimension as well, becoming sculptural.

²⁶ See Rose, *Captured Motion*, 6–7, 10.

Finally, since the gestures also serve to rhythmize speech, they have an acoustic effect as well.

AR Yes, I wondered how to conceive a spatial installation from the generated data and opted for the projections of the x, y, and z aspect in a cube. I think we have found a perfect shape in the black cube that was specially built for this purpose at the Chemnitz Museum of Industry in 2017. I designed it together with the architect Helmut Möller and had it installed across a corner in the museum’s huge hall. As a visitor to the exhibition, you headed straight towards the three projections of the motion notation. The right wall showed the motion trace from the front, the left wall presented the lateral view and the bottom the view from the top. In the viewing process the two-dimensional projections could thus be reassembled into a moving three-dimensional form.

CS In the art context, the motion capture process is rarely found in this form.



Captured Motion, Module #25, 2016–2017, installation view, Museum of Industry, Chemnitz, Germany, 2017

AR Yes, hardly in this or any similar form. Irene Mittelberg made the project possible. She opens her gesture research laboratory up to artists and architects as well, thereby enabling new collaborations.

High-speed recordings are, in addition to motion capture, another form of notation I introduced into my work. High-speed cameras are used to render something visible that the naked eye can no longer see. Engineers, for example, use them to find sources of error in automated processes. Such industrial cameras tend to record in black-and-white only. They stretch time and can massively magnify what is filmed. Even in the case of the knitting machine, the eye cannot register the process because it is extremely fast.²⁷ And so it made sense to me to have highspeed recordings made

²⁷ *Modul #23. stricken – high speed (Module #23. knitting – high speed)*, 2016. See Rose, *Captured Motion*, 5.

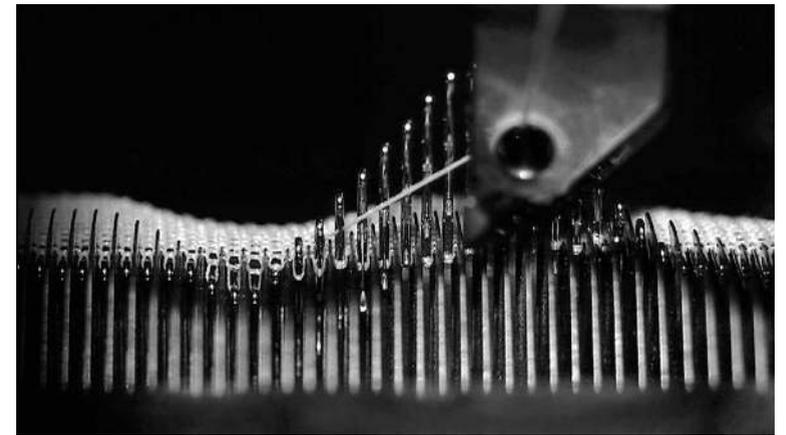
of the movements of the radial braider, to show in detail how the bobbins circle around one another.²⁸ I found the abstract and almost disconcerting effect of the black-and-white images very attractive as an element of the multi-part installation *Captured Motion*. The variety of modes of representation I was able to work with greatly enriches the cinematic repertoire and my installations. It pushes my work forward and motivates me to further develop it also in the three-dimensional, sculptural area.



Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen, Modul #26, 2016, video still

^{CS} In your work you reference various scientific, artistic, and technical fields; on the other hand, you show your installations both in art institutions and in a technology museum. These different contexts give rise to the different meanings of your work. Finally, this also contributes to the current discourse of artistic research.

^{AR} Yes, I have shown the installations in scientific and art contexts alike. The extensive *Captured Motion* series, for instance, was first exhibited in 2016 at the Haus am Lützowplatz exhibition space in Berlin and the Edith-Russ-Haus for Media Art in Oldenburg, before I then realized the three-channel installation *Captured Motion* (2017) — at the invitation of the Chemnitz University of Technology — as a cube at the Chemnitz Museum of Industry. There, it needed to be framed, if only to make clear that it was neither a technical-historical nor a didactic exhibit. The cube functioned both as a frame and as part of the artwork. The different locations and contexts shift attention and allow different readings. Sometimes it is the content — that which is represented — that takes center stage



Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen, Modul #23, 2016, video still

and at other times it is above all the representation itself, that is, the formal aspect.

Ultimately, the work I've been doing for years is a long-term research project.²⁹ My work starts from a basic figure and continues to develop from there; in retrospect, it evolves systematically. It was “artistic research” before the term was even coined. My work achieves its full incisiveness in the installations. Only in three-dimensional space does my synchronization develop its entire potential. Seeing becomes a physical experience — especially when the rhythmic sound of the machines is part of the work.

²⁸ *Modul #26. flechen – high speed (Module #26. braiding – high speed)*, 2016. See Rose, *Captured Motion*, 5.

²⁹ Anette Rose, “Sichtbarmachung als Wissensproduktion. Zur künstlerischen Methode der Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen,” in *LaborARTorium. Eine Methodenreflexion*, Anna-Sophie Jürgens and Tassilo Tesche, eds. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 199–212.

Witness and Tell

Nearby
the Camera

A Polyphonic Walk through Beirut's Outer Spaces



Martyrs' Square, Beirut, 1970,
published on Wikimedia Commons

Jürgen Krusche

The film series *state-theatre* is a project you realized together with Constanze Fischbeck by traveling to many different places. Can you tell how your collaboration started and what was the context for developing this project?

Daniel Kötter

The six films of the *state-theatre* series were all produced between 2010 and 2014 in close collaboration with the stage designer and video artist Constanze Fischbeck. For many years now, we have both been working at the intersection between theater and film and we share an interest in the spatial and institutional conditions for the possibility of what — in the West — is known as “theater.” The “founding myth,” as it were, of both our collaboration and this film series goes back to the year 2007 when we jointly ran a theater workshop in Lagos, Nigeria, and, while there, were able to visit the huge, vacant modernist National Arts Theater of Nigeria, a replica of the Palace of Culture and Sports in Varna, Bulgaria. Since then, the question of what happens to theater buildings or performative urban spaces symbolizing the state when suddenly they can no longer fulfill their originally intended function due to societal and political change ran as a common theme through our collaboration for several years. In addition to Beirut, we ended up doing case studies in Lagos, Tehran, and Detroit, as well as in Berlin and Mönchengladbach. In the process we always tried in different ways to turn the camera itself into a performer in the theater spaces. Each time, Constanze and I would first spend weeks doing research and conducting interviews in the various cities and then develop the film’s image and structure equally based on this research.

JK The Beirut film we will discuss here belongs to this six-part series titled *state-theatre*. You describe the whole thing as a “modular art project about the urban conditions of performance.” In other words, there are other “modules,” in addition to these six films, that make up the project. Can you tell us a little more about this, so we can better contextualize and thereby better understand the film?

DK The six films are kind of the centerpiece of the series. But a lot of material was created as part of the research and not all of it ended up in the films. Photos, ideas, texts, even other footage. Hence, there is a whole series of additional side projects: the case study on the National Arts Theater in Lagos, for example, also took me to Varna in Bulgaria, and the original building there was the location for another film titled *Bühne* (2013). As part of the research in Detroit I filmed all 46 current and former theater sites that are included in a film titled *Inventory (46 theaters, Detroit, June 2011)*. And because performance plays a major role in those films, we also took the project back to the theater, in 2010 to Künstlerhaus Mousonturm in Frankfurt, in 2013 to Lagos, and that same year to the Forum Freies Theater (FFT) in Düsseldorf where we realized all six case studies as guided performance tours throughout the city under the title *state-theatre translokal*. For a side project with the Venice Architecture Biennale and SALT Istanbul (2014) we developed more exhibition-like and discursive formats. Eventually, we assembled all the extensive material and put it on the *state theatre* website.

JK The Beirut film is markedly different from the other five films. You chose a special format that I personally really like: a walk through the city without cuts. How did you get the idea for this form?

DK To begin with, we developed a specific camera concept for each case study based on the research we had done there. The visual regime of the particular urban space or theater architecture was translated into a visual concept of the films. In *state-theatre #1 LAGOS* we put the camera on a motor and had it move in circles around the circular architecture of the National Arts Theater's arena. In Tehran we tried to convey the experience of the orthogonal architecture and the frontal separation of stage and auditorium at the Talar Vahdat opera house through a quick shot-reverse shot sequence of two cameras placed facing one another. In *state-theatre #4 DETROIT*, in turn, the camera is attached to a car and drives through the streets of the city where stories of the theater and automotive industries are more closely interlinked than in any other city. In Beirut we were fascinated from the outset by the way the city center was fragmented due to the civil war: every 100 meters or so, the political conditions of urban space changed radically. It is just a few steps from a street controlled by the Shiite Amal Militia to a Christian Maronite neighborhood, from the commodified designer store in the restored colonial building to the civil war ruin of the modernist shopping mall, from the country's largest church to its largest mosque. For this reason alone, it made sense to explore those immediate neighborhoods with the camera in an uncut, 65-minute tour on foot. But we also wanted to respond to the local scenes in each of the cities: the performative city walk in Beirut is a popular method both among Lebanese urbanists and as an artistic strategy. And so, it seemed only logical to translate this practice into a film. The time of the film and the filmed time are congruent here, as are camera time and viewing time. Only in this way can viewers of the film gain the impression of actually having walked through the city center of Beirut for an hour.

JK Let me ask right away about the film's technical implementation with six different commentators: How were those commentators selected? Who decided on the route and the related themes?

DK Beirut is the opposite of homogenous. Each interest group in the city, be it religious, political, or social, has its own view of, and its very own claim to, the urban space. We wanted to render this polyphony of perspectives on Beirut tangible, while also conveying to the film's viewers our own perspective as visitors and outsiders who let various local experts take them by the hand and guide them through the city. This is why we tried to contrast representatives of very different groups in the film: from the architect to the former theater director to the investment broker to the realtor. Instead of conducting static interviews as part of our research, we agreed to meet the respective representatives of the various groups for city walks during which we also recorded the sound. Finally, the six commentator voices and the exact camera route were developed from this very material. Just as the city guides guided our gaze, they also guided the gaze of the camera, directing it at details in the urban environment that otherwise might have escaped us and that are helpful in learning to read the urban space in its political complexity. The working hypothesis for all the people we talked to was the issue of the allegorical, identity-giving space in the city, the issue of a non-existent and indeed impossible National Theater of Lebanon, a state struggling, not just since the civil war, to keep the centrifugal social forces from exploding. Although we pass several former and current theater buildings along the route of the camera walk, and also discuss them, *state-theatre #5 BEIRUT* moves, of all six case studies, furthest away from an examination of the specific theater space and towards the issue of the allegorically charged urban environment.

JK In this publication we are looking at the camera and its function as an instrument of gaining knowledge. On those camera walks, the camera indeed plays a very specific role. You refer to the "camera as performer" in this context. Can you tell us a little more about this?

DK As described earlier, we tried to employ a camera technique that, in addition to being particular to each individual film of the series, also establishes a specific relationship to the filmed space. In each part of the first trilogy — Lagos, Tehran, Berlin — there is a scene where, in front of a static camera, a public space — the informal settlement Bariga in Lagos, a rooftop in Tehran, the street in front of the Berlin State Opera — is declared a stage for a performer. But whenever we film the actual (theater) architecture, the focus is on its vacancy: that is, not on what is happening on a possible stage, but on the relationship of the camera to the empty space itself. As a result, the camera doesn't so much document an event, but rather positions itself as a performer in the empty space. In the other five films it is somewhat like a mechanized performer, but in the Beirut film the role of the camera is more human-like: it represents the viewer strolling through the streets of Beirut, without a purpose, like a *flâneur*. It is the perspective of the visitor who explores the "car-friendly" city on foot.

This always involves three viewpoints, the first being the horizontal view while walking that visually takes in the urban space. And then there are two stages of pausing: the view down to the ground that enables reflections and descriptions and, thus, the shift from the visual to the discursive, and the view upwards that contemplates and considers particular details the interest-led pedestrian wouldn't notice. Yet we never get to see the people who guide the gaze of the camera through their descriptions. If their voices are essentially the city guides, then the camera's view is essentially the foreign, curious tourist's gaze being guided by the guides' words. And in this way the camera also represents the position of the filmmakers, because we were, and are, no Beirut experts. We were visitors with our external perspective of informed curiosity. Thus, it is a view that, rather than feigning knowledge, already carries the outsider's perspective, the periphery, inside.

^{JK} In the film, a reference is made very early on to Martyrs' Square, even before we get to see it. It is described as a possible site of national identity, which in its current state it is not. The walk then leads there and into the adjacent neighborhoods and business districts. It seems to be a desolate place that, nevertheless, evokes both strong memories and visions for the future. Why is this square so important, and why is it not brought back to life as the central, lively city square that it once was?

^{DK} In the other films of the *state-theatre* series there is invariably a central theater architecture around which the urban space-related questions cluster. We always tried to understand theater in a very broad sense, including the Central European sense of an allegorical meeting place of the different perspectives on society — allegorical, because the theater, unlike the parliament, is not a place where binding decisions need to be made. This understanding of *teatro* is essentially akin to the concepts of *agora* [Greek], *piazza* [Italian] or even *maydan/maidan* [Arabic/Persian], meaning the notion of a central town square as a public meeting place of the various societal groups. In Beirut, Martyrs' Square was, and would be, precisely that centrally located place where Lebanon's fragmented society could create for itself a place of shared identification — it would be the allegorical National Theater of a Lebanese state to be unified. But that very unification, even at a symbolic level, has never existed in this form and cannot and should not exist. On the contrary, during the Lebanese Civil War, Martyrs' Square came to demarcate the division: the green line between the warring factions ran right through the middle of the square, which is why, for many years, no one could set foot in it. Thus, removed from any common practical access, it quite naturally became a surface for the most diverse interest groups to project upon. None of those groups has managed to appropriate this sensitive site after the war abated, precisely because it was symbolically claimed and blocked by too many opposing ideas. Perhaps because of this, the partial emptiness of the concrete wasteland in the film is a metaphor of sorts for the impossible National Theater of Lebanon. But such a wasteland may also be a projection space for the unfinished future. In the sixth

and last film of the *state-theatre* series, the urban designer Nicolas Beucker is standing in the construction pit where a shopping center will be built in the place of the newly demolished Mönchengladbach City Theater and wonders: "What if, for the time, they would create a space where forms of appropriation could gradually solidify? If the vacant sites were released for appropriation?"

The Beirut film, on the other hand, ends in the overgrown green area north of Martyrs' Square, with the artist and architect Maxim Hourani raising the same questions, but in a more radical way: "Why does a public space have to be essential for a city? Maybe we ought to rethink how we live. Why do we have to live in the city? Why do we live in this place? Why do we need to have a public space at all, when instead we could have a space outside? Let's call it 'outer space.'"

Martyrs' Square can, of course, never be this outer space, but perhaps Maxim is right: maybe instead of the impossible national theater, we should focus on a possible theater of the periphery. But that's a different project.

"*Le temps retrouvé?*"

Rani al Raji

October 2020. A few years ago, I walked a German-Lebanese film crew through the broken streets of Khandaq el Ghamiq, a neighborhood controlled by the Amal militia, to the "illusions-controlled" Downtown District of Beirut and Martyrs' Square, its former center. The tour was among the most delicate ones, as we experienced several nerve-racking moments, including when we were approached and verbally abused by an Amal militiaman. This tour was one of many that featured in *state-theatre #5 BEIRUT*.

Looking back from my perspective of 2020 makes me realize how I was constantly fooled by everything that I considered to be solid about my Lebanese and Beirut existence. Back then, I was convinced that the ubiquitous presence of ruins and voids in the cityscape, mainly in and around Martyrs' Square, is an ephemeral phenomena resulting from a conflict that neoliberal capitalism was well on the way of quenching. I could not have been more mistaken!

Marcel Proust's seven-volume novel *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) concludes with *Le temps retrouvé* (*Time Regained*); there's a very strong analogy between Proust's work and the state of Beirut in 2020. The year 2020 in Martyrs' Square seamlessly follows 1990. Although the physical war ended in 1990, its specters have remained. Over the last 30 years, we have lost time, as well as lived, worked, played, and danced, raging around the crater of the volcano, both daring and cursing it. Now it's fuming and more than smoke will soon emerge from it.

The time that we lost has caught up with us and found us. In the year of the masks, our mask has finally fallen. We are not ready — and never were. And yet, it's our chance to put matters right.

Subjective Voices of a Collective Unease
Amira Solh

October 2020. It is almost as if the camera, the protagonist of *state-theatre #5 BEIRUT*, trained its gaze on the Port of Beirut and the grain silos of 2013, when the film ends to now when the explosion occurred ... in hindsight, *state-theatre #5 BEIRUT* is prophetic, and foreshadows the disintegration of a fragmented society. The malaise heard in the voices of the six guides through Beirut is uncanny: each describes their subjective view of a collective unease about where Beirut is heading.

On October 17, 2019, the Beirut revolution started. Once again, Martyrs' Square took center stage as citizens stormed the stage to protest against the corruption ravaging the country. Once again, Martyrs' Square became the home of the revolution and hosted debates, camps, art, music, theater, and different forms of resistance against the government and its criminal activities. The protagonists of *state-theatre #5 BEIRUT*, the Dome City Center and the Grand Theater, were reclaimed by the people. For the first time in the history of Lebanon's independence since 1945, the people rejected the government's celebration of independence. Instead, we staged our own celebration of the independent Lebanon we believe in. Once again, these events confirmed that Martyrs' Square is secular and represents a vision. In October 2019, the square was revived as the national theater of unity instead of the desolate space that bickering authorities had turned it into.

With the global pandemic and a worsening financial crisis, the square emptied out again, awaiting a revolution of a vision for a lost country. While the space was transformed into collective organizing and feeding the poor, fatigue set in. Once again, the question arose about how we might sustain our vision? How do we overcome the sociopolitical reality and the external forces that are ruining both our lives and our city?

And then, on August 4, the explosion occurred. We are still trying to understand what happened. The level of destruction and the number of lives lost are devastating. The city is devastated. Once again, Martyrs' Square became the stage where the people hanged their political elite, whose hands are soaked in the blood of more than 200 dead. Today, the challenge is to uphold our secular vision free of the political elite and to try to build a nation. This is not about the built environment but about rebuilding our community.

The only meeting place of national significance is the physical space around the Martyrs' Monument. Martyrs' Square. It doesn't function as a square, because it really is no longer a square. In a morphological sense, I mean. It has lost its definition as a square.

Yet it still carries the memory of a square. For this reason, it could be a good basis for creating a common national myth. This place still haunts people's minds as a possible national unifying element. But no one really knows why. All of that is just inherited; people hear vague stories from the past. They are more like echoes of stories, without any historical authoritativeness and reality. But somehow it seems to work because people have a need for such a place.



At that time, there was a historic concert by Fayrouz in downtown — on Martyrs' Square, then still a field of rubble. That must have been 1994 or 1995. The stage was located in a place most citizens had not been to for 15 years. Whether from west Beirut or from the eastern part of the city, they were not allowed to set foot on Martyrs' Square. To gather all in this location was a symbolic new beginning.

... I think the square is the central theater, a project that can represent the whole country. Lebanon is not very old. The country was born only in 1945. Seventy years later, we still haven't managed to turn it into a country without outside interference. People should ask themselves how this square can be turned into a National Theater from which a unified country could arise.



There is this fear. At this moment, in this place, we must overcome our own history. But we simply aren't at that point yet.

What if we do something with the square that fails to do justice to it? But at this point we get bogged down in endless discussions. What would do justice to the square?

Today it is nothing but a dump. No one comes here. Ok, it is clean, but also an absolute no-man's-land! We are in the process of creating a new present. But this place here was left out, because it would require articulating the truth: "This is our plan!"



All this, the whole square where we are now, looked completely different back then. There were palm trees everywhere. In the middle there were trees, roses, flowers, stuff like that. Here in front of me there were movie theaters. If you were walking east to west, for instance, there was Cinema Dunia, the Roxy movie theater, and then there was a third one whose name I've forgotten. Standing here now, I remember that behind me was the Rivoli.



And a little further up to the right the Cinema Opera. The main difference between then and now is that back then there were people everywhere. I remember well the taxis yelling "Aley Sofar!" Those are villages in Mount Lebanon. "Aley Sofar, who wants a ride?" It was a busy place, filled with people who came from all over Lebanon. They all came to this square.



There's this paradox: on the one hand, you like the vagueness of a place and then you sense the threat of constant change. I am more comfortable with the concept of "common space" than with the concept of "public space." Notions of private and public space are being rethought. A common space doesn't need to be a square; it can be something you use with others, something that can be temporary and multi-functional. Our kids grew up at the shopping mall.

When we change our standards of what a city center looks like and simply see it as a zone, then this here could be a potential theater, why not? In short: I don't mind if the city center is empty. If we use it! If we propose other uses. But there is too much money involved. That makes it difficult to suggest something.



The phantom of a square!



So, it's once again a question of possibilities. In this day and age, and especially in this place, architecture cannot concern itself only with building, only with windows, doors, stones, and plans. It's an issue, rather, of the politics of space. When you're thinking about a national park or public square, then architecture shouldn't become complicit with the political system and be a mere form of control. It should instead open up possibilities, create space for other forms. In our time it's crucial to have public spaces, but it is also important to think about other forms of controlling the space we inhabit.

Why does a public space have to be essential for a city? Maybe we ought to rethink how we live. Why do we have to live in the city? Why do we live in this place? Why do we need to have a public space at all, when instead we could have a space outside? Let's call it "outer space."



Stills from Daniel Kötter and Constanze Fischbeck, *state-theatre #5 BEIRUT*, 2014

Shirin Barghnavard, Sepideh Abtahi,
Mina Keshavarz, Sahar Salahshoori,
and Nahid Rezaei

On Longing, Belonging, and a Poetry of Resistance

Shirin Barghnavard

At first glance, *Profession: Documentarist* does not look like a poetic film. Nor did its directors intend to make a poetic work. Poetry is a subtle and hidden feature of this film, without, however, revealing itself as a theme. *Profession: Documentarist* is rich in excitement, emotions, regrets, sorrows, longing, and hopes. It's a rebellion that is embodied in image, sound, music, and text; an intimate intertwining of personal narratives, reminiscences, oral history, family, and historical, archival footage. The blending of its seven stories, narrated by seven female filmmakers based in Tehran, is shaped such that they don't seem separated from each other.

To more precisely grasp the role of poetry in this film, let me consider the collective nature of its making in terms of the social and political conditions at the time. All of us were shocked by the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election, when many Iranians decided to vote after years of abstaining from political participation in order to change their destiny and their country's. Yet matters turned out differently. For the millions of people who believed that electoral fraud had occurred, not only was clarification denied, but repression became more severe. Suddenly, new dimensions of the power wielded by the system became evident. Everything was vague and incomprehensible to us. We were scared, nervous, vulnerable, and sensitive — and needed each other more than ever.

Sepideh Abtahi

After the presidential election in 2009, after scores of middle-class votes were either forged or stolen, and after the silent protest of millions ended in bloodshed, Ahmadinejad's militaristic, ultra-conservative party seized power and jeopardized international relations. There was an acute fear of war. The all-powerful authorities saw the cultured class as their greatest enemy. As documentarists, we were part of that class. We would meet to find a way of coping with this social trauma. Our solution was *Profession: Documentarist*.

Editor's note: This conversation started with a questionnaire in which we asked all of *Profession: Documentarist*'s directors the same question: What role does poetry play in your film? Editing their answers, we could barely resist bringing these, or at least single aspects, into "conversation" with each other in order to make the collaborative nature of the project perceptible.

Sepideh Abtahi,
Shirin Barghnavard,
Mina Keshavarz,
Firouzeh Khosrovani,
Nahid Rezaei,
Sahar Salahshoori,
and Farahnaz Sharifi,
*Profession:
Documentarist*, 2014,
Shirin's Episode



Mina Keshavarz

We weren't allowed to capture these moments on film. We were forced to return to our houses and remain silent. All we could do was listen to tragic, sad news about the fate of those being arrested during protests, about the impending economic crisis, and about potential war with the United States. It wasn't easy to feel that we couldn't do anything or respond to what was happening to us, our friends and family, and many others in our country. We never decided to make a poetic film, but instead wanted to talk about our feelings, our worries, and nostalgia.

SA

Remembering the process of filmmaking, we confronted our fears and wrote about them. Our gatherings were more like therapeutic sessions than filmmaking. We made things and hid them in invisible cupboards. In facing our fears, we explored and examined them. We captured those moments so as not to forget untold history, and not vanish into oblivion. We wrote *Profession: Documentarist* in silence, to experience something new, something unknown, through which we rid ourselves of depression.

Sahar Salahshoori

We felt the need to document and voice our experiences, thus bearing witness to the history unfolding in our country; we also felt the need to construct a narrative testimony of our time, and of our place within it. *Profession: Documentarist* elicits stories from the past and present by combining images with a poetic approach to everyday language, as well as archival materials with contemporary film shooting and documentary explorations, to reveal the complexity inherent in ordinary life.

The first-person narrative and autobiographical format match our intention to share an intimate testimony, for us and for our imagined audiences. We needed the magic of language to express our feelings and thoughts. Confronted simultaneously with past and present, we felt lost in both reality and the imaginary. We managed to instigate all these dimensions only through the magic of language, which takes shape in poetry.



Sahar's Episode

^{SB} We began unearthing history and recounting the events that had befallen us from childhood to that time. *Profession: Documentarist* was like a massive explosion; an emotional outburst that could only happen as a group and not individually. We decided to use filmmaking as an excuse to talk to each other, to unite and to empathize with each other. To me, this move is itself unconventional and somewhat poetic. Sharing one's anger and concerns in a group and reflecting on both in a way that represents the words and feelings of a large part of one's society are poetic processes.

Profession: Documentarist emerged from a historical period in which as filmmakers we realized the importance of recording and documenting events. With each other's help, we completed a collective film with no funds, no backers, no commission, and no deadline. All of this lends the film a spirit of freedom and independence or, in other words, creates a kind of poetry. This explains why we never were able to repeat this collective experience together again.

^{MK} Looking back at *Profession: Documentarist* today, almost six years after finishing the film, I think it's a form of poetry about resistance, political suppression, and finding a way to survive in a country where finding hope proves elusive. We need to use poetry in our everyday life to be able to resist.



Nahid's Episode

When I was a university student, our literature professor used to say: “I doubt whether an Iranian who has never composed a few lines of poetry is truly an Iranian.” Poetry occupies an essential place within our culture. Even illiterate people in remote villages know the poems of our canonical Persian poets by heart. I believe that more than a poetical quality, our film’s episodes contain a certain oriental genealogy of poetics, a philosophy transmitted over generations through a historically rich literary culture. All of us have grown up with its concepts and its images. As I mention in the last episode while talking about my father, our country has undergone a history filled with oppressive regimes and cruel invaders who have rendered people’s lives unbearable. In order to resist, or even to merely survive and endure life, people had no choice but to rely on their imagination and the spiritual realm and to believe in their own inner strengths. These beliefs have been handed down from generation to generation via the poetry of Rumi, Khayyam, Hafez, and their like, each possessing a profound spiritual philosophy. Here is a poem by Rumi Jalalu’l-Din, a thirteenth century Persian poet and Sufi mystic:

Take someone who doesn’t keep score,
Who’s not looking to be richer, or afraid of losing,
Who has not the slightest interest even
Is his own personality: he’s free.¹

^{SA} Poetry and the imagination feature prominently in the Persian unconscious; according to Dariush Shayegan, a great thinker and Near Eastern scholar, Iranians value the imaginary world perhaps more than the real world. For example, Chehel Sotoun Palace (literally “Forty Columns”) in Esfahan only has 20 columns. Yet when reflected in the waters of the fountain in front of the palace, they appear to be 40 columns. Leaning toward that world, we are always seeking that lost atmosphere in the labyrinth of history.

^{SS} There are moments in life when the unexpected happens. It springs from another dimension and overwhelms you. It transforms your world or even casts you into another world. Your sense of the passage of time changes. It adopts another rhythm. You are torn into two beings: your physical body lives in what we might simply call reality and yet, your soul and mind are somewhere else, in the world of subjectivity and the imagination. In order to connect these two beings that you have become, you need to build a bridge. Poetry enables us to connect parallel worlds in a single object, our film *Profession: Documentarist*. It helped us to find ourselves in harmony, in order to be able to move forward in our personal and social history. We sought refuge and poetry was the solitary islet we escaped to when reality became unbearable. Poetry mentored us in — finally — creating a present with a new shape, a present that faces the light and enabled

¹ *The Rumi Collection: An Anthology of Translations of Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*, ed. Kabir Helminski (Boston and London: Shambala, 2005), 220.

us to continue living. Poetry is the free person’s last refuge and as Kiarostami puts it: “In the total darkness, poetry is still there, and it is there for you.” It is always there for us.



Sepideh's Episode

^{NR} Despite our different approaches, the episodes all have one thing in common: family. A family that has shaped the foundations of our thinking and that cannot be ignored, not even when we want to speak about our profession. A family that can symbolize our connections and that binds us to the past and to the life experiences of previous generations. In the first episode, we see Shirin as a child beside her family during the Iran-Iraq war. Her family is trying to emigrate to another country (a form of escapism). She is being dragged along, and that thread engages her until the very last moment of the episode. In Firouze’s episode, although her family is not directly present, we soon learn that she lives next door to her mother. When Firouze tells us about being interrogated and her passport being confiscated, she expresses her concern about her mother’s condition. A mother whose home proves to be the safest place in the world to hide her work. In the episode about Farahnaz, everything is defined in terms of family, which serves as a foundation for poetic discussions about music, revolution, filmmaking, censorship, and women’s freedom. Mina’s episode first deals with more overt and external issues such as oppression, sanctions, the inflated economy, and thinking about emigrating. Soon, however, it shifts to her family, her brother, and the story of his emigration, where the family’s heavy presence is felt strongest; Mina’s episode closes with a photograph of her parents pinned on the fridge, an allegorical shot that speaks to how they are hindering her emigration. Sepideh’s episode opens with her childhood. She is so submerged in the joys of childhood that, with a poetic expression, she calls herself a child of the revolution. Her fond memories of her childhood and parents are her escape from reality. Sahar, however, is quite the opposite. She spent her childhood away from her imprisoned parents. The prison, which deprived her of her family’s warmth and support, now fills her vision, utterly and nightmarishly. It is a vision from which she is still fleeing. In the final episode, Nahid, surrounded on all sides by social and vocational despair, her friends’ problems, and internal crises, seeks solace in her

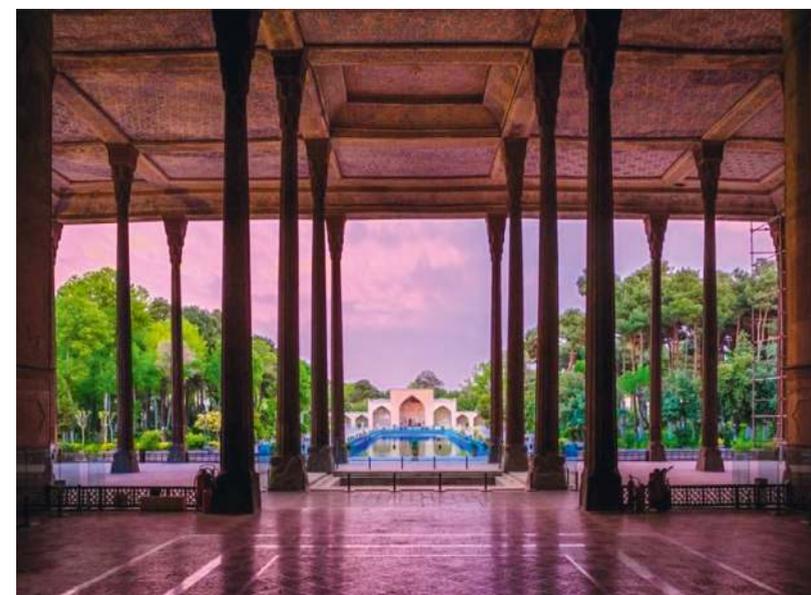
father's teachings. He taught her the philosophy of the people of her land from books of poetry — a philosophy not far removed from Buddhism. In *Profession: Documentarist*, parents and family are symbols of an ancient culture that tries to serve its children as a sanctuary in their times of turmoil. A culture, whose language, in this land, is poetry.

MK Music plays an important role in *Profession: Documentarist*. In Farahnaz's episode, we see how political suppression forces her family and many other families to take refuge in music, singing, and poetry in their homes. Sepideh's episode take us back to the days of the revolution, and we see people singing songs of hope in the streets. Many of those songs were forbidden a few years later, after which people never gathered in the streets again to sing together. What makes *Profession: Documentarist* poetry in my eyes is the personal stories of different women from different generations and social backgrounds, also from different cities in Iran. From the poetics of these differences emerges a poetry about the history of a country.

SB For me, beyond the structural and aesthetic dimension, the role of poetry in *Profession: Documentarist* is summarized by the sensitivity of its filmmakers to the social and political conditions of their time and by its touching and intimate reflection in the form of a "Collective Movement."



Mina's Episode



Chehel Sotoun Palace, Esfahan, published on Karnaval.ir

The 49th Year

Japanese intellectual and anarchist Toshihiko Kamata was a member of the Black Helmet Group, which was responsible for bombing several police stations in Tokyo and a US military communications station in Sendai in 1971. After the so-called “Christmas Tree Bomb Attack,” in which a bomb disguised as a Christmas tree exploded at Oiwake Police Station in Shinjuku on December 24, 1971, Kamata went into hiding. He was arrested in 1980 and was sentenced to “indefinite” imprisonment in 1991 as the alleged leader of the group. He is currently serving time in Miyagi Prison in Sendai.

For the past 40 years, his main connection to the outside world, his friends and supporters, are letters sent to his younger brother Katsumi, who passed away in 2014. Since 2006, when a new legislation allowed prisoners to also write to non-family members, Kamata has been corresponding with social activist Makiko Watanuki. His letters link his militant past and present life in prison with critical observations about the political and social situation in Japan and the world.

The following pages juxtapose photographs I took in Tokyo and in Fukushima Prefecture with excerpts (translated for the first time into English) from Kamata’s letters, which were published in Japan in several books and on a blog entitled “kt-grotesque.”

This contribution draws on my ongoing research for a film that will confront Kamata’s philosophical and poetic reflections with images of everyday life in urban and rural Japan. Both are linked to the prisoner’s story, as well as to protest and resistance movements in Japan from the 1960s through today.

Concept, photography: Heidrun Holzfeind
Text: Toshihiko Kamata
English translation: Norie Fukuda, Translation editor: Elliot Roeder
Editorial assistance and coordination: Makiko Watanuki, Koyo Yamashita

Text excerpts translated from: *The Life and Opinions of Toshihiko Kamata* (Hokuto-sha, 1997), *United Red Army: The Time of “Wolves,” 1969–1975* (Mainichi Newspapers, 1999), *I am Ready to Accuse* (edited by Makiko Watanuki, Sobo, 2007), and <https://kt-grotesque.tumblr.com>

Images from: *United Red Army: The Time of “Wolves,” 1969–1975* (Mainichi Newspapers, 1999) [includes news photographs taken in Shinjuku-Sanchome after the Christmas Tree Bombing on December 24, 1971]; Alex P. Schmid and Albert J. Jongman, *Political Terrorism: A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Data Bases* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988); *Black Helmet Trial Journal #23* (August 1987) [includes maps drawn by Mr. Kamata of where he lived as a fugitive in Yamaguchi City until his arrest in March 1980]



LETTER 8/29/1999

Mornings come early in the pen ... In fact, even I was oblivious to that aspect of prison life. Since the media typically depicts it as having an air replete with idleness and slow motion I had a cartoonish image of it. As hard as it can be to imagine, the basis of jail life is the factory ...

People say that the social standards of a country can be understood by looking inside their prisons — that a prison is a mirror that reflects society. In that regard, from the moment I get up and go to the factory until I return to my cell, I'm managed very systematically; in other words, my experience suggests that this is an extremely supervised society. Yes, ever since I stood at attention here in the slammer, I've been working according to the commands I'm handed ...

I always get funny looks when I tell people I never have any dreams, but it's utterly true. Some even laugh at me and suggest that it's my punishment for chasing endless dreams. But a few times a year, I wake up vividly remembering the Christmas tree bomb as if it were an instant playback. Apparently other prisoners often have dreams about factory work, but for me, even now, mine are limited to the time I was on the run. Could this also be due to the fact that I was on the run for eight years?

My dreams are square. It's hard to explain what I mean by this, but there's a metallic rigid frame, and dreams appear inside of it ... What's more is that there's a pattern to my dreams — if I step outside the frame, I can become "free," but I always end up getting caught in the snow, sand, or mud, and I can't run fast enough. And as I'm quietly seething over the situation, the detective who's after me in the dream approaches, and the eyes of people around me suddenly sharpen. But I suddenly wake myself up when I start to moan, and am relieved to find I'm in jail.

What the Christmas tree bomb instantaneously brings to life is the calm serenity at the Oiwake police box, like the flood of morning light in a Vermeer painting; the light blue, tidy company uniform worn by the woman who gave the warning phone call from a coffee shop in Shimbashi; the spectacle of my testing the accuracy of the bomb's timing device with a flash lamp while I was building it; the skylight that glimmered in the light of the setting sun in the public bath where I bathed before heading out that day; the green of the Christmas tree peeking out of my paper bag, gaily swaying with each step I took; the neon lights of the dusk-cloaked town of Shinjuku that had begun flashing on and off; and the dazzling red of the revolving lights on the patrol cars ...

In an earlier letter, I wrote that a person from the Red Army came to our camp. This camp was a seaside cottage on the beach that we had rented in a small town called Kosagawa near the border between Akita and Yamagata. It's known as being the camp where "Black Helmet" was formed. While that may be true, the number of people who gathered there evades me. Furthermore, perhaps my notion of us as a group of young men and women in our early twenties happily gathered making curry rice glossed over any idea of a serious and sinister ambience as the formation of a "(dissident) group." This could be what Red Army member "A" meant in his court testimony when he claimed he would have never imagined our group would employ terrorist tactics such as bombings. I knew that it was his role to rally members of our group for the Red Army, and that he had been secretly talking to some of our members ... I can now say that there were no more than 20 to 30 of us, and few knew we were planning to use bomb tactics.

To give an idea of the circumstances, while at the camp, I climbed the mountain trail of Mount Chokai early in the morning and conducted a small experiment in a slightly remote forest a distance from the lodge. I recall at that time noticing an increased number of people while looking at the backs of the members as they walked in groups of twos and threes down to the sea shining in the morning sun. After returning to Tokyo, half of the members had quit. Those were folks with weak constitutions or who could be more useful in other ways.

"F" wrote the other day that he had gone down to Kosagawa after the earthquake ... According to him, the seaside scenery did not appear to have changed much from those days — what's changed is that there weren't any young men and women laughing.

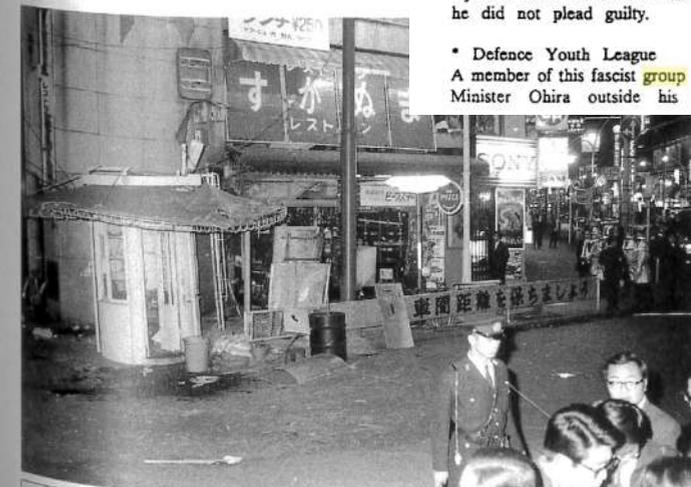
People often say that they don't need money within these walls, but in a highly consumerist society, there is no way we can allow such fantasies to go unchallenged. Envelopes, letter paper, ballpoint pens, etc., that require external transportation would be otherwise hard to come by without money, and it might take months, if not a year, to accumulate the bonus cash for them. It's true that clothing and everyday items such as tissue paper, toothbrushes, towels, etc. are provided free of charge by the government. But their quality is inferior and the quantity is strictly rationed. If you want to indulge in your favorite book or study, you have to pay for it all at your own expense. In any case, the number of items available here is gradually increasing.



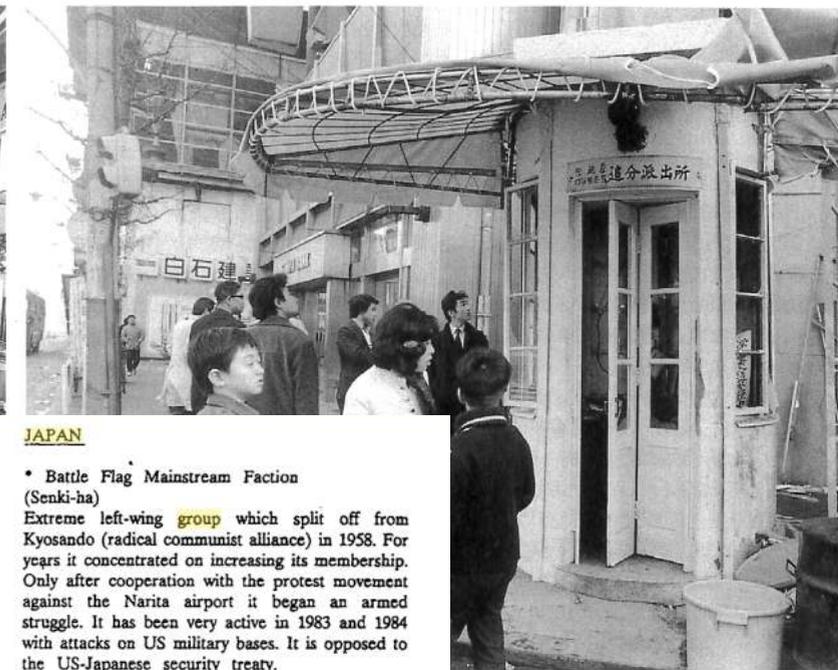
12月24日～25日にかけて新宿3丁目



12月24日～25日にかけて新宿3丁目



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JAPAN

• **Battle Flag Mainstream Faction (Senki-ha)**
 Extreme left-wing group which split off from Kyosando (radical communist alliance) in 1958. For years it concentrated on increasing its membership. Only after cooperation with the protest movement against the Narita airport it began an armed struggle. It has been very active in 1983 and 1984 with attacks on US military bases. It is opposed to the US-Japanese security treaty.

• **Black Helmet (Kuro Heru) Group**
 Group which has been responsible for the 1971 bomb attack on a police station in the Tokyo Shinjuku shopping district. It shared a bomb factory north-east of Tokyo with the Red Army.

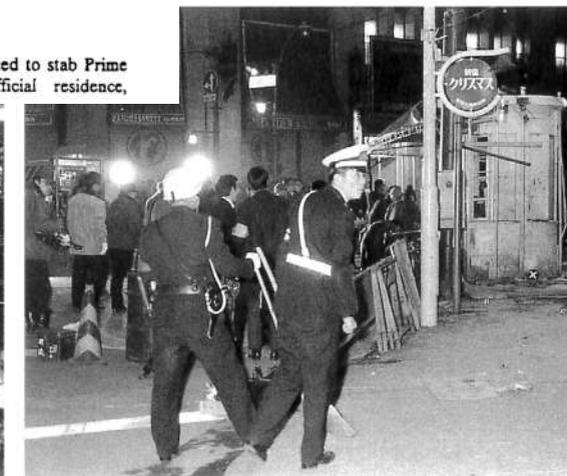
• **Cabinet Research Office (Naicho)**
 Most important of four intelligence agencies in Japan. It is the Prime Minister's own security service and has a staff of less than 100 men. Up to two thirds of the Naicho budget is spent on commissioning reports from private institutions and journalists. First steps to the establishment of a central agency were taken in 1971 to work in cooperation with the United States in collecting and analyzing information from the outside world about political as well as military developments.

• **Commune Minokamo**
 Leftist radical group which is striving for the overthrow of the existing societal order. It also rejects discrimination of minority groups. It was reportedly involved in a bomb attack in March 1976 in which two people were killed and 95 injured. Katsuhisa Omoni was convicted although he did not plead guilty.

• **Defence Youth League**
 A member of this fascist group tried to stab Prime Minister Ohira outside his official residence,



かけて新宿3丁目



12月24日～25日にかけて新宿3丁目

LETTER 9/12/1999

If one imagines that the majority of the prisoners are made up of yakuza or related riff raff, you may hold the conviction that the atmosphere here would have a rather brutal and eerie ambience, but in fact, it's much to the contrary — the prisoners display such chattiness that you'd be ridiculed as someone who reads too many horror stories.

Inmates loathe the single habitation prison cells. Despite their lack of even a shred of privacy, inmates are deeply satisfied with the narrow confines of the prison cells that evoke group habitations of an ancient past, as when humans lived in caves.

For the prisoners, the most common topic of discussion after connections and relationships among their peers is the disciplinary rules that keep them in various ways of bondage. People often misunderstand the inside of the prison walls to be a place for the repentance and rehabilitation of criminals, but there is no such system anywhere. The true purpose of the system is forced labor.

But it is the "political" prisoners who are most ostracized in prison. At first, I was too. I was shocked that not only could I not hold a proper conversation with the people around me, but I could not even march in line properly. This was because I had spent so much time in the detention center. There, I could stroll around at leisure, but here, I am always running at a fast pace. It might sound strange, but the longer one spends in detention, the harder it is to adjust to being in prison.

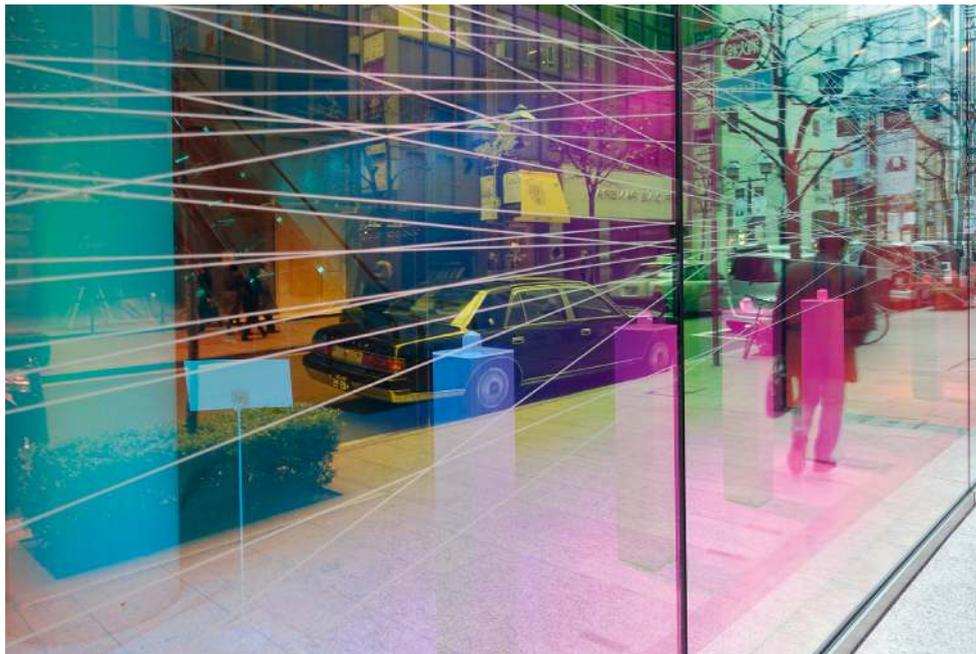
But that's the thing about being a "political prisoner" — I can't just toss out my dignity because of that. Apparently, that's why there are always many of us doing squats and other exercises in a corner of the prison grounds, on our own.

A few years after Kenzaburo Oe's *A Personal Matter* (1964) was published, *The Silent Cry* (1967) came out in the midst of tumultuous circumstances of the student protests and the anti-war movement in Vietnam. I read it as if I had become possessed and it made me think that just once I'd like to repeat the line that the protagonist's older brother, Takashi, suddenly spat out when they met up in America — "Shall I tell you the truth?"

LETTER 4/23/2016

How is "K"? Artificial intelligence has become a hot topic these days, but by the time she gets a job, I think that the work environment will be completely different from what it is now, perhaps to the point beyond what we can imagine. Of course, this goes for jobs titles, too. In such a case, there will be confusion for those of us living in prison cells, and we won't be able to function in the outside world.





25日にかけて新

25日にかけて新

LETTER 10/8/1995

According to Hegel, history is the struggle between different ideologies and when that struggle ends, it's the demise of history. For instance, the battle between the capitalist and socialist camps after WWII ended with the collapse and defeat of the former Soviet Union. And this explains why history ended with the victory of the capitalist camp since there will no longer be a global struggle based on ideologies like communism, which insists on its own ubiquity. This is the framework of *The End of History?* published by Francis Fukuyama in '89.

So, if we look at the world after *The End of History?*, it's only natural to imagine a capitalist society as a decadently ripe society. But it also seems to me that we are witnessing the emergence of a scenario in which the "economic animals" of a country we know quite well are glorified, and who claim that there is no other choice but to repeat the endless cycle of consumption.

I apologize that my letters are a bit formal these days. I don't have anyone around me with whom to hold a decent conversation — here, conversations don't go beyond the level of lower primary school, which is why I carry on this way.

Returning to *The End of History?*, there's been criticism that what Hegel is emphasizing is that the moment a political system has been perfected and reigns is also the moment when the divisions it harbors are exposed. That's why inside the capitalist camp that should have defeated the socialist camp, instead of creating an East-West conflict, it may have incited a North-South conflict, with developing countries in the South desperate to catch up with developed countries of the North. Moreover, it's said that it is not only North-South conflict in a geographical sense, but also racial issues within the United States are intensifying polarization domestically and are impossible to unify, just like immigration problems in Europe. The world is constantly being divided rather than the other way around, and this division seems more ubiquitous to me ...

Here, I'd like to mention the *White Paper on Zenkyoto* in which legal restrictions were increased for many workers from Asia and the Middle East because of "cultural differences." This division of people on the basis of "cultural differences" is the beginning of the most modern form of racism. Today, out of fear that their workplaces might be invaded, poor white people are turning to the far right supporting the persecution of immigrants. Many in the middle class are disgusted by the far right but turn a blind eye; this is the basis for "cultural differences" ...

Speaking of Christmas, I imagine Shinjuku and Shibuya are bustling with people, especially during this season of retail warfare ... As I gaze outside my window at Sirius shining coldly in the pitch-black darkness, I recall the all-consuming, energy-expending spectacle of this country and crowds of people standing in the streets, and to be honest, it somehow makes me nostalgic. But like the girls of that era, who flipped the hem of their pantaloons and skittered off, it may be a dream that will never return ...

A little while ago, the Nihon Keizai Shimbun published an article about a "dressmaking factory" in a German prison. They commissioned a famous designer to create fashionable products to sell, and they hit the jackpot; and yet they couldn't be mass-produced by prison work alone. It's the same in our factory as well. Until a few years ago, we were making 500 pairs of safety shoes a day, but because factory products that have moved into the Asian region are cheaper, we're now only able to make around 100 pairs of process-intensive combat boots and other made-to-order products. That's partly due to a shortage of technicians. Anyway, when it comes to mass production, prison factories can never hold a light to conventional factories.

But in the case of German prisons, the small number of products became more and more popular because of the brand effect. One of the most important factors in a capitalist economy is whether or not there is a difference between one product and another, so it's only natural that it would catch on ... it's the rarity of the product, however, not the sophistication of the technology. No matter how high the level of skill of a prisoner, ostensibly, the workers in factories outside are three times faster and better.

These days it seems like the colors of Christmas and New Year have vanished. When I look out the window, it looks like snowflakes are falling sideways. Snow must be falling near the Ou Mountains and is being carried away by the wind. The cold wave does not seem to be going away. And yet, stock prices are soaring abnormally — some of the prisoners are talking about stocks, and the other day, I found myself in such a group for the first time in a while. I came out feeling like I had a lot of money and was happy, if only for a little while, which is just pure folly. By the way, my bonus money to date amounts to 1,234,499 yen. I don't even know if this is worth much.



Stage and Perform

In Front and Behind
the Camera

Future Me – Memory, Narration, Fiction

Barbara Preisig

How do collective and personal memory, social structures, gender, and identity articulate themselves in spoken language? You address this issue in many of your mostly video-based works, which often involve the narrating of individual, perhaps personal stories.

The protagonists of your video work *Future Me* (2016) are young people who attended the Center for Transitional Programs in Basel. This center provides career support for youths as they look for apprenticeships and internships. How did this collaboration come about?

Lena Maria Thüring

Søren Grammel, the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Basel at the time, invited me to realize a new work as part of the education projects. In cooperation with me, the students wrote their memoirs — from birth to death. Straddling the boundary between documentation and fiction, they created a series of partly fictional and partly autobiographical texts that I subsequently edited, condensed, and excerpted. The result of this process is a collective and fragmented biography that, as a script, served as the basis for the work *Future Me*, taking on the features of a music video.

BP How long did you work together?

LMT I worked with the youths over a year-long period to build a relationship of trust. I slowly introduced them to the subject by jointly watching and discussing music videos, alter egos, and representation in pop music, as well as through other works of mine.

Editor's note: The following excerpts are coming from the voice-over in the works *Future Me* and *How to decide what to do with your life*.



Lena Maria Thüring,
Future Me, still, 2016

My mother and I had to act like we were going for a jog to cross the border. The bus that was going to take us on our vacation was waiting on the other side.

I'd also memorized a friend's address, telephone number, and date of birth to pass off as my own if I got stopped by police.

LMT Sometimes dance-like, sometimes combat-like, the choreographies and scenes staged in front of the camera fill the image frame. Regarding sound, the biographical fragments spoken by the students are voice-overs — a multilingual and polyphonic verbal fabric to the rhythm of the images.

By the time I was in elementary school, I got into fights every recess — no one was safe from me.

Sometimes our teacher tied me and my best friend to a chair or, during recess, to a tree.

Perhaps it was because my father beat me a lot, but I'm very grateful to him for it. He taught me to respect no one — people had to earn it.

BP How did you visually configure the scenes and images? Are they yours, or were images shot by the youths incorporated as well?

LMT It's important for me to incorporate the production context in the work. Revealing and displaying the staging and the production context also serves as a level of distancing from the work's biographical origins. Showing the process and setting was much more important to me than shooting a perfect music video. We always used two cameras so we could simultaneously film close-ups and distance shots of a scene. This allowed us to work much more spontaneously, and the cameras were also running when we weren't actually staging scenes, in order to capture the in-between moments, the goings on offstage and the production process. As a result, the scenes switch seamlessly between staged and documentary moments. These were my guidelines or the framework within which the youths could act.

It was important to me that the staged scenes were actually created in collaboration with the students. We asked them if they would like to develop choreographies and dances and provided support.

No one was forced to participate. Content like the Turkish dance or the combative choreographies were created by them. There were also youths who initially didn't want to do anything, but ultimately, they all got involved in some way, including being behind the camera. This work only was possible because of a wonderful team that gladly and patiently engaged with them. Sandra Knecht is an artist herself but also studied social work and directing, and she helped me in working with the youths and oversaw the choreography. There were also two camerawomen, Carlotta Holy-Steinmann and second camera operator Esther Mattei, gaffer Andrea de Stoutz, sound Silvio Anania, and hair and make-up Anna Tschannen.



Future Me,
2016

When my parents noticed I'd started smoking, my mother screamed at me — my father didn't say anything. It sucks when your father shows no interest in you.

My mother was always very worried that something might happen to me or that I might get stopped by police. So, I rarely got permission to go to town.

When my father was given a diagnosis of lung cancer, he quit smoking from one day to the next.

I haven't spoken to my mother in a year.

BP And the camera work? Did they witness how you put the video together, or were they simply the actors?

LMT We communicated clearly from the beginning that the work would not only include the scenes in which they actively and consciously performed. In this sense, the presence of the camera of course also affected and changed the off-stage scenes. At the same time, they helped shape the actions in those "documentary" scenes. These blurred boundaries between documentation and staged scenes were exactly what interested me.

It was also important to me that they were involved in the post-production process: they recorded the voice-overs themselves and I brought them into the editing process and explained to them why I made certain decisions and how I was going to proceed with the soundtrack.

To edit the soundtrack, I worked in the studio together with my partner, Fred Herrmann, and the percussionist Beni Bürgin who created a percussion score for the entire film, linking the various rhythms of the songs. This work was great fun.



Future Me,
2016

And at some point, the question of why I couldn't have a cell phone turned into a statement: I'm going to get a cell phone.

I never went home after school. I stayed out, walking around.

BP Does this mean that the music was also an important element for the whole choreography or for the composition?

LMT First, we worked with the songs the youths contributed, but it was clear that a coherent soundtrack would link the various choreographies and staged scenes, like an extended music video without vocals but with voice-overs. The editing, too, is inspired by music videos in terms of dynamics and cuts and, as a result, it takes up the rhythm of the music.

BP When I first watched the work, I focused on figuring out which statements belong to the same individual. Watching it again, I now feel that it is always the same person who speaks the utterances of a certain person, no?

LMT Not systematically. There were youths who didn't want to read their own biographies for privacy reasons. Some of the narratives are quite intimate. You carry a great responsibility in working with people and their stories, especially with people this young. We talked a lot about how recognizable they and their voices and stories would be, what the "public sphere" means, and we sensitized them to this issue. I also think it's important that the visual and the language dimensions are distinct, to deliberately create a dissociation between the biographical and personal texts — that are fictional as well — and the performances.

I was in my mid-20s and unemployed. I entered the drug business.

I left everything behind, went to Brazil for ten years, and realized my father's dream: I finished building the house by the sea.

BP Can you tell me more about this dissociation?

LMT Yes, the separation of spoken word and identity creates a conceptual distance, detaching the narrative from its biographical origin and any person-specific empathy, transcending an individual biography. So, visually, too, there is a questioning of identity through the play of presentation, of revealing and not revealing oneself with masks and costumes. At the same time, the youths are in an important phase of searching for their identity, at a time when so much is changing. So, for them the trying out of roles is not just play, but also an everyday reality.

Still, you can sometimes follow a narrative, but attributing it to a particular individual visible in the image is not possible. The youths thus become representatives of those narratives.

BP When you envision the ideal future, everything seems to be possible. Then everything you ever desired comes up. At least that's how I imagine it. In *Future Me* the exact opposite happens: the youths' previous experiences repeat themselves in their visions of the future.



Future Me,
2016

I found work at the bar across the street, and that's where, about two months later, I met the woman of my dreams. She was so perfect.

LMT I was astonished at how the young people's memories, as shaped by their family backgrounds, significantly informed the fictional parts. In some cases, Hollywood films also served as a source of inspiration, but their own perspectives on life were characterized by a striking soberness and toughness. It was also interesting that conflicts they had addressed only marginally in the biographical segment ended up reappearing and being discussed much more directly in the fictional part. In this sense, the fiction enabled a different openness and connection to reality.



Future Me,
2016

When I was 49, my past caught up with me; my daughter was 15 when I was arrested right in front of her.

When I was 63, I was given a diagnosis of lung cancer and a brain tumor, just like my father.

BP Your work *How to decide what to do with your life* is also about the fiction of the biographical.

LMT The video installation *How to decide what to do with your life* is based on a performance of the same title I developed in 2016 for my solo show at Le Foyer in Zurich. The exhibition was conceived as a three-part project focused on biographies through a script and performative staging, a discussion, and a video piece. *Future Me*, which was about adolescents and young adults, made me think about my generation. In Max Frisch's 1967 play *Biography: A Game*, a facilitator takes the protagonist through key past experiences and offers him the chance to change the course of his life. Life as a repeating game of possible designs. Yet despite being aware of the future and having the opportunity to behave differently towards events and people and thereby change his biography, he fails.

In *How to decide what to do with your life* I wasn't interested in finding answers to the essential questions, but rather in reflecting on and questioning role models and shaping experiences based on my generation. I believe that the models and the social structures in which we grow up also can have a determining effect on us, and that we need other examples in order to have different visions. In the case of my generation, some decisions have already been made and certain paths of life traveled. The question of children also pops up, and involves thinking about compatibility of family and career. At the same time, everything seems to be possible in our Optimization Society.

A script drawing on revised excerpts of conversations with people in my circle served as the basis for the performative version. Rather than choosing a socially representative group, I deliberately opted for cultural professionals who share certain background experiences with me: artists, musicians, filmmakers, actors. It was important to me to incorporate the biographies of the actors doing the performance into the script. Here, too, reality and fiction are combined, as the actors sometimes recited fragments from their biographies. After condensing the interviews into biographical, semi-fictional fragments,



Lena Maria Thüring, *How to decide what to do with your life*, HD video, two channel installation, performance, Le Foyer, Zurich, 2016

I worked with the four actors and a film crew in a multifunctional, installation setting. The climbing poles and ropes in the space were reminiscent of an athletic environment, of the many municipal outdoor sports facilities encouraging self-optimization.

Obvious attributions of the biographical fragments to a particular individual already come apart on the textual level. At the same time, however, the role and the person are no longer clearly separate. The characters are voiced by all four actors and disintegrate as a result. Life courses become subject to a play of possibilities in which the developing and staging of the topic is incorporated as subject matter.

During the performance viewers could witness this kind of rehearsal situation. At the same time, however, video recordings were synchronously projected onto two screens that were part of the spatial setting. Thus, the members of the film crew became protagonists of the work as well. Live performance and recording overlapped, resulting in duplications or multiplications. At the same time, the media equipment and the process of developing the project were revealed.

That's why I was sent to boarding school when I was fifteen. Handing in nothing but blank sheets and then a lesbian, too — I was more than the school could handle.

I come from a family of academics — with my people, you define yourself by your achievements. I dropped out of high school. I knew I didn't want to, and wouldn't, pass the final exams.

Playing the drums steadied me. Given my broken German, my job prospects were limited. After an internship in a geriatric clinic, my choice was to either be a nurse, wiping old asses, or play the drums. It wasn't that I always knew I wanted to be a musician. There was just nothing else I knew how to do.

^{LMT} The video installation shows the rehearsal situations without audience filmed with handheld cameras.

When I was 20, I became pregnant again. I knew from the start that I didn't want this child. It was an affair, and the guy was on drugs.

I didn't want to be an old father. She received a studio grant and left for Paris.

Getting married was never important to me. We got married.

^{BP} Are the repeated sentences being spoken as part of the script or are they improvised?

^{LMT} I had already marked certain sentences in the script where I felt repetitions would be good, but most of it developed during the rehearsals and through improvisation or something would again change a little in each iteration. Having worked together in various constellations,



Lena Maria Thüring, *How to decide what to do with your life*, HD Video, two channel installation, installation view, Helmhaus Zurich, 2016

the actors knew each other well, and so a dynamic developed in which they fed each other lines. It was important to me that they could work with the text, appropriate it, work through it, and that through this work on the text, the reading became visible.

So, I gave the actors a speech assignment. Often, I even tell the actors not to act, which is bound to fail. But it was precisely this failure that interested me, the ruptures that then occur and questions the role of the actors as such, in their function, their roles, and as individuals. By revealing the production context and showing what is happening — the reading of a script — an interplay arises between the protagonists, the actors, and the individuals.

BP How did you describe what you were interested in to your dialogue partners? For *Future Me* you asked the youths to tell a story from their birth to their death. What was the question here?

LMT I conceived this conversational situation to be very open; it was a two-way exchange. The biographical fragments, trajectories, and breaks were narrated in an associative manner. I wanted those biographical fragments to also question stereotypical images and be obscured in the staging. Who is talking about whom, who loves whom, and who is the one reciting?



How to decide what to do with your life, still, 2016

The question was always how we would get pregnant and who would bear the child. The idea was that her best friend would be the sperm donor. I could've seen myself donating the egg, fertilizing it with his sperm, and then having it implanted in her. That way we would all have contributed something, biologically speaking.

BP You mentioned Max Frisch and the promise that you need to have models to be able to rise above your particular circumstances or gain different perspectives. Was there this moment for the actors in the work process?

LMT You mean that the work in turn affects the protagonists?

BP Yes, precisely. The work can be read as a — maybe not therapeutic — but collective process of self-reflection involving all participants,

you included. I see it as a research approach, which I find interesting, because it is so far removed from traditional, scientific, and objectifying research. A self-interrogation really.



How to decide what to do with your life, 2016

We have joint custody. We simply put it in an Excel spreadsheet. It turned out that he couldn't take our daughter Wednesday through Sunday because that's when he has performances. Fifty-fifty was never an option. I did think afterwards that I should've insisted on it.

I often thought that our relationship was falling apart over the kid. It was hard at first. We're both self-employed. We have to negotiate everything every day: we both work at home, so we negotiate workspaces, who picks him up, who drops him off, who pays the rent, we negotiate ... it's taxing.

There were moments when I was tempted to bolt.

I regretted having had a child. The sleepless nights, the hours spent rocking the baby and walking around, the crying. I couldn't breathe anymore.

^{LMT} The processing of the text, the chewing on and repeating of those sentences, was at the same time a processing of the substantive questions in which the whole team was also personally involved, as their own biographies were part of the work. Hence, you can certainly speak of it as a collective process of self-reflection, a self-interrogation, and collective exploration that at times could also have cathartic effects.

Each new professional commitment is a matter of negotiation: Which project do I absolutely want to do, which job can I decline? How important is the other's work?

I'm glad we don't work in the same field, because that way rivalries and professional success don't come into it — "You're more successful than I am now, but is that only because I let you take more time? And what if I had more time?"

From Ethnographic to Virtual World Making

For a long time, ethnographic films, like ethnographic writing, have been propagated to function as a “mirror medium,” conspired to reflect the worlds experienced by a subject, depicted with the eye of a filmmaker and consumed by an audience. In looking at the role of the camera in relation to working at the interface of art and ethnography practices, it is interesting to consider ethnographic film as an experimental, unstable hybrid medium, which hovers uneasily between artistic and scientific practices.

In this regard, the most relevant model for the use of the camera in art/ethnographic practice is found in the films of Jean Rouch, where he created the idea of “shared anthropology” in which the ethnographic text is developed in active collaboration with the subject through improvisation, fantasy, and staged reality to reveal facts through fictional storytelling or poetic mechanisms. Additionally, a degree of space is also activated to allow for critical, self-reflexive interrogation of the ethnographic filmmaking process itself. When Rouch screened his rushes for his subjects, they would make comments that would affect the final editing process and suggest stories for his next films. Prefiguring the dialogical, postmodern anthropology of the 1980s, Rouch saw the involvement of his subjects in the filmmaking process as the ultimate form of critical evaluation by making his subjects themselves the adjudicators of the work. Ethnographic filmmaking in these terms shares more with immersive theater or relational art practices than documentary; the film is a reflection of the negotiation process around the conventions, contradictions, and tensions that arise from the production of representations and social relations. As a process of “world making,” ethnographic film offers the possibility of inhabiting a third “virtual” space, where meanings and conventions can be co-constructed through multiple subjective representations and shared experiences. We contend that Virtual Reality (VR) technologies provide new platforms for experimenting with these intersubjective creative filmmaking processes and the entanglement of subjective and objective experiences.

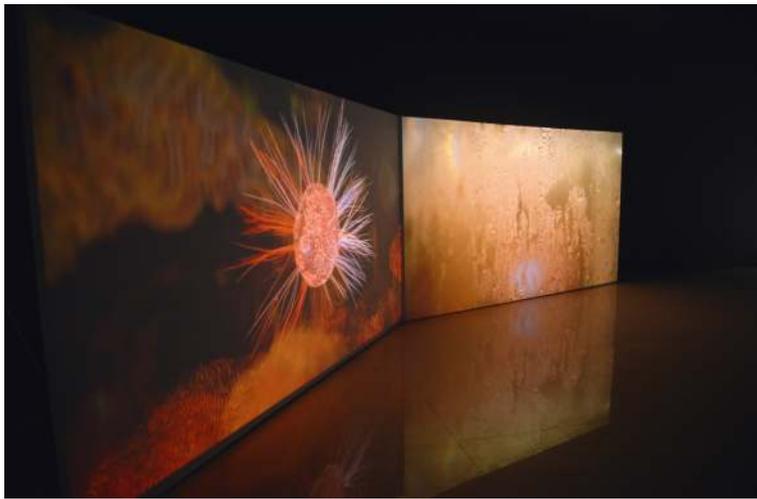
A Season in Shell (2013–2016)

The work that would become *A Season in Shell* initially found us engaged in fieldwork amongst African traders, businessmen, and asylum seekers in Hong Kong, focusing on the important trading hub of Chungking Mansions where we briefly led community discussion groups with the anthropologist Prof. Gordon Mathews. Inevitably our subjectivities

became entwined with the work of one particular Somali businessman, who referred to himself as “the Bull,” and the Red Sea Company which traded in abalone. Called upon to create an exhibition at short notice, and in real time, for the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich we worked with the Bull to create a “field report” that documented the passage of the pink abalone from the cooperative of Somali fishermen — who the Bull organized to have study Japanese abalone diving manuals, and who had collected over 600 metric tonnes of abalone — to funnel into the informal dried seafood markets in Hong Kong where the Bull had been selling them. The museum space in Zurich soon became activated and implicated in the trade route, where the muscle-shucked abalone shells were momentarily diverted along their journey to China to be exhibited temporarily in the space, linking the museum within a geographically disparate value-adding chain. With the aid of the Bull’s contacts in the self-declared sovereign state of Somaliland we moved two metric tonnes of abalone shells from Berbera to Dubai to Zurich to China. Audiences could contemplate the form and smell of the shells displayed in layers and waves, piled up in mountains, in old Omani camel feedbags or Chinese banquet tables, throughout the museum. Our problem in the exhibition was how to represent something as intangible and immaterial as transnational trade processes as well as a collaborator-informant-subject who we were ethically obligated to protect in many parts of the journey. We decided to borrow strategies from the ethnographic tradition of fictocritical writing, which is informed by the early surrealist influence on anthropologists Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Leiris (as well as Rouch). This mode combines personal narrative with critical theory and poetic lyricism to create genre-bending ethnographic texts. Our particular surrealist *rencontre* (the chance encounter between disparate objects that produce unexpected manifestations of beauty) involved constructing an assemblage that consisted of two tonnes of Somali abalone shells, suffocating the basement space and littering a Chinese banquet table; a ten-part prose scroll poem; and fragments of video, all which functioned as a visually endowed archive. Strikingly, it also went beyond a purely visual experience with the pungent stench of the raw shells escaping the containment of and permeating the entire museum building, challenging one’s olfactory senses, whilst the alluring dual textures of the shells’ surface became an irresistible



Zheng Mahler,
A Season in Shell,
2013–2016,
installation view,
Johann Jacobs
Museum, Zurich, 2014



A Season in Shell,
2013–2016

temptation for staff and visitors alike to pocket, instantly connecting and implicating them with the journey of the shells and the chain of hands they had passed through. This approach was used to encompass the invisible sensory aspects of trade, as well as the entirely overwhelming and at times un-digestible empirical and emotional experience of the research. Often omitted in traditional academic research, these elements provided opportunities for the audience to glimpse the wider intangible and entangled experiences that exist between the various registers of multisensory text.

Virtual Reality

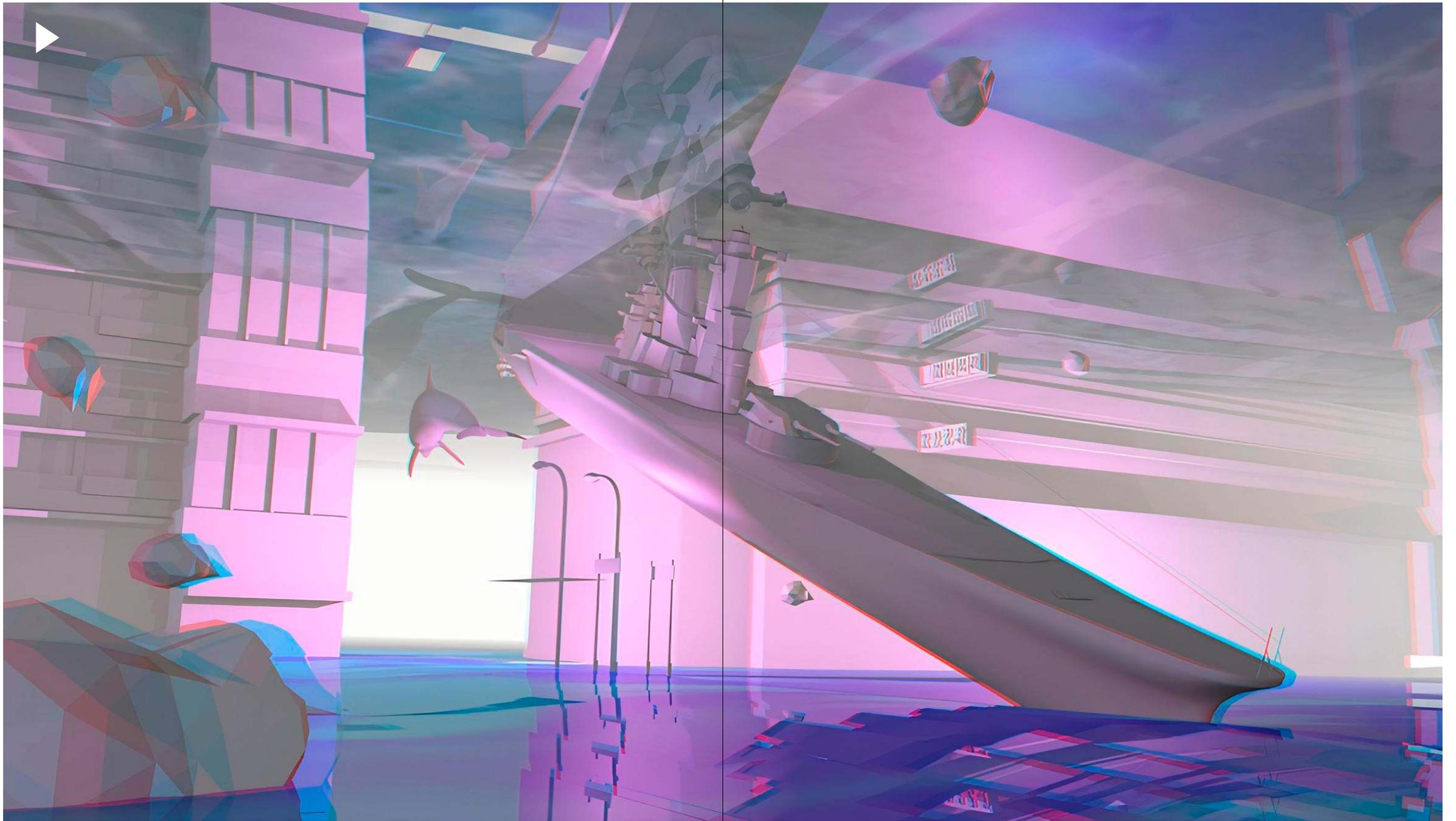
Since our experience with this fictocritical mode in *A Season in Shell* we have become interested in using virtual reality technologies that might offer new possibilities for articulating, representing, and inhabiting the spaces we operate in between art and anthropology. Virtual reality is the digital simulation of interactive environments viewed through head mounted displays (HMD) created for platforms like HTC Vive and Oculus Rift, in which the viewer wearing the HMD experiences a 360° field of view. Thus, all the conventions of film break down in 360° filmmaking. No angles, no framing: lighting and the rhythm of editing usually based on dynamic movement across the field of view become obsolete. The position of the viewer can be from the point of view of the filmmaker, the subject of the film, or as an objective observer and the camera movement is controlled by the agency of the viewer themselves. The viewer has the navigational freedom to turn their head and observe any part of the scene and actively construct their own virtual narrative. Such a filmic process adds a more collaborative layer to the ethnographic filmmaking as the 360° immersive lens in which there is no one author “behind the camera” as such, captures a spherical totality of perception. Like Rouch’s collaborative form of filmmaking whose best analogue is the theater, the VR filmmaker presents a virtual “tableau,” or a stage in which the viewer has a degree of freedom to navigate and explore. No two experiences of the VR film will be alike since it is entirely determined by the interest and attention of the participants’ exploration of the digital space. On another level, the fourth wall which separates the viewer from the scene in traditional

filmmaking (or theater) is dissolved as they become an active participant in the action, which is completely immersive, the 360° camera places the viewer in center stage.

VR film has become incredibly popular in the NGO world based on the premise that it is an “empathy machine” which can place viewers into the subject position of the individuals depicted, particularly of marginalized populations, proposing that the problem of “international aid” is simply one of empathy deficit. This has been critiqued as highly politicized and problematic since there is a strong interplay of “othering” dynamics in the erasure and colonization of subject positions entangled within a nexus of power relations between those producing the film, those for whom the film is produced, and the participant-spectator relationships in which a viewer is thrust. Thus, it is possible to approach the discourse of VR filmmaking from a more critical perspective and suggest that while it celebrates a kind of democratic equalization between the author, subject, and viewer, it also opens up even more unstable potentials by creating the affective illusion of immediacy. While allowing the filmmaker’s controlling hand to be effaced, the viewer might gain a fictive sense of agency. This dynamic, which scrambles the traditional relations of filmmaking, might open up new possibilities for the representation of unstable narratives and relational ethical relationships.

Deep Water (2017)

The first VR piece we produced entitled *Deep Water* took the form of a video and sound walk through the Sham Shui Po market area in Hong Kong, in which its urban spaces were digitally re-mapped to allow time to move in multiple directions and flow along the deep waters beneath concrete pavements that reveal unexpected histories of the area. Referencing both the concreted-over stream that existed until the 1960s on Nam Cheong Street and the harbor shoreline whose waves lapped along Pei Ho Street before land reclamation, the camera drifts through the streets, flickering between the past and present, following the currents of long-lost waterways. The camera becomes a virtual flâneur, transporting the dynamics of Walter Benjamin’s detached early twentieth century observer of the newly emergent European middle classes onto the post-industrial history of working class Hong Kong and the commensurate processes of urbanization and gentrification, whose aimless strolling is disturbed by the nonhuman bodies of aquatic mammals and by unraveling traces of the past and movements within the temporal sediments of a place and space. *Deep Water* was our first attempt to use purely immersive digital media to represent our research. Initially, we expected the work to be a purely archival piece, however it became interesting to reconstruct non-existent spaces using a virtual lens and virtual environment which opens up the possibility for representing the more intangible aspects of ethnographic research. Instead of “representing” an experience, one creates an analogous experience to our own experience of research for the viewer, one in which they are afforded a degree of agency, at once both subjective and intersubjective experiences. At the same time, using digitally constructed landscapes and virtual cameras confounds the indexical relationship between the landscape, its representation, and the problematic colonial overtones of the omniscient perspective of the 360° camera.



Deep Water, 2017

*Debt and the Making of
the Khmer Working Class*
(2017)

Our most recent experimentation with VR filmmaking was a collaboration with economic geographer Gavan Blau, a filmic companion piece to his research concerned with the role of debt in the formation of Cambodia's wage labor force, and is based on qualitative research conducted in partnership with the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS). The film draws on Blau's four months of qualitative research looking at the reasons for rural to urban migration amongst Cambodian farmers entering into wage labor. It is a 10-minute immersive 360° VR film about a Cambodian farmer named Sophea who has been compelled to leave the countryside to find work in the capital city Phnom Penh. Like many Cambodians, Sophea is faced with the challenge of navigating the rapid modernization and financialization of his agricultural community. After the fall of the Khmer Rouge in the early 1990s, the economy was opened up to the free market and the usual neoliberal orthodoxy was implemented in the country which liberalized the economy by removing tariffs and trade barriers. Yet the country has not managed to follow the Asian developmental state model to anticipated prosperity and move their economy and production up the value chain. Instead, international competition for so-called "unskilled labour" has compelled the government to maintain low wages for Cambodian workers — like Sophea who works as a hotel manager — to ensure the country is attractive to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Low wages combined with rapid financialization has led to rapidly increasing levels of household debt, forcing even more Cambodians to migrate from their rural homes to urban centres in search of work. The film was produced collaboratively with the protagonist of the film: many of the camera shots were filmed by Sophea himself, or he attached the camera to various points that offered a panoramic view of his experience and life. For example, a key sequence in the film, in which Sophea describes the stress of being in constant debt is filmed from the perspective of the camera which he attached to the handlebars of his motorcycle. The viewer can look up to listen to Sophea speak or turn around and observe the swarm of motorcycles swirling around central Phnom Penh. The shots themselves necessitated a slower pace of editing than would ever be



Zheng Mahler and
Gavan Blau, *Debt
and the Making of
the Khmer Working
Class*, 2017

possible in a conventional documentary film, as the viewer needs more time to absorb and explore the rich environments which cannot be consumed in the space quick cut editing allows. In addition, the position of the camera, through Sophea's choice or the necessity of the environment (i.e. where can we attach a camera in the middle of a mango field or a boat crossing the Mekong River) was usually below the eye level of the subject, something quite unusual in conventional filmmaking which necessitates the viewer looking up at Sophea and perhaps, on a very simple level, eases the hierarchical relationship between the viewer and subject. Somehow, the long takes and slower pace of editing creates a contemplative experience for the viewer, in which they are allowed to sensorily immerse themselves in the images. This also creates a more "loose" narrative which might be equated with a certain "openness" in the storytelling; the viewer connects the scene as episodes rather than a stream of consciousness didactically leading them towards a fixed meaning.

It is conceivable that the next phase of sensory ethnography will be a complete synthesizing of life, art, and science, in which the experiences of peoples, stories, and places are created in a purely virtual realm that the viewer experiences and can interact with. In these terms, the artist-ethnographer's job might be creating synthetic analogues of their subject relations and worlds of their research that viewers can experience. Going beyond the cybernetic mapping of natural systems toward exercises in "world making" that could be shared and experienced on, perhaps, a slightly more democratic relation between author, subject, and audience is possible.

Hand Over

Beyond
the Camera

Camera Dialogues

Barbara Preisig

The Visitor is about your audience with Oba Erediauwa, the former King of Benin. The conversation centers on the Benin Bronzes that were looted by the British in 1897 and today are scattered across more than five hundred museums and collections around the world. How did you become concerned with the colonial relationships between Benin and Great Britain, and the discussions around restitution? How did you arrive at this subject? Or how did it find you?

Uriel Orlow

The question where you work and what you work on has always interested me. To provide a little background about *The Visitor*: prior to this work, I had been working way more from my subject position, on my own family and cultural background. The works I created were very often related to the memory of the Holocaust, because it affected my family as well. I was interested in how memory works in the second, third generation. But with time I had an issue with those works: I didn't want to be a "Holocaust artist" and began to ask myself who can talk about what, and how?

Since there was somehow a biographical background, it was automatically okay for me to talk about these issues. In a way, I was speaking from a privileged position regarding the subject. On the one hand, it is surely the appropriate thing to talk about matters that concern you personally. But for me, this sense of expectation in the art world — the pressure to perform authentic identity and address yourself and your culture or history — gradually became a problem.

I created *The Visitor* in the context of being invited to participate in an exhibition on restitution. There was an expectation of sorts that I would do a work on the cultural objects that had disappeared or been looted during the Holocaust. For the reasons I just explained, I decided consciously not to focus on that. Instead, I decided to do a work on the Benin cultural objects that, at the end of nineteenth century, were stolen by the British, shipped to Europe, and from there distributed across various museums. This is considered to be one of the biggest cases of cultural looting in recent times. I traveled to Nigeria where the Kingdom of Benin used to be (it is now a part of Nigeria) and made multiple works there, including a seven-channel installation, prints, and various other works resulting from this research — and a 16-minute film, *The Visitor*.



Uriel Orlow,
The Visitor, 2007

UO For me it was a decision to work on those cultural objects, because they are in all our museums, including the Rietberg Museum, the British Museum, in New York, everywhere. There is an ethical issue, how we deal with this responsibility, and with the questions those cultural objects ask of us, the visitors of those museums. We are all automatically implicated, even though I am not a Briton and my ancestors, therefore, were not involved. To me it is important that, in a globalized world where goods, cultural objects, people have been circulating for quite some time, we also address those ethical questions of memory and not simply say, "That's your issue."

This entails questions of positioning, questions as to who you are in what context, and how. To illustrate this with an anecdote: When I arrived in Nigeria, I had a research assistant who had helped me organize things locally. When he picked me up at the airport, he had a cameraman with him. He said to me, "Here's your cameraman," and I replied, "Yes, but the plan was that I would do the filming myself." He countered, "But we have an audience with the king and you can't film there yourself, so you need a cameraperson." Somehow, I realized that, for the king, it wasn't simply a meeting but also, above all, a kind of media event. There was a cameraperson of the royal house, and then there was my cameraman whom I hadn't actually booked.

Bärbel Küster

The film consists of photo material, as I would have to call it, since there are just still images. Are they taken from the footage the Oba's cameraman had shot?

UO The cameraman assigned to me by my assistant shot the film footage for me. What I found interesting when looking through it was that the film also portrays me and presents my position performatively. The recordings show the stereotypical quality of my appearance as a European at an African royal court. Including the whole game

of questions and answers sometimes bypassing one another, giving rise to misunderstandings. This made it possible for me to reflect on myself and my positioning in this work.

I initially used the footage shot by the cameraman as documentary film footage, which I then wanted to further fictionalize with this photo story and with the voice-over by a Nigerian narrator, a woman telling us this story about me, the visitor.

BK There is a shared authorship in the film. You assign the voice-over roles to very diverse people, which is something I also really like about the work.

How did you choose the Nigerian woman? And did she receive instructions in terms of how you wanted her to speak? I find her way of speaking very striking and would like to hear more about it.

UO First of all, it was clear to me that it should be a woman, because there were only men in the film. She is a Nigerian actress living in London. We met and I actually gave her very few instructions. The script is a loose montage of the transcript of the recordings, that is, the actual conversation with the king. She responded to this material in a highly intuitive way, modulating her voice for instance. When she speaks for the king, her voice is much deeper, and when she speaks for me, she adopts a British accent and a higher pitched voice.

To me it was important that it would not be a “speaking about,” but rather a “speaking with one another” — in other words, for the focus to be on the dialogue. This means that, rather than assuming the position of the interceder, I am a party to the discussion, involved in the exchange.

BK The first shot shows you from behind in the museum. So, from the start, the camera seeks to communicate a subjective perspective: “This is *my* perspective, I stand here in the museum, this is *my* starting point.” And the perspective you adopt is not one of higher-level research, but really one that arises from your position of, “I am interested in it, but I am not an expert.” And the questions you ask when you meet the Oba are deliberately a bit naïve in the way they’re phrased, causing the response to expose what doesn’t work in such a communication. How did you experience this in that situation? I think there are moments of talking at cross purposes when you inquire about the memory of those objects and what their loss really means for memory, and the Oba forcibly responds, “I have no memory,” and, “That’s the secretary’s responsibility.” These moments expose unequal horizons of understanding. What significance do such indications of misunderstandings have for you?

UO The naivety is deliberately inscribed and the misunderstandings were key to me — in fact, I structured the script around those misunderstandings and positioned them as such. I wanted it to become clear that you can’t just go somewhere and talk about a situation and immediately understand each other, because you come from a totally different place and your position is a different one. I am talking about cultural memory and then they say, “Yes, cultural memory ...

we simply must have the objects here, then we can talk about that.” And later on, they say, “Yes, and when you go to London, then go to the museum and tell them we want the objects back.” So there is a kind of instruction. And I wanted to throw precisely that issue of restitution into sharper relief. At the same time, it was also important for me to not speak from a political or scholarly meta-level, but rather, from the outset, inscribe my position as a European subject as well.

BK That, too, is essentially a matter of translatability and of conflicting perspectives. For instance, when you say in the film, “I won’t also tell him that I am Swiss, because then things would get needlessly complicated,” this makes it even more clear that the royal family and its entourage have a very particular view of you as well: you suddenly become a delegate from London. Just as the Oba takes on a particular position in your imagination. The mission assigned to you in the conversation very sharply illustrates those diverging perspectives that are always there — and it is rather funny in a way, though also quite understandable, because just as people who come to them are turned into ambassadors, people from Nigeria here among us are suddenly seen as ambassadors of a Nigerian perspective. It’s just less common for someone from Europe to be cast in that kind of role.

UO The moment when I met the cameraman, before my meeting with the Oba, I realized that something was happening that also put me in play. During the meeting itself it was interesting for me to relinquish control of the camera. The cameraman filmed what he wanted to record. There are parts in the material he shot that I would never have filmed, and so the question arises whether he filmed what he assumed a European would like to see or whether it’s his view. Though unsolvable, this question is quite central. My presence also triggers something in him and has an effect on the image and its authorship.

BP Did you see the film *they* did? It would be interesting to have this additional perspective and the comparison.

UO No, I haven’t seen it, no. I don’t think they even edited a film; it’s more likely just archival material.

BK How was the camera positioned that produced the footage for your work? Did the cameraman walk around? And what would you have done with the camera, had you been allowed to film?

UO There were many people in the room and it was cramped. The cameraman therefore hardly ever left his position.

In retrospect, I somehow no longer see any possibility for using the camera. In the situation itself it was absolutely clear that I would not have filmed the meeting. I wouldn’t have dared to; even I would have thought it’s too voyeuristic.

BP You wouldn’t have filmed at all?

UO I wouldn’t have filmed it at all and so this work wouldn’t exist.



BP There are many forms of distancing that keep coming into play through voluntarily or involuntarily delegated narrator positions, starting with the voice that keeps saying, “He knew that.” You don’t simply lend your voice to someone else: she talks about you in the third person. Thus, the reference to the subject is always mediated doubly.

BK The narrator actually gets the higher-level position of author, because she talks about *you* and also knows what goes on inside your head. So, in a way, an omniscient narrator?

UO For me it was more a tool to complicate my position. It seemed important to me to speak from my own position — and not from an objective, universal one, while at the same time also shifting and decentralizing that subject position. They’re not simply camera recordings and then I narrate a report from my perspective: at the same time I also decenter myself through the third person.

BK At the end of the film everybody involved leaves the room and then there is a kind of guide who takes the camera around the palace. That’s when we learn that the audience room is really just an ante-chamber of sorts to the palace, as we pass by a doorway and the narrator says, “No outsider gets past here.” This is where it ends, there is no entrance. You’re left standing at the door. Is that how the meeting with the Oba ended?

UO Yes, the film concludes with the observation that the Europeans may have taken everything with them, but the spaces which remain are protected. The bronzes are in fact mostly ritual objects, royal art that was kept in the palace. Most of the population had no access to them, or only at special moments. This makes the theft of the objects and their public display in Western museums all the more brutal. The actual owners of the bronzes have no control over their display now. But even without the artifacts they still have control over the ritual spaces.

BP How do you present *The Visitor* in exhibitions? Because the Benin Project has multiple parts.

UO It is important to me that the individual works, like this film, have a degree of autonomy and can be presented by themselves. But I am also interested in showing works in a constellation relating them to one another, because then different aspects come together. Rather than infusing individual works with everything, with all the issues, all the themes, I try to scan various themes like a network and link them to one another. Very often the work is presented in a larger installation setting where there is this projection, as well as the seven-channel installation *Lost Wax*, which shows the (re-)production of new cultural objects using the traditional technique. They are presented on cube-monitors with the sound drifting between them. And then there are 28 prints of exhibition texts and wall labels describing the works. They range from 1897, when the objects came to Europe,



The Visitor, 2007

to 2007 when I created the work. They are ekphrases that verbalize the bronze plaques. Always tied in very specific ways to the time they were written, they become a kind of historical index of the gaze. In the entire body of work of the Benin Project you never really get to see the objects. At the heart of the work as a whole is the absence of the objects that are, after all, gone. An empty space. And the artifacts are never shown. Any depiction of the objects would also invariably involve exoticization. I was more interested in cataloging or questioning our gaze. How has this gaze changed? The texts are initially very racist and then, for a long time, simply ignorant. Only at the very end do we get to hear local voices, and then suddenly the texts become interesting.



Notes towards a Free Improvisational Cinema

Dialect of hurricanes.
Patois of rains.
Language of storms.
Unfolding of life in a spiral.¹



I am presenting this text as one member of the artist group The Living and the Dead Ensemble. We are: Léonard Jean Baptiste, Mackenson Bijou, Rossi Jacques Casimir, Dieuvela Cherestal, James Desiris, James Fleurissant, Louis Henderson, Cynthia Maignan, Olivier Marboeuf, Mimétik Nèg, and Sophonie Maignan. We first gathered in July 2017 for the *Monsieur Toussaint Sessions* (a workshop that I organized with Olivier Marboeuf at the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince, Haiti), in which we worked on collectively translating the play *Monsieur Toussaint* by the Martiniquan poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant from French to Haitian Creole, and from the 1960s to the present day. As an ensemble we focus on theater, cinema, and poetry. We performed our Haitian Creole version of *Monsieur Toussaint* in the cemetery of Port-au-Prince as part of the Ghetto Biennale 2017. More recently we finished a feature film, *Ouvertures*, which is a documentation of the translation and rehearsal process that evolves into a speculative fiction set in present day Haiti. In many ways it was through *Ouvertures* that the Ensemble came about. Perhaps the main conceptual gesture that the film tries to make is the gradual loss of my authorial position as director towards a co-authored work made with people from Haiti rather than simply about Haiti. This came from an ethical imperative that shifted my filmmaking practice from one in which I was frequently on my own with a camera, observing life from an estranged distance, towards a process that encouraged a certain proximity with life, encouraging the subjects of the film to inform the narrative and how it was told.

Édouard Glissant wrote *Monsieur Toussaint* in 1959, but it didn't appear in print until 1961. This original version of the play was not intended for theatrical production, and so it was first performed as a radio play for France Culture in 1971. Eventually it was redrafted for theater and performed on stage in Paris in October 1977. So, the play went from radio to theater, from recording to live event, and from sound to image. The version that we worked with was the 1977 *version scénique*. The play narrates the last days in the life of Toussaint Louverture, one of the leaders of the Haitian Revolution of 1791–1804,² imprisoned in the Chateau de Joux in the east of France, far away from the revolution that is still unfolding in Haiti all the way across the Atlantic. Napoleon's army arrested Louverture in 1802, and brought him to France, where he was kept in a frozen prison cell and essentially killed through imprisonment. Louverture died on April 7, 1803, from exhaustion, malnutrition, apoplexy, pneumonia, and possibly tuberculosis — so he was very badly treated in prison — and then his bones were chucked into an unmarked grave in the Jura Mountains.

I have been to the Jura many times, specifically to the landscape within which Louverture died, and I always had this feeling that Louverture's bones had fossilized into the landscape that itself is a fossilized tropical ocean.

Editor's note: This text is an edited transcription of the talk given by Louis Henderson on February 25, 2020 at Zurich University of the Arts.

- 1 Frankétienne, *Ready to Burst*, trans. Kaiama L. Glover (New York: Archipelago Books, 2014), 8.
- 2 The Haitian Revolution was an insurrection in which the enslaved people of the French colony of Saint-Domingue rose up against the French plantation owners and colonial government, abolishing slavery and establishing the first free Black state in the Americas.

So when walking in that landscape in the Jura I always had the sensation that I was walking with the remains of this Haitian revolutionary. Through this I developed the idea that the colonial history of France had been inscribed into French territory and landscape in France itself. This history is not always elsewhere, it is not always in the other countries, it is not just in Algeria, Haiti, or Mali, it is also in France, written into the strata that build up the mountains.

In a text called “Du boucan chez Glissant,”³ Olivier Marboeuf argues that the body of Louverture (in the play *Monsieur Toussaint*) can be understood as a kind of landscape. He describes this as *un corps-paysage*, a “landscape-body.” As Louverture’s dying body is in the process of decomposing, ghosts from the history of the Haitian revolution come and re-compose themselves and their stories over his decaying corpse. This is what happens in the play: Louverture is dying in his cell and ghosts from Haitian history come and haunt him and put him to trial. They create a chorus that produce a cacophony, loud enough to awaken the dead. This was how we treated the text of Glissant: as if the text itself was a landscape in decomposition from the 1950s, upon which we thought we could recompose a cacophonous space of many voices and noise.⁴

Furthermore, this idea of decomposition and landscape also relates to how the project of *Ouvertures* began more than seven years ago. In 2013, I went to the French national archives in Saint-Denis and read all of Toussaint Louverture’s letters that he had written whilst imprisoned in the Jura. These letters were handwritten and as such, I believe they contain material traces of Louverture within. They were also in a general state of decay; well-kept and cared for, but, as with all ancient documents, in a state of slow decline. From here, I went to see the landscape in which Louverture had written these letters and found the earth that had fossilized Louverture’s bones. There, I tried to read this colonial history of France written in the stratified limestone of the Jura. Indeed, if stratigraphy means the writing of strata, I was certain I could read what was written into the mountainside. Could the ghost of Louverture be resurrected from the decaying mass of his handwritten letters kept in the archives? Could he be brought back to life from the soil within which his body actually decomposed?

In an interview from 2018, Rossi Jacques Casimir, slammer, actor, and member of The Living and the Dead Ensemble was asked by the writer Rob Sharp, “Do you feel there is a language barrier for most Haitians to their history? What’s the best way of getting around this?”⁵

3 Olivier Marboeuf, “Du boucan chez Glissant,” in *Sonic Acts: Hereafter*, ed. Mirna Belina (Amsterdam: Sonic Acts, 2019).

4 This idea of decomposing revolutionary corpses was something Olivier and I had avidly discussed in Portugal at a seminar in Guimarães in 2015, after I presented a text called *Compost in the Creole Garden: The Archive as Multispecies Assemblage*. In this text I speculated upon the potential of archives as being made up of things that are caught between life and death, in the process of decomposing into compost. I asked if we could understand an archive of slowly deteriorating 16 mm films (that documented the war of independence in Guinea-Bissau) as a composting mass of collective resistance that could create the fertile soil from which future revolutionary propositions might be made. I was referencing a fragment from the film *O Regresso de Amílcar Cabral* by Sana Na N’hada and Flora Gomes, in which they say that the buried remains of Amílcar Cabral “... will fertilise the radicalisation of the revolution.”

Rossi replied: “It’s not a barrier, it’s a zombification because the majority of people living in Haiti are illiterate and the history of the country is written in a language that most people do not speak, the people in the poor neighborhoods and the countryside I mean — which actually represents the majority of the population. The best way to get around this is to make an education system that is more accessible to people’s understanding, our history should also be written in Creole because the population adapts better with Creole, and historical slogans work better in kreyol like *koupe tet, boule kay!* and:

Grenadye alaso!
Sa ki mouri zafè a yo (bis)
Nanpwen manman, napwen papa
Sa ki mouri zafè a yo!⁶

The project speaks of the divisions that exist between French and Creole and this is the reason why we decided to translate the play into Haitian Creole, not in a simple translation, but in a contemporary translation of the theme so that Haitians can understand the play today.”

Glissant remarks in the introduction to his 1971 theatrical version of the play, that he resisted a simple process of creolizing his work, and that he expects the interpreters to bring it into their own languages according to the situation they find themselves in.⁷ We took Glissant at his word, and wanted to put Glissant’s work into motion, as a way to test his claim of how the interpreters should put the work in their own languages and as a way to see how his work could stand up to the realities of life in Haiti today. We understood that this would involve, as Rossi put it at the time, “a total decomposition and recomposition of the original text.”

As such the *Monsieur Toussaint Sessions* workshops at the Centre d’Art were organized in an ad hoc manner, as we were keen to conduct a workshop on Glissant in kind of Glissantian terms: that we could work *in relation* to each other, generating an open-ended, non-reductive, and non-hierarchical relationship between each member of the group. The specific idea of *relation*⁸ that comes from the work of Glissant, is one that is based upon difference rather than the identification of shared values, in which the right to opacity is respected (as a refusal of transparency forced by a certain desire for knowledge about the “Other”). As a mode of working in a city and culture that I was not from, the philosophy of Glissant seemed to offer some interesting insights in terms of methods to experiment with. What I think we hoped to generate was a situation that would allow for a mutual absorption of elements of each other’s culture without having to entirely relinquish one’s own (and vice-versa). The

5 The interview was edited into an article that appeared on the website of *Frieze* magazine. See Rob Sharp, “The Master’s Voice,” *Frieze*, December 5, 2017, www.frieze.com/article/masters-voice, accessed March 25, 2022.

6 “Soldiers attack! Those who die, it’s up to them. No mother, no father. Those who die, it’s up to them.” A famous revolutionary song, attributed to a troop of soldiers killed by the French at the battle of Vertières, November 18, 1803.

7 Édouard Glissant, *Monsieur Toussaint: version scénique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998), 12.

8 Édouard Glissant. *Poétique de la relation* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

important thing was to encourage a form of mutual mutation in which “I can change, by exchanging with the Other, without losing myself or yet distorting myself.”⁹

This also relates to how we treated the text of the play; not to absorb it and to know it entirely but to allow it to mutate (and to mutate us) into something else. We repositioned *Monsieur Toussaint* in relation to the contemporary context of Haiti and then worked at translating its polysemic potential. In fact, each word’s polysemic potential, hence this is why we would speak for an hour about the ten different variations of a Creole translation of one word. Glissant’s text was not at all translated word for word, but rather *echo-translated* into a form alien to the original. This is then a kind of versioning or dubbing (in the musical sense) of the original in which the text is put through the bodies of the Haitian members of the Ensemble and rendered their own, through the use of particular contemporary slang phrasing, through the transformation of French to Haitian Creole. Slang was a very important addition for various members of the group. We were using very contemporary slang, words that had just been invented in the last few months, as a way to highlight the fact that obviously Haitian Creole, as with all languages, is in a constant process of development. There is a Haitian Creole Academy (Akademi Kreyòl Ayisyen) that regulates which words can constitute the language, but they don’t update it with slang. And so Haitian Creole risks becoming somewhat outdated (in so far as it is officially represented through the Academy of Haitian Creole). For the young people in Haiti today this is a problem, especially if you’re working in poetry, literature, and theater. They’re interested in how this Haitian Creole Academy could update their language with things like slang, so for them to create a piece of theater that incorporated contemporary street slang was an important political gesture.

Throughout its different processes of mutation Glissant’s text nevertheless remains fundamentally itself, it exists in relation and not in subjugation to our translation, and in this sense, it becomes, as Glissant might put it, “... a reconstituted echo or spiral retelling”¹⁰ of the original. The original text is echoed back to itself with all the inflections and textures of the landscape and bodies that it is reverberated within and against. And so, much like Echo in the Greek myth, the Ensemble attempts to speak for themselves through the words of someone else: the work of Glissant placed into relation with their own experiences. The collective body as an echo chamber for history, politics, and poetry.

After echo-translating and recomposing the play we decided to spend time together in November and December 2017 to begin rehearsals of the play and producing a public performance for the Ghetto Biennale in Port-au-Prince 2017. We ended up performing the play in the center of the cemetery in downtown Port-au-Prince, principally because the play speaks

9 “Je peux changer, en échangeant avec l’Autre, sans me perdre ni pourtant me dénaturer.” Translated from Édouard Glissant, *La Cohée du lamentein* (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), 25.
10 Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 16.

about ghosts and the dead, and then the cemetery became an important site in the film itself. This was because within Haitian Vodou culture the cemetery is the place of death, where you go when you die of course, but it is also the place where life begins, where you begin a new journey into the afterlife.

During that winter period in Haiti, I would shoot documentations of rehearsals for the play. Sometimes this would entail an approach in which I would document with the camera precisely what was happening as it happened. In other instances, these rehearsals would be set-up and prepared, scripted if you like, and, as with the shooting of fiction, we would do various takes of these rehearsal scenes. One instance of such is a scene between two characters from Haitian history: Jean-Jacques Dessalines, one of the other leaders of the Haitian Revolution, and Granville, who was Toussaint Louverture’s secretary. When initially trying to perform the scene, Rossi and Léo realized that the text had an interesting internal rhythm, and they naturally started to put it into something more along the lines of slam poetry. Then the idea came to do the whole sequence in this style because the scene is an argument between two people that moves back and forth between these characters. Léonard and Rossi decided to stage the scene as a slam battle, alongside the percussion of the drummer Atchatsou. We then thought it would be interesting to film this rehearsal at Pont Rouge, in front of a large painting of Dessalines that commemorates the site where he was assassinated in 1804 on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince.

Whilst working on the play and the film we started to realize that while both Olivier and I were directing different elements, the actors were also deciding how they would interpret the scenes with their bodies, language, and specific translations, for example the slam scene between Dessalines and Granville, and as such it was not easy to define who had authored the work that we were making. The echo that we had made was indeed constituted by multiple voices and there was not one individual that was entirely leading the creation or the narration. It was when we finally presented our Creole version of *Monsieur Toussaint*, that we decided, as a group, to form the Ensemble. Nevertheless, this had been something that Olivier and I had discussed a lot before coming to Haiti: how to make films as workshops, as conversations, collectively and as group work. We had discussed the idea of dissipating the singular voice of an author into a choral form as an ethical movement that informs the aesthetics of a film. I believe that we set out to see how we could work in such a way in Haiti, without the clear intention of creating the Ensemble.

Our project was about ghosts and we were performing it in the cemetery at dusk, the moment between night and day — between the worlds of the living and the dead. And so, from within this space between, within the cemetery, The Living and the Dead Ensemble was born. We decided on *Ensemble* so we could emphasize a shared interest in music and performance, thinking of a jazz or theater ensemble for example, rather than calling ourselves a collective. We certainly approach collective methods of working, but I prefer this word “Ensemble,” as I feel that it rather describes a sense of orchestration that allows adequate space for each solo performer.

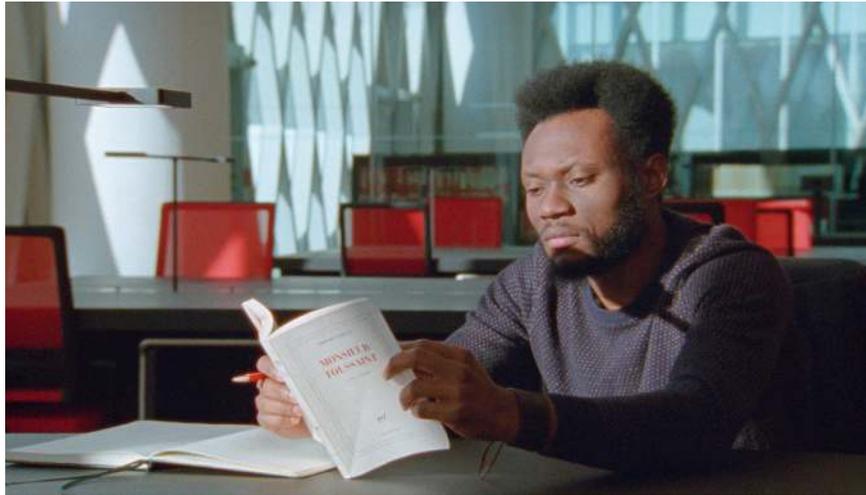
The Ensemble is supposed to be a group space that incorporates different individuals, perhaps containing an ever-changing whole of which the individual parts resist identification. Ensemble in French means *together*. Furthermore, the work we were doing of echoing and spiraling the work of others, of taking words and putting them into the individual's mouth and the Ensemble's body, could be understood as one method of decentering the singular voice of an author. Through the insistence of voicing a choral "We," we started to problematize the very notion of an individual author. Eventually it became clear that through the process of translating and then performing we had actually created this space of us being together, and not the other way round. We formed the Ensemble out of a necessity to find new ways of understanding how we could work together, as people coming from quite different countries and cultures that were nonetheless connected through a violent and colonial history.



Ouvertures, 2019







To return to Glissant, I would like to speak about some of the problems we had with his work, and how we tried to test its limits in relation to Haiti. The main issue we found was the discrepancy between how Glissant describes what fiction in the Caribbean should do and what his own fiction set in the Caribbean actually does. As Kaiama L. Glover remarks in her important essay on Haitian writer Frankétienne, "... Glissant proves far more adept at telling, diegetically, than at showing, mimetically, the veritable drama of self-expression evoked in his fiction."¹¹ It seems that Glissant's fiction didn't quite live up to what his philosophical program set out to do. To give an example, in *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant speaks of the importance of writing "the novel of the I implicated in the We, of the I implicated in the Other, of the We implicated in the We ... I am told that it is impossible to write the novel of the We, that it will always be necessary to provide the incarnation of particular destinies. This is a beautiful risk to take."¹² Yet we felt that in *Monsieur Toussaint*, for example, the play centralizes the figure of Toussaint as a kind of tragic hero who is distinguished from the revolutionary people through his destiny as a leader. In this instance, the notion of a collective We is somewhat taken over by the importance of the individual hero. Furthermore, in his essay "Theatre, Consciousness of the People," Glissant speaks of the importance of creating a form of community theater that could awaken a political and collective consciousness in Martinique; he says: "The life of the Martinican is certainly filled with drama, and the theatre is in the street."¹³ Yet his only play was written and performed for a French audience in France, both on radio and stage.

Indeed, the very beginnings of this project were rooted in a problem that we identified with the play being written in French. We were surprised to find Haitian characters from the eighteenth century, such as the maroon leader Mackandal, speaking a very Glissantian, literary form of French. This certainly did not seem to fit with the political program that Glissant sets up in regard to the dialectic between written and oral languages, the importance of written orality and of languages "in situation."¹⁴ Again, in *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant remarks: "... as a community we have lost the meaning of our own voice ... Would an awakening to orality and the explosion of Creole satisfy the deficiency?"¹⁵ This is indeed an important question, and something that Glissant would work upon for the rest of his life. As such, we found it strange that he had decided not to write *Monsieur Toussaint* in French and Haitian Creole, which would have seemed to suit his interests in Creole for the Caribbean region.

Kaiama L. Glover explores precisely these questions in her work on the Haitian poet, novelist, dramatist, and painter Frankétienne. In her essay mentioned previously, she uses the work of Frankétienne as a way to show how Glissant doesn't actually do with his novels what his philosophy

11 Kaiama L. Glover, "Showing vs. Telling: 'Spiralisme' in the Light of 'Antillanité,'" *Journal of Haitian Studies* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 106.

12 Édouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* quoted in Glover "Showing vs. Telling," 115.

13 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1989), 204.

14 J. Michael Dash, introduction to *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, trans. and ed. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press: 1989), xxi.

15 Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*, 12.

suggests should be done, and she explores how Frankétienne, in his own words, "... wrote the books that Glissant should have written."¹⁶ In fact, Olivier and I met Frankétienne in January 2020 in Haiti, and we filmed a long, extensive interview with him, and he actually said that exact same thing to us. Frankétienne, along with the fellow Haitian writers Jean-Claude Fignolé, and René Philoctète, founded the aesthetic philosophy of *Spiralisme* in 1965, that was committed to discovering an original approach to creative expression for the Haitian artist and individual. They established the spiral form as the primary thematic and formal point of departure for their works of fiction. In his 1965 novel *Mûr à crever* (*Ready to Burst*), Frankétienne writes through the voice of one of the characters, Paulin: "I take the pulse of the spiral and inscribe it in graphs and charts, from the very life of writing. It's a pluridimensionality at the level of words — words functioning as particles of sonic energy in motion."¹⁷ One of the key experiments in writing that Frankétienne tried to develop with his Spiral novels were subtle movements between the voice of the narrator and that of the characters. This results in various shifts in perspective between subjective and objective positions in the space of the pages of his books, confusing the readers' understanding of both the time and space of the story and also of the difference between autobiographical elements and fictional ones. It is perhaps in this sense that *Spiralisme* approaches *pluridimensionality*, as a formal invocation of a collective process of narrative development that Frankétienne wishes to create between the reader, the writer, and the characters.

Yet, before we had even started to think about Frankétienne, the film we gradually unfolded over the coming months discarded the play by Glissant and spiraled into a series of scenes with the actors in the Ensemble crossing over and into their own characters. They started by acting as themselves rehearsing characters from the play and then moved towards acting as themselves playing themselves, in fractured states of identity that are unsure and unfixed, mixed between dreams, nightmares, and waking life. This spiraling together of the characters within themselves and their environments created an echo-effect within the narrative itself, whereby the voices of the actors and the voices of the characters they were playing started to become indissociable.

"To embody Maman Dio and Suzanne Toussaint was an honor for me, because in the history of Haiti women are very under represented. This allowed me to highlight the involvement of women in the fight for freedom and to say to the whole world and to myself that the fight must not stop there," said Cynthia Maignanto to me via message in January 2019.¹⁸ In the same month, I received a message from Mimétik Nèg: "It has been important for me to participate in such a noble project, I say noble, Why? Because this awakened in each of us the afterlife of slavery, and through the incarnation of Mackandal I allowed myself to relive history."¹⁹

16 Frankétienne, quoted in Kaiama L. Glover "Showing vs. Telling," 91.

17 Frankétienne, *Ready to Burst*, 80.

18 Cynthia Maignan is an actor and member of The Living and the Dead Ensemble. She lives in Port-au-Prince.

19 Mimétik Nèg is a slammer, actor, and member of The Living and the Dead Ensemble. He lives in Port-au-Prince.

Eventually we realized that the narrative we were creating for the film was already infused with ideas and aesthetic approaches inherited from the work of Frankétienne. Neither Olivier or I had read much Frankétienne, but of course all of the Haitians were extremely familiar with his work and therefore his presence was very much felt in the forming and configuration of what we decided to tell and do and how we decided to tell and do those things. For example, how Glover describes the characters in the books of Frankétienne:

These beings are ultimately more relational than individual: that is, their value to a given text is primarily a function of their manner of insertion into the narrative collective. Like musical passages in textual symphonies, his characters literally and figuratively bounce off, echo, double, and reflect one another.²⁰

I only read this passage in October 2018, the moment I read Frankétienne's novels for the first time as well. Yet it could almost read as a description of *Ouvertures*, and more precisely what we were trying to shoot in Haiti in August 2018. Glover describes how Frankétienne's characters are echoing each other's words, and this was what we were trying to do with the work of Glissant three years ago. On reading this essay from Glover, alongside the work of Frankétienne, I realized that the attempt at representing a choral voice meant a clear stepping back from authorial control. To allow the narrative voice to, and I quote Glover on Frankétienne again: "stammer onto the page — to repeat, contradict, and affirm itself without predetermined objective."²¹ It is therefore in this manner, I believe, that *Ouvertures* is authored by the Ensemble. Even if I am responsible for making the images, the actors direct me within the shape of the space we work together in. This happens through processes of improvisation, both in terms of what is said and how the body says what it is saying within the particular space it is in. What I decided to try and create as a method was a circle, or perhaps a spiral, that could contain us as a group. I suppose that's almost like a *mise-en-scène*, or just our *scène*: a circled space that moves. Within the space of the spiral each performer, whether acting or filming or recording sound, was free to move and think in any direction in accordance with the movement of each scene. This is a form of free improvisational cinema that is guided and directed by a beat, by a rhythm.

20 Kaiama L. Glover, "Showing vs. Telling," 95.

21 *Ibid.*, 112.

To finish, I will read a poem by Cynthia Maignan, from 2018.

We spin round and round with our misery
We are lost without knowing it
Today everyone wants to beat their wings
A pointless game, and so we cheat
We want to go without knowing where we are going
To stay doesn't offer anything
We are exhausted from treading water
Because all it makes is mud
We are exhausted from chasing dreams without waking
We sow seeds of hope for a better life
We reap corn and we reap grains
So then, we say we're going
Leave? Travel? What difference does it make?
We do not know and so we don't look
We just want to go
Bòdègèt, chanpwèl, bizango, chawa pete; anywhere ...
Even if it's in hell
Since I'm not yet flat on the ground.

List of Works

Shirin Barghnavard, Sepideh Abtahi,
Mina Keshavarz, Sahar Salahshoori,
and Nahid Rezaei with Firouzeh Khosrovani
and Farahnaz Sharifi

Face to Face – Face to Screen, 2018
German with English subtitles
Three channels, HD, color, sound,
12:54 min.

Profession: Documentarist, 2014
Farsi with English subtitles
Single channel, DCP, color, sound,
80:00 min.

Bina Elisabeth Mohn
and Geesche Wartemann

Laura Coppens

Taste of Hope, 2019
French with English subtitles
Single channel, DCP, color,
sound, 70:00 min.

*Wechselspiele im Experimentierfeld
Kindertheater (Interplay in the
experimental field of children's theatre)*,
2009
German
DVD, 8 videos, SD, color, sound,
various durations

Louis Henderson
within *The Living and the Dead Ensemble*
(Léonard Jean Baptiste, Mackenson
Bijou, Rossi Jacques Casimir, Dieuvela
Cherestal, James Desiris, James Fleurissaint,
Louis Henderson, Cynthia Maignan,
Sophonie Maignan, Olivier Marboeuf,
and Mimétik Nèg)

Uriel Orlow

The Visitor, 2007
English
Single channel, SD, color, sound,
15:58 min.

Ouvertures, 2020
Haitian Creole, French with French
and English subtitles
Single channel, DCP, color, sound,
132:00 min.

Anette Rose

*What you lose on the swings you gain
on the roundabouts*, 1996
Video film, Betacam SP, 4:3, color,
sound, 31:00 min.

Heidrun Holzfeind

The 49th Year, 2021
Storyboard, pages 94–105
in the present publication

Telling Tales, 1998
Four-channel video, SVHS, 4:3, color,
sound, 29:00 min. loop

Daniel Kötter and Constanze Fischbeck
(With Rani al Raji, Amira Soleh,
Antoine Moultaqa, Karim Makarem,
Nesrine Khodr, and Maxime Hourani)

16 Traumstücke (16 Dream Fragments),
2001
ZDF – Das kleine Fernsehspiel
Video film, Digibeta, 16:9, color,
sound, 51:00 min.

state-theatre #5 BEIRUT, 2014
Arab, German, English, French,
with German and English subtitles
Single channel, HD, color, sound,
65:00 min.

*Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen,
Modul #1. Teig wirken, in Saaten wälzen
(Module #1. working dough, rolling in
seeds)*, 2006
Two-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 2x 4:53 min. loop

Bina Elisabeth Mohn, Pip Hare,
and Astrid Vogelpohl

*Wordless Language Game 01: Frühe
Kindheit digital (Early Childhood Goes
Digital)*, 2018
German and English
Interactive installation with 178 filmic
fragments, HD, color, sound,
various durations

*Modul #4. entgraten, schleifen,
verputzen – automatisiert
(Module #4. deburring, grinding,
cleaning – automated)*, 2006
One-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 1:15 min. loop

*Modul #6. prägen, stempeln, stanzen,
binden (Module #6. embossing,
stamping, die-cutting, tying)*, 2006
Two-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 2x 4:49 min. loop

Modul #7. kontrollieren und sortieren
(Module #7. controlling and sorting),
2006–2007
Two-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 2x 5:05 min. loop

Modul #8. abteilen, greifen, umstülpen,
klopfen, auskämmen, rütteln,
beschneiden, ringen – automatisiert
(Module #8. dividing, gripping, turning
over, tapping, combing, shaking,
cutting off, bundling – automated),
2007–2008
One-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 2:00 min. loop

Modul #9. ansaugen, auffalten,
einknicken, umklappen, einschieben,
zufalten – automatisiert
(Module #9. suctioning, unfolding,
creasing, turning around, pushing in,
folding up – automated), 2007
One-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 1:12 min. loop

Modul #10. bohren, stopfen,
entnehmen, abscheren – automatisiert
(Module #10. drilling, stuffing, removing,
cutting off – automated), 2006
Two-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 2x 3:17 min. loop

Modul #11. Interview #1
(Module #11. Interview #1), 2007–2008
One-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 5:33 min. loop

Modul #13. Interview #3
(Module #13. Interview #3), 2008
One-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 5:44 min. loop

Modul #15. verputzen, beischleifen,
stanzen, stempeln, ketteln, einziehen,
tauchen, ringen, walzen, eindrehen,
schleifen (Module #15. cleaning, fine
grinding, die-cutting, stamping, linking,
pulling in, dipping, bundling, pressing,
winding, sanding), 2008
Two-channel video, DVCAM, 4:3,
sound, 2x 13:14 min. loop

Modul #20.1 – 20.2 flechten –
automatisiert (Module #20.1 – 20.2
braiding – automated), 2016
Two-channel video, HD, 16:9, sound,
0:49 and 3:45 min. loop

Modul #21. weben – automatisiert
(Module #21. weaving – automated),
2016
One-channel video, HD, 16:9, stereo,
3:08 min. loop

Modul #22. flechten – Maibaumtanz
(Module #22. braiding – maypole
dance), 2016
Slide projection, variable size

Modul #23. stricken – high speed
(Module #23. knitting – high speed),
2016
One-channel video, HD, 16:9, without
sound, black-and-white, 6:12 min. loop

Modul #25. flechten, wirken, weben –
motion capturing (Module #25. plaiting,
warp knitting, weaving – motion
capturing), 2016
Three-channel video, HD, stereo,
3x 2:25 min. loop

Modul #26. flechten – high speed
(Module #26. braiding – high speed),
2016
One-channel video, HD, 16:9, without
sound, black-and-white, 4:37 min. loop

Modul #28. flechten – motion diagram
(Module #28. braiding – motion
diagram), 2016
Floor piece, digital print, 300×300 cm

Modul #29.1 – 29.2 seidenweben –
automatisiert (Module #29.1 – 29.2 silk
weaving – automated), 2017
Two-channel video, HD, 16:9, color,
stereo, 2x 11:03 min. loop

Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen,
Setphoto #2, 2009/2010
Digital print, 90×60 cm

Lena Maria Thüning

Future Me, 2016
German, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish,
Albanian, Macedonian with English
subtitles
Single channel, HD, color, sound,
11:49 min.

How to decide what to do with your life,
2016
German with English subtitles
Two-channel video installation, HD,
color, sound, 31:30 min.
Iron structure, ropes, dimension
variable

How to decide what to do with your life,
2016
German
Performance, two channels, live
stream, 40:00 min.
Iron structure, ropes, dimension
variable

Zheng Mahler

A Season in Shell, 2013–2016
English
Two-channel video installation, HD,
color, sound, 37:51 min.
Red sea abalone calcium carbonate
glazed porcelain dinner set, table,
chairs, dimensions variable

Deep Water, 2017
3D animated anaglyphic video,
VR headset, spatial sound
07:23 min.

Zheng Mahler and Gavan Blau

Debt and the Making of the Khmer
Working Class, 2017
Khmer with English subtitles
360° video, VR format, color,
sound, 10:21 min.

Biographies

Sepideh Abtahi is an independent documentary filmmaker and editor. She holds a BA in Drama from Azad University, Art and Architecture Centre Branch of Tehran (1994–1999) and is a member of IRDFA (The Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association). She has made and edited various documentaries including *Five Pieces on Iranian Dishes* (2011), *The First Door on the Sky* (2008), *Profession: Documentarist* (2014), and *A Church in Bazaar* (1999). She has also worked as an assistant director and editor of several documentaries, feature films, and series, including *Meydane Javanane Sabegh (Formerly Youth Square, 2019, Editor)*, directed by Mina Akbari; *In the Bazaar of Sexes* (2009, Assistant Director), directed by Sudabeh Mortezaei First; and *Silence Between Two Thoughts* (2002, Assistant Director), directed by Babak Payami.

Rani Al Raji is an architect, urban storyteller, and bar entrepreneur working and living in Beirut, Lebanon. He founded Studio Beirut in 2007 (together with a multidisciplinary team) as a platform/urban-lab to question the existence and necessity of public space in the modern, urban, post-civil war Lebanese context.

Shirin Barghnavard is a documentary film director and editor based in Tehran. She graduated from the Department of Screen (Audiovisual Media) at the Central Institute of Technology in Perth (Australia) and holds a bachelor's degree in film directing from Sooreh University in Tehran. Her documentary films combine social issues with specific research on the role of women in society. Her films include *21 Days and Me* (2011), *Profession: Documentarist* (2014), *Scenes from a Divorce* (2015), *Poets of Life* (2017), and *Invisible* (2017). She has edited numerous documentary films, including *Hey Humans* (2016) and *Touran Khanom* (2019) directed by renowned Iranian filmmaker Rakhshan Bani Etemad, as well as Firoozeh Khosrovani's award-winning *Fest of Duty* (2014). She has received fellowships from the Harun Farocki Institute, the Akademie Schloss Solitude, and the Fondation Jan Michalski.

Laura Coppens is a social anthropologist, documentary filmmaker, and curator from Berlin and currently based in Bern, Switzerland. She received her PhD from the University of Zurich's Research Priority Program Asia and Europe in 2014. In the same year, she joined the Institute of Social Anthropology at the University of Bern as a research assistant, teaching ethnographic media, documentary filmmaking, gender and sexuality, as well as alternative economies. Laura has lived and conducted fieldwork in Cuba, Australia, Indonesia, and France. Her PhD film project *Children of Srikandi* (2012) premiered at Berlin International Film Festival and won several awards, including the International Jury Award for Best Documentary at the 2013 Identities Queer Film Festival in Vienna. Apart from teaching and making films, Laura has also worked as the head programmer of the Southeast Asia section as well as the Queer Asia section of Asian

Hot Shots Berlin, a festival for Asian independent film and video art in Berlin. As a film curator, Laura has served on several film festival juries like the Berlinale Teddy Award Jury. The documentary feature *Taste of Hope* (2019) is Laura's debut as a director.

Louis Henderson is a filmmaker and writer who experiments with different ways of working with people to address and question our current global condition defined by racial capitalism and ever-present histories of the European colonial project. Since 2017, Henderson has been working within the artist group The Living and the Dead Ensemble. Based between Haiti, France, and the UK they work collaboratively on theater, poetry, and cinema. Their first feature film *Ouvertures* was awarded a FIPRESCI special mention at the 70th Berlin International Film Festival 2020. Henderson's work has been shown in various international film festivals, art museums, and biennials and is distributed by LUX and Video Data Bank.

Heidrun Holzfeind is an artist and filmmaker based in Berlin. Her films, photographs, and installations address questions about the documentary mode in general, and the social function of architecture and alternative ways of life that renounce consumerism, in particular. Based on extensive research, and realized with poetic charm, her works probe the interrelations between society and identity, between individual histories, and the political narratives of the present. Her works have been exhibited and screened across the world: Secession Vienna, NTU Center for Contemporary Art Singapore, Videonale Bonn, Shanghai Biennale, Kuandu Biennale Taipei, Photofestival Arles, OFF-Biennale Budapest, Steirischer Herbst, Manifesta, Tamayo Museum Mexico City, Badischer Kunstverein, Artists Space New York, Mumok Vienna, Camera Austria Graz, Documentary Fortnight, MoMA New York, Berwick Film & Media Arts Festival, FIFA Montreal, Impakt Festival Utrecht, Transmediale Berlin, and many other venues.

Mina Keshavarz is a documentary filmmaker and producer. She has made several award-winning documentary films on social issues that have premiered in Busan, IDFA, Thessaloniki, Sheffield, Zurich Film Festival, and London Film Festival including *Profession: Documentarist* (2014), *Braving the Waves* (2016), and *The Art of Living in Danger* (2020). She has won several awards including Sheffield Doc/Fest, Busan International Film Festival, and London Documentary Film Festival. Her films have been supported by IDFA Bertha Fund, Hot Docs CrossCurrents, Sorfond, Fritt Ord, and broadcasters (e.g., Arte and ZDF). Mina found her documentary film production company MinDoc Film Production in Iran in 2013, and has since been producing her own films and also those of other filmmakers, including Cheshm Mahi and Amin Behroozadeh's *Fish Eye*, which premiered at Visions du Réel 2020. Mina is alumnus of Berlinale Talents, Hot Docs Emerging Docs Accelerator Lab, Nipkow Film Residency, EsoDoc, Close-Up, and Tribeca Film Institute.

Daniel Kötter is an internationally active filmmaker and music theater director. His works alternate between different media and institutional contexts and combine experimental and documentary film techniques with an interest in the performativity of space. Visual research leads him again and again to the African continent and the Middle East. In 2014–18, he worked with the curator Jochen Becker (metroZones) on the research, exhibition, and film project *Chinafrika. under construction*. His documentary film trilogy *Hashti Tehran* (2017), *Desert View* (2018), and *Rift Finfinnee* (2020) about urban peripheries in Tehran, Cairo, and Addis Ababa amongst others won the special award of the German Short Film Award and the DEFA Award at DOK Leipzig. Daniel Kötter is currently working on a series of spatial performances and 360° documentary films on the landscape and social consequences of extractivism in Germany, West Papua, DR Congo, and Estonia under the title *landscapes and bodies*.

Jürgen Krusche is an artist and urban researcher. He has been a faculty member of the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) since 2001 and of the university's Institute for Contemporary Art Research (IFCAR) since 2011. Both his artistic projects and his research, publishing, and teaching activities are in the field of artistic-ethnographic urban studies, with artistic and ethnographic approaches and methods merging seamlessly. Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" is often the focus of his work, as in his latest book *Die fragmentierte Stadt* (Jovis, 2021). Cross-cultural perspectives on East Asian urban, space, and aesthetic concepts are another area of focus. His projects have taken him, among other places, including Tokyo, Shanghai, Berlin, and Belgrade, to the Ruhr and the Sham Shui Po district of Hong Kong.

Bärbel Küster is Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art at the Institute of Art History at University of Zurich since 2017. Her research focuses on public art, museum and collection histories, and issues of postcolonial art history. Her publications examine the impact of colonial history on multiple modernities. She currently directs a research project on conflicting methods in ethnographic, artistic, and art historical approaches.

Bina Elisabeth Mohn is a cultural anthropologist and founder of *camera ethnography*, a reflexive cinematic approach to shaping processes of perception and knowledge in ethnographic research. She studied cultural anthropology and completed her Dr. phil. in the fields of visual anthropology and sociology of science at University of Hildesheim, published in 2002 (e-book 2016) as the book *Filming Culture. Spielarten des Dokumentierens nach der Repräsentationskrise [Filming Culture. Varieties of Documentation after the Crisis of Representation]*. She produced and published observational research films with a focus on "silent" to "passive" practices in childhood and classroom studies. Since 2016 she implements *camera ethnography* in the context of the collaborative research centre Media of Cooperation (University of Siegen), where she is testing an arranging research style according to Wittgenstein in the sub-project *Early Childhood and Smartphone* (Jutta Wiesemann).

Uriel Orlow's artistic practice is research-based, process-oriented, and multidisciplinary including film, photography, drawing, and sound. He is known for his single-screen film works, lecture performances, and modular, multimedia installations that focus on specific locations and micro-histories and bring different image-regimes and narrative modes into correspondence. His work is concerned with the residues of colonialism, spatial manifestations of memory, blind spots of representation, and forms of haunting. Orlow's award-winning works have appeared internationally in museums (Tate Modern, Kunsthalle Sankt Gallen, Palais de Tokyo), film festivals, and major exhibitions, including Manifesta 12, Palermo (2018), Sharjah Biennial (2017), and the Venice Biennale (2011). Recent monographic publications include *Conversing with Leaves* (Archive Books, 2020), *Soil Affinities* (Shelter Press, 2019), and *Theatrum Botanicum* (Sternberg Press, 2018). www.urielorlow.net

Barbara Preisig is an art historian and art critic whose research focuses on contemporary artistic practices and their social and political contexts. In exploring translocal, transdisciplinary, and nonacademic ways of writing and thinking, she addresses a range of subjects, including artistic research, feminism, institutional studies, and the politics of authorship. She is currently a researcher and lecturer at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) and is co-editor of the magazine *Brand-New-Life*.

Nahid Rezaei is an Iranian documentary filmmaker. She has been working in the field of cinema since high school. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution broke out and universities were closed. She started to work as a teacher in a primary school. Later, in 1983, she entered the University of Seda and Sima and was expelled in 1985 for refusing to obey religious restrictions. She moved to Paris in 1986 to study cinematography at Paris VIII University and returned to Iran in 1991. Since her return, she has been working as a documentary filmmaker and producer and has co-operated with other filmmakers as an assistant and programmer. In 1995, she joined the first association of documentary filmmakers in Iran, which is an independent organization. She was the director of the Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association in 2004. She lives in Tehran.

Anette Rose's artistic approach is conceptual, research based, and transdisciplinary. For her multi-focal observations, she uses diverse filmic recording methods: video, motion-capturing, slow motion, diagrams, photography, and sound. A special feature of her multi-channel installations is the re-synchronization of sequences filmed simultaneously with several cameras. Her encyclopedic work focuses on the transformation from manual to mechanized labor, from verbal to nonverbal language, and from implicit to explicit knowledge. Recently she received funding from the Alexander Tutsek-Stiftung (2021) and the Kulturstiftung des Freistaates Sachsen (2017) as well as grants from the Berlin Senate (2019, 2018) and the Stiftung Kunstfonds (2017). Her work has been shown at the Galerie Cité internationale des arts Paris, Kunsthau Dresden, Edith-Russ-Haus

for Media Art Oldenburg, Haus am Lützowplatz Berlin, MARTa Herford, Nash Gallery Minneapolis, and ZDF-Das kleine Fernsehspiel. Her publications include *Captured Motion* (2017) and *Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen* (Kerber Art, 2011). www.anetterose.de

Sahar Salahshoori began working in cinema as an assistant director in 1999. In 2002, she made her first short documentary film. Between 2004 and 2009, she attended several intensive courses and workshops on documentary filmmaking (including Vision du Réel Film Festival, a professional documentary filmmaking course organized by the Association of Iranian Documentary Filmmakers at the Iranian House of Cinema, and a workshop hosted by the BBC World Service Trust). Her eight films through 2015 were screened and awarded prizes at national and international film festivals. In 2017, she began studying for a Master's in Image and Visual Culture at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. From 2019 to 2020, she was a visual archive research assistant in an European research project. She is a member of IRDFA (The Iranian Documentary Filmmakers Association) and Addoc (Association of Documentary Directors based in France).

Christoph Schenker is Professor ZFH of Philosophy of Art and Contemporary Art at Zurich University of the Arts. Since 2005, he has been head of the Institute for Contemporary Art Research (IFCAR), which is part of ZHdK's Department of Fine Arts. In the MA Fine Arts, he runs seminars and colloquia on practice-based artistic research and mentors students whose research focuses on their art practice. His main research fields are artistic research and contemporary public art (art and the public sphere). He is currently directing a research project dedicated to developing a procedure for the multi-perspective documentation of artistic-technical processes in lithographic print. Techno-ethnographic film plays a central role in the documentation methods being explored in the project.

Lena Maria Thüring is an artist based in Basel and Zurich, and a lecturer at the Institut Kunst in Basel. Using various media (video, sound, photography, performance, and installation), she questions social systems and their underlying constructions. Spoken language is the central medium through which she renders visible the production of history and addresses linguistic articulation, collective and personal memory, social structures, gender, and identity. Her work has been shown in solo exhibitions at Kunsthau Baselland, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Basel, Kunstmuseum PROGR Bern, and Centre Culturel Suisse Paris. Her work has appeared in group exhibitions and screenings at Haus Konstruktiv Zürich, Kunsthalle Basel, Haus der Kulturen Berlin, and Palais de Tokyo in Paris, among others. She has received numerous prizes such as the Swiss Art Award (2008), the Kiefer Hablitzel Foundation Prize (2009, 2011), grants from the City of Zurich (2011, 2016), the Manorkunstpries Basel (2013), the Kunstcredit Basel (2018), an art in architecture project at the Swiss Embassy in Seoul (2018), and the Werkjahr of the City of Zurich (2019). She has also spent artist residencies in Paris (2009) and New York (2010).

Laura von Niederhäusern is an artist-researcher whose work develops narrative methods of inquiry through film and writing. Her essayistic filmmaking explores current forms of governmentality, the role of re-sponsabilization, self-optimization, and internalized imperatives. She contributes audiovisual installations, interventions, and lectures to exhibitions, international conferences, and diverse teaching formats. Laura studied critical theory, cultural studies, and fine arts at HEAD Geneva, where she worked as a research assistant and faculty member of the CCC research-based Master's program (2009–2015). Since 2016, she has been a research associate in the Department of Fine Arts at Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK).

Zheng Mahler is an artist (Royce Ng) and anthropologist (Daisy Bisenieks) duo working together on research intensive, community based, site-specific projects often utilizing digital media, performance, and installation to explore relationships between art and research practice. Drawing from each other's respective backgrounds, they examine the limits as well as the methods and strategies of expanding both their familiar disciplines while experimenting with new interdisciplinary possibilities or cross pollinations, where anthropological approaches are applied to art practice and artistic methodologies are utilized as research exercises in the studies of anthropology. From 2013 to 2016 Zheng Mahler were artist-in-residence at the Johann Jacobs Museum in Zurich, where they produced the exhibitions on the economic relationship between Africa and Asia: *A Season in Shell* (2014) and *Mutual Aid* (2016). In 2015 they were selected to represent Australia at the Pavillion Without Borders for Performa Biennale in New York City. In 2021 they participated in the Shanghai Biennale XIII.

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and Ethnographic Research

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and Jürgen Krusche

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Heidrun Holzfeind, Mina Keshavarz,
Daniel Kötter, Jürgen Krusche,
Bärbel Küster, Bina Elisabeth Mohn,
Laura von Niederhäusern, Uriel Orlow,
Barbara Preisig, Rani al Raji, Nahid
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Christoph Schenker, Amira Solh,
Lena Maria Thüring, and Zheng Mahler

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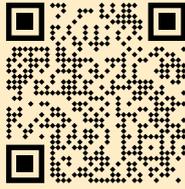
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Inside front cover images

Laura Coppens, *Taste of Hope*, 2019;
Bina Elisabeth Mohn and Geesche Wartemann, *Wechselspiele im Experimentierfeld Kindertheater*, 2009;
Anette Rose, *Enzyklopädie der Handhabungen, Setphoto #2*, 2009;
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Inside back cover images

Heidrun Holzfeind, *The 49th Year*, 2021;
Lena Maria Thüring, *Future Me*, 2016;
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The Living and the Dead Ensemble, *Ouvertures*, 2019.

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Mathis Oesterlen (pp. 54–55)



This book introduces camera-based practices at the intersections of artistic and ethnographic research that critically examine the means of their own production and social embeddedness. In shared practices such as recording in the field, editing in post-production and modes of presentation, the camera is involved as an agent rather than an innocent device. How does the camera grapple with the invisible and how does it reveal what the camerawoman is unable to see? How do films, videos and photographs provide access to vulnerable knowledges and what presentation formats can extend the linearity of narration? Taking account of their own situatedness and the limits of representation, many of this book's contributors attempt to speak with — rather than about — the other. These negotiations appearing in the featured projects open up a shared field of artistic and ethnographic inquiry, whose potential — for experiments and reflections — is far from exhausted.

Contributions by

Sepideh Abtahi, Shirin Barghnavard, Laura Coppens, Louis Henderson, Heidrun Holzfeind, Mina Keshavarz, Daniel Kötter, Jürgen Krusche, Bärbel Küster, Bina Elisabeth Mohn, Laura von Niederhäusern, Uriel Orlow, Barbara Preisig, Rani al Raji, Nahid Rezaei, Anette Rose, Sahar Salahshoori, Christoph Schenker, Amira Solh, Lena Maria Thüring, and Zheng Mahler



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