

SHOOT & THINK

Eva Leitolf, Giulia Cordin (eds.)

Negotiating Images

Volume 1

SHOOT & THINK

Eva Leitolf, Giulia Cordin (eds.)

Contents

No Image Is an Island, Nor Is Any Teacher Negotiating Images	Eva Leitolf Studio Image and Salvatore Vitale in conversation	07 09
Democracy in Distress? Manufacturing Majorities Through New Forms of Propaganda – Summer 2021		
Propaganda (Art) Struggle	Jonas Staal	20
Edel Rodríguez: Take the Risk	Interview by Bella Spratley	28
Please Return To Your Screens	Christina Vieira-Barry	30
Convergent Lines	Laora Kula	36
Le bambole	Sophie Krause	44
Rossella Biscotti	Interview by Barbara Casavecchia	54
Worth a 1000 Words? Image, Text and the Politics of Communication – Winter 2020/21		
Students in Conversation	Chiara Duchi, Luisa Pisetta, Matteo Zoccolo, a waiter	63
Meet Me At the Laundrette	Katharina Theresa Mayr	68
Wendeltreppen	Elio Pfeifauf	76
Immersed in Images	Nicola Kuhn	83
An Aesthetic of Absence: Critical Counter-narratives of Journalistic Story-telling in Eva Leitolf's Photography	Jana J. Haeckel	85
The End of the Global World? Visual (Counter-)Narratives of Territory and Identity – Summer 2020		
Salvatore Vitale: How to Secure a Country Through the Eye: The Aesthetics of Control	Max Houghton Michelangelo Boldrin	93 96
Illegalizing Crowds: The Visual Representation of People Flows in the (Post-)Schengen Era	Daniele Salerno	104
Our Uniqueness	Marco Enrico Giacomelli	110
Candy Oscuro: Apocalypse & Genesis	Luca Piscopo	112

ELIZA & Frankenstein

Techtopian Image Narratives – Winter 2019/20 119

New Photography: Discipula	Interview by Sara Benaglia and Mauro Zanchi	121
Shinseungback Kimyonghun	Interview by Rachel O'Dwyer	126
NONA	Mark Markin	130
VS	Giacomo Turra	136
FANTasia – Shared Lands	Fabian Mosele	144
What Is There	Bernhart Schwenk and Miro Craemer in conversation with Eva Leitolf	151

Violent Images – Summer 2019 155

Everyone in His Place?	Catherine David on Lukas Einsele	157
La guerra in testa	Chiara Cortellini	160
The Last Picture – Photography and Death	Felix Hoffmann interviewed by Brad Feuerhelm	168
shared space	Irene Rainer	174
Incidents and Situations from Common Life	Elisa Faletti	182
Stories from the Everyday Out-of-Field	Kathrin Meyer on Jana Müller	192
Almost a Love Letter	Josefina Sundblad	196

Fake for Real

Image Narratives and Strategies of Fake – Winter 2017/18 199

The Political Materiality of the Diorama	Noémie Étienne	201
Photography and Reality	Christina Leber	205
The Screaming Image II	Maximilian Pellizzari	208
Immagini di repertorio	Sophia Rabbiosi	214
Il tempo per pensare	Adriana Ghimp	222
The Vertigo of the New	Giulia Cordin	230

Artists and authors	233
Semester overview	236
Copyright and image credits	238

SHOOT & THINK Negotiating Images

Studio Image

No Image Is an Island, Nor Is Any Teacher

Eva Leitolf

The infamous Cal Arts Post-Studio Art Class set no assignments, didn't care about grades, ignored the canon and operated without graduation requirements.¹ "In the midst of the social club, people would bring their works".² There were "as many curricula as students". Besides its interdisciplinarity, the most radical aspect of the Post-Studio Class was probably to understand art-making as an activity that might happen anywhere (especially outside the studio).

Nearly fifty years later, in 2017, when I joined the Studio Image in the new Art Major at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, I was – like most of my European academic colleagues – confronted with a structure based on ECTS points. That required me to define a detailed curriculum and write a syllabus, all within a strongly hierarchical academic system. At the same time, the setup of the four studios of the Art Major was not like the art classes I knew during my own student days. There were no master classes of the kind still found at traditional German art academies. So no "Leitolf class". Instead a team of three teachers who spend an entire semester with a group of around twelve students.

We teachers stumbled into this first semester of the new major together with the first cohort of students. We got to know each other as the semester progressed, continuously reorganising and reinventing our practices. The potential of this special structure could only be guessed at back then. We named the semester *Fake for Real*. It was exciting and exhausting for everyone involved (probably at different times) as well as unsettling and (hopefully) exhilarating: the teachers experimented, as did the students, developing new ideas, new works and new forms of mutual learning.

¹ Initiated and run by John Baldessari at California Institute of the Arts from 1970–1988, later by Michael Asher and Mitchell Syrop.

² From oral history interviews with thirteen artists who trained at CalArts, in the exhibition *Wo Kunst geschehen kann: Die frühen Jahre des CalArts*, Kestner Gesellschaft, 2019.

Our experiences during the first semester gave us an inkling of what Studio Image could be: a space with minimal hierarchies where images can be negotiated, where media, materials and approaches can be tried out without fear of failure, where the focus is on individual processes rather than striving to make students imitate their teacher's style.

Our first excursion took us to the *Farewell Photography* exhibition.³ A section entitled *No Image Is an Island* investigated how sharing images changes their character and our relationship to them. The implications of social media, and of images proliferating at the touch of a button were central to Studio Image from the very beginning.

The ways photographic images are produced, distributed and utilised increasingly influence social and political discourses. Images affect how people see themselves, how they behave, what they buy. They are indexed on an enormous scale to train artificial intelligence systems. They play a key role in authoritarian regimes, and increasingly also in democratic societies. They are used for surveillance and control. They assist in manufacturing political majorities that can destabilise democratic societies (as we have seen with Brexit and in Trump's America).

Every semester we – the graphic designer Giulia Cordin, the media theorist German Duarte and I as an artist – reinvent Studio Image as a space where we and our students can address issues that concern us all. Our discussions led us to our second semester, *Violent Images*, which dealt with the representation of violence and the violent potential of images themselves. Other semesters followed: *ELIZA & Frankenstein*, *The End of the Global World?*, *More Than a 1000 Words?* and *Democracy in Distress?* We present some of the outcomes in this publication.

By the 1990s, when I went to CalArts, John Baldessari was no longer teaching the

³ *Biennale für aktuelle Photographie* in Mannheim, Ludwigshafen and Heidelberg, 2017.

Post-Studio Art Class. But the exchange he had initiated with the world outside the studio was still very much alive. The highlight of the week was Wednesday evening when international visiting artists presented their work. Meeting them was just as enriching for me as the seminars with Allan Sekula or Kaucyila Brook.

That concept resurfaces in Studio Image, where guests from a wide range of fields play a vital role. Edel Rodriguez, for example, told us how he makes his covers, which he designed for *Time Magazine*, available to anti-Trump protesters; Shinseungback Kimyonghun discussed how image recognition software can be tricked; Jana Müller confronted us with “little episodes of gruesomeness” in her studio in Berlin; and Rossella Biscotti, as a guest critic, dissected the students’ images and concepts. All of them taught us that looking at images means participating in, creating new thought processes.

Through experiencing different ways of talking about work, we learned how to think about it. We learned that listening to a multitude of often very different and sometimes opposing voices can help us shape our own positions and practices. By observing closely rather than merely reacting we can transcend our own limits. We might even develop counterprocesses and envision alternatives to positions we believe to be certain. In addition to images and texts from student projects, this book therefore also includes materials from our guests.

For Baldessari “the space of the arts was the last bastion of true democracy”. And he demanded his students “make no more boring art”.⁴

I feel very inspired by our experiences working with these young artists and hope to share with you a little of my enthusiasm.

⁴ “Remembering Artist and CalArts Faculty Member John Baldessari”, CalArts website, 6 January 2020.

Negotiating Images

Studio Image and Salvatore Vitale in conversation

Eva Leitolf

It’s nice to reconnect, Salvatore! We already had you as our guest at Studio Image to discuss your works with our students. We felt we shared many things in common, both in terms of practice and content, so we immediately thought of you for this conversation. It is going to be part of our publication *Shoot & Think*, which is on the one hand conceived as a platform for the student projects developed at Studio Image over the last five years. On the other hand, this publication encourages us – as Studio Image – to reflect on our teaching practice and engage in a wider discussion about what it means to negotiate images today within an academic institution. It’s wonderful that we can start this conversation with you, since you are also both an artist and a teacher at a rather new study programme.

German Duarte

I am curious: *Post-Photography*, the magazine of the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts to which you contributed,¹ seems to deal less with the overused notion of the end of photography and more with contexts and conditions relating to the production of meaning after the end of traditional concepts of image-making. I would be very interested to hear how you introduce this discourse and how present the notion of the post-photographic age is in your teaching.

Salvatore Vitale

Well, it’s important to say that the title *Post-Photography* was deliberately slightly provocative, in the sense that there are many discourses claiming that we are already beyond post-photography, we are in the post-post-post era of photography, right? Our intent was to focus on contexts and understanding. How are images used to create narratives? What are the processes that change photography to make it an intermediate product, a starting point in a moment of transition. How can images be generated, sampled and recontextualised to help construct complex narratives. As storytellers, what do we need to build a story, making use of everything that is out there?

EL Almost anyone – and now anything – can produce images. AI vision is generating new ways of producing and looking at images. Having been greatly influenced by Allan Sekula’s reflections on the politics of representation, questions concerning the political and social contextualisation of images (as well as their production and distribution) play a huge role in my teaching. When you are talking about methods of storytelling, how do you support students to realise those stories?

¹ *Post-Photography, Magazin der Hochschule Luzern Design & Kunst*, no 10 (2021), edited by Wolfgang Brückle.

SV “Camera Arts” is very much based on the idea of post-photographic media.² I teach Transmedia Storytelling. The ability to tell stories by drawing on multiple media, by splitting the story into different media and making the ends meet again, this complexity in the way we tell stories naturally requires the students to make use of different approaches to images. The output no longer happens within an exhibition in a white cube, but can be hosted by a YouTube channel or an Instagram account or a Twitch live stream.

From the very beginning our students are taught to do research, to make connections between their practice and what happens outside university. How can they contribute to discussions by building a position? We have students who work mainly with traditional photography, but we have many who use any sort of technical apparatus – CGI, AI, any kind of process that generates visuals. How do you work with your students in Studio Image?

EL We offer a rather open discursive framework as a team, as well as through our invited guests and field trips, through readings and a film programme, and we invite students to contribute and develop their personal practice. In “ELIZA & Frankenstein” for instance we were researching AI and operational images.³ In other semesters we explored “Violent Images” or worked with new forms of propaganda in “Democracy in Distress?”. More mature students sometimes join the Studio with urgent questions that might not be related to our semester theme. We are not only very open to wherever they take us, but aim to support them in developing their own practice with their own quality criteria. How do you work practically with your students?

SV I invite them to develop a common theme that they would like to work with over the year. All of them need to eventually agree on a shared topic that seems interesting to all of them. We had “Money” for instance, we had “Food”. Lately we worked with the “Narrative of the Anthropocene” and it was very surprising, because almost all of them developed projects that were reflecting more on communities, rather than, for instance, climate change. Since we are talking about a BA course, the students need tools to perform research. My role is very much about guiding them and pushing them outside their comfort zone. So, if you are doing a project on Twitch, why don’t you use all the features Twitch offers? You want to work with data, why don’t you experiment with data visualisation? Of course, there are years when there is not so much left of photography. But I think this is a trend we are seeing in many academies, photography classes, all around the world. I also lecture in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and I see more and more students working with CGI, working with video, as if photography is not enough anymore. And to me, this is an interesting question. Is photography enough? And to paraphrase Joanna Zylińska: Does photography have a future?

EL It seems that students do not care about the future of a certain medium but are happy to use and combine any medium. The ongoing discussion around the future of photography seems to me to be related to certain traditional photographic practices and discourses. The students themselves are already more advanced in their approach. The role of the fixed single shot is minor compared to practices of contextualisation. Although the roots of my own artistic practice are in documentary photography, from the mid-90s I became increasingly dissatisfied with the inability of the photographic

image to deal with complex issues. At CalArts I was introduced to the works and thoughts of Martha Rosler, Abigail Solomon-Godeau and others who were critically questioning photographic practices, especially documentary photography. One of my early solutions was to include more and more text, to question the narrative of the single image and make text an equal element, an equal medium.

Giulia Cordin

We encourage students to explore and combine different formats: installations, photos, videos, performances. Their experiments are eventually reflected in a real or virtual space as well as in publications, from artist’s books to websites and posters. Photography is critically interrogated and returned to in different ways.

SV I come from documentary photography too, but I make a lot of use of fiction. The intersection between fact and fiction can engender a new understanding of the documentary. There are several artists working in this direction right now, like Max Pinkers with his speculative documentary, or Lisa Barnard. When we look at cinema this practice has been around for a long time. I have been reading this amazing book that just came out: *Cinema Futuro* by Simone Arcagni. He’s giving this historical overview of expanded cinema, and while I was reading it I couldn’t help comparing it to photography. How do you interpret this tendency of young practitioners to go more intermediate, to offer a different type of experience in the way you get to the content? Why do you think that more and more photography students are working with video for instance?

GD Our discussion brings me straight back to questions from my post-student days. I was trained in analogue film and graduated from a traditional film school. The year after my graduation that technology started to disappear. This experience made me very interested in the question of post-photographic technology, of the so-called “post-photographic era”. That is why I was interested in telematic art. As a result of this technological trend there is no longer a direct relationship between the object and its representation, which had been the essence of the photo-chemical process. Then I dealt with video, and logically with digital works and phenomena. And these experiences influence my understanding of why students might prefer moving images to still photography or to any type of single image. Indeed, the single fixed image has disappeared along with the technology that allowed us to create this fixed relationship with the represented object. In my opinion, the process of remediation involved in digital media represents a cognitive process and not just a media transformation on the level of generating content. In my teaching, I discuss the transition to digital coding and I find fascinating when the students notice that we are actually talking about an anthropological change, a cognitive change, and not just about a new way of dealing with a technology for producing images. In fact, as I discuss with them, if we respect the word etymologically, we are not talking about images in the strict sense because they are no longer any form of shadow from an object. Visuals can be digital emanations that have no reference in the real world. I am convinced that the difficulties of developing complex narratives with a fixed

² Bachelor of Visual Communication – Camera Arts: Transmedia Storytelling, Post-Photography, Design and Society, Lucerne School of Art and Design.

³ “Operational images” is a term introduced by Harun Farocki to describe images that are produced for and by machines. The function of this type of images is not to represent an object, but to facilitate (logistical) operations.

image stem from this cognitive “mutation”. The single fixed image is not part of the cognitive process of this generation.

EL If we are thinking about transmedia being mainly associated with commercial and political contexts, it cannot be only about teaching students the tools. How can a transmedia practice become a critical, political and socially engaged art practice? Research, critical questioning and discussing as a group play a big role within our Studio. Yet confrontation and intense exchange with protagonists outside the university remain crucial: Felix Hoffmann introduced us to his curatorial decisions within the exhibition *The Last Image* at C/O Berlin, Jonas Staal taught us how to initiate a collective lawsuit against Facebook, and we are discussing with alumni how listening is connected to storytelling. I think it is important to give students enough space to experiment and fail. In the end it is about allowing them to develop their own criteria for quality as well as a personal thread throughout their projects. A specific visual language is rarely sufficient these days. The connecting element could consist in preferences for certain questions, methods or materials.

SV This is what I try to transmit to my students: You come up with an idea, you have an intuition, then you explore it, you research it. And then you find your position. And then you explore the best way to go through with it, which can be a compelling photography project made of still images, or it can be something different that lives on a different platform, different channels, different media. For me, the most important thing is to support them to reflect on what they really want to say. What is that position? And finding a position is always a political act.

GC This is a very important point: part of our job is to overcome the fascination with certain media, or the lack of knowledge about possible alternatives, to encourage experimentation and a critical expanded practice.

EL We are often confronted with very young students who come straight from high school, an institution that unfortunately often still works in the simple categories of success or failure. We offer the Studio as a safe space to discover a sense of inner urgency for what they are doing. For some of them this process is quite demanding. It’s about developing confidence and trusting their very own (artistic) processes.

GC With some of the students we establish long-term relationships. We keep in touch and are curious about how they continue to pursue their practice. Sometimes projects that started during Studio Image are taken further for the thesis. We invite alumni to talk to new students about their work. These are important moments for everyone: On the one hand you give value to what has been achieved over time and on the other hand there is a direct sharing of knowledge between students.

EL It is a mutual learning situation, for us too: If we didn’t have the chance to grow ourselves, how boring

would teaching be? A large part of my teaching consists of encouraging students to look closely at visual material, including their own production. In schools, we have an incredible lack of training in analysing images and understanding how they change in different contexts. I always take away a lot myself from this shared practice of close observation. The discussions that follow are often quite surprising.

GC It is interesting to understand how much of our practice goes into teaching and vice versa. How, to some extent, teaching is part of our own practice. It happens all the time that things I encounter in my work enter into my discussions with students, as well as questions and discussions that arise in the classroom and need to be expanded and explored through my practice and research work. Above all, the work on publications has led me to write and work on the functioning of books. I mean apart from the content, how do they convey information that may be (apparently) unrelated to the text. I think in different ways this happens to all of us.

SV During one of the semesters we worked on a project about money. Together we were exploring so many different aspects concerning money and we were engaged in a big research effort. In the end the project became basically all about data – big data – as a new form of currency. And I learned so much from this project, working with the students. They created a very complex app and this way they created an opportunity for me to understand aspects of post-capitalist societies. I had to do a lot of research myself to become a productive interlocutor.

EL When I trained, genre distinctions were still regarded as crucial. The artist working with photography, the documentary photographer, the photojournalistic, the advertising photographer and so on. What I enjoy very much now is to be confronted with students who have no interest at all in those traditional classifications, which simply play no role in their work. It’s not only the technological aspects that can be liberating, but also that we are not stuck in those categories anymore. They really aren’t relevant any more.

SV It’s basically just market logic.

EL It was. There is no longer a market for documentary photography or photojournalism ...

SV If you want to be extreme, yeah, there is no market. And yes, categories are becoming more and more blurred. Fashion photographers doing documentary projects in a very exciting way.

EL These categories don’t seem to be helpful in teaching. For my lectures I draw examples from very many different sources. If you are talking about “Violent Images” for example, you can discuss crucial issues concerning the pain of others, as raised by Susan Sontag – from historical photographs like Roger Fenton’s “Valley of the Shadow of Death” from the Crimean War to Steven Meisel’s photo shoot “Make Love Not War” for Italian Vogue in 2009. It is about developing an expanded, critical gaze to interrogate changing contexts.

SV There are still programmes that make a distinction between fiction and documentary and students have to pick where to study fiction and where to study documentary. So, it's not over yet. Nevertheless, I still believe that it's very important to know the history of the medium. And I find it such a pity that in many academies history of photography – or even better, media history – is not even a course anymore. This generates a lot of problems, because you really need to understand history in order to formulate a certain type of understanding of the present, but also to frame possible futures. And I would like to speak more about the history of media rather than just photographs.

GD I completely agree with you, because there seems to be a prevailing understanding that technology is just digital technology, is just digital devices, and as we know technology is anything related to humankind. I start every semester by highlighting the complexity of processes within society which are predominantly technological processes. I think we agree that the point of teaching history is not to memorise the exact date that Niépce took his first picture but to try to understand the complex socio-economical context that generated that technology. We need to understand that all these technologies and social developments deeply transform humankind, and by ignoring history we just erase the acknowledgement of complexity and difference.

EL I am suspicious of the term “History of Photography”, especially as an educational subject. It is often still taught as a succession of “pioneering photographers”, more or less renowned, almost always male, almost always white. When I started my MFA I was told that the history of photography class I had completed in Essen would not count at CalArts. So, reluctantly at first, I had to enrol in Allan Sekula's course. He taught a critical understanding of history of photography, and the way he connected contemporary and historical photographic practices with social and political discourses was mind-blowing. For my own teaching, I rummage through the history of photographic production to bring practices and theories together very differently each semester. My presentations are never the same and I see my input as part of an ongoing negotiation of images.

SV Media history can give the students some tools for understanding quality. I see how many students get completely lost in the abundance of inputs. Maybe they have some Instagram photographers as their main point of reference, but there might be no quality. You might like or dislike the work of Kudelka or Diane Arbus, but I think it's important to know their work before you reference photographers on Instagram.

EL We might have slightly different ideas about how to establish quality criteria. It is important to me that students experience their work process as an alternation between intuitive production and a lot of thinking. I love how they get involved in a very immediate, fluid work process and then bring their results back to the table or the screen or wherever it happens. In class we then take a critical look at their production together, looking for the questions that arise from it. Although I confront the students with a lot of historical and contemporary works and practices, I avoid comparisons.

The images I talk about with the students often come from completely different times and contexts. A student's Insta reference deserves my equal attention. I always want to understand how certain images work in particular social, political and cultural contexts. How they are produced, distributed, used and often enough instrumentalised.

SV Talking about history of photography and media: What is the structure of the theory classes in your programme?

EL It might be helpful to understand the structure of our Studio. The three of us develop the framework for the semesters together. The student's experience is not always clearly divided into practical and theoretical parts. This setup works very differently from a structure that you find within a traditional German academy for example. We have no “master classes” complemented by theory courses.

GD Our three modules – Photo/Video, Visual Communication and Media Theory – work at the same level. My background is in film editing, so I introduce the students to some theoretical notions, like montage theories, but always with the aim to connect those with their projects. As Eva said, we prepare the semester together. I don't arrive with a set of theories for the semester topic, but we build the semester framework together, right from the beginning. That's why I feel that I'm part of the practice of the Studio and the practice of the students. Of course, we have, and always need, some recurring subjects, but it's more about building a shared terminology. McLuhan is a strong point of reference to start developing a common terminology with students for example.

GC In my case, too, I offer practical tools that tie back to the questions that arise in the main module and the theory module. Not all projects follow the same process, some start from a practical stimulus, others from a theoretical suggestion, but what is always inspiring is to work with each student to develop the most coherent way to give practical form to their thoughts. How does it work in your case?

SV History of photography and media theory are very important. Students understand that first of all, there are very few things you can really invent. Our job is more about adding rather than starting from scratch. But you need to know what has been done to be able to add.

EL And to re-combine, re-do, re-think ...

GD This brings us back to the idea that there is no difference between fiction and documentary. Both documentary and fictional narratives are just snapshots of very complex moments in a very complex, always social context. It's important for me to discuss these narratives with the students as very particular moments of a larger complexity. I introduce them to the theories and works of Peter Watkins, who is an important figure for analysing and understanding

that there is not a well-defined division between documentary and fictional film, if there is any at all. All are just pictures – fictionalised realities of very complex social constructions – that deal with reality.

EL How does this approach change when we talk about the media handling of Trump, the pandemic or the climate crisis? Do recent experiences such as science denial and the proclamation of “alternative facts” affect this discussion? It seems we are just beginning to grasp what that might mean for the future of democratic societies.

SV We have touched on so many topics that are relevant for my teaching and my practice. There is Écal, The Hague, and then you have Dusseldorf academy, Lucerne and now Bozen. It’s exciting to discuss teaching images.

EL For us, as part of a young art major, networking is essential. I’m very glad that we had the chance to continue the conversation that began when you came and discussed your work with our students.

The conversation took place in September 2021.

Democracy in Distress? Manufacturing Majorities Through New Forms of Propaganda

“In our age there is no such thing as ‘keeping out of politics.’”¹ In *The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda*, George Orwell argues that all art is political. The “golden afternoon of the capitalist age” between 1890 and 1930, when “almost every European ... lived in the tacit belief that civilisation would last forever” was over. Now, amidst the Second World War and the threat of fascism, a mere aesthetic interest in writing as an art form was unacceptable. This new political period, where “literature, even poetry, was mixed up with pamphleteering, did a great service to literary criticism, because it destroyed the illusion



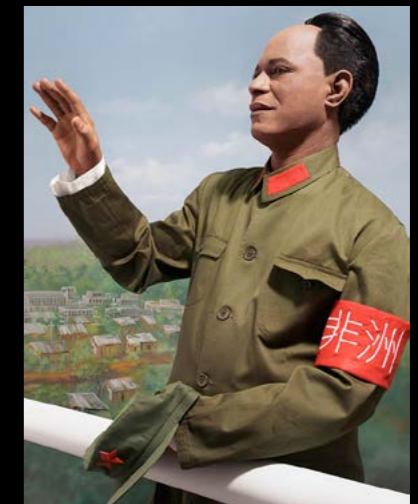
Heartfield / 1928

of pure aestheticism”. He argues “that propaganda in some form or other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning and a purpose – a political, social and religious

¹ George Orwell, *All Art Is Propaganda: Critical Essays*, compiled by George Packer (2009), 282.

purpose – that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs”. These experiences, he said, “debunked art for art’s sake”.

Samuel Fosso / Self-Portrait as Mao Zedong / 2013



The Soviet Union in the 1930s supplies prominent historical examples of totalitarian propaganda in photography. One image originally showed Nikolai Yezhov, then head of the Soviet secret police, smiling beside Joseph Stalin on the Moskva-Volga Canal. Yezhov fell out of favour a few years later and was executed in 1940. To ensure he was forgotten, he was removed from the photo by analogue retouching.

Contemporary propaganda is no longer limited to the classical analogue channels: print, radio, television. Opinions are manufactured in seconds via personalised tweets and social media posts. Texts and images are published, disseminated and liked millions of times by highly organised interest groups, political think tanks and millions of individuals (whether Trump supporters, climate activists

or vaccine opponents). Twitter trends are picked up – with a slight delay – by traditional media, which often no longer have the resources to check the veracity of the message.

Pepe the Frog / Hong Kong / 2019



For *Democracy in Distress? Manufacturing Majorities through New Forms of Propaganda*, Studio Image invited students to explore the relationships between images, opinions, interpretations and authority. We examined propaganda methods such as fearmongering, oversimplification and falsification. These techniques stand in contrast to pluralistic discussions, which are ideally shaped and challenged by experiences, observations and evaluations in the context of a rational, fact-based discourse.

Zuckerberg / congressional hearing / 2018



Referencing local and national issues, we explored how artistic processes can initiate, undermine and transform social, political and media discourses. One central question was how images are politicised and instrumentalised through their dissemination and contextualisation. How does our contemporary, image-heavy digital communication affect the formation of public opinion? Does today's

propaganda still require (state) organisation? We examined how artists play with (counter-) propaganda to confront us with our own susceptibility. Above all, we asked how we as artists can produce images that counter propaganda narratives. What does Orwell's statement "All Art Is Propaganda" mean today?

Pepe the Frog / 9GAG / 2017



In his text "Propaganda (Art) Struggle" our guest Jonas Staal states that: "Various performances of power each aim to construct reality according to their interests." He therefore suggests using the term propaganda in the plural. Staal develops Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman's elite propaganda model into a concept of "emancipatory propaganda" based on democratisation, grassroots mobilisation, public knowledge, transparency and collectivity.

The designer and artist Edel Rodríguez, who moved as a child from communist Cuba to the capitalist United States, told us about his growing interest in people-to-people communication. He hands out his stencil paintings at street protests. Initially produced for magazines like *Time* and *Der Spiegel*, activists repurpose Rodríguez's motifs in contexts as disparate as fingernail art.

Christina Vieira-Barry examines the manipulative qualities of communication during the pandemic. Her video *Please Return To Your Screens*, shows her young protagonist making his "32nd attempt to escape Lock-down". He hurries through empty streets, carefully avoiding police patrols, passing a poster demanding "Please Return To Your Screens", and finally ending up in a dystopian trap with no apparent way out. The video is conceived as a "critical commentary on the censorship of reality through lockdown".

Laora Kula explores personal migration histories in her video *Convergent Lines*. Her father and his brother both migrated from Albania to Italy, though at different times and under different circumstances. Kula herself moved to Italy as a child, and felt so well

received that she doesn't "even recall that very first day in the country". She is well aware of her good fortune: "Many wish they could forget about their first day."

Sophie Krause's video work *Le bambole* addresses the male gaze² of the film industry as an example of patriarchal propaganda. Using the format of an audition for a confession scene, Krause manages to connect her very personal reflections with the experiences of so many women. Her work raises important questions concerning the extent to which

² For more on the male gaze, see "Ways of Seeing" (1972), a four-part BBC television series written by John Berger.

women internalise the male gaze and how they can regain control.

In an interview with *Klat* magazine Rossella Biscotti – who joined us online to discuss this semester's projects as our guest critic – reflects on the propagandistic potential of moving images. Her work *La cinematografia è l'arma più forte* (2003–2007) takes up the slogan from Mussolini's speech at the opening of the Cinecittà film studio in 1937. Biscotti's works integrate documents, films and photographs to "explore the gap between history and its interpretation, between experience and its archiving".

Propaganda (Art) Struggle

Jonas Staal

Our reality is defined, in part, by a propaganda struggle. “Propaganda” here should not be understood as a singular term, since this propaganda struggle results from various competing propagandas in the plural. Various performances of power each aim to construct reality according to their interests, resulting in overlapping claims that shape the arena of the contemporary.¹ What visual forms are taken by these manifold propagandas and the realities they aim to create? What kind of artistic morphologies and cultural narratives does the propaganda (art) struggle bring about?

Digital study with stills from Bannon’s Generation Zero (2010). Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective, Study (2018).



1. A Specter Haunting Europe (and the World)

In late July 2018, Steve Bannon—former campaign manager and advisor to Donald Trump—announced the creation of a new Brussels-based foundation that will aim to become a right-wing “alternative” to George Soros’s Open Society Foundation.² The new foundation, which Bannon has ominously titled “The Movement,” will offer polling, messaging, and data-based targeting services to the ultranationalist and alt-right parties and platforms that are trying to dismantle the European Union from within: from

Geert Wilders’s Freedom Party in the Netherlands and Marine Le Pen’s National Rally (formerly National Front) in France, to The League in Italy and Alternative for Germany. Once again, a specter is haunting Europe—but this time, it’s the specter of what DiEM25 has termed the “Nationalist International.”³

Bannon’s new organization can tell us a lot about the meaning of “propaganda” today. Essentially, propaganda can be defined as a performance of power, meaning that propaganda aims to enact infrastructures—political, economic, mass-media, and military—that shape reality according to a specific set of interests. Thus propaganda does not just aim to send a message; it aims to construct reality as such. This is what Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, in their analysis of propaganda from the late eighties, defined as “manufacturing of consent”: the process of establishing a normative reality that conforms to specific interests of elite power.⁴ In this light, we can say that the Nationalist International is currently manufacturing consent both politically and culturally. The established conservative liberal parties of today speak like the extreme right of the nineties, yet this is considered the “new normal” in comparison to the even more extreme standpoints of the extreme right of the extreme right. This is how propaganda works: what is considered as the norm is reestablished. A new reality is constructed through manufacturing consent, where what was once unacceptable is now standard.

There are two crucial components to propaganda. The first is control over infra-

structure; the means through which society is organized. Propaganda succeeds when the performance of power operates—from the micro to the macro scale—to construct reality in a systematic and sustained way. The second component is control over collective narratives about where we come from, who we are, and who we will become—or in the case of the Nationalist International, who we are to become *once more*. Their narratives tend to take the shape of strange retro science fictions, referring to an aspirational past “greatness” that never existed in the first place. This narrative dimension of propaganda, however obscene, cannot be underestimated, as it mobilizes a collective imagination that legitimizes the construction of a new reality. This narrative and imaginative power of art are directly visible in the domain of film.



Architectural model of Biosphere 2, 2018. Installation view of Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective (2018), Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam.

2. Bannon’s Cyclical Time

Steve Bannon himself is an example not only of a propagandist, but also a propaganda artist.⁵ His work has focused on developing both the infrastructures of the Nationalist International—of which The Movement is the most recent example—and the narratives that provide purpose and unity to a growing alt-right alliance.⁶

Bannon’s work in the early nineties for Goldman Sachs was foundational for his organizational work as a propagandist, as it provided him with the tools to develop various venture-capitalist and political enterprises. His role as the CEO of the

Biosphere 2 project in Arizona from 1993 to 1995 revealed his obsession with closed-system technologies.⁷ The largest ecosphere ever built on earth, Biosphere 2’s original remit was to explore the possibilities for interplanetary colonization, but under Bannon’s leadership it became a massive laboratory for researching the impacts of climate change (in sharp contrast to his later decisive role in convincing President Trump to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement). In 2007, with funding from the ultraconservative Mercer family, Bannon cofounded Breitbart News—the self-declared “home of the alt-right”—and helped organize the anti-Obama Tea Party movement. Over time he has been instrumental in constructing, step by step, an expanding biosphere of the alt-right, with its own political, financial, and media wings—its own infrastructure.

A less discussed, albeit crucial, aspect of Bannon’s oeuvre is his work as a propaganda filmmaker—as an instigator of narratives intended to unite the right. Between 2004 and 2018 he made ten documentary-style films that can be described as cultural and ideological precursors to what would later be called “Trumpism.” Already in his first paleoconservative film, *In the Face of Evil: Reagan’s War in Word and Deed* (2004), Bannon’s obsession with strong national leadership is on display. Here, Reagan is portrayed as the sole defender of a Christian nation engaged in a battle to the death with communist evil.⁸ Bannon denounces the “appeasers”—diplomats and members of the peace movement—who strive for a negotiated resolution to the Cold War. The film ends with images of the attacks on the Twin Towers; out of the rising dust and smoke, the figure

1 In the words of Sven Lütticken, “The contemporary should be seen as a contested terrain, as asynchronous coexistence of different contemporarities, ideologies, and social realities.” Sven Lütticken, *History in Motion: Time in the Age of the Moving Image* (Sternberg Press, 2013), 25.

2 Jamie Doward, “Steve Bannon plans foundation to fuel far right in Europe,” *The Guardian*, July 21, 2018.

3 The term “Nationalist International” comes from an economic policy paper released by the Democracy in Europe 2025 movement. See DiEM25, *DiEM25’s European New Deal: A Summary*, 2017.

4 Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent* (Pantheon Books, 1988), named after the chapter “The Manufacture of Consent” in Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion* (1922).

5 See further: Jonas Staal, *Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective* (Het Nieuwe Instituut, 2018).

6 The Movement is part of the second, “international” phase of Bannon’s propaganda project. The first phase was the building of a powerful alt-right coalition in the United States; as David Neiwert writes, “the gradual coalescence of the alternative-universe worldviews of conspiracists, Patriots, white supremacists, Tea Partiers, and nativists occurred after the election of the first black president, in 2008. Fueled in no small part by racial animus toward Obama, the Internet and social media became the grounds on which this ‘lethal union’ could finally occur.” David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (Verso, 2017), 231.

7 Ten years later Bannon would work on another type of biosphere, this time online. In 2005 he became involved in the Hong Kong-based company Internet Gaming Entertainment (IGE), which sold digital assets to players of the massive multiplayer online role-playing game *World of Warcraft*. These digital goods in the form of gold and weaponry, were obtained by paying Chinese workers extremely low wages to play the game in ongoing rotating shifts. This experience, according to Joshua Green, was critical to Bannon’s later online mobilization of the alt-right during the Trump campaign. See Joshua Green, *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* (Penguin Press, 2017), 81–83.

8 The film also embodies Bannon’s ideal of a right-wing Hollywood, with Reagan representing both the creative side (as an actor) and the political side (as president and an anti-communist crusader).

of Osama Bin Laden appears. Not only is Bannon's first film a plea for a twenty-first-century Reagan-like figure to emerge and fight "Islamic Terrorism" with similar conviction; it also lays out his philosophy of the cyclical return of evil.

For Bannon, communism, Nazism, and Islamic terrorism are all successive reincarnations of what he terms "The Beast." Inspired by the fringe writings of William Strauss and Neil Howe, especially their book *The Fourth Turning* (1997), Bannon believes that time develops cyclically through four "turnings," and that every fourth generation—every fourth turning—an epic civilizational war against evil must be waged.⁹ This cyclical war provides the ground for a periodic rebirth of Bannon's core ideological doctrine, which can best be summarized as "white Christian economic nationalism."

Bannon uses this theory of the cyclical return of evil to explain social upheavals in the US over the past half-century. According to Bannon, the most recent fourth turning was the Second World War, out of which the United States emerged victorious and reborn, establishing a free market within its national borders and nurturing a devout and nuclear-family-centered culture. But this glorious new turning was quickly threatened by the next turning: the rise of flower power, feminism, and progressive social movements. This turning, says Bannon, introduced a godless individualism into American society and sowed the seeds for the culture of liberal-capitalist greed, with hippies growing up to become Wall Street sharks (this ahistorical blame game has been echoed by some leftists, such as Angela Nagle, who implies that left-wing discourse on transgression gave birth over time to the alt-right).¹⁰

9 In the words of Strauss and Howe: "Turnings come in cycles of four. Each spans the length of a long human life, roughly eighty to a hundred years, a unit of time the ancients called the saeculum. Together, the four turnings of the saeculum comprise history's seasonal rhythm of growth, maturation, entropy, and destruction." *The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy* (Broadway Books, 1997), 3.

10 Nagle's main target is what she calls "Tumblr-liberalism," which is preoccupied with "gender fluidity and providing a safe space to explore other concerns like mental ill-health, physical disability, race, cultural identity and 'intersectionality'" (69). Nagle argues that these concerns have resulted in a doctrine of self-flagellation in which "the culture of suffering, weakness, and vulnerability has become central to contemporary liberal identity politics" (73). In Nagle's view, Tumblr-liberalism not only gave rise

In Bannon's vision, "cultural Marxists," who also emerged from the tumult of the sixties and seventies, are perpetually conspiring to take over the government and collectivize the state from within.¹¹

Installation view of Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective (2018). Free copies of Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* (1971) were gifted to visitors.



In his film *Occupy Unmasked* (2012), Bannon maps out an alleged left-wing conspiracy inspired by the writings of Jewish-American community organizer Saul Alinsky, especially his book *Rules for Radicals* (1971).¹² This conspiracy involves dark alliances between the Occupy movement, unions, and the Obama Administration. In the face of this plot, the champions of white Christian economic nationalism—from Reagan to Tea Party favorite Sarah Palin (about whom Bannon made a biopic, 2011's *The Undefeated*) to Trump and the Nationalist International today—are tasked with defending civilization. They must crush the cultural Marxists plotting to take power at universities and in the streets, the wealthy global elites who make

to the alt-right; it also alienated the traditional working class. Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from 4Chan and Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Zero Books, 2017).

11 The term "cultural Marxism" was originally associated with the Frankfurt School and described the radical critique of standardized and commodified mass culture. The term resonates with Nazi campaign against "cultural Bolshevism" and surfaced in far-right movements in the US from the early nineties onward. The fact that the protagonists of the Frankfurt School were Jewish has made this conspiracy theory particularly popular in alt-right circles, as it encompasses both anti-Semitic and anti-left tropes. See also Sven Lütticken, "Cultural Marxists Like Us," *Afterall* 46 (Autumn-Winter): 67-75.

12 Bannon is not the first to claim that Alinsky's work serves as a handbook for the radical left-wing takeover of government and society. This conspiracy theory first emerged during Bill Clinton's presidency, as First Lady Hillary Clinton had written her 1969 college thesis on Alinsky's work. The theory rests in part on an epigraph in the book that describes the fallen angel Lucifer as "the first radical known to man who rebelled against the establishment and did it so effectively that he at least won his own kingdom." For right-wingers, this reveals not only the godless Marxist framework of Alinsky's book, but its ambition to seize control of the government. See Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (Vintage Books, 1989).

up the "Party of Davos," and the manifold incarnations of Islamic Terrorism, from Al-Qaeda to the Islamic State.

Bannon has described his particular brand of pamphleteering filmmaking as "kinetic cinema."¹³ He has also cited Leni Riefenstahl, Sergei Eisenstein, and Michael Moore as influences (the latter recently released the anti-Trump film *Fahrenheit 11/9*, around the same time that Bannon released his own pro-Trump film, *Trump@War*—both entering the propaganda fray in advance of the crucial midterm elections in the US).¹⁴ Bannon's "kinetic" aesthetic vocabulary consists of fast-paced sequences and editing, with commentary from various "experts" providing structure to the narrative. Viewers are bombarded with thematically organized stock footage and rousing music. Images of predatory animals such as sharks represent subterranean economic forces that can rupture reality at any given moment, while burning and scattered banknotes—which appear in nearly every one of Bannon's films—exemplify the evaporation of spiritual values in a society nearing its fourth turning. "What I've tried to do is weaponize film," Bannon has claimed.¹⁵ His films construct a "master narrative" that legitimizes the authoritarian power of strong leaders who face down the never-ending threats of a multi-headed Beast.¹⁶ This master narrative also defines who, in Bannon's terrifying worldview, belongs with "us" and who belongs with "them"—who fights The Beast and who appeases or sides with it.

Installation view of Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective (2018). Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam.



3. The Truth About Post-Truth

In Trumpism we have seen how Bannon's kinetic cinema transformed into a kinetic political campaign, twisting and turning historical narratives and symbols to the point that the very texture of what we once considered reality has been torn and reconfigured into something entirely different.

When Trump was criticized for failing to denounce the alt-right in the wake of the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Bannon pointed the finger at the real danger: the "alt-left." In a similar vein, Geert Wilders's ideologue Martin Bosma has highlighted the bad conscience of the left, which in his reading accused his party of Nazism only to erase their own socialist stake in National *Socialism*. Viktor Orbán, prime minister of Hungary and leader of the Hungarian Civic Alliance (Fidesz) party, has, like Bannon, perfected the "enemies outside/enemies within" narrative, warning through his state-owned media of a Muslim tsunami threatening his country's borders from without, while the pro-refugee propaganda of Jewish-Hungarian George Soros and his foundation threatens it from within.

Such narrative strategies are currently discussed as "fake news" and "alternative facts" that circulate within what is called the "post-truth era" of politics. In propaganda studies, these terms have a longer history. "Fake news" is also known as "flak," which has been defined as the covert dissemination of misinformation through proxy organizations in order to derail a dominant narrative and spread mistrust of mainstream institutions.¹⁷ "Post-truth" is a more complex term; on one hand, we should obviously fight against misinformation, but on the other, we should also question whose truth we are supposed to "return" to and who exactly this truth—the normative idea of a pre-Trump society—serves.

The propaganda campaign of the Nationalist International has moved far beyond the reach of any fact-checking machinery. Its project is a cultural one, consisting of its own pantheon of leaders, of climate-denying and cyclical-time-promoting scientists, and of propaganda

13 John Patterson, "For haters only: watching Steve Bannon's documentary films," *The Guardian*, November 29, 2016.

14 Adam Wren, "What I Learned Binge-Watching Steve Bannon's Documentaries," *Politico*, December 2, 2016.

15 Keith Koffler, *Bannon: Always the Rebel* (Regnery Publishing, 2017), 48.

16 Terence McSweeney, *The "War on Terror" and American Film: 9/11 Frames Per Second* (Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 10.

17 Chomsky and Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*, 26-28.

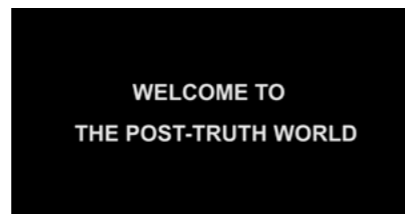
artists—like Bannon—who are capable of turning alt-reality into our new normal. Angela Nagle has argued that the Gramscians of the twenty-first century—those who make the long march through our cultural institutions in order to change politics through culture—are today on the alt-right rather than the left.¹⁸ But by the time Nagle wrote this, the cultural long march might already have ended and turned into alt-governance. The costs of alt-right propaganda are already clear for us to see, ranging from the rise of systemic and institutional racism; the criminalization, incarceration, and murder at sea of refugees; the lawless killing of those declared to be “terrorists”; the separation of migrant children from their families; and the willingness on the part of these alt-governments to humiliate and bomb other countries.

Is there a reality that preexisted alt-reality which we would even want to return to in the first place? Bruce Miller’s television series *The Handmaid’s Tale*, based on Margaret Atwood’s 1985 novel, has recently been a hit among liberals, desperate for an end to the Trump era. The dystopian series takes place in the aftermath of a second American Civil War, when a new Christian-fundamentalist, hyper-patriarchal state called “Gilead” has risen to power. Women are not allowed to work, study, read, own property, or possess money. Instead, they are assigned to domestic work or, if declared “degenerates,” sent off to brutal labor camps. The class of fertile “handmaids” plays a central role, as they are recruited to combat Gilead’s infertility crises by breeding children for elite households through ritualized rape. The world of Gilead could be regarded as an example of Nationalist International retro science fiction, insofar as it imagines a mythological future-past in which modern technology goes hand in hand with symbols of traditionalist puritan culture.

A crucial component in the series are the flashbacks of its main characters, which recall the liberal-capitalist order that existed before the second American Civil War. The show’s main protagonist, June, or “Offred” (read: “property of the

house of Fred”), thinks back to jogging in a park, iPhone in hand, or stopping at Starbucks for a soy latte, or hanging out with her boyfriend at an über-gentrified hipster cafe. These flashbacks to a soulless consumerist world can be read as a warning to viewers: our political apathy could allow a Gileadian coup to take place. But in Miller’s adaptation, which portrays Gilead’s totalitarianism and its culture of rape, torture, and mutilation in brutal detail, these sepia-colored flashbacks to the capitalist-liberal order suddenly seem like the normal we long to return to.¹⁹ A criminal mortgage system, the rise of trillion-dollar companies, global austerity and precarity: all of these suddenly seem like rather desirable problems compared to the retro-futurist horror of Gilead. In *The Handmaid’s Tale*, we witness the propaganda cinema of the liberal-capitalist order staging a critique against growing authoritarianism, but only to reimpose its own normality and desirability—which, as we know, contributed substantially to the conditions that fueled the Nationalist International in the first place.²⁰

Film still from Adam Curtis’ documentary *HyperNormalisation* (2016).



When we speak of “post-truth,” it is thus crucial to emphasize that there is not a “norm” to return to: there are, rather, various competing realities, past and present, each trying to impose its own set of values, beliefs, and behaviors. This is the essence of the propaganda struggle. Between alt-right propaganda and liberal-capitalist propaganda, there is admittedly a world—a reality—of difference, *but we should reject both of them*. What we need is not

¹⁹ Of course, this does not mean that *The Handmaid’s Tale*’s potent symbolism and original narrative cannot simultaneously operate to enable emancipatory politics. In fact, the red cloak and white hood worn by the handmaids in the book and TV series have shown up at protests in defense of women’s reproductive autonomy and gender equality the world over.

²⁰ See also Mihnea Mircan and Jonas Staal, “Let’s Take Back Control! Of Our Imagination,” *Stedelijk Studies* 6 (Spring 2018).

a return to some past reality, but a fundamental alternative to both the Nationalist International and the liberal-capitalist regime so that, in the words of Octavia Butler’s character Lauren Olamina, “Our new worlds will remake us as we remake them.”²¹

4. Totalitarian Historiographies

Filmmaker Adam Curtis—who has engaged in his own version of Nagle’s blame-the-right-on-the-left game²²—has dedicated much of his work to examining the mechanisms of power and propaganda. In his most recent film, *HyperNormalisation* (2016), he traces the emergence of what he considers a “fake world”—or what Walter Lippmann in 1922 termed “pseudo-environments.”²³ This “fake world,” which Curtis claims has been under construction by “politicians, financiers, and technological utopians” since the 1980s, aims to bypass complex geopolitical processes and conflicts to instead construct a simple binary world that serves the interests of these powerful groups.²⁴ The key historical moment, in his view, was the rise of Reaganite and Thatcherite neoliberalism and the subsequent shifting of power from elected politicians to corporations and the public relations industry. This neoliberal paradigm went on to transform civic resistance into a culture of individual expression and critique: collective action was abandoned and real power was placed solely in the hands of a new managerial class, which engineers our post-political world. To ensure that resistance remains futile, a range of “global super-villains” are contrived, from Gaddafi to Saddam Hussein; these perpetual threats ensure that populations remain preoccupied with Us-vs.-Them binaries.

²¹ Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Talents* (Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 358.

²² In his four-part documentary series *Century of the Self* (2002), Curtis suggested that an obsession with individualist “self-actualization” on the part of political progressives paved the way for the resurgence of the right.

²³ “In order to conduct a propaganda there must be some barrier between the public and the event. Access to the real environment must be limited, before anyone can create a pseudo-environment that he thinks wise or desirable.” Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (Transaction Publishers, 1998), 43.

²⁴ Transcript from *HyperNormalisation*.

If Bannon is a propaganda artist of the alt-right, and Miller’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* embodies liberal-capitalist propaganda, then Curtis is a propagandist of the defeatist conservative left. This becomes clear when he declares that our present time has “no vision for the future.”²⁵ Instead, he argues, the growth and popularization of cyberspace—the global technology environment—since the nineties has facilitated a cult of sovereign individualism: an online space of boundless post-political self-expression. These accumulated individual expressions, argues Curtis, do nothing but feed the algorithms of the Facebook State, strengthening the new global post-political managerialism.²⁶ For Curtis, the Occupy movement was a symptom of cyberspace culture: a leaderless “networked” movement that was more interested in self-expression and self-management than taking power.²⁷ Considering that a large portion of Occupy participants and sympathizers were people whose homes have been expropriated by the criminal mortgage system and whose shared precarity compelled them to gather in parks and public spaces to seek some form of desperate justice, the suggestion that it was not politicized people but algorithms that orchestrated the Occupy movement is deeply offensive.

Curtis’s defeatism reaches its true cynical depths when he declares that the Tahrir uprising in Egypt was a Facebook-led revolution. In his account, corporate social media brought people into the streets to dethrone dictator Hosni Mubarak; two years later Facebook brought these same people into streets, this time to welcome back the military regime after it had deposed the democratically elected president Mohamed Morsi. Cyberspace, in Curtis’s reasoning, has become a new realm of global managerialism: no matter how much we try to use it as a tool for our own ends, it is ultimately the new systems of algorithmic surveillance and management that benefit.

²⁵ Transcript from *HyperNormalisation*.

²⁶ A term borrowed from the work *Facebook State* (2016), developed by artist Manuel Beltrán and his students.

²⁷ A partially overlapping critique, but with more depth and greater fidelity to the potentialities of the Occupy movement, is Not an Alternative, “Counter-Power as Common Power: Beyond Horizontalism,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest* 9 (Summer 2014).

But as Melissa Tandiwe Myambo has argued, this ideological practice of “misnaming the revolution” not only ignores the fact that in 2012 only about 8 percent of the Egyptian population was on Facebook; it also engages in the neocolonial practice of “virtual occupation.”²⁸

Here defeatist conservative left propaganda shows its ugly face. Curtis’s determination to understand and map systems of power becomes so obsessive that even when systems are not absolute—and they never really are—he will argue that they must be, in order to bolster his narration of an all-encompassing fake world. This echoes the method employed by art historian Igor Golomstock in his major work *Totalitarian Art* (1990), where he argues that the art made in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, fascist Italy, and Maoist China is all part of one and the same totalitarian machinery.²⁹ While we can indeed witness glorified images of grand dictators, heroic soldiers, and militant peasants throughout the art produced under these regimes, major differences are present just the same, both ideologically and aesthetically.



Ye Yushan et al., *Rent Collection Courtyard* (1965), Dayi County, Sichuan.

For example, Mao Zedong’s art theory, as laid out in his “Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art” (1942), promoted cooperative artistic practice between art professionals and peasant communities, with the aim of their mutual education.³⁰ The famous group of sculptures

Rent Collection Courtyard (1965) resulted from such a process of co-creation and revolutionized various aspects of traditional sculpture. It rejected the pedestal as well as durable materials such as marble. Instead, the figures were created from clay and placed directly on the ground so that villagers could walk by them and scorn and spit on the sculptural representations of the landlords that used to rule over them.³¹ These specific characteristics of art production and presentation—co-creation, removal of the pedestal, and theatrical usage—were absent in Stalinist socialist realist sculpture; in the latter, monumental pedestal-facilitated figures made of solid materials, towering far above the crowd, sought to embody a sense of near eternity. So rather than describing totalitarian art, Golomstock’s work represents a form of *totalizing historiography* that overlooks difference in order to find comfort and a sense of desperate control in a closed-system theory.

In the case of Curtis, his totalizing narrations are even more tragic: the Occupy movement and the uprisings gathered under the problematic term “Arab Spring,” along with the manifold popular movements that have emerged around the world since, are not inventions of social media but rather the living embodied truth that there are visions and practices of alternative futures and world-making in our present. Hundreds of thousands of people did not take Tahrir Square because Facebook told them to. They put their bodies on the line not because they were controlled by a post-political managerial elite, but because they collectively reclaimed power in the face of violence, fear, pain, and death. In these rare moments of “performative assembly,” as philosopher Judith Butler has termed it, in these gatherings of extremely precarious peoples,

the possibility of another kind of power is enacted.³² We might also say that in these assemblist events, the possibility of another kind of propaganda is enacted as well—another way of telling stories and proposing narratives of where we come from, who we are, and who we can *still become*.³³

5. Towards an Emancipatory Propaganda Art

Our contemporary propaganda struggle is shaped by various performances of power, each with its own infrastructures and cultural narratives that attempt to construct reality according to its own interests. In the examples that I have discussed—the propaganda art of the Nationalist International, of liberal capitalism, and of the defeatist left—we can see that each particular structure of power performs differently as art. In other words, we can see that there is a specific, changing relationship between power and form.

Recent years have demonstrated that propaganda can set into motion vast geopolitical processes, from the Brexit vote and

the election of Trump—both of which took place amidst a haze of misinformation—to more brutish examples, like the rise of the authoritarian regimes of Erdoğan, Modi, and Duterte. These events have shown that responding to the propaganda of the Nationalist International with mere “facts” is no solution, because facts need narratives to make them effective and affective. While it is crucial to develop a collective “propaganda literacy,” understanding propaganda does not stop propaganda.

To oppose the various propagandas discussed above, we will need infrastructures and narratives that mobilize the imagination to construct a different world. To achieve this, we will need an emancipatory propaganda and an emancipatory propaganda art. There is no prior reality to which we should strive to return; there will only be the realities that we will author collectively ourselves.

This text resulted from two lectures, one presented as the introduction to the conference *Propaganda Art Today* at Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam, on June 2, 2018, and one titled “Art and Propaganda” for *Impakt Festival*, Utrecht, on September 1, 2018. I want to thank architect Marina Otero Verzier, with whom I developed the exhibition project *Steve Bannon: A Propaganda Retrospective*, for being a comrade in the process of making new propagandas a reality.

Originally published in *e-flux Journal*, issue 94, October 2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/94/219986/propaganda-art-struggle/>

28 Melissa Tandiwe Myambo, “(Mis)naming the Revolution,” *Montréal Review*, January 2012.

29 Golomstock goes so far as to credit totalitarianism as an author in and of itself: “Totalitarianism itself carried out the historian’s task of sifting through sources, using the scalpel of the concept of two cultures [Lenin’s thesis calling for revolutionaries to take from each national culture only its democratic and socialist elements – JS], of the struggle between racial and class elements, in order to split apart the living body of national tradition.” Igor Golomstock, *Totalitarian Art* (Overlook Press, 1990), 155.

30 “Prior to the task of educating the workers, peasants, and soldiers, there is the task of learning from them.” Mao Tse-Tung, “Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art,” in *New World Academy Reader #1: Towards a*

People’s Culture, eds. Jose Maria Sison and Jonas Staal (BAK, basis voor actuele kunst, 2013), 51.

31 The claim that this particular case of Maoist art production can be conflated with Stalinist art production is strongly refuted by art historian Christof Büttner, who argues that “it is a work of art that is so convincing that many interpret it to be the simple, unimaginative depiction of a real event and held it in disdain for exactly that reason. That was all the more true when Western art historians labeled it Socialist Realism and, even worse, stigmatized it as propaganda art for the Cultural Revolution.” Christof Büttner, “The Transformations of a Work of Art—Rent Collection Courtyard, 1965–2009,” in *Art for the Millions*, eds. Esther Schlicht and Max Hollein (Hirmer Verlag, 2009), 38.

32 Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Harvard University Press, 2018). See also Jonas Staal, “Assemblism,” *e-flux Journal* 80 (March 2017).

33 This is fundamentally different from the propaganda of the Nationalist International discussed earlier, which tells us who we will become *once more*.

Edel Rodríguez: Take the Risk

Interview by Bella Spratley

From featuring polemic work on its cover to becoming an art director at *Time* Magazine, Edel Rodríguez certainly has a way with imagery. You might have seen his Trump in flames, Mao in a Louis Vuitton suit or Che Guevara in the Nike tick beret. Fellow art director at *Time*, Arthur Hochstein, locates Rodríguez' work as transcendent of illustration due to its timeless quality, and we couldn't agree more. We talk to the Cuban-born artist about truth, censorship and the danger of, albeit unintentionally, satirising some of the most powerful men alive.

Meltdown, 22 August, 2016.



BS Moving from communist Cuba to capitalist America at nine years old sparked your interest in politics. What was it about your childhood that inspired you?

ER When we arrived in the United States, I was surrounded by regular family conversations about what had happened. My family's friends would gather and talk about the journey from Cuba to America, things they had been through, how much they missed our hometown, and the families they left behind. All of those conversations made an impact on me and made me interested

in political topics at a young age. I became interested in stories about migration, about World War II, the Holocaust, and so on. Politics was a topic that was ever present in my family's life, something that affected us in a real way, so it was natural to want to deal with the issues via my work.

BS Talking to *Time* about the motivation behind your work, you say, "I always feel someone is being victimised, someone is being taken advantage of and I feel like I need to speak about that." Is speaking about it enough?

ER Having conversations about the issues is one way to make change, and art can start discussions. There are other ways to bring attention to a subject, like investigative journalism or getting into politics, but making art about the issues is where I feel my experience and talent can make the most impact.

Photo sent to Edel Rodríguez, 2016.



BS Your cover for *Time* of a furious Trump in flames ended up being received by a larger audience than expected, as the Internet jumped on it. Do you think this was thanks to the political moment or does this illustration possess a unique characteristic, compared to previous pieces?

ER I've noticed that what creates a deep connection between an image and a viewer is a combination of both the image's graphic impact and proper timing. I think that was the case with this cover.

BS Wikipedia calls your work "socialist propaganda", which made me smile. Do you identify with that label?

ER I don't believe Wikipedia calls my work "socialist propaganda". The website states that my work is informed by many things, including Western advertising, socialist propaganda, island culture, and city life. These are aspects of the places I've lived, they are part of those societies, so they naturally show up in my work in one way or another. I don't identify with the words "socialist" or "propaganda". I vehemently oppose those things. If I reference those two things in my work, it is to subvert their meaning and criticize them.

Agent Orange, Wieden + Kennedy Art Gallery, Portland, 2018.



BS Intersectional feminism and equality are themes that come up in your art. What can the privileged do to support required changes in society?

ER We should all work toward an equal and just society for all sexes and races. If you see something that is not equal or fair, you should work to make it so, by voting for candidates that support equality, helping those groups gain a footing in your chosen field, and by backing up members of those groups when they seek help.

BS You discuss the importance of truth and honesty in your illustrations, but some galleries have been forced out of fear to censor what they choose to exhibit. In a way, does this type of censorship alter what the collective understands as truth?

ER Yes, any kind of censorship distorts the truth. Fortunately, we now have the power to self publish our work online. There are new ways to get around censors and institutions and get your work to the people. Many times, institutions are just trying to avoid controversy, but that is where the conversations and change occur.

BS Have you ever felt like you are putting yourself at risk through your political commentary?

ER There is always some sort of risk when you speak your mind but censoring oneself is a higher risk. Self censorship is a large burden to carry for an artist.

BS In your travel illustrations of Cuba, citizens slump indifferently next to proud symbols of political change, e.g. graffiti reading "viva la revolución". What is your intention with these pieces?

ER My intention was to show the reality of the Cuban revolution. These drawings were done on trips to my hometown in Cuba. There are upbeat slogans of support for the Revolution in the streets, propaganda put up by the government. The conversations in the back rooms of people's houses are very different. Most foreigners or visitors don't understand what happens on the island on a daily basis.

BS Che Guevara wears a Nike tick on his beret and headphones in *Brand CAChe*, your 2006 cover of *Communication Arts* magazine. Today, I see so many de-politicised Che Guevara and Frida Kahlo images for sale. Is your art a criticism of disturbing capitalist appropriation of communist images?

ER It is that, but it is also a critique of the commercial ways the image is used by the Communist party to sell merchandise in Cuba. It is on everything, sold at airports, tourist shops, and so on. Che has become a commodity of the state.

BS What can we expect from your up-and-coming talk at OFFF Festival, Barcelona?

ER I'll be speaking about how my work has developed, sometimes in unexpected ways. My family and I have taken risks, both personal and creative, that in due time, end up bearing fruit. With so much knowledge at our fingertips nowadays, we sometimes lose a sense of what it is to go with your gut, to take a leap of faith. These are some of the aspects of being an artist I will be talking about in Barcelona.

Originally published in *Metal*, 22 April 2019.

Please Return To Your Screens is a dystopian short film set in the year 2054 (35 After Corona). It is the protagonist's 32nd attempt to escape lockdown. This project was developed during Studio Image/Democracy in Distress. The initial idea for the short film stems from the development of the propaganda poster *Please Return To Your Screens* in response to the first assignment. These posters were designed as propaganda of the Corona era and are featured in the film. *Please Return* is a critical commentary on the censorship of reality through lockdown, and speculates a post-apocalyptic reality in order to redefine our relationship with the present.

*Today is Thursday 18th January 2054/35 After Corona.
Today is my 32nd attempt to escape Lockdown.
We're not allowed to go outside.
They say the air is toxic.
During the Great Pandemic,
there were several civil wars across the planet.
A lot of people died from the virus,
but even more during the riots.
The economy collapsed.
This Corona war lasted more than 15 years.
Everything is controlled now by the police.
They're watching us.
We are in permanent quarantine.
The only means to communicate is through the screens.
No physical contact is allowed.
The only information we have is through SERMO,
a global media controlled by the One Government.
A few people like me are unchipped.
We are the pre-generation.
The new generation are microchipped from birth.
They know no other world.
They say, we must quarantine for the survival
of the human race.*

70 x 100 cm poster
9'08" video, 16:9
Actor: Michael Della Giustina
Music: Wo Ist Übergang, Ben Frost



PLEASE RETURN TO YOUR SCREENS






I was born in Albania in the year 2000, and my parents are first-generation immigrants. I had no problem coming to Italy for the first time. In fact I felt so safe that I don't even recall that very first day in the country I have now lived most of my life in. But some people see that as very fortunate. Many wish they could forget about their first day.

I decided to interview my father and uncle. Both were born and raised in the same town and later moved to Italy, but at different times and under very different circumstances. Both had to face the struggles that came with the respective period. Both stories are equally valid and deserving to be heard.

The project relates to the *Vlora*, a cargo ship built in 1960 in Ancona (Italy) that sailed under the Albanian flag until 1996. It is most famous for a historical event on 8 August 1991, thirty years ago, when it carried tens of thousands of Albanian refugees to the Italian port of Bari. This unprecedented mass arrival caught the Italian authorities unawares.

8'03" video



A photograph showing a group of people, possibly at a public gathering or protest. In the center, a person is making a hand gesture with their right hand, palm facing forward, fingers spread. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and what appears to be an outdoor setting with trees. The lighting is somewhat dim, suggesting it might be dusk or dawn.

Albanians who stay in in their motherland
have always spoken well about Italy





but the answer is very different from Albanians who live in Italy.

*What is it even all about? All the screenwriting,
the need to stage, set up and film?*

*What if I just took all of those ideas, let them simmer,
then just wrote down everything that came
to my mind, in one sitting?*

And what if I then rehearsed acting it?

*With the camera gazing at me,
carrying the sight of the audience.*

*Then I would just send this piece out and with it
any ability to control and preserve it.*

I watch it and want to edit it, censor it, destroy it.

*But what if I stopped cutting and manipulating
while still cutting and manipulating.*

*Le bambole (The dolls) is the product of the weight I have
carried with me for years, together with the one borne
by all women over decades and centuries. It's the product
of a study of women's most intimate truths and secrets,
the ones too uncomfortable for anyone to touch on, but
the ones that perhaps deserve the most attention.*

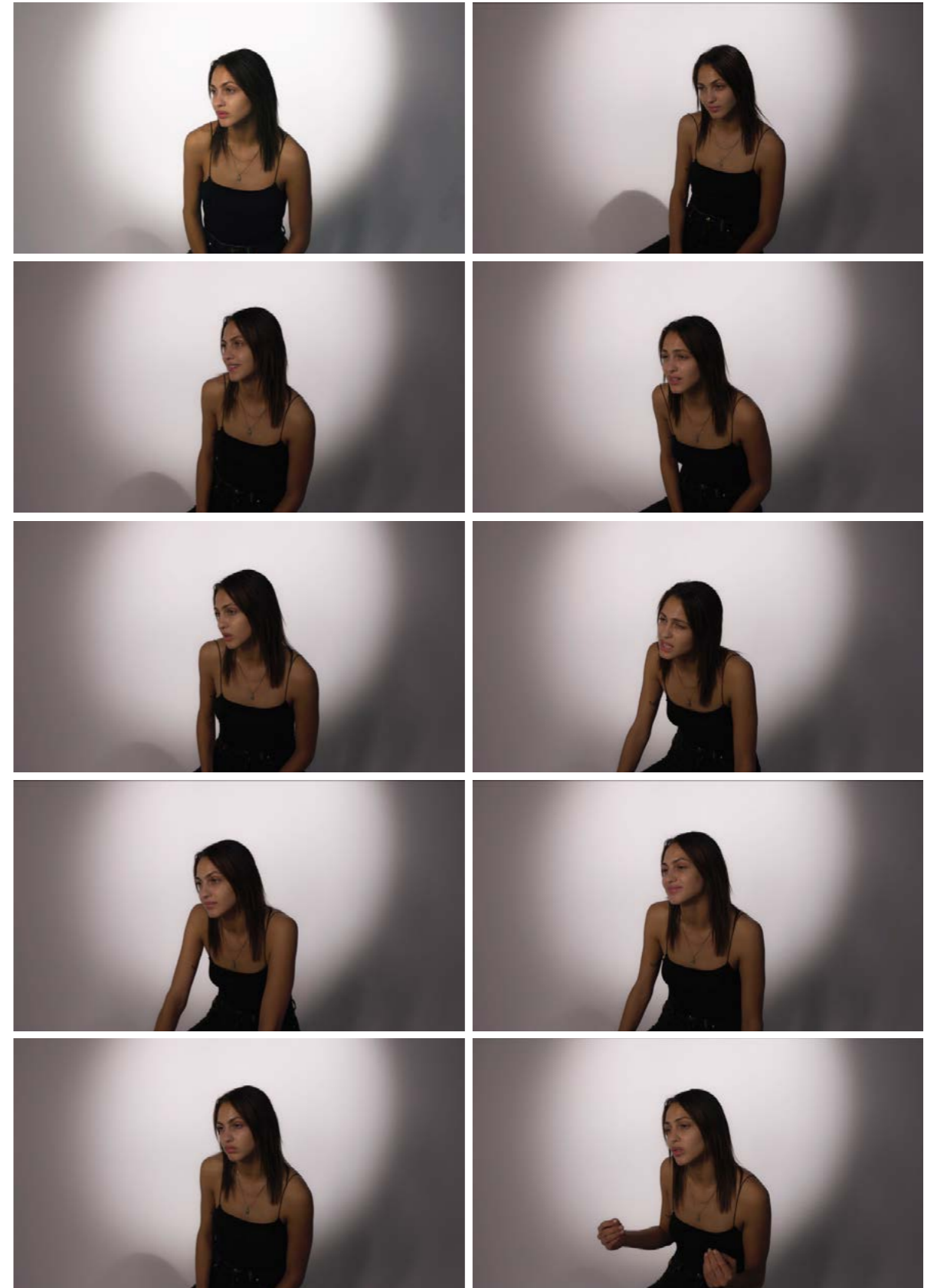
*Over the course of six months, I examined the power
and danger that lie within patriarchy and the male gaze
dominating the film industry.*

*I underwent a sort of enlightenment or epiphany or
whatever you want to call it, and put all the pieces together.
I had it, I knew what I wanted to say but not how.*

*After months of trying to make a short film as intricate as
it was bad, I dropped everything.*

*Then, after one anxious and sweaty night, I get up
and write all of my thoughts on a piece of paper, while speak-
ing them out loud as if I was talking to a friend, or maybe
to the whole world. It was kind of cathartic. And there was
everything, after fifteen minutes I had it all on paper. I read
it again in search of mistakes, of something to change.
Yet nothing changed, it was all there. I decided to trust that
intuition and here you have the most honest fifteen minutes
of my life, uncut.*

11'52" video, rear projection screen, video transcript, monitor





I feel guilty.

For not having being able to say no,
for submitting myself to the desire of
those who only wanted a piece of me.

But no one had ever taught me
how I should behave towards men.

Who could be my role model? The
women of cinema. They were the
ones who raised me, they raised
all of us. They told us that they were
there to be looked at, undressed,
trapped. Trapped in their category,
in their stereotype, in their role
of being viewed.

Let me explain: in the films I had
seen people, and, above all, women
all divided into categories. Well-
defined categories, from which it
was impossible to escape. Beautiful
women were there to please men,
to be scrutinised by the eye of the
director, of the camera and, finally,
of the viewer. They were there to
be possessed by those gazes to sell



the illusion that anyone could dominate them.

As a child I assimilated all these roles, all these symbols. But I was still free, I still didn't identify with any of these categories, I liked the idea of being everything. Being able to jump from one character to another, I liked so many of them, why should I have limited myself to one choice? I was very masculine, I was often mistaken for a boy. And it didn't bother me. I liked doing "boyish" things. But this masculinity then became toxic.

I only realised it later, where it came from. There was a moment when I must have realised the power that men have. I wanted that power too, I didn't want to end up like my grandmother. Of being constantly abused by a man. Mocked, ridiculed, disrespected, objectified, commanded, beaten. I did not want all this, I didn't want to end up like those women who take it in silence, who prefer to be nice to men, not to risk being labelled



a “feminist pain in the ass”. And then I thought, or rather, internalised, that if you weren’t one, you had to be the other.

For some reason I internalised toxic masculinity as the only antidote to this condition. I dressed myself in armour as hard as it was fragile and I became a bitch.

Then, as if it had happened overnight, the tomboy took the form of a woman. At the age of twelve I was one metre seventy tall. I had long legs but still the face of a child; my hair had grown in the meantime. But this transformation, albeit early, was very natural for me, it did not give me much trouble. I liked being tall, being taken seriously, with a deep voice and broad shoulders. I liked going out alone, feeling independent.

But then, all of a sudden, I began to experience this strange phenomenon, to receive a strange kind of attention from men. Because deep down



I know that they too were trapped in their role, that in the end they were insecure kids, under their robot armour. Even their movements were robotic, all the same, they emulated the movements of strong men in movies, and in porn.

Videos with no narrative content but very high resolution, shot from uncomfortably close, as one or more men use one or more women who pretend to have repeated orgasms to inflate the egos of the actors and spectators. And so a thousand robots in the world fuck mimicking someone who is there to teach them how to do the most natural thing in the world.

But then one day the curtain closed, the day I found out I was pregnant.

It was in that moment that I decided to close it, to be the director of my film and not an actress for the first time. I decided I wasn't going to end up like my grandmother, putting on a mom costume and slipping back into a role

Rossella Biscotti

Interview by Barbara Casavecchia

“I’m interested in the traces of history: documents, films, photographs. They offer another vision of reality. Only when these images are interpreted, decoded and shared publicly with others do they develop new meanings. My works explore the gap between history and its interpretation, between experience and its archiving.”
– Rossella Biscotti

BC Let’s start from the beginning, if that’s okay with you?

RB I studied art in High School, and then attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Naples until 2001, specializing in stage design. My studies did not have a fundamental influence on me, but Naples did. The end of the nineties was a lively time: in addition to the presence of historic galleries like Lia Rumma’s and places like the Fondazione Morra, there were some very young people who were beginning to work in the field: Paola Guadagnino and Marco Altavilla of T293, Gigiotto del Vecchio, Giangi Fonti... A very fine and positive moment. We grew up in a climate of experimentation, in a laboratory. Naples has also been an important city from the social and urbanistic point of view, it has given me a great deal of inspiration. From there I went to Rotterdam, a move that took place almost by chance, as a result of my contact with Cricca Gang, a Dutch artists’ collective run by Patricia Pulles. It was she who advised me to apply for a residence in her country. I left in 2004 and I’ve been there ever since.

BC How did you spend the first few years in the Netherlands?

RB Working. I started with five to six months’ residence at the Foundation B.a.d. in Rotterdam, an organization born out of a spontaneous initiative on the part of some artists (the occupation of a building) that has been given a formal structure over the course of time. In 2005 I was invited by

the SMART Project Space in Amsterdam to take part in a joint exhibition entitled *ADAM*, with around thirty site-specific projects on the theme of the sociopolitical conditions of the city. I spent another five or six months there, often going back to Rotterdam. In any case, my stays in the Netherlands have always been interrupted by trips abroad: to New York, Berlin, Rome.

BC You said that your training at the academy has not had much weight. Do you consider yourself self-taught?

RB Almost, yes. I attended the course of the Fondazione Antonio Ratti with Ilya Kabakov. And now that I’m doing my first year at the Rijksakademie I don’t really know what to call myself.

BC When did you start using video? Was it a premeditated choice?

RB No, it was not a rational choice. I made my first videos at the end of 2001 in Spain, at Valencia (where I had gone on an Erasmus exchange program), because somebody had lent me a video camera. They were very simple portraits of people I met and found interesting. They kept still for about fifteen minutes in a situation that was familiar to them, then performed an action that lasted a few seconds, and then the scene started again from the beginning, in a loop. In common they had the fact of not belonging completely to the context: a Dutch truck driver (*Rick*), a Brazilian woman and an Italian man who were living together (*Patricia and Antonio*) and an Argentine (*Cesar*), my first portrait. Notwithstanding my technical inexperience, looking at that work today still moves me: in Argentina there was a terrible economic crisis at the time and Cesar sang a song by Charly García, *Inconsciente colectivo*, and then exited from the scene. There was no script, just a few indications given at the last minute, so the videos became

moments of discovery. Rick, for example, a big man who kept a mountain of toys in a room for his son, whom he didn’t manage to see very often, in the end hid himself under a barricade of toys, like a child.

BC What was your starting point? Did those subjects interest you even from a social or sociological viewpoint?

RB I started out from the individual for sure. In those videos you have no background information on the story or the origin of the protagonists, and the possibility of developing more levels of interpretation is limited. The fifteen minutes of silence at the beginning create a strange interaction between the viewer and the motionless person that appears in front of him. I wanted to create a certain abstraction, to freeze reality in order to suggest a different kind of observation. In the same period I had also made a series of videos that I have never shown, entitled *Osservazioni con camera fissa* [“Observations with a Fixed Camera”, ed.], on various situations in the city. The portraits were a later step.

BC Within a short space of time you began to carry out projects in which the “Italian” connotation, whether geographical, cultural or historical, assumed a decisive weight.

RB Every work is a piece in the puzzle, the fruit of a particular line of aesthetic research. I don’t have a well-defined program and I don’t like to repeat myself. Of course, reflection on the theme of the Italian cultural identity is one of the interests that I pursue. In videos like *L’Italia è una Repubblica fondata sul lavoro* [“Italy Is a Republic Founded on Work”, 2004, ed.] or *Muctar* (2003) a social situation is depicted, but there is also a subtle aesthetic identity, which takes as its point of reference that cinema of Antonioni which I think is by now part of our way of representing things and representing ourselves. In *Muctar* we see two Russian immigrants speaking in their own language, against the backdrop of a Neapolitan landscape that is at once marine and industrial – the same alienation from the context, the same estrangement as in the earlier portraits. In *L’Italia è una Repubblica fondata sul lavoro*, the theme is not handled

in didactic terms, but I try to create a series of surreal situations, between the documentary and the mise-en-scène, in which the idea of the work is detached from that of a mere production and moves toward a playful action, toward Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens*, the utopias of Constant.

La cinematografia è l’arma più forte, 2007.



BC One current of your work carefully reconstructs fragments of the Fascist period.

RB My exploration of history started out from *La cinematografia è l’arma più forte* [“Cinema Is the Most Powerful Weapon”, ed.] of 2003, created for the Fondazione Adriano Olivetti in Rome. An inscription on a wall, a mural that was intended to refer to the history of Fascism from an aesthetic and conceptual point of view. An intense work, a harbinger of others that I realized later, like *Shooting on the Dam* (2005). Such a direct reference was shocking even for me, and it still is now: in Italy, with Berlusconi’s domination of the media, that word “cinema” takes on another meaning and in any case traces a history, indicates an origin.

BC How immediately recognizable do you think the “source” of that work is? How many people know who invented the slogan “Cinema is the most powerful weapon”? Awareness of history cannot always be taken for granted, especially in our country.

RB Often there is an almost empirical, immediate recognition. With a project like *Le teste in oggetto* [“The Heads in Question”, ed.], in which I discovered and put on display five monumental bronze heads of Mussolini and King Victor Emanuel III that had been stored at the EUR, the historical origin is spectacularly obvious. But what I’m referring to is a certain aesthetic, so strong as to be recognized and recognizable. After

that, certainly, there is a further level of meaning that depends on the personal culture of the viewer. And then yet another, fairly difficult one, that comes into play only if you know where that image or quote comes from. I was curious to try out that slogan because it was utilized a lot in Rome and is still very present. It's such a stratified city that it seems to absorb everything, but I believe that people have the capacity to recognize what is Fascist.

Le teste in oggetto, 2009.



BC **Luce newsreels from the Fascist era are often shown on television. Initially, they were accompanied by a voiceover that established a historical distance and offered a judgment a posteriori, whereas now they are presented just as they were originally: they give me the impression of a certain ambiguity, as if their propagandistic value was emerging again, above and beyond the documentary aspect.**

RB Even works like *La cinematografia* or *Le teste*, which propose materials of the time directly, are ambiguous for me. What I'm trying to do is open a discussion, turn it into a workshop: I'm interested in what goes on around the project, what sort of reaction and participation is triggered by the intervention. I look at these works as a kind of performance, because they interest me only when I'm in the midst of an audience, among people – the relational aspect is very important for me. Now that I think about it, it's no accident that I presented the two projects in private settings like the Fondazione Olivetti and the Nomas Foundation. I don't know if it would have been possible to do it in a museum. That might have made the whole thing more problematic, equating my position with that of the institution and undermining the ambiguity I was speaking of before.

BC **In the fall though you'll be working at the MAXXI, where you're one of the four finalists for the Premio Italia Arte Contemporanea.**

RB Yes, and I imagine it's going to be a bit difficult, because when your relations with the public enter a museum they are modified. I would like to work, from various points of view, on the history of architecture, which I think is the prime subject of the MAXXI. If I can, I'd like to present a project on which I've been working for a long time, on the bunker in the Foro Italico. It was created in the mid-thirties as a jewel of modernist architecture (originally it was called the Casa della Balilla Sperimentale, then the Casa delle Armi nel Foro Mussolini and the Accademia della Scherma, or Fencing Academy). Designed by Luigi Moretti, it was forgotten and then adapted for a different use in the eighties. A story and a building that I've been following since 2006 and know in all its details.

BC **Why that place in particular?**

RB I came across it in the course of a photographic study of Fascist architecture that I was conducting with Kevin van Braak. An investigation that started out from Rome, the EUR and the Foro Italico, and that took us to the sea camps on the Adriatic and in Versilia.

BC **In the same period you made a video, *Il ripristino della vasca vuota* ["The Restoration of the Empty Pool," 2006, ed.], on the swimming pool of the Foro Italico.**

RB Yes. I wanted to record the neutral, surreal relationship that exists between that place laden with history and rhetoric and the people who for twenty years have had the contract for its maintenance. Every September the pool is emptied, cleaned and filled again. In the video you see them wandering around and making some gestures, not doing anything really practical: the objective for me was to set up an encounter with the space, to make the presence of history felt through the grandeur of the setting. What you see is dreadful: mosaics cleaned with acid, fumes rising from the floor. But there is no moralistic intent or condemnation: it simply depicts a routine activity.

BC **The way people think about restoration has changed. In 1963, with his *Theory of Restoration*, Cesare Brandi argued that it "consists of the methodological moment in which the work of art is recognized, in its physical being, and in its dual aesthetic and historical nature, in view of its transmission to the future." In other words, if you don't recognize a work as such, if you don't set it in an aesthetic and an era, you can't restore it. At the most you repair it. Right through the seventies restorers practiced neutral retouching, which made the lacunae due to the passage of time clearly visible. Then, seeing that the effect was too Calvinist, "conceptual" and unattractive, they have gradually gone back to mimetic restoration. The preferred effect is the "as new," which makes the traces of the past vanish and brings the work back to a hypothetical original state. Or an eternal present.**

RB I find this reflection interesting. Over the years, Moretti's bunker in the Foro Italico has been reappraised as a rationalist masterpiece, while the renovation to adapt it to house high-security trials in Rome from the end of the seventies onward has been judged a defacement: trials ranging from the Moro case to the attempt on the pope's life, from April 7 to the Banda della Magliana. A very burdensome history that we are reminded of every time we see a picture of it: the hall is an incredible work of engineering, with very clear lines and the light entering from the side. Then you see the cages, the place of the court, the seats, the chambers and you remember the years of lead. Soon all this will be thrown away, because the complex is being returned to the CONI (Italian National Olympic Committee), the same organization that maintains the swimming pool in the Foro Italico, to turn it into a museum of sport. There has been a great political controversy, but in the end they decided to carry out a radical restoration of the hall, returning it to its "original splendor." This moment of transition interests me greatly. Erasing the renovation, however inappropriate it may

have been, also means removing the traces of that terrible past which is part of the history of Italy and which has not yet been completely worked through, discussed historically.

BC **I was struck by the fact that many students, interviewed after the Italian exam for this year's school-leaving certificate, said that they had not chosen the essay on Primo Levi because it was "not on the syllabus." It's precisely the twentieth century, the period that has left us the heaviest legacies, with all their ideological burdens, that seems to be the least studied in this country. Do you think that the most recent generations of artists are working on the theme of memory in part to draw attention to certain blanks and to try to fill them in?**

RB In reality, I too never got to many of the events and facts on which I'm focusing now with the program of study at school. My method of inquiry and research is very fragmentary, a metaphor for our attempt to reconstruct history through personal stories. I have always been struck by the almost total impossibility of finding an effective and original way of reconstructing history, avoiding second-rate pedagogy. A method based on historical research capable of including the individual part, while avoiding at the same time the rhetoric of the individual. Certain documentaries remind me of interviews of witnesses when something happens. How many kilometers were you from the incident? Did you know the victim? Witnesses who were present at the event and will never grasp the more reflective aspect of their memory.

BC **With *The Undercover Man*, whose protagonist is the famous Joseph Pistone/Donnie Brasco, you have analyzed all this.**

RB For me, *The Undercover Man* is a reflection on the documentary, on the possibility of presenting and recounting a constructed story as if it were a "true" story. There is always an editing, a choice, a reconstruction: even in the documentary. Let's take *The Sun Shines in Kiev* (2006), a project that includes a film, three slide-

shows and a poster linked to the ways in which the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant was reported and to the story of Vladimir Nikitovich Shevchenko, one of the first film directors to arrive on the scene. In the film you can hear two discordant versions one after the other, even though they are told by someone very close to the subject and the event, like Shevchenko's wife. It's not just public institutions, but individuals too who create situations in which it is hard to establish what is the true version of the facts. For my part, in works like *The Undercover Man* and *The Sun Shines in Kiev*, there is not even an attempt to create a coherent story through a multitude of accounts, traces and images. *The Undercover Man* puts all the material on display as if it were a collection of samples: there is the narrative method, represented by the device of the voiceover; the presumed objectivity of the interview, for which we constructed the set; the moment of the take; the omnipresent editing, given that over and under the image run the numbers created by the photo-and-film camera. *The Undercover Man* leads to a discovery of the mechanism of cinema and the documentary, starting out from the reconstruction of this real figure, who is an undercover agent and therefore a person who in his everyday life is lying continually so as to be able to carry on his investigative work.

The Undercover Man, 2008.



BC **Is analyzing fiction and its mechanisms a way for you to carry out a critique of current events, of the building of political consensus?**

RB Perhaps. I think that coming up today with a different system for telling stories that everyone knows is the most effective way of making sure they reach their destination. There's nothing new about Naples and the Camorra, but it's the way that Saviano wrote *Gomorra* that turned it into a bestseller worldwide. The example I like best is that of the graphic novels of Marjane Satrapi, which she uses to tell hard-hitting stories about Iran, but with an immediate, ironic and poetic tone. Perhaps traditional journalism is a bit worn out. It's nice to think that there are other forms capable of telling you about a situation without shoving it in your face.

BC **In the series of photographs *Everything is somehow related to everything else, yet the whole is terrifyingly unstable* (2008) that you made for the Museion in Bolzano, we see you walking along the top of the wall that used to run around the city's Nazi concentration camp. I like the way in which you reveal your sense of vertigo, the risk of losing your balance in the face of a story that cannot be told.**

RB That seems a very fair interpretation to me. I feel that vertigo as an individual in response to these episodes which are so intense but so distant, like black holes about which much has not been said, with silence being preferred in part for painfully personal reasons. And then I feel it in general with regard to history. With my agoraphobia, I wanted to put myself completely on the line with respect to that place, whose boundary wall is almost intact, incorporated into a contemporary urban situation: a former working-class district of public housing units. Many of the residents are fairly well aware of what it represents. There's a recent plaque, and every year there are people who come to visit it, with emotion, sadness and a desire for commemoration – although the numbers are growing ever smaller, owing to their age. In daily existence, the place has a very simple life: one part is used as a parking lot, on one

side there are apartment blocks, on the other a portion is covered with plants; one part is in ruins, one restored. When the Museion invited me to do a site-specific project, I didn't want to work on that theme, even though I was familiar with it. Then one day when I was walking around, I found it in front of me, without any way out. I thought it surrounded a military zone, then I realized that it was a vestige of the concentration camp. And the wall won.

Everything is somehow related to everything else, yet the whole is terrifyingly unstable, 2008.



BC **A book that I liked very much, in high school, was *The Historian's Craft* by Marc Bloch, one of the founders of the French Annales School. It's an unfinished work, as Bloch was shot by the Gestapo as a member of the Resistance in 1944. It opened with a question: "Tell me, Daddy. What is the use of history?" And argued that it was necessary to study "the past in relation to the present and the present in relation to the past."**

RB Yes, I agree totally. For me there is no break between past and present. I pass easily from one situation to the other, in an "ahistoricized" manner. I feel involved in historical events, just as I do in contemporary ones. Both are of use to me. Seeing that I have a very practical, empirical approach, I usually have no problem in finding somebody who knows, speaks, remembers. Sometimes I wish I could do it with many historical figures too.

BC **And the history of art, what use has it been to you?**

RB Here too, I never got to the end of the study program. I stopped at Warhol, making a few leaps along the way as well. I discovered it a bit at a time, through the works, the philosophy, the biographies, some catalogues.

At the academy in Naples the frame of reference was more local, focusing on situations better known to the teachers, like Marina Abramović's performance at the Fondazione Morra or Lucio Amelio's *Terrae Motus* project. Which was positive too, as it's good to study something and to be able to go and see it immediately.

BC **In recent years, in addition to the history of artists there has been much study of that of exhibitions too.**

RB I think that there is a return to a wider documentation, which includes not just the work but its context, the architecture, the display: the exhibition as a project, in short. As far as my work is concerned, it's what I'm trying to do too. It took me a while to realize that it's a necessary step. I've just come across a very beautiful catalogue that illustrates all the exhibitions held in the sixties and seventies by White Wide Space, a gallery in Antwerp. Apart from a parade of all the conceptual art of the period, what you notice are the discordant elements, like windows and radiators, the way in which the work is inserted in the space, negotiating its own location.

BC **Your "anti-monument" for the Carrara Biennale, *Gli anarchici non archiviano* ["Anarchists Do Not Archive," 2010, ed.], which won you the Premio Michelangelo 2010, is located in a very evocative space, an old laboratory, with its feet literally planted in the past. And it's a monument in reverse in part because, formed out of printing-press letters laid out on large iron tables, it only becomes legible when you invert each line in your mind.**

RB It's a work dedicated to the anarchists of Carrara, who have left a crucial mark on the history of the city. Here anarchism has had a strong syndicalist, collectivist tradition, linked to mutual aid and the territory. When the quarrymen went on strike, the stevedores worked and paid the cost of sustenance for the others, opening up their kitchens to all. There are five sculptures: two larger ones start out from the International, with materials drawn from the resolutions of its congresses. They are fragments of texts, documents,

reports and letters that come from three files on three different people: Alberto Meschi, Ugo Fedeli and Hugo Rolland. Meschi, founder of the newspaper *Il Cavatore* ["The Quarry Man", ed.], is a real legend in Carrara, commemorated by a monument in the city's main square. Fedeli was secretary of the Federazione Comunista Libertaria and the Federazione Anarchica. Rolland, an Italian who emigrated to America and then to Paris, was a correspondent of Meschi's and the author of his biography. The small tables are more specific, with subjects like the Carrara uprisings of 1894, illustrated by police records of people arrested, wounded and killed. When you read them you find surnames, first names, jobs: there is even part of the interrogation of an anarchist sculptor. Another table is devoted to an international congress held in 1968. I tried to do research in the Germinal archives in Carrara, but it has been closed down by the police, transferred and is not yet available. So it was suggested that I look in the International Archive for Social History in... Amsterdam! There I found almost everything.

BC **A demanding piece of research. And yet you decided to make the results difficult for the public to take in.**

RB I was interested in the idea that this work was fraught with potential, that it invited people to get involved. A not entirely

didactic relationship, based on interpretation, that required an individual effort.

BC **Do you intend to print those texts anyway?**

RB Certainly, but I still don't know in what setting. On the one hand there is the context of the city for which the works were created, with which they remain connected, on the other that of art.

BC **It's also one of your first true sculptures. Are you moving toward different media?**

RB It's the second sculpture I've made. The first was *Presente!* ["Present!"], ed.), a device that every thirty seconds projected for a fraction of a second the word that serves as its title. *Gli anarchici non archiviano* functions as an invitation to read, to reconstruct stories. In a certain sense, sculpture is a liberation, from technology as well. In the video there is always an aspect of intricacy that I've never found entirely convincing. And 16 mm has become a fetish. *Presente!* is a machine that fires a word as quick as a flash, but the end result, what you see, is almost nothing but the machine. In its own way, the sculpture for Carrara is also a machine of reproduction, a reflection on communication, propaganda and the distribution of ideas. And thus on my work.

Originally published in *Klat*, no. 4 (autumn 2010): pp. 28-45.

Worth a 1000 Words? Image, Text and the Politics of Communication

The image shows a group of people in silhouette against the sunset. The same photograph can be found online with many different captions: from male skincare to cannabis consumption, from gang membership to student information.

Since the advent of photography, the tricky relationship between photographic image and text has been embedded in photographic and artistic practices as well as critical discourses of photo theory.



THE SPECTATOR IS COMPELLED TO LOOK DIRECTLY DOWN THE ROAD AND INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE PICTURE.

Baldessari / *The Spectator Is Compelled ...* / 1966-68

Edward Steichen's landmark exhibition *The Family of Man*, curated for the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1955, featured a total of 503 images by 273 photographers, and was seen by ten million viewers in sixty-nine countries. Steichen believed that the humanist photography of the post-war years represented a "universal language" whose communicative power could unite mankind.

One of the first major projects to critically reflect on key issues of humanist photography is *The Bowery in two inadequate*

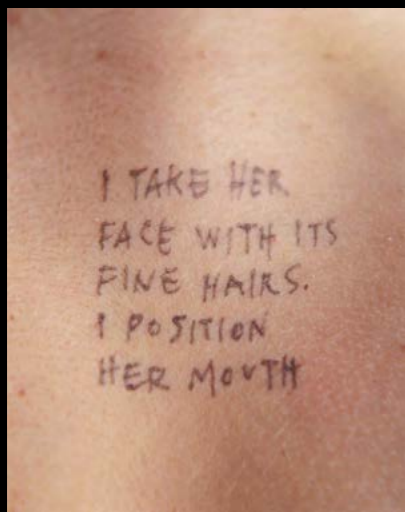
descriptive systems (1974-75), conceived by the American artist Martha Rosler around twenty years later. It comprises forty-five black-and-white photographs, each accompanied by text on white paper. The images show empty doorways, abandoned shop windows and deserted street corners in a neglected neighbourhood. The accompanying text fragments refer to drunkenness. In this groundbreaking image-text work, Rosler not only radically questions documentary photography's claim to representation, but also addresses the inadequacy of the media with which we describe experience and thought. By demonstrating how images depend on context, Rosler refutes the notion that photography is a universal means of communication, opening up a fundamental discourse on how meaning is constructed by and with images.



Barbara Kruger /
Mary Boone Gallery / 1991

One very contemporary critical exploration of the precariousness of image-text relations is *Just Like Arcadia* (2015) by the Italian artists' collective Discipula. The work demonstrates the vulnerability of the digital image, by manipulating its JPEG data. Repeatedly inserting parts of a poem into the data successively corrupts the photographic image.

During the semester Studio Image explored the relationship between image, text and politics of communication in artistic projects involving text layers.



Jenny Holzer / Lustmord / Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin / 1993

We examined how the convergence of private and public space in social media changes the relationship between photographic image and textual information and contributes to a new politics of communication. The production of text and images was understood as an exploratory activity, as knowledge-generating, self-resonant modes of exploration of the world.



Mushon Zer-Aviv, Dan Stavy, Eran Weissenstein / The Normalizing Machine / 2019-2020

Radiosüq does without images at all. Over a coffee Chiara Duchi, Luisa Pisetta and Matteo Zoccolo talk about their radio programme, touching on “listening for the sake of listening”, “semantic satiation”, “placelessness” and other issues that concern their practices as young artists.

Communication through social media is central to Katharina Theresa Mayr’s project *Meet Me At the Laundrette*. She describes her work as “a statement towards a period of time, living in restricted isolation and stories of being social in a non-space”. By repurposing the commercial space of a laundrette as a place for meeting strangers she recruits

online, she temporarily “activates the space” in unpredictable ways. At the end of the project she brings her book full of written reports and stories back to the laundrette and leaves it for the next customer to find.

Elio Pfeifauf’s interactive online video project *Wendeltreppen* introduces the viewer to a labyrinth with no way out. The viewer watches the protagonist roving endless hallways and staircases, lost in self-talk and trapped in repetition. Pfeifauf’s multi-layered narrative invites the user to actively explore “loneliness, failure and the art of loving yourself”.

Nicola Kuhn reviews “Feelings”, an exhibition that was presented to us online by Bernhard Schwenk, the chief curator at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich. Schwenk designed an art exhibition devoid of all textual information. Without the meta level of a textual framework, the viewers were confronted with an unfamiliar setting, and forced to rely on their own observations and previous knowledge.

The viewer’s reflection on the construction of meaning is central to Eva Leitolf’s work. Exploring phenomena like migration and racist violence, she combines her precisely composed photographs of mundane, unspectacular places with laconic textual accounts of events that happened there. In “An Aesthetic of Absence: Critical Counter-narratives of Journalistic Story-Telling in Eva Leitolf’s Photography”, Jana J. Haeckel asks “how can photography in the art context reflect on journalistic storytelling by questioning its documentary standards?”

Students in Conversation

Chiara Duchi, Luisa Pisetta, Matteo Zoccolo, a waiter

on radiosüq / listening for the sake of listening / three manifestations of love / tools to highlight information / screaming listening / semantic satiation / storytelling and manipulation / Jerusalem obsession / repetition / placelessness

Chiara Duchi So how did this path start for you? What led you to found radiosüq, and where did it start?

Luisa Pisetta I don’t know if it was Easter or something like that. It was Sunday. And I remember that we called each other just to...

CD Were you listening to the bells?

LP Oh, one moment, that’s a spoiler! We called just to check in and, you know... I had already sent you a piece of music I made from recordings. You were like, “Oh, I’m into sound too, let’s do something together!” Maybe we called each other to speak about that too. It was midday, twelve o’clock, and the bells started ringing so loudly that we couldn’t hear each other. You were living next door to the Latin Patriarchate and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, right? It went on for something like five minutes, but it felt way longer. I was recording the call, and I actually used that sound for the first broadcast we did for the radio. The sound of the bells was the beginning of everything.

Matteo Zoccolo I also remember that Luisa and I were both critical about the use of images at the time. We both studied for a semester at the Photography Department at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, which made us question many things. And we both had a lot of time because there was a lockdown, both in Jerusalem and in Bolzano, where Luisa had returned to. We were just calling every day, there was very good energy in the air. We spent hours and hours talking, we started to design the website, to call other people, to gather ideas, to write texts. And after a few weeks, radiosüq was broadcasting online.

LP Actually, I didn’t have so much time. I had to study German and English to pass all the language certifications, I had exams, I was attending a studio... I just gave priority to this idea, because I had such an urgent need. I was living at home and feeling like I was in a cage. My family didn’t really understand how I felt about Jerusalem, I was really missing that place. So working with you was a way to bring a little piece of Jerusalem back into my life. For me, it was a way to travel. I was travelling.

MZ Chiara, what do you think about this project? Because later you also took part in the organisation, right?

CD It was an experiment. I had never participated in a project dealing with sound art and radio. I actually first took part in the broadcast that went online on the 16th of June 2020, titled “rrr(rrrrrrrrrr)”. At the time Luisa and I were talking about the dematerialisation of language and categorisation labels. Especially after working together in Studio Image we had many interests in common. And it was a constant tryout and improvising...

Waiter Ecco a voi. Vi porto tre piatti?

MZ Certo, grazie.

CD And what I like about this project is that it was a kind of constant improvisation. We didn’t prepare much. We just experimented with sounds. And, yes, it was very, very spontaneous. This is what I really liked about radiosug in general, the fact that it was not all very well thought out, but very improvised and seizing every occasion, every opportunity to work with people.

LP Our collaboration with Chiara happened really naturally. We were just having lunch together, on the balcony, and we started to talk about the topics that we then tackled in our broadcast. We wanted to work at it, we had that need.

MZ Do you think that in this process we managed to use listening as a tool?

CD I think you often managed to use listening for the sake of listening. So, without second aims. Also, if I think about our work “rrr(rrrrrrrrrr)”, which was about the dematerialisation of language, it didn’t really have a second aim, we just did it for its own sake. It was a whim. It was actually a sort of whim, and I really like this about radiosug. We didn’t use listening as a tool, a means to an end, but just for the sake of pure listening. That was very genuine, I think. This is what we managed to do with the WhatsApp group too. We created a sort of pool of audios where people could contribute their sounds and also just listen to other people’s everyday lives, allowing this flow of sounds to go on without any aim.

MZ Actually, I don’t really know what I mean by listening as a tool. It’s a bit difficult for me to explain. Maybe we could better say “listening as method”.

CD Oh, that sounds better.

MZ So, listening is an active action that makes interaction and engagement possible. For example, Luisa and I were listening to each other’s needs when we first initiated the radiosug project. And later on, we were listening to the people we were collaborating with in order to produce each broadcast.

CD So, listening as a method is not like hearing. Is hearing a part of listening as method? Like when you hear the songs in the elevator, is that listening as a method?

MZ I would say no. I would say that listening and hearing are, very clearly, two different things, maybe opposites.

LP I agree with you that they are very different, but not opposite. When I went to Rome, I went to the Vatican to listen to Pope Francis. He was speaking about three verbs that are the manifestation of love. The first one is...

MZ To fuck!

LP To kiss, to bite!

MZ Ok sorry. What are those verbs?

LP First, to touch. He was talking about Jesus and his wounds. OK. For me that’s another thing. But he also said, “Lovers touch each other. Touch is loving.” The second, to eat. Because of the ritual of eating together, the sharing of such basic human needs. And this is also connected to sex, I mean, it’s also sharing a very basic and instinctive need. And the third one, to listen. And then he added, “To hear is not to listen.” It’s different.

CD Listening is active.

LP He told us exactly that. You listen to your lover, to your mother, to the people that you really care about.

MZ I think it’s very, very interesting how we look at this project with an eye on art, because we consider it an “independent artistic project”. But actually, listening has also very Christian roots. The act of listening is basically what Jesus was doing all the time.

Waiter Macchiato?

LP Per me, grazie.

CD Active listening is also very much connected to manipulation, in some way. Well, also talking about religion, but in general, the way you say or listen to something can manipulate information.

MZ Concerning listening, I definitely think it happens on the passive side of being manipulated. So, who speaks manipulates, who listens is manipulated? Or maybe not, actually. Can you manipulate through listening?

CD Well, if it’s really active, then listening can manipulate.

MZ A few days ago, when we were walking in the mountains, we were speaking about the difference between manipulation and seduction. And maybe that tells us something interesting about listening.

CD Is listening seductive?

LP Well, it can manipulate the way you perceive your past experiences in a way that they become attractive to the other person. What we remember of our past basically creates our present image. But to come back to listening, I don’t know if you ever had the feeling that, when you are reading something or listening to something, you think that it is so significant that you want to scream it to the whole world. Have you ever had this feeling?

MZ Personally, when I read, this feeling translates into underlining and highlighting with many colours, putting arrows and writing in the margin, “WOW!” The exclamation point is crucial.

CD But what if you are listening to this information, and you cannot underline?

MZ Then it turns into frustration. I always regret when I didn’t record a thing to keep it, as evidence or documentation. So that I can listen to it again and again. Which never happens, by the way, I rarely listen to the recordings I make.

CD That’s what I do, too. It’s for fear of missing something, for fear that my memory might fail. So, I record it. And then I never listen to it, but I know it’s there. So, if I want I can go back and still find it.

MZ But you never go back ... I think it’s actually interesting to transcribe audios. You lose data, you lose a huge amount of information that’s in a recording, in a soundscape, in a voice, but you gain accessibility.

LP For me, repetition is the most important tool when I see, listen to, or read something that is so significant to me, and that I want everyone to know about. Repetition plays a really important role in my life. For example, the Pope’s speech was so significant to me that I repeated it to every person I met, I mentioned it in every kind of conversation, like I did here just a moment ago. Repetition is the tool for highlighting the spoken word. I’m really obsessed with repetition. And it’s interesting because every time you repeat something verbally it changes in relation to what you really want to say and the people you’re speaking with. And another thing concerning listening is that, for me, it is a tool. It was a tool to build this radio project. For example, when I was listening to and recording my grandmother telling me her story, I was really listening with the aim of getting other people to listen to it through the radio. Listening as a tool to create a need, to scream.

CD I agree with what you said about repetition. But sometimes I think repetition can also lead to satiation, semantic satiation. When you repeat something many, many times, it loses its meaning.

MZ To me, this is all about storytelling. And it’s something I can really relate to when I try to describe my year in Jerusalem to people who’ve never been there. I end up telling the same three stories over and over again and I have the feeling that this repetition is useful for remembering, but at the same time it diminishes the importance of these and other happenings.

CD I was never in Jerusalem, and all I know about Jerusalem is what Luisa and you told me. I have this idea that is modified, kind of manipulated by you, because I don’t know much else.

MZ And every time I tell the same three stories, I’m pretty sure I’m modifying and shaping my past.

LP Ok guys, there’s so much to say. For me, Jerusalem is an obsession, and obsession is always connected to repetition. I have spent much more time remembering and telling than I did living there. So, for me, it became like a mythological journey, a holy and magnificent thing that now seems like a long dream. I have repeated these stories so many times that for me they are present, I think of them every day.

CD Did the story acquire or lose meaning through this repetition?

LP Through repetition it becomes present. Repetition is a way to create and to conquer a territory. My past conquers my present, it invades and shapes my present. And this is also what Deleuze and Guattari affirmed in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, and specifically in the chapter “1837: Of the Refrain”. Repetition is a way to circumscribe a territory, to create an identity. And it’s also a tool that nations use to build identity.

MZ And do you think that repetition also shapes the reality of the people who listen to the story, and not only the reality and memories of whoever tells it?

LP Well, reality is always shaped by words. When I told Matteo, “Yeah, come here because this place is fucking amazing!” he got a very specific point of view. If he had listened to a friend of mine who wasn’t feeling so good in Jerusalem, maybe he wouldn’t have come. What the fuck is Jerusalem? I can’t really understand what it is. Everyone tells their own experience. You can’t really understand what reality is.

CD What is reality?

MZ Luisa, I think it’s so interesting that we actually started radiosuq as an opportunity to build a bridge between a city, Jerusalem, and us. But we did it through the medium of radio, which we discovered is placeless. So, we were talking about a place with a medium that embodies placelessness. Pretty crazy, right?

LP At the time, I really liked the word “placeless”. For me, it is the crucial word of this project. Maybe, thinking of one year ago when I was in Trentino after being in Jerusalem, I wished that place didn’t exist. Because I only wanted to be in Jerusalem. In my head, I was there, and the physical place where I was did not exist. This radio project has no place and is in every place at the same time. I didn’t really need to be physically there for this project. I can always be in Jerusalem with my mind and with a project that is placeless, which can be anywhere. Anywhere I want to be.

The conversation took place in June 2021.

The time and date of the laundry sessions are announced and shared through a variety of social media channels. I spend thirty-five minutes at the laundrette, waiting for my laundry to be done. I observe the comings and goings, collecting thoughts and indulging myself in smalltalk while waiting. How can a public space be so private – and how can privacy become public property in the glimpse of an eye?

I activate the space, I observe it, I use it, I leave it behind, I return again after ten days. This is as much social activity as is possible. The work is a statement on the constraints of living during a pandemic, delivered through the micro-universe of the laundrette. Stories are told and privacy shared. *Meet Me At the Laundrette* is rooted in a performative process, with underlying repetition and rotation. Here, the planned meets the unexpected, the private the public and the intention the experience. It is all a cycle, like the washing procedure itself, a machine spinning round and round. It has its clear structure, filled with the same monotonous action but always leading to different encounters and experiences.

At the end I am bringing something back to this space to set this cycle once again back to its beginnings. It is an artistic statement closing on itself after a certain period of time, commenting on the Covid-19 pandemic through a collection of written reports, texts and statements. All these stories from the laundrette can be found in a paperback publication which was left behind during a non-event, a non-exhibition in this non-space during these non-social times within the duration of thirty-five minutes. What will happen to the book and its stories? It will continue in some way, starting a new cycle I suppose...

#meetmeatthelaundrette

Written/printed matter, paperback publication, 12.5 × 19.0 cm





#meetmeatthelaundrette
stories from the
laundrette



Some Sentences

***How can a place
be so publicly private and
so privately public?***



#STAYTUNEDFORMORE

observations made
at the laundrette
03.12.20



Nordst/Wash

Nordst/Wash
Laundry

Nordst/Wash
Laundry

#meetmeatthelaundrette
stories from the
laundrette



Some More Words

***The CCTV has the
power and the control...***



#STAYTUNEFORMORE

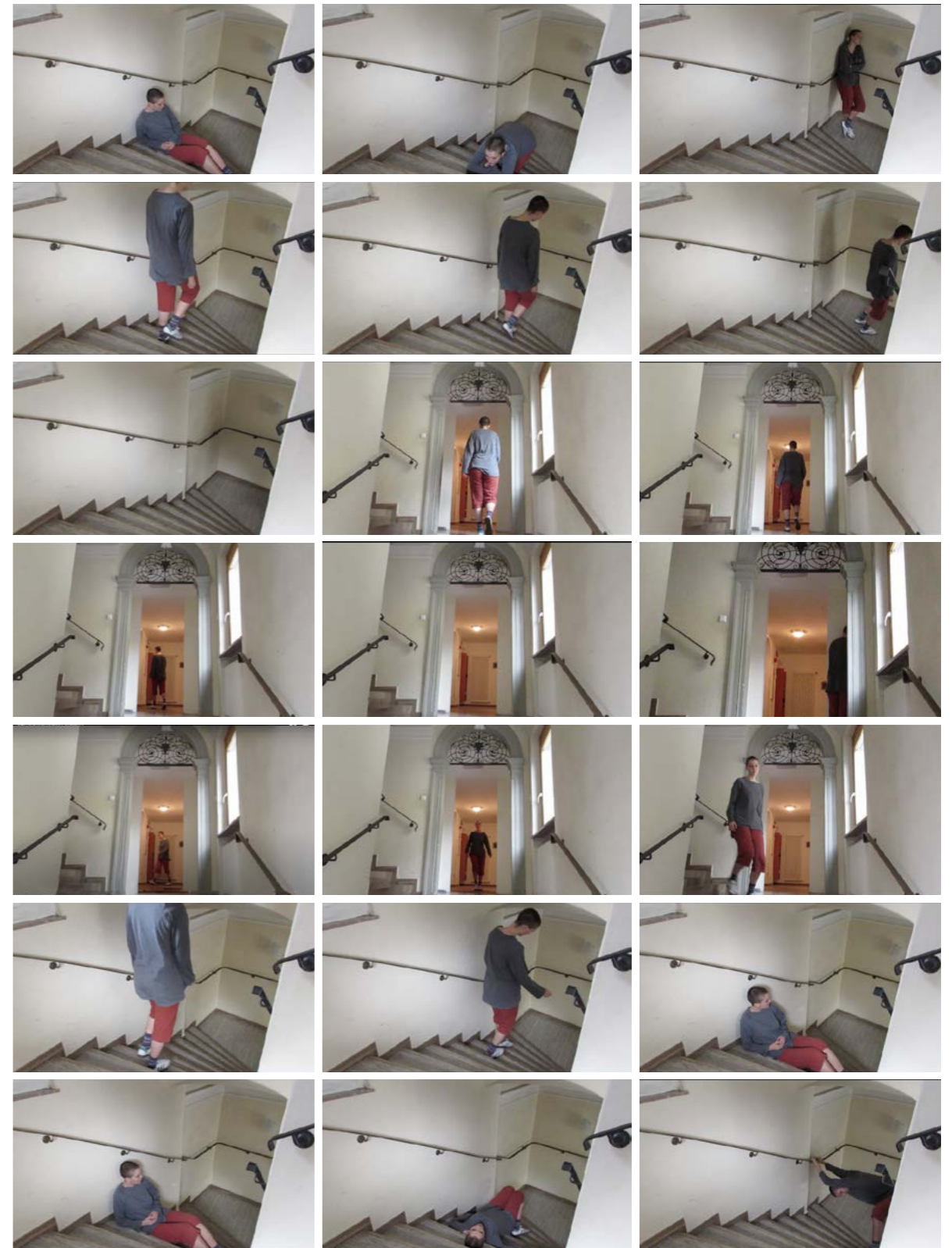
update from the
laundrette of the
23.11.20

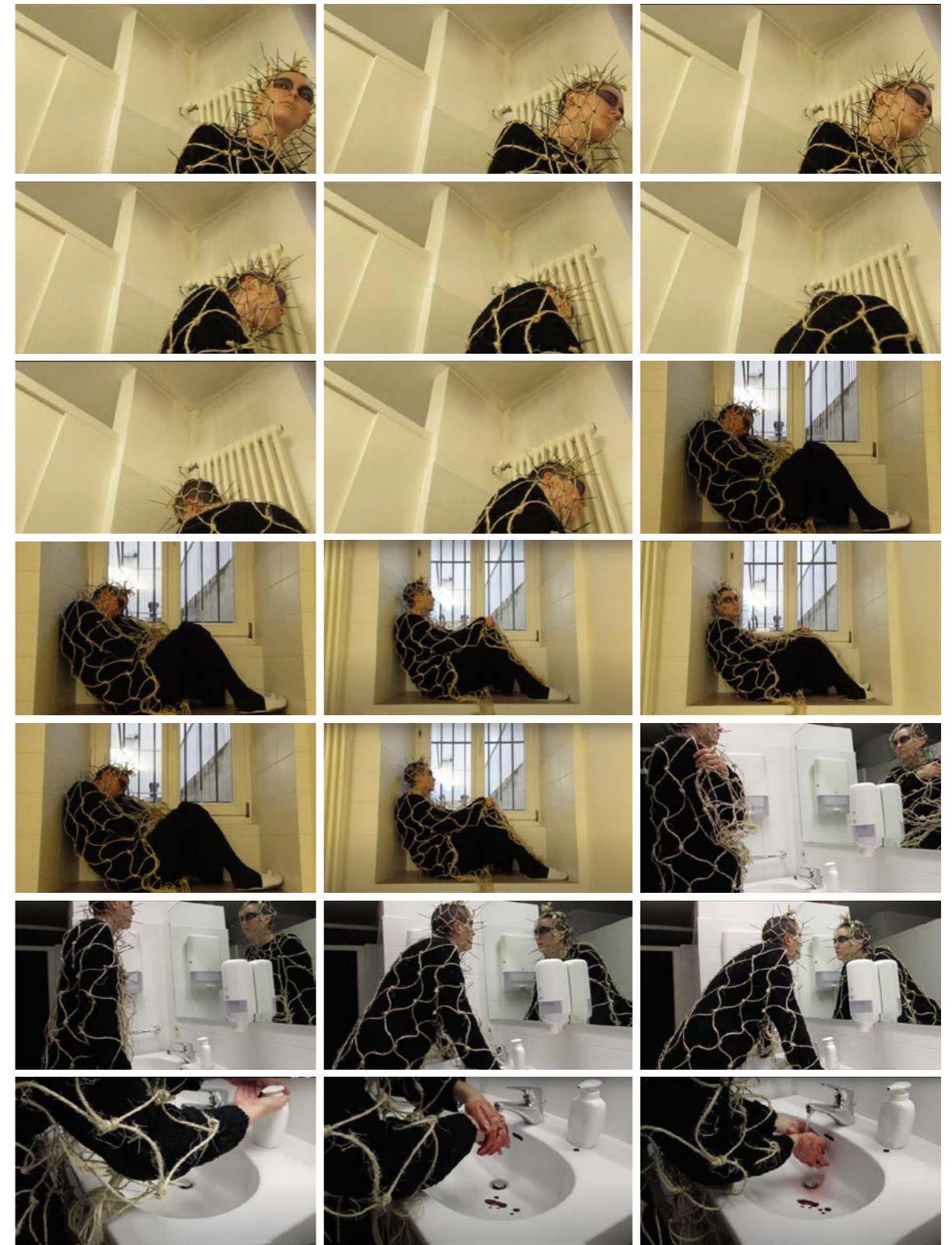


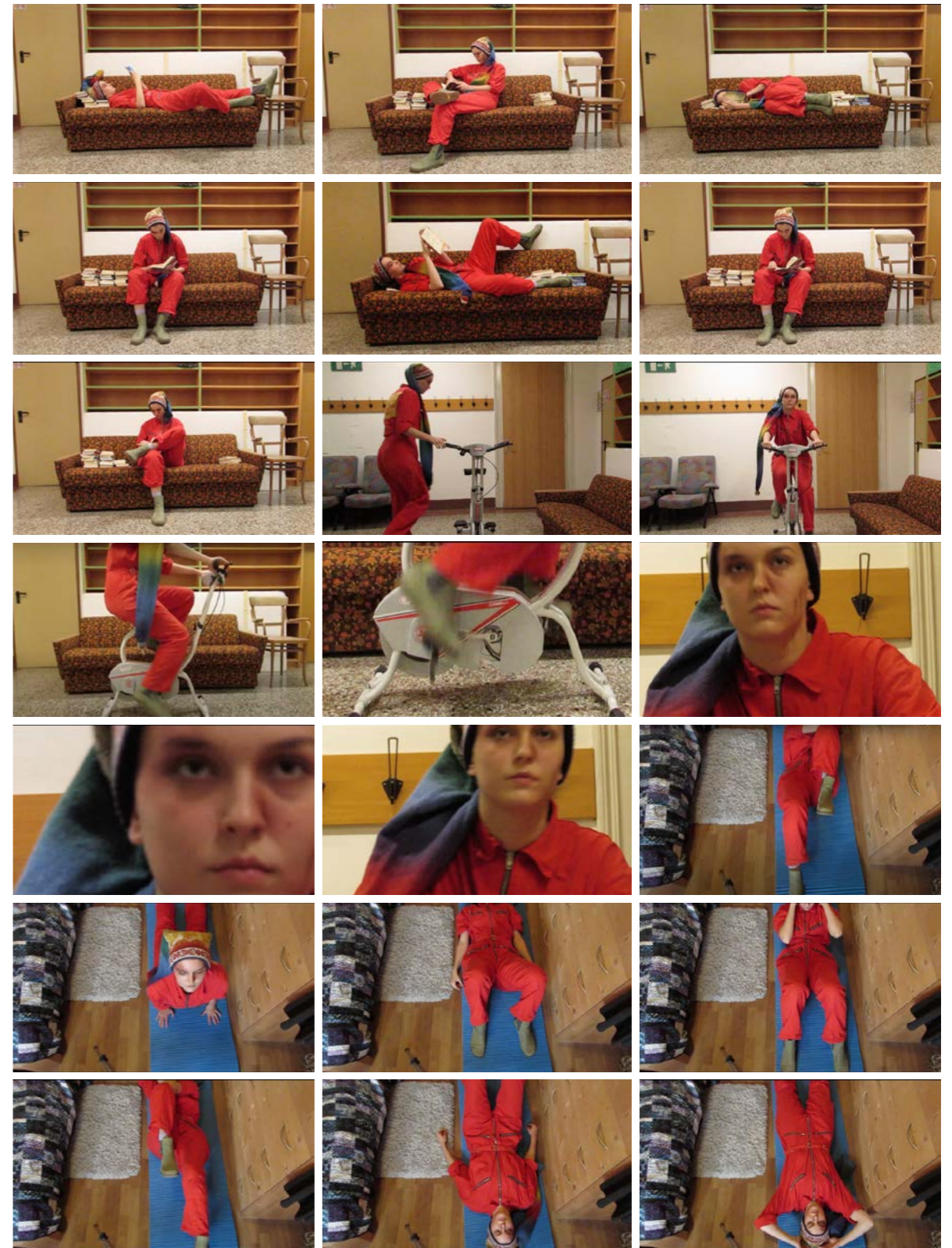
Wendeltreppen
Elio Pfeifauf

Wendeltreppen (Spiral staircases) is an interactive video experience talking about loneliness, failure and the art of loving yourself.

23 videos, various lengths
www.youtube.com/watch?v=aT1BiXBoFMo&t=1s







Immersed in Images

Nicola Kuhn



What will tomorrow's art museum look like? A new exhibition at Munich's Pinakothek der Moderne explores the possibilities. Seeking the most direct experience, prioritising feelings over information.

So you go to the museum to see, to learn, to appreciate. And then you discover that there is nothing to learn, or at least nothing to read. The Munich exhibition "Feelings" plays – as the title implies – with the emotions. And that turns out to be enormously productive. Viewers are left with the works alone, there are no labels stating title, artist's name and other details. They are forced to rely on their intuition, their authentic emotions. No didactic assistance in the form of art-historical contextualisation.

The Pinakothek der Moderne is risking an experiment with this novel presentation of its collection. Bernhart Schwenk, chief curator of contemporary art, fetched the Berlin-based film-maker Nicola Graef, who encouraged him to ditch all categorisations and send the visitor on a journey into the self. "Art and Emotion", the exhibition's subtitle, is a call to candid dialogue between work and viewer.

So what's up with the little girl standing in the corner with her back to the viewer? While the initial reaction is sympathy, the intimate scene generates a growing feeling of unease: The child is not in a public setting like a classroom, but beside a huge wardrobe that could be in a bedroom.

The piece is from the Swiss Stephan Melzl, one of the 42 participating artists. Another of his works also shows a corner scene. A woman in a red dress presses a naked young man to the wall. No need to know the title – "Spiel" (Game) – to be fascinated and perturbed by the ambivalent situation.

We navigate the first raspberry-red room from work to work, more or less by coincidence. Gone the neutral white; the spaces here are mint green, sea blue, ice grey to keep the feelings welling. They change with every work. "Turn into me" provokes disgust. In this stop-motion animation by Nathalie Djurberg and Hans Berg a human corpse is successively consumed by the beasts of the forest. Maggots crawl all over it, a racoon slips into the disembowelled abdomen and hops out again with the last morsel.

Dismay creeps over you as it dawns that there is a baby asleep in the carrier in front of the cashpoint machine. "Modern Moses" by Elmgreen & Dragset sets off entire imagined stories. How, why was the baby abandoned? Hoping it would find new parents who could afford it? Growing admiration for Tracy Emin, who relates in her film how she skipped school when she was 13 and 14 and instead pursued pleasure and lust with random acquaintances. She turned her back on Margate after former lovers chanted "slag" at her at a dance competition. In the closing minutes of the film she dances for herself.

"Feelings" is on trend. Across the world museums are wondering what their function is, their place in society. By banishing all accompanying information and concentrating on the moment of pure experience the Munich curators are seeking not least to reach new audiences, to make art accessible. They assimilate concepts currently being trialled in the great art museums, for example the Museum of Modern Art, soon also the Museum of the 20th Century in Berlin. MoMA does still have room texts, but pared of any jargon that might deter a new visitor.

The sideways leaps in the revamped MoMA are wonderfully perplexing. Whatever fits formally and thematically is brought together, heedless of decade. The compulsive

chronology of -isms is no more, the fixation on the Western canon was already obsolete. National Gallery Director Udo Kittelmann has announced something similar for Berlin. As in New York the familiar and unknown will hang side by side. That will not necessarily be easy for the traditionalists.

“Feelings” goes yet further. The exhibition becomes an adventure, the museum is no longer a sacred temple of art, still less an institution of authority. Mixed feelings again. After all, knowledge expands the complexity of the viewer’s understanding. Here the motto “We only see what we know” has been thrown to the winds.

But there is more to the Munich exhibition. It builds on the relatively young field of emotion research in psychology, sociology and neurology. It is only relatively recently that researchers have begun to show an interest in the fact that more than half our decisions are based on emotions and are frequently only rationalised retrospectively. People are no longer understood as purely rational beings. But it has only recently become possible to investigate exactly what happens in our heads when we view images. Using magnetic resonance imaging we can identify which regions of the brain – apart from visual processing – are active when art is viewed. For example the default mode network, which is responsible for daydreaming, is also involved.

“Feelings” is an invitation to daydream. Yet it was not easy for art historian Schwenk to let go of the aspect of contextual knowledge. But he is firmly convinced that radical opening and de-hierarchisation will be vital for the museum’s future.

The institution must finally shake off its elitist aura. Documentary film-maker Graef’s relationship to art is much more straightforward. She wants to feel touched, thrilled, moved. In the exhibition one can bathe – although not necessarily delight – in the emotions.

Tadeusz Kantor’s installation “Die tote Klasse” (The dead class, 1975) is deeply disturbing. It consists of old-fashioned school benches with glassy-eyed students in uniform staring to the fore. Vlassis Caniaris’s “Hühnerstall” (Chicken coop), made one year earlier, is similarly uncomfortable. Its construction of wood, wire and items of clothing references the living situation of his Greek compatriots while he was studying in Berlin. The critique was universally understood. Miwa Ogasawara’s painting is also self-explanatory. Not that the title “Grau” (Grey) would reveal anything about the six dead girls laid out in white dresses. They are the dead daughters of Joseph Goebbels, painted from a black-and-white photograph. One can only guess at the tragedy. That must suffice.

Visitors have so far responded positively to the Pinakothek’s experiment. And if you do want to know the artist’s name and the title, answers are supplied at the touch of a screen. The only criticism to date: The works are all so sad. “Where are the smiles?” one visitor wrote. Schwenk shrugs. What place does gaiety have in art? The strongest emotions are always the heavy ones.

Originally published in *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin), 13 February 2020. Translated by Meredith Dale.

An Aesthetic of Absence Critical Counter-narratives of Journalistic Story-telling in Eva Leitolf’s Photography

Jana J. Haeckel



Orange Grove, Rosarno, Italy, 2010

In January 2010 the price obtained by Calabrian citrus growers for their Moro and Navel oranges was five euro cents per kilogram. They paid their mostly illegally employed and undocumented African and Eastern European seasonal workers between €20 and €25 for a day’s work. Depending on the variety and the state of the trees a worker can pick between four and seven hundred kilograms of oranges in a day. The business was no longer profitable and many farmers left the fruit to rot.

During the 2009–2010 harvest there were between four and five thousand migrants living in and around Rosarno, most of them in abandoned buildings or plastic shelters, without running water or toilets.

On 7 January 2010 local youths fired an air gun at African orange-pickers returning from work and injured two of them. The ensuing demonstration by migrant workers ended in severe clashes with parts of the local population, during which cars were set on fire and shop windows broken. Accommodation used by seasonal workers was burned and hundreds fled, fearing the local citizens or deportation by the authorities.

On 9 January, under police protection from jeering onlookers, about eight hundred Africans were bussed out to emergency accommodation in Crotona and Bari.

A Season in Hell: MSF Report on the Conditions of Migrants Employed in the Agricultural Sector in Southern Italy, January 2008; tagesschau.de, 10 January 2010; interviews with orange farmers and seasonal labourers, Rosarno, 27–29 January 2010.

An orange tree standing on a field, filled with fruit, most of them overripe, fallen on the muddy ground. Dry, high-growing reed plants in the background, and above, an almost blue sky (image 1). This is a colorful, well-balanced composition, which could be located at any of the numerous orange groves in southern Europe. But how might one read the photograph—as a symbol of

fruitfulness/fertility, a contemporary Garden of Eden? Is the landscape truly as innocent as it appears at first glance?

The atmospheric and unobtrusive photo is part of the series *Postcards from Europe* by German photographer Eva Leitolf.¹ First exhibited at Villa Massimo, Rome (2012), and then at Sprengel Museum Hannover, Germany in 2013, the picture conceals a dark history linked to the circumstances and place where the tree is located.² Next to the hanging photograph, visitors find a stack of postcards with a simple, unemotional description of its frightening background.

Leitolf planned the series *Postcards from Europe* as an “open-ended archive,”³ documenting the desperate situation of migrants at the European borders from a *different* point of view.⁴ Since 2006 the project has taken her to Spain and the Spanish exclaves of Melilla and Ceuta in Morocco, to the Hungarian borders with Serbia and Ukraine, to the Channel ports of Calais and Dover, to southern Italy, and to Greece, in order to witness the distressing situation of migrants at European borders.⁵ In doing so, Leitolf’s photographs track a tragedy that could be called the biggest failure of human rights in the European Union, or the fact that more

1 The full series can be found online on the artist’s homepage: <http://www.evaleitolf.de/>, accessed August 1, 2014.

2 Detailed background about the circumstances in Rosarno has been described by journalist Johan Kornder in his article “Früchte des Zorns,” in *Amnesty International Journal* (Aug 2010), <https://www.amnesty.de/journal/2010/august/fruechte-des-zorns>, accessed August 1, 2014.

3 Interview with Camilla Boemio, <http://www.landscapestories.net/interviews/eva-leitolf?lang=en>, accessed August 1, 2014.

4 See interview with Camilla Boemio. More and detailed information about the hopeless situation of migrants at the European border can be found on the homepage of Amnesty International: <http://www.whenyoudontexist.eu/at-the-borders-of-europe-facts-and-figures/>, accessed August 1, 2014.

5 See interview with Camilla Boemio.

than 23,000 people have lost their lives in the last fourteen years while attempting to reach Europe.⁶

In Hannover, twenty different photographs in her series were exhibited, presented on archival boards alongside each other, close to the wall, and each in a portrait format with the same size (68.6 × 83.5 cm). The visitors were meant to get close to the images and to find an unpretentious description of the place/crime where the photographs were taken. Subsequently, they would discover the harrowing stories behind the images, all of them suspended in a similarly disturbing moment of silence and *emptiness/absence* of a “real” event such as, for example, a peaceful-looking beach scene in Tarifa, Spain, contrasted with a shocking note (image 2) or a picturesque shot showing an open view to the ocean in a nature reserve in Italy, to which truly disturbing information is added (image 3).

The separation of image and text creates a certain tension between the iconic quality of the photographs and the journalistic aspect of the facts, raising the question of what can be seen and what is left to the viewers’ imagination.⁷ But why has Leitolf transferred strategies of journalistic storytelling into an art context, playing with the different meanings of a text and image relationship?

Furthermore, Leitolf not only designed the *Postcards from Europe* series for the exhibition/art space, but also published excerpts from it in a journalistic context, in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*.⁸ By placing the photographs in a newspaper magazine, linked to a specific tradition of

image-making and storytelling, her strong interest in the aesthetics of documentary becomes obvious. In an age where people are overwhelmed by media images, mostly used to shock in order to gain attention, Leitolf asks how the form of documentary photography offers new spaces for viewer reflection. The crux of the matter is then: how can photography in the art context reflect on journalistic storytelling by questioning its documentary standards?



Playa de los Lances, Tarifa, Spain 2009

A boat carrying twenty-three undocumented Moroccan immigrants went down off Tarifa during a severe storm on 1 November 1988. The bodies of ten who drowned were washed up on the beach at Los Lances. Nine were never found and there were four survivors.

A vessel with more than thirty people on board sank near Tarifa on 15 September 1997. Six passengers survived, fourteen corpses were found on the Playa de los Lances and an unknown number were lost at sea.

El País, 2 November 1988 and 16 September 1997; *Diario de León*, 9 October 2002

The main problem/challenge of the documentary form might be found in the presentation of “reality”: while its defenders believe that documentary images reproduce facts that help to unveil/picture an “essence” of truth, its critics regard the idea of a documented “truth” as a social construction, reproducing ideologies/functions of power.⁹ Leitolf’s interpretation of documentary photography seems to strike at the heart of this problem. In combining a neutral text and photo that blatantly refuses to reveal

⁹ See Hito Steyerl, *Politics of Truth – Dokumentarismen in the Art Field*, Springerin (2003), http://www.springer.in.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1353&lang=en (accessed August 1, 2014); and Hito Steyerl, *Die Farbe der Wahrheit: Dokumentarismen im Kunstfeld* (Vienna: Turia + Kant, 2008).

the described crime, in fact, she develops a critical counter-narrative to journalistic or “conventional” documentary storytelling. After reading the text of the photographs, certain expectations and images are evoked. Yet Leitolf’s images do not illustrate the referenced disasters; they refuse to show the deported seasonal workers or the dead bodies washed ashore. Instead, they trace only the “innocent” landscape where the disaster occurred, thus capturing a disturbing moment of absence and silence.

In doing so, Leitolf plays with the indexical character of photography, creating a *double absence*: an empty space between text and photograph as well as between the indexical image (photograph) and the imagined image. Whereas traditional documentary photography uses the indexical status of the medium to refer to the pictured facts, Leitolf refuses to illustrate the described crime, or to show the crime at all—she confronts the viewers with non-events. Her images, moreover, do something that conventional documentary photography does not: they avoid giving space for visual/literary identification and open up a process of inquiry for the viewers through an *aesthetic of absence*. Yet which aspects of the “truth” do Leitolf’s photographs manifest, compared to traditional, journalistic image-making? And wherein lies the critical impact of such an *aesthetic of absence*?

As famously theorized by Susan Sontag, photographs are always an interpretation of the world, and this interpretation, be it by the photographers or viewers of the image, is affected by conventions and ideologies. In her collection of essays, *On Photography*, Sontag discusses the negative effects of mass reproduction and distribution of images, especially when it comes to photographs that are used to witness war crimes and historic events by utilizing “shock” aesthetics. From this point of view, Sontag is especially interested in the strong interrelation between the indexical status of photography in creating “traces of the real” and the “circulation and consumption of these traces.”¹⁰ According to Sontag, the act of taking

¹⁰ See Peter Geimer: *Theorien der Fotografie: Theorien der Fotografie zur Einführung*. Junius Hamburg, 2009, especially chapter 4.1. “Kritik der Bilderflut (Kracauer, Sontag),” here 157.

a photo creates a distance between photographer and reality, while simultaneously giving an illusion of participation—the negative consequence is a neutralization of meaning and events. In this sense the ambiguous character of a photograph is both “a pseudo-presence and a token of absence.”¹¹ As a consequence, Sontag compares photography with a symbolic weapon and the act of taking a picture with shooting, reifying people into objects.¹²



Venticari Nature Reserve, Italy 2010

On 27 October 2007 two walkers came across several shoes washed up on a beach in the nature reserve of Venticari. During the following days seventeen corpses were found there.

On their own initiative the couple obtained a list of the names of the dead from the authorities, contacted the relatives in Egypt and Palestine and arranged for a Muslim funeral to be held. About one hundred people attended the ceremony officiated by the imam of Catania on 1 November 2008, including relatives of the dead and local police. The events led to the founding of Borderline Sicilia.

RagusaNews.com, 24 October 2008; interview with journalist Roman Herzog, *Noto*, 23 January 2010

Leitolf’s photographs seem to strike at the heart this problem: they do not pretend to represent the “real” event, to have been there to “document” the crime. And they do not “shoot” people by objectifying their suffering. All they show are deserted landscapes—the pictured emptiness becomes a sign for the illusion of participation in traditional “shock” photos, as critiqued by Sontag. In this sense the photographed *absence* represents an ethical way to picture a crime, without showing

¹¹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 16.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14

the details of the suffering victim, like a wounded or dead body. Leitolf leaves it to the viewers to decide for themselves how thoroughly, and in what order they wish to explore the different levels of photographic meaning. The separation of text and image creates space to reflect on the question of what “real” means—there are no “victims” or “perpetrators,” no pictured stereotypes allowing easy identification.¹³

Image 4



Schweriner See, near Berlin, 2006

A group of French and Italian teenagers – black and white – camping by the lake near Schwerin were attacked on 1 August 2006 by a German youth throwing bottles. The attacker gave the Hitler salute and went on with two friends to Gross Köris, where he smashed a window of an Asian take-away. Following police investigations, the three suspects were charged with criminal damage, displaying banned symbols and attempted grievous bodily harm, as well as a robbery committed later. One of the perpetrators was sentenced to two years youth custody (suspended), another to one year and six months youth custody (suspended), while the third was cautioned.

Landeskriminalamt Brandenburg, Staatsanwaltschaft Potsdam.

In this manner, the deserted landscapes, in combination with the texts, become a launching point to interrogate how meaning is constructed in the first place. In the line with Sontag, Leitolf’s photographs try to re-integrate viewers’ reflections on “the real” in order to reach a new quality of participation with the pictured crime. Published as a series of twenty photographs taken over a long duration (six years),¹⁴ Leitolf’s images fascinate by their precision and detailed background knowledge. Her photographs illustrate at first glance a visual distance, picturing “innocent” landscapes as silent

witnesses of the tragedy. Yet the artist participates actively and in an intimate way. During the process of the series’ production, Leitolf spent a long time living at the places where the crime took place, researching the “facts,” observing the surroundings, and talking to different people about the circumstances.¹⁵ In her careful observation and long-term research lies another critical counter-narrative of journalistic storytelling, questioning the growing information flow and the non-authored image circulation in contemporary media. As a result, the photographed *absence* accrues a kind of forensic quality, attempting to give back meaning to the photographed event.

Leitolf’s work has often been described as a “combination of documentary and conceptual strategies,” exploring the possibilities and limits of visual representation.¹⁶ In this sense, her artistic education plays an important role. Born in 1966 in Germany, she studied photography at University GH Essen with Angela Neuke,¹⁷ and earned her MFA at the California Institute of the Arts as student of Allan Sekula.¹⁸ In this sense Leitolf’s practice stands within the tradition of engaged documentary photography that, in the strictest definition, works “against the strategies that have succeeded in making photography a high art.”¹⁹

13 See Torsten Scheid: “An den Grenzen des Abbildbaren. Im Atelier von Eva Leitolf (At the borders of the picturable),” in *Points of View. Orte der Fotografie* (Heidelberg 2012), 37-41 (95, engl.).

14 See interview with Franziska Brückner: “Mehrfachbelichtung: Eva Leitoffs Arbeit im Prozess,” March 2009, <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/miscellaniesnetzwerk/mira-38541/137/PDF/137.pdf>, last access August 1, 2014.

15 See interview with Franziska Brückner.

16 See interview with Camilla Boemio.

17 Neuke was part of an important movement of young German photographers during the late 1970s and early 1980s, known as “Autorenfotografie”—a term established by Klaus Honnef. The approach of this photography could be found in its combination of subjectivity with an analysis of social reality, in order to define photography’s documentary function. Exh. Cat. *Die Welt als Ganzes: Fotografie aus Deutschland nach 1989* (Ostfildern-Ruit 2000), 134 f.

18 The artist and writer Allan Sekula, known for his politically pointed photographic and film projects, is a thoughtful critic of the social function and the use and abuse of photography and its documentary character in global power relations. See Allan Sekula, “Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation),” *The Massachusetts Review*, 19:4 (Dec 1978), 859–83; and chapter 4, “On Photography’s Social Function: The Documentary Legacy,” in Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 152–189.

19 See Sekula, 1978.

In the early 1990s with *German Images – Looking for Evidence*, a photo series depicting locations where immigrants were attacked in Germany after the fall of the Wall, Leitolf began to increasingly emphasize an “aesthetic of absence.” As in *Postcards from Europe*, the second part of *German Images – Looking for Evidence* (2006–2008) combines short text notes with photographs taken from the different crime scenes.²⁰ The notes describe in the same neutral, dispassionate way the injustices that occurred at the pictured locations, such as in the example of a photograph displaying a sunny, summer lakeside scene (image 4) or a deserted street close to a bridge (image 5).

Designed as a series, *German Images – Looking for Evidence* consists of two parts: one taken between 1992 and 1994, the other between 2006 and 2008. Whereas the first section shows mostly interiors and people who have been directly and indirectly involved in the racist attacks of August 22–25, 1992 in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, the second part follows a different visual narrative. These photos show mostly deserted, beautiful landscapes, and question—as in *Postcards from Europe*—the innocence of the pictured locations. In an interview with Rémi Coignet, Leitolf states that the second part of the series aims to prevent a type of identification mostly linked to people, in order to create “images that look like an empty theatre where the viewer is able to project his own thoughts and emotions.”²¹

In creating “images that look like an empty theatre where the viewer is able to project his own thoughts and emotions”²² Leitolf’s photographed, deserted landscapes become a placeholder for projection and imagination, standing in the tradition of the French pioneer of documentary photography, *Eugène Atget*. As Walter Benjamin

20 For the museum presentation of *German Images – Looking for Evidence*, the text notes were located close to the entrance, so that the separation of text and image was even more drastic than in *Postcards from Europe*.

21 See interview with Rémi Coignet “Une conversation avec Eva Leitolf,” in *Des livres et des photos* (January 25, 2012), <http://deslivresetdesphotos.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/01/25/une-conversation-avec-eva-leitolf/>, last accessed August 1, 2014.

22 See interview with Rémi Coignet “Une conversation avec Eva Leitolf,” in *Des livres et des photos* (January 25, 2012), <http://deslivresetdesphotos.blog.lemonde.fr/2012/01/25/une-conversation-avec-eva-leitolf/>, last accessed August 1, 2014.

observed concerning Atget’s Paris photos, the “emptiness” of the deserted streets plays a significant role in the construction of photographic meaning, becoming a sort of stage, a space for projection, *beyond* uncritical contemplation.²³ Benjamin compares Atget’s photographs with the scene of a crime and describes a sense of mysterious emptiness at the heart of Atget’s images, a feeling of uncanny incompleteness.²⁴

Image 5



Pond, Viersen, 2007

A twenty-two-year-old man told the police in Viersen that on 10 July 2006 he had been verbally abused and physically assaulted by four young men on account of his skin colour. He said that he had succeeded in defending himself and getting away. The state security department of the Mönchengladbach police took charge of the investigation but was unable to identify any of the perpetrators.

Kriminalpolizei Mönchengladbach, Staatsanwaltschaft Mönchengladbach.

Furthermore, Benjamin addresses a politically significant aspect in the photographs of Atget: as mentioned earlier in his essay *A Small History of Photography*, Benjamin discovers the ability of photography “to give free play to the politically educated eye.”²⁵ Benjamin’s crucial point about photography is that one should never uncritically present a photograph as a document with undisputable historical/political value.²⁶ Following this position,

23 See Walter Benjamin, *A Small History of Photography* (1931), 256.

24 See David Company, “Eugène Atget’s Intelligent Document,” in *Eugène Atget: Photographe de Paris, Errata Editions* (2009).

25 Benjamin, 251.

26 Sekula on Benjamin, see Sekula, 1978, 863.

Leitolf's *double absence* between image and text allows viewers a kind of freedom and responsibility at the same time. Her documentary photographs uphold a tradition that "frames the crime, the trial, and the system of justice and its official myths."²⁷

Indeed, the deceitful beauty of Leitolf's landscapes in *German Images – Looking for Evidence* can be read as a critical counter-narrative to journalistic story-telling in the media during this time, as art historian Inka Graeve Ingelmann notes:

"[...] the shockingly graphic pictures in the tabloid newspapers and on television also offered many people the opportunity to distance themselves from those events and view them as something that had nothing to do with their own lives and their well-cultivated democratic self-image."²⁸

A "shocking" aesthetic, used by photojournalists to document Nazi crimes, as well as asylum seekers, actually produced a distancing effect for viewers. They could assume an uninvolved stance—the perpetrators were "the others," not those living next door. The photographic clichés, in other words, excluded viewers and created an "unreal" effect, which concealed the frightening circumstances and context of the images.

One of the earliest critiques of such an "explicit" aesthetics of shock, often a key characteristic of fraught images, goes back to Roland Barthes in his essay "Shock Photos." Included in his *Mythologies* (1979), Barthes writes in his essay about a photo showing the execution of Guatemalan Communists. He provocatively suggests that "this photograph is not terrible in itself, and that the horror comes from the fact that *we are looking at it* from inside our freedom."²⁹ It is the same critique offered by Sontag—that the explicit visual language of framing a *fraught image*, of documenting the crime, creates a "pseudo-presence." Yet Barthes goes further.

27 Ibid., 864.

28 See Inka Graeve Ingelmann, *Deutsche Bilder – eine Spurensuche in Rostock, Thale, Solingen und Bielefeld Rostock Ritz*, <http://www.evaleitolf.de/Ueber1.html>, accessed August 1, 2014.

29 See Roland Barthes, "Shock-Photos," in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 71–73.

For him, most "shock photos" have no effect on the viewer because of the almost overproduced quality of these photographs. Barthes states that "we are linked to these images only by a technical interest."³⁰ As a consequence, images that are meant to "shock" in a traditional way are "over-constructed" and lose their effect due to the subdued presence of the photographer.³¹ What Barthes longs for are photographs that offer an undiscovered residue of meaning beyond the photographer's obvious intention, images that are not reducible to "language," or photographs that offer an *imaginative space* for the viewer to "elaborate himself without being encumbered by the demiurgic presence of the photographer."³² This quality can be found in Leitolf's concept of deserted landscapes. What differentiates *her photography* from a conventional way of dealing with the evidentiary status of photographs, as critiqued by Sontag, Benjamin, and Barthes, is that Leitolf never treats the medium as one that falsifies "reality." Interested in the prejudices and assumptions of viewers, she interrogates a photographer's motives and a photograph's larger relationship to the world. In doing so, Leitolf uses a quality that is typical for photofilmic images as such: she creates a distance, another temporal experience that permits the viewer to reflect more freely upon what he is seeing.³³

Concomitantly, she questions what viewers "believe" in, and about a photograph. The absence of the pictured crime, of an "event," positions itself against an "overconstructed" photograph, giving the viewers space for their own imagination. It is a space that finally overcomes the distance to the photographed tragedy. In doing so, Leitolf's *aesthetic of absence* offers a way to a conscious, critical reflection on photography—creating a present, not absent viewer.

Originally published in *Image [&] Narrative* 16, no. 1 (2015), pp. 45–56.

30 Ibid., 71.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 73.

33 See Raymond Bellour, "The Pensive Spectator," in *Between-the-Images* (Zurich/Dijon: JRP|Ringier & Les Presses du Réel, 2012), 86–93.

The End of the Global World? Visual (Counter-)Narratives of Territory and Identity

"Territorial identity, which is initially an individual feeling restricted to a small area, is instrumentalised politically, via a change of scale, in order to construct regional or national identities."¹ Yves Guermond's concept of territorial identity appears to contradict the force of deterritorialization associated with the popularisation of digital technology.



Fascist monument / Bolzano-Bozen / 1928

Although the internet was originally developed by the US military, the World Wide Web of the 1990s seemed to promise a globally connected utopia. Unrestricted and equal access to information – at least for those with the required technical means. The internet allowed "space" to be understood as a set of relationships rather than a container. Extremely diverse communities emerged, without heed to nationality or place of birth, creed or colour.

¹ Yves Guermond, "Territorial Identity: The Ambiguity of a Geographical Concept", *L'Espace géographique* 35, no. 4 (2006): 291.

Today, Internet 2.0 has become a forum for hate speech, offensive imagery and nationalist narratives. Rather than enlightening our societies, the availability of almost unlimited information and opinion has promoted isolationism and anti-democratic tendencies.

Images widely shared on social media play an important role in constructing and questioning social and political reality. Whether a photograph of a contemporary Italian politician posing on a historically loaded balcony or a video of apparently threatening male migrants: Images have the potential to shape cultural and territorial identities by implementing, strengthening or counteracting cultural, social and political narratives. At the same time, the processes of production, selection, appropriation and interpretation of images are continuously shaped and changed by cultural influences and identity politics.



r/place / 2011-16

In the project *The End of the Global World? Visual (Counter-)Narratives of Territory and Identity*, Studio Image invited students to explore the interplay of images, cultures and identities. We discussed Erna Lendvai Dirksen's

Das deutsche Volksgesicht (1941), Robert Frank's *The Americans* (1959), Martin Parr's *Think of England* (2000) and Taryn Simon's *An American Index of the Hidden and the Unfamiliar* (2007) as well as Doug Rickard's *National Anthem* (2014) and Wolfgang Tillmans' anti-Brexit campaign *Remain* (2016), to name just a few examples. Contemporary representative and operational image practices that promote or counteract populist and nationalist visual narratives were also investigated, including the media representation of minorities and the use of racial profiling in policing. The central questions of the semester were: Can artistic practices help to balance populist ideas of homogeneity? How can art strengthen liberal democracy and the idea of a shared Europe/world?

Paulo Nazareth /
Notícias de América / 2011-12



In her essay on Salvatore Vitale's visual research *How to Secure a Country* (2014-18), Max Houghton describes Switzerland as "the third most heavily armed country in the world". Vitale collaborated with ETH Zurich to reveal Switzerland's "most complex security systems", which are otherwise invisible. "Vitale's enterprise reveals how state power is a significant factor in shaping the very environments in which we live."

Michelangelo Boldrin collected and analysed operational images produced by surveillance systems of border regimes. On the website for his project *Through the Eye: The Aesthetics of Control* he reflects on the aesthetic practices of de-humanisation of population movements.

In "Illegalizing Crowds: The Visual Representation of People Flows in the (Post-) Schengen Era", Daniele Salerno discusses "the end of a regime of visibility". Referring to Algirdas Julien Greimas, Salerno describes the ongoing representation of people flows as a threat to nation states as part of a larger process of illegalization of individuals.

Marco Enrico Giacomelli, deputy editorial director of *Artribune* and our end-of-semester

guest critic, joined us online to discuss the students' projects. In his essay "Our Uniqueness" he reflects on the notion of the banal in art and the changing qualities of relationships, and concludes "that the only possible uniqueness is, counterintuitively, plural".

Zineb Sedira / Air Affairs / 2018



Luca Piscopo took the topic of territorial identity to a very intimate setting: the family. "Identity is grounded in habit; the repetition of action and thought establishes home."² Piscopo's *Candy Oscuro* radically challenges traditional family roles to illuminate the fragile and changing nature of what we consider identity.

2

J. Macgregor Wise, "Home: Territory and Identity", *Cultural Studies* 14, no. 2 (2000): 295.

Salvatore Vitale: How to Secure a Country

Max Houghton

Switzerland has long enjoyed its reputation as 'the safest country in the world', not least for anyone wishing to keep financial affairs private. Since the Treaty of Paris in 1815, self-imposed political neutrality has been central to Switzerland's security. This decision saved thousands of Swiss – though few Jewish – lives during WWII, when the country was encircled by Axis powers. Neutrality, however, does not equal pacifism. With every male citizen aged 18-34 mandated to military service, Switzerland is a gun-nation, the third most heavily armed country in the world, after the United States, and Yemen, and where it is common-place to see a ten year-old loading SIG SG 550 or FAS 90 (similar to the AK47, but also customised for sport). In case of invasion, hyper-vigilant Switzerland is ready to defend its territory.

Making citizens feel safe comes at a price, of course, as Josef K. found out, to his detriment and eventual voluntary suicide, in Kafka's *The Trial*. Kafka was matchless in describing what happens to a person, when everything and everyone is perceived in terms of a threat; a kind of disintegration at the level of the soul. Spiritual bankruptcy.

A question hovers, and remains ever-present: when does a threat become a risk? Looking for the answer has preoccupied photographer Salvatore Vitale, a Sicilian, who has been living in Switzerland for the past twelve years. One imagines the initial shock of experiencing the smoothness and visibility of a Swiss road at night. His adopted home, surrounded by mountains, enfolded into the very centre of Europe, offers unique social, political and financial protection to its citizens; it is palpable. Vitale could feel it in the air. Over time, his observations of differences in efficiency and state protocols inspired a desire to create an extensive visual research into *How to Secure a Country*. He began to collaborate with the prestigious ETH

university in Zurich, a relationship which has proved essential in both trying to assess one of the most complex security systems in the world and in gaining permission to access places otherwise sequestered. The collaboration functions at many levels and is used by Vitale specifically to be responsive to interests outside the art world. By being guided by specialists within various institutions, he aims to show how the system works from the inside. This approach to research is as refreshing as it is rigorous.

From: *How to Secure a Country*, 2014-2019.



Looking at Vitale's meticulous, clinically clean Switzerland, we might begin to comprehend that the landscape we more stereotypically associate with skiing or yodeling or Heidi is in fact weaponised, to use a popular term, or we could say 'securitised'. Mountains are hollowed out to house entire army divisions. Fake stone-work conceals artillery; domestic residences in chocolate-box pretty villages harbor cannons; bridges are stuffed with dynamite, ensuring all roads become dead-ends in the event of an attack.

'Pre-emption,' Brian Massumi writes, 'is the generative logic of our time.' He is

writing, in *Ontopower*, about post 9/11 USA, but the Swiss approach might operate as a kind of antecedent. The experience of looking at Vitale's chilling imagery reminds us how '[t]his incipience of an event as yet to be determined, overfull with really felt potential, carries an untenable tension.'

From: *How to Secure a Country*, 2014–2019.



Vitale has striven to find an aesthetic approach that bears witness to this tension. He has restaged the contents of instruction manuals, spent time in border control rooms, weather stations, and airport watch-towers, and been present at simulation exercises in order to understand the production of security. Vitale's eye also takes in the environment in the shape of mountain valleys, nocturnal foliage, a lake inhabited by a police diver. To further the connection with Massumi's thinking, Vitale's enterprise reveals how state power is a significant factor in shaping the very environments in which we live. Eventually, it all becomes *entirely natural*.

Vitale is also spending time – the project is ongoing – at MeteoSwiss, which supplies vital meteorological analysis via its super computer in Lugano. There is a productive connection between the weather and state security, which Vitale is exposing, in terms of air traffic, both civil and military, or chemical or nuclear accident, for example, as well as providing forecasts for climbers or hikers, who would be at risk from extreme weather. In wealthy Switzerland, the profitable insurance industry relies on such risk analysis.

Piecing together the many links in this unwieldy network, via Vitale's imagery, we begin to see how a politics of knowledge is created through power relations. He brings us a sonar image, used on a rescue mission undertaken by Swiss lake police, who provided the image. Sound wavelengths in water are approximately 2000 times longer than those of visible light, which

makes it possible to 'see', when light can't penetrate far enough. The resulting image can only be interpreted by a highly trained expert, leaving the layperson to consider it purely as visual spectacle: a narrow, symmetrical chasm between two masses, with an unidentifiable circular ring to the top right. Scientists have employed sonar imaging techniques in Lake Neuchatel to find evidence of tectonically active zones that might trigger earthquakes, for example. Seek and you shall find.

As might be expected, technology is at the forefront of security production. While older methods of detection are still utilised – as we see in the image of the sniffer dog – the most advanced robotics technology is playing its role too. Vitale introduces us to ANYmal, which (it is tempting to say 'who') is being developed for rescue missions, and is designed for autonomous operation in challenging environments. Robotics research has been focused predominantly in this area since Fukushima. The inclusion of ANYmal in this series seems ominous. The human body begins to feel superfluous.

From: *How to Secure a Country*, 2014–2019.



Perhaps the most revealing glimpse into the production of security is the series of still images, the title of which translates as *The six errors with regard to security threats*. Classic stock imagery of elegant ballet dancers, or three generations of a healthy Swiss family, is juxtaposed with more sinister pictures – a hooded person at a keyboard, a raging fire. The original video is a Swiss Army production, at once

bane and antidote: on the one hand, it educates the public on possible dangers to their culture or economy, while at the same time, presents the army as the necessary solution; guarantor of peace and prosperity.

From: *How to Secure a Country*, 2014–2019.



A couple of images offer brief respite from the tightly-calibrated visual regime. Vitale's research began with border control, where, outside the inspection rooms and the extraterritorial space of the airport, he observed traces in the landscape, left by refugees. The viewer is affected by this fleeting human touch. A hand-written note in Tigrinya, the Eritrean language, offers reassurance for those that might follow in their footsteps: 'We are here. You are in Switzerland.' Elsewhere, a vivid red map acts as a warning to fellow refugees, to make clear that Switzerland is in fact a country in its own right.

A final image in this illuminating series shows a white cross on a red square, one of the most-recognised flags in the world, or the looking-glass version of a never-ending state of emergency. The disaster-to-come is always already present.

Originally published in *1000 Words* 26.

**Through the Eye:
The Aesthetics of Control**
Michelangelo Boldrin

We live in the age of the triumph of borders. These lines are drawn and represented by the nation-state as a primordial statement, an ancient feature of our own inner nature. In this scenario, the “illegal” overcoming of a border is a crime, and one that represents an unnatural state of being. This is why Fortress Europe has been created, as a powerful “machine of control” that aims to monitor and identify everyone crossing the border in order to impose its power on them.

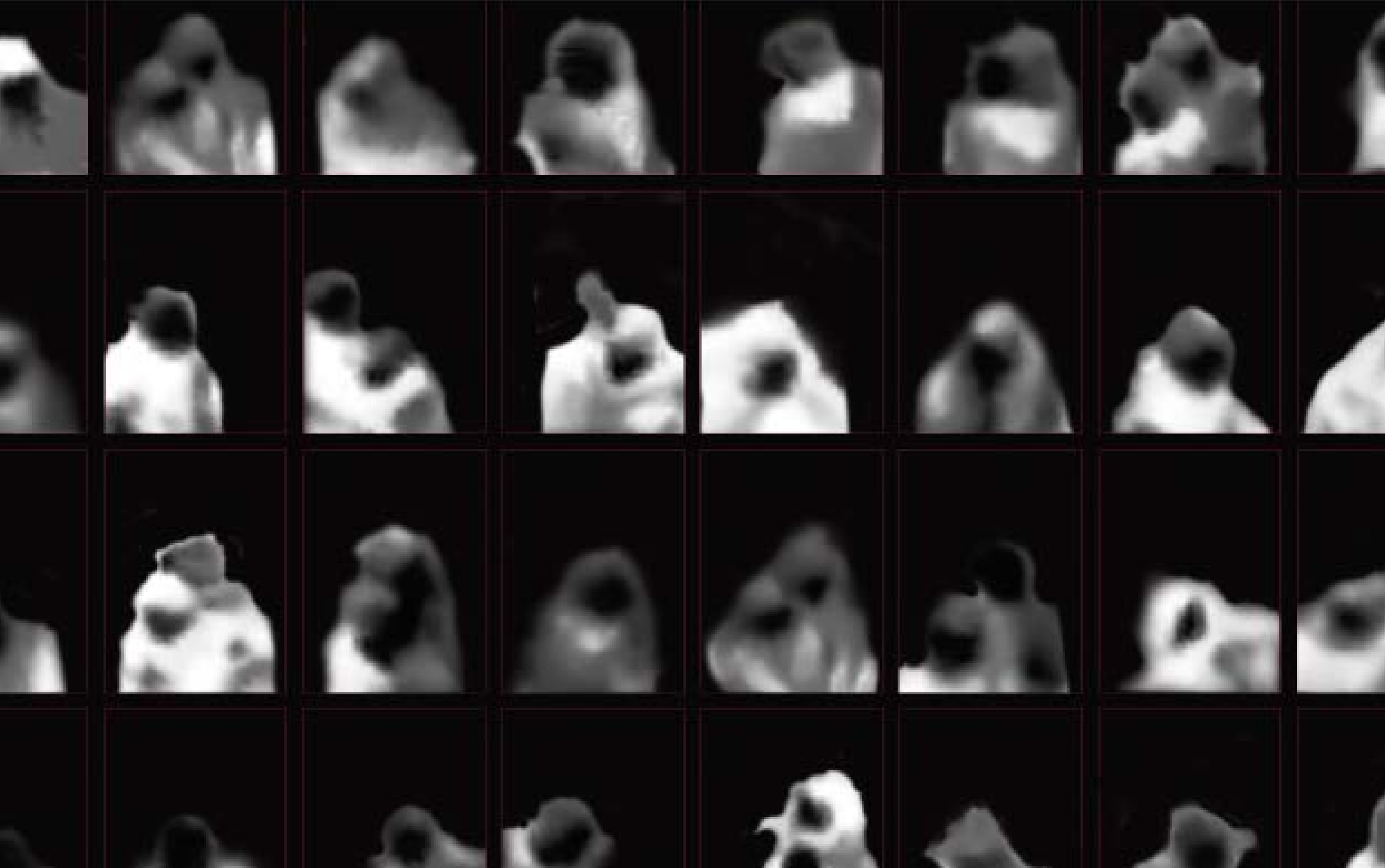
Through the Eye is an open-source archive that investigates how this “technological border” shapes the bodies of the “illegal” traveller. The intention of the project is to visualise, through an elaboration of images resulting from those control practices, the actual condition of the refugees, their invisibility. Moreover, in a context when this type of material seems hard to access, this archive represents an attempt to create a shared platform to which any citizen can contribute new sources.

Website (no longer online)





Mediterranean Sea, 2018 >>>source: <https://www.facebook.com/446328492986791/videos/414278423796396>




The Aesthetic of Control

control which aims to monitor and identify people attempting to cross borders “illegally”.

As a result, the “illegal” travelers are forced in a condition which tends to de-humanize them through an excessive bureaucratization of the “ritual of the frontier”. The images resulting from these practices [from x-ray visions, satellite view, night and thermal scanning] represents a clear example of the human condition in which these individuals are forced: *the invisibility*.

The aesthetic outcome of these pictures seems to make visible the consequences that this mentality of coercion has on the body and identity

The Aesthetic of Control



California, December 21, 2018 >>>source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6EHpMm2OKho>

Illegalizing Crowds: The Visual Representation of People Flows in the (Post-)Schengen Era

Daniele Salerno

1. Borders/Flows, Freedom/ Security: At the Semantic Core of the Schengen Project

In 1991 the International Institute for Strategic Studies – one of the most important global think tanks – classified people flows as one of the threats to national securities. The think tank argued for this classification by taking as an example the “flood of refugees from East Germany to West Germany”, which was pivotal in the fall of the Berlin Wall: “Until recently it would have been unusual for policy-makers even to consider classifying population movements and refugee flows as a national security problem. The common perception was that these were humanitarian concerns, demanding a humanitarian response. It is now clear, however, that we are living in an era in which fundamental political and economic changes in the international system result in large-scale movements of people which affect political, economic and strategic developments worldwide. Indeed, it was the flood of refugees from East to West Germany in 1989 which helped to bring down the Berlin Wall and generate the most significant transformation in international relations since World War II.” (IISS, 1991, pp. 37–38).

Although throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the representation of population movements and refugee flows as a threat has been quite common in the media and in political discourse, in 1991 – a moment that celebrated freedom of movement – that statement was almost surprising. What is particularly bewildering is how an icon of liberation, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the defeat of the Communist dictatorships, turned “into an index of a new security threat” (Huysmans, 2006, p. 17). Such an ambiguous articulation between freedom and security and how we understand the relationship between borders and people flows, shapes the very semantics of the

Schengen project and is in fact its very core. Indeed, the meaning of people flows and the meaning of borders are co-constructed and emerge coevally. When the free movement of people is presented as the icon of the European dream, borders and walls acquire a negative meaning and freedom of movement substantially coincides with the freedom from borders and walls.

People atop the Berlin Wall near the Brandenburg Gate on 9 November 1989. The text on the sign “Achtung! Sie verlassen jetzt West-Berlin!” (“Notice! You are now leaving West Berlin”) has been modified with the addition of “Wie denn?” (“How?”), November 9, 1989.



The fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Iron Curtain, which epitomised the idea of border in Cold War Europe, was interpreted in that way. It allowed people to circulate from East to West (Germany and Europe) and, through the image of people dismantling the wall, crossing the former border and hugging each other, became a symbol of the reunification of the peoples of Europe; when people flows appear as a threat, the border and the wall take on the positive meaning of defending us, the stability of our social and economic systems, and our freedom.

The ambiguity of such a cultural construction and of the relationship between borders and people flows lie at the very heart of the Schengen project if we consider

it as a boundary-producing political performance (Campbell, 1998, 61). On the one hand, the Schengen project envisioned a common internal European space in which the differences between nations were to a certain extent negated by eliminating the borders (for EU citizens); on the other hand, the need for differentiation was shifted to the outside with the creation of what is known as *fortress Europe*.

This process underplays the differences *within* Europe, by enhancing the differences *between* Europe and its Asian and African neighbours (with the well-known ambiguities involving some parts of Eastern Europe, Russia, Turkey and Israel). According to Campbell, the boundary-producing political performance, external dangers and internal threats need to merge. In the Schengen agreement, the internal threats to the European project were gradually identified as coming from its outer borders: the arrival of people from Africa and Asia, as well as Eastern Europe (e.g. Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Poland), can threaten our security and our freedom of movement within Europe, compelling states to reintroduce border controls. As Alexander Langer said in 1995 “when we raise a wall we will be perfectly ready for Schengen”: this sentence describes an ambiguous process in which the maximum internal openness and freedom of movement, quintessentially part of the European dream, merges with a maximum of external closure and the illegalization of arrivals, signifying the co-existence of double meaning in the relationship between border and people flows. What is at stake here is also the development of different types of “borderworks”, complicating the inside/outside dichotomy, and making the border more diffuse, “generalised” (Vaughan-Williams, 2009), less visible but no less real: as Étienne Balibar wrote in 1998, borders are multiplied and reduced, thinned out and doubled (Balibar, 1998, p. 217). The Schengen agreement works as a new dispositif for regulating the transnational circulation and movement of people, from, to and through the European Union. It therefore did nothing to dissolve borders but refashioned them, establishing new ways and modes for dividing good and bad movement – to paraphrase Michel Foucault

(2004; on this topic see also Tazzioli, 2016) –, legal and illegal circulation and crossings.

In this paper, I will analyse the semiotic processes of illegalization in images, as they emerge in the montage of visual material that was made for the *Europa Dreaming* project (Moretti et al., 2016), and adding another case study: the Apulia sea border. I will do this by drawing on a cultural semiotic perspective (see Lorusso, 2015), i.e. the study of the functional correlations of different discursive fields. In particular, as W.J.T. Mitchell explains, the analysis of the visual illegalization processes demands the convergence of three fields: law, migration and iconology, in which law and migration engage the realm of images, i.e. of aesthetics (2010, p. 13). As politics (foreign policies and European processes of integration), intertwine with the law (codes and agreements that regulate migration) and the media, we will see how the processes of legalization and illegalization of migrant flows take shape in visual representations.

2. Jumping Walls, Crossing Borders: Illegalizing the Migrant Crowd

The first video posted on the *Europa Dreaming* website (Moretti et al., 2016) takes us back to 1989: the image of people bringing down the Berlin Wall, reunifying the two Germanys. A genealogy of the illegalization of people flows within and to Europe may start from here – in the celebratory apex of freedom of movement – and in the analogies between the liberation from a wall that symbolised the Communist dictatorships and the more recent historical events that led from the social movements in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011 to the arrivals from the South and South-Eastern European borders.

However, the seeds of such processes were embedded in the agreements signed after WW2 between Mediterranean countries (Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey) and Northern European countries (e.g. Belgium and West Germany) regulating the access of workers to sustain their economies. The Italian *Gastarbeiter* (immigrant workers) depicted in the documentary excerpt (Möckel, 1998, 0:00–3:27) on the *Europa Dreaming* website are shown in a domesticating process. Their health conditions and physical performance

are checked first by the medical institutions in the migrants' own countries and before leaving for West Germany; they are organised and divided upon their arrival at the different train stations; they are regulated as a guest working class and lodged in houses and suburbs that discipline and spatially contain their presence; finally, we can imagine them regimented in the assembly lines of factories. Media use a military language to describe this process: the physical examinations evoked the draft of recruits and the guest workers appear as the "industrial reserve army" of a fully-employed Germany (Friedrichs, 2010, p. 37).

Disciplinary institutions are put in place to tame, order, segment and legalize crowds whose arrival is regulated by international agreements. As *Europa Dreaming* reminds us, these bilateral agreements regulating the movement of the workforce are the prehistory of the Schengen area, where we can also see the rise of illegalization processes.

While on October 7, 1964 *Der Spiegel* celebrated the millionth *Gastarbeiter*, in 1973 the German recruitment ban stopped the arrival of labourers, initiating a process of illegalization of arrivals that spread from the juridical domain to the media representations and to the shaping of urban spaces. Analysing how *Der Spiegel* reported on migrations from 1973 to the 1980s, Jan-Henrik Friedrichs (2010) shows how migrants ceased to be *guests* to become *foreigners*, and the category of *asylum seeker* partially replaced that of *Gastarbeiter*, dividing migrants into victims and criminals, legal migrants and illegal migrants to be deported (on the politics of label see also Binotto, 2015).

In the 1990s, the arrival of refugees from Yugoslavia and Turkey impacted on the Brenner Pass and Ventimiglia. However, the arrivals that prompted the most spectacular media exploitation in the 1990s were those of the Albanians, who landed massively in Apulia after the fall of their regime. I would like to add the images of that period from the sea border of Apulia, to those assembled and analysed by *Europa Dreaming* from the land borders of the Brenner Pass and Ventimiglia, because they show how migrant crowds are visually illegalized.

Eight months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, Albanians jumped from the walls of the Western embassies in Tirana in order to flee the poverty afflicting their country (at that time the poorest in all of Europe).

Journalists described this process as strictly connected with the fall of the Communist dictatorships, and Albanians were welcomed as refugees. Visually, the acts of jumping from walls and of jumping out of boats seem very connected, they are constructed as liberating border-crossing acts, and in this sense used by the press and even in advertising (as in the famous Benetton posters by photographer Oliviero Toscani).



Front page of *La Stampa*, March 8, 1991.

Albanians are shown jumping and climbing on and off the boats, waving their first passports in one hand and making the V sign of victory with the other. Some journalists, clearly echoing a colonial language, defined the events as "our fall of the Berlin Wall", with Albania as East Germany reunifying with Italy (e.g. Deaglio, 1991). From the beginning of 1991 the double meaning of this crowd as both threatening and liberating emerges clearly in media and visual representations. In 1990 the arrival of the first Albanian refugees, termed an "exodus", was presented on local television networks with a certain "paternalistic racism" (Pesole, 2015, p. 112). As Elisabetta Pesole argues, Albanians were shown in television programmes as they were being fed, dressed, and cleaned by local people who felt it to be their duty to welcome

them and demonstrate solidarity, but also their (colonial) mission to civilise an almost "primitive", although not yet barbarian, crowd.

In the special edition of the news on the regional channel Telenorba *Brindisi, sbarco albanesi 10 luglio 1990*, we can see Albanians interviewed by a journalist, narrating their stories in Italian, assisted by an Italian soldier of Arbëreshë background¹ who attempted ("along with 20 other Italian Arbëreshë soldiers", the journalist points out) to help Albanians express themselves in a more comprehensible Italian.

The journalist begins the interview by describing the registration procedures for the individual migrants by the Italian authorities and the dressing process (called "vestizione" by the journalist). The Albanian immigrant, like the Italian *Gastarbeiter*, is shown as he is led through a process of "civilisation" and disciplining, hosted in a former barracks, assisted and controlled by the Italian Army (the Restinco Military Camp in the Brindisi Province, which will soon be transformed into an identification centre).

The ship *Vlora* docked to a quay in the port of Bari, August 8, 1991.



This phase of (paternalistic) welcoming ended very quickly in 1991, after the arrival on August 8, 1991 of 20,000 Albanians at the port of Bari, on board the *Vlora*. The social and moral panic caused by these events led to a gradual process of illegalization of the arrivals. Albanians were soon racialized: references to the historical and political context (the fall of the Communist dictatorships) were lost as the Albanians were blackened² through the discourse

¹ Arbëreshë are Italians descending from Albanians who emigrated to Italy from the XV to the XVIII centuries, and include figures such as Antonio Gramsci and Stefano Rodotà. Arberesh communities still exist in southern Italy and still try to keep their traditions and language alive.

² Until then, the whiteness of the Albanians and their knowledge of the Italian language and culture (learnt

targeting "dirtiness" and "poverty" as well as the "savageness" of the Balkan people (on the role of the concept of race in these processes see Giuliani, 2015). The metaphor of the invasion of a Barbarian horde and of the human flood became central in the public discourse (on this issue see Pogliano & Zanini, 2011), generating a sense of danger and a consequent demand to set mechanisms of border control in place, which emerged almost immediately, affecting the regime of visibility of the Albanian arrivals. Whereas the first arrivals were reported "live", with close-ups of groups of people and individuals, and the Albanians were interviewed by journalists, recognized and allowed to narrate their stories, after their illegalization the only image associated with them was that of an overcrowded boat. The migrants became inaccessible to journalists as they were secluded in the new immigrant detention centers instituted by the Turco-Napolitano Law (1998), a response to the sense of menace and insecurity rising from Italian public opinion. From this moment on, interviews with migrants that showed their faces, spelled their names and told their stories became very rare, pushing some journalists to penetrate the regime of invisibility of the individual migrant (see Fabrizio Gatti's reportage, 2005). The *Europa Dreaming* interviews show the visual effects of the illegalization of people, in which politics, aesthetics and ethics are closely intertwined: how to represent migrants and their stories, without putting them in danger but also avoiding the visual *clichés* of illegalization (e.g. black-barred or blurred faces)?

Those visual and media dynamics began in 1997, a year that marked a turning point in the processes of illegalization. To stop arrivals from Albania – which was now on the verge of a civil war caused by a financial crisis –, the Italian government set up a *de facto* military naval blockade, allowing push-back at sea operations. On March 27, 81 people died in the collision between the Italian military corvette

by secretly watching Italian television during the regime) helped them to be perceived as more similar to Italians and thereby easier to assimilate than the black African immigrants.

Sibilla and the Albanian boat Katër i Radës (on this issue see Leogrande, 2010; Pistrick, 2015, pp. 196–219; Salerno, 2016) in the first massacre at sea in the Mediterranean after the end of the Cold War.

In 1998, Nanni Moretti dedicated a short section of his film *Aprile* to this case and, in general, to the 1997 arrivals (see on this also Pintarelli, 2012): he shows images of the boats landing and interviews Albanians arriving in Italy. Visually, these extracts represent the end of a regime of visibility, in which migrants could show their faces and tell their stories, in other words, were singularized in a form of recognition.

The process of illegalization and representation of people flows as a threat visually produced a predominance of what semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas (1976) calls an integral unity over any representation of the individual in a process to dehumanise the people flow. Moreover, the

representation of the individual is no longer a form of recognition, but is transformed into a process of potential *identification*, which is not a process of subjectivisation and self-determination (i.e. of identity construction through personal narratives) but of *subjection* to the illegalization process.

The regime of visibility of the arrivals, and the construction of meaning for the masses of people went (and go) hand in hand with the new legislative system. Apulia became a workshop (Ravenda, 2011) for the construction of the Schengen area where the Martelli (1990), Turco-Napolitano (1998) and Bossi-Fini (2002) laws created detention centres for migrants (labelled with different names over the decades), thereby laying the first stones of what has now become the European Frontex (2004).

Originally published in *Europa Dreaming: Yearning for Europe from the Brenner Pass*, ed. Valeria Burgio and Matteo Moretti (Bozen-Bolzano University Press, 2019).

Bibliography

Balibar, É. (1998). The Borders of Europe. In P. Cheah & B. Robbins (Eds.), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and feeling beyond the nation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Binotto, M. (2015). Invaders, aliens and criminals: Metaphors and spaces in the media definition of migration and security policies. In E. Bond, G. Bonsaver, & S. Faloppa (Eds.), *Destination Italy. Representing migration in contemporary media and narrative*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Campbell, D. (1998). *Writing security. United States foreign policy and the politics of identity* [revised version]. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Deaglio, E. (1991, March 8). Aiuti non elemosina [Help not alms]. *La Stampa*, p. 1.

Foucault, M. (2004). *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au Collège de France (1977–1978)*. Paris: Seuil/Gallimard.

Friedrichs, J. H. (2010). Representation of guest workers, refugees, and spaces of migration in *Der Spiegel*, 1973–1980. In C. Bischoff, F. Falk, & S. Kafeshi (Eds.), *Images of illegalized immigration. Towards a critical iconology of politics*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Gatti, F. (2005, October 7). Io clandestino a Lampedusa [Me, an illegal immigrant in Lampedusa]. *L'Espresso*. Retrieved from <http://espresso.repubblica.it/palazzo/2005/10/07/news/io-clandestino-a-lampedusa-1.594>

Giuliani, G. (Ed.). (2015). *Il colore della nazione* [The color of the nation]. Milano: Le Monnier-Mondadori.

Greimas, A. J. (1976). *Sémiotique et sciences sociales* [Semiotics and social sciences]. Paris: Seuil.

Huysmans, J. (2006). *Politics of insecurity. Fear, migration and asylum in the EU*. London, New York: Routledge.

International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). (1991). *Strategic survey 1990–1991*. London: Brassey's.

Langer, A. (1995, June 27). L'Europa muore o nasce a Sarajevo [Europe will die or be reborn in Sarajevo] (M. Ba, Interviewer)[Audio file], Radio radicale, 31:20–37:42. Retrieved from <https://www.radioradicale.it/scheda/73748/73820-leuropa-muore-o-nasce-a-sarajevo-manifestazione-promossa-dal-partito-radiale-in?i=2288572>

Leogrande, A. (2010). *Il naufragio* [The wreck]. Milano: Feltrinelli.

Lorusso, A. M. (2015). *Cultural semiotics – For a cultural perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Mitchell, W. J. T. (2010). Migration, law, and the image: Beyond the veil of ignorance. In C. Bischoff, F. Falk, & S. Kafeshi (Eds.), *Images of illegalized Immigration. Towards a critical iconology of politics* (pp. 13–30). Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Möckel, P. (Director). (1998). Abgrenzungen – Ausländer in Deutschland [Exclusions – Foreigners in Germany] [Documentary]. Baden-Baden: Sudwestdeutscher Rundfunk. Video excerpt retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIAhByL5mNg>

Moretti, M., Boschi, M., Weissensteiner, M., Burgio, V., Corrent, C., Pisoni, L., Cimarelli, A. et al. (2016). *Europa dreaming*. Available at <http://www.europa-dreaming.eu/>

Moretti, N. (Director) & Barbagallo, A. (Producer). (1998). *Aprile* [Motion picture]. Italy: Sacher Film.

Pesole, E. (2015). Genere, 'razza' e crisi albanese a Telenorba [Gender, race and the Albanian crisis at Telenorba]. In G. Giuliani (Ed.), *Il colore della nazione* (pp. 106–122). Milano: Le Monnier Mondadori.

Pintarelli, F. (2012, March 2). L'immigrazione ai tempi dell'immagine [Immigration in times of image]. Retrieved from <http://www.lavoroculturale.org/asylum-5-limmigrazione-ai-tempi-dellimmagine/>

Pistrick, E. (2015). *Performing nostalgia: Migration culture and creativity in South Albania*. New York: Routledge.

Pogliano, A. & Zanini, R. (2010). L'immaginario e le immagini degli immigrati: un percorso qualitativo [Imagination and images of immigrants: a qualitative process]. In L. Gariglio, A. Pogliano & R. Zannini (Eds.), *Facce da straniero. 30 anni di fotografia e giornalismo sull'immigrazione in Italia*. Milano: Mondadori.

Ravenda, A. (2011). *Ali fuori dalla legge: migrazione, biopolitica e stato di eccezione in Italia* [Ali outlaw: migration, biopolitics and state of emergency in Italy]. Verona: Ombre Corte.

Salerno, D. (2016). Memorializing boat tragedies in the Mediterranean: The case of the Katër I Radës. In L. Mannik (Ed.), *Migration by boat. Discourse of trauma, exclusion and survival*. New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Tazzioli, M. (2016). Foucault and the irreducible to the population. The mob, the plebs and troubling subjectivities in excess. In L. Cremonesi, O. Irrera, D. Lorenzini & M. Tazzioli (Eds.), *Foucault and the making of subjects*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

TGnorba24. 1990, July 10. Brindisi, sbarco albanesi 10 luglio 1990 [Brindisi, debarkation of Albanians, July 10, 1990] [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyLbEHoTeTY>

Vaughan-Williams, N. (2009). The generalised bio-political border? Re-conceptualising the limits of sovereign power. *Review of International Studies*, 35 (04), 729–749.

Our Uniqueness

Marco Giacomelli

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was (is) a tragedy of course. Yet I must confess that the pandemic responses in Italy have been productive for me in certain respects. One such is having been able to meet, albeit virtually, Eva Leitolf and Giulia Cordin and their students. Would this have turned out the same, or perhaps even better, if the pandemic had never occurred? No, for the very banal reason that I would not have accepted the invitation to spend a day together. Because the journey from Turin to Bolzano is longer than from Turin to New York, so to speak.

Are we in the realm of chatter and banality? Undoubtedly. But I believe that relationships may have decreased quantitatively, yet have grown qualitatively precisely because they have been hindered by the pandemic containment measures. This is something I have experienced comprehensively with students on my Master's Critical Writing course at NABA in Milan. For example, the complicated relationship with Asian students, especially Chinese, has paradoxically been simplified or, better said, intensified by the exponential *increase* in media opacity – the use of chat within platforms such as Zoom. It has become structured, more direct and transparent, more profitable in both directions. Does this mean that the infamous distance learning is a panacea? Obviously not, but nor should it be abolished entirely as soon as health conditions return to “normal”.

But let's not digress. My study day with the Studio Image class was literally Babelic. Streams of English, Italian, German – and other languages and other dialects and other prosodic inflections – intersected for hours, for many hours, with data streams translated into voices, still and moving images, tensions, silences, interruptions, flickering monitors.

It wasn't frontal teaching, it couldn't and shouldn't be. It was digital brainstorming where it was impossible to “lose the thread”, because so many threads were intertwined

in ever-changing configurations – meaning, by *difference*, multiplicity, diversity, dissidence and disagreement.

The disagreement. That is what I would like to contribute here: Not for the sake of controversy but in order to keep alive the *storm* of that brainstorming.

The Studio team chose, in their unquestionable and legitimate judgment, to present the works of Michelangelo Boldrin, Pietro Rigo Langé, Luca Piscopo, Elda Ergüleç and Luana Carp. I will certainly not be disputing that choice, first of all because I “saw” each of these students for just a few minutes, while their teachers had been working with them for months. However, the fact remains that another project also impressed me during that study day. A project of disconcerting banality – a term that will recur.

The student is Giulia Battisti, the title is *Between*, the medium is video, used to document a performance. The artist's statement is divided into two parts. The first frames the problem: “As time passes, it becomes ever more evident that humans are losing their connection to the natural environment. Everyone is busy with their everyday life, spending most of their time in buildings, apartments, homes, always surrounded by walls, with a roof on top and a floor under their feet. During the lockdown this situation was raised to a new level, no longer normality but a forced condition that inevitably confronted us with the walls of our homes.” You will agree with me that that is banal. In the second part of the statement she moves from observation to action: “The piece came together as a reaction to this condition. By radically living in the complete opposite of those two months – taking my room, my childhood furniture into the forest – I escaped from the walls that had suffocated me and existed for a day without them. Suddenly, the ground under my feet was earth and grass and I had the possibility to reconnect. But this comes with exposure, as our homes are

meant to protect us. During this experience I confronted myself with the duality my action implemented.” The operation itself is also conceptually – although not materially – banal.

But isn't art, according to Arthur C. Danto, precisely *the transfiguration of the banal*? And above all: How has a term describing a *common good* (check its etymology) acquired a negative and derogatory meaning? The “common” cannot function as a positional good, it is not *exclusive*, there is no doubt about it. The banal is not culturally “high”. What is common and banal cannot and must not concern that “disadvantaged class” of which Raffaele Alberto Ventura wrote so insightfully, and to which we all belong – the author of that book, the author of this piece, and probably the artist and the readers. (Note: Ventura plays on the double meaning of the Italian term “disagiata” [“disadvantaged”], which means both “impoverished” and “awkward”.)

The banal, even the *naïf*, can however generate extremely profitable interpretations. The banal, etymologically understood, is the ideal *trait d'union* between identity and community, between I and Us. It is not sectarian entrenchment, nor is it, at the opposite extreme (opposites that often come together dangerously), a populist appeal to indistinction. Let's try to apply these interpretations to the cases chosen by Leitolf and Cordin.

The case of Michelangelo Boldrin and his project *Through the Eye: The Aesthetics of Control* is very simple, I would like to say: banal. (And, *en passant*, an extremely mature project for a student.) Everything revolves around borders, those between nation-states in particular. Let's banalize: these are basically signs drawn on a map. Totally arbitrary signs that often decide between life and death. They are signs that impact on aesthetics, in the sense of Immanuel Kant's transcendental aesthetics: signs that influence space and time, or the zero grade (or even “ground zero”) of our being-in-the-world. Transcendental aesthetics, space-time, is the most banal “thing” that human beings share, what they (we) have in *common*.

I think the soundtrack of the project *+39 0452456316.jpeg* by Pietro Rigo Langé is astonishing in its banality: nothing simpler and more revolutionary, when you live in a scopic regime, than entrusting your vision to sounds – not music but ambient sounds: tires on gravel, a dog barking, the rustle of leaves...

If Michelangelo Boldrin's work is mature, Luca Piscopo's *Candy Oscuro: Apocalypse & Genesis* is worthy of a mid-career artist. Everything stems from a catastrophe, again understood in an etymological sense. During lockdown, Candy appeared, like a chemical reaction (*precipitated*), in Luca's childhood home. Nothing more banal, once again: dealing with one's physiological origin, with the beginning of biological life. An undoubtedly painful recapitulation but I imagine – I hope – a harbinger of acquired certainties. A sort of rite of passage experienced as a protagonist, a revitalization of the world by putting one's own identity into play and therefore, necessarily, the identity of others – in this case, of one's parents. Because the construction of the Self always and inevitably passes – it will be banal to say – through a dialectic, as the German idealists teach better than psychoanalysis.

Elda Ergüleç is banal from start, the title of her project: *Attribuiamo immagini alle nuvole per avvicinarci ad esse* (We attribute images to the clouds to get closer to them). Banal in the image it brings to mind (“Yes, I did that too!”), in reminding us of an experience that I believe all human beings have in common: giving shape to clouds, making what frightens us familiar and therefore harmless. But it is a trap, as Freud teaches us when he speaks to us of the *Unheimlich*, the uncanny. And Ergüleç drags us into this trap, attracted by such a homely title only to find ourselves, as in the case of Langé's project, confronting the scopic regime. Because Ergüleç forces us to realize how much voyeurism is now inherent to our lives.

Finally, Luana Carp and *UN(NAH)BAR*: what is the boundary between the desire for relationality and intrusiveness, between communion and privacy? The height of the banal, in short, because this is a question of reflecting on the dangerous porosity of the dividing line between Self and Other – where the We is gelatinous, unpredictable, more organic than any organism that perceives itself as unique, monolithic, immutable. A project so banal that it reflects on banality itself, that is, on commonality.

Let me be banal, for the umpteenth time, the last, I promise you: the banal is the commonplace. And for human beings there is nothing more banal than planet earth. In its uniqueness. And in *our uniqueness* – the most vital paradox of all, because it tells us that the only possible uniqueness is, counterintuitively, plural.

**Candy Oscuro:
Apocalypse & Genesis
Luca Piscopo**

In a moment of obscurity last year, I instinctively decided to give life to one of the characters in my head. I decided to call her Candy Oscuro. Candy as a word originally derives from Sanskrit and means “fragments”. I felt it was representative of this character, which was an agglomeration of fragmented personalities, she could be many things all at once and she already existed in everyone’s collective consciousness. Another reason was because candy was always banned at home when I was a child because of its highly dangerous effects, such as causing psychological addiction and caries. The word “candy” also made me think of something very shiny, wrapped in plastic, artificial, extremely manufactured. I was fascinated with the idea of creating a persona that could embody the visions of my ideal self, with both masculine and feminine characteristics, creating a new scale between the gender binary into which my character, and myself, could fall into. I found great comfort in losing myself between reality and fantasy. Somehow for the first time ever I was looking in the mirror and I wasn’t seeing something that completely repulsed me but saw staring back at me something I had created, with great love.

As the pandemic approached, a series of plot twists found me stuck in my childhood home. The same home I had grown up in, the one I was so scared by, the one I loved, the one I despised. I was with my mother and father and somehow, I knew that I had to go further with my exploration. I decided to include my mother in the project by letting her slowly into my world and into my mind by introducing her not only to Candy but to my whole idea of gender and identity. I let her take pictures of me, every other day, as I dressed up in her clothes and wore layers and layers of make up to obscure my masculinity. At first she couldn’t understand and this part of me frightened her. But as I let her in deeper, she fell in love with my fragments. I revealed a part of me by wearing a mask that let me unlock a dimension that I hadn’t believed was inside of me to begin with. As I went deeper into my surroundings, I found my father’s 1990s video tapes of my mother. I decided to bring them out of the dark, to give them life in order to represent femininity and give my mother a voice and a chance to take control of her narrative, not through a masculine eye but from a contemporary perspective. We found ourselves in the same place, many years later, changed by time, looking at each other through a lens.

Two publications, 28.9 × 38.0 cm
1’04” video









ELIZA & Frankenstein Techoptian Image Narratives

“Siri is a creep – a servile arselick with zero self-respect – but he works annoyingly well. Which is why, last week, I experienced that watershed moment: for the first time, I spoke to a handheld device unironically. Not for a laugh, or an experiment, but because I wanted it to help me.”¹ Charlie Brooker is the creator of the British television series *Black Mirror* (2011–), which was an important point of reference during this semester. The series offers endless material for discussing the relationship between images, technologies, social control and the social imaginary.

Tactical Assault Light Operator Suit / US Special Operations Command / 2013



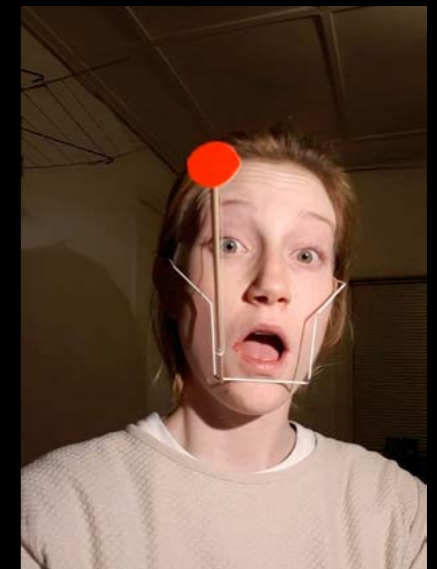
In 1624 Francis Bacon imagined the New Atlantis, a utopian society on the fictitious South Sea island of Bensalem. In its scientific institution, Salomon’s House, weather phenomena such as lightning and hail are imitated, and very distant or small objects are viewed using special optical instruments. With “knowledge of causes, and secret motions of things”, the father of Salomon’s House strives to enlarge “the bounds of human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible”².

¹ Charlie Brooker, “The Dark Side of Our Gadget Addiction”, *The Guardian*, 1 December 2011.

² Quotes from *New Atlantis and The Great Instauration*, ed. Jerry Weinberger (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1980, rev. ed. 1989), 71.

Technological developments have always been a powerful driving force for cultural discourse and practice. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Marinetti and the Futurists celebrated speed, motion and the potency of modern weaponry in their manifestos, paintings and sculptures. From the late 1920s, architect and visionary R. Buckminster Fuller created buildings and urban spaces that combine science, technology, and design, recalling (and inspiring) science-fiction film sets. Joseph Weizenbaum’s ELIZA demonstrated the possibility of communication between human and computer in 1966. In his video work *5000 Feet Is the Best* (2011), Omer Fast contemplates the structural power imbalances created by contemporary surveillance technologies.

Hanneke Klaver / Free the Expression / Instagram / 2018



The question of what artists can contribute to the discourse on technological developments has been widely discussed. Examples include the symposium “Guest,

Ghost, Host: Machine!” organised by Hans Ulrich Obrist and John Brockman at Serpentine Marathon 2017, and the exhibition “Training Humans”, which we visited at Fondazione Prada in Milan. Trevor Paglen, who curated the show with Kate Crawford, is quoted on the foundation’s website: “When we first started conceptualizing this exhibition over two years ago, we wanted to tell a story about the history of images used to ‘recognize’ humans in computer vision and AI systems. We weren’t interested in either the hyped, marketing version of AI nor the tales of dystopian robot futures.”

Training Humans / Milan Osservatorio / 2019



During the semester we set out to find more about how we relate to technological progress – individually and as a society. Will culture “surrender to technology” as Neil Postman argued in his *Technopoly* (1992)? Or will regulation prevent our societies from becoming “totalitarian technocracies”? Are social context and empathy the decisive factors that prevent AI from ever becoming intelligent? How does technology generate images of the world? How does it change the ways we see? And most importantly: what is our contribution as artists?

During our studio trip to Milan, the Italian artist collective Discipula showed us their latest ad campaign. They define dreams as “the next frontier” within “the grand narrative of late capitalism”. In their interview with *ATP Diary*, they discuss dreams as “the last bastion of privacy left today” – which might be conquered using advertisements from their fictitious tech company *Aura*.

When Kim Yong Hun of the artist-scientist duo Shinseungback Kimyonghun

visited Studio Image we learned about the relationship between image-based media and AI, about machine vision and classification systems. In their interview with *Neural*, Shinseungback Kimyonghun talk about Jorge Luis Borges’ taxonomy of imaginary animals, about recording data as waves break on a stone for an exhibition on the posthuman, and about CAPTCHA as a “symbol of humanity”.

The discussion about the uniqueness of humanity is also central to the work of Mark Markin. In his project *Nona*, a mask prototype on which he worked throughout the semester, he explored the “correlation between the unique human facial architecture, machine vision and nature”.

Geminoid HI-1 / Hiroshi Ishiguro / 2011



During the course of the semester a growing number of followers witnessed the meteoric rise of the young American rock star Vince Summers. Thousands of fans on Instagram watched him record his new music video in North Hollywood. They saw him in his luxurious whirlpool, cruising downtown Los Angeles, and finally touring Italy. The highlight of the semester was Vince Summers in concert at our university. Such a stereotypical image narrative seemed almost too good to be true. Now Giacomo Turra is touring the States himself and wondering if he will ever complete his art studies.

Fabian Mosele’s project features a different reinvention of pop culture. He reflects on the relationship between consumer and producer by inviting visitors to the end-of-semester exhibition to reassemble the characters that populate his video *Fantasia: Shared lands*.

Bernhard Schwenk, chief curator at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, and the artist Miro Craemer joined our exhibition as guest critics. For two days, they never tired of discussing the works in depth and with great empathy. In a conversation with Studio Image, they share what they learned from these encounters.

New Photography: Discipula

Marco Paltrinieri and Mirko Smerdel
interviewed by Sara Benaglia and Mauro Zanchi

As part of a series on the new photographic scene, this piece is dedicated to Discipula. Founded by Marco Paltrinieri, Mirko Smerdel and Tommaso Tanini in 2013, Discipula is a collaborative research platform operating in the field of photography and visual culture. All of Discipula’s research is aimed at revealing, or at least bringing to light and overturning, the mechanisms that have allowed images to come between us and reality, thus to a certain extent replacing reality itself.

MZ In the Wim Wenders film “*Until the End of the World*”, the main character Claire Tourneur is much more interested in the visual fragments occurring in her dreams, the images of her unconscious, the memories not yet revealed, that are recorded with a new technological device. *Outdoor Media Action*, your project shown on six giant LED screens provided by the M4 agency – along with the *Digital Out Of Home* installations that broadcast advertisements for AURA, a fictitious tech company – promoting both the brand itself and *Morpheus*, an imaginary technology being developed to visualise users’ dreams, seem in terms of ideas to be in some way linked to Claire’s obsession. How did you use photography to probe the medium of dreams and revelations from another dimension of the imagination? And what relationship do you see between images (including oneiric) and the mechanisms of production and consumption via which they are conveyed?

MP Although we love film, I admit that none of us has ever seen *Until the End of the World*. However, given the frequency with which Wenders’ title appears in interviews and discussions about *Morpheus*, it seems

obvious that we will have to fill this gap sooner or later. While we often work quite transparently with suggestions and quotations derived from cinema or music (for example, the phrase at the centre of *Dead Commercials*, taken from the script of Romero’s *Diary of the Dead*, or the title of the work *Just Like Arcadia*, borrowed from a song by Psychic TV), in this case the idea of dreams was the result of thinking about the themes addressed in *How Things Dream* (of which *Outdoor Media Action/Morpheus* are part): surveillance capitalism (one of the themes thoroughly explored in the similarly-titled book published in 2018 by Shoshana Zuboff), specifically the central role played by images in the process of colonising consumers’ minds. How far can the manipulative and extractive nature of capitalism go?

Just Like Arcadia, installation view, 2016.



It was with the aim of answering this question that we touched upon the theme of the dream, the last bastion of privacy left today, one over which we are moreover unable to exercise any control. We thus found ourselves thinking not only of a corporate entity that could finally access this El Dorado, but also of the fact that consumers, now fully integrated into the mechanisms of semio-capitalism, would probably be enormously excited by it. At the end of the day, it is clear that, with respect to the grand narrative of late capitalism, we are all both victims and executioners. As far as formalising these suggestions was concerned, we decided

to work by subtraction, in other words we concentrated mainly on the communication and promotion of *Morpheus*, working at a graphic and textual level and thus proceeding via the suggestion rather than the unveiling of the possible content of *Morpheus*. After all, trying to give form to the imaginary dreams of imaginary users would not have made any sense. What we did instead was to blend the world of *Morpheus* with the real world, via the advertisements you mention, but also via anonymous questionnaires that can be completed both online and during the exhibitions staging *How Things Dream*. The results we obtained were certainly interesting.

Just Like Arcadia, installation view, 2016.



MS We were very interested in tackling the theme of dreams through this project, as we believe this is the next frontier of capitalism. We have seen how the mechanisms of production and consumption are conveyed through the control of desire and unconscious impulses, and how these mechanisms are increasingly invasive, so it seems to us quite logical (and recent technological developments confirm this) to foresee an increasing interest on the part of the socio-economic system in the activity of dreams. The most interesting and controversial aspect of *Morpheus* in my opinion is, in fact, the ambiguity linked to the operation of the questionnaires. If on the one hand this operation is virtual and functional to the meta-narration of AURA,

on the other we are building a genuine archive of real dreams, where all the images of these dreams are presented solely in textual form. After repeated experiments, in fact, we decided not to visualise the dreams, as we realised that the imagination is much more powerful than any fully finished image. Taking cinema as an example, the most intense effects in thrillers or horror films are achieved when you never see the “monster”, but merely perceive its presence and the danger it represents. When the monster is seen, the effect is almost always false.

MZ **In your investigation into the potentials of “metaphotography”, what strategies have you used to appropriate and manipulate the rhetoric and mechanisms of advertising language?**

MP All of Discipula’s research is aimed at revealing, or at least bringing to light and overturning, the mechanisms that have allowed images to come between us and reality, thus to a certain extent replacing reality itself. Guided by the work of the usual big names – Flusser, Baudrillard, Virilio, etc. – we have repeatedly dismantled, recontextualised and reprogrammed original and/or found images. *How Things Dream* contains at least three different types of work on the images:

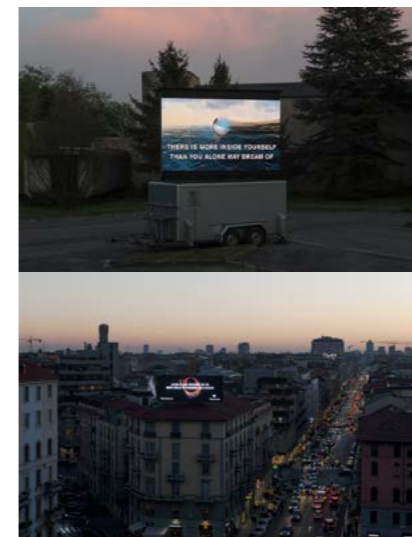
– Imitation and sabotage: in *The Communication Series* (2016–ongoing) we have worked with original images, taken by Tommaso, which subsequently become part of complex signifying systems in which the images themselves, as well as being heavily manipulated, are placed in dialogue with texts and graphic elements in the creation of marketing messages.

– Documentation: with *Outdoor Media Action* (2017) we staged, thanks to the support of the collector Simone Sacchi and the M4 agency, a sort of public performance where advertising texts by *Morpheus* were displayed on LED screens travelling around Milan over a period of three weeks. The work was documented and “returned” in the form of photographs, generally of large format, that illustrate the adverts in question on tour. These, by the way, are among the conceptually simplest photographs that we have ever produced with Discipula: pure and simple documentation.

– Subtraction: as mentioned in the answer to the first question, within the story of *How Things Dream*, *Morpheus* (2017–ongoing) represents a technology that allows people to visualise extracts from their own dreams. At this stage of the project we decided to proceed by eliminating what WJT Mitchell would call “pictures” in favour of mental “images”, an imagery that we mainly try to project into the public’s head through the use of advertising slogans. The idea here is to evoke a sublime dimension of capitalism, with sublime understood in the Gothic sense of the term: an abstract force capable of penetrating and overwhelming man and his will.

MS From a purely formal point of view, in constructing the imagery of AURA our starting point was a simple imitation of reality (especially the new-age corporate imagery of Silicon Valley); we then moved on to possible imageries, inspired above all by surrealism, the experiences of the Situationist International, the Whole Earth Catalog, Ballard’s *Atrocity Exhibition* and by Victor Burgin, finally achieving a unique and personal identity. The challenge was to maintain a balance between the visionary nature of soft sci-fi content and a certain formal rigidity that would ensure the credibility of the mimesis with the corporate reality.

HTD – Morpheus, Landscape – AD 01 (detail), 2017.
HTD – Morpheus, Outdoor Media Action – AD 03 (Corso Buenos Aires), 2017.



MZ **After your experimental work and the AURA advertising campaigns, how do you now imagine the “post-democratic world characterised by**

the absolute imposition of a global and corporate-centric regime” (i.e. a world in which surveillance and control are totally accepted and integrated into the progressive commodification of everyday life)? What role does the photographic medium play in this spatiotemporal shift, and what links the imagination of the present to that of the future?

HTD – Morpheus, Outdoor Media Action – AD 02 (Teatro Piccolo), 2017.



MP The project stems from a bleak vision of the future and from the desire to explore this future from the seeds that are already firmly planted in the present. Four years after *How Things Dream* came about, I would say that the world has kept on surprising us in negative ways. As for the medium of photography, it seems clear to me that it is one of the main tools through which power traces the trajectory of our lives. From Benjamin’s reflections through to the fusion of the real and the digital now fully realised in the 21st century, the power of images has become progressively more overwhelming and able to operate at an ever-deeper level in our psyches. This kind of reflection is one of the points underlying *How Things Dream*. Having said that, when thinking in terms of mass culture, it seems to me that, rather than helping to link the present to possible futures, images vomit a false and illusory idea of the future into the present. This creates a huge sensory blockage, leading to a considerable loss of orientation and making it difficult even to imagine a future other than the one that we are fed. The only possible alternative seems to be catastrophe, the collapse of our species. One of the main tasks of an artist today, I believe, is therefore to invite his or her audience to find the strength and stimuli to construct images that are not surrogates for a vision imposed from above, but rather help to prefigure other realities.

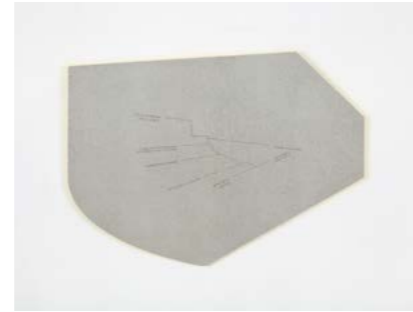
MS In my opinion, we have in recent years reached an epochal turning point in the history of photography and its power to convey ideological content. I do not believe that photography has ever told the truth, but it is a fact that to take a photograph you still needed a real object to start with. Using new digital technologies it is now possible to produce a photographic image from scratch, without any need for a foothold in something real. This makes photography more and more like painting in its ability to create worlds, but with the added power of its aura of hyper-reality and therefore credibility. An interesting example is provided by architectural renderings, which we have – not by chance – been working on for years and which have the ability to let us imagine not only an urban space that does not yet exist, but also how this space should be experienced, making us accept, for example, the increasingly constant deprivation of sociality to make room for profit.

HTD Communication (Domoties), 2016. How Things Dream, installation view, Centre de la Photographie, Geneva, 2017.



MZ
SB You recently (2019) published your book *L'invenzione del buio* [The invention of darkness]. Images taken from the photo

of the Archaeology Department in Bari alternate with a dialogue between “I” and “He”, a being from another world. How did this publication come about? What are the relationships between history, catastrophe, dystopia and science fiction that it contains?



Promise Areas #04 – Hong Kong, 2020.

MP The book is the outcome of an artistic residency curated by Off the Archive, an organisation dedicated to the rediscovery and development of archival heritage. Off the Archive had the great idea of inviting us to work together with Pierangelo di Vittorio, a philosopher and member of the Action 30 collective, resulting in both an immediate intellectual understanding and a wonderfully deep friendship. Together we explored the “raw” material offered by the archive, namely the magnificent photos documenting the architectural heritage of the province of Bari, and promptly sought a strategy to connect this material to the present. In this process, in addition to reflecting on the potential of the archives themselves, we introduced a series of shared passions that became the skeleton of the work itself: science fiction, surrealism, fiction theory, JG Ballard, Aby Warburg and more. In particular, we worked on Bataille’s concept of formlessness, first reviewing the visions proposed by Krauss and Didi-Huberman, then placing this concept in dialogue with key concepts such as catastrophe, apocalypse and the end of the world, which seem to have acquired an ominous consistency these days. The result is a story written by Pierangelo, accompanied by our selection of images, that invites us to explore the fractures and fissures in our civilisation as escape routes towards a new tomorrow. An experiment, a science fiction story, understood, in the Deleuzian sense of the term, as “writing at the limits of knowledge”.

MS In editing the images, we decided to take a visual path, starting from the formal (well-defined and recognisable objects and architecture) before arriving at a total formlessness, thus creating a resonance with the text accompanying the images. For the layout we then decided to superimpose the images on other photos and documents so as to keep alive the feeling of the vastness and indefiniteness of the archive.

Originally published in Italian as “New Photography: Discipula”, ATP Diary, 14 February 2020. Translated by Bonetti & Peroni, Bolzano.

Shinseungback Kimyonghun

Interview by Rachel O'Dwyer

RO'D Nearly all of your recent works deal with the aesthetics and the politics of machine vision. What drew you to this topic?

KYH I immediately got into machine vision when I used the technology for the first time. It was about ten years ago. I think it was because I had studied photography. Machine vision seemed to be the next important visual technology. Machine vision can be understood as a camera plus a processor – eye plus brain. It sees the world by itself without human intervention. It is going to change how we see and how we are seen. Our practice explores the nature of machine vision, its relationship with human vision, its future impact on human life, etc.

RO'D What drew you to collaborate?

SSB I wanted to explore computers in everyday life, not in the lab. I found out art could be a way to do it, and I started to work with an artist, Yong Hun, who was interested in technology.

KYH The works we do require deep understanding in both art and technology. It would be very difficult for me, an artist, to obtain engineer level knowledge and skill. I thought collaboration would be an answer. Luckily I met Seung Back, who studied computer science, and was interested in doing creative works. I think the collaboration occurred quite naturally out of a need for the skills and knowledge the other already had.

RO'D *Mind* uses machine vision to respond to users' emotions. Are you commenting on the dangers of affective advertising? What are the limits for improvisation or creativity when we tailor systems to real-time emotional responses? Is it still possible to be surprised when engaging with such a system?

SSB When I was working on *Mind* and testing the emotion recognition system, it kept saying that I was sad and angry. I wasn't aware of the state of my emotions, but I was pushing myself to the limit with short sleep and overwork at that time. I was somehow comforted that the machine recognized it. I think in the near future we will face a situation where machines know our minds better than we do. Unlike my experience above, I think its negative effect could be bigger than its positive one. We need to try to understand how machines recognize our emotions and also we need to think more about our own minds.

KYH Many of our works deal with machine vision itself as a subject. But *Mind* is more about emotions than emotion recognition technology. The piece presents the collective emotions of people as a sea – as wave sounds. We wanted to create a space where one can feel one's own mind together with the mind of others through the sea of emotions.



Cloud Face, 2012.

RO'D *Cloud Face* is a project where human imagination and machine error meet. Similar to how humans see figures in clouds, machine vision systems misidentify cloud formations as human faces. For humans, cloud gazing is an imaginative activity, finding meanings and extrapolating from random

patterns. With machine vision this activity is simply classified as a categorisation error, finding unintended patterns in noise. Do you think computers need more space for creativity, dreaming and productive errors? And if so, what might machine creativity, dreaming or interpolation look like?

SSB This is definitely an error. However, just as errors in human vision are closely related to human cognitive systems, errors in machine vision cannot be easily removed. I think it is an important tool to explore how machines see. I think we don't need to intentionally make machines creative. As machines advance and become more complex, they will show things that we call imagination or dreams.

KYH Machines find faces in the clouds only by mistake now, but they may soon see figures appear in the clouds while knowing they are not real. Some might call it imagination and others would say it's not a genuinely imaginative act. Machines will produce creative outputs in many fields but whether they are to be considered as creative or not will remain in debate for a long time.



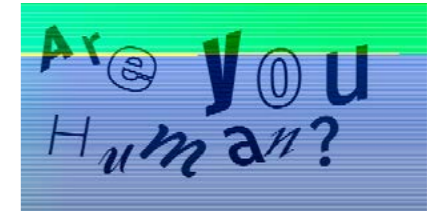
Nonfacial Portrait, 2018–ongoing.

RO'D *Nonfacial Portrait* asks artists to make portraits of Kim Yong Hun that would not be detectable by an AI agent. Is this designed as an adversarial attack or a form of resistance to machine vision? You speak, for example, about finding “the small visual space where only humans can perceive”. Is this small space a productive space for resistance to surveillance?

KYH The originality of humanity is often discussed in relation to AI today since AI is increasingly able to mimic many human abilities. It makes us rethink the nature

of human originality, things that make humans different from machines. The project was an experiment to explore human unique visual perception. If the painters successfully completed the task, the paintings would represent some sort of humanity. The small visual space only visible to humans might be used for resistance to surveillance but I'm more interested in that as a symbol of humanity.

CAPTCHA Tweet, 2013.



RO'D *Aposematic Jacket* is one of a number of pieces that deals with defence from machine learning and machine intelligence in the form of cameras embedded in the jacket that can record the wearer's environment in 360 degrees. Your works explore two possible modes of resistance to surveillance. One, exemplified here, is the use of counter surveillance techniques. The other, such as in your works *CAPTCHA Tweet* and *Nonfacial Portrait*, occurs by exploiting the spaces where machine and human vision don't overlap, creating spaces where humans can still see and recognise while machines cannot. Which of these appeals to you most? Are there others?

SSB I don't see machine vision in opposition to human vision. Human vision can be extended through machine vision's unique ability. I'm interested in the relationship between a personal machine and a human. I expect a partnership like the combination of a laptop and a human who beat a super-computer in chess.

KYH We didn't think much about AI when creating the *Aposematic Jacket*. The jacket was intended to protect the wearer from any offense by presenting the ability of recording. The camera lenses covering the jacket were inspired by the vivid colours of poison frogs. The skin sends warning signals to predators that it's not worth attacking or eating, and so do the camera lenses.

CAPTCHA Tweet employs CAPTCHA, human only legible text, as a secret communication tool between humans. It was created in 2013 and it was the year when Snowden exposed the US government online surveillance system known as PRISM. *CAPTCHA Tweet* could be used to avoid such machine vision powered surveillance, but I was more interested in the situation – that we need to consider the intervention of machines in daily communication – than with the actual usefulness of the application. I also think CAPTCHA itself is conceptually interesting. CAPTCHA is a symbol of humanity in a way, as it’s something that can be solved by humans only. But CAPTCHA has also been changing shape, because computers are increasingly able to read distorted text. If we distort the text more, humans cannot read it either. Now we need to come up with another form of test to distinguish computers from humans. Of course we have many things that we do better than computers right now. But will it be so in future decades? Do we possess abilities that will *never* be mimicked by computers? This line of thought led us to *Nonfacial Portrait*.

RO’D *Stone* experiments with another kind of nonhuman sensory apparatus and tries to reproduce the sensory experiences of a rock, battered by water. Have you thought much about the relationship between these two forms of nonhuman sensory systems – the nonhuman machinic and the nonhuman mineral? As someone who has only experienced documentation of this work, I’m also curious how viewers who have experienced it reacted and described the experience?

SSB Machines are nonhuman, but because we make them, it is easier for us to understand them than any other nonhumans. We can think of machines as a medium that lets us hear the voices of nonhuman beings.

KYH *Stone* was created for an exhibition at Goethe-Institut Shanghai. Its theme was posthuman. I somehow had this idea of future humans being able to exist in any form. I thought it would be nice to be a stone

at the beach where waves embrace it every day. I went to the volcanic island, Ulleungdo in Korea and walked along the shore for 5 days to find the perfect stone while Seung Back was developing water sensors in our studio. I went back to the stone with Seung Back after a few months and recorded wave data breaking on the stone. In the exhibition the waves were recreated in the wooden structure which was supposed to represent the stone. Audiences were invited to go inside the structure and feel what it is like to be the stone at the shore. Many people said that it actually felt like being the stone. They might have just been being polite to us though. Haha.



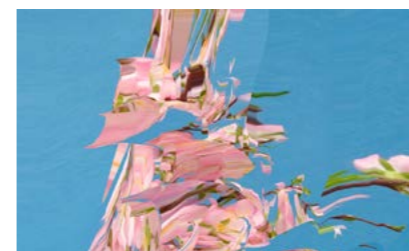
Animal Classifier, 2016.

RO’D Many of your works deal not only with machine vision but also classification systems. Take for example, *Animal Classifier*, a computer system that categorises images according to Jorge Luis Borges’ taxonomy of imaginary animals. It often seems to involve taking an imaginary form of categorisation or extrapolation from human practices (i.e. cloud gazing, dreaming, fictionalising) and making that the parameter for a machine system. Are you trying to suggest that all parameters and schemes for categorisation are somehow arbitrary and/or socially constructed? Are you thinking about the politics of classification systems? Do you think about how classification systems might be better designed?

SSB All classification systems involve particular points of view. It doesn’t mean that it is entirely arbitrary. The changing classification systems in scientific history show the process of human efforts to truly understand nature. And in the process, our understanding is expanding. What is important, then, is to make the process in which the classification system was created

transparent and clarify the views it contains. Machine classification systems show higher accuracy than humans in certain areas. And such systems further amplify human biases or limitations that have defined these categories. This is dangerous, but it can also be an opportunity for humans to realize their limitations because the problems in machines look more obvious. Furthermore, the latest technology enables machines to set their own rules without humans. It is possible to create a system that can make categories as well as humans, in its own perspectives. I think this will help us understand our own classification systems better.

KYH Most current AI systems are basically classifiers: object recognition, translation, sentiment analysis, etc. And they learn and work based on classification schemes that are pre-defined by humans. These are inevitably imperfect. Borges writes in his essay, *The Analytical Language of John Wilkins*, “...it is clear that there is no classification of the Universe not being arbitrary and full of conjectures. The reason for this is very simple: we do not know what thing the universe is.” No matter how good the algorithms and datasets that are used in machine learning, if the base classes are flawed, so is the trained AI. Realizing this issue is the first step to improving the system.



Flower, 2016-17.

RO’D *Flower* pushes the possibilities of machine vision almost to abstraction, at least to the eyes of a human viewer. Once more there is the feeling of being in between two vision schemes, onehuman and one machinic or nonhuman. What can we learn by seeing like a computer? What can we learn when we push machine recognition to its extremes or focus on mistakes? Or is this the wrong line of questioning...

KYH We don’t have to see like machines, but we need to understand how *they* see

as we all have to live alongside machine vision. *Flower* examines machine vision’s abstraction recognition. The behaviours of machines under unusual circumstances offers new perspectives on this process. Machine vision errors can reveal important aspects of its nature, just like human optical illusions help us to learn more about the way we humans perceive things.

RO’D *A Million Seasons* feels like a form of computational aesthetics, except instead of trying to display all the data it turns each image into a pixel of one colour. What can we learn from examining very large image data sets? What is it not possible to learn?

SSB Machines are good at understanding and processing high dimensional space. In particular, recent advances in deep learning have achieved dramatic performance improvements through the machine’s direct handling of this high dimensional data. But we are living in three dimensions. So many data visualization techniques involve projecting high dimensions into two or three dimensions. The images created in this way can’t contain all of the original information. Furthermore, images that look strange to our eyes but which machines recognize can be understood easily at a higher dimension. These images allow us to glimpse a dimension that we haven’t yet seen. I think human vision will be expanded through machines. However, there will certainly be limitations due to human biological systems. I think this difference is rather meaningful. Recognizing the difference, embracing it, and expanding our limits, is the human’s greatest strength.

RO’D Are you working on anything at present?

KYH We are working on a couple of projects. One is a dancing performance involving machine vision. It will explore dances invisible to machines.

Originally published in *Neural*, issue 67: “Adversarial Tactics” (autumn 2020).

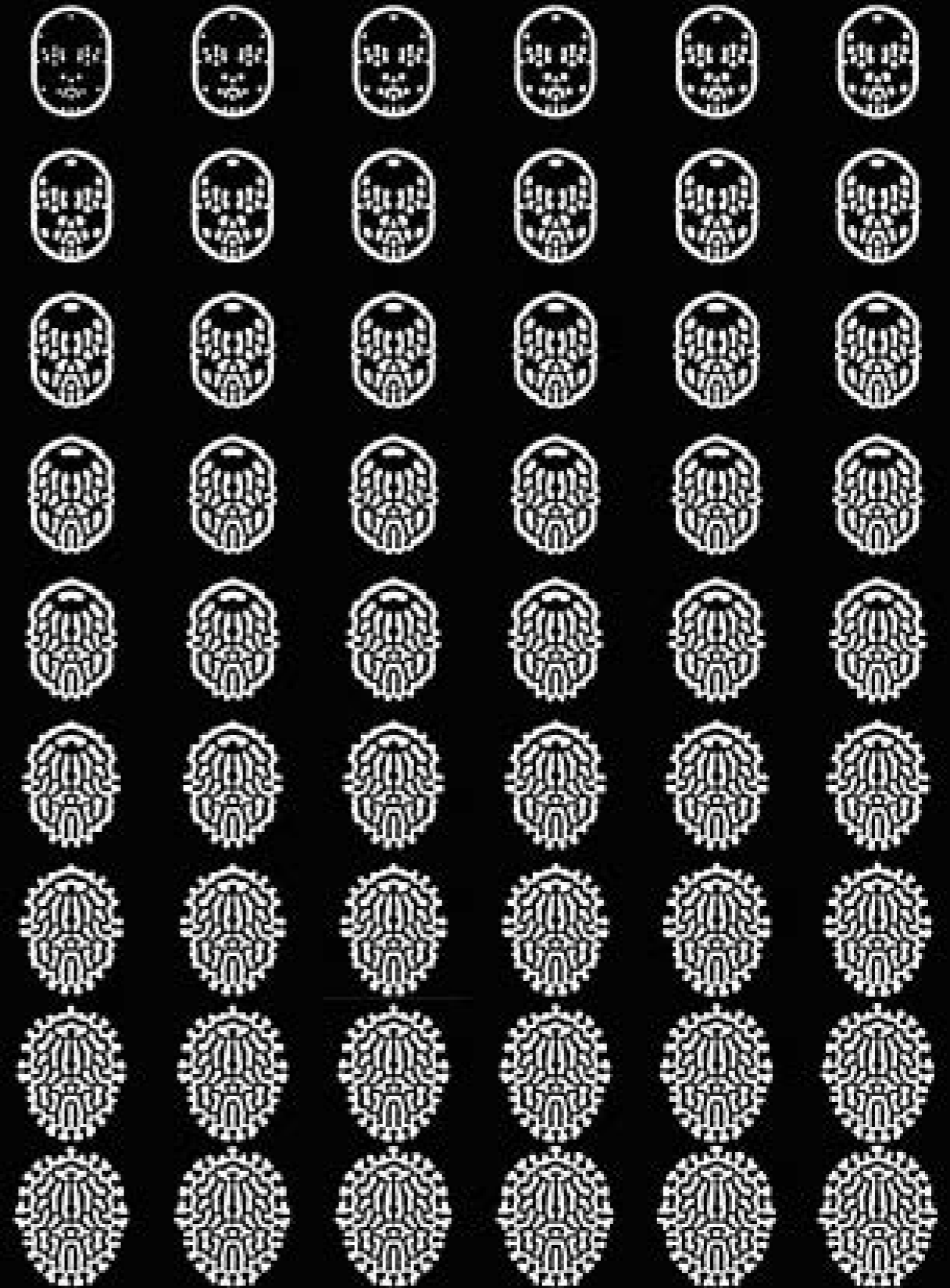
NONA
Mark Markin

NONA is a study of the correlation between unique human facial architecture, machine vision and nature. Many fields were covered during the research process, including anatomy, biology and coding, distant but yet so close. The first mammal was cloned in 1996 and scientific progress did not stop there. Now we are on the path of integrating technology into our lives, into our bodies. We can be boldly identified as the first generation of cyborgs. But we are also the first to feel the pressure of many technological fallouts impacting our lives. Privacy and individuality are two of them.

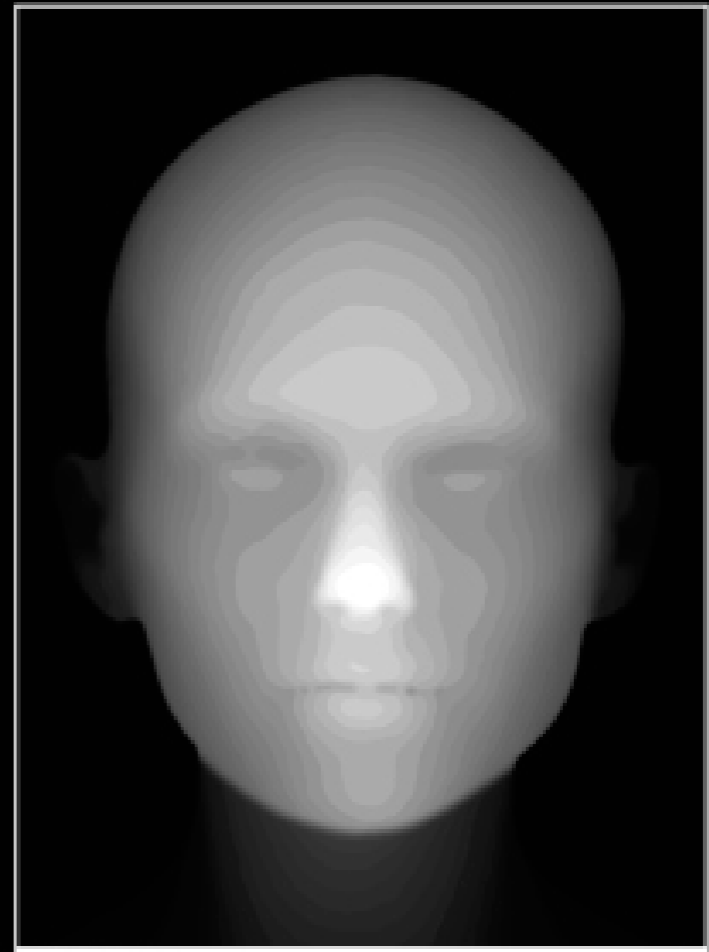
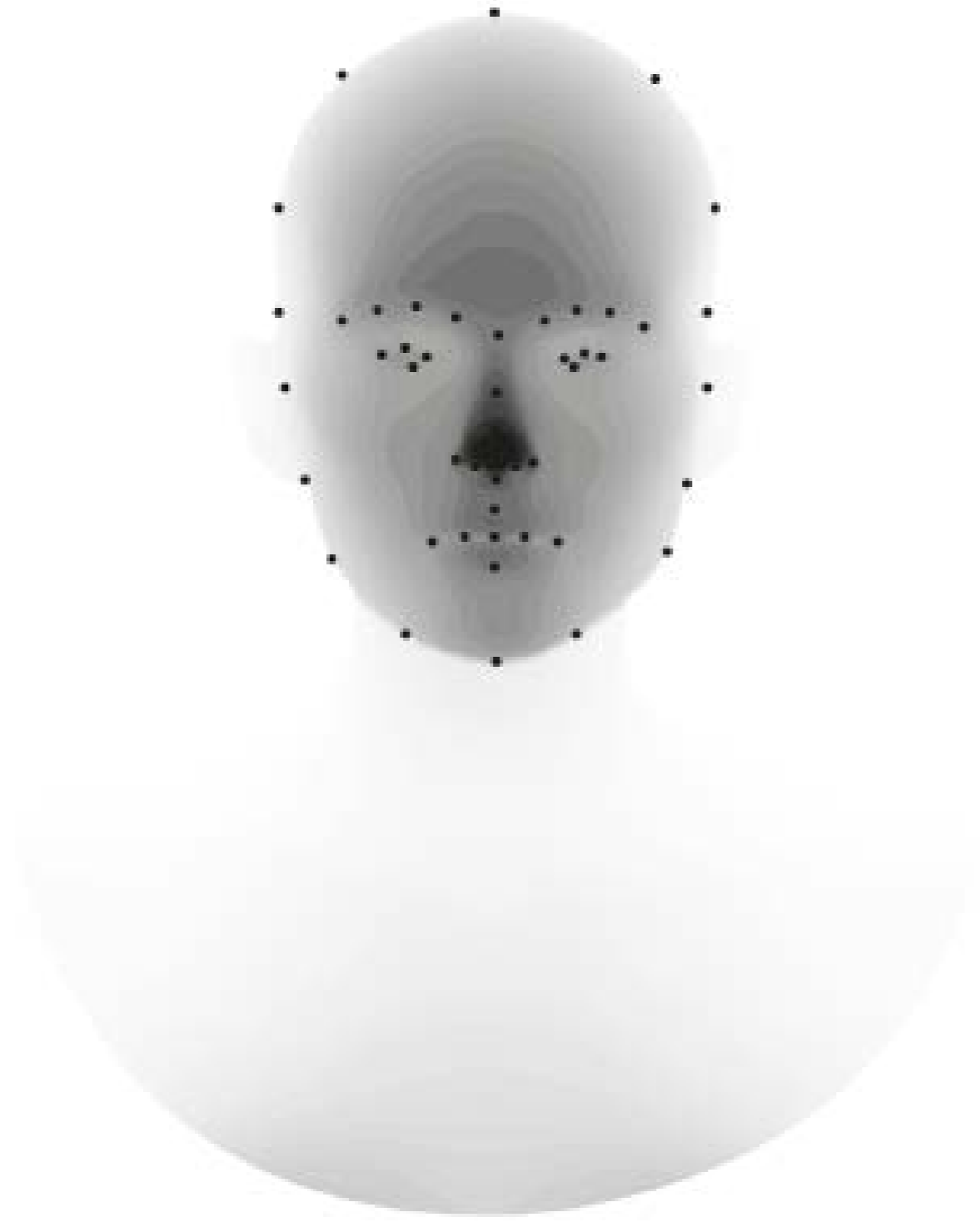
Two variables that many of us overlook. Twenty years ago only certain people could track our lives. Right now, with a little bit of patience, anyone can become a cyber Sherlock Holmes or a stalker. Your past, your present and your face are “under my thumb” and you are the one that feeds the database, “ain’t it the truth babe?”

Nevertheless, NONA was not made as a mask to hide or critique our society. Instead, it is a visualisation of interactions between human facial biometric data that have been captured by machine vision and processed by the emulation of nature’s algorithms.

Laser-cut aluminum, three video loops, printed manual







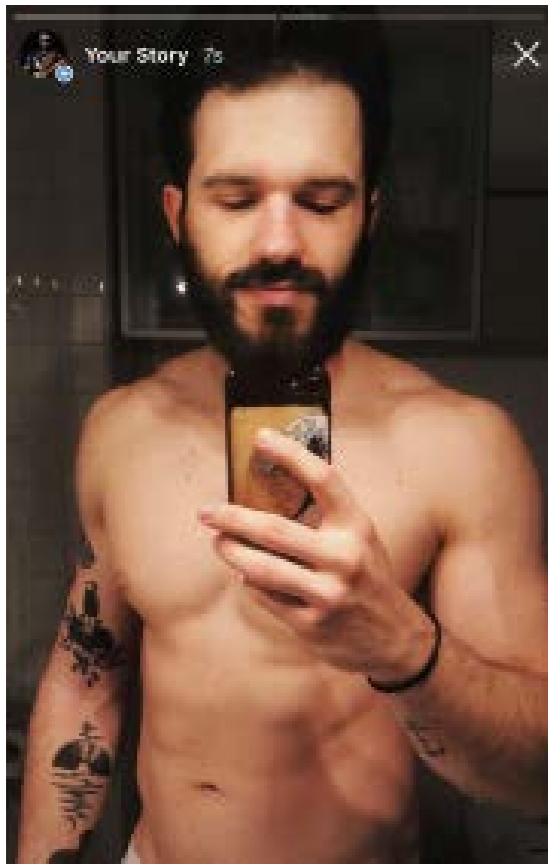
HUMAN
CONFIDENCE: 96%

As social networks become the main place for socialisation and identity construction, they are not just a virtual playground separated from external existence, but a space in which a major part of our real life takes place, with real consequences. Many studies show that Instagram, where personal photos take centre stage, can often set unrealistic expectations and create feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem, as seeing friends always on holiday or enjoying nights out can make people feel like they are missing out while others enjoy life. This explains why social media users add filters and alter their pictures in order to look perfect: Instagram makes us feel like we're not good enough, so we end up portraying our life as better than it really is. If that is true, isn't it like trying to live a new one?

How many little lies are we willing to tell to build our image on social media? What does it mean to be real? VS aims to demonstrate that in the digital age it is possible to live the life of your dreams without really living it, as there are narratives that don't need any validation to be credible on the internet. In the digital world an Italian student can become Vince Summers, the successful American rockstar he always wanted to be, and the more people believe it, the more he believes it. But can Vince Summers exist in the outside world?

90' performance with microphone and electric guitar,
Instagram posts and stories, 70 × 100 cm poster

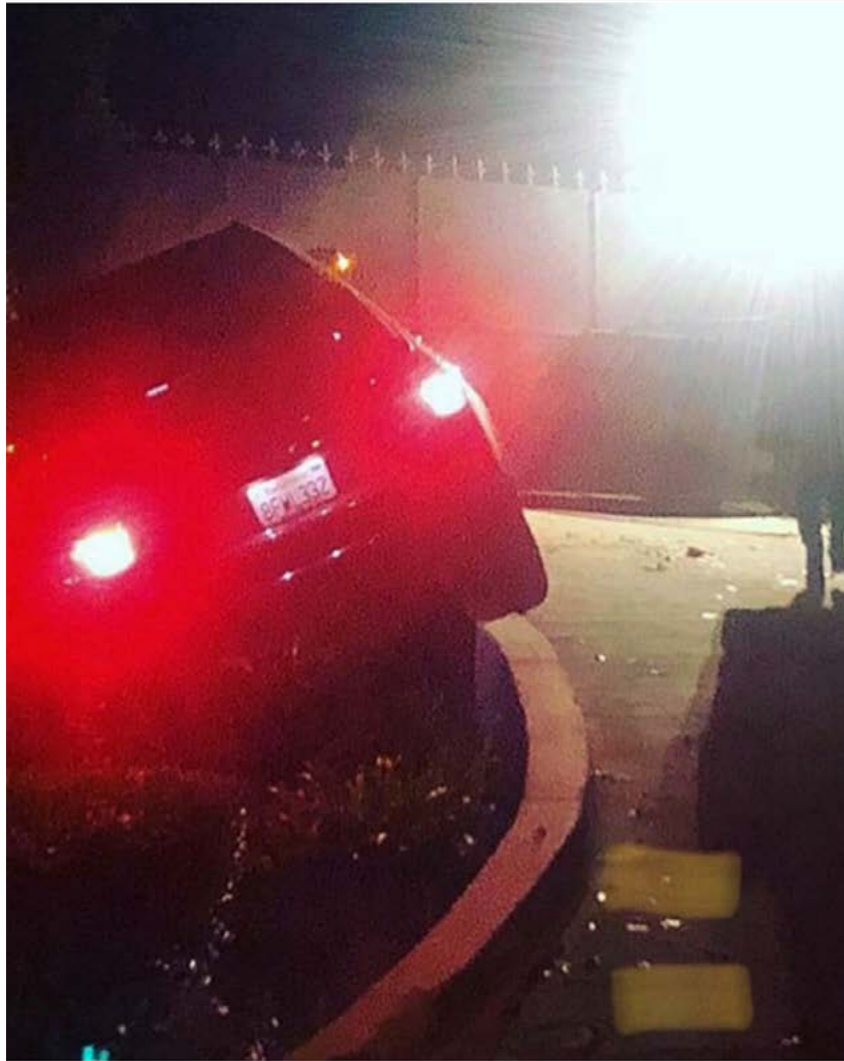








vincesummersmusic
Los Angeles, California



vincesummersmusic This is the second time this has happened this week in front of my house in LA and the fifth time overall since I moved in. Thanks again to my neighbor Harry for looking out for me as always. Sober the fuck up and slow the fuck down people!



vincesummersmusic
Rome, Italy



1/2

vincesummersmusic 2019 was the most decisive year of my life. It was the turning point, a dream coming true. Last night I celebrated New Year's Eve in Rome and in a week I will start my second headliner tour in Europe. 2020 will bring many changes and we're gonna make bigger things happen. Brand new Vince Summers is here.

Welcome to *FANTasia, Shared Lands*. Ruled by passion and creative freedom, these worlds are based on our pop culture and inhabited by derivative characters.

As kids, we grew attached to the stories we all watched, thus sharing a culture that connects us on a very emotional level. This bond is easily shared on the web, where both amateur and professional artists contribute to this culture with their own derivative works – works that break the rules imposed by big companies, thus enabling total creative freedom. The relationship between producer and consumer is transformed, shifting from passive to more active. Stories that were once linear and untouchable now become universes that are constantly changing and open for us to explore.

Wall projection of a 3' video loop, ink-jet print mounted on hardboard panel, 105 × 185 cm, various stickers









What Is There

Bernhart Schwenk and Miro Craemer in conversation with Eva Leitolf

Eva Leitolf Bernhart, Miro, you were both guest critics for the exhibition at the end of our “ELIZA & Frankenstein” semester. Your visit was a real highlight for us. You were enthusiastic, sensitive, and extraordinarily inspiring. Both of you explore and expand conventional boundaries in your own work. I’m thinking about Bernhart’s “Feelings”, as an exhibition that almost entirely dispenses with text, or Miro’s “Denkraum Deutschland”, which harnesses the political potential of artists, designers and architects. Bernhart’s praxis is located in the established setting of a major museum, while Miro introduces elements from his work as artist, designer and curator into contexts as varied as major institutions and off-spaces. So what led you to take up our invitation to discuss projects with students who are only just beginning to develop their personal artistic practices?

Bernhart Schwenk Well the most important reason for us to accept your invitation to come to Bozen was because it was you, Eva. We’ve followed your work for a long time and love the way you handle image and text, and how you maintain your own distinctive voice, conceptually and aesthetically. So that already made us very curious about your work with students.

Miro Craemer I also find the institution very interesting, the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. It’s multilingual, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, the connection between design and art. There are lots of intersections with my own ideas about creating and communicating art. And I really did find lots of points of contact. Altogether that trip to Bozen was extremely inspiring, and I know I can speak for Bernhart there too.

EL What did you find especially interesting in your discussions with students? Were there situations or projects that remained with you?

MC Well at a quite fundamental level we sensed a free artistic approach to the set topic, a very diverse attitude to the relationship between art and technology. We could see that this free approach was not hampered by self-imposed rules or the limitations of a single medium. Instead a broad spectrum of media art and photography were employed, a wide-ranging understanding. Materials and techniques were not selected for their own sake, they always related directly to the message. That showed absolutely the right kind of confidence.

BS Yet that confidence, the independence of the artistic approach, never tipped over into overconfidence, or at least that’s how we experienced it, never arrogant. Whether the works were already fully developed was completely irrelevant. I found that striking in connection with the confidence and self-awareness.

MC Yes, they had great confidence in their chosen methods. Each of them seemed to know where they stood. In my opinion that was helped by the format of the seminar, and above all by your leadership, Eva. It seems to me that you promote a kind of freedom through your critical but always attentive manner of questioning, which starts off by exploring and respecting the artist's world and space. There was no sign of pressure being applied. That made it very easy for us to find our way into your exchange as externals. I think it's generally helpful to start off by concentrating properly on what is there. To that extent we weren't looking to judge, nor to idolise. It was more about asking the right questions. It's the students themselves who are responsible for their artistic development.

BS The projects were also simply too different to compare directly. And there were also quite different perspectives. For example you, Miro, were interested in how an artistic approach is communicated, for me it was perhaps the art historical aspect. In any case it was exciting for us to knock ideas around in this format.

MC It's not at all easy to say which works I remember best, because for me sometimes the students' ideas and our discussions were just as interesting as the implementation in a concrete work, or inspiring in quite some other way. For example the project by Michael Unger, *Fünfstrahlig* it was called. It provoked a wonderfully constructive discussion because the work was so open. We talked about wiping with fingers on a smooth surface as a painterly gesture, about the contrast between the body and the high-tech device, and of course about the competition and dependency between organic and technological bodies. That was different with the work by Mark Markin for example. There the mood was tranquility, because we were so impressed by the work's perfection. But there was something creepy about its coldness, and of course that fits wonderfully with the Frankenstein theme.

BS I also found Fabian Mosele's *FANTasia: Shared Worlds* unbelievably thought-provoking. The most interesting thing here was not the high perfection but his subversive and whimsical appropriation of an animated visual language. At first glance it appears highly polished, almost commercial. But then the video did something else entirely. It drew you into a strange place, a peculiar exhibition where art and audience were in permanent metamorphosis, where the dependency between those who were viewing and that which was viewed had been abolished. That captivated me. If I remember rightly, the weird music contributed to the suggestive impression.

EL In the "ELIZA & Frankenstein" semester we were thinking about what we as artists can contribute to the question of how technological progress challenges and changes our society. Will we end up with the "surrender of culture to technology", as Neil Postman suggested in his *Technopoly* in 1992? Or will we manage to regulate the effects of technologies? How does technology transform the way we see? Technological developments have always been

a strong driver of cultural discourse and cultural practice. How do you see that? What contribution can we offer as artists? Which artists' practices spring to mind? Are these issues for you as curators?

BS My experience suggests to me that art and culture have never had any problem creating a critical distance to everyday reality, and that art will continue to be able to do so. This means that art is also able to reflect and undermine technologies and their social consequences – or to use and perhaps even instrumentalise them for its own ends. That's why artistic practice and discourse will never be dependent on technology. But conversely technology will always be dependent on creativity. Or how would you see it as an artist, Miro?

MC For me the most important partner of art is failure, the absence of success as the decisive step to something changing, something becoming different and new. It is almost impossible to create this moment of "failure" technologically, nor is that the purpose of technology. Functionality and optimisation are its central concerns. In art it's about a different concept of "realisation", art has a different objective. And it moves in different places and spaces, in the unplanned and unexpected. Incidentally "Denkraum Deutschland" in 2019 at the Pinakothek der Moderne was concerned with that kind of in-between, namely between the analogue and digital worlds, and as such with a field that is rather interesting for art. We saw that artists are rarely drawn to the heart of a technological system – where the potential for dependency is inevitable baked in – but tend instead to seek spaces at the margins of the system. The chances of something new emerging are simply greater there.

BS When you mentioned conscious failure, non-success, I had to think of the deliberate misuse or "prohibited" use of technology. One example would be *Spirit Is a Bone*, where the artists Adam Broomberg and Oliver Chanarin "hijacked" facial recognition technology that is normally used for surveillance. Their uncanny portraits were shown last year in the exhibition "Resistant Faces" at the Pinakothek der Moderne, curated by Jana Johanna Haeckel. The exhibition also featured other anarchic adaptations of technology.

EL All the student projects we have discussed so far were from Studio Image – but I know you also met with students from the other Studios, till the early hours and the next day too. What was your impression? How do the students from the other Studios treat the media of photography and video?

MC What I found especially interesting, as already mentioned, was how the students combine media with space, objects, actions and also light; how freely they jump the boundaries that are supposed to exist between photography and video. Implementing a medium's codes differently or expanding them creates a captivating field of association, also for the viewer. To my mind this also created a kind of "circuit" that authorises the viewer to think, which is also a substantive

expansion. The work creates a space that is larger than the visual space. The content does not end at the bounds of the medium.

BS Expanding the visual space, exploding the genres and limits is a phenomenon that has been observed for at least fifty years, but every generation takes new steps that would previously have been inconceivable. Younger generations are ever more blasé about blurring the line between the real and the representation. Art never repeats itself, even if it might appear so at first glance.

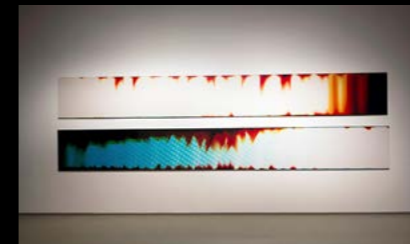
MC The guest critic format at your end-of-semester exhibitions offers a wonderful opportunity to clarify expectations and motivations and explore new ways of thinking. It creates a great chance to question each other, and incidentally also ourselves by the way. So we'd love to come next year – if you'll have us.

The conversation took place in July 2021.

Violent Images

“The image in war” or “the war in images”: The role of the image in conflicts is ambivalent and controversial. The twentieth century saw – and created millions of viewers who witnessed – the Somme, Guernica, Nanking, Bergen-Belsen, Hiroshima, Mỹ Lai, conflicts and atrocities without end. Photography became an increasingly important force, often delivering propaganda. The politics of representation are laid bare during war, and with them the (im)possibility of constructing meaning in the simple act of taking a picture.

Broomberg & Chanarin /
The Day Nobody Died / 2008



Images both reflect and exert violence. Snapshots from Abu Ghraib were shared round the world; surveillance now employs facial recognition and drone monitoring; sexist images permeate advertising and the entertainment sector. Violent images surround us. Some represent violence directly, others reveal their violent potential in their production, dissemination or use.

Social platforms like Facebook and Google possess sweeping influence over what we view. So-called content moderators remove certain violent images from the global stream – along with art (and trivia) that (apparently) transgresses their guidelines.

In *Violent Images* Studio Image invited students to reflect upon the violence of images and of image-making. What makes an image violent? Who decides this, and in

what context? How do new production technologies and distribution channels influence the relationship between image and power? And above all: How do we – as artists – relate the issue of power to the violent potential of new image technologies?

Nina Berman / *Marine Wedding* / 2006



The artist Lukas Einsele introduced us to his *One Step Beyond – The Mine Revisited* (since 2001), a contemporary search for traces of modern warfare. In her text on Einsele's work Catherine David describes antipersonnel mines as “the least visible, least spectacular part of the military arsenal”. Einsele counters the invisibility of the mine with images, narratives, and drawings that “interconnect people, things, and landscapes”, and “construct situations like force and energy fields that blur the usual coordinates of the near and the far, the personal and the foreign, the singular and the commonplace”.

Chiara Cortellini explores photography's relation to memory in *La guerra in testa*. She finds tranquil landscapes close to the village she grew up in. Only upon the closest examination are the traces of the First World War visible in Cortellini's photographs. In conjunction with the accounts written by hospitalised mentally ill soldiers, the images unfold a lasting horror.

During our excursion we met with the curator Felix Hoffmann at the exhibition "The Last Picture" at C/O Berlin. In an interview for *American Suburb X*, Brad Feuerhelm discusses photography and (the violence of) death with Hoffmann. Hoffmann paraphrases the German art historian Hans Belting: "a photograph of a dead person is not an abnormality but the very reason photographs exist". "The true purpose of a photograph is to depict something that is absent and thus can only be present in an image."

Eva & Franco Mattes / No Fun / 2010



In her video loop *shared space* Irene Rainer observes a drone observing a human. The entire operation occurs within a tight space – defined by a white chalk circle – that neither drone nor human leave until the drone's power runs out. The thousands of photographs taken by the drone are documented in the book *homo ad circumum*.

Elisa Faletti also explores the violent potential of surveillance technology. For *Incidents and Situations from Common Life / Chapter II*, she compiled thousands of images from surveillance cameras at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. In her installation she turned the tables to conduct her own surveillance. After looking at the pictures of the Western Wall, visitors moved on to the adjacent room. Here they saw live footage of other visitors now looking at the work – and realised they must have been monitored themselves.

Shifts in perception are also central to the work of Jana Müller, who we visited in her studio in Berlin. In her text on Müller's

work, Kathrin Meyer describes "little episodes of gruesomeness" that we consume every day. Müller develops strategies to deal with the fascination with violence, "with the suppressed and the disturbing". She explores "subjective and collective fears" and reflects on "the fragility of normality and the invisible potential horror just below the thin layer of everyday life".

Finally, in *Almost a Love Letter* alumna Josefina Sundblad contemplates "the politics that takes hold of institutions" and power relationships within hierarchical academic institutions to give us very personal feedback on her experiences with Studio Image.

Everyone in His Place?

Catherine David on Lukas Einsele

A concise introduction to Lukas Einsele's project is no easy matter, given the context of responding to questions—or the lack of them—from journalists and a public sometimes perplexed by an agenda not tied to the disaster clichés antipersonnel mines might have them hoping for: pictures of victims who really look like the victims television and press coverage has got them accustomed to. Nor is it easy to get a handle on a mode of presentation that is makeshift, fragile, readily transportable, and only apparently didactic: one that groups together, in no special order, texts, maps, video images, photographs, anamorphically projected drawings, and display cases full of more or less sophisticated mines produced at different times by a host of different countries and, in some cases, still being spread around vast tracts of land beyond the occidental pale.

Deminer working on a hill, Afghanistan, 04.11.2002.



Sketch of the accident site, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 07.09.2003.



This is because it is not easy to open your eyes and confront and weigh up things you would rather ignore or ascribe to the unspeakable workings of fate—before leaving them, with a more or less clear conscience, to humanitarian organizations. Just as it is not easy to accept images that challenge and do not assign things to a predetermined place.

This is doubtless in part the case because our relationships with modern warfare are paradoxical: distance (real or fantasized) and proximity (repressed or denied) in terms of responsibility; massive visual media presence; and the decline or standardization of representation not only in the media, but also in the cinema and in literature. Thus "war seems everywhere today, on our borders and in our minds; but here in the West we no longer know it from experience. Firstly we have no immediate perception of it via our bodies; and as a logical consequence, no war bequeaths—except perhaps to a tiny minority among us—the feeling left by any major existential experience, of a before and an after."¹

It is doubtless also the case because antipersonnel mines are the least visible, least spectacular part of the military arsenal turned out by modern states—or cobbled together by various other interested parties;

¹ Claude Gautier and Pierre Zaoui, "Vivre la guerre sans guerre: Expériences, discours, représentations," *Vacarme*, Winter 2005, no. 30.

because the legions of amputees stay home and do not clutter up the streets of our cities; and more decisively, because “the primary effect of the hijacking of the contemporary antitotalitarian imagination by democratic consensualism is to render unutterable the multiform disaster that is the present and mask its connections with the different blue-prints for order.”²

Lukas Einsele neither denounces nor demonstrates; rather, he insidiously disturbs the received perception of accidents and their causalities. The images, narratives, and drawings he records interconnect people, things, and landscapes, and they construct situations like force and energy fields that blur the usual coordinates of the near and the far, the personal and the foreign, the singular and the common-place—all the while leaving the viewer free to move among the words and images, to put them together in his or her own way, aware that “you can’t see properly if you’re scared of losing your place.”³

Rosa Múruca, Angola, 29.11.2001.



During his first journey to Luena, Angola, he felt the need to share his impressions, emotions, and questions, articulating them in “travel letters” he e-mailed to a few carefully chosen recipients. He came up with a method—a protocol I shall come back to—invented and shaped during the course of meetings, discoveries, and experiences “on site” in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Cambodia. A method brought,

² Alain Brossat, *L'Épreuve du désastre: Le XXe siècle et les camps*, Albin Michel: Paris, 1996.

³ Jean-Luc Godard.

doubtless by the project’s rationale, to such further stages of development as the returning of the images to their places of origin and subsequent cooperative ventures requested by some of the participants, in particular in Kabul.

Sardar, Afghanistan, 05.11.2002.



The various contexts were highly distinctive in human and cultural terms, as well as with respect to the organization of the more or less provisional communities formed by the victims of antipersonnel mines. Nonetheless, the protocol established for the encounters and interviews remained identical: those who were willing were asked to relate the circumstances of the accident that had cut short the normal course of their lives and, when words failed, to provide a rough sketch of the spatial and emotional framework. In the various forms of exhibition of this material—in institutions, books, and magazines—these psychographs accompanied the (often revised) texts and the black-and-white portraits taken during the interviews or at other moments. Like the full-length and group ones in color, these portraits were taken indoors. The narrowly framed portraits make restitution of the physiognomies and the individual expression of each of the children, women, men, youths, old people, villagers, combatants, and soldiers, without revealing the nature of their shared misfortune. By contrast, the large, color group portraits, which focus on certain moments of everyday lives in the process of being (re)organized during or after rehabilitation, draw the viewer’s attention to the prostheses, but only after lengthy study of facial expressions, group

interaction, and ways of standing, dressing, and passing the time: Afghans drinking tea together, men and a woman with a child in Luena, a bicycle battalion of Afghan policemen surrounded by rubble. Yet in none of these photographs is there any intention to establish a typology, an amputee “identity,” or anything else that might tend to point to a standardized victim.

Other series of images record the work of doctors and humanitarian workers, sessions of rehabilitation and adaptation to the wearing of an artificial limb, bicycle races, and—less often—the return to work and restructured daily lives. Still others follow the human and technical aspects of clearance operations, catalogue the various kinds of mines, and catch the colors and contours of sweeping landscapes that some detail or remark indicates as being mined. Here, too, the images avoid generalization, the emphasis being on the sheer diversity of the situations: there is nothing in common between the technique of a Bosnian and an Afghan bomb disposal worker, and nothing routine about an Angolan demining squad warily carrying away mines in what looks like a procession of weird beekeepers.

The project incorporates the knowledge and skills of professionals and people variously concerned in an enormous network of complex interaction, charting without the slightest naiveté the situation’s paradoxical rationale. Here are the demining teams, soldiers, and other combatants; doctors and surgeons made specialists by force of circumstance (refer to the text by Dr. Jonathan Kaplan), forced to perform emergency operations of all kinds; NGO personnel supplying prostheses and helping with rehabilitation; specialist journalists and jurists. And here, too, are the manufacturers, sellers, and dealers more or less legally involved in the lucrative sale and circulation of the weapons in question: weapons offered in detailed, regularly updated catalogues and on stands at trade fairs usually open only to “specialists.”

And yet this precise notation of the objective circumstances underlying the drama is never reduced to the mere statement of a “problem.” It is no doubt in this space—this blank or empty zone on the map, these distances between one face and another—that the throb of what philosopher

Jacques Rancière defines as “intervals” can be felt: “Political intervals are created by separating a situation from itself, by establishing connections between identities and loci defined in a specific place in a given world, identities and loci defined elsewhere, and identities and loci that have no place in those places.

TMRP-6, antitank (AT) mine (SFR Yugoslavia).



A political community is not the actualization of a shared essence or of the essence of the commonplace; it is the pooling of that which is not initially held in common, somewhere between the visible and the invisible, the near and the distant, the present and the absent. This pooling presupposes the building of links between the given and the not-given, the communal and the private, the appropriate and the inappropriate. It is in this process of building that common humanity reasons itself out, reveals itself, and has an impact.”⁴

Originally published in Lukas Einsele, *One Step Beyond – Wiederbegegnung mit der Mine*, ed. Catherine David and Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2005).

⁴ Jacques Rancière, *La Méésentente*, Gallilée: Paris, 1996.

La guerra in testa
Chiara Cortellini

The environment becomes a silent storyteller of its own scars and recreates, from time to time, an atmosphere of brutal violence. *La guerra in testa* (The war in the head) recalls some of the traces left in soldiers' minds by a horrific conflict.

Are we sure that this is just an act of reminiscing about the mental aftermath of World War I? Past and present meet. Silence.

Three ink-jet prints, 65.0 × 97.5 cm
Publication, 29.7 × 23.0 cm

Written material courtesy of Fondazione Museo storico del Trentino, archive in Trento. Original photographs taken in Val di Pejo and Passo del Tonale.

The work was titled after Anna Grillini's book *La guerra in testa: Esperienze e traumi di civili, profughi e soldati nel manicomio di Pergine Valsugana (1909-1924)*, Il Mulino, 2018.





Il risultato del movimento è stato il riconoscimento del fatto
che il movimento è stato, in definitiva, una forza di
E questo è il risultato che ha permesso di
in un modo che è stato
in un modo che è stato

Il risultato è stato



Un giovane ragazzo è seduto sul moggio di terra che si trova nelle vicinanze di Montecarlo di Reggio.
Il suo sguardo è rivolto verso il mare.
Il mare è molto vicino, ed è molto bello.
Per questo il ragazzo ha fatto un bellissimo disegno di paesaggio.
Il disegno è molto bello ed è molto bello.
Il disegno è molto bello ed è molto bello.
Il disegno è molto bello ed è molto bello.
Il disegno è molto bello ed è molto bello.

Disegno di un ragazzo
Montecarlo di Reggio



The Last Picture – Photography and Death

Interview with Felix Hoffmann and Brad Feuerhelm

“The other reason is the question of memory – in line with the invention of the medium, mass images of the dead emerged in the second half of the 19th century. A fashion wave that is not only reserved for the nobility and clergy, but also for simple people, in order to have a portrait, a memory picture of someone at all”. – Felix Hoffmann

Tacita Dean, from the series
The Russian Ending, 2001.



The last picture, the final image, imago mortis, etc. The tale of death and the image has a very long history from some of the earliest folk paintings and tribal artifacts in which the thwarting of finality is expressed in artistic form and totemic stature. These images of death proliferate in human history. The photographic medium and its invention at the cusp of the industrial revolution seems to almost pointedly mark the transition in which technology, humanistic impulse and the direct questioning of iconic image worship fuse, or perhaps diffuse into a state of interlocked confusion.

The “birth” of the camera, the distribution of the photograph and the general attitude of spiritual matters in the Nineteenth Century with Charles Darwin and later Nietzsche created a perfect storm in which the photograph could begin to question the idea of “the unseen” as it related to spiritual matters. William Mumler, the most noted of spirit photographers, almost single-handedly turned the camera into a device that manufactured belief through the technological aspects of the machine and the

body with his image of Mary Todd Lincoln and her deceased husband Abraham. His images of “spirits” resting their hands on the shoulders of the living would become most controversial when he was brought before court.

The post-mortem photograph in the Nineteenth Century had a clear correlation with mortality and the living conditions of the times. Infant mortality rates being what they were, the employ of the local studio or itinerant photographer to make photographs of deceased loved ones was a significant occupation. The practice of photographing the corpse would dissipate as mortality rates improved and the cultures and attitudes toward death and its image was quietly, but rather quickly put in the rear view. One could also speculate that as the industry around death became a new occupation in which capitalistic tendencies were introduced to make death and dying an expensive pursuit, images of sadness, horror or shock were also detached from the final acts of memory and burial. I have made post mortem photographs of my mother and grandfather. They sit in my holding as something alien, other and not as a totem of memory, but rather something that gives less security to how I have been accustomed or persuaded to see death and its image.

Felix Hoffmann has created the exhibition *The Last Picture* at C/O Berlin in which images from media, private collections, and artists have been assembled to contemplate how we have looked at death and the image in photographic terms from the beginnings to present. There is also an incredible accompanying exhibition catalogue produced with Spector books that illustrates the exhibition with essays and is imperative for anyone interested in the subject. Felix has been kind enough to grant us an interview for which I am thankful. Below, he gives his insights

to my questions, but also really presses the point about how he personally developed the idea and how he sees the subject.

BF **Death is by own definition one of two defining experiences that are considered as universal to the human species – the other is of course, birth. And yet, within these two polar observations that encapsulate the human experience, book ending it as it were, we as a species are more engaged at least in the West with images of death and not birth. In some ways, as it relates to image-making we celebrate death or at the very least take more time to consider it as an image than birth. Perhaps it is because one has been experienced and the other remains shrouded in mystery and anticipation. Do you personally have any thoughts as to why this is the case? Perhaps it is a marker of finality in image form? Perhaps it is a testament for the living that they are still holding power of their inevitable conclusion?**

Arnulf Rainer, *Untitled (Death mask)*, 1978.



FH In the occidental tradition in Europe and North America different ideas merge that desire to preserve the deceased as a picture. These tradition notions invoke the idea with which we are confronted in all Christian churches – a dead body hangs on a cross. The body becomes an image. Or as the German art historian Hans Belting once put it to paraphrase him: The true purpose of a photograph is to depict something that is absent and

thus can only be present in an image. A photograph makes manifest something that is not in the picture, and which can only manifest itself in the photograph. Read this way, a photograph of a dead person is not an abnormality but the very reason photographs exist. The dead person has already departed and their death is an unbearable absence only made bearable when swiftly filled with a photograph. The other reason is the question of memory – in line with the invention of the medium, mass images of the dead emerged in the second half of the 19th century. A fashion wave that is not only reserved for the nobility and clergy, but also for simple people, in order to have a portrait, a memory picture of someone at all.

BF **So, that suggests that the recording of a photographic image of death actually speaks about the decimation of social hierarchy as we all share the same punch line. That is interesting as in the past to get a memento mori or a painting of the deceased would certainly evoke class status. The exhibition that you have arranged is one that is beset in my own research, acquisition/collection of images, but also features ruminations as a curator on how to deliver an exhibition that could offend a public very easily. How long did it take you to put the exhibition together and what were some of the obstacles that you faced either internally at the museum or with press and public spaces in which the exhibition was advertised such as newspapers, but also outdoor signage, etc. C/O Berlin is a private museum space correct? You must have quite a bit of freedom...**

FH In 1999 I found pictures of the dead that had been photographed “as if alive” in Vienna around 1850 – a practice that was widespread especially in Catholic areas of Europe. But what is photography doing here? It brings to life and does exactly the opposite of what photo theory repeatedly postulates: To mortify the counterpart in the moment of photographing by cutting through a time continuum that surrounds us all. That was my starting point.

It took me a long time to develop the C/O Berlin Foundation, where I have been working since 2005, as an institution in such a way that museum loans, financial leeway and a viable concept fit together. The exhibition now mixes photographic images from amateurs, journalists and artists and gives an overview from 1840 until today in three chapters “Dying” “Killing” “Surviving.”

Andres Serrano, *Rat Poison Suicide II*, from *The Morgue*, 1992.



BF The lie of photography is its only truth. I guess you and I are both of an age where we can speak about the history of exhibiting or publishing books about death and photography. I remember that in the 90’s and early 2000s that there were similar exhibitions and publications around the concept of death and photography. “The Dead”, “Looking at Death”, “Photography and Death”, the Stanley Burns “Sleeping Beauty” and medical histories of photography. Eugenia Parry’s book about crime scenes. Joel-Peter Witkin, Jeffrey Silverthorne, Andres Serrano, Sally Mann, Rudolf Schaeffer, etc. etc. etc. ad nausea and then for about the last 20 years, it has been a fairly quiet topic. What are your speculations about why the topic has been muted over the past couple of decades? Is it the post-Aids scare world? Is it simply that it works in cycles?

FH I don’t know of any exhibitions that have ever attempted a historical overview of the subject. Often painting and graphics were mixed with photography without really doing justice to the subject and focusing on the medium. Especially in the last 20 years, digitalization has completely changed our viewing

habits and thus our direct contact with the corpse. The debate has shifted and is now taking place in the cinema or on TV, visible to everyone. But who has experienced a house lay out today, featuring a dead person in the room? The newspapers and media are full of death and suffering. It is astonishing that especially catastrophes, suffering and death and their media distribution reveal the way in which photographic images function. But in our private lives we are far from it and do not want to see death.

BF There is certain elasticity in that idea. We are almost sweeping away and removing death as a one to one ration and in America in particular, we are certainly more interested in building a financial industry around death and dying. Our concentration on fame, money and material value are certainly at odds with dying. Barbara Krueger “I Shop, therefore I am” comes to mind. Perhaps Elizabeth Kubler-Ross may have opined, “I Die, therefore I am”. My last question wasn’t necessarily quite a set up for this one, but in some ways it makes sense now to ask about how you chose the material that you did. I recognize some of the historic material to be from the Burns’ archive, but also wonder how you came to choose the contemporary artists such as Tacita Dean and Andres Serrano and Erik Kessels over the names previously mentioned or perhaps unknown voices working on this sort of thing? How does one begin the process of choosing a *better* death?

FH When selecting the exhibits, we tried to focus entirely on the dead body, the corpse. The shifting of images from different contexts into the realm of art plays a role. For example, media images were important here: As a paper sculpture, the German artist Thomas Demand has recreated a press image from Whitney Houston’s last dinner in 2014 in paper. He then takes a photo of this paper culture. So it refers to a picture that many people know. And so at various points we have these shifts and questions about the appropriation of pictures: Appropriation.

The exhibition is also about shifts in the meaning of pictures through context: do I look at a picture differently when it’s published in a newspaper, or when the same picture by Andy Warhol hangs on the wall as a screen print? The question of appropriation puts our viewing habits to a fundamental test.

BF We as a society getting back to your previous point certainly have a maligned way of appropriating death. Perhaps photography is a perfect totem or stand in for our fear of it.

... If I might ask about one piece in particular, why did you choose to exhibit the Kessels piece as to my knowledge his father did not die, but it was close... but I might have that wrong...and then...why not the work about his sister?

FH The last chapter of the exhibition deals with the survivors’ processing strategies and the survivors’ view of what happened. How do we process death and disappearance? Erik Kessels’ father worked all his life on car wrecks and renovated them. The father is dying and the son finds an unfinished wreck and finishes it in love. Although Erik’s father recovered in the end, the son does something for his father: he builds him a monument. It is about the son’s look at what’s happening or what’s about to happen. It wasn’t important to me whether the father had already died, but how the artist dealt with it. The finished car is like a tombstone to escape oblivion and to last forever.

G. M. Howes, *Older Child Propped on Pillow and Tucked In Bed*, ca. 1863.



BF Ok. I think of the age we live in and the fast changes that inhabit our world by means of technology. We live in a society governed by an incalculable volume of change and data that push the currents of culture, life and politics to the edge of acceptability through the speed of its network qualities and the spiraling nature of these fast-moving conduits. What I mean is that with the technological changes that are occurring both in for example AI and communications, how do we incorporate the question of existence in those terms? For example, with death in particular, we are looking at ways in which the human body may elude death or at least postpone it, separate it from living tissue by interfacing our cerebral lives into a more machine-oriented domain and work to enable propositions regarding the complete disposal of our living bodily selves. This is becoming less and less Sci-Fi and more accepted by the day as a realistic likelihood. In thinking out about what Paul Virilio might have argued as the boundless speed of technology’s ability to counter-determine society, democracy and its progress, death is at the forefront of the debate, as always. In examining this relationship with AI, Internet and the post-industrialized world, were you able to inject this aspect into the exhibition? I did note the use of newspaper imagery, which I loved...

FH I wasn’t interested in the actual body and strategies for preserving it, but rather the image itself. And that’s where photography plays a decisive role. It is interesting to note that memory is shifting into digital space today: at www.reddit.com people and survivors place last images of people in digital space, since physical space is changing and one is looking for a new space for endless memory.

BF Do you feel that there is a national aspect to the way death or images of death are interpreted and distributed? For example, you use a very...Western

palette in your exhibition, and by no doubt we can all agree that various cultures historically up to the present have a different solution for the image and death. However, keeping our focus to your exhibition and the nationalities involved, which seem to be mostly from the perspective of America and Germany, are you able to ascertain any difference of their handling? Did the war, for example determine either nation's outcome for dealing with death? I can think of Kubler-Ross work the "American Way of Death" or in psychoanalytical interest with Ernest Becker's "Denial of Death" through to a more practical archive cum photographic art - application such as Michael Lesy's *Wisconsin Death Trip* as ways in which the American system has been exposed or has communicated on the idea of death and its image. Perhaps the same is in Germany with Gerhard Richter's October 18, 1977 series about the RAF and the works surrounding Stammheim prison which was a major force in the German recognition of terrorism, but also death and suicide. Germany, from an outside point of view seems to have this impenetrable weight of death in its post-war society and yet the oppressive feature of German-ness, that is also touched on obliquely in works by Thomas Demand (also exhibited) are more of an allusion, a fondness for dead-tech material such as Kiefer and concrete and seemed anaesthetized and hidden under the surface of things. How would you explain the dichotomy of dealing with death between the two nations?

FH The big question was: Do we want to integrate the themes of "killing" and "war", i.e. aggressive dying, into the exhibition? When we decided to do this, the question was how to deal with war and murder. Many colleagues said: Please don't forget Hiroshima. And you should also consider the Russian genocide, Rwanda, the genocide in the Balkans, and so on. That is why, when

it came to killing, we concentrated entirely on Germany and its history, the Holocaust and terrorism by the RAF.

BF How have the reactions been to the exhibit so far? Have you had positive healing reviews on occasion from people that may have helped them process the concept? Adversely, have you had negative reviews from people and are there age restrictions to this exhibit? If not, have you had any minors in and how do they grasp it?

FH The reactions are very individual. Some visitors react strongly to the children's pictures from the 19th century, others perceive the Morgue or the Holocaust as an emotional challenge. I have had a lot of different feedback. The theme polarizes and there seems to be no recipe for a reception for such a theme.

Timm Rautert,
Crazy Horse II, 2010.



BF ... and yet it's the punch line of life that we all share. Was there anything that you cut from the exhibit that you cut for the reasons of possibly being too offensive or difficult? Conversely, were there any images that you cut for being too quotidian? Such a strange way to ask about this sort of decision-making, I know...

FH No. But there were artists who didn't want to be involved for personal reasons. Unfortunately, mainly women. We concentrated on the dead body and as little as possible metaphors or detour strategies. The examination of the corpse was very important to me - but also because of the Western tradition mentioned at the beginning. And of course you also have to be able to afford loans: Sometimes it is a long way until you find an object in a collection, you have convinced the owner to lend it to you for three months

and then to be able to afford it as a loan with couriers, transport modalities. Some loans would have exceeded the financial framework - even in the catalogue. You have to cut back and there is a lot of work involved that you don't see anymore.

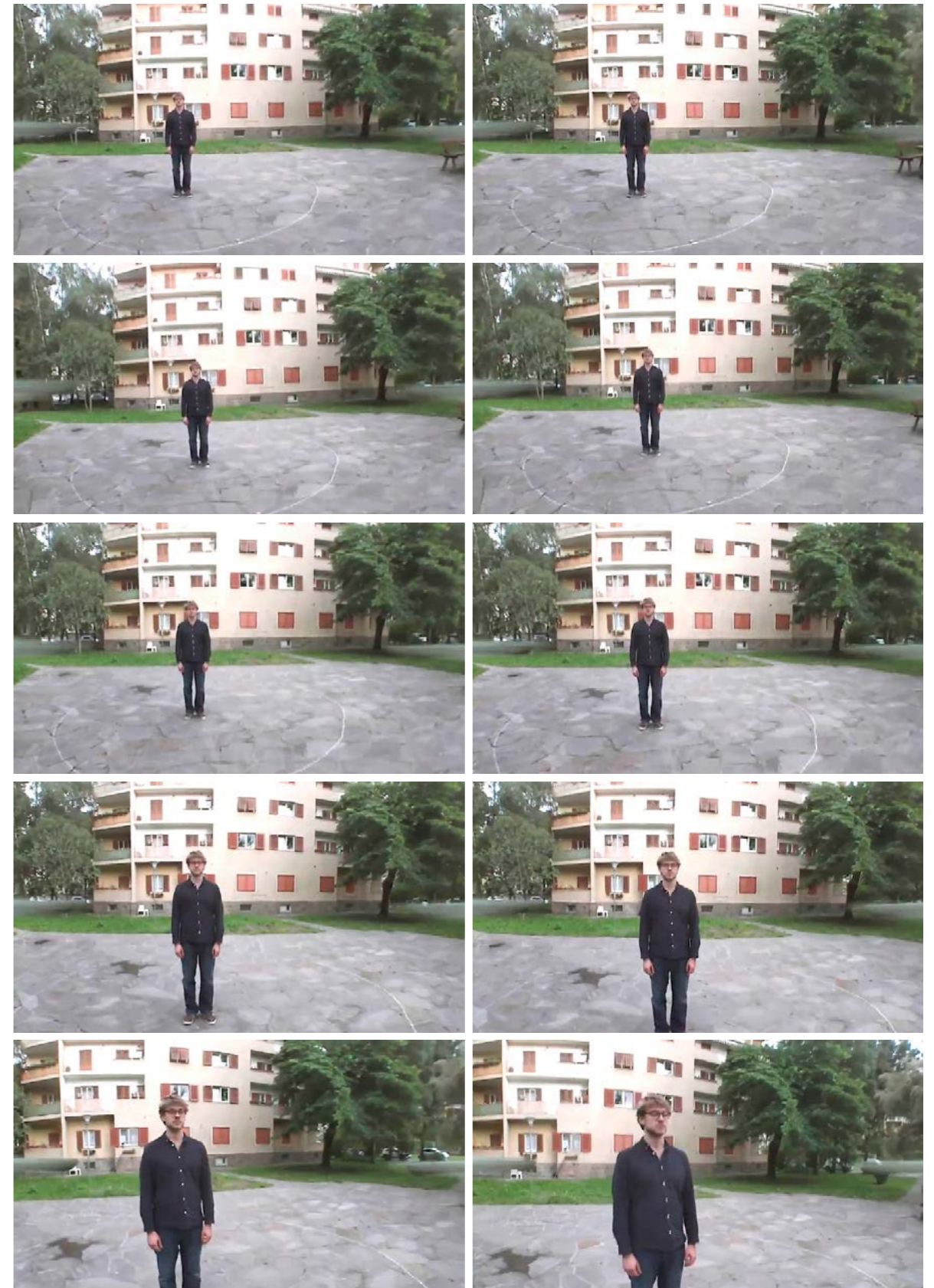
BF Thank you for this and your brave efforts to exhibit such heavy work.

Originally published in *American Suburb X*, February 2019: <https://americansuburbx.com/2019/02/the-last-picture-photography-and-death-interview-c-o-berlin.html>

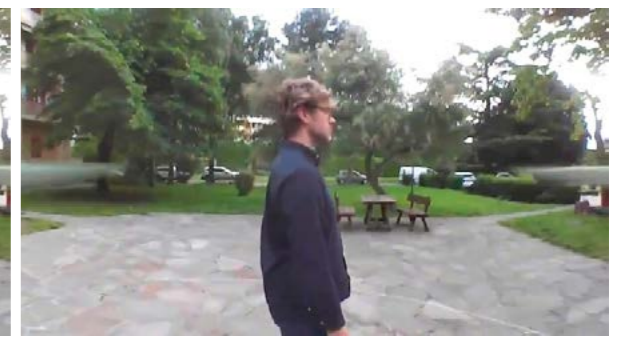
shared space
Irene Rainer

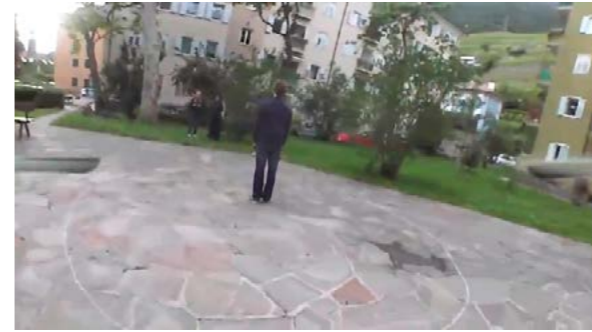
A white chalk circle, a human being and a drone are the experimental set-up of the project *shared space*. Circling around the human object, the drone produced over two thousand photographs within the four minutes and twenty-nine seconds before its power ran out.

Life-size projection of a 4'29" HD video loop with drone sound. The drone's view is documented with more than two thousand images in the book *homo ad circumum*, 16.5 x 22.0 cm.









**Incidents and Situations
from Common Life / Chapter II
Elisa Faletti**

Seeing so many security cameras installed in shops, banks, parks and on the street led me to ask: Who is controlling us? Who is watching the cameras? And who has the power to do so? Websites exist where citizens can check security cameras around their city, not for the weather, but to see someone else's life: people walking on the street, jellyfish swimming in an aquarium (and the people there to watch them).

While exploring these possibilities, I discovered a security camera in a zone of contemporary conflict. Its location is a place where people cannot actually feel safe, the Western Wall in Jerusalem. In *Incidents and Situations from Common Life, Chapter II*, I turned the viewer into the object of observation. While viewing 2,560 surveillance images of Jerusalem's Western Wall the visitor was in turn watched by a security camera and displayed on a monitor around the corner.

2,560 images from EarthCam website, prints on paper, security camera and monitor, seven-volume publication









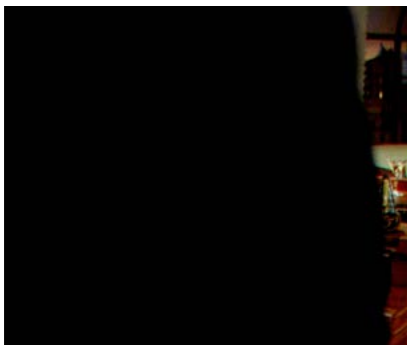


Stories from the Everyday Out-of-Field

Kathrin Meyer on Jana Müller

Everyday life is interspersed with little episodes of gruesomeness, which are consumed in various dosages: be it the evening's TV crime film, the inexhaustible supply of the Internet, or the latest news headlines. What is fascinating about the periphery of the normal, or rather the transgression of its boundaries? Jana Müller's *Blackout* (2006) deals with this fascination not so much through revelation or narration than concealment and withholding. The artist isolated five stills from Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope* (1948), enlarged them and produced them as C-prints. The images each still show a small detail of the scene – such as a door frame, a few glasses on a table, a bandaged hand – but the greater part is obscured by a dark surface, for example someone's back or the lid of a trunk. The events are withdrawn from us for a moment and remain in the dark. When shooting the film, Hitchcock used a trick in order to avoid visible edits: *Rope* was filmed in ten-minute shots (the maximum length of a film reel) which each end with actions that briefly mask the camera and create a blackout. The film tells of two young men who murder a mutual friend. Afterwards they hold a cocktail party in the presence of the body – hidden in a trunk – which only the two murderers and the viewers know about.

Blackout, 2006.



The murderers put on an almost perfect act of normality, and invite relatives of

the dead man, who remain unaware of the appalling other side of this performance. Jana Müller's appropriation of these film stills is an indication of a theme that runs through her work like a leitmotif: an interest in cruelty in the disguise of the everyday, in the far side of social agreements and rules, in avid curiosity, pleasure in crime and the transgression of boundaries.

TAGEBUCH eins (detail), 2005.



The plot of *Rope* is not comprehensible to the viewer of *Blackout*; instead, we encounter a permanent and impenetrable out-of-field. The image sequences of the plot become single frames; the order of events coagulates into a single moment. The shortage of visual information, which in the film only lasts a few seconds, becomes absolute darkness without continuation or resolution in the still. In his discourse on cinema, Gilles Deleuze writes: 'In one case, the out-of-field designates that which exists elsewhere, to one side or around; in the other case, the out-of-field testifies to a more disturbing presence, one which cannot even be said to exist, but rather to "insist" or "subsist", a more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time.'¹ The work *Blackout* takes this insistence and subsistence

¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (Cinéma I. L'image-mouvement, 1983). trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London, New York: Continuum 2005), p. 18.

literally by isolating the brief moment of darkness within a sequence and turning it into the main motif. We are not shown the complete blackout, however, but the moment just before it occurs. The images present us with the coming of something that evades visibility. The imagination replaces representation, or as the artist John Smith puts it: 'The monster in the horror film is always less frightening when you see it.'²

The fragility of normality and the invisible potential horror just below the thin layer of everyday life are also the subject of Jana Müller's *TAGEBUCH eins* [DIARY one] (2005). This consists of five photographs, a video and the intersecting plans of three rooms taped to the floor of the exhibition space. The photographs show the contents of wall units and cupboards: various items such as books, a framed photograph, ornaments, decorative pottery and glasses, a lady's jacket patterned in black and white. But there are noticeable gaps: something appears to be missing or to have been removed. Perhaps the diary mentioned in the title can provide more information – however, it is only present in the space as a photograph, together with a ruler, as if to establish its actual size for forensics or as evidence. Its cover states 'You are required to make proper entries,' followed by the initials J.M. Another photograph in the same format shows a house – perhaps the photographed shelves belong to its furniture. What has happened here? Does Jana Müller have a connection to this house? Is this her diary? On the screen of an old-fashioned television, a looped two-and-a-half-minute video shows a wide, dilapidated cupboard, whose door opens as if by magic after a while and then closes again. When the door opens, it reveals empty compartments – only the bottom one contains a full, corded-up garbage bag.

Jana Müller puts various elements into a context that remains fragmentary – no information is given about the house, its location or occupants, and just as little about the objects in the photographs, the obvious gaps, the mysterious garbage bag or the diary. Instead of a self-contained

² 'John Smith talking film with Cate Elwes: Trespassing beyond the frame', *John Smith Film and Video Works 1972–2002* (London: Picture This Moving Image/Watershed Media Centre 2002), p. 67.

narrative, we see ourselves confronted by signs of the apparently domestic and familiar, which in this context feel more uncanny than homely. Sigmund Freud describes the uncanny as 'that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar'.³ Freud also maintains that 'this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression', and that 'the uncanny [is] something which ought to have been kept concealed but which has nevertheless come to light'.⁴ The works of Jana Müller seek this moment in which the familiar becomes foreign and terrifying by – as here, for example – staging the domestic and private as the potential scene of a crime. The house in this work is in fact Jana Müller's parental home, which she turns into a 'criminalistic object'.⁵ In this quasi-documentary inventory, a setting from her own past becomes a place of mystery, unsolved incidents and unease.

TAGEBUCH eins plays on the active positioning of objects and images into an arrangement that produces meaning. The inscription on the diary refers to 'proper entries' – but how are we to understand this in the context of a diary, which is intended to record experiences from a decidedly personal perspective? The outlines of the rooms under investigation recall crime-scene reconstructions or schematic portrayals, as in Lars von Trier's film *Dogville* (2003), for example, whose narrative unfolds exclusively within such floor plans. In *Dogville* the monstrous breaks through the fragile surface of the normality established by social conventions. In *TAGEBUCH eins* the surface remains intact, but is under exact observation and appears fragile and suspicious.

The installation *Never-Ending Story* (2012) also deals with the attribution of order and its disruption. Precisely positioned

³ Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', trans. Alix Strachey, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf> (accessed 23.12.2012), p. 1f.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12f.

⁵ Translated from Lillian Engelmann, 'TAGEBUCH eins – Eine Installation von Jana Müller', *Bilder no. 201*, exhibition brochure, (Vienna: Fotogalerie Wien 2005, p. 10). This text goes into greater detail about the fact that the house shown is the one where Jana Müller grew up.

items of clothing lie between panes of glass stacked in layers, whose arrangement is determined by the rule that every pane has to be exactly horizontal.

Never-Ending Story (detail), 2012.



Each ensemble contains several items of clothing, which can probably be assigned to a particular person. A pane of glass also covers the upper layer of clothing, making the objects beneath visible but unable to be handled, and offering a reflective surface in which the exhibition space, viewer and object meet. The glass surfaces emphasise the act of presentation, of exhibition for the purpose of observation and ensuing interpretation. In conversation Jana Müller has called these objects ‘preparations’, accentuating the aspect of examination: microscopically, systematically – the clothing appears as a piece of evidence, a souvenir or a remnant and is here presented for scrutiny. Since 2009 Müller has recurrently integrated such objects into her exhibitions in various constellations. She carefully assembles the items of clothing, mindful of colours and patterns, sometimes including a rug or a scarf. Each ‘preparation’ is an image, or spans the area between image and sculpture, between surface and body – and between a formal, abstract sculpture and a possible reference to a real person, incident or place. The clothes can be identified socially, temporally and geographically; beneath the glass lie possible clues, fragments of stories, which the viewer discerns in the presence of his or her own image reflected in the glass. This exploration has to take

place via the surface; touching or examining the objects more closely is impossible. The glass creates a boundary, and separates any traces of violent incidents from normality – but this boundary can rupture at any moment and abolish the division between past and present, between crime and the social contract.

On the walls around the floor installation hang five large-format black-and-white photographs behind glass, mounted on decorative wooden boards. The images show people hiding their faces from the camera; people who can’t see anything, but above all who don’t want to be photographed. Their clothing appears to come from the 1950s, and written markings at the edge of some of the photographs indicate archival origin. Müller did in fact find these pictures in archives; they show people in court or its immediate environs.⁶ The artist writes about their postures as follows: ‘The people are attempting, poignantly, to hide their identity behind bags, newspapers, pulled-up coats. They turn themselves away, contort themselves into strange choreographies, like figures in a social ballet.’⁷ The faces concealed from the camera engage the eye, suggesting shame or fear. Taken together with the ‘preparations’ and their spectral hints of human presence, the question of culprit and victim arises, and that of the crimes that were committed here. In the juxtaposition of archive material and the ‘preparations’, which the artist relates to the photographs as the remnants of fictive stories, the further question arises as to the temporal context of the fictive or real occurrence. Are we looking at traces of the past that protrude into the present, perhaps elements of unsolved cases that should be reopened but won’t be brought to a close? The works bridge the temporal gap through the simultaneous presence in the exhibition space of documentary image and ‘preparation’, which belongs to the realm of the fictive. From the present, Jana Müller produces fragile, many-layered image-objects that tell of the fundamental instability of both past and present constellations. The installation thus comments of the sensationalism

⁶ Jana Müller in conversation with Kathrin Meyer, 18.10.2012.

⁷ Jana Müller in an e-mail to Kathrin Meyer, 2.12.2012.

of the media and their consumers, and the transaction in acts of violence and private fates, which are marketed in headlines and reportage. The form of presentation of the photographs underlines their sensationalist overtones: the glass, the wood and the clips on the sides recall decorative frames, thus hinting at the voyeuristic interest in crime, the pleasure taken in gaping, scandal and getting the creeps.

Never-Ending Story (detail), 2012.



Jana Müller’s works don’t deal with specific crimes or the relationship between good and evil, but with the potentially other, uncanny side of the normal. They create a stage for stories which take place in the imagination. The viewer becomes

part of a narrative structure as soon as he or she enters the exhibition space. This is also referred to by the installation *Sie irren sich* [All are mistaken] (2011). A disconnected microphone on a stand is positioned in front of a picture frame; on the other side of the space there is a blue curtain. In the frame we see the reverse side of a highly enlarged playing card. The curtain remains closed, the microphone silent and the card face down – these various elements only begin to speak when the viewer enters the ‘stage’ and interpretively follows and advances Jana Müller’s options in relation to images, objects and gestures. The resulting stories are perhaps about the realms of the irrational, the suppressed and the disturbing – about subjective and collective fears, memories and fantasies which persist in the out-of-field and resist visual portrayal.

Originally published in German as “Geschichten aus dem Off des Alltäglichen” in Jana Müller, *So jung, so schön, so kriminell* (The Green Box Verlag, 2013). Translated by Michael Turnbull.

Almost a Love Letter

Josefina Sundblad

The fact remains, it is almost impossible to conceive the importance of a moment, an opportunity, a lesson, in the moment of its happening. The further from it you get and the more experiences you gain, the easier it will be to comprehend how much something, or someone impacted your life. The subtleties of what you learned.

I attended Studio Image in my fourth semester. I remember sitting at the project presentations convinced that I did not need to be there, since I had already decided (rationally) that Studio Space was next. I remember Eva, Giulia and German all standing in front of us. They took turns with the microphone and made their case. I was sold within seconds, my mind convinced. It wasn't so much that I knew them or that I was overly tempted by the idea of studying image and video. I just remember reading the title of the semester project (which I hadn't before) – VIOLENT IMAGES – and hearing them speak to us, the students, in a real and impactful way.

Well now, "if that isn't for me" I thought – then I know nothing.

The representation of violence through images is a fact of our everyday lives, from the communication of daily news, to propaganda, to representations of historical events, video games, film, etc. Today, unfortunately, I cannot really recall the lectures, the talks, the jumps of comprehension in theory and practice during the semester, too much time has passed since then. Let us just say that the topic goes further than just the inanimate artistic production of images in which violence is depicted, by this I mean that in the age of the infinite reproducibility of the image, completely removed from context, Studio Image tries its best to deduce and analyse some of the possible consequences of said imagery on us, the subjects/producers/ objects. Today it is easy to "take a picture", yet extremely difficult to go further than the immediate reproduction of the illusions which some call reality. It speaks to an intrinsic human reality,

one that is difficult to engage with but that we must question, raise in conversation and try to comprehend.

I cannot speak but from my own experience. Take this as the subjective account of a soul who was lucky to be touched by something special. Timing is crucial. Yet, through the myth of storytelling we might all come to some conclusions, or at least concretize some themes. I may not remember the specifics of that which I learned. From the artists and works we discussed and analyzed, to the historical and theoretical research, since speaking frankly, I was a young student just entering the world of academia, at the time I did not care much for anything apart from producing for the sake of production.

Studio Image holds a special place in my memories. It is special in very specific yet abstract ways.

The best way to explain it would be that it is the team that makes the Studio what it is. The art program is rather new, so it is testing its wings, perhaps wondering if it even has any. Small as our faculty is, cozy as Bolzano can be, the camaraderie between the few students is as important as the relationships with the professors themselves. Studio Image has had the luck to have hit what I believe to be a jackpot of interconnectedness and understanding. The triangularity of Giulia, Eva and German works as if by magic, yet we know that it stems from hard work and dedication to its students.

Let's re-read that last one: dedication to its students.

The politics that takes hold of institutions is real and must not be disregarded. A lot happens within the structure for the sake of some few, power relationships are everywhere, intrinsic to social engagement, yet a university space should be an unbiased space where there is freedom to explore, experiment and fail. An open line of communication from students to institution and back. When you step under the tutelage of Studio Image you do not feel you are a number, you do not feel

manipulated or worst of all (as happens in some cases) standardized. Their methods balance uniformity and repetition, each semester follows a similar pattern: small side projects, exposé, abstract, revisions, an essay or two... but they bring the mouldability needed to approach each student and their projects uniquely. Their knowledge is vast. Being taught and guided by them is a challenge that we should all be prepared to take. I do not think there is one student who would not, in one way or another, be able to take away a better understanding of themselves, their likes and dislikes, their practice. They cater individually to the student, the group and the topic. Very little is repeated or taken for granted. They allow us great freedom of discussion. Big words I know, but truly they do. It is not an easy studio to be in, they all have strong characters, and they care about the betterment of their students. As it always should be, yet rare to find. Again, politics. They follow a pattern and structure their semesters accordingly, but the beauty lies in the flexibility of their teaching, their attention to the individual.

As said before, they cater.

What I learned and the way I did so is unique to my experience, it cannot be repeated. And let us be thankful it can't. The very idea that art can be taught is complex, a philosophy, an approach that is questioned by many. I cannot speak for how art is taught in other places so I won't. If I may be granted permission to make a potentially controversial jump: in our faculty we don't seem to exactly study at all. The words studying, teaching, and learning are complex and differ depending on their subject and context. That is why it is difficult for me to present to you what exactly was learned throughout Violent Images. You won't walk into the studio and learn the techniques and technologies but you will (if you are open and dedicated) learn about yourself and your own practice. Why does this happen? They are more concerned with awareness, the need for knowledge about the world that surrounds us and how as artists we are political agents, like it or not. When we make a move, it enters a larger discourse, this is unavoidable. We cannot ignore that which surrounds us, and that is something which the three of them know and try their best to share with us. What is your reason? What is your concept? What does violence mean to you and how does it

relate to the ideas and perspectives of others? They give you knowledge freely, but it is up to you to structure it within your own reality. And that is, in my opinion, one of the wonderful qualities of this Studio. It is not even about guiding you, since guiding implies a pre-set idea of a direction. They listen and respond, propose and analyze with you. The team becomes them and you. I felt like we collaborated in the production of possibilities. They are professors who are also open to admitting when they made a mistake, and are not shy to enter heated discussions with their students.

Within this team roles are taken: Duarte becomes your beacon of theory. Giulia becomes the pillar of practicality and presence. And Eva keeps it all together. A little bit of this and a little bit of that.

There are no wrong ideas, but potentially unfruitful processes. It is impossible to generalize about this Studio. My experience and ensuing ideas are directly connected to my memories and the outcomes of my time there. I arrived having just finished performance. What I had found in performance was a piece of string that I picked up and unconsciously decided to keep pulling at or following (metaphor it as you wish). I began a process that Studio Image did not murder. Sounds like a small thing, but in the larger picture of a young student's mind, the freedom to find oneself is critically necessary and they do it with finesse.

Each Studio has its niche. Image and video is expected, yet in my case I was still immersed in the process I had just found and the idea of not following my own interests repulsed me. The artistic practice is a difficult one. The steps are not pre-chiseled and the background is just a reference point. What art is in this day and age is a question we will not be able to answer until enough time and space hasn't passed, let us leave it to historians to name and categorize. Yet the professors at Studio Image are not just willing to open the topic to exploration but actively push the boundaries. They do not tell you what they believe but instead ask you to question collectively. The most I could do was to try and stay true to my own interests (aka performance) regardless of what I was supposed to be interested in (aka image) just based on which studio I attended or not. In this case I was attracted to the topic, not to its form. They didn't just allow other forms of representation

but embraced and maybe even welcomed them. As a young person taking her first steps into the so-called art world, having had three talented professors who allowed me to explore freely was the best possible gift.

Violence seems to me a given characteristic of the human experience, the idea that we may somehow capture, retain, convey, or represent an abstraction of something that goes further than the act of violence itself and touches a conceptual state is ironic and confusing. Working through the connections I was finding in their teaching, I came to the naive conclusion that the topic was way to wide for me to deal with alone. I therefore made a leap of faith and decided to collaborate with others, hoping that together we might be able to work out what the representation of violence is, has been, and could be to us, humbly and simply with the knowledge at hand.

My project that semester was called “Searching for Humans: real ones only: An Open Art Collective”. Over the course of three months a few random people who hadn’t known each other previously began meeting on a weekly basis for a few hours with the aim of producing something together. To do so we had to learn about each other, in a non-hierarchical space where everyone is equal, or should be. The art of collaboration is as painful and enjoyable as the next form. This project concerned itself with the experience of each participant. Each one of us holds within us our own story of violence, in my case the mere fact of being alive is a daily form of violence. There is no pleasure without pain, there is no being alive without the violence of literally being violently alive. From waking up to choosing what to eat. The daily occurrence. At the end we performed a two-hour improvisational theatrical performance called Raw Exposition.

I was curious about the idea of collaboration and interested still in performative practice. I was lucky to have found early on something to begin working on with passion. I was concerned about the aimlessness of that which I was searching for; Eva and Giulia would set my mind at ease through their own curiosity about what I was developing. Follow the process and see where it takes you, that became not just the mantra of that semester but the mantra of my thesis. At the end of the day, the topics presented in a studio are a suggestion. What matters

the most, it seems to me, is not that you follow the pre-set idea to the beat but that you find your own connections and interests and give it your all.

I have now told you what I believe to be the main reasons why the Studio is the success it is. To me it boils down to the team, the professors make the space and it is up to each student to take advantage of the wonderful aura that Studio Image emanates.

The cold hard truth is that violence is everywhere, there is no hiding from it for long. Those who work to represent, show, and communicate the harder edges of the world we live in and create together are doing an incredibly hard job, a job I cannot say I am a part of. My project that semester could be compared to a baby’s first steps. The world we live in is in a constant state of crisis. Within the bubble of the university I felt coddled into a state of – not to sound insensitive or ungrateful – fake concern. We speak of problems, we deal with important world issues and human affairs from behind a “safe” glass structure. What Violent Images tried to accomplish was to bring the reality to us. Did it succeed? I don’t know. I just know that the difference is radical and I may just be having another existential crisis right now but they truly tried, they tried to grab us by the shoulders and shake us into opening our eyes and exiting our passive observer state.

As I said at the beginning, it takes time and space to grasp properly what was taught and learned. I can safely say that even though I don’t think I succeeded in waking up while taking part in the Studio, today, two years later, I am awake. Paralyzed, but awake.

Empathy, awareness and a willingness to not just enter into discourse but actively participate and produce within the real, that is all they seem to be asking for. Which is not a small ask, yet with patience, one step at a time we may all wake up together.

This is starting to sound like a strange love letter to a studio, I apologize for my melancholy, but alas.

Fake for Real Image Narratives and Strategies of Fake

“You’re fake news”. At a press conference on 11 January 2017 the president-elect of the United States refused to answer a question from a journalist with a major international news outlet. After four years of normalising post-factual politics, he (and parts of the US media) claimed that his election defeat had been the result of massive electoral fraud.



Trump / Hyperflesh / 2017

“Lies are often much more plausible, more appealing to reason, than reality, since the liar has the great advantage of knowing beforehand what the audience wishes or expects to hear. He has prepared his story for public consumption with a careful eye to making it credible, whereas reality has the disconcerting habit of confronting us with the unexpected, for which we were not prepared.”¹ Hannah Arendt dissects the strategy of normalising political lies as “alternative facts”

¹ Hannah Arendt, “Lying in Politics: Reflections on The Pentagon Papers”, *The New York Review*, 18 November 1971.

in several of her works. She observes that facts are always in danger, especially in politics where power is built through effective action rather than truth. Continuous, organised mendacity corrodes the perception of its recipients, turning facts into mere opinions and vice versa. The shared factual fabric of reality is undermined. Communication, as an important prerequisite for democratic processes, breaks down and finally becomes impossible.

David Shields / The New York Times Pictorial Guide to the Glamour of Armed Conflict / 2015



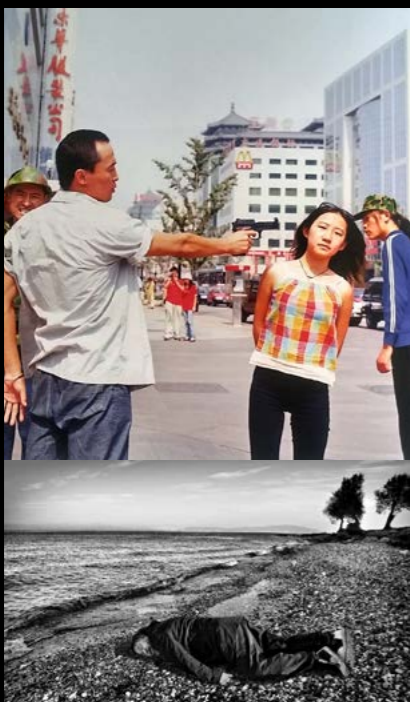
“The medium is the message.”² We began the semester with a review of this famous assertion, questioning the understanding of media as simple carriers of content (an idea that appears to have been enormously boosted by the fake news/ conspiracy theory discourse). Media impact the organisation of social spaces, and therefore play a crucial role in the development and instrumentalisation of social and political narratives, in the (re)introduction of ideologies and ultimately in the exercise of power.

In the course of the semester we explored strategies such as deception, imitation

² Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), 7.

and propaganda, critically analysing the roles of images in their social, political and cultural contexts. Concepts of authenticity and fake were studied with reference to historical and contemporary image narratives.

Liu Jing / News - Wang Fu Jing / 2001
Ai Weiwei / Kurdi / 2016



We explored the theory and practice of artistic strategies adapting, imitating, parodying and playing with fake. Works by the Yes Men, Allan Kaprow, Orson Welles, Broomberg & Chanarin, Thomas Demand and many others were discussed. We tested whether fake as a complex artistic strategy can serve as a useful tool of thought and analysis and examined how, in this framework, the notion of objectivity is used as a vector to manufacture public opinion.

Noémie Étienne describes one aspect of this phenomenon in “The Political Materiality of the Diorama” in the catalogue for the exhibition “Diorama”, which we visited during our excursion to Frankfurt am Main. Noting the important criticisms of the role played by the “optical spectacle” of the diorama in the “construction of the primitive”, Étienne also explores the medium’s contributions to alternative visual historical narratives.

In the publication accompanying the exhibition “Fotografie und Wirklichkeit”, Christina Leber discusses “a reality generated by power relations”, as epitomised by the polemics around “fake news”. This she contrasts with the curatorial method of the “polylogue”.

The exhibition, curated by Thomas Rietschel, challenges the concept of documentary photography and reflects on the need for different and diverse perspectives.

In the performance *The Screaming Image* (2020), Maximilian Pellizzari develops ideas that arose in *Paradiso I* (2018), which he created at Studio Image. Every word of Canto I of the *Paradiso* of the *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri was substituted by an image selected by an algorithm. In the *The Screaming Image* Pellizzari examines our use and perception of two different (inadequate) descriptive systems,³ revisiting a classic critique of photography and extrapolating it into a performative acoustic experience.

In her publication *Immagini di repertorio*, Sophia Rabbiosi demonstrates the importance of context for photographic images. She researched numerous different uses of a single stock image – in different contexts – overlaying the visual information to the point of unrecognisability.

In *Il tempo per pensare*, Adriana Ghimp explores the moments that arise between spoken words: a slight hesitation, a glance, a throat-clearing. She isolated these specific moments out of recorded conversations about the concept of “belief” and assembled them in six video loops. In the exhibition the screens are arranged in a semi-circle, half surrounding the viewer. In the eponymous publication Ghimp visually contemplates the term “pensiero” (thought) and the time required to think.

In “The Vertigo of the New”, the last text in this volume, Giulia Cordin looks back at our very first semester. After six semesters with Studio Image, she reflects on the intriguing moment of a new beginning and connects it with her practice in book design.

³ See Martha Rosler, *The Bowery in two inadequate descriptive systems*, 1974–75.

The Political Materiality of the Diorama

Noémie Étienne

The 1980s were an era of far-reaching reforms for North American museums. A legal framework was created for returning illegally acquired exhibits, new exhibition spaces were opened, and existing museums thoroughly revised their museological approach. In this context the “dioramas” on show in anthropology and natural history museums came in for fierce criticism. The Tuscarora Richard W. Hill Sr., who served as special assistant to the director of the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, condemned them in no uncertain terms: “But the dioramas are in themselves a throwback to the old-style museums that freeze Indians in the past.” And: “Will museums forever associate Indians with dioramas containing life-size figures? Will museum visitors always expect to see casts of Indians next to the stuffed animals, mechanical dinosaurs and replicated fauna?”¹

Many museums began removing dioramas with representations of indigenous people during this period. For example, the New York State Museum in the state capital in Albany substituted new display cases for dioramas created between 1907 and 1917 by the anthropologist Arthur Parker – who was himself a member of the Seneca-Iroquois.² It is now time to historicise this mode of presentation and to reinterpret its complexity and function: The contemporary museological debates and the persistence of the “diorama aesthetic” in contemporary art demand a comprehensive academic treatment.³

¹ Richard W. Hill, *The Indian in the Cabinet of Curiosity*, in idem, ed., *The Changing Presentation of the American Indian: Museums and Native Cultures* (Washington, DC, and Seattle, 2000), pp. 105, 107.

² On Arthur Parker’s project, see “Noémie Étienne, Memory in Action: Clothing, Art, and Authenticity in Anthropological Dioramas (New York, 1900)”, *Material Culture Review* 79 (2014): 46–59.

³ This is the approach I pursued in my habilitation thesis at the University of Bern, and together with Nadia Radwan at the international conference “Seeing Through? The

The roots of the diorama, as a display case with objects and figures, lie in religious art – in particular Italy’s seventeenth-century Sacri Monti and eighteenth-century Neapolitan crèches. The term “diorama” was coined in 1822 by Louis Daguerre, from the Greek *dia* (through) and *horao* (to see). The word originally described the translucent canvases that Daguerre showed in Paris, where landscapes and other scenes were set in motion before the viewers’ eyes. “Diorama” was also the name of the theatre built in Paris to show this attraction. The term came to be used more broadly after 1900, both in Europe and in the United States. In due course it was adopted by two different academic disciplines – anthropology and natural history – to describe museum installations that seek to create an illusionistic effect by presenting objects before a painted background. Dioramas are also political; firstly on account of their iconography, which is widely discussed in the scope of post-colonial studies, but also, as I will show in this contribution, on account of their materiality which both conditions their physical deterioration and permits them to be resited and reused.

In the early 1980s, in parallel to the aforementioned museum reforms, the biologist and historian of science Donna Haraway proposed a critical reading of the habitat dioramas in the American Museum of Natural History in New York. These displays had been created in the 1930s by the sculptor and taxidermist Carl Akeley, who was a friend and hunting companion of Theodore Roosevelt. Haraway describes taxidermy and photography as technologies serving the conservation ideal propagated by the museum: to conserve habitats and

Materiality of Dioramas, University of Bern, 1–2 December 2016, participants: Jean-Roch Bouiller, Liliane Ehrhart, Noémie Étienne, Francine Giese, Valérie Kobi, Thierry Laugée, Guillaume Le Gall, Sam Omans, Florence Ostende, Veronica Peselmann, Nadia Radwan, Alexander Streitberger, Mercedes Volait and Xenia Vytuleva.

record a world threatened by loss. Put more generally, Haraway presents the diorama as a machine that serves an evolutionary discourse and obeys the values of its creators: paternalism, racism, sexism.⁴

To Haraway, the eye is the organ that defines the diorama's reception. The handful of other relevant studies also concentrate above all on seeing.⁵ The art historian Jonathan Crary points, with a nod to Walter Benjamin, to the emergence in the nineteenth century of the ambulatory observer past whom the phenomena rush.⁶ The media historian Alison Griffiths argues that any diorama can be imagined as a scene from a film, using the image of a walk to describe how the museum visitor "creates" a film. The visitor's movement between dioramas, she writes, echoes the transitions that appear between the typical sequences of early ethnological films.⁷ The other experience that Griffiths raises is consumption: As a glass-fronted space in which figures and objects are displayed, the diorama resembles the shop windows and arcades characteristic of late-nineteenth-century department store architecture.⁸

In these studies the viewer is apparently nothing more than a roaming eye. Seeing already played a central role in the Anglo-American definition of the diorama around 1900, and all the contemporary dictionaries described the diorama as an optical spectacle. But the diorama is also an object. Firstly, because it combines different materials, plaster, textiles, paint, fur, paper, wood etc. But also because it is the product of craftwork by artists, anthropologists and taxidermists. In some cases the viewer may even enter the display, generating an immersive experience in

4 Donna Haraway, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936", *Social Text* 11 (winter 1984-85): 20-64.

5 For example Birgit Verwiebe, *Lichtspiele: Von Mondscheintransparent zum Diorama* (Stuttgart, 1997).

6 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1991), pp. 20-21.

7 Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York, 2002), p. 49.

8 See also Erkki Huhtamo, *Illusions in Motion: Media Archeology of the Moving Panorama and Related Spectacles*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 2013).

the reconstructed epoch or place.⁹ Various forms can be distinguished: dioramas with painted backdrops are viewed from the front, frequently behind glass. There are also encased dioramas that can be viewed from all sides, offering different perspectives. And thirdly, immersive, walk-in ensembles have appeared especially since the 1990s.

The author in the Pequot village at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, June 2015, Mashantucket, Connecticut.



The Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center, which opened in 1998 in the US state of Connecticut, was an initiative of the government of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation. Like many US museums founded by activists it also shows dioramas, despite their widespread criticism. One of these is a life-like reconstruction of a Pequot village in which the visitor can walk around. The life of the Pequot Nation, the arrival of the first settlers and the ensuing conflicts are addressed. Native Americans are not alone in employing immersive dioramas in alternative exhibition spaces. They also feature in the National Great Blacks In Wax Museum in Baltimore, a community museum founded in 1980 and dedicated exclusively to African Americans. One walk-in diorama shows a ship used to transport slaves. Other scenes address strategies of resistance by slaves. In the museum basement a remarkable representation of a lynching is followed by a reconstruction of a contemporary street scene.¹⁰

Why do some museums in the United States that are run by indigenous and African American community groups still employ dioramas despite the criticism that they tend to freeze such communities in

9 Paper given at the University of Bern on 1 December 2016. The conference contributions will be published as a special issue of *Culture et Musées*.

10 On these dioramas, see Noémie Étienne, "Activisme et diorama: Un siècle d'histoire made in USA", *Culture et Musées*, no. 8 (2017): 203-23.

the past?¹¹ Can historicising this decision open up a new perspective? Considering the history of the diorama takes us back to the display cases that appeared around 1900 in the United States. These include the dioramas created at the New York State Museum in Albany under the auspices of the indigenous anthropologist Arthur Parker. Since its arrival in the New World the diorama has brought forth a succession of alternative forms of historical representation at fairs and in museums.

As already mentioned, the Albany Museum removed its dioramas at the end of the 1980s. Parker's dioramas, created with activist intentions at the beginning of the twentieth century, fell victim to the museum reforms of the 1990s. Those that were not put in storage were simply destroyed. But one, or at least parts of one, can still be viewed in a public setting today, reconfigured and renamed for presentation in a new exhibition context. This is the Shako:wi Cultural Center of the Oneida Indian Nation, just a few dozen kilometres from Albany. Inaugurated in 1996, it is very much more modest in terms of its size and funding. Figures from a diorama designed by Arthur Parker are displayed upstairs, distributed among several display cases with new labels explaining their identity and history. Far from being politically incorrect, the setting honours the figures as guardians of an almost lost collective memory.

National Great Blacks In Wax Museum, Baltimore, visited April 2015.



This contextual effect raises questions: Is the diorama an empty, apolitical form that can serve any chosen purpose? Has a defined "grammar of the diorama" been used for more than a century by different groups - academics, activists

11 For example in post-colonial studies. Cf. Pauline Wakeham, *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality* (Minneapolis and London, 2008).

or artists? Whether walk-in or not, dioramas are usually rectangular in shape and surrounded by some kind of frame. Viewers remain in the dark; the only light source emanates from the installation itself. Many, although not all, dioramas are protected behind glass. The background landscape and the arrangement of figures create perspectival depth. Finally, there are different scales: life-size as in the aforementioned examples, but also miniature versions where the viewer looks down on and dominates the scene.

Museums that show dioramas combine within one space times and places that are essentially incompatible,¹² because dioramas simultaneously generate distance and simulation, while sometimes permitting contact and immersion. Additionally they present fragments of material culture in ways that shape the historical image, as was the case with the overwhelming majority of the anthropological dioramas created in the nineteenth century in Europe. At the Paris world's fair in 1889, for example, the section on Gaul featured dioramas dedicated especially to the early history. The archaeologist Salomon Reinach described this show as the model for an "academic Grevin".¹³ At the same time the Musée du Trocadéro showed dioramas in the Salle de France illustrating the lives of groups living far from the urban centres, such as Breton peasants. In Scandinavia the local population was presented in typical national interiors.¹⁴ But dioramas also contributed to the construction of the primitive: the first anthropological displays presenting Africans as backward and primitive appeared in London's Crystal Palace in 1851. And not least, dioramic representations constructed "regimes of historicity" as described by François Hartog,¹⁵ by placing living ethnicities in an imagined past. For

12 Cf. Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres (1967), Hétérotopies", *Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité* 5 (October 1984): 46-49.

13 Salomon Reinach, *L'Histoire du travail en Gaule à l'Exposition universelle de 1889* (Paris, 1890), p. 2.

14 Mark Sandberg, *Living Pictures, Missing Persons: Mannequins, Museums, and Modernity* (Princeton, 2003). See also Nadia Radwan, "Scènes de la vie rurale au Musée agricole du Caire", *Qantara: Magazine des cultures arabes et méditerranéennes* 96 (2015): 43-45.

15 François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris, 2003).

example since 1964 the Museo Nacional de Antropología de México has presented contemporary indigenous groups in dioramas that place them entirely in the past.

From 1850 the diorama became established as an indispensable museum exhibition form. It was omnipresent in the new museologies, first in Europe, then also in the United States, in Latin America and in the Middle East. Anthropological dioramas of the kind introduced by the German anthropologist Franz Boas around 1900 in New York are not only representative of the hyperreality described by Umberto Eco.¹⁶ For almost two centuries dioramas have been producing the past in museums. At the same time they are material spaces that can be viewed and entered.

16 Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, New York and London, 1986).

Their material life is characterised by re-shapings that determine their meaning and function depending on the respective exhibition context. All too often described by museologists, art scholars and film historians as “windows” on nature or into a remote and alien world,¹⁷ the diorama is in reality an explicitly material construction that the viewer is able to appropriate bodily.

Translated by Meredith Dale from “Die Politische Materialität des Dioramas”, in *Diorama: Erfindung einer Illusion*, exh. cat., ed. Katharina Dohm, Claire Garnier, Laurent Le Bon and Florence Ostende (Cologne, 2017). Originally published in French as “La matérialité politique des dioramas”, in *Dioramas*, exh. cat., ed. Katharina Dohm, Claire Garnier, Laurent Le Bon and Florence Ostende (Paris, 2017).

17 Stephen Quinn, *Windows on Nature: The Great Habitat Dioramas of the American Museum of Natural History* (New York, 2006).

Photography and Reality

Christina Leber

“Complexity is the totality of possibilities that can occur.” – Niklas Luhmann

Under the title *[An-/sichten]*, the Art Foundation DZ BANK presents biennial exhibitions realized by personalities from different disciplines, alternating with the exhibition of works associated with the fellowship stipend.

What intrigues us is the glimpse of a perspective other than that of art history, the gaze of people who move in contexts all their own. At the same time, we are all participants in our time and our society. We have access to the same information and move through the same environment. Yet each of us perceives a different version of this reality and develops different points of view that engage and mold us.

Our initial conversations with Thomas Rietschel, former president of the Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Frankfurt am Main, whom we were able to convince to put together an exhibition from our collection, took place during the election campaign in the USA. The way in which this presidential campaign was waged deeply disturbed Rietschel. He wanted to confront the battle cry of fake news, which Donald Trump sent into the world, with the question of what reality actually is, how it comes about and who defines it. Can we really simply proceed from Ludwig Wittgenstein’s famous phrase: “The world is all that is the case”? Is this not where questioning begins? Doesn’t the German word for “reality” – “Wirklichkeit” also contain “the work” and “to act,” just as the Latin term *actualitas* on which it is based also contains the act (*actus*)?¹ And what does it mean when this acting is reflected in the media? How do we deal with such forms of reporting? When does a one-sided

1 In German the word “Wirklichkeit” is derived from the verb “wirken,” which means to work, to be active, or to exert influence, and this refers, at the same time, to the “Werk,” (work) as the result of an action (Greek *ergon*).

representation of reality begin to turn into deliberate false reporting, and what consequences does this have—additionally and especially in a political context?

These considerations were followed by a very personal selection of photographic works of art, each of which in turn reflects an artist’s very personal outlook. The outlooks expressed in the work, in turn, encounter the viewer’s own subjective perspective. The result of this “polylogue” is thus precisely the opposite of what Donald Trump propagates: a reality generated by power relations. Instead, the divergence leads to a contingency and thus to the possibility of recognizing and respecting the complexity of perspectives and opinions instead of negating them and declaring them a lie, and as a result, unreal.

Photography plays a special role in the question of the “power of images.” Since its beginnings, photography has been (and still is) considered a medium that is able to depict reality in a seemingly unadulterated way. The reason for this lies in its technical mode of production and its reproducibility, which seem to exclude a genuinely individual creation. This applies to all areas of photography, from so-called press and documentary photography, which still most closely pursues the claim of approximating reality, to reportage, which already implies an individual dramaturgical sequence, to artistic approaches to the medium. The latter seem to enjoy the most freedom.

After sifting through the collection and searching for the right images for him, Rietschel decided to make the work “Exposure #56, NYC, 428 Broome Street, 06.05.08, 1:42 p.m.” from 2008 by Barbara Probst the central motif. In it, the artist shows a scene that was photographed simultaneously from ten different perspectives with the help of ten cameras distributed around the room. This multiple view of one and the same scene, however, by no means

conveys the impression of a comprehensive approach to reality. On the contrary, the diversity of the points of view, some of which are cropped to reveal only small parts of the set, gives the viewer the impression that crucial areas necessary for grasping the entirety of what is happening are missing. As more perspectives are offered, the observer becomes more and more distanced from the *one* reality.

Another early choice was the work “Büro” by Thomas Demand, which refers to a photograph that passed through the daily press on February 15, 1990, before the official end of the GDR. It is supposed to document an office in the Ministry of State Security after citizens had stormed it and apparently ransacked the files. It is impossible to tell whether these were files that the Stasi still wanted to destroy or records that were intended to document the workings of the Ministry for State Security at the time. Moreover, in the reproduction that Demand made of this interior in 1995, only blank sheets of paper can be seen. It is therefore not about what was actually found, but about the image itself, which has entered the collective memory and with which every viewer associates something different: be it fear of discovery, rage in the face of spying, or joy at the end of a government whose goal had been to impose a collective perception of reality on its citizens.

Gradually, other works were added that in very different ways reflect artists’ disparate approaches to the creation of a photograph and repeatedly challenge the viewer to examine and question his or her own point of view.

Barbara Klemm was the news photographer for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* from 1970 to 2005 and accompanied its journalists on countless assignments during this time. Her photography represents an attempt to capture the events of the time in pictures. She herself emphasizes time and again that she is not an artist. Her gaze, however, and the selection of her motifs as well as her pictorial compositions testify to a very distinct personal language. In Klemm’s works it becomes unmistakably clear that an author can develop a great individual visual language even when committed to documenting reality. With her images, she has at the same time

decisively shaped our perception of more than three decades worth of events.

In this regard, the concept of documentary photography and its use must be fundamentally questioned. As the photographer, artist, author, and exhibition organizer Reinhard Matz explains, the term “documentary” was coined in America in the 1920s and initially characterized an artistic movement associated with Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Russell Lee, Arthur Rothstein, and Ben Shahn, among others, that saw itself as committed to the task of using photography “to confront relatively affluent city dwellers with the poverty of the rural population and to create something like an ‘American community consciousness.’” These photographs all exhibit highly individual styles. In German translation, on the other hand, the term documentary photography is used to refer to all areas in which “what is the case” is to be authentically documented. This has led to photography in general being ascribed a depictive function.

Photography’s meaning, Reinhard Matz continues, is, however, never exhausted “in its analogous moments to the given reality.” To the extent that photography is pursued and understood as an artistic practice, it is even “at cross purposes with documentary aspirations, more precisely, what makes a photograph an aesthetic product in the first place is nothing other than exactly the *differential relationship* to the given reality, the measure of its particularity, consolidation, construction, and the constitution of meaning, the consistency of the formulation of what a photograph can only ever be: A specific *view of reality*.”

To create a link between supposedly documentary and artistic photography, we proposed a new acquisition for the exhibition *[An-]sichten*. Michael Schäfer is an artist dedicated to the processing of images that we seem to know from the media—be it the newspaper, television, or the internet. He restages them or combines them with his own photographs and in this way questions their truthfulness. In addition, he superimposes the images, most of which come from war regions, with subjective everyday situations, placing both the document and

the staging in completely new contexts. The images of horror gain a new intensity. In imagining that the step from our “perfect” world to catastrophe is in essence tiny, we suddenly feel threatened in a peculiar way, so that the conditionality of the calm in one and the unrest in the other suddenly seems to become evident.

Louise Lawler tackles the questioning of reality on different levels: on the one hand by altering a motif and on the other hand in the processing of the material. By conjugating the processing of the motif of the woman descending a staircase, from Eadweard Muybridge’s “Woman Walking Down Stairs” from 1887 to Marcel Duchamp’s “Nu descendant un escalier no. 2” from 1912 and Gerhard Richter’s “Ema (Nude on a Staircase)” from 1966 to her own images, she offers a multitude of subjective realities through which the viewer can pass. At the same time, she places painting and photography on the same level in terms of possible forms of processing. In essence, in this highly condensed work, she shows the development toward abstraction in art. For while Muybridge was still concerned with real sequences of movement in humans (and animals), the motif is abstracted in its further use and in the end serves merely as a cultural cross-reference within the exhibition landscape.

Massimo Cacciari, philosopher and mayor of Venice until 2010, underlines the degree of abstraction inherent in photography. “The ‘photographic’ is not a duplication of reality, but the embodiment of the utter impossibility of its duplication.” What “is most disturbing about photography is its absolute abstraction, is that it is in no way a duplicate of what is, but rather presents a new reality.” In each successive processing of the woman descending the stairs, a different, new reality is expressed.

Perhaps Lawler’s image could even be read as photography’s superiority over painting, insofar as the artist begins with Muybridge as a pioneer of photographic technique and ends with her own photograph. From a temporal perspective, painting would thus only be a moment in the artistic development of a motif.

All the pictures in this exhibition question our perception in manifold ways

by constructing confusing images of reality that make us doubt. What is right? What is wrong? This form of questioning no longer seems appropriate. Instead, we return in our perception to a reassurance of ourselves: Where are we? How do we perceive? From this immediate dismay and in dialogue with the images or with other visitors, it is a matter of constantly re-examining and changing our subjective perception of reality.

“Roland Barthes saw [...] the consternation caused by an unintentional feature in the photograph as proof that photography, in its very essence, is nothing other than pure analogy of contingent reality.” (Andreas Haus)

Perhaps it is precisely this contingency that allows us to understand photography as a depiction of reality. Because if we believe something was exactly so and not different, we don’t have to deal with the multitude of perceptual possibilities. We act as if there is a consensus and block out the reality of other perspectives—just as Donald Trump does. The art historian Herbert Molderings even goes so far as to claim that today we use photographs as evidence of reality in order to deny ourselves the complexity of life. An image is supposed to convey simplified reality—and therefore we simply like to believe in this image.

The risk here is that, despite all contingency, political and social decisions require agreement. For the basis of this agreement, essentially only one thing is important: that people are not misled in their perception of reality. And that means allowing other points of view and arguments to have an impact and to be effective, instead of simply dismissing them as fake news. It is about a basic agreement with regard to a many-sidedness of perspectives that can be applied to life, to politics, to the personal situation; a basic agreement that also allows for errors and makes mistakes correctable.

It is therefore up to each viewer to change their own vantage point in front of the images many times. In so doing, the artists take us by the hand and show us the way into the reality of multiple points of view.

Originally published in German as “Fotografie und Wirklichkeit”, in *[An-]sichten: Vom Umgang mit der Wirklichkeit*, exh. cat. DZ Bank Kunstsammlung (Frankfurt am Main, 2017). Translated by Aimée Ducey-Gessner.

The Screaming Image II
Maximilian Pellizzari

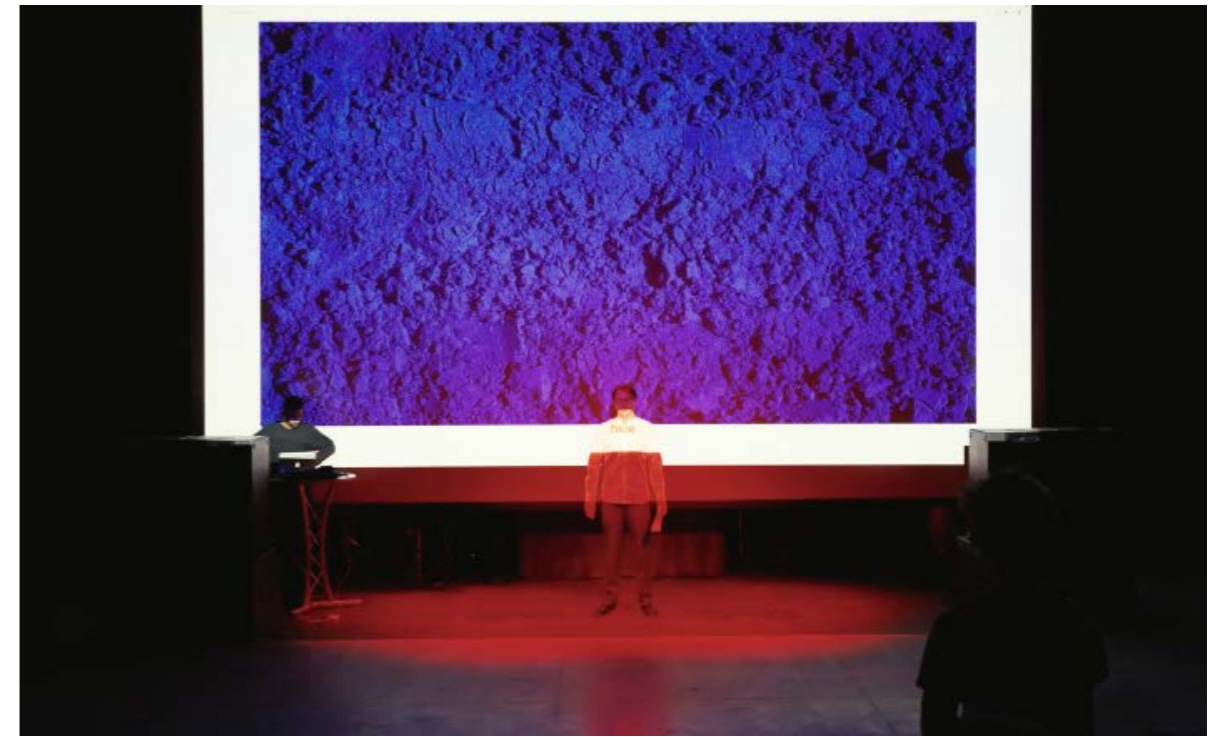
The performance *The Screaming Image II* connects online images to the spoken word and seeks to highlight how they affect meaning and change our perception of words. The image “screams” into spatial and aural dimensions, influencing the subject’s ability to communicate according to their intentions. Every word spoken by the performer is recognised by a speech-to-text system (Google API) and searched online in Google Images. The resulting images are projected simultaneously with the performance, creating a juxtaposition of spoken word and image. Each image also emits a sound at the moment it is projected, generated as follows: A program scans the image from left to right, extrapolating data from the pixel composition and colour distribution that is then used to modulate fifteen sine curves and thus generate an improvised musical composition. The performer plays a role, but may improvise according to the projected images.

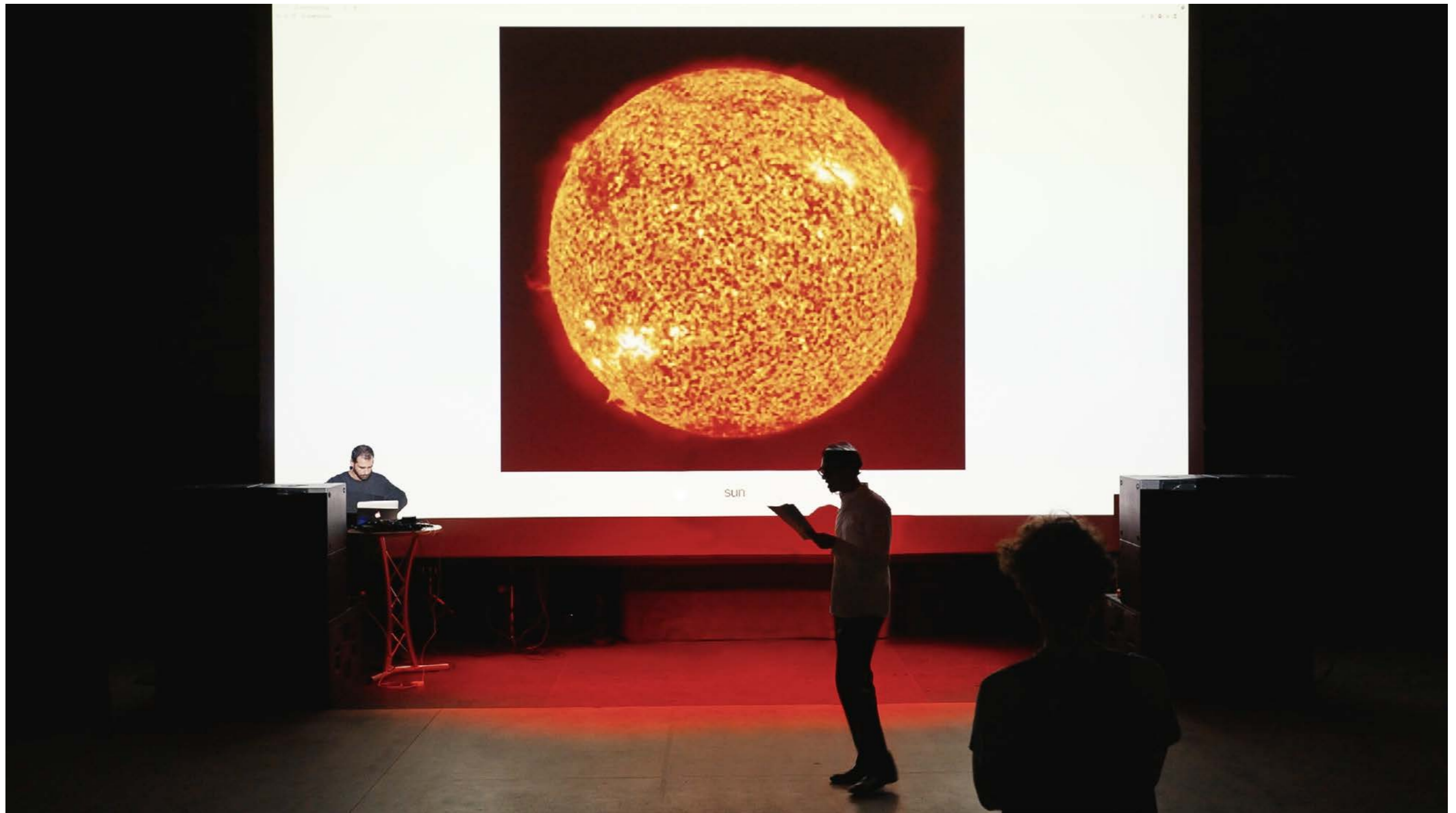
Performance, c. 10'
Programmers: Daniel Morandini, Andrea Kaus
Sound designer: Zeno Lösch

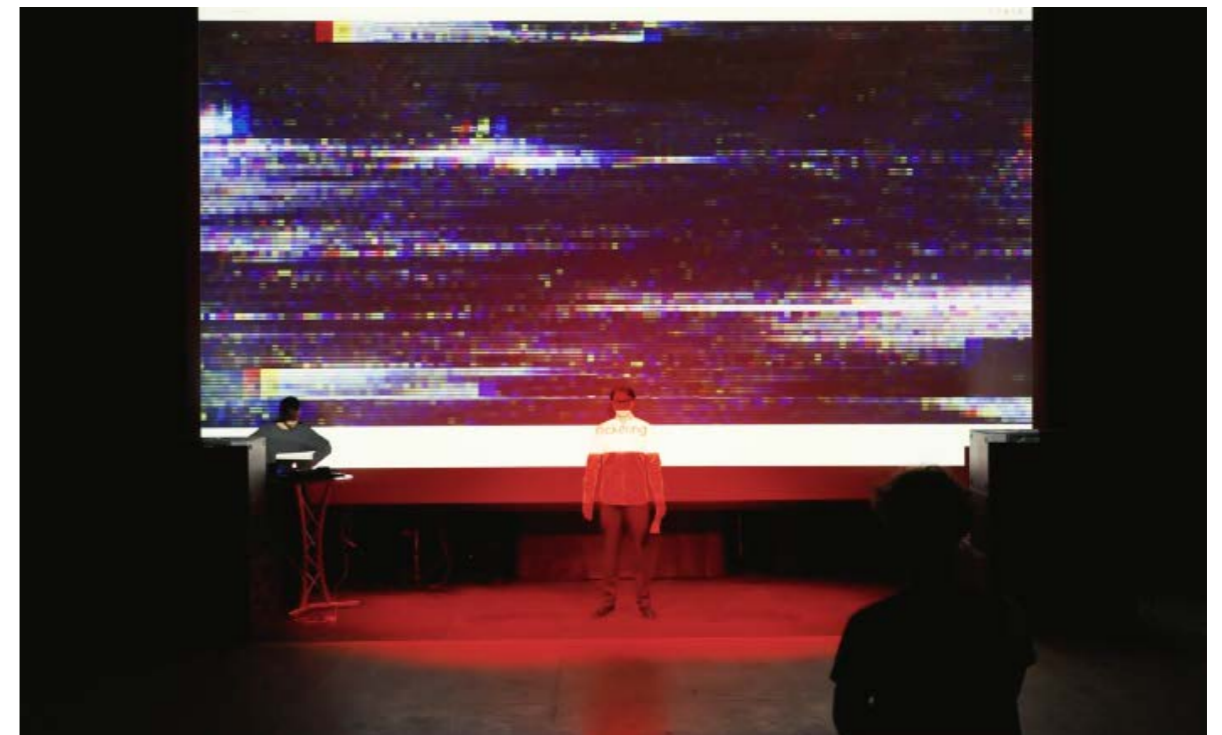
Initially conceived as part of the bachelor dissertation
L'immagine discorsiva: Riflessioni tra oralità e immagini digitali.
Supervisors: Italo Zuffi and German Duarte.
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Faculty of Design and Art, Curriculum in Art.

The Screaming Image II, 2021
Performed in August 2021 during DenkMalFest, BASIS Vinschgau Venosta, Silandro/Schlanders, Italy.
Realised with the support of BASIS Vinschgau Venosta and with the contribution of the Autonomous Province of Bolzano - Department for Italian Culture.

Video stills from a documentation video produced by Matthias Lintner.







Immagini di repertorio (Stock images) analyses the use of stock images by news channels and aims to provoke, tease and make us question the way we perceive information. How come we are so sceptical about what we read or hear, but allow ourselves to be deceived and manipulated so easily by the images that illustrate the news?

Echoing the way an image is used and reused to portray different events, the image reproduced in the publication has been repeatedly printed and scanned until the subject, and therefore the message, has become almost unrecognisable: it has been consumed.

Publication, 94 pages, 21 × 26 cm







4. 18 Settembre 2013
**Botte da orbi in Ucraina:
folle rissa in strada tra tifosi di Metalist
e Dinamo Kiev (VIDEO)**

Le immagini che state per vedere non hanno nulla a che fare con il calcio, eppure sulle strade ucraine le tifoserie di Metalist e Dinamo Kiev, in occasione del match di campionato tra le suddette squadre, si sono letteralmente picchiate a dovere come peggio non si può.

Ecco lo sconvolgente video: <https://youtu.be/EnA8OzkpvhI>



<http://www.calcioweb.eu/>

20. 12 Agosto 2017
**San Marco in Lamis, maxi rissa in paese
dopo i funerali di Luigi e Aurelio: 13 arresti**
Il violento litigio consumato a suon
di mazze in ferro, è avvenuto esattamente
a cento metri dalla chiesa dove mezz'ora
prima si erano tenuti i funerali del fratelli
Luciani.

Sono i terribili contorni del violento litigio divampato ieri nel paese garganico dove sono state arrestate ben 13 persone, tra i 30 ed i 50 anni, con l'accusa di rissa aggravata e lesioni e denunciate 5 donne. I protagonisti hanno riportato lievi ferite giudicate guaribili in pochi giorni.



<http://www.ilmattinodifoggia.it/>

Il tempo per pensare
Adriana Ghimp

The video work, whose title translates as “time to think”, presents six conversations on belief. The artist’s six interlocutors appear on the screens, each caught in the moment just before the words came out of their mouth. These conversations explore the interviewees’ thoughts and feelings about their belief, seeking privileged access to their state of mind. The work captures mental states and moments of insight associated with interruptions in mental focus.

The publication is conceived as a further reflection on the power of thought, on the time it requires, and on its manifestations. On the cover appears the etymological definition of the word “pensiero” (thought). It derives from the Latin *pensum*, which was the quantity of wool a Roman slave was required to spin in a day. *Pensum* is thus associated with acts through which the soul perceives, considers, reflects, observes, imagines, remembers, judges, reasons.

Six video loops, 46'00"
Hand-bound book, 21 × 26 cm









The Vertigo of the New

Giulia Cordin

A subtle sense of vertigo accompanies the layout of a new book. The electricity of the nascent, forms as yet undefined. As the designer you have materials, a goal, an exchange of ideas, and – if you are lucky – a free hand to interpret, to decide how the elements will be distributed on the page. Design and content must dovetail perfectly. Countless variations can be imagined: although there are shared tools, established rules and criteria, and a standard rational aspect, the execution remains a matter of personal interpretation. The content itself is a source of inspiration. Sometimes the conditions are the idea.

“Page 1” of Studio Image is dated October 2017. After more than fifteen years offering only design, the Faculty of Design and Arts added a specific art curriculum. By institutional necessity, its structure echoed its precursor – the project-based studio, the opportunity to explore different artistic media over the course of four semesters, the blending of complementary practices within a studio – but still offered ample room for freedom and exploration.

The beginning of Studio Image was also a moment of vertigo, excitement, novelty. And a fortuitous encounter. The curriculum included photography and video, with media theory and visual communication modules. This is where the pieces had to dovetail: Eva as a renowned photographer with experience in both the media and art worlds; German, a film editor with a Ph.D. in media theory; and me, an editorial designer, returning from an artistic residency in the Netherlands. Three paths that met, three practices that had to be integrated.

It took time to get to know each other, to refine the spaces, to understand the peculiarities. What could we offer collectively? Studio Image was born as a generous and experimental project, enjoying freedom to explore; sometimes intuitively finding successful paths, sometimes risking and failing.

But always starting from the lessons of failure, striking out anew.

Studio Image has quickly become a space for developing theses and putting them to the test. That certainly applies to the students, but it is also a continuous process of self-discovery for us teachers. Constantly renegotiating inputs, the ways in which we transmit and share knowledge, the methods we use to work and discuss together. Things are not right or wrong, they need to be examined closely, from different perspectives, from inside, and discussed. A maieutic method, always striving for constructive dialogue, always trying to grasp the essence, ensuring the foundations are solid.

Fake for Real was Studio Image’s first try-out, in the aftermath of Brexit and Trump. We decided to cross-fertilise our different perspectives and practices, deploying practice and theory in parallel, 2-D and 3-D, outcome and conceptual framework. The topic of fake news and propaganda lent itself to questioning the tools of visual communication; the process of shaping the message inevitably involves interpretation. As the Hungarian architect and thinker Yona Friedman said, describing an event in language reshapes the event itself. In the first weeks of the course we interrogated formats and messages, seeking a clearer awareness of the elements, meanings and fields of application of different visual techniques. This investigation was echoed and reflected in similar explorations in all the modules.

Just as books are given titles, Eva likes to give names to our formats, perhaps to make them more appealing, more likely to acknowledge their presence, their place in the overall discourse. “Collateral” is the weekly film programme, connecting to the topic at hand. Or “Image Workers”, our programme of guest lectures by professionals and practitioners who question the role of images. Beate Gütschow was our first guest. She spent an afternoon at the university with

us, challenging our ideas about the construction of images. Always looking to expand, to multiply the perspectives, access points, stimuli, readings.

We wanted to offer students the opportunity to test their ideas and work by exploring different formats. One of these is the end-of-semester exhibition, the GOG. So they know from the outset that their work will be displayed. And in parallel they each develop a publication. Not a catalogue, not a documentation, but exploring how a publishing project in the broadest sense can integrate, extend, connect with the work itself in a dialogue of references. Students were free to interpret this according to their individual needs: the publication can take the form of a book, or a hybrid digital object, a site, a poster, a manual, even a blanket.

The objective always remains the same: to articulate the project coherently, making use of different formats. As it turned out, this worked well and was repeated in the following semesters, even through the difficulties and remote learning formats of the pandemic.

Fake for Real was a bit like the vertigo induced by the blank page of a new layout. It was chapter one, where we laid the groundwork and set the “master page”, the template. Other chapters have been added over the years, each time a new theme with new students, each time reinventing and rethinking: how to shape the pages, how to organise the layout, how to shape the next volume. Or the next Studio. Then as now always poised on the next blank page. Awaiting discovery. Between vertigo and excitement.

Eva Leitolf is an artist who loves to work with young art makers. In 2019 she was appointed tenured Professor of Fine Arts and head of Studio Image at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. Critical examination of the practices of image production and contextualisation is a central thread running through all of her work, which explores contested societal phenomena such as colonialism, racism and migration. Her works have been shown at international institutions including Savvy Contemporary in Berlin, the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, the Hamburger Kunsthalle, the Sprengel Museum in Hannover, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, the KunstHausWien in Vienna, the National Gallery of Kosovo in Pristina and the DePaul Art Museum at the University of Chicago.

Giulia Cordin is a designer, researcher and educator with a focus on communication and editorial design. She currently teaches at Studio Image in the Major in Art at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, and at the Universität für künstlerische und industrielle Gestaltung Linz (Austria) as adjunct lecturer in Visual Communication. She has worked as a graphic designer for the publishing house Rorhof and has been artist in residence at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. She is on the editorial board of *Progetto Grafico* and collaborates with Museion, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Bolzano.

Sara Benaglia is a visual researcher and curator of the non-profit space BACO (Base Arte Contemporanea Odierna). She writes essays and interviews on the relationship between art and politics with a feminist and decolonial approach. She collaborates with the magazines *ATPdiary*, *Doppiozero* and *Art e Dossier*. Her most recent publications are *The Mobility of the Matrix* (Lubrino Editore, 2021) and *Metafotografia(3)* (Skinnerboox, 2021).

Rosella Biscotti explores and reconstructs social and political moments through the subjectivity and experiences of individuals, often against the backdrop of institutional systems. Her cross-media practice intersects filmmaking, performance and sculpture. She has participated in major international exhibitions, including the Dhaka Art Summit (2020), 55th Venice Biennale, 13th Istanbul Biennale (2013), Documenta 13 (2012), and Manifesta 9 (2012). Her work has been presented in solo exhibitions at daadgalerie, Berlin (2019), Protocinema Istanbul (2018), V-A-C foundation at GULAG History State Museum in Moscow (2016–2017) and Museion Bolzano (2015).

Barbara Casavecchia is a freelance writer, independent curator and educator based in Milan, where she teaches at Brera art academy. Contributing editor for *Frieze*, her features and essays – often focused on Italian contemporary art, visual cultures, and feminisms – have appeared in *Art Agenda*, *Art Review*, *D/La Repubblica*, *Flash Art*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Mousse*, *Nero*, *South/documenta 14*, *Spike*, among others, as well as in several artist books and catalogues. She is currently the curator of the research platform The Current III, “Mediterraneans: ‘Thus Waves Come in Pairs’ (after Etel Adnan)” by TBA21-Academy.

Miro Craemer is an artist and social designer. His interdisciplinary actions, performances and film projects combine textile elements, movement, writing and sound, social aspects and active audience involvement. He initiated the experimental art education programme TOGETTHERE at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich and publishes the magazine *MAG - Museum and Social Change*. In 2020, he began managing the mim | Raum für Kultur, an offspace for art and design in Munich.

Catherine David began her career as a curator at the French National Museum of Modern Art in the 1980s. In her work with documenta X and Witte de With she endeavoured to create a conversation between the audience and the artists’ ideas, creativity and processes. Her highly acclaimed and controversial Contemporary Arab Representations encouraged an invaluable exchange between the Arab world and the Western art world.

Discipula is a collective operating in the field of contemporary visual research. It was founded in 2013 by Marco Paltrinieri, Mirko Smerdel and Tommaso Tanini. Discipula works across a range of practices and focuses on the role and uses of images in the contemporary mediascape. The collective understands images as political and economic tools whose ambiguous nature can be controlled to bring about shifts in the perception of reality. Discipula’s work have been exhibited at Centre Photographie Geneva, Fotomuseum Winterthur, FORMAT Festival (Derby), Kunsthalle Budapest and Tokyo Institute of Photography.

German A. Duarte is a media theorist, film scholar, film editor and currently Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. His research interests include the history of media, film history, cognitive cultural economy and philosophy.

Chiara Duchi is an artist. She graduated from the trilingual Faculty of Arts and Design at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano. She is currently conducting research on the construction of the subject in online profiling processes, within the Master of Art Research and Media Theory programme at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Karlsruhe. She makes art as a healing practice, mainly through a philosophical approach. Her kaleidoscopic interests merge into one another, embracing curiosity, open-mindedness, and vulnerability.

Lukas Einsele explores social, political and humanitarian issues in his long-term projects, using artistic research and documentary strategies mainly based on photographic media, video, text, and lecture performances. His works have been exhibited at Witte de With Center Rotterdam, Haus Esters Krefeld, Casino Luxembourg, Umeå Museum, UN New York, Fotomuseum Winterthur, several Goethe Institutes and many other international institutions.

Noémie Étienne is professor of art history at the University of Bern and a specialist in the fields of early-modern material culture, heritage, and museum studies. Her most recent book is entitled *The Art of the Anthropological Diorama* (De Gruyter, 2021). She is currently starting a new research project entitled “Global Conservation: Histories and Theories”.

Brad Feuerhelm is a London based artist, curator and editor of the contemporary photography and art magazine www.americansuburbx.com.

Marco Enrico Giacomelli is a journalist. He studied philosophy at the Universities of Turin, Paris 8 and Bologna, and gained a doctorate in aesthetics. He has written monographs on René Daumal (Bulzoni, 2011) and Mike Kelley (Johan and Levi, 2014), and has translated texts by Marc Augé, Nicolas Bourriaud, Gilles Deleuze and Boris Groys. He teaches Critical Writing at NABA – New Academy of Fine Arts in Milan. He is deputy editorial director of *Artribune* and managing director of *Artribune Magazine*.

Jana J. Haeckel is an art historian, curator and lecturer, working on image and body politics in contemporary art, specifically in the new ethics of photography in the digital age. Art practices that subvert historical narratives through archival research are also part of her work. She holds a doctorate in art history and is director of Photoforum Pasquart in Biel, Switzerland. Haeckel recently published *Everything Passes Except the Past* (Sternberg Press, 2021) and curated the exhibition “Resistant Faces” at Pinakothek der Moderne (Munich, 2021).

Felix Hoffmann is an art historian and art theorist. He is currently Head Curator of the C/O Berlin Foundation, where he is responsible for exhibitions, programmes and strategy. With passion, curiosity, and a talent for

improvisation he has developed C/O Berlin from an idealistic project into an internationally renowned institution. Hoffmann has curated numerous international exhibitions including Nan Goldin (2009), Robert Mapplethorpe, Peter Lindbergh (2011), Gordon Parks (2014) and Ren Hang (2018), as well as group shows like “The Uncanny Familiar: Images of Terror” (2011) and “The Last Image: Photography and Death” (2019).

Max Houghton writes about photographs for the international arts press, including *FOAM*, *Photoworks* and *The Telegraph*. She edited the photography biannual *8 Magazine* for six years and is also Senior Lecturer in Photography at London College of Communication – University of the Arts, London.

Nicola Kuhn has been arts editor at the Berlin *Tagesspiegel* since 1991.

Christina Leber holds a doctorate in art history and is head of the DZ BANK Art Collection as well as managing director/artistic director of the DZ BANK Art Foundation in Frankfurt am Main. In addition to her curatorial activities, she has authored numerous essays on contemporary artistic photography. She also lectures at Goethe University’s Institute of Art Pedagogy, Frankfurt am Main, and the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen.

Kathrin Meyer has been director of Museum Sinclair-Haus (Stiftung Kunst und Natur) since February 2020. She studied culture and aesthetic practice in Hildesheim. She has worked as a curator since 2010, most recently at the Deutsches Hygiene-Museum Dresden. She has also worked for Kestner-Gesellschaft (Hannover), Kunstverein Hildesheim and galleries in Berlin, New York and Barcelona. She has taught exhibition theory and practice at Hildesheim University and Hochschule für Bildende Künste Braunschweig.

Jana Müller studied art photography at the Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig and now lives in Berlin. She has taught at Kunsthochschule Mainz and Universität der Künste Berlin. As an artist, Müller explores the field of criminology and forensics, in particular the materialisation of memory using the full spectrum of archives and archival materials. Her work has been exhibited internationally and received numerous awards.

Rachel O’Dwyer is a lecturer in digital cultures in the School of Visual Culture in NCAD, Dublin. Her research is at the intersection of digital cultures and cultural economies with a particular focus on money, algorithms and art. She is an editor for *Neural* magazine and was the founding editor-in-chief of *Interference*, a journal of audio culture (2009–2017). O’Dwyer has published extensively on digital cultures, digital value and digital art in both academic and public scholarship contexts. She is currently completing a book for Verso: *Tokens: How Platforms are Transforming the Future of Money* (spring 2023).

Luisa Pisetta studied contemporary art at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, including an exchange semester in Jerusalem and various volunteer experiences in challenging countries. Her artistic training in two frontier

cities led her to develop a critical, fantascientific and obsessive vision of (imaginary) borders, which she has investigated mainly through sound. She is currently studying in the master’s programme Arts in Applied Human Rights at Angewandte in Vienna, with the intention of opening up her poetic research to a more social and political approach.

Edel Rodriguez is a Cuban American artist who has exhibited internationally with shows in Los Angeles, Toronto, New York, Dallas, Philadelphia and Spain. Inspired by personal history, religious rituals, politics, memory, and nostalgia, his bold, figurative works are an examination of identity, cultural displacement, and mortality. Rodriguez has received commissions from clients including *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *The New Yorker* and many others. Rodriguez’s artwork is in the collections of institutions including the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., as well as numerous private collections.

Daniele Salerno has a doctorate in Semiotic Studies (University of Bologna) and is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie postdoctoral researcher at Utrecht University in the project Memorights – Cultural Memory in LGBTQ Activism for Rights. Salerno’s publications include *Terrorismo, sicurezza, post-conflitto: studi semiotici sulla guerra al terrore* (Librerie Universitarie, 2012) and *Stranieri nel ricordo: Verso una memoria pubblica delle migrazioni* (as co-editor with Patrizia Violi, Il Mulino, 2020) and *The Heritage of a Transit Camp: Fossoli: History, Memory, Aesthetics* (with Matteo Cassani Simonetti and Roberta Mira; Peter Lang, 2021).

Bernhart Schwenk is an art historian and has been head of the contemporary art collection at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich since 2002. After studying in Mainz, Cologne and Bonn, he first worked as a research assistant at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt am Main and as an exhibition curator at the Haus der Kunst in Munich. His exhibitions, publications, and lectures focus on the entire spectrum of artistic expressions in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, curatorial practice, and the self-image of the museum as an institution.

Shinseungback Kimyonghun is a Seoul-based artistic duo consisting of engineer Shin Seung Back and artist Kim Yong Hun. Their collaborative practice explores technology and humanity. Their work has been exhibited internationally at venues including Ars Electronica Center, ZKM, NTT ICC and MMCA.

Bella Spratley graduated in French and Spanish from the University of Bristol. Her academic interests intersect contemporary art culture, political imagery and gender theory in Francophone and Hispanophone culture. She is a freelance journalist and features editor of *Metal* magazine.

Jonas Staal is a visual artist whose work deals with the relation between art, propaganda, and democracy. He is the founder of the artistic and political organization *New World Summit* (2012–ongoing). Together with Florian Malzacher he co-directs *Training for the Future* (2018–ongoing) and with human rights lawyer Jan Fermon

he initiated the collective lawsuit *Collectivize Facebook* (2020–ongoing). With writer and lawyer Radha D’Souza he founded the *Court for Intergenerational Climate Crimes* (2021–ongoing) and with Laure Prouvost he is co-administrator of the *Obscure Union*. His book *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century* was published by MIT Press in 2019.

Josefina Sundblad travelled the oceans with her family. After graduating from unibz, she is based nowhere and is currently working on taking a year to comprehend what her next step should be.

Salvatore Vitale is a senior lecturer at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts (HSLU) where he leads the Transmedia Storytelling programme. His artistic practice and research focus on the development and complexity of modern societies. Vitale’s work has been exhibited widely, with solo shows at Modena Foundation for Visual Arts (2022), Camera – Centro Italiano per la Fotografia (2021), OGR Torino, the Swiss Foundation for Photography Winterthur (2018), MOCAK – Museum of Contemporary Art, Krakow (2018) and the Photoforum Pasquart Biel/Bienne (2017).

Mauro Zanchi is an art critic, curator and essayist. He is has been director of the temporary museum BACO (Base Arte Contemporanea Odierna) in Bergamo since 2011. He has curated solo exhibitions by Luigi Ghirri, Mario Giacomelli, Irene Fenara, May Hands, Guido van der Werve, Navid Nuur, Dan Rees and Adrian Paci. His essays and critical texts have been published by Giunti, Silvana Editoriale, Electa, Mousse, CURA, Moretti & Vitali, and *Corriere della Sera*. His publications include *Lorenzo Lotto e l’immaginario alchemico* (1997) and *Metafotografia(3)* (Skinnerboox, 2021).

Matteo Zoccolo is a listener and socially engaged artist currently travelling in Europe. Questioning contemporary notions and experiences of togetherness, he initiates and maintains inclusive physical/immateral spaces for reflection and mutual exchange, facilitating the formation of horizontal groups, communities and networks. Using enquiry and active listening as tools, his work embraces uncertainty, vulnerability, fluidity, openness and responsiveness, hoping to participate with small but meaningful actions in a potential shift towards a culture of empathy.

**DEMOCRACY IN DISTRESS?
MANUFACTURING MAJORITIES
THROUGH NEW FORMS
OF PROPAGANDA**
Summer 2021

Image Workers

Guest critique
Rossella Biscotti
*Propaganda by
All Digital Means Possible*
Hilde Van den Bulck and Aaron Hyzen
Options
Riccardo Giacconi
Propaganda Art in the 21st Century
Jonas Staal
Study of Focus
Kristina Benjocki
Agent Orange
Edel Rodriguez

Collateral

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari (1920)
Robert Wiene
Battleship Potemkin (1925)
Sergei Eisenstein
Triumph of the Will (1935)
Leni Riefenstahl
Citizen Kane (1941)
Orson Welles
The War Game (1965)
Peter Watkins
Apocalypse Now (1979)
Francis Ford Coppola
The Atomic Cafe (1982)
Kevin Rafferty, Jayne Loader and
Pierce Rafferty
Jesus Camp (2006)
Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing
Feels Good Man (2020)
Arthur Jones
The Great Hack (2019)
Jehane Noujaim and Karim Amer

Reading Group

Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949)
George Orwell
Il cimitero di Praga (2010)
Umberto Eco
*Manufacturing Consent: The Political
Economy of the Mass Media* (1988)
Noam Chomsky, Edward S. Herman
*One Dimensional Man: Studies
in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial
Society* (1964)
Herbert Marcuse
La tyrannie de la communication (1999)
Ignacio Ramonet

**WORTH A 1000 WORDS? IMAGE,
TEXT AND THE POLITICS OF
COMMUNICATION**
Winter 2020/21

Image Workers

Guest critique
Huib Haye van der Werf
Denkraum Deutschland: Interspace
Miro Craemer (and Philipp Messner)
Feelings
Prof. Dr. Bernhart Schwenk
Image Stories
Emilie Josso
The Art of Art Direction
Alexandra Zsigmond
Deposit
Yann Mingard
Radio Suq
Luisa Pisetta and Matteo Zoccolo
Cazzo Magazine
Fabian Mosele

Collateral

Arrival (2016)
Denis Villeneuve
Into Eternity (2010)
Michael Madsen
La Jetée (1962)
Chris Marker
Riso Amaro (1949)
Giuseppe De Santis
Enjoy Poverty (2008)
Renzo Martens
The War Game (1966)
Peter Watkins
Stranger Than Fiction (2006)
Marc Foster
The Pillow Book (1996)
Peter Greenaway
eXistenZ (1999)
David Cronenberg
Minority Report (2002)
Steven Spielberg

Reading Group

*Remediation: Understanding
New Media* (2000)
Jay David Bolter, Ricard Grusin
*Convergence Culture: Where Old
and New Media Collide* (2006)
Henry Jenkins
*Spreadable Media: Creating Value
and Meaning in a Networked Culture*
(2013) Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford
and Joshua Green
*Windows Shopping: Cinema and
the Postmodern* (1994)
Anne Friedberg
*La condition postmoderne: Rapport
sur le savoir* (1979)
Jean-François Lyotard

**THE END OF THE GLOBAL WORLD?
VISUAL NARRATIVES OF
TERRITORY AND IDENTITY**
Summer 2020

Image Workers

Guest critique
Marco Giacomelli
Artist talk
Marc Weis and Martin de Mattia
Contemporary Documentary?
Salvatore Vitale
Europa Dreaming
Matteo Moretti
Hidden Islam and Other Books
Nicolò Degiorgis

Collateral

Amistad (1997)
Steven Spielberg
Tōkyō monogatari (1953)
Yasujirō Ozu
Memory of the Camps (1945)
Alfred Hitchcock, Sidney Bernstein
Comizi d'amore (1965)
Pier Paolo Pasolini
American Psycho (2000)
Mary Harron
Incendies (2010)
Denis Villeneuve
Darwin's Nightmare (2004)
Hubert Sauper

Reading Group

*Remediation: Understanding
New Media* (2000) Jay David
Bolter and Ricard Grusin
The Gutenberg Galaxy (1962)
Marshall McLuhan
The Internet Galaxy (2003)
Manuel Castells
Identity (2018)
Francis Fukuyama
*Hypertext 3.0.: Critical Theory and New
Media in an Era of Globalization* (2006)
George Paul Landow
Race et histoire (1952)
Claude Lévi-Strauss

**ELIZA & FRANKENSTEIN
TECHTOPIAN IMAGE
NARRATIVES**
Winter 2019/20

Image Workers

Guest critique
Prof. Dr. Bernhart Schwenk
and Miro Craemer
Images and Reflections
Daniela Friebe
AI and Vision
Shinseungback Kimyonghun
Framed Source Footage Collages
Markus Oberndorfer
Studio visit
Francesco Jodice (Milan)
Lab visit
Alessandra Brusa
(Bicocca University, Milan)
Studio visit
Discipula (Milan)

Collateral

Black Mirror (2011–)
Charlie Brooker
Fahrenheit 451 (1966)
François Truffaut
Metropolis (1927)
Fritz Lang
Source Code (2011)
Duncan Jones
Total Recall (1990)
Paul Verhoeven
Orwell 1984 (1984)
Michael Radfort
Videodrome (1983)
David Cronenberg
Gattaca (1997)
Andrew Niccol
The Terminator (1984)
James Cameron

Reading Group

Il Cyborg:
Saggio sull'uomo artificiale (2008)
Antonio Caronia
*Writing Space: Computer, Hypertext,
and the History of Writing* (1991)
Jay David Bolter
*Ins Universum der technischen
Bilder* (1996)
Vilém Flusser
*Die technologische Bedingung:
Beiträge zur Beschreibung
der technischen Welt* (2011)
Erich Hörl (ed.)

VIOLENT IMAGES
Summer 2019

Image Workers

Guest critique
Letizia Ragaglia
One Step Beyond
Lukas Einsele
Exhibition visit "The Last Image"
Felix Hoffmann (C/O Berlin)
Studio visit
Jana Müller (Berlin)

Collateral

Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes (1972)
Werner Herzog
A Clockwork Orange (1971)
Stanley Kubrick
They Shoot Horses, Don't They? (1969)
Sydney Pollack
Blow-up (1966)
Michelangelo Antonioni
Memento (2000)
Christopher Nolan
La virgen de los sicarios (1999)
Barbet Schroeder
The Cleaners (2018)
Hans Block and Moritz Riesewieck
*71 Fragmente einer Chronologie des
Zufalls* (1994)
Michael Haneke

Reading Group

Symbolic Exchange and Death (1993)
Jean Baudrillard
The Perfect Crime (1996)
Jean Baudrillard
The Rhetoric of the Image (1964)
Roland Barthes
*Camera Lucida: Reflections on
Photography* (1981)
Roland Barthes
The Society of the Spectacle (1970)
Guy Debord
*Against Interpretation and Other
Essays* (1966)
Susan Sontag
Regarding the Pain of Others (2003)
Susan Sontag

**FAKE FOR REAL
IMAGE NARRATIVES AND
STRATEGIES OF FAKE**
Winter 2017/18

Image Workers

Guest critique
Christian Lange
Artist talk
Beate Gütschow
Museum visit
Mario Kramer
(MMK Museum für Moderne Kunst,
Frankfurt am Main)
Exhibition visit "I Am a Problem"
Peter Gorschlüter
(MMK2 Museum für Moderne Kunst,
Frankfurt am Main)

Reading Group

Understanding Media (1964)
Marshall McLuhan
Media Crisis (2003)
Peter Watkins
*La scomparsa dell'orologio universale:
Peter Watkins e i mass media audiovi-
sivi* (2009)
German A. Duarte
*The "Uncensored War": The Media
and Vietnam* (1989)
Dan Hallin
*Le dispositif: approches métapsy-
chologiques de l'impression de réalité*
(1975)
Jean-Louis Baudry
La guerre du Golfe n'a pas eu lieu (1991)
Jean Baudrillard

Copyright

For the reproduced works by Nina Berman, Michelangelo Boldrin, Chiara Cortellini, Elisa Faletti, Adriana Ghimp, Hyperflesh, Liu Jing, Hanneke Klaver, Sophie Krause, Laora Kula, Eva & Franco Mattes, Mark Markin, Katharina Theresa Mayr, Fabian Mosele, Maximilian Pellizzari, Luca Piscopo, Elio Pfeifauf, Sophia Rabbiosi, Arnulf Rainer, Irene Rainer, Edel Rodríguez, Zineb Sedira, Andres Serrano, Shinseungback Kimyonghun, Jonas Staal, Giacomo Turra, Christina Vieira-Barry, Salvatore Vitale, and Mushon Zer-Aviv/Dan Stavy/ Eran Weissenstern:

© the artists and their legal successors

For the reproduced works by Lukas Einsele, John Heartfield, Jenny Holzer, Eva Leitolf, and Jana Müller:
© SIAE, Rome 2022

For the reproduced works by:

John Baldessari: © John Baldessari 1966–68 / Courtesy Estate of John Baldessari © 2022 / Courtesy Sprüth Magers; Rossella Biscotti: © Rossella Biscotti / Courtesy mor Charpentier, Paris; Broomberg & Chanarin: © Broomberg & Chanarin / Courtesy Robin Scher / Courtesy Goodman Gallery; Tacita Dean: © Tacita Dean / Frith Street Gallery, London / Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris; Discipula: © Discipula / Courtesy MLZ Art Dep Trieste / Courtesy Fondazione Francesco Fabbri; Samuel Fosso: © Samuel Fosso / Courtesy Jean Marc Patras, Paris; Fotostudio Waldmüller / © Amt für Film und Medien, Autonome Provinz Bozen-Südtirol; John Heartfield: © The Heartfield Community of Heirs / Akademie der Künste, Berlin; G. M. Howe: Courtesy Stanley B. Burns, MD Photography Collection / The Burns Archive, New York; Barbara Kruger: © Barbara Kruger / Courtesy Mary Boone Gallery, NY; Paulo Nazareth: © Paulo Nazareth / Courtesy Mendes Wood Gallery; Timm Rautert: © Timm Rautert / Courtesy Galerie Parrotta Contemporary Art, Cologne; David Shields: © Power House Books

Image credits

Unless otherwise indicated, the rights to images of works are held by the holders of the rights to the works themselves.

p. 18: © Michael Reynolds/EPA; p. 18: © Journalist Excellence Worldwide; p. 20 © Jonas Staal and Remco van Bladel. Produced by Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam; p. 21, 22, 23: © Jonas Staal / photos: Nieuwe Beelden Makers; p. 26: © Ye Yushan et al., Rent Collection Courtyard: Sculptures of Oppression and Revolt (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1968); p. 56: © Rossella Biscotti / photo: Ela Bialkowska; p. 104: © Sue Ream / CC BY 3.0.; p. 107: © Luca Turi; p. 120: © Studio Image; p. 120: © Makoda Ishida; p. 200: © Rohit Chawla / India Today magazine; p. 202, 203: © Noémie Étienne

All rights reserved to the copyright owners, unless otherwise indicated. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The editors apologise for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.

SHOOT & THINK
Negotiating Images – Vol. 1
Studio Image

Editors
Eva Leitolf, Giulia Cordin

Published by
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, Italy
Faculty of Design and Art

Published to coincide with the exhibition
SHOOT & THINK
Negotiating Images
frei_raum Q21 exhibition space, Vienna
11–27 March 2022

1st edition, March 2022
© 2022 by Studio Image
Faculty of Design and Art
Free University of Bozen-Bolzano
All rights reserved.

Texts © the authors.
Images © see image credits, p. 238.

Graphic design
Giulia Cordin, Lorenzo Toso

Editing and proofreading
Meredith Dale

Typefaces
General Sans, Frode Helland
Termoli, Luzi Type Foundry

Paper
Munken Kristall

Printed in Italy by
Longo AG, Bozen-Bolzano


@unibz_studioimage

ISBN 978-88-942888-7-2

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Meredith Dale. His generous support extended far beyond translating, editing and proofreading, always pressing us for clarity and precision. We are also very grateful to Josefina Sundblad and Matteo Zoccolo for assisting with research and to Elio Pfeifauf for transcribing our long conversation with Salvatore Vitale.

With the generous support of

 **unibz**
Fakultät für Design und Künste
Facoltà di Design e Arti
Faculty of Design and Art




longo



STUDIO IMAGE

Rossella Biscotti, Michelangelo Boldrin,
Chiara Cortellini, Miro Craemer, Discipula,
German A. Duarte, Chiara Duchi, Lukas
Einsele, Elisa Faletti, Adriana Ghimp,
Marco Enrico Giacomelli, Felix Hoffmann,
Sophie Krause, Laora Kula, Mark Markin,
Katharina Theresa Mayr, Fabian Mosele,
Jana Müller, Maximilian Pellizzari,
Elio Pfeifauf, Luca Piscopo, Luisa Pisetta,
Sophia Rabbiosi, Irene Rainer, Edel Rodríguez,
Daniele Salerno, Bernhart Schwenk,
Shinseungback Kimyonghun, Jonas Staal,
Josefina Sundblad, Giacomo Turra,
Christina Vieira-Barry, Salvatore Vitale,
Matteo Zoccolo and others

ISBN 978-88-942888-7-2

 Fakultät für Design und Künste
Facoltà di Design e Arti
Faculty of Design and Art