

HILA PELEG  
THE DOCUMENTARY  
EVENT  
P. 4

ANTJE EHMANN  
HARUN FAROCKI  
VOLKER PANTENBURG  
CONTROL AND  
CONTINGENCY  
P. 12

CHRISTOPHER PINNEY  
SALUTARY  
ESTRANGEMENT  
P. 19

SYLVÈRE LOTRINGER  
FRAMING DEATH  
P. 28

SYLVÈRE LOTRINGER  
JOHNNY ESPOSITO  
CRIME IS EVERYWHERE  
P. 39

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER  
REALITY MUST BE  
DEFENDED  
P. 45

KLAUS WILDENHAHN  
FOURTH READING:  
KINO-EYE. FUNDAMENTAL  
DIFFERENCES  
P. 54

CORDULA DAUS  
CHRISTINE MEISNER  
DISQUIETING NATURE  
P. 62

# BERLIN DOCUMENTARY Forum 2

31 May – 3 June 2012

NEW PRACTICES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

HAUS  
DER  
KULTUREN  
DER  
WELT



## BERLIN DOCUMENTARY FORUM 2

Artistic Director: Hila Peleg

Research and Program Coordination: Koen Claerhout, Nadja Talmi

Curator "A Blind Spot": Catherine David

Coordinator "A Blind Spot": Elsa de Seynes

Festival Office: Andrea Schubert

Architecture Berlin Documentary Forum 2: Kooperative für Darstellungspolitik

Architecture "A Blind Spot": Kuehn Malvezzi

"issue zero": Pierre Becker (TA-TRUNG), Norbert Pöllmann, Florian Schneider (KEIN.TV)

Documentation Production: Johanna Aust, Sonja Baeger, Jörg Karrenbauer, Sören Köhler, Eric Menard, Maria Mohr, Astra Price, Orlan Roy, Silvia Wolf, Mich'ael Zupraner

Stage Manager: Quirin Wildgen

Interns: Nathalie Küchen, Leonie Riek

Editors: Cordula Daus, Hila Peleg, Bert Rebhandl, Vera Tollmann

Translation English—German: Bert Rebhandl

Translation German—English: Helen Ferguson, Lisa

Rosenblatt, Jennifer Taylor

English Text Editors: Nicolas Currie, Catherine Schelbert

Proofreading (German): Michael Baute

Proofreading (English): Mandi Gomez

Design: Double Standards

Print: Primeline Print Berlin

All texts © the authors

## HAUS DER KULTUREN DER WELT

Director: Bernd M. Scherer (V.i.S.d.P.)

Head of Visual Arts: Valerie Smith

Head of Communication: Silvia Fehrmann

Editorial Office: Axel Besteher, Franziska Wegener

Press: Anne Maier, Henriette Sölter

Internet: Eva Stein, Jan Köhler

Public Relations: Christiane Sonntag, Sabine Westemeier

Technical Director: Jochen Petzold

Head of Audio and Video Engineering: André Schulz

Head of Event Engineering: Hermann Volkery

Assistant to the Technical Director: Harald Weißmann

Technical Coordination "A Blind Spot": Gernot Ernst, Christian Dertinger

Haus der Kulturen der Welt is a business division of Kulturveranstaltungen des Bundes in Berlin GmbH.

Director: Bernd M. Scherer

Managing Director: Charlotte Sieben

## CREDITS

"The Pixelated Revolution" by Rabih Moué is co-produced by: Berlin Documentary Forum / Haus der Kulturen der Welt, The Spalding Gray Award, Performing Space 122/New York, The Andy Warhol Museum/Pittsburgh, On the Boards/Seattle and The Walker Art Center/Minneapolis, dOCUMENTA (13)/Kassel.

"Disquieting Nature" by Christine Meisner is produced in cooperation with The Walter Collection.

"Melodrama" by Eszter Salamon is supported by The Capital Cultural Fund Berlin and co-produced by Berlin Documentary Forum / Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Festival des Arts Vivants/Nyon, Next Festival/Valenciennes.

The screening of "Ginrin" (Matsumoto Toshio, Japan 1955) has been made possible thanks to support from the National Film Center, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. The screening of "Der lachende Mann" (Walter Heynowski/Gerhard Scheumann, GDR 1966) has been made possible thanks to support from the Stiftung Deutsches Rundfunkarchiv, Potsdam-Babelsberg. The screening of "Notre Nazi" (Robert Kramer, France/FRG 1984) has been made possible thanks to support from the Filmmuseum München. The digitalization of the film "Der Reifenschnneider und seine Frau" (Klaus Wildenhahn/Roland Hehn/Horst Schwaab, FRG 1968/69) has been made possible thanks to support from the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dfb), and the Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen, Berlin.

"Montage Interdit" is a project by Eyal Sivan in cooperation with Audrey Maurion, Robert M. Ochshorn, Dafydd Harries, Patrick Hepner, Felix Boggio and Gabriele Urbonaite.

"DAYS, I See what I Saw and what I will See" by Meik Ohanian is co-produced by Sharjah Art Foundation, courtesy: the artist and gallery Chantal Crousel, Paris.

"issue zero" is supported by Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht.

## THANKS

Agence VU, Altofragile, Art Services Berlin, Benoît Jacob éditions, David Zwirner, Deutsche Kinemathek - Museum für Film und Fernsehen, Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie Berlin (dfb), Filmmuseum im Münchner Stadtmuseum, Galerie Chantal Crousel, Galerie Gisela Capitain, Goodman Gallery, Institut français, Jan Mot, Korn Manufaktur, Les Productions du Sablier, Magazzino d'Arte Moderna, Sammlung Ringier, Sommer Contemporary Art, White Cube

Weronika Adamowska, Heike Ander, Ariella Azoulay, Mads Bacher, Ilka Backmeister-Collacott, Michael J. Baers, Michel Balague, Christina Beller, Philippa Benson, Nikki Berriman, Kerrie Bevis, Brigitte Bidovec, Anaëlle Bourguignon, Lisa Brook, Stella Bruzzi, Craig Burnett, Ted Byfield, Paolo Calamita, Erin Carroll, Alex Clarke, Jean-Marie Courant, Celia Crétien, Brian Currid, Nicolas Currie, Murielle Daenen, Catherine Davies, Corinne Diserens, Katrin Dod, Annie Doutreloux, Stefan Droessler, Okwui Enwezor, Yuval Etgar, Anselm Franke, Ingo Franke, Martin Furler Bassand, Gabriele Gaspari, Lapo Gavioli, Lilian Astrid Geese, Marie-Laure Gilles, Mary Glaser, Jonathan Glazier, Nea Granlund, Yasmin Guener, Paz Aburto Guevara, Philippe Guillaume, Cornelia Haberl, Anke Hahn, Hata Ayumi, Stephanie Hausmann, Maren Hobein, Katarina Holubcova, Christine Houard, Bellatrix Hubert, Mark Johnson, Michèle Kastner, Shinji Kitagawa, Mirjam Klootwijk, Leonard Kluge, Martin Koerber, Hans Kohl, Sylvia Kouvali, Angela Kowalewski, Enna Kruse-Kim, Cathy Larqué, Xavier Le Roy, Alex Leite-Pinheiro, Marcus Lieberenz, Linn Löffler, Giovanni Majer, Jessica Manstetten, Danielee Maruca, Isabelle Mégré, Daniel Meiller, Angela Melitopoulos, Mafalda Melo, Reiner Meyer, Rebecca Meyers, Max Milhahn, Meghan Monsour, Walter Münster, Brigitte Morgenthaler, Patricia Morvan, Maria Muhle, Leena Närekanigas, Marie-Laure Narolles, Irit Neidhardt, Ingo Niermann, Christian Noller, Mathias Nouel, Johanna Ortner, Andreas R. Peterzell, Ana Pinto Gonçalves, Simona Pizzi, Matthias Rajmann, Chris Rehberger, Kerstin Reichert, Carrie C. Roseland, Anne Rüdiger, Christina Ruf, Volker Sander, Anna Sarkissian, Roxanne Sayegh, Catherine Schelbert, Anna Schierse, Ingo Schöningh, Marcus Schütte, Nicole Seifert-Schmauch, Joshua Simon, Dorothee Sorge, Daniel Sponsel, Sofia Stavrianidou, Pia Thilmann, Cornelia Tischmacher, Peter Trentmann, Barbara Ulrich, Anne-Sophie Van Neste, Anne Vasseviere, Kathi Verhaag, Morgan Vidakovich, Daniel von Behr, Anna Voswinckel, Alexandra Wellensiek, Dörthe Winter, Koyo Yamashita, Volker Zander, Cécile Zoonens

With the kind support of the Embassy of the United States of America, the Embassy of the French Republic, Culturesfrance, Institut français and Goethe-Institut Ramallah



Presented by



Supported by



"A Blind Spot" is supported by



Haus der Kulturen der Welt is supported by



## PREFACE

A high hedge cuts diagonally through the photo, extending from the foreground into the background. It blocks the observer's view of the realm beyond and marks a border. No people are visible, yet the paved road indicates that this setting has not simply been left in its natural state. In terms of the viewing conventions that inform it, the photo at the same time correlates to a political power structure that has become inscribed in the landscape, as David Goldblatt reveals in his commentary on this photo. The hedge was planted in 1660 by Jan van Riebeeck to keep the indigenous Khoikhoi out of the Dutch East India Company's gardens. Parts of the hedge still survive today in the Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town.

This photo by Goldblatt, displayed in the exhibition "A Blind Spot" (curated by Catherine David), takes us to the central idea informing the Berlin Documentary Forum: revealing the structures and logics in documentary media.

As recently highlighted by the "Animism" exhibition at HKW, photography and film were developed in the nineteenth century as Western, modernist attempts to draw clear demarcating lines between subjects and objects, culture and nature. These media play an interesting twofold role in this process. On the one hand, photography and film may form part of strategies of objectivization, for example when deployed to document racial or indeed cultural features of indigenous peoples, in the process making these accessible to scientific analysis. On the other hand, the very magic driven out of the subject matter through this process of documenting and categorization is displaced into the medium *per se*.

From the outset, photography and film have succeeded in creating connections to things, re-establishing links that modernism tries to sever, *inter alia* by using these selfsame media. Art is the terrain legitimized by modernism for that specific purpose. Artistic strategies in particular take on the role of disrupting the routines within perceptual regimes that guide modernism's practices and thus instigate a new reflection on these strategies. In this sense Goldblatt's photo is not a simulacrum of a landscape, but instead opens up a space of perception and imagination that places the viewer's gaze in the Khoikhoi's perceptual situation. Through this shift, the photograph draws the viewer into the depths of historical strata in South Africa.

Therefore the work of Goldblatt is paradigmatic for revealing complex historical and visual layers of meaning – those layers, which Berlin Documentary Forum 2 decided to deal with this year.

Bernd M. Scherer, Director of Haus der Kulturen der Welt

## THE DOCUMENTARY EVENT

The Berlin Documentary Forum is a space for the production and presentation of documentary practices marked both by acceptance and intensification of the medium's inherent tensions and paradoxes. It was founded in 2010 in response to the growing importance of documentary forms in the arts in recent years, and also to fill a gap in the institutional landscape by creating a platform exclusively devoted to critical engagement with "the documentary" as an art-form. The contributions to both the first and this, the second edition of the festival are connected not through affinities in subject matter, but by a reflective stance towards their medium: they never "use" the documentary without first drawing attention to the tacit assumptions inherent in the form itself. Above all, the festival was created to provide an outlet for various uses of documentary strategies in and across different disciplines. It is no longer the technologically reproduced image – whether photographic or cinematic, analogue or digital – that forms the exclusive basis of the documentary form. The very definition of a "document", as becomes increasingly clear, is inherently linked to procedures of contextualization and subject to negotiation. Similarly, documentaries themselves are the result of such negotiation, of acts of framing and particular modes of address and response. What is created between an original event or place and an author who seeks to represent and shape it, is further compounded by the encounter with a perceiving and interpreting audience.

The second Berlin Documentary Forum wishes to emphasize that the documentary exceeds the concept of the "document". The festival addresses the *documentary event*, in which we are not external to but rather implicated in the process of composing "what is real in reality". This encounter is always unique – we never look at "historical documents" twice in the same way, documents change their meaning in the act of encounter. The *documentary event* hints that the documentary form, too, is never stable and fixed, but needs to be updated, like the past. In addition, as the contributions to this second edition show, images, sounds, text, objects, geography, even fiction, and above all, the

human body can become *sites of the documentary*.

Something always appears to escape the grip of an image, most especially the idea of truthful representation. There seems to be too much movement even in a still photograph, since all images "travel" through space and time, coming from a distant place and a different moment in time. Berlin Documentary Forum 2, rather than identifying this evasion with the "invisible" *per se*, finds it in the gaps between images and their referents, the relation of the image to linear or non-linear time and continuity, in the paradoxes of perceptions of space, in (cinematic) gestures, in historical narratives or in our relation to life – and death. Alternative documentary models, as developed, presented and tested here, consist of manifold collisions of signs, referents, bodies, devices, spaces, times and gazes. It is to these collisions that we have devoted the second Berlin Documentary Forum.

In addition to the program of events, this publication includes contributions by participants of the Berlin Documentary Forum 2.

In screenings and discussions, filmmaker Harun Farocki, film historian Antje Ehmann and film theorist Volker Pantenburg identify a repertoire of filmic gestures, characteristic of camera movement in documentary film. Knowing that the camera is not a neutral recording device, they focus on its handling in documentaries from the 1960s to the present day, with special reference to Klaus Wildenhahn's early works and Miriam Fassbender's recent work. The camera position and angle, speed and panning, constitute a "controlled" or a "contingent" choreography that influences the construction of an image or an event. Printed here are the transcription of a conversation in preparation for the festival events and a text by Wildenhahn, "On Synthetic and Documentary Film" (1975), which outlines the conceptual foundations of Direct Cinema, its methods and forms.

The exhibition "A Blind Spot", organized by curator Catherine David inquires into the political potential of the fluid relationship between the photographic image and its referent. Photographs, videos, installations and drawings by eleven contemporary international artists are complemented by a program of film screenings from the

1970s and 80s, all regarded as photographic practices, which relate to the "subject" of photography. In his essay "Salutary Estrangement," the anthropologist Christopher Pinney describes a few of the exhibition's works, relating them to the discourse on the ethical and political claims of photography. Inquiring into the legitimacy of photography as a mode of diagnosis and a practice of prophecy, he calls attention to a sense of displacement, inherent in the historical tradition of photography. He examines the relationship between the image and what it represents in terms of what Walter Benjamin called "the soulful portrait."

Sylvère Lotringer's interpretation of Artaud's Theater of Cruelty is extended to address contemporary Western attitude towards death—and life. Looking at particular documentary attempts to frame crime, death and dying, he not only presents rare documents from his own comprehensive archive, but also addresses historical variations in coping with death, from public, collective display to private grief to complete suppression. His essay is complemented by a phone conversation, recorded last winter with Johnny Esposito, police videographer, discussing the ways in which the experience of death and contemporary digital technology impact the American judicial system.

The possibilities of networked production and networked engagement with reality are discussed in a text by filmmaker and writer Florian Schneider. His strategic proposals for the production of 'truth,' 'continuity' and new cognitive experiences in networked environments (as opposed to traditional methods of film and television) are implemented in a new online platform of the Berlin Documentary Forum. Entitled "issue zero", this on-line project is launched in collaboration with filmmaker Eyal Sivan, whose first "networked documentary" analyzes the ideology of montage and linear perception through the prism of Jean Luc Godard's films, addressing Israel and Palestine.

A conversation with Christine Meisner reveals her thoughts on historical narratives inscribed in the natural landscape of a place and how they resonate in the musical tradition of a people. The artist tells of her experiences traveling through the Mississippi Delta in the Southern United States, studying the legacy of Blues. Her

new piece about black agricultural laborers and their regained liberty in a segregated racist society is presented in a screening and live concert.

Traditional Japanese concepts of "place" foreground multiple, simultaneous perspectives of actual experiences and activity within a defined spatial-temporal continuum. The "given" objective aspect, and the "felt" subjective aspect of a place are understood as interrelated and integral. This traditional approach towards the structuring of place, which parallels the structuring of 'relationality' between material and immaterial bodies and spaces, is demonstrated in experimental Japanese documentary cinema. Film curator Eduardo Thomas addresses these issues in a program of screenings.

Other contributions to the festival, performed on stage, critically reflect on the transformative potential of the documentary. They include new pieces by theater director Rabih Mroué and choreographer Eszter Salamon, lectures by artist Hito Steyerl and cultural theorist Ella Shohat, as well as a screening program devised by artist Ben Russell.

My personal thanks go to the long-term collaborators for their on-going support of the conceptual development of the overall structure and content of the festival since its conception in 2009. I also wish to thank the artists, filmmakers and theorists who have contributed to the exhibition "A Blind Spot", to the "issue zero" project and to the live events of the four-day festival. I thank the Berlin Documentary Forum 2 team and the team of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt. I am grateful to the exhibition architects Kuehn Malvezzi and to the festival architects Kooperative für Darstellungspolitik, each have planned a unique spatial model that foster special correspondences between the works and ideas on display, the visiting public, and the building of the Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

Hila Peleg, Artistic Director of Berlin Documentary Forum







## CONTROL AND CONTINGENCY

EXCERPTS FROM A CONVERSATION  
BETWEEN ANTJE EHMANN, HARUN  
FAROCKI AND VOLKER PANTENBURG

Volker Pantenburg: How did you arrive at the notion of the gesture when you refer to documentary gestures?

Antje Ehmann: There have long been efforts to draw distinctions between the documentary and the fictional aspects of film. In the process there has above all been a focus on defining concepts and terms. When considering early film history, it transpires that it makes more sense to avoid the exclusion of certain sub-genres or hybrid forms, such as industrial films, educational films or ethnographic films, which frequently also incorporate fictional, scripted or re-enacted sequences, to refer not to documentary films but to “non-fiction films”. That of course raises questions such as the concept of reality that is taken as a basis. In this discussion theoretical analysis has paid very little attention to the role of the camera, which is generally understood as a neutral recording apparatus. In our project for the second Berlin Documentary Forum we attempt to address the issue from a different angle. We don’t want to take such an essentialist, defining approach, but strive instead to concentrate on the effect that is produced. That is why we talk of the *gesture* of the documentary approach and the fictional approach.

Harun Farocki: Even if it is perhaps impossible to say *what* constitutes the documentary or non-documentary approach, there are films that absolutely want to be one or the other. We call that the documentary gesture. On the one hand there are feature films that assert “we are a highly organised construction” and, through a particular way of handling the camera, choreography comes into being as a way of dealing with space, and a quite extraordinary position, which casts the only conceivable gaze upon an event. This slightly boastful stance, this tongue-in-cheek bragging with prior knowledge of what is about to happen, is an old topos in feature films. For example, the slow crane shot along the flag in “Gone with the Wind” (1939), revealing the giant army of war-wounded from the Civil War.

The converse example would be a feature film that says “I am rather documentary” and the camera can’t keep pace with events; in other words, the profilmic event is so autonomous that the camera is unable to seize the best image at every moment. A documentary film may equally assert “I’m incredibly genuine, I don’t know anything in advance and so I’m not always quite in focus and the lighting’s a bit clumsy” or, for a moment, it may not have the relevant object in the frame at all. Or indeed, in the fourth and last case, it may claim “I’m entirely in control of the circumstances and am actually a feature film”. That means that if you’re lucky, for a moment, the audience might take a documentary film for a feature film, or vice-versa.

Ehmann: To put it in a nutshell, you could say that the camera chases after events in documentary films, whereas in feature films it anticipates the events. We find it particularly interesting when these genres or gestures typical of genres imitate each other.

Farocki: The documentary film is actually very often a hybrid form, comprising elements of *mise-en-scène*, descriptive, atmospheric moments, yet also statements, interviews or commentary sections in which a longish text serves to introduce an image that is allegorized, that becomes a symbol, or is used to draw conclusions. Even the most rapidly produced journalistic reportage format made for the evening news comprises staged sequences, such as a politician making a statement. You see him take a few steps before he steps up to the rostrum to start to speak. This narrative element emulates the approach adopted in feature films. If a documentary film makes any use of angle/reverse-angle sequences, drawing on this form of dissecting space, it displays a marked resemblance to procedures that are classical hallmarks of feature films.

Ehmann: One characteristic of the fictional, the story film, is that the crew shooting the film is familiar with the staged event. The events are stage-managed in order to function in terms of a particular narrative intention. The documentary camera can assume an observational standpoint in respect of profilmic events. If a feature film uses a documentary camera style, it acts as if it is uncontrolled, observing, and works by evoking an analogy between natural ways of

looking and filmic ways of looking. Conversely, a documentary film may act as if it were a feature film, avoiding spontaneity and multiple strata of meanings.

Farocki: As theorists have often stated, every film is also a documentary film about its own production or what happens on the set. In other words, it is literally a *mise-en-scène* that is not entirely controllable and contains elements of surprise.

Ehmann: Or then there’s also something that often crops up in the Dardenne brothers’ films: they show events unfolding as if in real time with the camera calmly observing. For example, in “Le Fils” (“The Son”, 2002) where many of the scenes in the carpentry workshop are shot with great artistry in a single, long take. I would view these methods as being almost those of Direct Cinema, this non-intervention in the profilmic. Observing at length and not introducing edits. There are scenes that last for more than seven minutes without one single cut. Really astonishing!

Farocki: Or think about the scene in “Le Fils” when the boy slips off the ladder during an exercise and is carried on someone’s shoulder. But the man carrying him has back trouble and the burden grows too heavy for him. When you look at this St. Christopher scene, you see that it’s an unedited take, but staged using an incredibly refined *mise-en-scène* of the sequence; firstly with events unfolding rapidly, and yet, secondly, shot so elliptically that there is nevertheless a really pronounced density to it. But it isn’t the kind of concentrated density you usually get with editing, where you see someone start hammering, cut, move in a little closer, cut, some time has elapsed. That is exactly what the film avoids. The film nonetheless succeeds in creating this condensed depiction through this practice of ellipsis. On the one hand you have a feeling that it’s incredibly sophisticated, and at the same time a sense that it is completely documentary, and nothing is controlled. Both elements are present in the Dardennes’ work.

Ehmann: Or the way the camera in “Rosetta” (1999) follows the lead character through the undergrowth in real time.

Pantenburg: On the one hand, the issue is clearly that the documentary and the non-documentary gesture are linked to particular narrative practices. I wonder whether the camera is in a sense the instance in terms of which such questions are to a large extent determined.

Ehmann: I think this aspect is very important and has often been overlooked in film theory, precisely because it is linked to a particular technological background. Direct Cinema did not emerge until the 1960s when mobile 16 mm cameras became available, then there was a move to working with sync sound, and film-making became increasingly flexible. A further new phase began when video technology appeared on the scene. I think these aspects are sometimes given short shrift when films are only approached and analysed semiotically. I reckon that an insistence on paying attention to the camera might serve as a slight corrective to that.

Farocki: Of course there are also other strategies; the documentary camera is only one of many. In this event we will first of all seek to concentrate on the camera. To put it in very simple terms: is the camera shaky when it is looking for something or does it always glide elegantly into the most ideal position? We plan first of all to enumerate and comment on these various stances, these gestures.

Pantenburg: A festival like the Berlin Documentary Forum needs a strong concept of the documentary, of what constitutes documentary practice. Against that backdrop I find it interesting that you call into question the notion that this refers to a category defining a fixed corpus of works, and yet, at the same time, you wish to adhere to the concept by asserting that there are documentary gestures, which may appear in feature films, in documentary films and also in television reportage. The point being that the crucial issue is always the particular blend of documentary and other gestures.

Ehmann: To put it in a nutshell, you might say we are asserting that the documentary dimension is so strong that it even infects feature films.

Farocki: Yes, in terms of what one could dub “style”, the camera as a stylistic element. In my



own films, for example in “Nicht ohne Risiko” (“Nothing Ventured”, 2004), I realised that I enjoyed editing for a while in a way that makes people think: “That has to be shot with two cameras, it just wouldn’t be possible otherwise”. That might mean cutting from one figure to another at just the right moment, like in a feature film, with the other person in an interaction responding precisely to something, as they would in a feature film, for example nodding to show they have understood, trying to interrupt and finally interrupting and all those things. And in the middle of that I suddenly include the shakiest pan from A to B that you could imagine, in order to show that we only have one camera and naturally can’t capture everything. I always thought that was just because I enjoy fooling with the audience, taking them for a ride a little in the way I tell a story. Then I worked out that it’s actually something more banal after all. Documentary filmmakers have to prove that they are not dilettantes – even if they are brave enough to make a contingency film, in other words, a film in which they are not entirely in control of what they are narrating. There is a great fear – particularly among cinematographers – a need to prove that they aren’t too stupid to get the shot in focus, get the light right, etcetera. They do allow themselves to have moments like that though; one example might be Klaus Wildenhahn, who pans boldly onto a figure and only then pulls focus, zooms back a bit. In a film like “Heiligabend auf St. Pauli” (1968; no English title, literally: Christmas Eve in St. Pauli) you can see how the film first of all demonstrates that the camera is in a good spot, that it can capture the evening nicely, dissect it and then reassemble it. After that it is possible to let something slip a little bit off track. These so-called production values are also a very pronounced influence in documentary films.

Ehmann: Just yesterday we discovered something similar in the great serial “Breaking Bad” (2008–ff.). It sometimes uses speeded-up sequences, with events related at a rapid pace ... There are jump-cuts; the camera really is set at an angle, as if it couldn’t see straight. That’s a wonderful example of a serial with high production values that nonetheless explicitly incorporates this element.

Pantenburg: Would it be possible to look at this from a more precise historical perspective? Has

a repertoire of gestures developed over the course of film history that a clever, well-trained director can draw on at any time? I don’t mean that at all in the sense of randomly selecting elements, these gestures continue of course to be codified and to play a specific narrative role, yet it seems to me that particularly in cinema over the last few years the great skill lies in the way filmmakers draw on precisely this kind of documentary or fictional gesture, which has developed over film history, and then repeatedly created something surprising from these connections. “Breaking Bad” would be one example of that.

Farocki: It is probably like cinematic depictions of dreams. In the past you’d have to show someone lying down and closing their eyes, then the image would blur via a dissolve-trick, like an expanse of water, and you’d understand that it was a dream. In contrast, in a film such as “Don’t Look Now” (1973), you never know which temporal plane you are on, whether it’s a flash-forward or a flashback; if something is imagined or not. At some point this form became a narrative standard. Nowadays a documentary can also take the liberty of jumping backwards and forwards in its chronology without having to add some form of intertitles. In 1992 I heard a lecture by Thomas Elsaesser that I liked a great deal. His argument was that mainstream film in the past had to seem to take everything it was narrating really seriously. As a result, in the early Bond films there were perhaps episodes that could be described as humorous; Lotte Lenya for example in her factory of terror or things like that. However, it was only later that the Bond films became parodies of themselves. I think that over time the role of the camera and the narrator has also been transformed. You have to be much cooler about doing that now. It’s no problem to show a series of poorly filmed images one after another but you nonetheless have to demonstrate your competence.

Pantenburg: “Heiligabend auf St. Pauli” was shot at Christmas in 1967. I’d like to mention a quotation from Wildenhahn that I found interesting because it touches on a point you just mentioned, namely that the documentary gaze, although it might mean an unprofessional approach, must nonetheless set itself apart from dilettantism – Wildenhahn said: “The long-serving craftsman and creator would tend to say, ‘Anyone could

just come along and sell his plaster painting as being more than just utilitarian, opening the door wide to dilettantes, dreamy idealism, laziness, resistance to learning.’ There are two points I’d like to make about that. Firstly: why not? And secondly: an excessive supply of production teaches skills in drawing distinctions.” You introduced the concepts of control and contingency as two important polarities. When I watched Wildenhahn’s film again, I realised that he works with contingency on many levels. First of all there is of course this framing setting: a particular place, a pub, and a special point in time; Christmas Eve in St. Pauli. After that, however, a whole series of unpredictable elements come into play: the way people talk, the dialogues, whether fights break out or not etcetera. Despite all of that, 12 or 13 hours are condensed enormously here into 50 minutes, which is an incredible dramaturgical achievement. I wondered whether it would be possible in the first instance to identify the documentary gestures (in your sense of the term) by considering the visual plane, which encompasses camera movements and so on, or whether the aspect of control is only introduced subsequently through editing and its quasi-narrative compression.

Farocki: But camerawork anticipates editing too. When I refer to the camerawork, I am also thinking of the editing. Precisely because during editing you decide what will be shown and what will not be shown. Camera teams learn very early on in shooting documentaries not to film in a way that is impossible to edit. That’s why there’s an almost automatic 20-second phasing to always allow the option of recording something else in case what you’re filming right then is flawed. That means the film is already filmed that way, for example automatically following the pub-keeper if the camera operator notices that this is the figure holding everything together. There’s always a slight tendency in documentary film to do that. There are more texts warning about the danger of Direct Cinema than films in that category ... Many years ago already, I read an article in *Filmkritik* explaining that you should always follow one of the protagonists. That means that during shooting anyone making Direct Cinema will naturally readily “cast” a figure like Dieter Bohlen (former member of the German band Modern Talking and a judge on Germany’s reality talent show [Deutschland sucht den Superstar], a spin-off of American Idol.

Bohlen personifies mainstream pop and the concept of “casting-shows” on German television.) ... Simply the character that is the most interesting or expressive.

Ehmann: That’s very interesting with reference to control and contingency. The contingency in Direct Cinema or in the documentary world is in a sense relinquished, yet is controlled by selected protagonists who tell a conflict-ridden story of their own accord. I think it’s funny that this is always critiqued for being an uncritical practice when, actually, it is rather one of the laws of the documentary that you develop an eye for the subject matter.

Pantenburg: At the festival you’ll be showing Wildenhahn’s “Der Reifenschneider und seine Frau” (1968/69). What does Wildenhahn represent? Are you interested primarily in this particular film, or in methods and forms from the 1960s and how these took shape, with this film as an example?

Ehmann: Wildenhahn has a very good grasp of his craft but accepts that some aspects are not under his control. As we said earlier with reference to “Heiligabend auf St. Pauli”, he doesn’t mind if someone walks right through the frame or is standing slap-bang in the middle of his shot ...

Farocki: Or that the most important figure is unfortunately not visible because they’ve moved so far away ...

Pantenburg: Or if he walks into the frame himself. (Everyone laughs)

Ehmann: Another of our examples is the Romanian film “Moartea domnului Lazarescu” (“The Death of Mr Lazarescu”, 2005) by Cristi Puiu. It has fantastic flawed panning shots, as if the camera couldn’t work out where the protagonist was, and then corrected its position. I think this is highly artificial – what I’m interested in is that tension between the people who walk in front of Wildenhahn’s camera and this artificial approach.

Pantenburg: In terms of the phenomenon, at first it’s not possible to distinguish one from the other. In both cases there’s a pan that peters out into nothing.

Farocki: That really is a highly peculiar quotation from the documentary realm. Cristi Puiu does the same in “Aurora” (2010), although that film has a less documentary look than “The Death of Mr Lazarescu”. There again you find these contrived *ersatz* panning shots, this pseudo-panning.

Pantenburg: Those hybrid forms ... That reminds me of a text by Jean-Louis Comolli from 1969 on Direct Cinema. He gives a series of examples, including Jean Eustache or Jacques Rivette, directors who had great confidence in the contingent. Comolli talks about “accumulation as a practice”. You shoot a lot of footage and trust that a narrative will emerge from the material. It is a kind of deferred exercise of control, which in the first instance accords a great deal of space to contingency. The films are what would generally be dubbed “feature films”, works of fiction, even if their narratives are imbued on many levels with entirely aleatory elements. He makes this very clear via the notion of Direct Cinema how misleading it is if people believe that “direct” is tantamount to “unmediated”, “one-to-one” or “objective”. Comolli emphasises that this directness is always the outcome of techniques, materials, the mobility of camera and sound equipment and all those things. This question slots neatly into what you wish to show: positions from the 1960s and the way that documentary gestures have gained considerable ground in the last ten, 20 years. How would you describe the relationship between these two points in time? Have these gestures in a sense been almost re-invented as video and digital video cameras have become available? Or what factors help explain why there are so many interesting uses of these documentary gestures?

Ehmann: I can't answer that question in general terms right now. One interesting point does occur to me though. The way that “Sombre” (1998) by Philippe Grandrieux is shot you might actually think that it would only be possible with video, because it's too risky. His working method involves not telling the camera operator what it's all about. The camera man shoots a scene that is arranged but doesn't know what is happening, and that is done over and over again ...

Farocki: And he never repeats the scene the same way, but keeps on developing it, and has

to reconstruct the sequence later from these fragments.

Ehmann: Exactly. And that makes you think that this actually stems from a background in video. But Grandrieux shot “Sombre” on film. There are camera strategies or practices that could already have been deployed in the 60s, but then in turn there are practices that film has learnt from video and then re-appropriated for the realm of film.

Pantenburg: There are similarly confusing elements in Claire Denis's films, for example, when someone walks into their own point-of-view shot. There is a strange shift in agency here: a sudden change from a highly reduced narrative stance, an I-perspective, into the external role of an objective narrator. This kind of amalgam, in which minimal shifts between various narrative options become visible, would be interesting for your project too.

Farocki: That's right. But here we could also talk about your examination of the pan as a formal strategy and a method.

Pantenburg: The impulse to reflect on what camera pans actually are came to me through Gerhard Friedl's films in which panning shots are a strikingly prominent element. You'd have to describe those films – “Knittelfeld – Stadt ohne Geschichte” (“Knittelfeld – A Town without History”, 1997) and “Hat Wolff von Amerongen Konkursdelikte begangen?” (“Did Wolff von Amerongen Commit Bankruptcy Crimes?”, 2004) as documentaries – but the pans deployed there are very much slanted towards the control end of the spectrum and are thought out carefully. You can see that Friedl and his cinematographer have given a great deal of thought to where the camera is placed, whether it will pan from here to there by 180 degrees or 90 degrees. Yet nevertheless what actually happens within this clearly defined spatial and temporal framework is left to chance. The off-screen voice commenting adds another entirely different element, a peculiar narrative stance *vis-à-vis* the material. That was the point of departure for thinking about panning shots ...

Harun Farocki: Do you mean autonomous pans or pans in general?

Pantenburg: At first I concentrated on autonomous pans, by which I mean pans that are not rooted in a narrative intention and do not follow planned events in the images. That's because this seems to be the *modus* in which panning shots reveal the most about their nature, because they are most self-aware in this form. This holds true for experimental films, documentaries or feature films: the possibility of drawing a distinction between the documentary approach and the fictional approach seems to me to be in the first instance partly suspended when it comes to individual camera movements. The issue is rather how the documentary approach is actually generated. Does it arise through particularly panning shots or is it a phenomenon that comes from montage? Or is it produced solely as a consequence of the fact that in the profilmic there is in a sense no narrative; is it perhaps about the absence of narrative? To put it in slightly different terms: is the documentary angle or the fictional angle inscribed in simple techniques like autonomous panning shots?

Farocki: A panning shot that is motivated is clearly a cinematographic technique: you follow a protagonist because you do not wish to break off the narrative strand around that figure. An autonomous panning shot can also be a cinematographic technique: for example if the camera pans to show that someone is standing in a particular spot, such as a policeman observing the scene. In most cases, however, an autonomous panning shot expresses a switch from a narrative to a descriptive mode: we turn our gaze away from our hero and take a look at the world around him. I believe there is a gestural component in every panning shot. It is not just a particular technique but also symbolises an author's attitude.

**Antje Ehmann** is an author, film scholar and film curator based in Berlin.

**Harun Farocki** is a filmmaker and author based in Berlin.

**Volker Pantenburg** is a film scholar and teaches at Bauhaus University Weimar.



## SALUTARY ESTRANGEMENT

NOTES ON THE EXHIBITION "A BLIND SPOT"

CHRISTOPHER PINNEY

Isn't it the task of the photographer – descendant of the augurs and haruspices – to reveal guilt and point out the guilty in his pictures?

Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

We can easily imagine Benjamin's suggestion – made in the midst of a discussion of Eugène Atget – conscripted as the motto of a certain form of engaged photojournalism intent on pointing out the guilty. But his proposal that photographers might be thought of as the descendants of the augurs and haruspices points us to a very different manner of grasping the relation between the image and what it represents.

Augury, a Greek science entailing the close study of bird habits, was perfected by the Romans who elected a college of augurs "who alone were authorized to 'take the auspices', that is, read the signs".<sup>2</sup> Auspices were taken before any important public or military event, and might involve the observation of sacred chickens taken by armies into war, or the augur's demarcation with a wand of the *templum*, the area of the sky in which wild birds were to be observed.<sup>3</sup> Haruspices, Etruscan diviners, who came to rival the augurs, also sought to discover the will of the Gods but through the study of entrails (*exta*) or, sometimes, lightning whose frequency and directionality was pregnant with meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Atget, in Benjamin's reading, was a forerunner of Surrealism, "the first to disinfect the stifling atmosphere generated by conventional portrait photography in the age of decline".<sup>5</sup> His images of a mysteriously empty Paris evacuated the photograph of the face, its standard default signifier, in favor of a different physiognomy. Looking for what is "unremarked, forgotten, cast adrift"<sup>6</sup> Atget's city is "cleared out" and offers a "salutary estrangement between man and his surroundings".<sup>7</sup>

His deserted cobbled streets, silent courtyards and frozen shop-fronts worked against the "exotic, romantically sonorous names of ... cities"<sup>8</sup> as Benjamin memorably put it and engineered a transition from a conventional facial physiognomy

to a public physiognomy. Whereas conventional portraiture took the human face as its *fons et origo* of expressive signification, Atget pioneered a different mode of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari described as "facialization".<sup>9</sup> In Deleuze's account, in "Cinema 1: The Movement-Image", facialization – a form of landscaped physiognomy – is approached through filmic close-ups which present the face as if it were a landscape from which "the viewer seeks to fathom meaning from its darker or hidden regions".<sup>10</sup> Atget facialized Paris and in the process moved photography away from the human face as the ground zero of intention, meaning and clarity towards a different and more opaque topography.

Early photography, if we are to believe Benjamin, likewise deposited aura in its "ultimate point of retrenchment" – the face. The technology for the production of these faces created a new time-space: "The procedure itself caused the subject to focus his life in the moment rather than hurrying on past it; during the considerable period of the exposure, the subject ... grew in to the picture, in the sharpest contrast with appearances in a snapshot."<sup>11</sup> In consequence, daguerreotypes transcribed peculiarly powerful individualized physiognomies. Benjamin cites the photographer Karl Dauthendey's anxiety about the facial presence in these early images: "We were abashed by the distinctness of these human images, and believed that the tiny little faces in the picture could see us."<sup>12</sup>

But for Benjamin the concern with what he calls "the soulful portrait" is a derailment of what is "more native to the camera". The face was a deviation, a detour, from photography's necessary work. Just as psychoanalysis permits us access to the instinctual unconscious,<sup>13</sup> so photography – when it follows what is truly "native" to it, allows us to discover the optical unconscious around which swirl practices of prophecy and divination. Benjamin describes Karl Blossfeldt's close-up plant photography in which are revealed "the forms of ancient columns in horse willow, a bishop's crosier in the ostrich fern, totem poles in tenfold enlargements of chestnut and maple shoots, and gothic tracery in the fuller's thistle".<sup>14</sup>

Here technology reveals itself as a magical process, a mode of diagnosis. Photography, as Benjamin continues in a crucial and justly oft-cited phrase "reveals in this material physiognomic

aspects, image worlds, which dwell in the smallest things – meaningful yet covert enough to find a hiding place in waking dreams, but which, enlarged and capable of formulation, make the difference between technology and magic visible as a thoroughly historical variable.<sup>15</sup>

Atget, who has been eulogized as the formal pioneer of photographic modernism, and who prefigures practitioners as diverse as Walker Evans and Bernd and Hilla Becher,<sup>16</sup> can be figured as anticipating the particular estrangement apparent in the work of all the artists in “A Blind Spot”. From Atget to Thierry Knauff’s “Le Sphinx” (1986) and David Goldblatt’s “The Structure of Things Then” (1998) is an easy leap. Both Knauff and Goldblatt also take landscape and architecture as the elements of their non-facial physiognomy. “With Atget,” Benjamin wrote in the “Work of Art” essay, “photographs become standard evidence for historical occurrences, and acquire a hidden political significance”.<sup>17</sup> Knauff’s film animates an Atgetian sensibility, much as Michael Haneke’s “White Ribbon” (“Das weiße Band. Eine deutsche Kindergeschichte”, 2009) gives cinematic form to August Sander’s photographic aesthetic. “Le Sphinx” commences with a tracking shot along a hedge that prefaces an Atget-like vista before stopping at the outward-facing sphinx which punctuates the landscape. This symbol of arcane knowledge and of desire is then confronted by the camera “full-face”, presenting the viewer with a “face”, but not a human one (it appears to be female as in the Greek incarnation)<sup>18</sup> grafted to an animal body. It is famously blank, a transitional zone from the motor of the “four-eyed machine” gesturing to a dispersed space of other physiognomic forms pregnant with political significance. The voice-over layers increasingly static images in which seemingly random human forms ally themselves with this problematic face with fragments from Jean Genet’s 1983 text “Quatre heures à Chatila” (“Four hours in Shatila”).<sup>19</sup> Knauff’s opening extract from Genet’s text also opens up the question of what the photograph can and cannot reveal. The photograph, like a television screen has only two dimensions and cannot be walked through. For Genet, walking through Shatila and Sabra “resembled a game of hopscotch”, a three-dimensional kinesthetic as he threads his way through and across corpses “bent or arched, with their feet pushing against one wall and their heads pressing

against the other”.<sup>20</sup> Photography refuses this, refuses to show how “you must jump over bodies as you walk along”. Centered on the archetype of an undecipherable physiognomy “Le Sphinx” establishes an experimental space for a different deterritorialized faciality providing, without doubt, evidence of “historical occurrences” with “hidden political significance”.

A similar fascination with the transitional and translational space between faces and bodies and bodies and spaces, informs Jeff Wall’s desolate “Cold storage” (2007). An empty space yawns in front of the viewer embodying, at first sight, everything that the embodied spectator is not: concrete, decay, the chill of death. But it is an image that slowly reveals itself as the *alter ego*, or inverse mirror, of the viewer, a space created for the preservation of flesh. Emptied, hollowed out, its oblivion declares an absence, an absence which is its *raison d’être*, what was once breathing, warm, flesh.

In Goldblatt’s magisterial work the political significance is rarely hidden, but the project explores a historical occurrence of colonization and spatial separation, which resonates with the one which informs “Le Sphinx”. A foundational history still, literally, sprouts in the remnants of Jan van Riebeeck’s hedge of wild almond, the subject of one of Goldblatt’s images. Planted in 1660 to exclude indigenous Khoikhoi from the Dutch East India Company’s gardens, a portion of the hedge still thrives in Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town. In another of Goldblatt’s documents Table Mountain appears mysterious and mist-shrouded, detached from the suburban lawns and bird-baths of the “White Group Area”, Bloubergstrand, as though a quite distinct continent. Elsewhere a black domestic worker has placed her bed on tins filled with sand so that a husband or lover could be hidden during police raids enforcing pass laws. The Group Areas Act of 1950 enforced the provision of separate accommodation for black and colored workers in white-owned properties and it was illegal for partners to stay in employer-provided rooms. This image, supercharged as it is by the newspaper headline “Moon Men on the Way Back” reveals the manner in which the “structures” that so compel Goldblatt are not only physical forms (luxurious bungalows, squalid township housing, the paraphernalia of state history) although Goldblatt is certainly fascinated by these

too. Structures are also relations and disconnections – structuring and structurations. Black and white, earth and moon, near and far: there is a set of constellations, orbits, parabolas that constitute Goldblatt’s “facialization” and reek of augurs and haruspices.

When the Dutch first established their revictualizing garden at the Cape in 1652 the Khoikhoi had as Goldblatt tells us in one of his extended captions to the series, willingly exchanged sheep and cattle for the tobacco and copper that the new visitors brought. Within a few years conflicts over access to water and grazing intensified, culminating in an attack by the Khoikhoi in 1659 in which they “attacked farms, destroyed crops, and seized livestock”. Subsequently van Riebeeck arranged for the planting of the nine kilometer-long wild almond hedge, this plant being sufficiently dense to obstruct the passage of “people and livestock ... except at controlled posts”.

One could easily imagine this history, and Goldblatt’s photograph, to be the prompt for Efrat Shvily’s “100 Years” a series of, as she puts it, “thickets, without path, horizon or outlet”. The images are tangled, skeined, beautiful and disturbing. These dendritic “arabesques” simultaneously evoke for Shvily the centennial of the Jewish National Fund which sponsored forest planting in Palestine throughout the twentieth century and “the leaf-covered walls of the castle where sleeping beauty lays dormant and unaware”. In the Brothers Grimm tale the sleeping beauty’s century-long slumber delayed a curse whereby she will pierce her hand with a spindle and die. Forest and brambles were conjured to protect her: they were insulation and a kind of shroud. Like van Riebeeck’s hedge, JNF forests have been a mechanism of obstruction and control facilitating the “redemption” of absentee Palestinian land. “Nature” is made to fill in and overwrite contested human landscapes, as it has in many other settler-colonial societies.

The curiously powerful compaction of distances and sense of the political grotesque that Goldblatt captures is narrated more expansively in Eric Baudelaire’s “L’anabase de May et Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi et 27 années sans images” (“The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi, and 27 Years without Images”, 2011). The Japanese Red Army’s

27 years in Beirut collaborating with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (of which the depressing low-point was the Lod Airport massacre) is mediated by Xenophon’s account of the army of ten thousand Greek mercenaries hired by Cyrus the Younger to remove his brother Artaxerxes II from the throne of Persia and who then wander lost – estranged – in the middle of an unknown country (the “Anabasis”, known more commonly in English translation as the “Persian Expedition”). Baudelaire’s embarkation to the interior and return to the shore, details Fusako’s continuing incarceration and Adachi’s travel embargo. Adachi, a major avant-garde filmmaker helps Baudelaire in Japan in return for film footage from Beirut, his beloved city of conflict and defeat, hoping for heroic narrative. Baudelaire can only offer images of Beirut’s Ferrari dealership and waves crashing over the harbor seawall.

Xenophon took the augur’s advice when setting out from Ephesus to join Cyrus. An eagle had screamed at his right, but this was an ambivalent sign, interpreted as a sign of the great rather than ordinary man by a soothsayer but also signifying the necessity of hard work and the possibility of failure. Baudelaire’s “Anabasis” is saturated with similar signs and a corresponding set of doubts.

Recall Genet as he is voiced in “Le Sphinx” marking the difference between photography’s flatness and his experience walking in Chatila and Sabra as akin to a “game of hopscotch”. “I stepped over bodies as one crosses chasms” he writes later. This question of movement in relation to experience and to the image, and more precisely the image as constructed through a pathway of movement is engaged by Melik Ohanian’s “DAYS: I See What I Saw and What I Will See”, which enacts something akin to an *Anabasis* for the railway age. Film and railroads have run on “parallel tracks” since the Lumière Brothers.<sup>21</sup> Cinema’s appropriation from the railway age of miniaturized dolly track was conventionally used to invisibilize the process of producing the smooth tracking shot. The infrastructure of track guaranteed the absence of those erratic signs that might inadvertently betray the fact that we were looking through a moving camera. Foregrounding what he terms a “labor camp” in Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates, it is natural that Ohanian should make

hyper-visible the – “labored” –material conditions of the moving image – 100 meters of track which the camera smoothly negotiates in four minutes each day. These tracks were then dismantled and reinstalled to permit the onward progression of the camera, past aggregate yards, factories, and workers’ temporary housing. Filmed over 11 days and nights the end product was 1,100 meters of movement unfurled over 42 minutes of time.

The coming and going, and the sense of circularity to which *anabasis* gestures, hangs suspended in Vincent Meessen’s remarkable “Vita Nova” (2009) which also takes us back with an absolute directness and explicitness to the face and its effects. The face in question is in the first instance the celebrated young black imperial loyalist who appeared on the cover of the copy of *Paris Match* that Roland Barthes was handed at the barber’s. In “Mythologies”, in the second section on ‘Myth Today’ this is presented with memorable casualness: “I am at the barber’s, and copy of *Paris Match* is offered to me”. And on the cover that famous image of “a young Negro in a French uniform ... saluting ... his eyes uplifted” and signifying – so Barthes concludes – “that France is a great Empire” through its “purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness”. In the second instance the face that has the power to signify in “Vita Nova” appears in profile on the edge of an image of the funeral of Louis-Gustave Binger the colonizer of Côte d’Ivoire, founding member of the Academy of Colonial Sciences and founder of the Colonial Party. The profile – unmistakably that of Barthes himself – belongs to Binger’s grandson who will later publish photographs of his grandfather un-named. But Binger’s name endures in the surreal semi-abandoned structures of Bingerville which survives as a photograph in architecture of the referent. Like Barthes’s photograph it preserves the there-then in the here-now in all its exorbitance and crammed-ness. Bingerville, like any photograph, records an unsettling double temporality.

Meessen’s very rich film resonates with Ohanian’s “DAYS” in its concern with the temporality of images. The film entwines a set of concerns with the legacies of images both at a formal semiotic, and a political level. Barthes’s ideas and his biography thus become bundled with a meditation on enduring neo-colonial practices in

Africa which guarantee that boy soldiers still salute the flag. Barthes may have gone (he “died in the last century”) but the timbre of his voice endures, for as he argued, words will never die, they only change, becoming “avatars, reincarnations”. One of Meessen’s central questions is how spaces remain the same, as at Bingerville where ordinary time seems to fail. Meessen notes the memory of the contemporary and also perhaps a memory of the future. “How do we define this disorganization of time?” he asks before proposing as possible answers “History, hysteria?”.

For Meessen the central problem is how one might “refuse to accept a heritage”. How might old images and names be re-used and given new contexts? He suggests that images, and history, can only be constituted as such if we choose to view them as such (as history) and that this possibility is predicated on our exclusion from them. In this respect he shares Genet’s distrust. Genet had contrasted the two-dimensional image with the experiential journey across “chasms”. Meessen contrasts a history that mobilizes documents as “witnesses” (that is, doomed to repeat a stale memory) rather than narratives filled with proliferating “voices”. It is the iterability of language rather than the stasis of the image which offers the probability of salutary estrangement here. “The proper noun is a simulation ... a phantasmagoria” he enthuses, suggesting a thin veneer that can be cracked to reveal a world of unfolding alignments and re-alignments. It is when the image becomes a “voice” that it is capable of self-estrangement.

Joachim Koester’s narcographic investigations of the parallelism between photography’s double temporality and opium and hashish seem able to mobilize photography’s temporal unconscious as the alibi for analytic narratives of great grace and insight. In his beautiful text, “Nanking Restaurant” (2006), Koester documents the East India Company’s coercive promotion of opium in China and the effacement of this narcopolitics both in conventional historiography and the remaining structures of Calcutta – the command centre for this destructive trade – to probe beneath the surface of a contemporary amnesia, just like the “marvelous power” of opium itself (as De Quincey had suggested in “Confessions of an English Opium Eater”, 1845). Koester notes that for De Quincey opium was a

“portal” permitting access into the “secret inscriptions of the mind” and he describes his own photo-narcography as an intervention which permits the “bottom layer” to “be excavated by applying the right ‘chemical’” to retrieve “seemingly lost incidents”. Koester’s tactic is applied in this exhibition to Calcutta as the imploded residue of the global traffic in opium, to Alamut Castle in Iran the ground zero of the “Hashishin” legend. All these become locations for the camera, deployed like a surgeon’s hand to pierce the sedimentation of epochs. Just as De Quincey insisted that it was magical opium (and its “marvelous agency”), and not the opium-eater, who was the hero of his tale, so Koester develops a profound investigation of the magical agency of photography and its narcochemical ability to recover a past lost to ordinary human vision.

Ineffable alignments and re-alignments run through Hassan Khan’s remarkable work. Pulsing lights mutate into piscatorial augurs which in turn mutate into a Kaaba disco projector around which participants in a fleetingly-seen street-dispute enact some arcane choreography in the weirdly entertaining “Jewel” (2010). This is the realm of augurs and haruspices: random signs denied any decoding. Estrangement, finally, is also at work in Christopher Williams’ exemplary displacement from the conventional physiognomy of pity. “Angola to Vietnam” (1989) consists of 27 photographs of Leopold Blaschka’s glass models of botanical specimens from the Harvard Botanical Museum’s Ware Collection. Ethiopia is represented, for instance, by the familiar *Coffee Arabica*, Indonesia by *Musa paradisiaca* or the Banana: most of the other specimens are less recognizable. Viewing the images in 2012 one wonders how Syria and Bahrain would figure in an updated metaphorical register of glass botanical specimens. Photographically the series may dispose the viewer to think of Karl Blossfeldt’s enlargements of plant forms and it is difficult to imagine that these images and Benjamin’s discussion of them do not inform Williams’ strategy (his interest in *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) is well known). Recall that for Benjamin, Blossfeldt’s “astonishing plant photographs” served as the paradigmatic instance of what is “more native to the camera than the atmospheric landscape or the soulful portrait”. The “soulful portrait” is the default setting of a certain type of engaged photography capable of manifesting

what has recently been termed a “cruel radiance”. Williams’ project catalogues countries named in Amnesty International’s 1985 report as the sites of political disappearance. Much could doubtless be said about the fragility of these glass models and the tenderness of vulnerable human bodies when subject to ruthless state power. But this would be to inscribe the fixity of the proper noun, to insist on a stable metaphorical correspondence between two registers whereas Williams seems to be insisting on its dialectical and simulatory character, its phantasmagoric ability to transform, its “graphic of iterability”.<sup>23</sup> While insisting that Blossfeldt’s photographs revealed more of what is “native to the camera” Benjamin articulates the “optical unconscious” as a set of proliferating associations that allow us to re-vision the world: as we have seen, ancient columns appear in horse willow, a crosier in an ostrich fern, gothic tracery in a thistle.

In her recent book the philosopher and cultural theorist Ariella Azoulay makes a case for the ethical and political claims of photography – its civil contract. However it remains strikingly tied to physiognomy rather than the experimental and dispersed facialization that features in this exhibition. It is the human face which frequently hails Azoulay – claiming, as she writes, “my civil gaze” and Azoulay as the “spectator” who enters the civil contract with these faces. Azoulay makes a case for what Michael Fried would condemn as “theatrical” images, images which acknowledge the presence of a (belated) beholder and collapse the separation implied by what, following Martin Heidegger, she terms the “conquest of the world as picture”.<sup>24</sup> The spectator and the photographic citizen exist in a mutual state of becoming. Through prolonged observation the spectator “has the power to turn a still photograph into a theater stage on which what has been frozen in the photograph comes to life”, Azoulay suggests.<sup>25</sup> That it is the human face and human eyes that play the central role in reanimating the ethical relationship between image and beholder is made distinctly clear in Azoulay’s discussion of the haunting daguerreotypes of African-American slaves made by Joseph T. Zealey for Louis Agassiz in 1850. She notes that the images were made to support the racist polygenist agenda of Agassiz, but that lengthy beholding of the images – particularly of the two women identified as “Drana” and “Delia”

makes manifest what Benjamin termed photography's "tiny spark of contingency".

Both women are seated, their clothing pulled down to their waist, their heads "turned almost imperceptibly to the right, gaze directed straight ahead – almost certainly towards the site from which they received instructions in the course of the photography session". Azoulay finds herself occupying the location upon which their "piercing gaze" falls, attempting to understand what makes these images so "stately and glowing".<sup>26</sup> Part of the solution relates to the fact that the photograph is the trace of an *event*<sup>27</sup> – an actual physical occurrence that involved the participation, and agency, in some sense, of the women themselves. But more important is a mode of ethical address which emanates from these sitters' eyes and which can be reciprocated by a future beholder. In the time of the event itself the reciprocity of the gaze is declined and frustrated: "the situation in which they are gazed at is one that departs from the direct meeting of gazes between those present opposite each other".<sup>28</sup> Enslaver and enslaved look past each other, deferring the ethical revelation of the face. That revelation awaits a subsequent fulfillment, but we should be in no doubt that what is finally redeemed is something akin to the mutuality of expression which, as Darwin argued in "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals", transcends the vagaries of language,<sup>29</sup> something akin to what Jacques Derrida would categorize as metaphysics of presence. In the event-time of the making of those daguerreotypes, Zealey's sitters understood that the "gaze resting on them at [that] moment didn't exhaust the gaze to be directed at them". Note how that *to be* conjures a future state of fulfillment and completion of a gaze initiated during 1850 but directed to an external and deferred addressee. This completion, and suturing, is what Azoulay then delivers when she narrates how the gaze addressed to "someone who [was] not present" finally meets its true beholder who "undoes – albeit very slightly – its oppressive limits". Though Zealey's sitters knew nothing of the (future) "universal addressee, their gaze is addressed to someone like her whose existence they assume when they address their gaze to her, revealing something of their feelings toward their enslavers".<sup>30</sup>

Azoulay's narration is heroic and the temptation to be persuaded by this is immense. But the work collected in this exhibition serves to underline the ways in which it marks a retreat to an archaic physiognomy, an abandonment of the radicality of the new faciality which the works presented here start to explore. Azoulay's redemptive narrative echoes many aspects of Darwin's conclusions. In that work Darwin wrote of how: "The movements of expression in the face and body, whatever their origin may have been, are in themselves of much importance for our welfare. They serve as the first means of communication between the mother and her infant; she smiles approval, and thus encourages her child on the right path, or frowns disapproval. We readily perceive sympathy in others by their expression ...".<sup>31</sup> The historical lineament which over two centuries links Johann Kaspar Lavater's physiognomy, via Darwin, to the "face" of Azoulay's universal addressee serves to demonstrate the tenacity of the "soulful portrait". The salutary estrangement and the hidden political significance that Atget perfected, and whose legacy is grasped by the practitioners represented here, remain pitched in a battle against the desire for understandable faces and bodies; a desire for human agency that wears the patina of recognition, a desire for – in other words – *familiar expressions*.

**Christopher Pinney** is an anthropologist and art historian, currently Professor of Anthropology and Visual Culture at University College London.

- 1 Benjamin, W., 'Little History of Photography', in M. W. Jennings et. al. (eds) "Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings" vol. 2.2, 1931–4. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press 1999, p. 527. In the original: 'Nachfahr der Augurn und der Haruspexe', "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie", in "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit: Drei Studien zur Kunstsoziologie". Frankfurt a.M. 1977, p. 64.
- 2 Howatson, M. C. (ed.), "The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature" 2nd edition. Oxford 1997, p. 78.
- 3 Howatson, op. cit., p. 79.
- 4 Howatson, op. cit., p. 260.
- 5 Benjamin, 1999, op. cit., p. 518.
- 6 Benjamin, 1999, *ibid.*
- 7 Benjamin, 1999, op. cit., p. 519.
- 8 Benjamin, 1999, op. cit., p. 518.
- 9 Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., 'Year Zero: Faciality', in "A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia" (trans. and Foreword Brian Massumi). Minneapolis 1987, p. 167ff.
- 10 Conley, T., 'Faciality', In A. Parr (ed.) "The Deleuze Dictionary". New York 2005, p. 97.
- 11 Benjamin, 1999, op. cit., p. 514.
- 12 Benjamin, 1999, op. cit., p. 512.
- 13 The recent work of Clément Chéroux on the photography of quasi-mesmeric "vital fluids" suggests that the parallelism between the two unconsciousnesses was far closer than usually thought. He documents the work of individuals such as Hippolyte Baraduc who worked (as had Freud) closely with Charcot at La Salpêtrière. Louis Darget pursued a similar interest and explicitly invoked divination as a method of reading the resulting photographs: "he deciphered his photographs in the way fortune-tellers interpret the shapes in tealeaves, troubled liquids of all kinds, animals' entrails, molten lead, swirling smoke, and cloud formations". Chéroux then suggests that Freudian psychoanalysis repositioned this selfsame divinatory paradigm into an endogenous, rather than exogenous field (Clément Chéroux, 'Photographs of Fluids: An Alphabet of Invisible Rays', in Chéroux et. al. (eds) "The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult". New Haven 2005, p. 121).
- 14 Benjamin, 1999, op. cit., p. 512.
- 15 For a parallel exposition, see also Michael Taussig, 'Physiognomic Aspects of Visual Worlds', *Visual Anthropology Review* 8.1, 1992: pp. 15–28.
- 16 Lemangy, J-C., "Atget the Pioneer". Munich 2000.
- 17 Benjamin, W., 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in H. Arendt (ed.) "Illuminations" (trans. H. Zohn). New York 1968, p. 226.

- 18 The Egyptian sphinx fused a male face with a lion's body.
- 19 Originally published as 'Quatre Heures à Chatila', *Revue d'Etudes Palestiniennes* 6, 1983.
- 20 I quote from Daniel R. Dupecher and Martha Perrigaud's translation of Genet's full original text available at <http://radio-islam.org/solus/JGchatilaEngl.html> [accessed 2 May 2012].
- 21 See Kirkby, L., "Parallel Tracks: The Railroad and Silent Cinema". Exeter 1997 and Moore, R. O., "Savage Theory: Cinema as Modern Magic". Durham, N.C. 2000.
- 22 Linfield, S., "Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence". Chicago 2010.
- 23 Spivak, G., 'Revolutions that as yet have no model: Derrida's "Limited inc"', *Diacritics*, 10, 4, 1980: p. 36.
- 24 Azoulay, A., "The Civil Contract of Photography". New York 2008, p. 167.
- 25 Azoulay, *ibid.*
- 26 Azoulay, op. cit., p. 178.
- 27 Azoulay, op. cit., p. 179.
- 28 Azoulay, op. cit., p. 180.
- 29 "They reveal the thoughts and intentions of others more truly than do words, which may be falsified". Charles Darwin, "The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals". London 1872, p. 388.
- 30 Azoulay, op. cit., p. 184.
- 31 Darwin, p. 388.



## FRAMING DEATH

SYLVÈRE LOTRINGER

Since what early age have I wanted to die? Perhaps not die, but experience death? To experience death without dying seemed like a natural goal for me.

Nick Ray's Diary

There's no "Great Family of Man", and there's no universality of death. Yes, people are born and people die, but birth and death, like everything else, keep changing in unpredictable ways and only the bad habit of attributing ancient origins to recent collective customs lead us to believe that they have existed in this form at all times. Actually, if we were to project on a screen in rapid succession all the figures that death has adopted over the last thousand years, it would be difficult not to laugh at the dizzying, and apparently senseless, permutations of so many attributes that we believed to be fixed fixtures of death. Just take the expression of grief: violent in the Middle Ages, it became ritualized in the 12th century, ridiculed in the 16th, privatized in the 17th, exalted in the 19th century and forbidden in the 20th century. And these metamorphoses are not always what one would expect. At the news that his close friend had been killed in the battle, the medieval knight would faint on his horse, but then resume his life as if nothing had happened. In the Middle Ages, the grieving family remained in strict seclusion while priests led the funeral processions on their behalf. One century later, the family hired mourners, beggars and indigents while ostensibly staying indoors. In Romantic times, the family remained in seclusion, their grief being too extreme to be displayed publicly. The same attitudes toward death can express widely different phenomena, and this holds true for every figure of death (mourning rituals, wills, burying, incineration, embalming and so on). These transformations could happen in rapid succession or after long periods of stasis. They could be due to untimely events, like invasions, the black plague, or the AIDS epidemics, and their effects could be temporary, or structural. None of these stages were monolithic, and contradictory behaviors could be manifested side by side. A reluctance to mention death publicly could coexist with a renewed interest in memorials.

Philippe Aries, Michel Foucault's mentor, reminded us of all these unpredictable shifts of behaviors toward death in his masterful essay, "The Hour of Our Death", 1977. What remained constant throughout the centuries was the idea that death wasn't an individual event, but something that affected the entire environment. While the reasons for seclusion were many, no one questioned the necessity for an interruption in everyday life. Death has always been a public and social fact. It was the whole group that was stricken by the loss and it affected relatives and friends in widening circles. It was manifested in countless ways. The door of the deceased's building was draped in black, passers-by saluted the slow funeral procession on its way to the graveyard, the burial was attended by the whole community and friends would visit the grieving family. The interruption was necessary for society to absorb gradually the sudden disappearance. It gave people time to reflect on their own lives and alter their behavior accordingly.

All these ways of registering someone's death publicly ceased abruptly in the early 20th century. Death no longer introduced a hiatus in everyday life; it stopped being shared collectively. This massive change in Western culture wasn't perceptible at first. How could one notice what wasn't there? Death had become life as usual. Aries called this the "Invisible Death". It also meant that life had become a kind of death. There was nothing anymore to measure it against. Actually no one seems to have acknowledged the momentous transformation for what it was until much later – more recently – when another shift started being felt in the culture. It is this seismic pressure for change in contemporary attitudes to death – and to life – that I would like to bring out in areas – public, but remote – where one wouldn't exactly expect them.

There is no doubt that something happened in the wake of World War I. The enormity of the massacre perpetrated on the battlefields was unprecedented in the history of humanity and the numbing anonymity of trench deaths certainly contributed to the sudden cultural change. The technological leap achieved on the battlefields didn't stop there either, it deeply affected everyday life, emptying the countryside and delivering a mass of workers to fast-growing, dehumanizing industries – the assembly-lines. Never before had attitudes toward death

changed so drastically and in such a short time. It wasn't just death that had lost its human face, but life itself.

It was around that time that theorists of the masses, like Gustave Le Bon or William McDougall, even Sigmund Freud himself ("Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego", 1922) set out to identify the danger presented by unruly crowds and the need for charismatic leaders capable of channeling their regressive energy toward worthy ideological causes. Fascism was the first to appeal to them. It was not just a dictatorial regime; it managed to enlist entire populations. The discovery of speed and its powerful effect on every aspect of life deeply altered the time-space coordinates. The widespread dislocation of traditional ways of life was accompanied by a significant religious decline. Individuality asserted itself at the expense of the community. Torn between outward mobility and growing internal weariness modern societies were struggling to contain the flows of unregulated capitalism. The 1929 crisis was the last blow. It tore apart the social fabric and created mayhem worldwide. In 1933, returning from Vienna where he first learned of Freud's "death instinct", Louis-Ferdinand Céline, in a famous speech, warned that the "massive onrushes of entire people toward extreme, aggressive, ecstatic nationalism" were on their way to crystallize into a suicidal form. A few years later, apprehending the worst, he joined the pack and turned rabidly anti-Semitic.

Major "high modernist" writers of the 1930s and 40s, like Antonin Artaud, Georges Bataille, or Simone Weil, on the contrary, mobilized their energy to recreate symbolic bonds capable of replacing weakened social allegiances. Unlike the Marxists, they didn't believe that ideological analyses could account for the increasing volatility of political passions, let alone contain them. Instead, they resorted to myths, which were far more in tune with the virulent impulses that permeated the period. They became myth-dealers and myth-makers and ended up being devoured by the very myths that they had created. Reason had failed miserably in World War I and those writers endeavored to confront irrationality on its own ground. Disgruntled Christians, they renounced God, but not the power of faith. They reached back to ancient pagan religions and sacred practices capable of eliciting a cathartic

terror in society. Death was their only ally, and a volatile weapon at that. Everywhere democratic structures and institutions were crumbling down. Only a concentrated form of death – a symbolic "sacrifice" – could still hold society together. The sacrificial bond would spread by contagion, like the plague, and redeem society from its increasing aimlessness. "The only question at this point," Artaud wrote in 1933, "is whether, in this world which is slipping away and committing suicide unknowingly, a core of men would prove capable of imposing a superior notion of the theater that would bring us back the natural and magical equivalent of dead dogmas" ("The Theater and the Plague", 1933).

Death having disappeared, the first step was to make it visible again. In a Surrealist inquiry, André Breton asked: "Is suicide a solution?" Artaud replied that he first wanted to be sure that death existed. In "Art and Death", 1927, though, he asserted that "within some limits, death is knowable and approachable with a certain sensibility" and he took his readers step by step through the horrific experience of dying: "Who in the depths of certain kinds of anguish, at the bottom of certain dreams, has not known death as a shattering and marvelous sensation unlike anything else in the realm of the mind?" But death couldn't be satisfied so cheaply and Artaud dragged them breathlessly through fear, despair, terror and panic. And yet the sensation of anguish kept coming back, "this suffocation, this despair, this torpor, this desolation, this silence ... The body reaches the limits of its tension and crosses to that other side for which nothing in you is ready." In this harrowing journey, nothing was left to improvisation, everything was calculated with clinical precision – with the "cruelty" of a surgeon – until the nervous sensibility, like an infant hurled through the womb by frantic contractions, reaches the much dreaded and desired moment of delivery. For Artaud, death and rebirth always went together. He wanted his audience to experience dying *in the present* evoking certain childhood panics "in which death appeared clearly in the form of an uninterrupted confusion". His "Theater of Cruelty" wasn't based on shedding blood, "at least not exclusively", it involved at once a contagion of affects (the disorder of the plague) and the codified element of the ritual (the Balinese dance). Artaud was the last in a long cohort of preachers who invoked death throes in order to convert the unbeliever.



But death itself had replaced any other belief. Asked to lecture about the theater and the plague at the Sorbonne in 1933, Artaud scared his public away by embodying the disease. He crawled between the seats – exhibiting his boils – and then, when everyone had left, he turned toward Anaïs Nin and said: “Let’s have a drink”. And then he added somberly, “They don’t realize that they are already dead.”

Early in the 20th century, the dead were not entirely divorced from the living. There still was a sense of intimacy with death, for instance, in James Van Der Zee’s early family photographs in Harlem where parents tenderly hold a dead baby. Often times the photographer wasn’t able to tell later on who was alive and who was dead. He had no compunction either about using double exposures and superimposing images of angels or pious inscriptions around a woman’s deathbed as a way of anticipating the joys of the other life. Playing tricks with the dead – introducing the current issue of a newspaper in a dead man’s hand – wasn’t considered sacrilegious either. Van Der Zee’s photographs were not experimental in the modernistic sense, but they had an aesthetic of their own. They also had a specific function. They sent a message to families living far away in the South or in the Caribbean that their deceased had been treated in the proper way.

Other photographers rediscovered death some half a century later and it was as if a lost continent had suddenly re-emerged. Something was starting to change. Diane Arbus had shown the way with her freak shows and then a handful of photographers followed suite in the 1980s, among them were Jeffrey Silverthorne and Jerome Liebling, Joel-Peter Witkin and Andres Serrano. They managed, with curiosity and some trepidation, to work their way even into the morgue itself. What they brought back had none of the easy familiarity found in Van Der Zee’s funeral photographs, but a sensuous detachment registering at once their attraction to the subject and a deeper dread. In a well-known article “The Pornography of Death”, 1955, Geoffrey Gorer, a British sociologist, argued that death had replaced sex as the major interdiction. The photographers were conscious of transgressing a taboo. Even Joel-Peter Witkin’s flippant display of grotesques and fetuses didn’t quite succeed in keeping the horror in

abeyance. Unlike the Harlem portraits, their photographs didn’t address anyone or anything in particular, but for their own fear. Trying to dispel their own confusion, they fell back on a sense of form.

\*\*\*

In “Lightning over Water” (it was first known as “Nick’s Movie”) Wim Wenders admitted to having fallen into the same trap. In 1979, he offered to co-direct a film with Nicholas Ray, the legendary director of “Rebel Without a Cause” (1955), whose glamorous career in Hollywood had been cut short by booze and drugs. Nick Ray was at the end of his rope. He was broke; he hadn’t made a film in ten years. He had terminal cancer and was lying on his bed in his Soho loft, coughing out his lungs. For a number of years, Nick had drummed up for support. Wim was the first serious candidate to answer his call and give him a last chance to direct. When the two filmmakers, young and old, looked at their first rushes, Wim sheepishly, but luminously, admitted to Nick: “The film, whatever we did, looks very clean, pretty – like licked off. And I think that is a pure result of fear.”

It was the start of a filmic adventure that neither of them had really foreseen, let alone wished to happen. They were not the only ones to be rattled by the dread of death. It didn’t take long for the small international crew hastily assembled around Wim and Nick to realize that Nick wasn’t just sick, but dying. “As soon as you saw Nick,” Stefan Czapsky, the gaffer, said, “you knew he was a dead man.” Everyone had a lot of respect for Nick as a filmmaker, but it wasn’t the filmmaker who was dying, it was the man. The man was certainly formidable, but he wasn’t especially likable. He could be mean and arrogant. He had been a hustler all his life. Wim wanted to pay homage to the filmmaker, not to the dying man.

The crew was torn as well between their admiration for Nick and their own fear of death. They got even more confused when Nick pressed Wim to acknowledge that they were not just making a fiction film, but a film about Nick’s death. This switch didn’t happen right away. It wasn’t death that Nick had in mind when he developed a thirty-page screenplay based on the old painter caper from “The American

Friend”. Nick rarely used screenplays, he was an actors’ director. Obviously, he wanted his last film to be a real film. At first the two co-directors had conferences in a corner of the loft to discuss the story, but the fiction was thin, and it wasn’t difficult to recognize Nick in the dying artist. Wim resisted the idea. Besides, a fiction film was extravagant considering their small budget. He wanted to bring the action back to Nick, but not in a documentary way either. Nick would play his own character in the film, the way Fritz Lang played the character of Fritz Lang in Godard’s “Contempt” (1963). But as soon as the shooting began, reality started intruding, narrowing their choices. After a week Nick became too weak to co-direct the film. The screenplay started unraveling and was soon forgotten. Why not make it a story of Nick himself? Wim asks. “It’s you, Nick. Why take the step away?” Wim didn’t realize that he was opening the door wide for death to step in.

“It has to be about you, too then,” Nick replied, challenging Wim in turn. Nick’s action in the film was clear: regaining his self-esteem before he died. But Wim had no action of his own that he could think of. “My own action is going to be defined by your facing death,” he said cautiously. Wim was reluctant to commit himself. He still had to learn – it is not obvious that he did – that facing Nick’s death would involve his own death too. By a series of gradual adjustments, the film was beginning to slip away from everyone’s hands and turning into something of its own. Not just a challenge between Wim and Nick, but a challenge to death.

The switch from a fictional painter to an actor in his own life had another immediate consequence. Two days after they began shooting, Nick was scheduled to go to Vassar for the projection of his film, “The Lusty Men” (1952), starring Robert Mitchum. The crew filmed his presentation. But if Nick was playing Nick, and Wim was becoming his own character in the film, then the crew itself would have to play their own parts as well. One week later, they all returned to Vassar to shoot some additional footage of Nick, but also of the film crew shooting themselves. They would now be acting as some kind of Greek chorus to the tragedy that was unfolding. As the shooting was progressing, the team became worried by what was happening in the loft and tormented at the thought that

they might be unknowingly trespassing some moral boundary. It was difficult to distinguish between homage and exploitation, let alone voyeurism and exhibition. The confusion increased even further when they started realizing that Nick’s last “private moments” may be filmed as well. Neither Nick nor Wim had set any limits, and it now looked more and more as if only death would bring the film to a close. Wim suggested that much when he asked: “How is our film going to end, Nick?”

The tall white-haired filmmaker still cast a powerful figure and his dying itself made oedipal fantasies all the more irrepressible. “The only real father,” French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan dropped, “is the dead father.” In everybody’s eyes Nick became the dead father *before* he actually died, and they felt all the more anguished and guilty for it. Had they known Nick’s actual life as well as his family and friends did, they would have realized that he hardly deserved being killed on that account. He certainly knew how to use the father fantasy to his own advantage and kept waving it like a red cape in front of anyone who approached him. It was a perfect con-game. Susan Ray, Nick’s common-law wife – she was forty years younger – had no illusions about it and confronted Wim’s own fantasies headlong. Didn’t he, like all the others, feel that Nick was his father? Wim denied it angrily and walked out. One thing for sure, Nick wasn’t a passive victim. He had always used direct confrontation in his life and in his films. Wim didn’t work that way. He was exposing himself to externalize through his actors what he felt at the moment. He didn’t quite realize what he had gotten into when he offered to help Nick direct his last film.

Self-exiled in Europe for a number of years and increasingly dependent on his young entourage for survival, Nick had become a cult figure for Cahiers du Cinéma authors. Once Godard famously said: “Nick Ray is cinema” – and now “cinema” was dying. One of Wim’s major concerns as a filmmaker was the death of cinema, movie-houses closing everywhere (“Kings of the Road”, 1976). But he wasn’t quite ready for the death of Nick Ray. Was Nick himself ready for it? Nick wanted to be involved with film one more time before he died. He wanted to experience again the kind of power that comes with being a director. He had a taste of it during the

first week of shooting when he subreptitiously took some cocaine to give him enough energy. But Wim had been right to take over from Nick. Nick was in no condition to take care of the mechanics of the filming schedule and the list of shots. Actually, whether or not Nick really wanted to make a last film before he died remained an open question. He probably didn't know himself. But he certainly welcomed the idea of dying making a film.

During the last period of his life, Nick had been notoriously reluctant to finish a film. "We Can't Go Home Again" – his most iconoclastic work which exploded the screen in a myriad of fragments – was still in progress. And maybe it was meant to remain that way. His friends and family in Hollywood reacted to "Lightning over Water" with a healthy skepticism. All Nick wanted, Betty Ray, his third wife, estimated, was a diversion from himself. "Nick was on stage. And, the fucker, he was having the time of his life." And yet she recognized that Nick had always been bigger than life. It was a great piece of honesty that "a person who is going through the death process was willing to talk to the mirror. Nick was clear in that way. He never was a person to hide who he was. And in terms of what they set up to do," she added, "nothing's been done like that to my knowledge."

Wim was fascinated by the American way of life, but also repulsed by it. He hadn't been exposed to the American way of death yet. At the time, Wim was on his way to a brilliant career. Two years before, he finished a major film, "The American Friend", which featured Nick as an old artist forging his own work and pretending to be dead in order to raise the value of his original paintings. Francis Ford Coppola noticed the film and offered to back-up one of Wim's projects. Coppola had created Zeotropes, his own company in San Francisco, to produce his favorite directors, like Jean-Luc Godard, Werner Herzog or Wim Wenders, or maybe, to destroy them. After all, Coppola was a filmmaker himself. But there was a catch. Instead of producing the film, Coppola would raise the money to develop a screenplay and, for the previous two years, Wim had rewritten his screenplay for "Hammett" three times without the film getting closer in sight. He was feeling increasingly alienated and it didn't help that Coppola treated the young German director rudely. The Hollywood film be-

came a real ordeal. Wim had to fly back and forth from New York to San Francisco or Los Angeles to work on the screenplay while Nick and the film crew were waiting. And when "Hammett" finally was released it looked like any other product of the industry. Wim was experiencing first-hand what working for Hollywood meant. He should have known better after what had happened to Scott Fitzgerald and to the best Hollywood filmmakers of Nick's generation, like Samuel Fuller and Orson Welles. It was no coincidence that Wim had asked Nick and Sam Fuller to play in his films – the attraction was too strong. And maybe Wim himself secretly wanted the experience – entering into the Hollywood legend. "The State of Things", his next film, at least suggests that much.

Shooting "Lightning over Water" was Wim's revenge against Coppola, a way of preserving his own integrity; a low-budget film and a selfless homage to his dying mentor. But leaving the Mogul in San Francisco for the maverick father in Soho wasn't much of a relief. Wim was getting it on both sides. To make things worse, Nick kept going in and out of the hospital and no one could tell how much longer he would last. Neither Wim nor Nick had anticipated that the film would focus on Nick's dying, although it had been on the cards from the very beginning.

Many among the film crew, even Susan Ray herself, became convinced that Nick would remain alive as long as they kept shooting. The film wasn't just death in the making, but a way of prolonging his life. This was what other institutions had been doing quietly all along. Their aim too, like film, was an attempt to defer death.

\*\*\*

Keeping patients alive at all costs is the function that hospitals have come to assume in the technological age, but it has made the difference between life and death, terminal and interminable, "near-death" and near-life increasingly difficult to maintain. Once medicalized, death has become a non-event, erased before it has even occurred. It wasn't just death that had become problematic, as Artaud suggested, but life itself – death interrupted. In fact it was from the hospital's terminal wards that, in the late 1960s, the first cries for help were heard. Contrary to what one could have expected, they didn't come from the pa-

tients themselves, but from the medical personnel left without specific guidelines. Other codifications were being introduced in various places, waiting to be picked up and given more visibility. Buddhism and Eastern philosophies, for instance, were finding their way into Western societies ready to fill the vacuum. In "Imagined Communities" (1983), a ground-breaking essay on the invention of nationalism, Benedict Anderson reminded us that "all profound changes in consciousness, by their nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivion, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives."

Anderson's "amnesia of death" was already slowly being lifted and a new narrative – a new mythology for the living – was springing forth from the very place where dying patients had been exiled. State-of-the-art technologies alone had not prepared the medical personnel to answer the insistent questions that "end-of-life" patients increasingly raised. It took Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-born psychiatrist working with "near-death" patients to address these in "On Death and Dying", first published in 1969. The book – euphemistically renamed "The Five Stages of Grief Model" – was enthusiastically embraced worldwide and became the new Bible of Death. It identified five stages that terminal patients are wont to experience when confronted with the prospect of their own demise: *denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance*. These stations of dying were obviously patterned on Freud's four stages of infantile sexuality leading to "genital normality". They neatly tied down sexuality to the final regression of mature adults to the state of inert matter. Kübler-Ross was more open-ended with her own sequence of stages than Freud had been as long as terminal patients, dismissing their "irrational anger", humbly reached "total acceptance".

This total acceptance gave the hospital personnel a chance to share with the dying "a mutually gratifying experience". The gratification, of course, was only one-sided as it demanded from the patient a gradual detachment from the world leading to a state "almost void of feelings". Obviously this is, as Kübler-Ross asserted, "gratifying to the visitor because it doesn't present dying as a frightening experience". The staging of dying at the hospital was meant to

subsume death seamlessly into life the way the stages of grief integrated life into death. We are pretty far from Artaud, who had used the experience of death to *disintegrate* the fiction of being alive. It wasn't by chance that one-third of Kübler-Ross's book was dedicated to eradicating anger: she tried very hard to eliminate it as a normal reaction in patients who were forced to give up on their life. For her, "encouraging the patients to express their rage" was only meant to lead to a "quiet acceptance" of the world as it is. Kübler-Ross's model was a brave attempt to deal with death, but a normalizing one. Its major effect was to extend the therapeutic model born within the hospital to society at large.

Kübler-Ross went even further. In reality, acceptance, she admitted, wasn't a stage, but "a natural process, a progress indeed, a sign perhaps that a dying person has found his peace and is preparing himself to face it alone". Facing death alone: we certainly have come a long way from the time when death was experienced collectively, as she herself witnessed with her own family in Switzerland. The new narrative of death belongs to a very different culture – a culture that imposes on people to live and die alone.

\*\*\*

We learned from "primitive" societies that there isn't such a thing as a "natural death". Whenever death occurred, it was considered to be an accident or a crime. Among the Sara populations in Chad studied by Robert Jaulin in "La Mort Sara" ("The Sara Death", 1967), for instance, the sorcerers were always the first culprits. They were well versed in sympathetic magic and experts in a variety of poisons – and would kill anyone just to try them. They were the wretched ones, the anti-social ferment, threatening the tight-knit tribe from within. Their function was to introduce confusion in the group's order and they were feared and hated for it. But anything else could have replaced them as long as death could be pegged on something – anything really: a minor quarrel, a spouse's rebuff, a jealous reaction. When someone died, everyone rushed to deny that they had anything to do with it. But it was enough to accuse someone of the crime for that individual to become the criminal. It may be difficult for us to accept this idea in the West since we go to great lengths before proving someone guilty under the law. The Sara had little

regard for an individual's rights and death for them was never considered a personal affair. As long as someone was responsible for the death they would remain immortal as a tribe. Death didn't come with old age – they didn't live long enough to experience decay – it always came from the outside and pounced on the living. Whether guilty or not, the family of the "criminal" had to pay an indemnity for the death. "Each dead is a capital" they would say, and it had to be matched by a counter-gift. By the same token the alleged crime would become a "total social fact" mobilizing at once violence, magic, affects, economic and legal elements. Each death was a way to involve the entire society. Among "primitives" no one ever died alone.

\*\*\*

The hospital wasn't the only place where attempts were being made to identify and register publicly the transformation of attitudes toward death. The modern judicial system as well was revealing of the way death is experienced in Western society. Although the technology used to identify criminals replaces sorcerers' poisons and séances of possession, old rituals are still re-staged via documentation. For the police, death is always a crime and it needs to be documented in a very special way. In Western society, paradoxically, crime is the only alternative to an anonymous death. The police have taken over the task of acknowledging someone's death collectively. They are, it seems, the only people capable of paying full attention to a death; the only ones for whom the details of an individual's death – deserving of serious attention – have to be shared. Indeed, crime victims are now more alive in their death than they were in their lives. In cities where everyone, virtually, is alone, police officers substitute for the missing family and make sure that the dead are not forgotten or "disappear" in the overall urban landscape. In the hands of the police, it is not just the death of the victim that is investigated in some detail, but also the life.

In terms of criminal justice, it isn't so much the crime that is the problem, but the way the experience of death impacts the judicial system. This probably wouldn't be the case if it were not for the jury, a small group of people chosen to represent at the trial the feelings or the fears of the entire country. They are as unfamiliar with real

crimes as the public at large are, and yet, they remain the keystone of the entire system since it is they who will eventually decide whether a defendant is innocent or guilty. For a long time trials used to rely exclusively on live witnesses to establish the incontrovertible truth. They would be called to the stand and be subjected to tough questioning. As happened in ancient tragedies, the murder always occurred off-stage and it behooved the witnesses to provide the jury with a vivid and truthful narration of the homicide. These descriptions of violence were strictly codified and satisfied the audience's desire to know without offending their sense of decency. The recent introduction of sophisticated visual recording devices, like videos and surveillance cameras, brought the question of witnessing – documenting – to the forefront and opened a new window on death and crime.

The idea of shooting crime scenes goes back to the early 1970s in New York City, at a time when videos were becoming more readily available. The first pilot program sponsored by the criminal justice system was created in Manhattan, where crimes were rampant, and premises tainted by crime could only be preserved for a very short time. Besides, the trial – if there was one – could be held months or years away from the time of the actual event. Videos of crime scenes, in this sense, were archival material before they were even shot. They were meant to provide a visual testimony of the crime. Contrary to witnesses, who could only be called to the stand once and whose memory could be faulty, these videos were shot according to strict rules and could be requested by the jury any time they were deemed necessary during the trial.

The power of conviction of these new judicial instruments, of course, was far greater than mere verbal witnessing. A confession made in front of the camera was difficult to dismiss unless the prosecution successfully managed to demolish it through close questioning of the technician in charge. But this is where the rub was. The trial is a special theater where professional actors, the prosecution and the defense, present their case to the jury. Every move that the cameraman made, every sequence that he shot and the order in which he did it, had to be foolproof. For confessions, it required establishing explicitly the absence of any coercion. Crime scenes were harder to account for in codified

ways. They were supposed to bring out not just the crime itself – the body lying on the floor in a pool of blood – but the entire context in which it had been perpetrated, every element deemed relevant for the investigation: it may be the street outside the motel, the bloodied shower room in the basement, the white circles painted around the absent bodies in the rooftop parking lot. The challenge was to document the crime scene in an objective way. Police photographers take neutral photographs of a crime, making sure that the light is evenly distributed. Videos of a crime scene also make this kind of claim. They aim at pure objectivity. Isn't their purpose to help establish the truth in the judicial context? Pure objectivity, of course, is unattainable. But is it even something to be wished for?

The jury has no special preparation. It is no more used to seeing real crime scenes than anyone else in the country. But jurors certainly watch made-up ones every day on their TV screens. Videos of crime have to compete with the spectacular images circulated in the media. They have to convince the jury that the crimes they are watching in the courtroom are unlike the faked ones dripping with ketchup. These are *real* crimes. But then they may be overwhelmed by the reality of a crime presented in all its raw violence. And if they become outraged or horrified by what they see, how can they be expected to deliver a proper verdict, thoroughly informed and rational? Any overreaction on their part would certainly upset their judgment and endanger the search for the truth. The jury, therefore, has to be protected against itself and their anxiety assuaged by means of certain techniques. Otherwise the videographer could be publicly accused of manipulating them emotionally. The camera used isn't just meant to document a crime, but to register like a seismograph current attitudes toward death. Far more so than abstract sociological analysis filming a crime scene reveals, as Artaud said, that "within some limits, death is knowable and approachable with a certain sensibility".

This is where Johnny Esposito comes in. Johnny studied a variety of disciplines, especially psychology and communication, besides filming skills and techniques. Confronted with the vexing problem of truth and degrees of tolerance, he had the idea of introducing into the legal context a technique meant to account visually for

crime scenes. His main concern, though, wasn't technical, but psychological. He had to find a way of presenting the crime documentation to the jurors and making it not only tolerable or acceptable, but also desirable. In order to do this, Johnny turned to "film noir", adapting its ominous atmosphere and sense of foreboding. His own strategy was to delay viewing the crime and to "keep the eye moving". His camera would peek from a distance at some cues: an arm hanging limply from a bed, drops of blood on the floor; little stabs of cruelty meant to partially "desensitize" the viewers, or better still, to "whet their appetite" in such a way that they couldn't wait to see the maimed body. In a strange roundabout way, the jury's judgment had to be protected from the truth by a calculated fiction. What was taken for truth in the criminal justice system in fact resulted from an ingenious artifice, a fiction that could pass the test of reality.

\*\*\*

There are no crime scenes in "Lightning over Water"; the entire film is one, and Nick himself contributed to it. It was a bloodless crime, a symbolic crime, but cruel all the same, and it kept haunting all those who got involved in it.

On 9 April 1979 Wim announced that he was leaving for two days, but he remained in Los Angeles for one month. The shooting in Nick's loft had reached a real momentum, and everyone felt that it could be finished in a couple of days. "It was the first real improvisatorial film I ever worked at," Stefan Czapsky, the gaffer, told Wim later on during Nick's wake "we were very open to whatever would happen. And I felt bad when it stopped. Because it stopped and then you didn't come back." Why Wim had stayed away for so long seemed simple enough. He certainly had greater obligations on the West Coast; he had to take care of "Hammett". The situation may also have been getting too much for him. It was more than he had bargained for. The small crew was left in the dark, and they all felt cheated. There was no way of telling when the shooting would resume, or if it would resume at all. People came and left, but they were totally on-call. Nick was disappointed too. He always had a rush of energy when he was involved in shooting. He wanted to go on with the film. He probably wanted to die working. But time was running out. Nick's condition kept

deteriorating. Would he be strong enough to shoot again? Nick wasn't someone to be discounted easily; he certainly remained a wild card. The crew left with the same question: should they go on filming the dying of Nick? Was he really willing to expose himself that far? The prospect was terrifying.

On 28 April, Wim flew in from Los Angeles. Everyone realized the purpose of this trip was to finish off the film. They didn't have enough material. Chris Sievernich, the producer, recognized reluctantly that "it had to be done". But it could certainly have been done differently. Wim was returning to New York with Ronee, his fiancée. She was an outsider. She hadn't been involved with the first shootings, and she hardly knew Nick. On the other hand, she shared none of the insiders' hang-ups. She wasn't taken in by Nick's father image or by the drama of his death. For her, the film was "about two filmmakers making a film about dying, starring Nick". She tried to remain professional. She was probably the only *normal* person around: all she cared for was her career. Wim had asked her to compose music for his film and she wrote the title song. She could be heard singing away at the piano between takes, to everybody else's consternation. She wasn't acknowledging the code. And yet her presence acted as a catalyst, bringing into the open conflicts that until then had remained latent.

Ronee was also an actress, and she certainly could play a scene with Nick. She could be Cordelia, the good daughter, helping King Lear vent his pain. It was a stroke of genius: she could also establish herself as Nick's daughter. Most people found the dialogue between the two incoherent, even delirious, but she introduced the feeling of mortality with just a few touchstones. She brought Nick some flowers, like an accessory, as actors do. "What kinds of flowers?" Nick asked. Ronee: "Lilies of the Valley . . ." Nick: "They are burying flowers." Ronee: "They are?" Ronee wasn't afraid to call things by their name: she was the only one who got Nick to talk openly about his cancer.

Being an outsider and the director's girlfriend, Ronee had no difficulty obtaining what Wim had kept stubbornly refusing the legitimate "family":

Susan Ray; Tom Farrell, one of Nick's devoted assistants; and Tim Ray, Nick's son. Susan was a tough woman. She had taken good care of her elderly partner throughout his illness. She had been suspicious of Wim's intentions from the start. Once, she accused him of wanting to be Nick's son, and Wim had walked out on her. He eventually cut their scene from the final version of "Lightning over Water". Tim Ray didn't quite belong with any of them. He was flown back from an ashram in India to be assistant cameraman on the film, but he had his own script in mind, even a whole film focusing on his father's dying. Nick had promised him (he did it with everyone) that they would shoot it together when they got some money. But when Tim arrived on the set he realized that Wim was shooting his own film.

In the proximity of death, symbolic gestures take on special weight, and Ronee's presence in the film exacerbated the others' desire to immortalize their special bonds with Nick. Ronee played a scene with Nick. Susan still expected that she would do one too, but when she realized that she wouldn't be, she walked out on Wim. He could find himself a nurse to take care of Nick for the rest of the shooting.

Nick had another reason to feel enraged. Wim had arranged for Nick to be transported on a wheelchair from Memorial Hospital, New York, where he had been admitted, to a fake hospital room built with white parachute material in Ed Lachman's loft in Soho. Nick was in terrible shape, a mere bag of bone. But what hurt him most was that he hadn't been consulted. He wasn't even co-directing anymore. He was a mere object. He felt betrayed and humiliated. They were rehearsing his death in advance. "They could have made a set of a coffin," he told Becky Johnson, his assistant. Nick was already edgy when he played King Lear with Ronee. "Hi Dad? Dad? Hi," she began. Nick was lying on his fake hospital bed with her in his arms: "You horrible bitch," he said, "you finally got me." He was playing cat and mouse with her while Susan was sternly watching them flirting. He also called her "a beautiful liar".

The same day Nick had a huge fall out with Wim and told him that he never wanted to talk to him again. The two were scheduled to play the next day. Ronee suggested that they should exchange

roles; Wim lying on the fake hospital bed and Nick sitting on a chair at the bedside. Their exchange didn't work as expected. Wim asked Ed Lachman to keep the camera rolling. Nick didn't talk to him, he talked at him. The old filmmaker started drooling over himself, blabbering, singing, doing everything he could to debase himself in front of Wim. And then Nick said "cut", but Wim kept the camera rolling. Nick said: "Don't cut". The camera was still rolling. It was Wim who was calling the shots. Nick said angrily: "Don't cut! CUT" and the camera stopped. It was Nick's last shot.

Wim's part of the dialogue was added later on, but without Nick. It was a skillful montage. There was no resolution or revelation, no lighting over water.

## EPILOGUE

Nick died on 16 June, but not in the film. Wim and Ronee were in California in the high desert and only got the news two days later. The film had been more of a challenge for Wim than for Nick, who only died. Wim had fulfilled his part of the contract and delivered "Lightning over Water". The film remained incomplete, and every effort to finish it failed. Even the inclusion of Tom's video footage to the 35 mm stylishly shot by Ed didn't prevent it from remaining fragmented and inconclusive.

Nick dreamt of taking a "slow-boat" to China in order to find the magical Ginseng that would cure his cancer. After his death an Irish wake was hastily arranged on a Chinese junk sailing across New York Bay, with the crew and Wim on board getting drunk on sake and making final pronouncements about Nick's death. Nick's ashes were on the deck in a Chinese urn, along with rolls of films flying in the wind and Susan looking away. The wake was used prominently throughout the first version of the film edited by Peter Przygodda, Wim's longtime editor, as an attempt to bring together a very disparate film. The first version was more of a document than a documentary, and more a documentary than a fiction. It resisted classifications. It was also more democratic; everyone treated equally; all actors in the same drama. The film has been reproached for lacking a point of view, but this may well be its most programmatic feature.

Viewers are not led by the hand, but given the chance to think for themselves and derive their own conclusions from this attempt to confront death on its own terms.

Peter Przygodda spends eight months editing the first version (120 minutes) of "Lightning over Water" while Wim Wenders is shooting "Hammett". Contaminated by his material, the editor experiences the same panic as those who participated in the film.

Wim Wenders watches Peter Przygodda's editing and doesn't like it. He edits out three or four scenes from the film. The shortened version is screened-out for the competition at the Cannes Film Festival in 1980 and isn't well received.

In 1981 Wim spends three months alone re-cutting his own version (90 minutes) of "Lightning over Water" and adds his voice-over to the film.

All the copies of Peter Przygodda's first version are destroyed and the only existing copy entrusted to the Munich Film Museum for the exclusive purpose of scholarly research. It will remain in seclusion until the period of mourning is over.

**Sylvère Lotringer** is a cultural theorist, author and general editor of *Semiotext(e)*, he lives in Los Angeles, USA and Baja California, Mexico.

The author would like to thank Robbie Dewhurst, Lisa Darms, George Diaz, Iris Klein, Brent Phillips, Astra Price, and the Fales Library (New York University).



[At the beginning of the 1980s Sylvère Lotringer led several long conversations with police videographer Johnny Esposito. Esposito and Lotringer met up again in New York 25 years later.]

## **CRIME IS EVERYWHERE**

EXCERPTS FROM A PHONE CONVERSATION BETWEEN SYLVÈRE LOTRINGER AND JOHNNY ESPOSITO  
HELD ON 31 OCTOBER 2011

Johnny Esposito: Sylvère, I'm trying to remember the last time we saw each other. When was that?

**Sylvère Lotringer: Mid-80s; late 80s. So you're still working for the DA [District Attorney], for the Brooklyn DA? Amazing.**

Yes. I still do the same work I do, though the work has evolved a lot. And this might not have the same shock value as dead bodies, but we live in a Big Brother society, where everybody's movements are recorded.

**Right.**

Everywhere you go. In every city that you're in and every store and every elevator and every ATM and every supermarket, everywhere that you go, your image is being recorded. So when crimes are committed, we're able to recover that footage and use it to convict the people. So, very often on recovered surveillance video are crimes as heinous as murder. For instance, one time I saw some footage of a bus stop, and it was around midnight in Brooklyn, and a gang of, like, four people, four kids attacked some man at a bus stop, an outside shelter, and killed him. They stabbed him, and they beat him up, and you see everything clearly on the surveillance video. So, then that video is actually used as the evidence to convict them. It's like the technology has advanced so much in the last 30 years that they're just able to recover [the footage]; actually there's a relatively new term for it because of the popularity of the TV shows, and that's "forensic video". And basically any kind of video that is used as evidence is considered forensic material.

**Wow. So basically what you mean is that the crime scene is everywhere now.**

Everything is being recorded all the time, and when a crime occurs, you just go, you canvas the neighborhood and you find all the camera

angles of all the film and you review all the video until you actually find what you're looking for. So you could have, like, 24 hours of surveillance, or you could have two weeks' worth of surveillance. It's not one point of view. If you go into a bodega [spanish wine bar], there's a camera outside the bodega. And sometimes from the camera in the bodega you see crimes right on the corner of the street. And the technology has made it almost foolproof in court.

(...)

**But what happens when the crime happens indoors, is there still the crime scene to document?**

Oh, there's so much in-door recording it's unbelievable. There's so much.

**You mean private people?**

Private people; yes everybody. It's unbelievable. Private people, for instance, they have what are called "nanny cams". Affluent people, and not even affluent people, just middle-class people set up cameras in their home to record their babysitters and what they do throughout the day with their children.

That footage alone has produced all kinds of stuff. Then there're people that are sexual deviants, and they record themselves left and right. And while that's a perfectly fine liberty, when you record abusing a child, or abusing a woman, or abusing anybody – and you record it on film, it's all there to sort of—we actually recover stuff from Facebook ...

**That's why I don't want to have it!** (Laughs)

... and use it against people. Seriously, that's how much the technology has advanced in the last 20 years. Remember I told you that I used to send my people out all the time as a phone crew? That's down, like about – believe it or not – 90 per cent. Because everything is about recovering all this surveillance material, going through it, finding what you need to find, enhancing it either with sound or enhancing it with captions. And of course, blocking the faces of the people who are innocent and just showing the faces of people that you're processing the crime from. It's, like, very detailed work with edit-

ing software and it's all kind of computer software now. I had one case that had something like 600 hours of recording and 29 defendants. And all 29 are being tried separately. So it's like 29 cases, but for each case you have to produce the 600 hours of material.

**Of collected material, collected everywhere, already existing?**

Yeah. Everywhere: you could either see it as an aid of some kind, you know to help keep society safe, or you could see it as the ultimate intrusion in civil liberties because it's everywhere and it's being done without your permission.

**What does it mean in terms of the strategy that you use to adapt— I mean, do you still have to present things in such a way?**

Absolutely. That particular formula has not changed. The only thing that changed is that back in the [early] days we used to use an analogue clock visually. Now we use a time-based date and a digital format at the bottom of the film. So you see a digital display of the clock. You remember the purpose of the clock?

**No.**

To show that it was unedited. Because you would see the arms on the clock jump. You had to have a visual reference point.

**Oh, I see, yes. Unedited was an important thing.**

The only way that you could demonstrate that it wasn't edited was by having a clock that had sweeping hands. An old-fashioned face clock that had sweeping arms. And if you tried to edit it, you would actually see the arms, the sweeping arms on the clock, jump. If you cut out, like, five seconds, you would have seen the second hand jump. Very quick. Now the software that is available is so sophisticated that you could fake the clock. What you cannot fake is a digital display at the bottom of the frame that is running continuously. And tenths of seconds are passing by.

**But then you must have some very heterogeneous material. It must be different cuts that are put together for the jury, right?**

No, I mean, while that is quite possible, that's pretty complicated, because all those cuts have to be agreed by all the parties, both the defense and the prosecutor. And that's kind of a virtual impossibility. The compromise that you get is just blocking innocent faces and enhancing sound, doing captions. And beyond that – editing it the way you would edit a commercial, for instance, to sell something – you're still not allowed to do anything like that.

**But if you don't film it yourself, you can't really control the events the way you would [like to] to present the material to the jury, only through editing then.**

The material that is gathered these days, as I mentioned to you earlier, is all recorded video through all kind of situations. And the amount of material that comes in is enormous. And you're constantly editing it, just to get to the portion that is relevant to the case. If there're 24 hours of surveillance, you're not going to show 24 hours. You're going to show ten minutes of it. But finding those ten minutes of it and slowing it down to a pace [so] that you can follow it (because surveillance is recorded in time-lapse), that's basically the work these days. You know, get a video from an ATM machine and you just make a digital copy of it and put it in the trial, and the person is sent to jail, for like, forever for bank robbery. And they don't even have to make a confession. Before, we had to rely on the person actually making a confession. These days, there's so much video-surveillance information around that you don't need anybody to say anything. You just recover the video, and that's all you need.

**But then, there're very few crime scenes that are shot at all, only in exceptional cases, right?**

I don't need to send somebody to film a dead body, I just ask the police department to give me a copy of their video. And then with the copy of their video, we do whatever we're going to do and present that in court, as evidence. You see what I'm saying? But, we still do a lot of children, and that's a very complicated thing. I have a room set up with a two-way mirror, and we shoot through the two-way mirror. And the room, it's decorated in a way that is child-friendly. And then the child is interviewed with anatomically correct dolls. And through the careful

illustration with anatomically correct dolls, very young children are able to describe sexual abuse that they went through. And that recording, without any editing at all, is such a powerful image that when it's presented to the Grand Jury they indict the person. And the same thing is true when I send people out to a hospital to take a statement from a victim. It could be an elderly abuse, a child abuse, a domestic violence. And then, for instance, I'll give you an example. I set up an automatic place for recording only domestic violence [statements]. In a set, the person comes in, sits down, makes their statement, and continues on through the booking process. And then that video is presented against them in court. And basically, they're sitting there giving very comfortable and casual details about the violence that they were just arrested for. It's done totally automatically. It's done with, like, a webcam.

**You devised a certain strategy that dealt with respecting the possible effect and emotion that could be created on a jury so that they would be incapacitated to provide, kind of a rational verdict. This involved on your part a whole itinerary, and a camera, and a strategy – and not showing it directly.**

Well, it's taking film knowledge. In other words, a film, even a documentary film has a point of view and takes you somewhere. Right?

**Yeah.**

Remember the purpose of a close-up scene, in film, is to create tension on the part of the viewer. The way that you create this tension is that the image is trying to squeeze out of the frame that's in front of you. So when you watch the close-up, it's associated with a feeling of tension. It's a direct cause and effect. Okay? So, if you don't want to manipulate a scene to produce that effect, you have to do the exact opposite. The exact opposite is having a neutral frame, and whatever occurs within the frame is the reality of what's happening. And most of the time, that's more than enough. But people are not used to it, because everybody that watches media in general is watching a point of view. And it's the point of view either of the filmmaker, the producer, the channel, the network. Somebody's got a point of view, and they're putting it through, and they're controlling your feelings,

and they're controlling your reactions. Well, in this kind of setting, it's the exact absence of all of that. And so you have to be cognizant of all the elements that are going on at any given time. And basically, you're capturing a moment. If you remain open to the moment, if you allow yourself to be very fluid in how you react to it, you should be able to capture some subjective reality. You should be able to. If you don't, if you allow yourself either to get angry, upset, or assuming your ego somehow, what you will produce, or what you will record, will reflect that bias. And once you introduce bias into a piece of evidence, it is subject to suppression. And a lawyer, especially a skilled lawyer who knows some of this language and knows some of this imagery, can go to a suppression hearing and they can suggest that the material is prejudiced, that it's biased, and the entire evidence will be suppressed, nobody will be able to look at it.

**The idea of these evenings in Berlin is to say that there's still something left of documentary that you could rely on, as opposed to the possibility of manipulating everything. Right?**

Right. I have people that—you ever go on YouTube?

**Sometimes, yes, of course.**

On YouTube, they have these unbelievable videos that are done by helmet cameras. And there are unbelievable videos that are done by cameras that they put on balloons. And a lot of these videos are posted on YouTube. They're amazing: dirt-bike riders biking down the side of a mountain; people doing snowboarding; people doing hiking up the side of mountains; mountain-climbing. And they're recording all this stuff with, like, little cameras on their helmet, or little cameras on their [back] pack, and the videos, they're unbelievable. It's amazing. Really powerful.

**This I know directly, because one of my old friends is a filmmaker in Hollywood and he has all these technical—He made one or two films on surfing, with cameras on the surfboard. That's pretty amazing, yeah.**

And, now they have this footage for, like, people who do bungee jumping and people that do all kinds of, like, what they call extreme sports. And

they have all this footage, and what I find the common denominator for all this material, is that the image is virtually un-manipulated. Unedited. And the subjective reality of it is so overwhelming that it pulls you in. It draws you right into it. It could actually make you feel, like, as if you're riding down the side of a mountain on a dirt-bike. And you're actually there. And some of these young filmmakers that are making these videos and posting them on YouTube are incredibly talented. I mean, seriously. And so much is available now, that the technology just never stopped. But let me stop talking here, maybe.





## REALITY MUST BE DEFENDED

FLORIAN SCHNEIDER

Cinema addressed the unconscious, television modulated distance. Nowadays it is not just about working on the net but above all on working within and across networks. But how is it possible, especially in a medium that claims to document anything or everything, to rediscover or even reinvent documentary?

“We must engage with this society in the prevalent medium”: this slogan conveyed filmmaker Michael Mrakitsch’s decision, shared by many other filmmakers in the 1960s and 1970s, to work against television on television rather than trying to make a living in some niche of the cineastic realm.

If we agree with Mrakitsch, it’s time to apply this principle. Political and aesthetic strategies shouldn’t just duplicate or illustrate what is *given*; instead, they must seek to confront new configurations of power and powerlessness that proliferate across networked environments. It might sound strange to drop the illusions of artistic freedom. This may seem disconcerting from a contemporary perspective, since documentary has migrated almost entirely out of television and back into even older media — the museum, theater, or more recently cinema. This is not a result of political or aesthetic considerations but, instead, one of the few survival strategies still available.

To rely on claims about the pervasiveness of the internet in almost every sphere of life has become hopelessly banal. However, it’s much more promising to suggest using this medium as the terrain for debating questions about how social fictions are made — and, instead, sets out to defend the real. Far beyond questions of taste, gossip, and the notorious difficulty of addressing what unfolds on the net, there are many reasons why it is difficult to view the net as an appealing environment for critical debate, particularly in the era of so-called “social networking.”

For instance, networked reality is still perceived as “virtual” (with an unpleasant aftertaste of being somehow “unreal”), which is still seen as a threat to authenticity and originality. At the same

time, networked services have enabled additional apparatuses that document, store, monitor, and record every possible movement. In this light — omnipresent documentation, on the one hand, and the deceptive appearance of second-order reality, on the other — documentary is fighting a losing battle on two fronts.

The rise of particular network services reduces myriad ways of looking at things to short-term, unambiguous necessities (“Like!”). With this, other ways to inhabit the net, or even to use it against the grain, are dissipating. The net increasingly becomes a sort of convenient transportation hub or a technology that is more or less “neutral.” Even in this latter view, at its very best, it is supposed to accept *the given* at face value, in the literal sense of the Latin word *data*, meaning *that which is given*.

It seems as if the room to play with the potentials of a new medium — freed from outmoded conventions of seeing and unburdened by the imperative to realize value — has vanished beyond our conceptual horizons. Walter Benjamin said of analog photography, “The illiterate of the future will not be the man who cannot read the alphabet, but the one who cannot take a photograph.” In this sense, our challenge now is to learn once again how to see — both with new devices and despite them.

To make something visible one must leave something out. Visual production is always a more or less conscious process of reduction, which is never merely or strictly technical. Devices have nothing to do with it. Editing images, reducing quantity and complexity to *given* data for straightforward consumption, filtering out disturbing elements and suppressing ambiguities: these illusions are fabricated, as if reality could be consumed.

As long as these processes were standardized and were generally accepted, we could participate in the great debates: Are we really seeing the same thing? Who benefits from what is shown to us? Doubt was the driving force of the analog — or so it would seem in retrospect.

But, paradoxically, standardization of image production was the necessary precondition for perception to become “individualized”, and for the “subjective” to give rise to subjectivity with all of its supposed shortcomings and flaws.



To discuss what was seen and its effects made sense only as long as unified standards applied — for recording and transmitting images, for resolution and aspect ratios, and above all for *framing*.

Contrary to many claims made about the supposed power of images, their actual impact was never as potent as the standardized realities of factory society. Instead, it was the systematic over-estimation of that power that was most effective. Yet through this ambiguity of standardization, on the one hand, and individualization, on the other, perception could seem autonomous enough to produce (or at least enjoy) a certain degree of authenticity in what was seen.

In clear contrast to the age of television, the conditions under which images are now produced are constantly renegotiated on an *ad hoc* basis. Encoding, decoding, compression, and distribution of data — let alone its reception and processing — are all done more or less in compliance with proliferating, overlapping, and conflicting technical standards. There is no clear ground for calling these disparate “technical” processes into question. The outcomes of these endless renegotiations cannot be predicted; as a result, they cannot be generalized, let alone refuted.

Authenticity no longer stems from a more or less autonomous rejection of the standardized, mainstream image. Instead, it is largely the accidental result of disparate factors — limited bandwidth, technical improvisation, and/or the time pressures dictated by the demand for “content”. It is no longer produced by an audience that can only listen and watch yet is entitled to criticize — and does so precisely to compensate for its own powerlessness. Instead, authenticity resides in the “honesty” of more or less raw images which at their best can awaken sympathy or malice.

Of course, television wasn’t replaced by some digital cottage industry; instead, its scale has been supplanted and expanded upon dramatically and is sometimes called the “creative industries”. This deregulated image production, a sort of postmodern affect industry, and its cynicism about the digital are no longer concerned with details. What is at stake is the question of power: what does it mean to own an image?

Who has the power and the means to exercise ownership?

Moreover — and unlike the production of images in the fictional realm — documentary has always had to raise the question of ownership. Who does seeing belong to? And how does the image transform — even just quantitatively — the reality latent in a period time?

This is the significant distinction that marks documentary now. When realities are produced in networked environments, we must engage with them in a network mode. Only if we claim control of the contemporary means of production — the means to produce reality, in a sense — can we begin to make an image that need not apologize and is not compromised by its made nature, which does not inform on but, rather, *forms* reality.

Conventional understandings of documentary would have it capture and “fix” reality in order to replay it later on. A particular moment or site is isolated, stored, and reconstructed as an event in ways that produce plausible forms of truth — all with a degree of permanence beyond the contingencies of time and space.

However, conventional approaches are doomed to failure in networked environments. When uncertainty is the precondition of any assertion and instability is the rule, we must rely on an opposite strategy to produce, invent, and develop truth.

We must do more than merely emphasize that everything is “intertwined” somehow or other, with events following one from another with a certain degree of probability in some hazy automatic way.

It isn’t enough to simply demand the triumph of “transparency” and “openness” without also questioning how realities need to be re-created again and gain in new contexts. And it is scary to imagine ceding the empire of optical experience — and hence the anti-optical as well — to the imperatives of a handful of corporations and their proprietary code.

A crucial characteristic of networked environments is that image production no longer takes place in our heads, as sometimes claimed.

Instead, a great deal of visual production is outsourced — in many ways, and at every level — to apparatuses that pre-empt even the most basic decisions involved in perception, cognition, and imagination.

Documentary must find new standpoints, both literally and figuratively. It must take a stand *vis-à-vis* a postindustrial production of fictions that increasingly possess, even own reality. Practices such as computer vision, automated image analysis, and pattern recognition permeate crucial areas of everyday life in the control society and subjecting them to sophisticated algorithms. Empirical perception, less and less the domain of our senses; instead, is taken over by cybernetic devices, which operate on the basis of their own assumptions and in the end produce tautologies.

Against this, reality must be defended. But merely capturing it isn’t enough; instead, it must be broken free and become fugitive. But what could this mean? Where could documentary flee to? Ultimately, this cannot be a polite question about the “appropriate use” of technology but, rather, the opposite: How can we use technologies for things very different than their intended purposes?

The machinic legibility of images makes it possible to treat them like text, and to input and output them correspondingly. It becomes possible to interrogate images in new ways, not just according to the immanent relations of what they depict but formally — categorize, index, and tag them — to search and to find. In this way, networked environments give rise to an almost irresistible temptation to reduce the image to what is or can be made legible. Anything that might remain unreadable in any way is directly threatened with extinction — dismissed as incomprehensible and useless, ignored and discarded.

That however can scarcely be said to tell us anything about reality. Quite the contrary; after all, this is a really redundant undertaking. Visualizing data as a means of rendering the given visible and verifying what is anyway obvious leaves no scope for an exploration of reality that could call into question the rules by which this reality is produced, let alone assert a right to take production into one’s own hands. However, an exploration of this kind is exactly what would

constitute the importance of documentary: generating realities that free themselves from obsessions and possessions; that resist the ways in which all forms of living are captured by technical devices.

Today this kind of proposition is lurking below the noise threshold. Not the image’s ground but its *underground* is no longer to be found *between* images, or *in front of* or *behind* images, but rather *in their midst*: within or beyond the visible, in the static buzz of useless information. Just as the beauty of the documentary film once lay in its graininess, today this beauty is drunk on what is supposed to be the least significant bit.

But when images become illegible and the actual, existing information can’t be compressed, truth is no longer the sum of probabilities. This non-compliant remainder with its generative multiplicity of meanings is the basis for a networked documentary that sets out to escape from an tautological, menu-driven “reality”. Documentary that aims to produce surplus of reality confronts a paradoxical realization nowadays: communication “over the net” tends to consume reality’s store rather than expanding it in the ways imagined (and partly practiced) in the techno-utopias of the 1990s.

Social exchange, in terms of individual creativity and shared affect, is subordinated to specious economic “laws” regardless of their ability to generate profits (or, indeed, epic loss). As a consequence, images of reality are diminished quantitatively — literally compressed — and their “processing” is reduced to the endless algorithmic exploitation of metadata in order to profile, monitor, and foreclose user generation.

The art of documentary is resistance to communication. It means rejecting the imperative that *everything must be communicated* — and, instead, to work with breaks, ruptures, and incomprehensible elements. It means leaving behind the semantically homogenized space of “the net” and delving into the underground beneath the threshold of what is visible only because it is legible.

In the networked image of reality, change encompasses more than just perceptions of space understood, in general terms, as the shift from

optics to semantics. It also encompasses the ways in which time is imagined, toward a framework within which events unfold simultaneously, in so-called “real time”.

Traces of this transition, from similarity to simultaneity, can be observed at many levels — as numerous commentators have noted from particular perspectives. Immediate availability and exchangeability is the *sine qua non* of both the production and distribution of images, to the point where the two are almost indistinguishable. Rather than past, present, and future, we are left with only real-time or “on-demand”. The advance of network technologies has driven and been driven by the imperative that no time can be wasted, either in producing or consuming images. Delay, any delay, means loss; whereas, instantaneous availability is a profit — and much more than just saving time. Instantaneous availability short-circuits not just the legal discourses about images — their power, their ownership, and so on — and replaced it with the act of appropriation here and now.

In the digital simulacrum, linear time collapses into networked ubiquity; we no longer concern ourselves with whether or how an image resembles its ideal. Autonomic surveillance, carefully staged broadcasts, handheld serendipity: each has definitively become an act of taking possession, immediately and indefinitely.

Documentary must search for false time instead of real time: too early or too late, but never at the appropriate moment to capture an image and take possession of it. This inevitable failure, which goes hand in hand with false time, allows for insights that could never have been calculated or predicted. We can glimpse the underlying codes — human readable, not machine-readable — of networked reality. In doing so, we recognize the idiosyncrasies of images that cannot be possessed, are no one’s property, and therefore will be different every time they are viewed.

False time is a time that never pretends to be real. It is just as hard now to identify as it was to identify false cuts and continuities in their day. Determining the right moment is comparatively easy. But one of the great challenges of documentary is to decide what false time could mean and how to determine it.

False time and the noncompliant, illegible remainder aren’t new approaches that became available only with the advent of digital information and communication technologies. On the contrary, one could easily demonstrate that documentary, in contrast to documentation, is marked by two key refusals: on the one hand, to be reduced to the legible, and, on the other, to conform to a flat notion of timeliness.

However, now, in defending the real, this remainder and false time play a pivotal role. These two features of documentary can disrupt the contemporary production of continuity. It provides the status quo with the legitimacy it so desperately needs in the age of networking: to justify its claim to the exclusive rights to reality.

Traditionally, continuity results from the fabrication of linear time and a consistent space. Ambiguities were eliminated, contradictions were reconciled, and the immediate was standardized in order to reduce what couldn’t be understood to a comfortable selection of endlessly repeated facts. Cutting off all uncalculated or unpredictable outside influences was a necessary condition for a cinematic self — one that, by losing itself in such a protected environment, was constantly assured of its continued and contained existence. Continuity served as a kind of ideological workout in the fitness studio of the soul.

But what importance does continuity have now, in a seemingly ahistorical, networked, and converging media environment? Continuity is produced here in ways that are diametrically opposed to traditional methods of film and television. In networked environments, the perception of time and space is inverted.

Classical “continuity” established synthetic time and a consistent sense of space, so that the viewer considered them to be both plausible and seductive — and thereby made two worlds one. However, contemporary continuity is no longer a matter of mechanics and geometry. It doesn’t present events in a logical sequence from an anthropomorphic perspective. Instead, the aim is to produce both the event and its representation simultaneously.

Networked continuity is based on immediate availability and exchangeability. It demands unified semantic spaces and an insistent real time

with neither past nor future. However, a critical understanding of continuity must sidestep these homogenizations. In their place, we can envision a very different kind of continuity — one that consists of something more than incessant self-reassurance, one that struggles against the onslaught of repetition of the same. It would demand an engagement with history that is more than mere entertainment: one that proceeds through breaks and ruptures, standstills and sudden movement. The result: a past that resists any form of “coming to terms” with it, and a present seen as the beginning of the past rather than the end of the past.

Networked reality can only be recorded as asynchronous, heterogeneous data flows. There is no longer any synchronous time in the industrial sense, whose interdependencies demanded a “pulse” to implement and coordinate the assembly line, the mass media, and indeed the nation state. Motorized simultaneity drove material production and media. It was within *this* scheme that the camera served as a “clock for seeing”, as Roland Barthes noted.

In contrast, networked global economies exploit asynchronicity. Rather than a binding, quartz-based time, there are only time-slices: the principle — applied explicitly in operating systems, for example — of the transient, discrete moments when actions are allowed on a constantly renegotiated, *ad hoc* basis. This constant re-prioritization is called multitasking. We cannot understand its effects; we can only accept them. Criticizing a milliseconds-long “phenomenon” on historical or ideological grounds is almost beyond comprehension.

The effects, which would otherwise run rampant, can only be mediated by realizing real time. However, in the too-early or too-late of false time, reality cannot be satisfied with the time-slice allocated to it. It will necessarily occupy a longer or shorter interval — and give rise to all sorts of endless discontinuities.

Ultimately, documentary need not fear the paradoxical illegibility and polyvalence of the real. Instead, documentary must revalue the heterogeneity of data flows — not only as an overwhelming chaos but also as a plenitude of almost mythical extent. This superabundance of political, social, and

cultural scenes must be investigated and re-created.

None of this is new.

Each time the documentary has undergone a renewal, its reinvention has gone hand-in-hand with a radical change of milieu: from early landscape photography to portrait ateliers, from “living portraits” of traveling and fairground cinemas on to silent-film studios, then subsequently returning into the factory, heading off to war, and back into the natural world.

In the 1960s documentary, as camera and sound-recording equipment became portable and broke free from the studio, filmmakers and video artists seized that opportunity. By moving into settings where they had little or no control over the noise threshold in any sense, they engaged with a lively, animate world, became aware of life in the public sphere, and reclaimed realities that had once existed independently of mediated images.

Now, we could lament how surveillance cameras monitor our streets, and how our public spaces are becoming “mere” collections of semipublic images on the net. But it also means that, for documentary, today’s street *is* this networked environment. Not just the “net”, but a much deeper investigation of what that milieu might mean.

It is just as risky and dangerous here, and the contrast to conventional modes of filmmaking could not be greater. We have no choice but to find new ways to see it.

**Florian Schneider** is a filmmaker and author based in Berlin. The author would like to thank Ted Byfield for editing the English version of this text.





[The original “On Synthetic and Documentary Film” was published with the subtitle “Twelve Readings” by the German Film Museum in Frankfurt a.M. in 1975. Each reading is accompanied by an appendix with examples of films; this appendix has in general been omitted here. The texts have also been shortened. The abridgements have been made and the essay reprinted with the kind permission of the author. The reprint of the abridged version in this magazine is once again courtesy of the Dokumentarfilminitiative im Filmbüro NRW and publisher Vorwerk 8, which in 1998 re-published Wildenhahn’s text in their anthology “Bilder des Wirklichen. Texte zur Theorie des Dokumentarfilms”, edited by Eva Hohenberger.]

## FOURTH READING: KINO-EYE. FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCES

KLAUS WILDENHAHN

Every synthetic film – and again, I would like to clarify the term: I do not use the term “synthetic” in a derogatory fashion: synthesis = joining individual, independent parts to form a whole; a film (feature-length film) made up of different elements = synthetic film – every synthetic film lags a step behind the development of the society it is intended for.

“October” by Sergei Eisenstein and “The End of St. Petersburg” by Vsevolod Pudovkin were created to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. The synthetic film is situated in a rear defensive position with regard to contemporary politics. Political developments provide movie directors with the necessary material; they rework it for the medium and play the revised version back to society. The artistic, synthetic piece has the task of linking a historical situation to the current one; it must call to mind, it must interpret, construe, crystallize-out role models, communicate a self-image, encourage and thus give clues for further action. The artistic, synthetic work is the stuff legends are made of – and it should by all means be realistic and positive.

The shorter the distance between society’s actions and the replaying of the artistic, critical treatment of them, for instance in film, the better the discussion, i.e. the political debate within society, functions. Should there be a deadlock, our liberal entrepreneurial society will tend to avoid the issue by switching to the theater of illusion. A reminder:

(Wilfried Berghahn, 1961) “If Ruth Leuwerik managed to top the popularity charts for female movie stars for three years after the “Trapp Family”, continuing to only play roles that confirmed her audience’s hopes that there are no problems in this world that can’t be solved, because we all basically have our hearts in the right place (they’re ‘pure’, they’re ‘clean!’), that says more about the mentality of the German burgher during Konrad Adenauer’s third term in office than the so-called socially critical films produced in those years.”

The fundamental political issues and conflicts are kept quiet. The separation of the classes is much more noticeable than in reality. The ruling class not only dominates the economy and the distribution of society’s wealth, but also determines the degree of enlightenment that society is to receive about itself. For the most part, it controls the creation of legends, developing them into the entertainment industry’s diversionary tactic. The middle-class producer of art is left with nothing but to exploit his increasing state of isolation in a sensitive manner. Perhaps he’ll be awarded an art prize for his efforts.

At this point, filmmakers must take a step back, before the advent of the synthetic work, before the beginning of the motion picture. Every society has a basic cultivation of information that comes before the legend: the creation of a chronicle. Within the film industry, newsreels and lengthy documentaries, often supplied by the newsreel producers, play that role. We know full well that they contribute and have contributed to as much misinformation as has the motion picture genre that Berghahn described in 1961. All the same, newsreels are theoretically marked by a less artificial and more direct basic approach *vis-à-vis* the viewer. Newsreels play back first-hand material. It is journalistic work: more modest, less expensive, right on the ball.

(A digression about the scope of information in our system – We don’t mean to claim here that in a system of free-market entrepreneurship the journalistic accumulation of information can act independently and radically, detached from this system. Its scope is by all means limited by what the system’s liberal or reformist ideology of information allows. But this room for maneuver must be filled out and taken advantage of, if only to never lose sight of the boundaries that have been set. It is significant that it was in 1961 when Berghahn wrote his work about the guiding principles of synthetic film in the Federal Republic of Germany that the ARD television station’s very first news magazine shows, chiefly “Panorama”, came into their own in terms of style and political significance. TV news magazines are nothing but newsreels. They contributed to the rise of political discussion within our society. Certainly there were limits, and when these boundaries were crossed, senior editors were replaced. Again, as far as I’m concerned, that’s also useful informa-

tion. It serves as an example of how one more degree of enlightenment was provided with regard to the dogma of the freedom of the press and freedom of opinion. I don’t want to idealize or overrate the role of journalists, authors and directors. But it would amount to a reverse renouncement not to continuously expand to the maximum the positions once conceded in a liberal educational space. That is nothing but solid craftsmanship.

At some point, we must certainly ask how much informative material no longer gets shown in the official and tolerated “leftist” newsreels and magazines. That brings us to the problem of the counter-newsreel. Where and how can counter-newsreels be produced and distributed? The situation doesn’t look promising in the Federal Republic of Germany. There have been minute beginnings and failed attempts. For the time being, one would have to admit that the need for a functioning source of counter-information – information that is not just offered now and then, esoterically, in student cinemas – is not yet recognized. At least not to the degree that such a need would be reflected materially in any way. Attempts that were made failed due to a lack of financing or functioning commitment. They failed because there was no actual site to replay them and no perception that “counter-newsreels” can even contribute to enlightenment).

Back to my thoughts on the advent of newsreels and the “kino-eye”:  
At the beginning of a new social order, newsreels are the very first information platforms. Soviet newsreels accompanied the civil war in that country, not motion pictures. Newsreel cameramen, editors and directors laid the foundation for the future works of the famous directors of Soviet synthetic film. I believe I can derive this much for our current situation: whenever the theater of illusion staged by the powers that be gets out of hand, we should heed the call by a “documentarist”, a “cinematic eye” – a call that usually demands in a solemn lecture the return to reality. This is an expression of healthy confidence that the propaganda-effect of social raw material is sufficient to trigger in humans – the recipients – the awareness of “truth”.

“WE declare the old films, the romantic, the theatricalized etc., to be leprous.  
– Don’t come near!

- Don't look!
- Mortally dangerous!
- Contagious.”

Dziga Vertov wrote these words in 1922. Vertov is the first “kino-eye” we refer to, a Soviet filmmaker who propagated and made short newsreels for everyday needs – “Kinopravda” (Cinema of Truth) – as well as lengthy documentaries about socially relevant topics – “Kinoglaz” (kino-eye). He learned his trade in the “Film Chronicle” department at the Soviet government’s cinema committee in Moscow. He compiled intertitles, was a master-editor, and rode along on propaganda trains during the civil war.

Vertov was instrumental in the young Soviet society’s very first newsreels. His 1922 manifesto “WE” attacks the re-emerging, commercialized theater of illusion of synthetic film in the Soviet Union’s NEP period. (See Jay Leyda’s ‘Kino’, Chapter VIII, “Reconstruction 1921–1923”) In 1922, in the midst of the New Economic Policy era, Vertov – building on his practical experience with newsreels during the civil war – started his “Kinopravda” newsreel series, a series that became famous and whose 23 episodes were to become exemplary for progressive newsreel work. “Kinopravda” started when there was nothing to be found in movie theaters save conventional films from foreign dream factories; while the old Russian dream factories were busy resuming their old style of production with the same old hacks, churning out the same old tear-jerkers. In these times, the “Kinopravda” newsreel started off with a new, social brand of art production, its partisan topicality forming the only counterweight to the theater of illusion.

In the West, the term *cinéma vérité* (“Kinopravda”) has since become a cliché in the film business, used whenever a documentary approach begins to oppose commercialized films with an antithesis; usually, however, the existing production apparatus lets it merge with the work of illusion before the attempt at documentary can even develop into an antithesis.

Vertov’s newsreel work was the starting point for further thought on creating feature-length documentary films. He established a direction in the development and creation of film that he called the “cinematic eye”, or kino-eye.

Vertov demonstrated the most important leap that every young filmmaker must make when he turns back to the beginnings of film in his society, every young filmmaker who no longer wants to work with synthetic film because, among other reasons, it exposes him to too many possibilities of being corrupted. Dedicated journalistic work is a beginning.

Here, the filmmaker takes the leap from newsreel work to kino-eye work. First, he needs to find current, socially relevant material (newsreel). Then, it’s about defining not only current, but also neglected social material (kino-eye). Certain topics must be treated in detail, must be treated as documentary material rather than being dealt with only briefly in a newscast, in a report.

This switch from newsreel work to kino-eye work is important and should be kept track of. Both are driven by the same journalistic urge – and we do assume it’s progressive, dedicated journalism – but they’re defined by different features with regard to topicality, thematic intensity and emotional engagement.

The pressure of events forces the journalist to bundle and summarize when working on newsreels; it is he, a single voice, who reports.

In documentary work, the protagonists have the floor. It is no longer the voice of the filmmaker that dominates. Of course he chooses the pictures and he is responsible for the final montage. But the story is told by the protagonists on film – the heroes of our everyday lives – caught up in conflicts and events. Their collective voices report. The story might consist of statements they make or the observation of an unfolding activity.

It is the documentarist’s job to capture this in as concrete a manner as possible. He doesn’t tell the story in his running commentary but through the montage of the material that has been shot. This difference between journalistic reporting and a film documentary, between newsreel and kino-eye, is fundamental and a first step in the type of film production we are defining. Kino-eye work calls for long-term dedication on site. The breathless overview is anathema to it.

An ideological aspect of kino-eye work: it aims to encompass social life in its entirety, meaning

that as many people as possible should be involved in the work of documentation. According to Vertov’s plan, for instance, this means all the amateur film-groups in a country. This might be a naive plan, since documentary work, like all types of production, requires a great degree of adept professionalism if it is to be effective. But a tendency to spontaneous participation is inherent in making documentaries; they trigger a move toward lively discussion in large groups.

From this basis, the next leap is to the type of production chosen, the leap to making a synthetic film. This might be the motion picture we’re familiar with (or it can also be the so-called poetic film, but more about that later).

In the Soviet Union, Vertov’s colleagues moved on to dramatized synthetic film; beginning in 1925, they founded the great tradition of the Soviet motion picture, with for instance “Battleship Potemkin”, “Mother”, “October” and “Arsenal”. Without the early newsreels and the continuing documentary work of kino-eye, these motion pictures would never have been possible. Vertov described and boosted the documentary method primarily in his writings. I can only refer here to his essays on the principle of kino-eye (“Kinoglaz”), e.g. “On the Film Known as Kinoglaz”, “Artistic Drama and Kino-Eye”, “Three Songs about Lenin” and “Kino-Eye: On Love for the Living Human Being”. (They are all to be found in German translation in the edition of Dziga Vertov’s works mentioned at the end of this essay, published by the East German Institute for Film Research.)

It is easy to see a vital documentary inquisitiveness in Vertov’s films, how his theory of “life taken by surprise” becomes concrete, how he observes everything he can get his hands on: work, birth, accident and death, switching on electricity, baking bread, the Soviet Union’s streets and the countryside.

In 1930, Vertov made a discovery without which the documentary film as we know it would be unthinkable: synchronous audio/video recordings of interviews with everyday workers. A female concrete worker, a collective farmer and a woman farmer in “Three Songs about Lenin” (1934) and a female parachutist in “Lullaby” (1937) are the first everyday heroes in the history of documentary film to speak spontaneously. From

his silent-movie observations to these scenes of synchronously recorded speech, Vertov continuously pressed ahead in his productions toward experimental documentary work.

We enjoy invoking him. But these documentary sequences are not the decisive element in his filmmaking.

For the most part, Vertov created synthetic films. In his products – in contrast to his theories – he moved away from a documentary approach, creating “film poems”. One must allow of course for the production conditions in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s. (Vertov’s diaries, published by the Austrian Film Museum – also listed at the end – provide important information on this topic.)

Let’s continue: in 1927, Vertov had mapped out a good part of his theories, and he and his co-workers had shot four major movies (“Kinoglaz”; “Forward, Soviet!”; “The Sixth Part of the World”; “Man with a Movie Camera”).

In 1927 in Rotterdam, the first significant Western European documentarist began his work: Dutch cameraman and filmmaker Joris Ivens. With Ivens, we move closer to our own social beginnings and to the experiences a young filmmaker has during his training. These are experiences that almost instinctively lead him to make documentaries and then take him further down the path of becoming one of our major progressive filmmakers. One who can teach us many useful things; who is still prepared to learn new things, too.

Ivens shot his first documentary, “The Bridge”, in 1927, and he did so deliberately to try out his technical prowess and to hone his observation skills. It was serious professional work for Ivens, the one difference being that the end product was not meant for sale:

“‘The Bridge’ may now look like no more than a study in movement but I got a great deal more out of it than that. I learned many secrets about these movements in relation to the camera. For example, I learned that when you film repetitive movements such as the actions of a counterweight on the bridge, you have to observe this for a longer time and with greater attention than you would think. You will always discover some-

thing new, the countermovement of a gliding shadow, a significant trembling as the cables come to a halt, or a more telling reflection at a more subjective angle.

From the little glass house below on the bridge, the operator watched everything I did. When I came down the long iron ladder after filming the huge cable wheel at the top of the bridge he just had to tell me what was on his mind:

‘You don’t have to *eat* the bridge. You look like some sort of tiger sneaking and creeping around that wheel. I had to laugh when you suddenly stood up straight against the sky with your camera. Did you get what you wanted?’

I did get what I wanted. What he had seen from below was the long careful observation of all the elements, the turning wheel, the gliding, sticky oily cable and the busy traffic down on the dock. When I stood up I had finally found the right moment for the shooting. That is, the ‘here and now’, the acid-test of your sensitivity. With your handheld camera you freeze at that critical moment – the moment you find the right spot for your shot. Not two inches more to the right or to the left or a little higher or a little lower, or closer or further away, not a split second later or earlier – but here and now.

Of course you learn to give yourself leeway: you can begin your camera motor shortly before that decisive moment and stop shortly after that moment has been completed; but you have to be sure that it has been caught within your total footage.

I learned from ‘The Bridge’ that prolonged and creative observation is the only way to be sure of selecting, emphasising, and squeezing everything possible out of the rich reality in front of you. The filmmaker’s discovery that he was not smart enough the day before is more depressing than in any other medium of art. He cannot afford the psychological luxury of this *esprit de l’escalier* – the smart afterthoughts that come to you on the stairs as you consider all the clever things you might have said, but at the time didn’t.”

That is the gist of the documentarist’s experience: no clever second thoughts. You have to be in the right place at the right time, prepared to

shoot. On what Joris Ivens experienced here, I’d like to quote again the old master of kino-eye. In 1944, when he was almost 50 years old, Vertov wrote in his diary:

“Repetition – is impossible on this earth. If I do not register what I see with my camera, what I see at this very moment (at the same time I’m watching it), then I will never be able to do so again. I must diagnose the situation and shoot it simultaneously. Not earlier or later, but exactly at that given moment, for a second later it may be completely different. Better or worse, but different. It may well turn into something I don’t need. This is particularly true in filming human behavior.

Hence, writing a script about the behavior of *real* people is possible only if you know in advance what will happen to those people. This means having a general schema and approximate plans which will not provide a precise representation of the people to be filmed because people reveal themselves only in rare instances, which ought to be recorded immediately. Otherwise, it’s best to film an actor. At the most that will be – well-acted. There is no such thing as prior ‘precise’ coordination in documentary film. If you ‘coordinate’ a shot it will always misfire. I’ve never noticed that anything ever repeated itself. What’s lost, is lost forever.”

Thus, the documentary filmmaker deliberately puts up with what the director of fiction films tries to avoid at all costs (or at the most employs as a formal subtlety): a roughness in style and statement. An asperity that isn’t intentional but that evolves from the method. The documentarist is dependent on his surroundings; he can’t remodel them to the specifications of his authors. Smoothness is thus lost. Camera movement, lighting conditions, conversations and action can’t be predetermined: the filmmakers don’t arrange shots, they chase down the material; sometimes, that literally renders them breathless and this tension is mirrored in the product. It’s the opposite of formalism; the documentary content seeks and defines its form. That is an immensely agreeable experience for bourgeois creators who have grown up in a conceptual environment where form and content, feeling and thinking, aesthetics and ethics are separated. This roughness in shots should not be evened out at the end, during the film’s montage.

Anyone who has worked with film knows how easy it is to create fast shots and sequences, to find smooth transitions and re-jig the drama in the artificial world of the cutting room. In the cutting room you believe you have the actual power to include a message. Of course, the maker has power. Here, in the cutting room, is where his authorship begins. The filmmaker bares his soul in montage. And that’s when the lonely author most easily falls into the traps of pre-cut middle-class art patterns. The temptation is great to delicately sprinkle in some sarcasm, knowledge acquired by reading, a sentimental touch, or the mentality of a German language lesson. A formally self-contained argument can be quickly achieved in this way that has nothing whatsoever to do with reality.

Any excessive formal effort at smoothness or typesetting should fall away in documentary film. Each and every artificial attempt to round out the story must be avoided. You show a collection of slivers that have been trapped. If you were persistent and lucky (one requires the other), you’ll succeed in drawing the audience, the recipient, into the arc of suspense created by this open game. That’s what it’s all about: including the recipient. In that respect, the roughness of documentary film offers the audience the empty spot in the dialogue between the filmmaker and filmed persons; in that respect, a documentary film represents a beginning and synthetic film a continuation; in that respect, documentary film is an open game and synthetic film a closed game. In synthetic film, the viewer can accept examples but he cannot join the beginning of a conversation offered by the synthetic product. He has to submit to it. In the case of a documentary film, the audience can soon say yes or no to the product.

If the documentarist has fulfilled his task, the product opens up a field of discussion between him – the creator – the people depicted and the audience. The creator by no means dominates the conversation. This relationship is best demonstrated in an actual discussion at the end of a screening.

Back to Joris Ivens. In 1929, the Association of Soviet Film Directors invited him to show his films in the Soviet Union. In the meantime, he had shot several additional short films, but he was still at the beginning of his career, which

would eventually lead him to become a dedicated socialist filmmaker. One of his short films was “Zuiderzee”, a documentary about Dutch land reclamation from the sea. The Russian audience appreciated this film most of all. One presentation in particular was to attain a certain amount of significance for Ivens and would influence his future work – it proved educational for him. The film was shown in a Moscow auditorium, to 800 construction workers contracted to build the Moscow subway. Although Ivens had shown the film easily 200 times before, he stayed in the auditorium because he understood that his absence would have snubbed the audience. After the film was over, the discussion began:

“After these answers my questioner arose again. ‘I think,’ he said, ‘that Citizen Ivens is either a fake or a liar.’

When this was translated for me I was puzzled. The audience was now as excited as I was. I told the translator to ask him for an explanation. He repeated: ‘A fake or a liar.’ ‘Could you put that a little more concretely?’ I asked.

‘You say you’re from the middle class, yet the film we have seen was surely made with the eyes of a worker. I know, because it is exactly the way I see the work. So, either you are a liar and bought the film in Holland from somebody or else you are a worker who’s pretending to be from the middle class – and that is certainly not necessary here in a workers’ and peasant state,’ he added smiling.

I couldn’t have asked for a higher compliment: *The film is exactly the way I see the work.* I had no documents with me and I made no attempt to prove that I was really a member of the middle class. Somewhat desperate, I tried to pin the questioner down on his sharp observation. I asked him, ‘Where, in my film do you see the work shown exactly the way you see it?’

‘Several places,’ he said, ‘especially in that heavy stone work on the dike. I have done that kind of work.’

‘I see what you mean. I can explain how I filmed that sequence. I could not find the right angle of my camera on this stone work. So I started watching the work to see how it begins, how it ends, what its rhythm is; but still I could not find my camera angle. Then I tried to move the heavy basalt stones myself because I thought it would be valuable to get the actual feel of the

work before filming it. I soon became exhausted because I wasn't used to the work, but I found out what I wanted to know. You have to feel first where to get a grip on the stone – not in the middle, but at certain corners. I found out there is a trick of balancing with the stone – how to use your own weight to get the stone from one place to another. I found that the greatest strain in the work was on the shoulder muscles and on the chin. Therefore, those were the things to emphasize when photographing this action because they belong organically to the work. From then on the camera – its angle and its composition – were all dictated by that muscle and the chin. Those became the two focal points for the action. Reality dictated the photography, not my esthetic effort to achieve a nice balance of lines and lighting. But this realistic angle also happened to be the most beautiful angle. I could not satisfactorily and truly photograph the stone laborer until I found out the physical strain of his work.'

My questioner was satisfied. 'That is good, very good,' he said. (...)

This was one of the most significant evenings in my young film career. That man had discovered a secret of my working method which I myself had not fully realized. No film critic had ever touched the cause of the realistic quality in my films which they had observed and written about. It took the common sense of a Russian worker to do this."

The question a Russian worker put to Joris Ivens is right on the mark with regard to the beginning of it all: where does the documentarist even come from?

Answer: making documentary films is the effort on the part of the middle-class art producer to steer attention in his society back to the actual production conditions and work procedures. It's his attempt to develop an aesthetic point of view out of the action he plans to illustrate and not to foist his own formal ideas onto the action. It's his endeavor to bring material from the people, working-class material, back into the center of attention.

This represents an impulse to enlighten at a juncture where enlightenment was long denied. It is carried out by members of a social stratum who are able to acquire the requisite training and means of production thanks to their class-

status and who are then able to get assignments (usually from non-commercial institutions) to finance this basic documentary provision of information. And who then often end up experiencing serious "commercial" difficulties. (This statement refers to the German social system and also to the beginning of a socialist society like the Soviet Union, which initially, in the 1920s, relied for art production on the progressive educated middle-class.)

A few examples of where socialist and bourgeois documentarists came from in the early days of the documentary film movements:

Dziga Vertov's father was a librarian. Vertov writes that after finishing elementary school he attended music school and two institutions of higher learning. He wanted to be a writer.

Joris Ivens's father owned a chain of photography shops. Ivens was supposed to join the family business. His father could afford the best education for his son, who studied economics in Rotterdam and photochemistry in Berlin, and did internships at a camera factory in Dresden and at Zeiss in Jena.

John Grierson, founder of the English documentary film school, studied philosophy and social sciences. His father was a teacher at a Scottish village school.

Robert Flaherty ("Nanook", "Moana", "Tabu", "Industrial Britain", "Man of Aran", "Elephant Boy", "The Land", "Louisiana Story"), whom Grierson once called the "father of documentary film", was an iron ore prospector, his father a mining engineer.

Richard Leacock, American documentarist and student of Flaherty, himself marks the advent of a renewal of international documentary film. His films and those of his co-workers, which they dubbed "cinema direct" or "living camera", exerted an influence on socialist documentary film. Leacock was also a technical inventor who studied physics at Harvard.

This list has the sole purpose of demonstrating that enlightened men passed on their knowledge in other ways than originally intended; that they at some point in their filmmaking career were interested more in the "raw material" of

their society, in documentary material, than in the formal translation of their observations into the accepted (and easily marketable) synthetic artistic products.

This was the start of an effort to return social attention back to the broader strata of society. That doesn't mean that the material in the documentaries immediately met with widespread acceptance, especially not when audiences were plied on all corners with the "sweet embraces of the romance" (Vertov). But it is nonetheless a sign of resistance and the will to recover the health of the social body when interest in enlightenment is awakened: when people begin to ask about how things really are. This start was made by documentary film. It demonstrates an art that comes before the art of play-acting.

Joris Ivens, "The Camera and I". Berlin (GDR) 1969, p. 28ff, p. 59ff.  
Dziga Vertov, "The Birth of Kino-Eye". (GDR) , p. 101.

Dziga Vertov, "The difficult years of Dziga Vertov: Excerpts from his diaries", *Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 7/1, Vienna 1982, p. 17.

Dziga Vertov, 'We: Variant of a Manifesto,' in Annette Michelson, ed., Kevin O'Brien, transl., "Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov". (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London) 1984, p. 7.

**Klaus Wildenhahn** is a documentary filmmaker based in Hamburg.



## DISQUIETING NATURE

CORDULA DAUS IN CONVERSATION  
WITH CHRISTINE MEISNER

**Cordula Daus: The video “Disquieting Nature” starts out with a black screen. Song and music begin: “Big Jack Johnson dies into a dim March morning”. After a while, one can imagine the inside of a recording studio. A shot of a half-open Venetian blind follows until the view finally arrives completely outside, in the countryside.**

**Christine, you traveled the Mississippi Delta in the southern United States in 2010, and after dealing with the subject theoretically for quite some time, became deeply involved in the history and environment of the Delta blues. Like in your earlier works the actual experience of the journey, the here and now of a place, is very important for you. Perhaps you can say something about the process of creating “Disquieting Nature”. What were you looking for on a journey down the Delta?**

Christine Meisner: During the preparatory work, I used my research to draw out a route with sites that mark particular events of the Delta. In doing so, I was interested in the crossovers of the conditions of origin of the Delta blues, the social situation of the people who gave rise to this music, and the conditions under which they lived then and live now: that fateful linking of disenfranchisement (which from the start contradicted the US’s founding myth of maximum freedom for all citizens) and a genuine American music, which had such great influence around the globe. Thus, on my journey, I took a number of specific preconditions as a starting point. As you correctly said, however, in this, for me, only the here and now of a site is important. I am not interested in tracking down and depicting historical events, but rather, visualizing human behavior to understand the present a bit more. I investigated that, *in situ*.

**To what extent did the journey define the development and aesthetic of “Disquieting Nature”? How did the lyrics of the songs and the narrative structure of the work form?**

I traveled to the Delta during the transition from winter to spring because I wanted to find nature in a cold, “graphic” state in which the twigs, earth, and fields were visible, the landscape quasi-exposed. To this extent, I already had a clear idea of the video’s aesthetics; also that it should be black-and-white.

I foresaw a chronological order for the work’s structure; from the end of slavery to the present day; the period of the blues’ origins and activity. Whereby, right from the start, I wanted to build in digressions that sketch out the colonization process, the quasi-origins of this musical fusion. But the beginning of the video was not planned. Big Jack Johnson’s death came unexpectedly. It happened when I was there in Clarksdale. I wanted to talk with him; the local blues-icon. He died on the day that we had planned to meet.

That music should play a major role was the basic idea. I did not want to create a work about the blues, but instead, work with the blues at all levels. Exactly how first became clear during the journey when I found a CD by John Lee Hooker, which I had been looking for, for a long time, and thereby discovered his brilliant song “Country Boy”. This song was like an awakening. All of a sudden I could see the entire video in my mind, the atmosphere, and the role that music would have in it. Listening to this song while riding through the fields and the woodland of the Delta opened my eyes.

**In the second part of the video there is the story of a strange encounter: suddenly, a man dressed in a black leather coat, with a hat and silver walking-stick appears. He is called the “God of the Crossroads”. What is the significance of this character?**

I actually did meet this character, exactly as described in the song, on the day that Big Jack Johnson died, at a crossing on the road in Clarksdale. I recorded the encounter because it resembled a common motif in several blues songs that tell of the musician meeting a mysterious man at the crossroads who “tunes” their guitars, after which they are able to play like virtuosos. Blues legend Robert Johnson, for example, embodies this myth—it is said that he sold his soul there in the Delta at a crossroads for his own unique way of playing the guitar. In my research I searched for the origins of this

myth and came across a fusion of various African and European motifs. I was particularly interested in the character of Eshu, also Exú and Elegba, an Orisha from Yoruba culture, which I had already encountered during a previous project in Brazil. Eshu is a messenger between the here and now and the hereafter and can be found at the crossroads, the symbol of the encounter of journeys through life. There, he also fulfills wishes at the price of a sacrifice. In the Afro-American Voodoo religion, Candomblé or the Santería plays a more important role than in Africa because his mission, among others, is also one of re-shaping the connection to the ancestors in Africa: A connection that was broken by slavery. The character of Eshu came to New Orleans through slaves from Haiti and Cuba, and found its way northward on the Mississippi into the Delta.

In the context of the blues, Eshu becomes a trickster, who is often described in the same way as the person that I ran into.

**Eshu disappears just as suddenly as he appears. Afterwards, the song says: “Beyond the city limits the light turns over making things lucid”. From this moment on, the time-levels mix between now and back then; between what can really be seen and the knowledge about what has happened. In that, the drawings in the video play a very important role. They open up an entirely different view of reality than the documentary image. They show a land from a surreal perspective, all-embracing in terms of time: one sees the markings of a terrain that has been thoroughly economically developed, individual parcels of the land-lease system, border lines and the courses of rivers. But also traces that have long passed, of white settlers, or the original inhabitants, appear, which you have put together from various maps and researched. Your works generally take a starting point in a concrete historical and social context and yet you are not concerned with depicting this, as such. For you, what is the role of the documentary element? How do you see the relationship between the found and the fictional in your work?**

I have never viewed my work as documentary, and I never asked myself this question. But there is this dilemma with the truth, with the

“authentic”: I was busy with it for a long time, but never came to an artistic conclusion — Foucault was useful to some extent. I think that the category of truth does not exist in art and have decided not to consider it and to see what makes sense within my work and what is believable within the framework that I have set. It is actually so that I first want to experience something — I want to understand why something has become the way it is. Put simply: why certain things in human history have happened. What I then pass on in my work has gone through a long filtering process. Ultimately, nothing in “Disquieting Nature” is invented or contrived. Almost everything took place as is. Every depiction of a past event is always a construction. With regard to Roland Barthes’s concept of writing history as narrative, Michel de Certeau once emphasized a small but important difference — he described historiography as narrative, a telling of something that truly took place, and we are the result and further development of it. Precisely this is the distinction from fiction, and that is what interests me — “the discourse with the dead” as de Certeau calls it. For that I needed a mediator to open the doors. That is also the reason for the scene with a character like Eshu at the beginning of my video, before the history is “called on”.

**This transcendent perspective is also mirrored in the way that the river is sung about in the lyrics. The Mississippi River becomes a protagonist of a worrying, deceptive nature that makes the stories, the bodies, disappear and simultaneously makes them reappear. In your video, too, the images of flooded landscapes and the movements of the water’s current repeat: “Fluid stories seeping into the land”. Things have played out on the river’s shores and the riverbed that should actually be forgotten. “The river carries them off, and they wash downstream”. And at the end: “the river is flowing easy as it didn’t have a thing to do with nothing at all”. The lyrics emphasize the river’s ambivalent testimony — it is both a place of refuge for the victims and an accomplice of the propagators. How did you arrive at this personified portrayal?**

This awareness of a river as a *stream of history* is a motif that has long accompanied my work. In the “Wade in the Water” drawings (2009–10), I

thematized and drew the ambivalent role of the river (in this case it was the Ohio River) as the route for shipping slaves inland and also as a vanishing point for people who wanted to escape from slavery. Right from the start I was interested in the river's importance in the American landscape as a sign of progress, as a border to be crossed, as a marker of penetration and an aid in escape. In this way, in my drawings, the river became a protagonist in the process of colonization.

"Disquieting Nature" zooms in on the sites of individual crimes. The river is their witness, it absorbs them; they drift with it through the landscape. The river is, of course, also a metaphor for time in that it plays absolutely no role for me exactly when something happens. The "river" will bring it forth again sooner or later. The events come on land only in the present; one can view them only in the here and now.

**You often speak about "nature's memory" in relation to the work. What exactly is to be understood by that? At a different level you focus on music as a time-based, cultural recording medium that preserves the stories of individuals and allows them to become part of a collective memory.**

In my confrontation with the relationship of music and nature, I consider the human-made landscape as a memory storehouse in the same way that music is also a type of archive. Music is fluid; there is never the one moment in which a thing is created. Sounds are carried through history, everyone adds something. Particularly important for me were two references that influenced the narrative-base of the blues: European minnesingers who traveled from town to town and passed on stories, and the tradition of the *Griot*, West African storytellers who have a similar function of carrying stories within them, and while spreading these stories, constantly further developing them. The events have written themselves into the landscape in a similar way. And I am not talking about excavation sites here, but rather, how in the case of the Mississippi Delta, in its very nature became a landscape of colonization and thereby a memory of it: The way that the entire landscape was re-structured to install large-scale agricultural systems and how the attempt was then made to reconstruct its "original" nature again. In the

video I looked for sites that stored the violence that went along with this process. The acts of violence themselves are no longer visible, but nonetheless registered in a disquiet nature. My work sings of this.

**"Disquieting Nature" has an open narrative structure in which various stories and storylines surface and submerge. Whereas the images show landscapes and places where people are only indirectly present, the lyrics are about racist attacks, murders, and the appropriation of space. The impression of crime scenes appears only in the connection between music and text while, however, their evidential nature has been lost.**

In the work I was concerned with depicting human interventions, even when people cannot be seen in the images. Sites where something has happened; which is, however, not shown. I am interested in the depiction of violence; that is the basic motif of all of my works. I consider violence to be an unresolved dimension of our existence. It cannot be stopped. As the lawyer Jacques Vergès once said, "Violence is the mark of our freedom". In my works I attempt to understand violence, or at least get behind the motivation, the reason, for certain acts, to illustrate the dimensions of these basic human acts, and the way that their conceptualization and social acceptance change over the course of history.

**Christine Meisner** is an artist based in Berlin.

**Cordula Daus** is a cultural scholar and author based in Berlin.





## THU 31.5.

4 – 7 pm

### A Blind Spot

Exhibition Opening – conversation between the curator Catherine David, the anthropologist Christopher Pinney and the exhibition artists

7.30 pm

### Festival Opening

with Hila Peleg, artistic director Berlin Documentary Forum and Bernd M. Scherer, director, Haus der Kulturen der Welt

8 – 9 pm

### The Pixelated Revolution

Performance – Rabih Mroué

The Lebanese theater director, actor and writer Rabih Mroué presents a “non-academic lecture” about the role of mobile phones and social media in the Syrian revolts. To what extent are these electronic devices extensions of the participants’ own bodies? How does the physical deterioration of a human body relate to how data deteriorates as it is sent across the Internet via unreliable connections, subject to censorship and viruses? And is the seen footage from the Syrian clashes just the tip of an iceberg of unseen material, the data which didn’t make it onto that delicate nervous system, the global network?

9.30 – 11.30 pm

### Framing Death – How to Shoot One’s Crime

Presentation – Sylvère Lotringer

In a series of three lectures cultural theorist Sylvère Lotringer will examine representations and changing attitudes to death. Once an event ritually shared with the family and the community, death has become invisible. It is now being collectively acknowledged only when it results from a crime, and even then the brute facts of mortality are presented to the jury in ways that borrow heavily from fiction. Drawing from police crime archives of the 1980s from the five boroughs of New York, gathered by the police videographer known as Johnny Esposito, Sylvère Lotringer looks at the different ways death is resurfacing in Western culture.

12 midnight – 2 am

### Dead Birds

Screening presented by Antje Ehmann and Harun Farocki

Seeking a more subjective and humanistic form of documentary film, Robert Gardner — under the auspices of Harvard’s Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology — set off to film the Dani people, warrior-farmers in the highlands of New Guinea for his movie “Dead Birds” (USA 1964, 35 mm, 120 min, OV). Influenced by psychoanalysis, Gardner had come to believe that there could be an anthropology that revealed the meaning of one’s own life as well as those of its subjects: “I was sure that whatever film I might make about the world outside myself would have to be done with mirrors (as is virtually inevitable in the case of cameras) that also revealed me and my inner world”.

## FRI 1.6.

12 noon – 1.30 pm

### Control and Contingency

Presentation – Harun Farocki

GER, S/I into EN

The documentary form is contingent, destined to chase after events, whereas feature films anticipate and control events. However, boundaries blur in interesting ways when these forms imitate each other. Unfocused images and erratic lighting, borrowed from documentary, give immediacy and relevance to a fiction film, whereas plotlines and aestheticized cinematography are legitimate devices for documentarists. Using visual examples which include a specially digitized version of “Der Reifenschneider und seine Frau” (Klaus Wildenhahn/Roland Hehn/Horst Schwaab, FRG 1968/1969), the filmmaker Harun Farocki’s presentation will look at hybrid forms between the two genres.

2 – 3.30 pm

### Heiligabend auf St. Pauli

Screening and conversation – Antje Ehmann, Harun Farocki with Klaus Wildenhahn

GER, S/I into EN

Klaus Wildenhahn’s film “Heiligabend auf St. Pauli” (FRG 1968, 16 mm, 51 min, OV, English subtitles) condenses ten hours of observation of the people in a Hamburg bar on Christmas Eve. We see drivers, prostitutes, policemen, a coach and an amateur boxer, all avoiding the family holiday and

instead seeking alcohol, sex and solitude in the city’s docklands. Although the film seems haphazard, rambling, unshaped by directorial cuts, Farocki points out that Wildenhahn has first chosen a prime spot for his camera, allowing it to dissect and then reassemble events. “After that it is possible to let something slip a little bit off track”.

4 – 6 pm

### Fremd

Screening and conversation – Antje Ehmann, Harun Farocki with Miriam Fassbender

GER, S/I into EN

“Foreign” (Miriam Fassbender, Germany 2011, Digibeta, 92 min, OV, English subtitles) follows two African migrants, Mohammed and Jacques, as they head for Europe, hoping to cross into the continent illegally by swimming. Subplots show a Nigerian woman, Hope, who runs a restaurant, and an Algerian-Congolese man called Jerry. Mohammed has the key role, linking the various plotlines, a structural role assigned to him by Fassbender. Although the documentary has a semi-fictional feel, it’s offset by the Direct Cinema-like approach of issuing the protagonists with their own cameras. By accumulating on the screen the subjective self-imaging of her characters, the director hopes to break down the idea of foreignness itself.

6.30 – 8 pm

### The Gesture of Panning

Lecture – Volker Pantenburg

GER, S/I into EN

Despite the plethora of books about film, surprisingly little work has been done on the phenomenon of camera movements. Perhaps because, as David Bordwell put it, “Camera movement has usually been considered too elusive to be analyzable”. Using the example of the horizontal pan, film scholar Volker Pantenburg will propose some thoughts about the way the camera pan structures space and time into the semantic worlds proposed by documentary and fictional films. In particular, he addresses the special ability of panning shots to juxtapose and contrast a controlled form of portrayal with the contingency of what is being depicted.

8.30 pm – 10.30 pm

### Framing Death – Crime is Everywhere

Presentation – Sylvère Lotringer

Sylvère Lotringer looks at the impact of video-surveillance cameras on crime: its identification, definition, legal re-assembly and investigation. Police videographer Johnny Esposito, described by Lotringer as a pioneering “semiotician of crime”, met up again with the theorist twenty-five years later, an encounter recorded in a taped interview made especially for this event. In the conversation the two revisit old themes (the use of video as a source for court-ready “neutral evidence”, the construction of narrative) in the light of the new technological developments employed by today’s control societies.

11 – 11.30 pm

### Disquieting Nature

Screening with live concert – Christine Meisner

“Disquieting Nature” evokes a sense of moving through the memory of a landscape and its music. The first Delta blues songs told the story of black agricultural laborers and how they regained their liberty in a segregated and increasingly racist society. The rhythmic cadences, structures and narratives of those early songs were the starting point for artist Christine Meisner’s cooperation with composer William Tatge, during which the artists developed ideas of an “abstract blues” in the form of a video piece. “Disquieting Nature” will be expanded here into a video screening with a live concert by five musicians.

With: William Tatge (composition and piano), LD Brown (vocals), Anders Nilsson (guitar), Craig Akin (bass) and Kenneth Salters (drums)

## SAT 2.6.

12 noon – 4 pm

### Amidst the in-between — Documentary films from Japan

Screening and conversation – Eduardo Thomas with Günter Nitschke

OV, English subtitles

Eduardo Thomas will present a fragment of his ongoing research into the Japanese concept of “ma” (a structuring absence), screening short films by Matsumoto Toshio and Ito Takashi and a feature film by Kawase Naomi. In conversation with Günter Nitschke — an iconoclastic Kyoto-based architect and urban planner — and the

filmmakers, Thomas will address this specifically Japanese concept, which challenges such binary distinctions as space/time, inside/outside, emptiness/fullness, and foregrounds the spaces between elements. The three filmmakers have employed strategies like unusual montage techniques, off-centre framing and abstract electronic music to examine traditional subjects in distinctly non-traditional ways.

Matsumoto Toshio: “Ginrin”, Japan 1955, 35 mm, 16 min | “The Song of Stone”, Japan 1963, 16 mm, 24 min | “Atman”, Japan 1975, 16 mm, 12 min | “Sway: Yuragi”, Japan 1985, 16 mm, 8 min | “Engram”, Japan 1987, 16 mm, 12 min

Ito Takashi: “Spacy”, Japan 1981, 16 mm, 10 min | “Ghost”, Japan 1984, 16 mm, 6 min | “Venus”, Japan 1990, 16 mm, 5 min | “The Moon”, Japan 1994, 16 mm, 7 min | “Unbalance”, Japan 2006, video, 5 min

Kawase Naomi: “Tsuiku no dansu”, Japan 2002, Beta Sp, 65 min

### 4.30 pm – 6 pm Objectification Lecture – Hito Steyerl

Filmmaker and theorist Hito Steyerl’s presentation examines the relation of objects to objectivity and objectification. How do 3D technologies affect our notion of space and material reality? What are the affinities between these new tools and early photography, with its ability to freeze life? And what are 3D’s blind spots and white shadows? Case studies will include 3D-mapping based on videos and other live-gathered data. Once a scan is produced — for instance, of a battlefield — the event can be revisited and observed from an infinite number of angles. However, the data does not simply provide evidence but also introduces ambiguities, interpretations, confusion. “If you want to establish the truth,” Steyerl says, “then you establish at the same time the contradiction”.

### 6.30 – 8 pm A Blind Spot Screening presented by Catherine David

OV, English subtitles

#### Les mains négatives

Marguerite Duras, France 1978, 35 mm, 18 min  
Taking as her motif mysterious prehistoric handprints discovered in southern European caves, Duras juxtaposes against this narrative a series of blue-and-black filmed images of Paris boulevards at dawn. “The word is not yet invented”.

#### Le Sphinx

Thierry Knauff, Belgium/ France 1986, 35 mm, 12 min  
Using on its soundtrack fragments from a Jean Genet text about massacres committed during the

Lebanese civil war in the Palestinian refugee camp Shatila, “Le Sphinx” dwells visually on the figure of the stone sphinx.

#### Toute révolution est un coup de dés

Danièle Huillet/Jean-Marie Straub, France 1977, 16 mm, 10 min  
In the rigid, objective poses of Brechtian epic theater a series of actors recite, under a plaque commemorating the “valiant dead” of the 1871 Commune, Mallarmé’s poem “A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance”. For Straub, the challenge of this film was, he said, to “combat opacity”. Dedicated to the dead of the Paris Commune, the film and its voices turn into a rhythmic equivalent of the poem’s experimental typography.

#### Les Photos d’Alix

Jean Eustache, France 1980, 16 mm, 18 min  
Alix Cléo Roubaud, a photographer, talks to Jean Eustache’s teenage son Boris about her photographic manipulations and the reasoning behind them, confessing cheerfully to many instances of “trucage”, although always in the name of some kind of truth. The film’s themes of mismatching, manipulation and masking are underlined when it emerges that the photographs described are not the ones seen on screen.

### 8.30 – 10 pm Opium, Indigo, Photography Lecture – Christopher Pinney

In this lecture Christopher Pinney, an anthropologist specialized in the visual culture of South Asia, looks at Joachim Koester’s work “Calcutta Served as a Basis for British Expansion in the East” (2005–07). Koester flags up topics occluded from official photographic histories of the city of Calcutta: its role in the illicit opium trade with China and its trade in indigo dye. Both were controlled by the East India Company, an early Anglo-Saxon multinational corporation exercising military and administrative as well as trading power in India. Pinney’s political analysis of photography’s “optical unconscious” is complemented by the more delirious, subjective approach of Thomas de Quincey, for whom opium was a “marvellous agent” able to reveal “secret inscriptions”.

### 10.30 – 12 midnight Melodrama Performance – Eszter Salamon

“Melodrama” is a solo “documentary performance” in which Eszter Salamon re-enacts interviews she made in 2006 and 2012 with a woman living in a small village in Southern Hungary who happens to share her name. Reading her homonym like a

choreographic script, Salamon performs the 62-year-old woman’s gestures and intonations, reproducing them on stage to the music of Terre Thaemlitz. The result is a meditation not just on the possibility of getting inside another person’s skin, but the extent to which personal hopes

## SUN 3.6.

### 12 noon – 5 pm On Continuity Screening and conversation – Florian Schneider with Thomas Heise

GER, S/I into EN - OV/English subtitles

Continuity in the cinematic sense involves fabricating the illusion of consistent time and space. When cinema deals with the history of colonialism and fascism it is confronting continuity of a different kind: historical continuity that is hijacked to reveal the presence of the past in the here-and-now.

#### Der lachende Mann – Bekenntnisse eines Mörders

Walter Heynowski/Gerhard Scheumann, GDR 1966, 35 mm, 66 min  
“The laughing man – Confessions of a murderer” is a documentary about the German mercenary Siegfried Müller, known as “Congo Müller”. In 1964 Müller was involved in the suppression of the Simba rebellion in the Republic of the Congo (now DR Congo). The GDR film crew place Müller against a black background, letting him get increasingly drunk on Pernod as they intersperse their questions with covertly obtained photographs and tape recordings.

#### Notre Nazi

Robert Kramer, France/FRG 1984, 116 min  
“Notre Nazi” is a making-of documentary filmed between takes of another film, Thomas Harlan’s “Wundkanal”. Harlan managed to cast Alfred Filbert in “Wundkanal” as an 80-year-old Nazi officer kidnapped and interrogated by a filmmaker. The former city commander of Vilna, “actor” Filbert was in fact a Nazi directly responsible for thousands of deaths.

#### Tod und Teufel

Peter Nestler, Germany 2009, Beta Sp, 56 min  
“Death and Devil” examines the legacy of the director’s grandfather, Count Eric von Rosen, a Swedish aristocrat, ethnologist, explorer, hunter and adventurer whose racism and Nazi sympathies (he was brother-in-law to Hermann Göring) were counterbalanced by a personal fascination for Africa, evidenced by his travels to the former

Belgian Congo in the aftermath of colonial genocide.

### 5.30 pm – 8.30 pm Framing Death – the Unmaking of Lightning over Water Presentation – Sylvère Lotringer

The last of Sylvère Lotringer’s three presentations focuses on the making of “Lightning over Water”, Nicholas Ray and Wim Wenders’ film (USA/FRG 1980) about Ray’s final days of life. The director of “Rebel Without A Cause”, Ray had been diagnosed in 1979 with terminal cancer, and Wenders offered to help him direct his last film. But the attempt to turn the film into a fiction failed, raising ethical questions about the entire project. Featuring “Lightning over Water”, rare videos of the film and re-enactments of key scenes as well as audio interviews with all the participants in the production, this session will explore a film seen by Paul Virilio as a latter-day Greek tragedy, with the technical crew in the role of chorus.

With the voices of: Gerry Bamman, Stefan Czapsky, Bernard Eisenschitz, Tom Farrell, Laurie Frank, Jim Jarmusch, Becky Johnson, John Houseman, Edward Lachman, Peter Przygodda, Betty Ray, Tim Ray, Susan Ray, Chris Sievernich

### 9 – 11 pm Montage Interdit Eyal Sivan in conversation with Ella Shohat

“issue zero” — an online project designed to examine documentary practices in networked environments — is launched in pilot form during the festival. The first commissioned work is by filmmaker Eyal Sivan. “Montage Interdit” explores the language and possibilities of montage in documentary work through the prism of Jean-Luc Godard’s films. The piece consists of film materials accompanied by interpretive commentaries from various thinkers. One of the commentaries will, however, take the form of a live on-stage event: Eyal Sivan in conversation with the theoretician Ella Shohat, whose book “Israeli Cinema” discusses Sivan’s work examining historically revisionist documentaries about Palestine.

## A Blind Spot

### Exhibition

31 May – 1 July 2012

The blind spot of a photograph refers to something not visible or shown but nonetheless latent in the image. Dismissing the dominant pictorial regime, the images in “A Blind Spot” preserve an openness and indeterminacy that precludes reducing them to a description or illustration of a fixed reality. This is the point of departure for questioning the documentary aspect in contemporary artistic and photographic practices.

The exhibition, curated by Catherine David, includes works by Eric Baudelaire, Elisabetta Benassi, David Goldblatt, Hassan Khan, Joachim Koester, Vincent Meessen, Olaf Nicolai, Melik Ohanian, Efrat Shvily, Jeff Wall and Christopher Williams.

Thu 31 May – Sun 3 June

10.30 pm and 12 midnight (West Garden)

**DAYS, I See what I Saw and what I will See**

**Video installation – Melik Ohanian**

Projected on either side of a screen, “DAYS, I See what I Saw and what I will See” is a two-channel video installation of a labor camp in the United Arab Emirates. Over the course of eleven days in 2011, Melik Ohanian laid camera tracks through the camp, shooting 100 meters during the day and at night to make a sequence which, once edited, became a continuous track showing the whole camp in 42 minutes. One side of the specially constructed screen shows night, the other day.

Artist and curator Ben Russell misreads an architectural schematic as a diagram of the eye and constructs a peripheral cinema space within the permanent viewing structure that hosts the Berlin Documentary Forum. Occupying a field just outside the direct line of sight, this theater-within-a-theater will host a 7-part program of 20 contemporary video works presented in looping half-hour segments throughout the course of the festival. United through a singular vision that claims the expansion of the documentary form as a defining characteristic of artists' video works within the last decade, this meta-program functions as both highlight and counterpoint to the main-stage program.

With video works by Basma Aisharf, Neil Beloufa, Jacob Ciocci, Mary Helena Clark, Matt Dipop, Kwon Hayoun, Oliver Larc, Laida Lertxundi, Dani Leventhal, Makino Takashi, Shana Mouton, Takeshi Murata, Charlemagne Palestine, Steve Reinke, Michael Robinson, Eva Marie Rodbro, Sylvia Schedelbauer, Phil Solomon and Michael Snow

## Peripheral Vision

## PICTURE CREDITS

**p. 1** Joachim Koester  
“The Barker Ranch” [Detail], 2008  
From a series of four gelatin silver prints  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Brussels

**pp. 6-11** Joachim Koester  
“The Barker Ranch”, 2008  
From a series of four gelatin silver prints  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Brussels

**p. 18** Joachim Koester  
“Time of the Hashshashin (Alamut Castle – Interior)” [Detail], 2011  
From a series of six gelatin silver prints  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Brussels

**pp. 26-27** Joachim Koester  
“Time of the Hashshashin (Alamut Castle – Looking South West)” [Detail], 2011  
From a series of six gelatin silver prints  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Brussels

**p. 38** Joachim Koester, “Histories”, 2003–2005  
From of a series of six diptychs  
Gelatin silver print  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Brussels

**p. 43-44** Joachim Koester, “Histories”, 2003–2005  
From of a series of six diptychs  
Gelatin silver print  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Brussels

**pp. 50-53** Joachim Koester, “Histories”, 2003-2005  
From of a series of six diptychs  
Gelatin silver print  
Courtesy Jan Mot, Brussels

**p. 65** Efrat Shvily, “100 Years” [Detail], 2012  
Archival pigment print on baryt paper  
Courtesy of the Artist and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

**pp. 66-67** Efrat Shvily, “100 Years”, 2012  
Archival pigment print on baryt paper  
Courtesy of the Artist and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

**pp. 74-75** Melik Ohanian, “DAYS, I See what I Saw and what I Saw and what I will See”, 2011  
Video Still - Day Version  
HD video with sound. Double projection on the two side of a same screen. Duration: 2 x 42 min.  
Courtesy the artist and Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris  
Co-prouded by Sharjah Art Foundation.  
Photo: © Melik Ohanian



15th THESSALONIKI  
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL

Images of the 21st Century



22-31.03.2013

Deadline for Submissions:

November 30th 2012

documentary@filmfestival.gr

Doc Market 22-31.03.2013

15

Festival Director: Dimitri Eipides

The Thessaloniki Documentary Festival is a leading European Documentary Festival, carried out every March in Thessaloniki since its inception in 1999. Through its tributes and retrospectives, the TDF focuses on filmmakers with unique cinematic voices, internationally renowned for their contribution to the documentary genre. Its main thematic sections are: Recordings of Memory, Portraits-Human Journeys, Stories to Tell, Habitat, Music, Views of the World, Greek Panorama. The TDF has been attended by major documentary personalities of the world, including Monika Treut, Joris Ivens, Johan van der Keuken, Albert Maysles, Pirjo Honkasalo, Stefan Jarl, Kim Longinotto, Barbara Kopple, Julia Reichert & Steven Bognar, Jennifer Fox, Jon Alpert, Arto Halonen, Joe Berlinger & Bruce Sinofsky, Sergei Loznitsa, Eyal Sivan, and many others. The Festival's side events host exhibitions, masterclasses, round table discussions, publications, concerts and parties.

www.planetedocff.pl



© Bert Stern

PLANETE +  
DOC FILM FESTIVAL

WARSAW  
WROCLAW  
AND OVER 20 VENUES IN POLAND  
MAY 11-20 2012



www.filmfestival.gr





INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY  
FILM FESTIVAL

# CINÉMA DU RÉEL

CNRS images /  
Comité du film ethnographique

[www.cinemadureel.org](http://www.cinemadureel.org)

Photographie : La Villa, Mexico DF © Anne-Lise Michoud, 2011

**Bibliothèque**  
**Centre** publique d'information  
**Pompidou**

22.-27.1.2013



55

29.10.  
— 4.11.  
2012

# DOK LEIPZIG

ENTRY  
DEADLINES:  
15 MAY  
FOR PRODUCTIONS  
COMPLETED BEFORE  
1 MAY 2012  
10 JULY  
FINAL ENTRY  
DEADLINE

*The HeART*  
—  
*of Documentary*

INTERNATIONAL LEIPZIG FESTIVAL FOR  
DOCUMENTARY AND ANIMATED FILM  
DOK FESTIVAL & DOK INDUSTRY  
WWW.DOK-LEIPZIG.DE



Member of **DOC ALLIANCE** With the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union **MEDIA**



occupy

reality

duisburger filmwoche 36

5.- 11. november 2012 im filmforum am dellplatz  
www.duisburger-filmwoche.de | www.do-xs.de



Ministerium für Familie, Kinder,  
Jugend, Kultur und Sport  
des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen

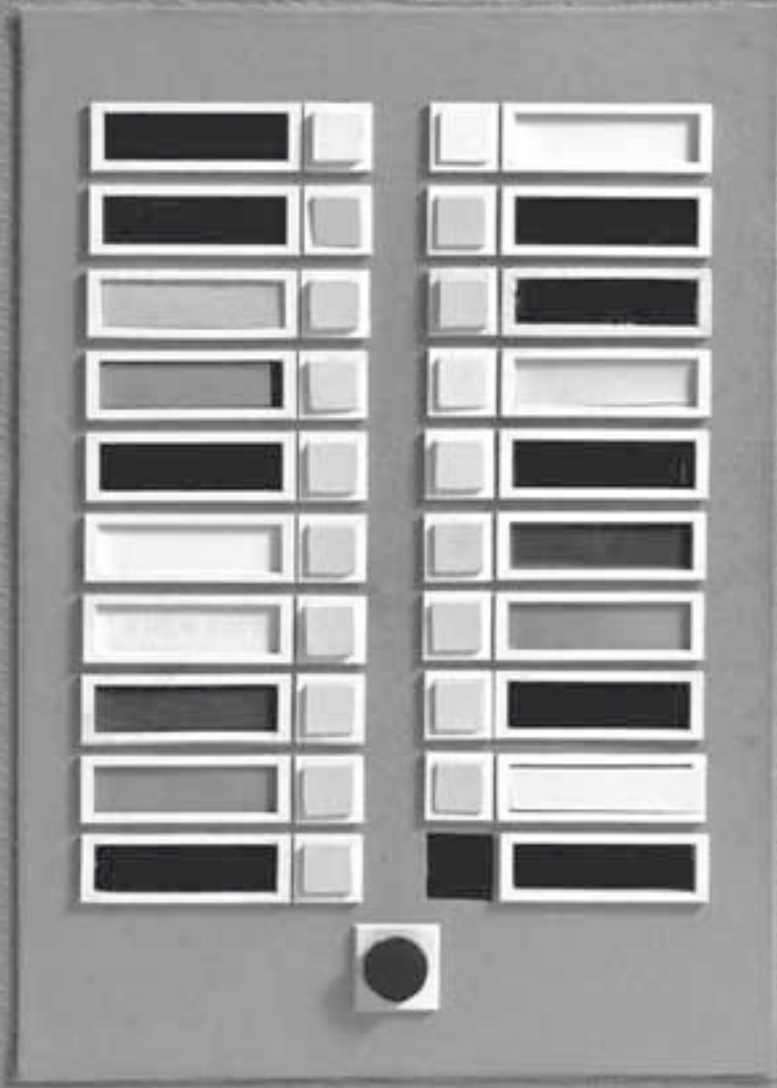


Film und Medien  
Stiftung NRW

arte

sat

Sparkasse  
Duisburg



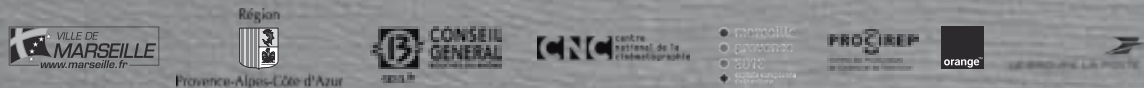
Hinterhaus, 2005, C-Print, framed, 26.9 x 21.5 cm  
© Thomas Demand, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn / ADAGP, Paris  
Courtesy Sprüth Magers Berlin London

# FID

[www.fidmarseille.org](http://www.fidmarseille.org)

23rd  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
— MARSEILLE

JULY  
04  
— 09  
2012



16. Ji hlava International Documentary Film Festival

23—28/10 2012

# Ji hlava

Ji hlava  
International  
Documentary  
Film Festival

INDUSTRY 2012 / EMERGING PRODUCERS 2013  
INSPIRATION FORUM / FESTIVAL IDENTITY  
MEDIA AND DOCUMENTARY



[www.dokument-festival.cz](http://www.dokument-festival.cz)

29.  
**KASSELER  
DOK FEST**  
13.-18. NOVEMBER 2012

**AWARDS**

**GOLDEN KEY € 5.000**  
BEST UP-AND-COMING DOCUMENTARY

**GOLDEN CUBE € 3.500**  
BEST MEDIA INSTALLATION

**GOLDEN HERCULES € 3.000**  
BEST REGIONAL WORK

**A38-PRODUCTION GRANT**  
WORTH UP TO € 8.000

**DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES:**  
**JULY 20, 2012**



RENCONTRES  
INTERNATIONALES  
DU DOCUMENTAIRE  
DE MONTRÉAL

MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL  
DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL  
7 > 18 NOV. 2012

DOC CIRCUIT  
MONTRÉAL  
MARCHÉ DU

DOCUMENTAIRE  
DOC CIRCUIT MONTREAL  
DOCUMENTARY MARKETPLACE  
12 > 14 NOV. 2012

INSCRIPTIONS : AVRIL À JUIN  
SUBMISSIONS : APRIL TO JUNE

[RIDM.QC.CA](http://RIDM.QC.CA)

LÀ OÙ TOUTES LES HISTOIRES SE RENCONTRENT.

# 10 Years. 400 Films. A world of change.

The Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program and Fund provides year-round support to contemporary-issue nonfiction filmmakers worldwide in the production and exhibition of cinematic documentaries. Services include the Sundance Documentary Funds, granting between \$1 and \$2 million per year, multiple Creative Documentary Labs, DFP Work-in Progress screenings, DFP Fellows Programs at the Sundance Film Festival and the Sundance Creative Producing Summit, and international creative partnerships, including Good Pitch, designed to increase resources and impact for the field and amplify the use of film as a tool for increasing awareness of key global challenges, motivating change towards more open and equitable societies.

**LEARN ABOUT THE DOCUMENTARY FILM PROGRAM'S NEW OPPORTUNITIES AT**  
[sundance.org/documentary](http://sundance.org/documentary)

**SUNDANCE** DOCUMENTARY  
INSTITUTE

©2007 robertglennketchum.com

THE ONLY DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL IN SWITZERLAND AND ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WORLDWIDE WITH ITS EXCLUSIVE DOC OUTLOOK INTERNATIONAL MARKET.  
**NYON: A MUST FOR PROFESSIONALS AND FILM LOVERS**

**VISIONS  
DU RÉEL**  
INTERNATIONAL  
FILM FESTIVAL  
DOC OUTLOOK  
INTERNATIONAL  
MARKET-NYON  
19-26 APRIL 2013  
[WWW.VISIONSDUREEL.CH](http://WWW.VISIONSDUREEL.CH)

IMAGE: DES PALLIÈRES - IS DEAD DESIGN: BONTRON/CO

MAIN SPONSORS



PARTNER OF THE FESTIVAL



Association des Exportateurs  
Confédération suisse  
Confédération suisse  
Confédération suisse





1-11 NOV 2012

# CPH:DOX



COPENHAGEN  
INTERNATIONAL  
**DOCUMENTARY**  
FILM FESTIVAL

## CPH:FORUM

FINANCING FORUM

7-9 NOV 2012



IMAGE BY: RICHIE DIESTERHEFT

<http://truthisconcrete.org>  
A 24:7 marathon camp on artistic strategies  
in politics and political strategies in art.  
21.09 - 28.09.2012 : steirischer herbst : Graz

TRUTH IS CONCRETE.  
SELL IT AT AN  
ART FAIR!

With Hans Abbing (NL), Ulf Aminde (D), Zdenka Badovinac (SLO), Center for Political Beauty (D), Alice Creischer (D), Annie Dorsen (USA), Marcelo Expósito (ARG), Eleonora Fabião (BR), Dirk Fleischmann (ROK/D), Free Slow University Warsaw (PL), Isabelle Fremeaux (F), Ganzeer (ET), Federico Geller (ARG), The HairCut Before The Party (GB), Paul Harfleet (GB), Khaled Hourani (PS), Iconoclastas (ARG), Joana Mazza / Observatório de Favelas (BR), Jeudi Noir (F), John Jordan (GB/F), Jisun Kim (ROK), André Lepecki (USA/BR), Oliver Marchart (A), Antanas Mockus (CO), Mao Mollona (GB), Chantal Mouffe (GB/B), Giulia Palladini (I), Public Movement (IL), Srđa Popović / CANVAS (SRB), raumlaborberlin (D), Gerald Raunig (A), Oliver Ressler (A), Reverend Billy (USA), Irit Rogoff (GB), Andreas Siekmann (D), Kevin Smith / Platform (GB), Jonas Staal (NL), Kuba Szreder (PL), Teatr.doc (RUS), Theater im Bahnhof (A), Bert Theis (I/L), the vacuum cleaner (UK), WAGE (USA), Joanna Warsza (PL), Wochenklausur (A), Stephen Wright (CAN), Salam Yousry (ET), Michael Zinganel (A), and many others

Truth is concrete #5 by Dan Perjovschi, illustrator and art director of "Revista 22", the first political magazine launched in Romania after the fall of communism. //revista22.ro

GIRA DE DOCUMENTALES  
10 FEB - 3 MAY

# AMBULANTE

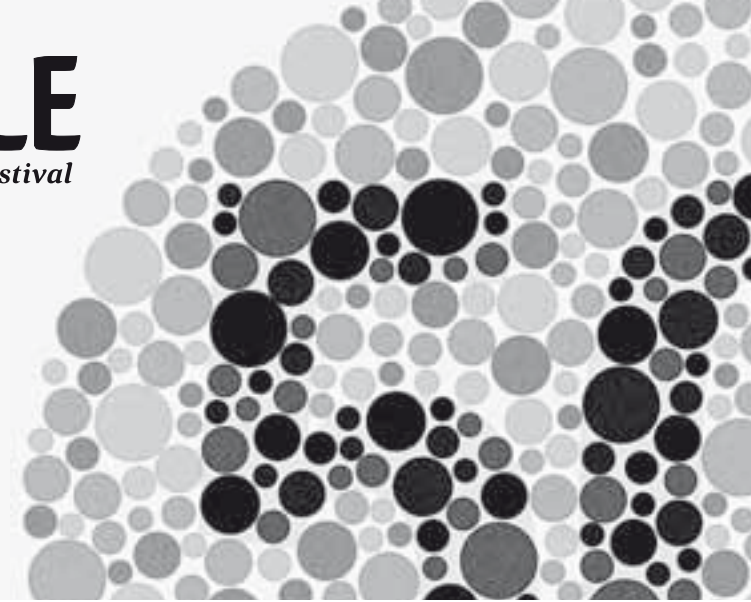
FILM FESTIVAL  
DISCOVER. SHARE. TRANSFORM.  
[www.ambulante.com.mx](http://www.ambulante.com.mx)

# 2012

[@Ambulante](#) [Ambulante Gira de Documentales](#) [www.festivalambulante.blogspot.com](http://www.festivalambulante.blogspot.com)

# VIENNALE

Vienna International Film Festival



50th Festival Edition: October 25 to November 7, 2012

50th Anniversary activities throughout the year.

Detailed information on [www.viennale.at](http://www.viennale.at) as from May 4.

Sheffield  
Doc/Fest

In association with  
mediaguardian

THE UK'S MOST IMPORTANT DOCUMENTARY  
& DIGITAL MEDIA FESTIVAL

# Register Now

For your All-Access pass to —  
WORLD CLASS FILMS / SESSIONS /  
WORKSHOPS / MARKETPLACE /  
VIDEOTHEQUE & FAMOUS PARTIES  
at Sheffield Doc/Fest 2012

[WWW.SHEFFDOCFEST.COM/REGISTRATION](http://WWW.SHEFFDOCFEST.COM/REGISTRATION)



Sheffield Documentary Festival

June  
13-17  
2012

# DOK.fest

27. Internationales Dokumentarfilmfestival München.  
02. bis 09. Mai 2012. [www.dokfest-muenchen.de](http://www.dokfest-muenchen.de)



Mit:  
DOK.forum – Medien- & Branchenplattform  
DOK.education – Bildungsprogramm  
DOK.tour – Festival in der Region

 **indie**  
Lisboa'13  
10<sup>TH</sup> INTERNATIONAL  
INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL.



---

CALL  
FOR  
ENTRIES

DEADLINE JANUARY 25

SUBMISSIONS ONLINE [WWW.INDIELISBOA.COM](http://WWW.INDIELISBOA.COM)

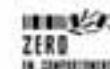
COMPLETED IN 2012 OR 2013

DOCUMENTARY ANIMATION

FICTION EXPERIMENTAL

---

Organization



Support



Co-production







**YAMAGATA  
International  
Documentary  
Film Festival  
2011** October 6–13



ヤマガタで  
また会いましょう!  
Let's meet again  
in YAMAGATA  
**2013!**

[www.yidff.jp](http://www.yidff.jp)

---

# Diagonale 2013

Festival des österreichischen Films  
Graz, 12.–17. März 2013

---



Großer Diagonale-Preis  
Spielfilm 2012:  
**Stilleben**  
von Sebastian Meise



Großer Diagonale-Preis  
Dokumentarfilm 2012:  
**Richtung Nowa Huta**  
von Dariusz Kowalski



Diagonale-Preis  
Innovatives Kino 2012:  
**Hypercrisis**  
von Josef Dabernig

---

[www.diagonale.at](http://www.diagonale.at)

---

# doclisboa 2012

X Internacional Film Festival 18 > 28 October

## CALL FOR ENTRIES

WWW.DOCLISBOA.ORG

*Deadline June 15th*

- \* International Competition (Full-Length and Shorts)
- \* Portuguese Competition (Full-Length and Shorts)
- \* Special Screenings
- \* Retrospectives and Tributes
- \* Masterclasses and Workshops
- \* Installations

# Lisbon Docs 2012

Workshop and Pitching for Documentary Film 15 > 20 October

The annual pitching session Lisbon Docs is a great opportunity to pitch your documentary project to leading financiers as well as to form new networks and alliances for future collaborations. If you are a documentary maker with an international project in development Lisbon Docs is the place to be.

During Lisbon Docs documentary projects will be developed during an intense 3 day workshop guided by international experienced tutors, pitched to a panel of leading broadcasters and distributors and individually matched for meetings with potential collaborators.

Organization:

**apordoc**  
ASSOCIAÇÃO PELO DOCUMENTÁRIO



Co-production:

Fundação Casa Casal de Senechal  
**Culturgest**

Funding:



# Hard copy. Sticky content.

Berlin in English since 2002.



# Mehr Lust auf Kunst

mit Berlins größtem Stadtmagazin



- ✓ Ausstellungen, Interviews mit Künstlern und Galeristen
- ✓ Tipps, Empfehlungen und Kunsthighlights

Das volle Kunstprogramm finden Sie alle 14 Tage neu am Kiosk und unter [www.tip-berlin.de](http://www.tip-berlin.de), sowie als iPad App im App-Store!

# MISSED OBERHAUSEN?

FILMS FROM THE PROGRAMMES OF THE SHORT FILM FESTIVAL

[WWW.KURZFILMTAGE.DE/EN/VIDEOTHEQUE](http://WWW.KURZFILMTAGE.DE/EN/VIDEOTHEQUE)



# ISSUE ZERO

[WWW.ISSUEZERO.ORG](http://WWW.ISSUEZERO.ORG)

# Between Walls and Windows

Architektur  
und  
Ideologie

HAUS  
DER  
KULTUREN  
DER  
WELT

Ausstellung  
1.9. –  
30.9.2012

OPEN + FREE