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Mapping the Politics of Vision: searching for a transformative gaze

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Mapping the Politics of Vision: searching for a transformative gaze

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2021

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Abstract

Through this commentary, my intention is to create a coherent rationale to account for my film practice, which is based on, and is the result of, research. This reflective process will draw out the aesthetic and political approaches that I have forged over the last ten years, so as to reveal their singularity.

To do so, I revisit and contextualize four of my film works, which were produced between 2014 and 2018: *Apicula Enigma* (2014), *Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless* (2015), *May 13th, 1968* (2011) and *Cinétracts* (2012 - 2018). Their subjects are, respectively, the non-human gaze, the gendered gaze, and the dominant gaze. I demonstrate how these works are an attempt to deconstruct the inherent complicity between the gaze and political ideology and, as such, I outline the profile of an artistic practice that understands filmmaking as being a transformative and seditious act. To reveal this, I elaborate on the position of the author and on the distance between the observer and the observed, which is understood as being a critical space. This leads this commentary to examine how these four films are intended to form a social critique in which the question of gender is at its core. Feminism, gender fluidity, and the anti-colonial and post-human perspectives will be brought forward in order to expose the underlying political outreach of these four works.

This commentary also investigates the relationship between the materiality of film and its illusion - the meaning of the tension produced. The production of film, as well as its reception and exhibition, form a critical space on which this commentary will focus in order to expose the particularity of the processes that were involved in the making of these films.

I will analyse how the politics of vision is the uniting thread of my practice, the goal of which is to deconstruct the cultural frame that informs the gaze in the search for an unalienated and transformative one. My aim, in this commentary, is to reveal the potential of my work, and to understand my position as a woman and my role as an artist, so as to affirm the emancipatory value of my practice and to take it forward.

List of films

Apicula Enigma, 35mm., 26 minutes, 2014

Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless, 16mm., 5 minutes, 2015

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Acknowledgements

Thank you to Dr. Margherita Sprio for her supervision and support whilst I was writing this commentary.

Thank you to Dr. Michael Newman for his friendship and trust in my work.

Thank you to my mother, father, second mother, my brothers and sister for being so supportive and inspiring.

This commentary is dedicated to my son, Alyosha.

Author's declaration

I declare that all material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Marine Hugonnier

"The essence of cinema becomes a story about animals."

Serge Daney ¹

"If we had a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk around well wadded with stupidity."

George Eliot ²

"They say they have learned to rely on their own strengths. They say they know what they mean together. They say that those who claim a new language learn about violence first. They say that those who want to transform the world take guns first. They say that they start from scratch. They say that a new world is beginning."

Monique Wittig ³

¹ Daney, Serge: Screen and Phantasy (Bazin and Animals), trans. Mark A. Cohen, in *Rites of Realism: Essay on Corporeal Cinema*, Edited by Margulies Ivone, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2003, p.32

² Eliot, George: *Middlemarch*, Signet Classics, New York, 2003, pp.433-434

³ Wittig, Monique: *Les Guérillères*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1969, p.55 (own translation)

Introduction

For a short time, I was Chris Marker's assistant, when I worked for him during the installation of "Passages de L'image" at the Centre Georges Pompidou in 1990.⁴ Both Chris Marker and his work, *Zap Zone (Project for an imaginary television)*, left a long-lasting effect on me. Comprising of twenty monitors and a few computers screens, piled up on top of one another, on a circular pedestal, *Zap Zone* combined graphic images that referenced Tarkovsky's *Stalker*, the corridors of *La Jetée*, and Fellini's *Roma*.⁵ I was twenty-one, and rather ignorant of the importance and scope of Chris Marker's work. He appeared to be a silent giant, and eye contact was a strange voyage into a timeless maze. His presence was overwhelming, and it very likely permeated me for good.

I subsequently made films for twenty years and have screened them in contemporary cultural institutions, galleries, or at film festivals. Whether that makes me an 'artist filmmaker', as opposed to a 'filmmaker' or an 'artist', does not matter, I actually use these different denominations according to the place in which I am, or to which I need to get. I have been travelling with my 16 mm. Aaton set on my shoulder, filming and walking,

⁴ *Passage de L'image*, curated by Catherine van Assche, Catherine David, Raymond Bellour, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, 19th September, 1990 -13th January, 1991.

⁵ *Stalker*, Andrei Tarkovsky, 35mm. b/w, 161 min, 1979 and *La Jetée*, Chris Marker, video, 28 min, 1962, and *Roma*, Federico Fellini, 35mm. col, 128 min, 1972.

and *vice versa*, leaning to the posture of a reporter and of an ethnographer, more than to that of an artist, mixing imagery and genres, attempting to make experience of images through the world, as opposed to the world through images. Could these ingredients be those that I grasped when looking at Marker's work? Was I unconsciously influenced, trapped in one of his meanders?

In the wake of his footsteps, I have walked the path of a world where landscape is not intended to be a geographically determined place, but an imaginary one, where sediments are a symbiosis between facts, fictions, imaginary realities, technologies and bio-organisms, and where the act of looking and picturing is a delicate political affair. Infused by a sense of displacement, having grown up in different cultures and, later, through my studies in philosophy and anthropology, an eagerness drives my practice to deconstruct the cultural frame that informs our gaze and to seek for an unalienated and transformative one.

Some early works, *Ariana* (2003), *The Last Tour* (2004), *Travelling Amazonia* (2006), *Secretary of the Invisible* (2007), *Territory I, II, III*, (2004), *Death of an Icon* (2005), are films which discuss: the military gaze, the tourist gaze, the dominant gaze, the question of the author, the medium of film itself and, finally, journalism, in the realm of the aesthetic. This commentary will reveal how these films push the boundaries of definitions and experiences, and how the politics of vision which reoccurs in my work, constitutes its uniting thread.

Four films made between 2014 and 2018 are discussed here: *Apicula Enigma* (2014), *Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless* (2015), *May 13th, 1968* (2011) and *Cinétracts* (2012 – 2018). Despite differing in their inception and intention, their modes of production and exhibition, these four works have in common the use of a documentary approach.

The aim of this reflective process will be to investigate the technicity and the materiality of film. An in-depth exploration of the mechanics of film; its production and exhibition, will reveal how the 'presentation' of the subject is affected. The meaning of film as a medium – the fruitful tension between illusion, materiality and its experience – will constitute the nucleus of this analysis, so as to divulge how the subjects of these four films are constructed.

Cinematography is an important component of my work, as transforming the light reflected from objects into pictures involves mastering and understanding the implications, both technically and ideologically, of every component of filmmaking. I will explain why I believe that the transformation of the sensible is a political matter - how these alterations form a political subjectivisation of the real. The questions of what is representable or unrepresentable, what meanings the processes of image making have, and how cinematography should be a reflection of this thinking, are at the core of my work.

Serge Daney's quote, "Cinema teaches me to tirelessly touch with my gaze the distance from me at which the other one begins" has been my motto.⁶ In my understanding, film is an effective tool with which to assess this distance - this short length to the other. The relationship between the filmmaker and his/her subject, as well as the reception of the viewer, constitute the clear line of my enquiry.

This commentary will examine how these films form a social critique of the gaze, how they challenge the power game of the gaze in which the question of gender is at its heart. To do so, feminism, gender fluidity, and the anti-colonial and post-human perspectives, will be used in order to expose their underlying political outreach. Hopefully, my position will become clearer through this reflective exercise and will foreground my unconditional dedication to both cinema and art.

⁶ Daney, Serge: *Persévérance: Entretien avec Serge Toubiana*, P.O.L. Editions, Paris, 1994, p.19

Chapter 1: *Apicula Enigma* (2014)

Shot in June, 2014, in the Koshuta mountains of Southern Carinthia, Austria, this film is a wildlife documentary essay. This region was named after the *Apis Millifera Carnica* bee, and has had a long tradition of husbandry since the 400s/300s BC.⁷ My intention was to capture the interaction between the bees, their environment and the film crew; to record live events, and rely on the indexical strength of images, whilst avoiding building a narrative.

Apicula Enigma was shot digitally, then transferred to 35mm. film in order to form a single screen projection. On set, two cameras were used: the second camera filmed the first whilst it was filming the bees.⁸ The intention was to articulate a dialectic between what the cameras were aiming at, and the way the images were made, so as to create a tension between production and reproduction, presentation and representation. The aim was to minimise the illusion's seduction and, instead, to point at the production of relations in between the elements that were present on set. The result was that "viewing such a film is at once viewing a film and viewing the 'coming' into presence of the film,

⁷ Crane, Eva: *The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting*, Routledge, New York, 1999.

⁸ A Red Camera MX 5K and a Canon EOS 5D Mark II.

i.e., the system of consciousness that produces the work.”⁹

The installation included a 35 mm. projector (Fig.1). Its purpose was to clearly establish a formal metaphor between the beehive and the projector, via the format of both of the elements in the room. Designed as an immersive and sensual experience, in which speakers were set at ear level, this display aimed to make viewers simultaneously conscious of the space between the two cameras on set – the one in between the camera and the beehive, as well as the space between them and the screen – so as to establish an immediate reflexivity. A bench was designed to match the size of the projected image. Its distance to the screen mattered. It was set far enough away so that the projection did not feel overwhelmingly big, but close enough so that the viewer would feel that s/he was ‘in’ the image. That point of balance needed to be found so as to minimise the distortion of proportion, and so that the size of the bees on screen did not appear monumental. Although the size of the projection was going to picture them oversized, I intended to find a way to allude to their real size, so this ‘in the image’ feeling offered an intimacy. This was crucial, so that the viewers would feel that they were at the centre of this reflexive display, and for this installation to be a reflection of the cinematography of this film, as I will explain later.

⁹ Gidal, Peter: *Structural Film Anthology*, BFI, London, 1978, p.2.



Figure 1: Installation view: *Apicula Enigma*, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Arts, Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK, 2014.

My interest in the animal realm was an attempt to picture the distinctiveness that defines wild life; to assess the distance that was initiated by the Renaissance's division between nature and culture. As the film starts, one can hear a whisper that says: "Nature doesn't tell stories", which sets the film against the conventions of wildlife films. This whisper suggests an intimacy and prepares its viewers to fall short of their usual expectations; to have no handle on which to anthropomorphise what they are about to see.

If humanizing animals' expressions eventually erases the fact that they are distinct, here, anthropomorphism points to another understanding of the term. This critical framework considers the nature/culture distinction as a cultural construct, and attempts to reassess

the use of the “diversity of species for the conceptual support of social differentiation”¹⁰ so that anthropomorphism offers the possibility to re-evaluate the differences between animals as an expression of our similitudes.

Critical post-humanist discourses also imply a move that goes beyond anthropocentrism in order “to see the inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each. It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the ‘nature’ of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction.”¹¹ This sensibility confirms an intuition, which was the driving force behind the making of this film about a possible ‘milieu’ for a human-non-human continuum, in which the middle ground of that interaction had to remain normatively neutral “in order to allow for new parameters to emerge for the becoming-animal of *Anthropos*.”¹² This lead the theoretical framework of this film to become a critique of the human’s dominant gaze, which indexes access to a power in which the ‘other’, in its difference, implies a subordination. It addresses the questions of subjectivity, and of subjectivity formation, in a search for a different type of measure of all things, in an area where the opportunistic form of post-anthropocentrism

¹⁰ Berger, John: *Why We Look at Animals*, Penguin Books, London, 2009, p.17.

¹¹ Braidotti, Rosi: *Posthuman, Post-Anthropocentrism: Life beyond the Species*, Polity Press, 2013, pp.79-

¹² *Ibid*, p.80.

is built into the new cognitive capitalism in order to profit from all life forms.

From this perspective, assessing how a non-human subjectivity may be translated, in filmic terms, became a challenge, as a subjective point of view is mostly constructed by the reassurance that whatever it is that looks back recognizes the one who is looking. Returning the gaze builds a dialectic that implies a common response between the unanimated, or natural, organism and man, since "to perceive the aura of an object we look at, means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return."¹³ Here, making the assumption that the bees would look back recalls Laura Mulvey's conception of the bearer of the gaze, but this won't be discussed here, since animals offer a different configuration of this exchange, in which our gaze is somehow co-opted by the strangeness of what we assume is feedback. The nature of this response is elusive, as we fail to rationalize their abrupt moves and are soon caught up in something rather peculiar - a feeling - which reassures us that this possible liaison informs us about ourselves. This exchange, which points beyond the frame at something that our eyes and mind can neither distinguish nor compute, is an attempt to reset the boundaries of what appears to us as the 'other'.

Jakob von Uexküll's concepts, '*Umwelt*' and '*Merkwelt*' were a great source of inspiration

¹³ Walter, Benjamin: *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, Schocken Books, New York, 1969, p.188.

while I was preparing this film.¹⁴ According to him, animals have receptors which respond to the features of objects, and they understand them as a mark or a sign. An animal also has affecters – or ‘Merkwelten’, so when the appropriate mark is presented, the receptor projects upon the object a perceptual response, thus assigning to the object a significance. It is the combination of the receptors and the affecters that builds around animals a world that is theirs. However, the same mark or sign can respond to different receptors and can have different significances. In other words, “each subject lives in a world that is composed of subjective realities alone, and that even the *Umwelten* themselves represent only subjective realities,” Von Uexküll concludes.¹⁵

His quest for the indistinguishable in nature refers to what lies before our eyes, yet remains unseen, but also to the gaps that lie between species that are living in the same environment. These perceptual worlds form intervals, or abysses, between them, where predation organizes their existence, and indifference rules their separation.¹⁶ It is this indifference that intrigued me most; the distance that seems to exist between the world that I perceive and the world that might be perceived by other beings, which is effectively the same world, but which is separated by the way we look at it (Fig. 2). I

¹⁴ See, Von Uexküll, Jakob: ‘A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men, 1934’, in *Instinctive Behaviour*, trans. Claire H. Schiller, International Universities Press, 1957.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.383.

¹⁶ Von Uexküll, Jakob: ‘A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men, 1934’, in *Instinctive Behaviour*, trans. Claire H. Schiller, International Universities Press, 1957.

wondered if I could rely on the capacities of film to picture what remained indistinguishable, or what Benjamin calls 'the optical unconscious.'¹⁷

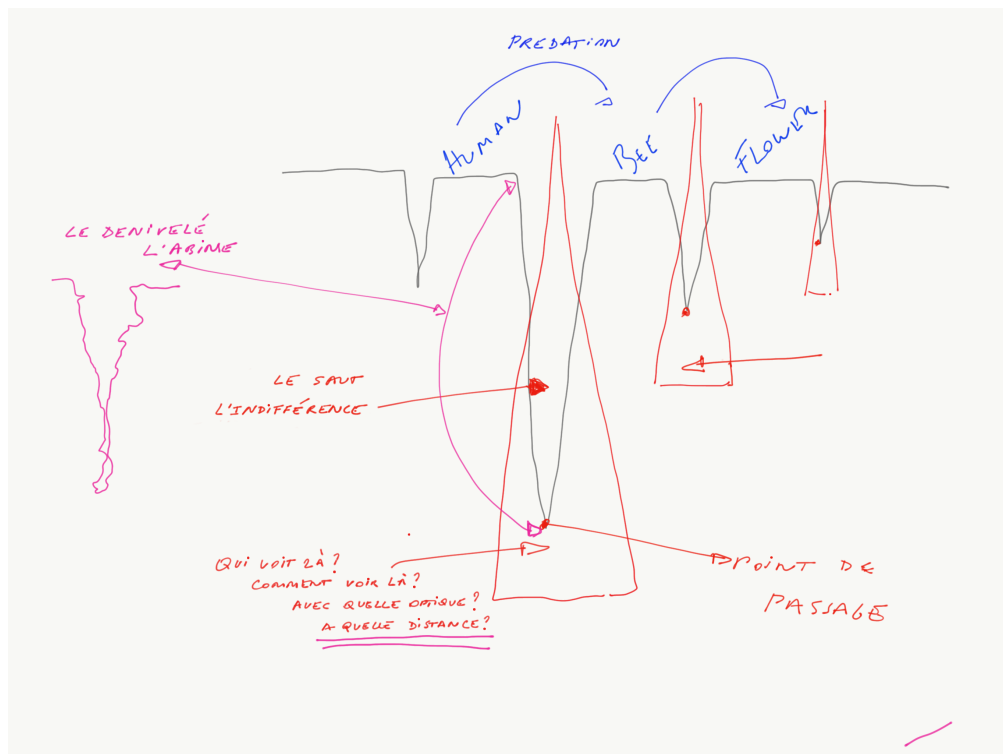


Figure 2: Diagram made during the pre-production of *Apicula Enigma*.

The questions I asked while making *Apicula Enigma* were: could film picture what can perceive me, but which I, in turn can hardly see? Can film move its point of view within

¹⁷ Benjamin, Walter: *A Small History of Photography, One-Way Street*, New Left Books, London, pp.240-257.

the gap, in the abyss that separates me from the animal realm? Could these two regimes of visions be reconciled? Could we de-measure film and set another measure?

The Lumière brothers' *Workers Leaving the Factory* and *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat* are an expression of the great divides that modernity has inflicted upon us, in which film has re-instated the dichotomies that are embedded in the 16th century reform of vision, such as the empirical/transcendental, rational/non-rational, establishing oppositions between objects and subjects, objectivity and subjectivity.¹⁸ With these short films, the Lumières' new technology formalized a world in which bodies had to conform to a system of representation, inaugurating a morphological inflection onto human physical bodies, conforming them to frame rates and lenses' formats. Film's frame rate was set to the minimum amount of the human's eye image frequency so that an illusion of movement would be perceived. Twenty-four frames per second became the norm for economic reasons, and not sixty frames per second, which is the true frame rate of the human eye. This economy of the gaze, and its policies, made the world look as we decided it should. With telescopes and microscopes, the infinitely big vs. the infinitely small, film was set in the middle of this vertical diagram as a social project in which the human figure is described through its inter-relations with others. This resulted in

¹⁸ Lumière, Auguste and Louis: *Workers Leaving the Factory*, 46 seconds, 1895 and *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, 50 seconds, 1896.

anything that was beyond the human gaze remaining out of reach (Fig. 3). Film organized itself around the human figure, while it left other worlds at a distance, formalizing breaches and gaps. The limit of its technicity relies on these constraints, or discontinuities, as the conditions of its expression.

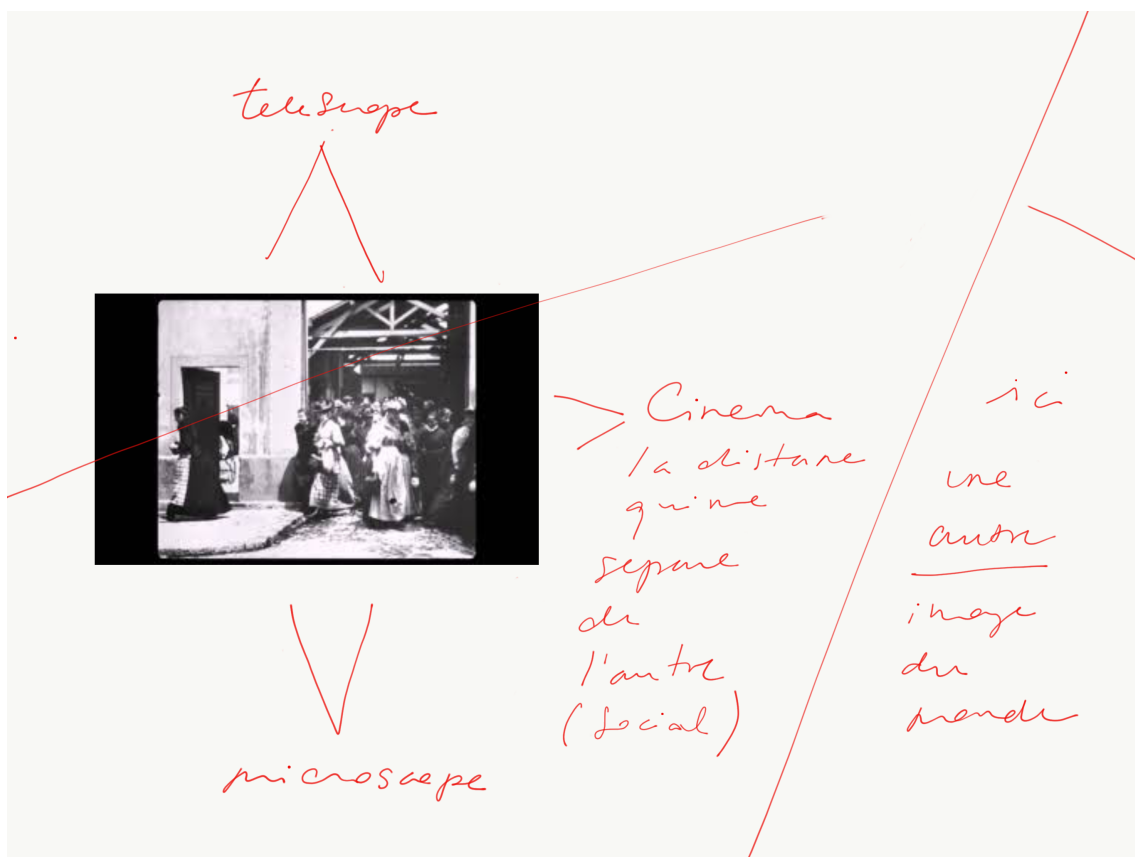


Figure 3: Diagram made during the pre-production of *Apicula Enigma*.

With this in mind, *Apicula Enigma* still attempted to reach the 'point of passage', or the gap between human perception and the animal realm, to approach the limit of the scope of representation as we know it. This interspace, or passage way, defines the capacities of film, and largely exceeds them. Numerous scenes in the film show a hand measuring the distance between the bees and the lenses of the camera, in order to embody this very idea (Figs. 4 and 5).

This gesture, which is usually done on set to establish a focal point, here takes a symbolic turn. It searches for a lens formula which is the equation between the distance of the centre of the image, the object and the focal length of the lens. In my film, this gesture beyond its practical use, sets the possibility of a language and forms the basis of a contract with the viewer, informing them that its subject lies in the significance of what is measurable or unmeasurable. It delineates a domain to the film, as well as to the author's line of sight, who has set its focus on a point which resumes its research; s/he is looking for a formula, however mysterious it may be.

To set the focus on that elusive point, or passage way, I had to consider the conventions of wild life documentaries. On set, I avoided staged actions, voyeurism - a point of view which, in reality, is impossible for a viewer, or the use of new filming techniques that break down the barriers between a subject and the audience.



Figure 4 and 4: Film still from *Apicula Enigma*.

Nevertheless, I was left with a few problems to solve. The first concerned the use of slow-motion and macrophotography usually assisting the creation of wild life documentaries, and which were necessary to make images of the bees, as their movements are almost imperceptible to our eyes. With the director of photography, Attila Boa, we decided to use 36 fps, as opposed to the conventional 300 fps, since it would allow the bees' movements to be perceived, but not to be seen in their entirety.

The second concerned how big the bees should appear on screen. Should they fill the entire image, knowing that the format of the screen was likely to be bigger than the face of our viewer? How close should we bring the eye of the viewer and, thus, what lenses should we use? Here, the DoP and I decided that anything close and small should resemble the gaze of a *flâneur* on a promenade. In order to achieve this, we decided that the focal length would be 1200 mm. Those cinematographic decisions informed the content of the film, which is a faithful recording of the factual truth of what happened on set. It accounts for the length of time we spent waiting for, and looking at, the bees. The collection of pollen and the bees that, luckily, swarmed out of the beehive to the nearest tree, and then swarmed out again so as to disappear into the forest. Staying close to the factual truth included filming the crew and the process of making the images. Doing so formed a two-sided apparatus as measuring the distance to the bees while looking from afar at the crew doing so, invited the viewer to have a sense of scale and visually transformed this project into a critical one. On film, the crew's work, namely, cleaning

lenses, recording sound, or setting camera shots, as well as the presence of the mirrors that were installed on set, offered a sense of reflection on the author's gaze, the technology that was in place, and the object of the enquiry (Figs. 6 and 7).

However, what became an expression of this place was not the result of my direction as a filmmaker. It was what came with this situation: the weather - the storm and the rain - the change of light throughout the days, the presence of the bees, and of us as a crew. All these elements, in coexistence, which are caught in a set of invisible links and filmed in real time, are what the film depicts. It is the assemblage of these uncontrollable elements which, captured on film, are the vector on which an emotion arises. It forms a quest through which to search for the ineffable in the interstices that separate the observer from the observed, an attempt to find moments in which science turns into science fiction, a point at which the most factual events become poetic and phantasmagorical. This film is an experiment to find the tipping point that implies a rupture with the modern regime of vision, a discontinuity, or a deregulation. *Apicula Enigma* searches for a way to be in the middle of things, to look into nature, and not at nature, but, of course, this point of passage to the animal kingdom eludes itself, and the quest fails to find any treasure. "It" remains out of reach, hence the enigma.



Figure 6 and 7: Film stills from *Apicula Enigma*

Chapter 2: Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless (2015)

Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless is a 16mm. film, made in collaboration with Michael Newman, for a group show at the Marian Goodman Gallery, in Paris.¹⁹ This show, entitled *Presque Rien*,²⁰ was curated by Christian Boltanski. It praised artists' works that find their strength in "subtle and austere gestures."²¹ The film we made for this show was a study of *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, which belongs to the Louvre in Paris. At that time, the sculpture was on display at Le Grand Palais for the Velázquez survey show. It was installed in a room with the *Venus and Her Mirror* (1673). Upon entering the space, one could see the back of the sculpture and, on the way out, one had to circumvent it, which revealed its bisexuality (Figs. 8 and 9).²² This designed pathway took me by surprise. Discovering the sculpture's nature felt so disturbing that it called for an examination of my reaction. To restage the way in which I had encountered the marble sculpture, the camera made two opposite circular movements around it. The first tour starts on its feet, moves up the back, and turns around its shoulder to reveal its breasts and penis. Then the film goes backwards from its feet to its penis and moves down its back.

¹⁹ Michael Newman is Professor of Art Writing at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

²⁰ Translation into English: "almost nothing".

²¹ *Presque Rien*, press release, Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris, May 2015.

²² *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, Greek marble, Roman copy of the 2nd century CE after an anonymous Hellenistic original of the 2nd century BC. Mattress made by Bernini in 1619 on Cardinal Borghese's request.



Figure 8: *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, Le Louvre, Paris.



Figure 9: *The Sleeping Hermaphrodite*, installed in the Velázquez exhibition, Grand Palais, Paris, 2015.

These two camera movements created a sense of life, as if the sculpture was moving imperceptibly. To accentuate this, I then decided to animate the sculpture. A post-production company made a 3D scan of the marble, and animated parts of its body by pulling the vector points of the graphic (Fig. 10).²³ This technique made its lips and feet move subtly. These animations were then inserted near editing points in the digital file of the film. Placing them near cuts made these movements almost imperceptible. The animations added to the ambivalence of *The Hermaphrodite*; it looked animated while it was still, and vice versa.

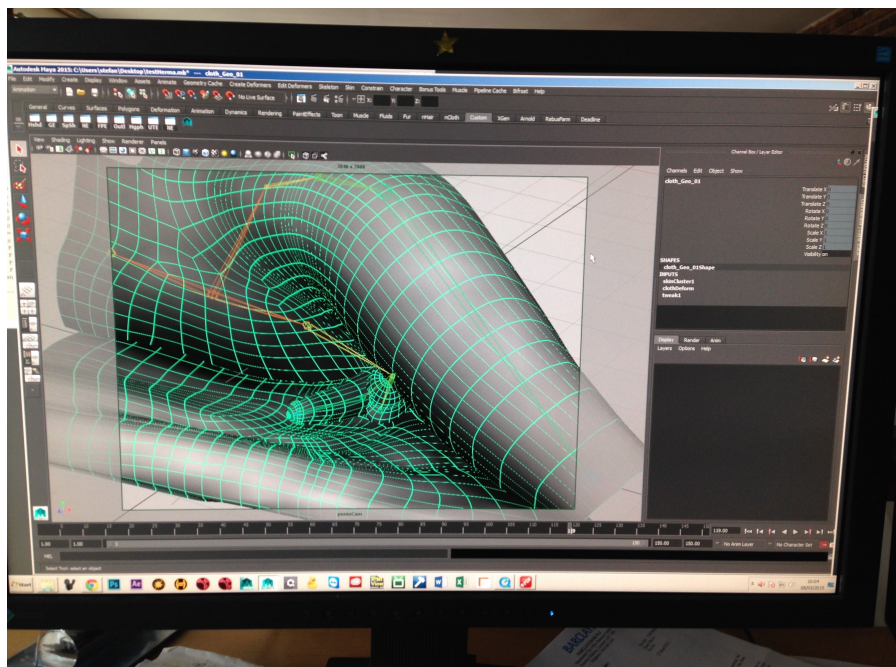


Figure 10: Production still: view of the computer-generated animation in progress.

²³ Hoxton Redsox, visual effects studio, London, EC2, UK

The black and white film, shot on a digital camera, as well as the animation files, were then transferred to 16mm. film in a 4/3 format. The entire film was slowed down to 1/3 of its normal speed. The analogue film was then spliced to include colour images, lasting 18 frames each, which made them appear as flashes. These three images, licensed from the internet, were of a shoal of fish making a sudden dispersal movement, a clan of hyenas devouring its prey, and an image of the Fall of the Berlin Wall in 1981.²⁴ Their combination conveyed social violence, animal instincts and historical facts.

For the exhibition's installation, a 16mm. projector was set on a pedestal with a loop (Fig. 11). The projection was silent, which allowed the audience to hear the film going through the gate. The duration of the film was five minutes, and no bench was offered on which the viewer could sit. The size of the projection was small, as the intention was to create an intimacy, so that the viewer would come closer (Fig.12).

This film was shot using a Red digital Camera with a video assist. Unexpectedly, an interesting relationship between the marble, the digital medium and the question of the nature of desire arose.

²⁴ These images were licensed from Pond5.com



Figure 11: Installation view: Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris, France, 2015.



Figure 12: Installation view: *Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless*, next to Lygia Clark's *Biju* (1964), Marian Goodman Gallery, Paris, France, 2015.

The first round of the camera; revealing the heels, back, head, breasts and penis, offered the possibility of seeing one body that became two; thus, referring to Narcissus encountering his reflection.²⁵ The second round, reversing the first, offered the possibility of seeing two bodies becoming one, revealing the features of an hermaphrodite, as these two bodies formed a single one (Figs. 13, 14, 15 and 16).



Figure13: Film Still from *Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless*.

²⁵ See Ovide: *Les Métamorphoses*, Livre III, Théâtre Classique, Ernest et Paul Fièvre, 2017



Figure 14 and 15: Film Stills from *Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless*.



Figure 16: Film Still from Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless.

It is interesting to note that what the features of that hermaphrodite do not respond to is the definition of one - which is that there are two sexes in one. What we see is a pair of breasts and a penis, the sum of two genres. From this perspective, the formula was then: $1=2$ and $2=1$, which effectively resemble the digital 0 - 1. The choice to then transfer the digital file to 16mm. analogue was not that paradoxical. Analogue film, ontologically, forms a continuum and might be associated with the binary and a gender continuum if we are to think that the recurrence of frames on celluloid forms a repetition, a recurrence to produce a plurality. Repetition is to be seen as a repetition of the not-same, the non-

identical, and the diverse, according to Deleuze.²⁶ In opposition, the digital cancels all possibility of distinction and differences; the matrix of the feminine and the masculine is here overtaken. The digital belongs to the fluid, where the immaterial performance of code allows the transaction of identity and memory. The digital file, transferred to analogue film, then became the vector on which the non-binary aspect of *The Hermaphrodite* was reiterated.²⁷

Lying lustfully, *The Hermaphrodite* displays an enviable sense of completeness. As we gaze at its curves, we glimpse eternity. However, would *The Hermaphrodite* ever experience a sense of loss? Perhaps what is at stake here is the relation of the infinite to numerical distinction, which is another way to approach the question of the digital versus the analogue. The meeting point of the two extremes (finite/infinite) renders formulae null, and turns time into a state that can be described as an ontological un-determination of things. The loop on the projector embodied this fluid state between what is neither feminine nor masculine, which challenges heteronormativity and normative gender roles, as "if gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes then a gender cannot be said to follow a sex in any one way."²⁸

²⁶ Deleuze, Gilles: *Différence et Répétition*, Puf, Paris, 1968

²⁷ These ideas were evoked by Michael Newman whilst the film was being made.

²⁸ Butler, Judith: *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, London, 1990.

Maybe the question that needs to be asked concerns the nature of the pleasure that is provided when looking at this hermaphrodite. The first movement of the camera, before revealing the penis, shows the large hips. They are immediately associated with the female, on which male viewers may lay a patriarchally formatted sight that objectifies women, and thus associates it with pleasure. However, soon, the appearance of the penis and breasts distorts that pleasure. The gaze laid upon *The Hermaphrodite* produces a sense of vertigo, as what the viewer is looking at is "either a man or a woman but *nevertheless s/he is neither man or woman*".²⁹ An impossible resolution between the two occurs, and this challenges the viewer with the option to identify with the figure: to embrace it, or not. This is how our gaze is caught up in a subversion as a sense of eroticism remains, although the dissolution of normality and subjectivity is associated with a void, or even death. This oscillation between acceptance and refusal produces fear, as "the vertiginous possibility of a dual sexual identity, vertiginous in that from a dual sexual identity to a non-sexual identity, in effect to non-identity, there might be only one step."³⁰ If this indecision confronts the viewer with the denial of a sexual difference, I would argue that it might also offer the possibility of a new grammar in the epistemology of sexual difference, in which this undifferentiation does not point to

²⁹ Pacteau, Francette: 'The Impossible Referent: Representations of the Androgyne' in *Formations of Fantasy*, Victor Burgin, James Donald and Cora Kaplan, Methuen, London, 1996, p.63.

³⁰ Idem, p.62

something alien - a being that has no reality and status, but generates the possibility of a third gender, whose existence redesigns the limits of what being human means.

The reverse movement of the camera confirms the point. What has been seen is still present when the camera rolls backwards from the penis to its back. The new sight of the woman's back here fills our gaze with a renewed sense of pleasure. *The Hermaphrodite* opens the way for a transgressive gaze, in which the look alone exists outside time and conventions. This pleasure of 'another' kind reveals the revolutionary component of what is fluid, which, as Paul B. Preciado says, "should cross the borders of the genre, whether philosophical, geographical or epistemological, the borders between nationality and language, between humanity and animality, between the present and history."³¹

The Louvre's catalogue describes the sculpture as "...stretched out in erotic abandon on the mattress, the figure sleeps," but is it really sleeping? ³² Its eyes are closed, but its foot is raised, which indicates otherwise. Her half-open lips add to this ambiguity, not to mention its peaked nipples and half erect penis. All these elements are offered to the viewer so that s/he wonders what goes through the mind of this figure while one gazes at it, without being seen in return. Its unanimated state is contradicted by the attempt of

³¹ Preciado, Paul B: *Un appartement sur Uranus*, Grasset, Paris, 2019, p.43 (author's own translation).

³² <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/sleeping-hermaphrodite>.

the film to grasp it entirely: soon the film's motion makes the marble move, for those who lose their gaze, following its curves, which pleases equally all sexual inclinations. This brief suspension of the limits between the unanimated and the animated produces a feeling of perplexity. The oscillations between stillness and movement are the nature of film. The single frame, which holds and freezes time, forms a transition between the animated and the unanimated, from life to death, while film does the opposite, by means of an illusion.

However, there is more to film - to this reverse process - than simply bringing back to life what is unanimated, or still, in an image. What film does is to merge movement and stillness and, as such, it creates an uncertainty, if not a fear, as we are reminded of the passing of time and death, which lie within the materiality of film.

The loop again accentuates this point of uncertainty. The animated/unanimated body brings the viewer to a point where they may feel confused. They know that what they see moving is, in fact, still, but the power of the illusion takes over their reasoning and produces the unreasonable; there is an appearance of life in what is dead. The rational and the irrational are suddenly entwined in a constant battle that, ultimately, throws into doubt the certainty of stillness, or the unanimated, as death. This doubt, when the unanimated and animated merge, produces anxiety, but also attraction and fascination. According to Freud, it is when the supernatural and technology collide that this other-

worldly effect arises.³³ He associates this effect "with doubts and an intellectual uncertainty about whether an apparently animate being is really alive or, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not in fact be animate."³⁴

In my film, this "uncanny effect" is reinforced by the fact that *The Hermaphrodite* itself transcends norms. Its indeterminate gender opens up a space for speculation. The forward movement of narrative that normally leads to a point of resolution - an end bringing the death contained in still frames to merge with a halt in a narrative - is circumvented. The 'uncanny effect' is continuous, as the camera reverses its own movement for the second tour around the sculpture, reinstating the illusion of the sculpture's movement and heightening the confusion between what is animated and unanimated, creating a sense of *déjà vu*. A sense of vertigo arises within this infinite forward-backward movement. The speed of the film, slowed down to 1/3 of its normal speed, increases this feeling, as the limits between still frames and movement create the possibility of a complete halt whereby, at any given time, the film may stop, and *The Hermaphrodite* might be seen to be breathing.

³³See Freud, Sigmund: *The Uncanny*, Translated by David McLintock, Penguin Books, New York, 2003.

³⁴ Mulvey, Laura, *Death 24x A Second: Stillness and Moving Image*, Reaktion Books, London, 2006, p.43.

At the same time, the viewer may be caught in fascination with what s/he sees, possessing this animated unanimated body with their gaze, they may also be confronted with another question: if *The Hermaphrodite* were to dream, what might it be dreaming about? This question haunted the project. What else could someone who has a sense of completeness be desiring? This moment of identification with *The Hermaphrodite* propelled me into imagining it opening its eyes and thinking about its gaze. A non-gendered gaze, or a non-binary gaze, forms a problem of visibility, since it defies the supremacy of the female or the male gaze, and with it the phallogentric view and the heteropatriarchal paradigm of a body having only one gender and being desired by the other. The possibility of a non-gendered gaze escapes definition and therefore appears as a symptom of the inadequacy of the politico-visual regime of the sexual difference, which fails to reflect and account for this complexity. Although the law is working towards recognising the possibility of registering a body as a citizen without assigning it a masculine or feminine gender, the following questions remain: how can we organize a system of visibility, representation, concession of sovereignty and political recognition that goes beyond sexual binary categories? The challenge is embodied by Paul Preciado, when he says: "I am not a man, I am not a woman, I am not heterosexual, I am not homosexual, I am not bisexual."³⁵

³⁵ Preciado, Paul B: *Un appartement sur Uranus*, Grasset, Paris, 2019, p.14 (author's own translation).

The three short colour sequences inserted into the body of the film, which function like acupuncture points in its tissue, are there to support and reinforce this idea. The fragmentation of the synchronicity of the unique movement of a shoal of fish, or the savage dismemberment of prey by a clan of hyenas, acts as a metaphor for a type of dismantling. The Fall of the Berlin Wall (1989) foregrounds the reversed idea: what had been divided could be reunited (Figs. 17,18 and 19).



Figure 17: Film Stills from Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless



Figure 18 and 19: Film Stills from *Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless*

As Michael Newman wrote: "But do the two become one, or do they remain two in the unification? Can the One tolerate dissensus and antagonism? Is it the old State-as-One that re-emerges, or a new kind of unity-in-diversity, an immanent togetherness of the multitude?"³⁶ The sequence of the fall of the Berlin Wall embodies the dismemberment of the body of the State and its institutions. It is an illusory and ephemeral moment when, in a violent movement, the people, as one, project their desire to belong to History. This sequence of the Berlin Wall sums up the first two: it is a symbolic syncretism of all the conflicting forces of desire.

The Hermaphrodite, gilded by these sequences, seems to be a syncretism of all the conflicting forces of desire. The fluid gaze it requires from the viewer, and the non-gendered gaze it possibly has, form a figure in constant transformation, relieved from the perpetual conflict between embodying and refusing patriarchy, between denying and embracing the hegemony of the phallus. *The Hermaphrodite* simultaneously divides and unites itself, and us with it, and, as it does, formalises an exhilarating feeling of life - a promise of the emergence of new political, social, sexual and artistic experimentations, and this is very likely what constituted my attraction.

³⁶ *E.R.O.S Issue 8, Self/Love, Desire is Not Much, But Nonetheless*, Michael Newman, Edited by Sami Jallili, EROS Press, 2017, p.193.

Chapter 3: May 13th, 1968 (2011)

This four-minute 16mm. film is a documentary featuring the uprisings in Paris in 1968 made by my artistic alter ego, the war reporter, Marine Lazare.³⁷ This work was made for a show entitled *Alias*, which was curated by Oliver Chanarin and Adam Broomberg³⁸ at the *Photomonth* in Krakow, Poland, in 2011.³⁹ The two curators' strategy was to team writers with artists so that they could invent a fictional character, and produce an artwork under the name of this invented person. Viewers of the show had no additional information with which to recognize what the alter egos' real names were.

Boomberg and Chanarin asked a friend of mine, Clare Carolin, who, at that time, was a curator at the Hayward Gallery in London, to write the fictional biography of my alias, Marine Lazare. Her text, in *Photomonth Krakow's* catalogue, is an eight-page account of her fictitious biography as a journalist and war reporter between the 1950s and the 1980s.⁴⁰

³⁷ Marine Lazare is my alter ego, a fictional character, invented by the writer Clare Carolin, for this exhibition.

³⁸ Oliver Chanarin and Adam Broomberg are an artist duo living in London. Their work enacts an archaeology of aesthetic and ideological constructs behind the accepted tropes of visual culture.

³⁹ *Photomonth* was organized in Krakow in May, 2011, and was hosted by the Polish Foundation for Visual Arts.

⁴⁰ Born in 1930, in Krakow, Poland, Marina Katarzyna Lázár was part of an assimilated Jewish family, originally from Estonia. She became a war reporter and covered all of the political conflicts from 1954 until 1984. At the end of her career, she donated countless processed and unprocessed reels of films to the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, which holds an archive of Alternative Visions of History. She died in London in 1988.

In the exhibition, my installation featured a letterset text, informing the viewers of Marine Lazare's biography and of the fragility and extreme precarity of the film on display, which had been found unprocessed in her attic. This text clearly stated the rationale behind the decision to show the original reel: "digital technology could have offered a preservative option, but a 'true' experience of M. Lazare's work was favoured" wrote the curators.⁴¹ These lines clearly influenced the viewers' actions, with various audience members that I saw at the opening walking into the installation with caution.

From the viewer's point of view, the film featured scenes depicting protesters running in the street of Paris in May, 1968, during the student uprising, throwing stones at the police and helping others who had been injured.⁴² Crowds of people could be distinguished walking down the streets shouting "Adieu De Gaulle!". This unedited film seemed to have been shot sequentially over a single day, but some sequences looked blurred, as if the images were fading. They featured what I will loosely call 'white veils', covering the images with an opaque white layer. Although they rendered the image out of focus, at the limit of visibility, what was depicted remained distinguishable. These 'white veils' had the appearance of light leaks on analogue film, as if the reel had been accidentally opened before being processed. Dirt and scratches added to the impression

⁴¹ *Photomonth Krakow's* press release, Krakow, Poland, May, 2011.

⁴² May, 1968, in France, refers to a period of civil unrest, lasting some seven weeks and punctuated by demonstrations, strikes, and the occupation of universities and factories by students and workers.

of a 'vintage' film that had been saved from oblivion.

The film was projected on a 16mm. projector, on a continuous loop and in a dark space. The viewers were confronted, at its entrance, with the blinking light of an infra-red detector which was triggering the 16mm. projector. This device was set up to limit the amount of passage of the film through the projector's gate. It clearly made viewers self-conscious, as it transformed the space into an interactive one. The effect of the loop disallowed any closure and resisted the viewer's expectation to see an end. It frustrated the recognition of a sense of time, as any cut in the film could be mistaken for an end or a beginning. When the film effectively started again, it was without warning. The viewer, who soon wondered if what s/he was looking at was similar, or maybe the same, as what they had previously seen.

The projection wall was painted with a light, iridescent grey paint; a plastic-based primer that allowed contrast and maximized sharpness. The vanishing images on the wall left the viewer in front of the physicality of the screen. The sequences in between visibility and non-visibility made the materiality of the images more poignant. The viewers had to fill in the gaps of the missing parts of the film (Figs. 20 and 21).

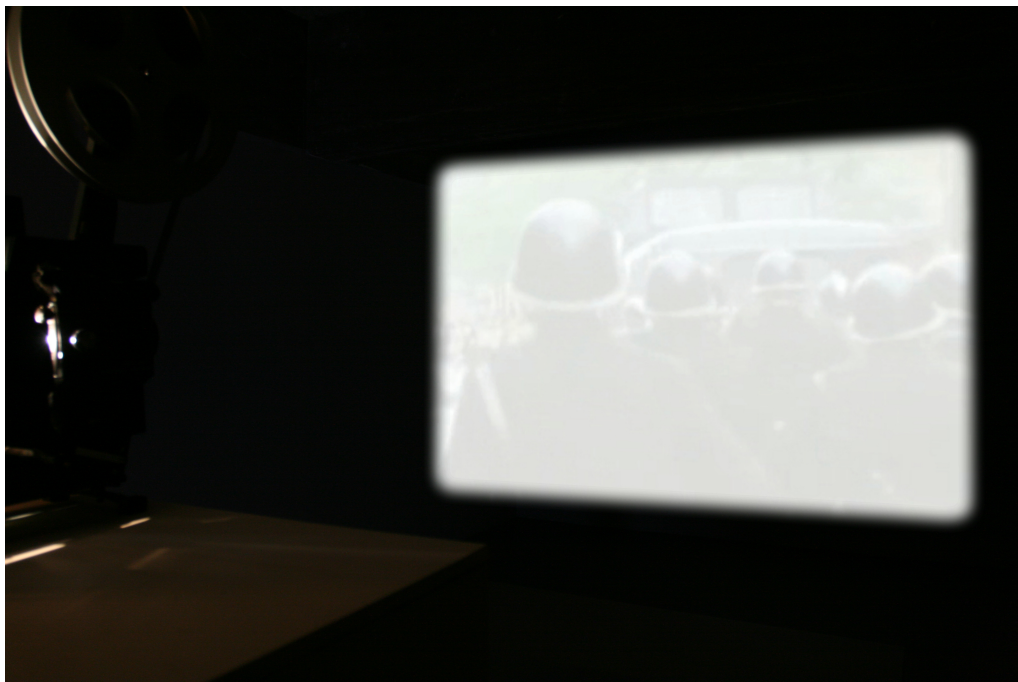
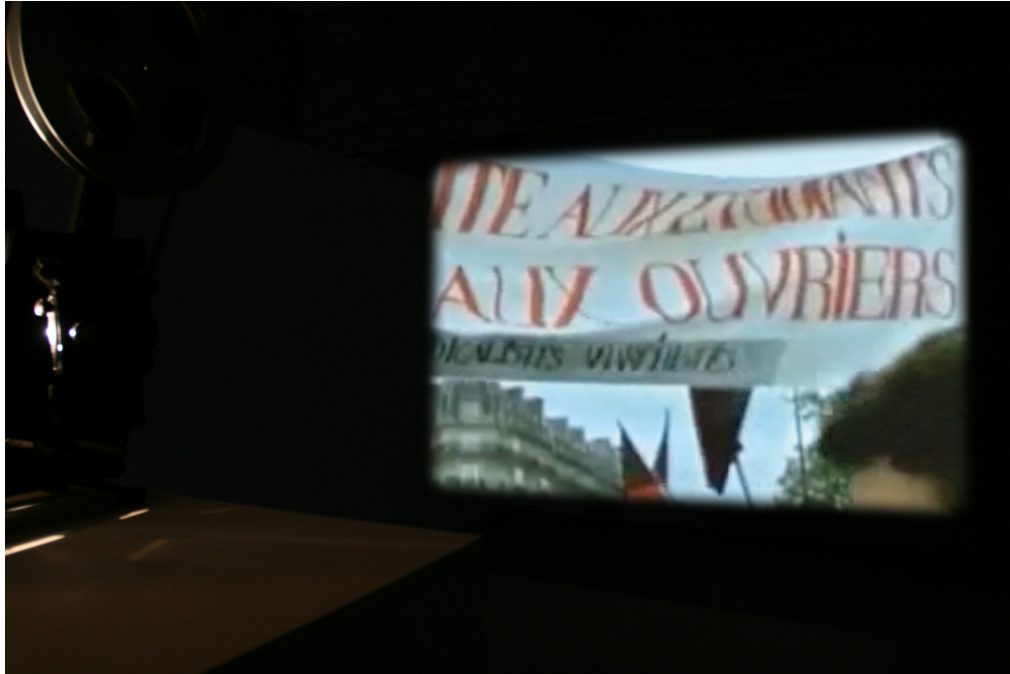


Figure 20 and 21: Installation views, May 13th, 1968, Photomonth Krakow, Krakow, Poland, 2011.

This film interlaces two apparently different components: an aesthetic experience and journalism. Coincidentally, the exhibition *All That Fits: The Aesthetics of Journalism*, opened that same year, 2011.⁴³ It aimed to analyse the new spectatorial economy, the ideological links between the production of images and truth, the politics of the gaze in the context of social conflicts and, more importantly, the position of the artist, who, in an attempt to endorse the role of a journalist, blurs categories and creates new ways of reporting. This exhibition “provocatively tried to advance the idea that art and journalism are not separate forms of communication, as mostly thought but, rather, they are two sides of a unique activity.”⁴⁴ Its claim to erase the difference between the two methods of investigation echoed a number of the questions that I have encountered in my practice.

May 13th, 1968, and other films in my practice, attempt to merge conflicting elements, such as aesthetics and news images.⁴⁵ These two projects triggered the following questions: is it possible to report while reflecting on the images produced? Is it possible to use journalistic methods while remaining self-reflective and critical of that genre? Could the two genres merge and, if so, what kind of truth was produced from the reality?

⁴³ *All That Fits: The Aesthetics of Journalism*, curated by Simon Sheikh and Alfredo Cramerotti's, Derby Quad (UK), May 28th - July 31st, 2011.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ For example: *Death of an Icon* (2004), shot in Ramallah, Palestine, which is a portrait of the city awakening to the news of Yasser Arafat's death.

Could this hybrid genre be legitimate outside the realm of the art world? Could this practice be considered as another kind of journalism and, in turn, could I consider myself to be an artist who makes reportage of another 'kind', as an artist-journalist?

My questioning deepened over time and explored what constitutes information in the context of art and journalism. Informing, in journalism, implies presenting the viewers with what really happened in order to wrap their belief around a sense of truth. The main difference between the journalistic output and art works seems to me to be nested in the inherent definition of the latter, which does not aim to deliver information but, rather, questions the information. "Art does not replace the journalist's perspective with a new one, but extends the possibility of understanding the first – where journalism attempts to give answers, art strives to raise questions. "⁴⁶ If journalism's aim is to deliver a knowledge of facts, what art could bring to this realm is the reflective procedure it uses in order to transform the way we view the world and transform the world itself. In turn, journalistic methods may offer to art the immediacy of reality as a primary material. The combination of these two cultural productions offers a fruitful ground – a transformative experience in which the role of the artist-journalist is to form poetics and concrete modes of engagement through which to advance socio-political change.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.30.

My film was made from gathering all of the footage that was available of May 13th, 1968, on the internet. It was edited so that the spaces and the actions depicted seemed to be continuous. I then played with the opacity effect on *Première*, and faded some sequences to help the flow and the movements between shots. These 'white veils', as I have named them above, did not alter what was seen of the actions, but played with the limit of what might be legible. I intentionally wanted to create an ambiguity, a zone of uncertainty as to what had caused these white veils, and about their meaning. As such, they mark a difference in the flow of images, since what the sequences of the film depict can never be ascertained. They constitute a gap in the knowledge of the viewer, who might, at first, wonder if this effect has significance. Soon, they may think that the repetition opens up another layer of meaning (Figs. 22 and 23).



Figure 22 and 23: Film stills, May 13th, 1968.

The white veils break the linearity of this film and, as such, confront the viewer with something 'other' than a simple documentary. They challenge the viewer's expectations, and excite his/her cognitive capacities. The film capitalized on the viewers' deception, as these veils force them to open up to the perceptual potential of the film. The white veils, which provide an aesthetic coherence and, foremostly, problematize the film, clearly show that the film relies on the emotional value, rather than on an informative one.

What remains visible in the images is solely what appears immediately in the foreground.

The materiality of the film is in constant conflict with what it wants to depict. The labour process, in other words. The materiality of the film is confused with the reality that is depicted and that renders determination impossible, as the viewer does not know what is responsible for the appearance and disappearance of the image. Whether these white veils are, in fact, smoke from the Molotov cocktail that has been thrown at the police, or light leaks on the unprocessed film, the two merge and problematise the scenes and the reality of what is seen. It is here that a transformation of meaning takes place.

This presence in the absence of the image produces a material difference. The white veils, although rendering the images abstract, form a concrete reality. Despite the fact that they opacify what is seen, they paradoxically produce more, add another layer to

the reality of the scenes. They produce a heightened version of this revolt, pushing all historical features to the background, leaving an outline. This intermittent space between the discernible and the semi-discernible is a non-language space, 'a figure of thought', as opposed to a figure of speech, which refers to Lyotard's idea of 'the figural' as the designation of something sensuous that cannot be defined by language or perception, which breaks the structures of seeing and reading.⁴⁷ For Lyotard, there is a space that lies beyond art. He describes it as a sensible experience beyond language, which is to be grasped in between meanings and understood as a resistance to representation: "the position of art is a refutation of the position of discourse (...) Art stands in alterity as plasticity and desire, a curved expanse against invariability and reason."⁴⁸

In 1985, he curated *Les Immatériaux*, which he described as a non-exhibition that questioned the legacy of the tradition of exhibitions and displays since the 18th century. His design of the show's layout replaced the usual picture rails with what are called 'trames', in French. The word 'trame' has a double meaning, as both the points of articulation of a narrative, and as the weft of a fabric.⁴⁹ These 'wefts', or semi-screens,

⁴⁷ See Lyotard, Jean-Francois: *Discourse, Figure*, 1971, Trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.7.

⁴⁹ *Les Immatériaux*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France, March 28th – July 15th, 1985.

were playing with transparency, opacity and created in between spaces, blurring perspectives. Controlled via dimmed lights that produced different intensities of colours: "the layout of these semi-screens, suspended, allows the visitor to choose his pathway semi freely. He is not constrained, but induced."⁵⁰ There is a sensory dimension to the indiscernible. This state of un-determination formalises a sensuous boundary, a suspension, a transition which merges what has been seen and what comes next. Similarly, the 'white veils' in my film form a shield, resist the viewer's assumptions, and build a space of dilution. They produce an aberration in the historical presentation of this revolt – an alteration of the truth. These vaporous opacities render depiction out of focus and are nesting fantasies. In the catalogue of *Les Immatériaux*, Derrida describes the words 'out of focus' as a "respectable desire to abandon a destination, to leave the other to make a move, to let it play, the out of focus leaves things open to desire."⁵¹ Similarly, the white veils draw our eyes to something that transcends the reality of that moment in the streets of Paris. The viewer's conscious and unconscious mechanisms build a dialectic between the difference of the scenes and opens up a place for speculations. At times, these white veils act like buffers, or like porous surfaces opening intermediate spaces, without a closing perspective. Their opacity changes the content of the film. It is no longer solely a reportage, as the white veils induce a transformation

⁵⁰ Ibid, Chapter: 'La Manifestation', p.3 (author's own translation).

⁵¹ Ibid, Chapter: 'Flou', p.74 (author's own translation).

and, as such mirror the May '68 revolt, which wanted a classless society.

Peter Gidal's description of Malcolm Le Grice's, *Yes No Maybe Maybe Not* (1967) wonders about "a new spectator, a new subject. Realism of another kind. How is this 'new' constructed? A viewer not 'in-the-know'."⁵² The effect of the white veil also calls for a different kind of involvement from the viewer. The reception of the film is not based on a projection: a propulsion of the viewer's body into another realm but, rather, relies on an operative intention in which the viewer becomes a receptacle. Gidal's 'in-the-know' refers to an experience that demands an examination of both spectatorship and of spectacle.⁵³ According to Debord, the viewer is offered a chance to bypass their alienation through radical actions and to formalise a reordering of life, as they "stop to look for the meaning of what is, but rises to a knowledge of the dissolution of all that is, and in its movement dissolves all separation."⁵⁴

The externality of the spectacle, in relation to the spectator, appears in the fact that their own gestures are no longer theirs, but those of another. who represents them. To transcend the commodification of reality, the powerful idea of 'dissolution', in my view, refers to this non-linguistic place of the not being in the know. It allows for the outline of

⁵² Gidal, Peter: *Materialist Film*, Routledge, London/New York, 1989, p.124.

⁵³ The spectacle is a central notion in the Situationist Theory that was developed by Guy Debord.

⁵⁴ Debord, Guy: *La Société du Spectacle*, 1978, Rebel Press, London, 1992, p.100.

a new gaze and redesigns the relationship between the observer and the observed, in the hope of a revolutionary reordering of society.

Chapter 4: *Cinétracts* (2012-2018)

Cinétracts is an ongoing collection of short videos that was started in 2012. They are composed of three different series that are entitled according to the season in which they were made. The Spring series corresponds to 2012 until 2014, the Summer series to 2015 to 2016, and the Winter one to 2016 to 2018. There are 32 films in total, each lasting a maximum of 5 minutes, and the duration of the entire work is 75 minutes.

The project was initially conceived in 2012 as a commission for *Random Acts*,⁵⁵ a TV program on UK's Channel 4.⁵⁶ It was made to be inserted between public television programs and, as such, to function like interludes, but Channel 4 did not agree to show this work outside the late night 15-minute slot that was allocated to it. Despite this, I continued to add more *Cinétracts* to the initial 10, as the work took on a diaristic aspect that I wanted to explore.

Their titles reference the short, militant, anonymous films made by the workers during May, 1968, in France.⁵⁷ At this time, politicians tried to deflect the public's attention and, in response, Chris Marker offered the factory workers his film equipment so they could

⁵⁵ Created in 2011, *Random Acts* was a Channel 4 short film strand that was dedicated to the arts.

⁵⁶ Channel 4 is a British public-service television network, headquartered in London, United Kingdom.

⁵⁷ May, 1968, in Paris, refers to a period of civil unrest that occurred throughout France in May and June, 1968.

depict their struggle. Their aim was to take direct revolutionary actions and also to serve as *agit-prop* during the uprisings.

Most of my *Cinétracts* are made up of footage that was gathered from the internet. The series explores the visual regimes of news imagery, of advertising and pornography. They are a meta critical examination of the media's narratives – a search for a critical distance from which to deconstruct their sensationalism. Many were made with a sense of urgency that responded directly to political events, while others are templates for future works' ideas.⁵⁸ Most of the sequences subvert, or diverge from, their original imagery, reshape or refashion what they say. Overall, this project was an occasion to experiment with sound and editing in order to explore cinematographic strategies.

A few examples of the procedures used are: zooming in, altering the editing, adding subtitles, slowing duration, looping or isolating fragments, using subject as fictional material, or simply not doing anything to them. In the latter, the simple fact of re-contextualizing them as part of this project was enough to shift the viewer's perception so as to create awareness of the mechanism of information making.

When the sequences were intentionally altered, the *Cinétracts* pretend to deflect the meaning of the original subject, and point to another way to inform so as to create new

⁵⁸ Twelve *Cinétracts* are reactions to political events, and nineteen are future works 'ideas.

forms and meaning. They are not a negation of the media and journalism, nor are they attempting to provide a new angle – set a record straight about the truth in any way – they essentially tell the same ‘story’, but subvert their message, so that their imagery can be read counter-culturally and critically.

The series is framed with a 16mm. cache. This is not some kind of fetishism for an almost obsolete mode of producing images, the intention lies in the anachronism, which creates a conscious displacement of the information. This analogue look perverts and deflects the overall meaning of the original sequences by moving their content to a place in time, which renews the way they are perceived.

The project references Allan Sekula’s position, he who neither embraced nor rejected journalism in general, and photojournalism, in particular, but intended to investigate the history of the media and to produce a different one.⁵⁹ Similarly, the *Cinétracts* search for a way in which information can be different, and other than the normative ways of the media. As such, this project discusses journalism and media imagery in relation to art, assuming that the fabrication of truth and knowledge lie within the framework of the latter. It foregrounds my definition of the position of the artist who questions point of views, indexes the failure of representational systems, interrogates

⁵⁹ Allan Sekula (1951-2013) was an American photographer, writer, filmmaker, theorist and critic.

the relation to the viewer and renews the perception of the sensible. Echoing Rancière: "Art is emancipated and emancipating when it renounces the authority of the imposed message (...) when, in other words, it stops wanting to emancipate us."⁶⁰ the *Cinétracts* offer the viewer a point of view in which they perceive me (the author) as regarding the subject in relation to them; they are invited to think and create meaning.

As a whole, this project conveys feminism and gender fluidity as an ongoing battle, pornography as the sole regime of images, news footage as fictional material, and they promote poetry as a direct response to political events. They define cinema as an effective political tool, in fact, they are political pamphlets in cinematographic form.

This project was exhibited at the Nogueras Blanchard Gallery in Madrid in November, 2017 (Fig. 24). A floor to ceiling single projection was installed, as well as four white speakers, at an acoustic level that enabled an immersive experience. A bench was set at a distance, so the size of the screen felt captivating. The rest of the gallery was left empty.

⁶⁰ Rancière, Jacques: 'Art of the Possible', an interview with Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey, *Artforum*, no.47, March 2007, pp.4/19 and 5/19.



Figure 24: Installation view: Cinétract, Nogueras Blanchard Gallery, Madrid, Spain, 2017.

I chose three Cinétracts to focus on, and each of them responds and relates to the other films in this commentary. The first, Cinétract 009, fictionalizes a historical moment' the second Cinétract 017, uses pornography as a means through which to examine the materiality of film, and the third, Cinétracts 032, reconsiders the non-human gaze.



Figure 25: Film still from Cinétract 009.

Cinétract 009, which is entitled "Conflict Resolution Part 1: A conversation between Anwar Sadat and Jimmy Carter, April 8th 1980" is a sequence that last 3 minutes and 20 seconds. It features an authentic photograph that was released by the US Library of Congress, which I licensed from an online photo archive.⁶¹ It shows Anwar Sadat and Jimmy Carter conversing in the White House's Garden in April 1980.⁶² Taken from afar,

⁶¹ A photography license is a contract in which the photographer grants specific rights to a client.

⁶² This conversation takes place after the first iteration of the Camp David Accords, which was signed by the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, on 17th September, 1978, at the White

this photograph triggered an excitement to investigate its context and to invent the content of a possible dialogue between these presidents of Egypt and the USA, respectively (Figs. 25, 26 and 27). The appeal was due to the following: two presidents of two radically different cultures, a conversation which looked intimate and passionate, and a pivotal historical moment which still has an impact today. This conversation took place after the first iteration of the Camp David Accords, which were signed at the White House by Sadat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Menachem Begin, on 17th September, 1978, and the second of these Accords in 1979, which led to the all too brief Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. My interest in this particular image was drawn by Sadat's effort for a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. This agreement was a set of political engagements which largely exceeded the purpose of the sole end of the war between Egypt and Israel, and the return of Sinai's peninsula, but which was to effectively bind the Arab and Jewish states. If this peace treaty had fulfilled Sadat's vision, if it had not been countered by the Muslim Brotherhood, who thought Sadat had abandoned efforts to ensure the creation of a Palestinian State, the world today could possibly look entirely different.⁶³

House. This was witnessed by President Jimmy Carter, and the second of these Accords, in 1979, which led to an Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty before Anwar Sadat's assassination in October, 1981, in Cairo.

⁶³ The Palestinian state was recognised on December 15th, 1988, by the United Nations' Resolution 43/177, but has remained in permanent conflict against Israel ever since its creation in 1948.



Figure 26 and 27: Film still from Cinétract 009.

The fictitious conversation describes the foreign policy of their respective countries and reveals the interplay between geographies, economies and policies. Their divergent interests, which formalize a set of conflicting problems, is the core of this exchange. This fictional dialogue attempts to foreground a possible resolution or reconciliation of their conflicting ideas and policies, although we know today that the political forces displayed that day never allowed for an alignment.

The setting of a political conversation provided me with an opportunity to practice and challenge my writing skills. Using an authentic document prevented me from having to build a historical context, as the two characters and the circumstances of their relationship were well known. The challenge laid in building a dialogue that would reveal who they were, and what the political situation was at the time, solely through their words. My goal was therefore to write a conversation that might have taken place, which was truthful to the circumstances – and thus very probable.

This intimate dialogue between the two friends needed to clearly reflect the true colours of their relationship in the subtext of their exchange. Revealing their characters beyond their words was my aim, to give us an insight into who they were, the situation they were in, the constraints that bound them. Building a subtext was key, as often politicians reveal what is truly important to them when they talk around questions, instead of answering them. The dialogue had to be lively, to draw upon their profiles as well as on their power relationship, without relying on any of the usual tropes, which are body language, facial

expression, and tone of voice.

The soundtrack of a garden in spring added in post-production to this still photograph, contributed to building a more realistic frame for this dialogue. Subtitles were then added. They usually appear as entire sentences but, here, the pace of each word -- appearing one after the other -- was a key feature in drawing the viewer's attention. In many ways, the pace of the subtitles animates the sequence. It provided this still photograph with an '*hors champs*', in which the viewer could imagine how Sadat was possibly leaning when voicing his concerns to Carter.⁶⁴ It helped to imagine their body language, the interplays of their relationship, the antagonisms of their political positions, despite their friendship, their mutual respect and understanding.

As they are both seated in the garden, away from the ears and eyes of the public, Sadat and Carter are having a drink. At the time, Sadat's political vision was set in stages. His plan was, firstly, to agree with Israel, then to implement a Palestinian state. In other words, to make Egypt, the mediator between Israel and Palestine. However, the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) strongly opposed Sadat's peace agreement with Israel as they felt side-lined in the consultation. As a result, Egypt was suspended from

⁶⁴ The *hors champs*, or off-screen, is what does not appear in a filmed image because it has not been recorded by the camera's field, but which is suggested by various elements, or by the sound.

the Arab League until 1989.⁶⁵ What was the most tangible benefit of the Camp David Peace Agreement for Egypt (other than the subsequent US aid) was the Sinai's oil, tourism and land resources, and a peaceful mutual border, enabling the Israel Defence Forces to reduce their levels of alert on Israel's southwestern frontier.

The Sinai oil resources played a key role, as Egypt had promised to supply Israel with Iran's cheaper oil in compensation for the loss of the Sinai Peninsula. However, Saddam Hussein wanted to seize the Arab League's leadership, which had been left vacant by Egypt's exclusion, and prepared Iran's invasion, while Iran threatened to kill all of the American hostages in the US Embassy in Tehran. The US offered support to Iraq's war effort against Iran, and this lessened the amount of oil Israel was to receive in order to honour the Camp David Agreements.

The dialogue describes Sadat's efforts to bring Carter to change his views, to undo this conundrum, but Carter talks around the questions instead of answering them, while the birds are singing in oblivion and ice cubes are poured into glasses so as to freshen the drinks. The aftermath of this conversation was the assassination of Sadat, Carter's resignation, the invasion of Iran by Iraq (December 22nd, 1980), a year of detention for

⁶⁵ The Arab League was founded in Cairo in March ,1945, thus establishing the first organisation with a Pan-Arabic ideology in the 20th century - it has 22 members, which include Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Yemen.

the American hostages in Tehran under Khomeini's regime (Nov., 1979 – Jan., 1981), and the ongoing war between Palestine and Israel (1948 – ongoing).

Overall, this film draws on the possibility for fiction to convey some truth, or to induce the possible effects of truth. According to Foucault, historians fabricate history.⁶⁶ They write a genealogy of events, build their own discourse according to mechanisms of knowledge that are framed by the dominant ideology. As such, history is traversed by the question of the relations between the structures of rationality that articulate their discourses and the mechanisms of subjection that are linked to them. Foucauldian history would thus be nothing other than the construction of a narrative, a fiction: "It seems to me that it is possible to make fiction work in truth, to induce effects of truth with a discourse of fiction, and to make the discourse of truth provoke, 'fabricate' something that does not yet exist, therefore 'fictionalize'. History is 'fictionalized' on the basis of a political reality that makes it true, a politics that does not yet exist is 'fictionalized' on the basis of a historical truth."⁶⁷

This *Cinétract* questions what is called truth, referring to the protagonists of this story, and this includes the viewers, to their consciousness and their arrangements with reality. The investigation of the image searches for what is dramatic. In fact, this dialogue could

⁶⁶ See Foucault, Michel: *Histoire de la Sexualité*, Gallimard, 1976

⁶⁷ Foucault, Michel: *Dits et Ecrits, Volume III*, Gallimard, 1996, p.236 (author's own translation).

be what has been said at the time and this blurs what is seen – is this a documentary, a fiction or an adaptation? This confusion questions the truth of facts. Yet it is a realistic, not to say naturalistic, presentation that is based on a reconstruction which is historically correct. The intention that drove this investigation aimed to reveal and re-establish continuities where postmodernity intentionally scatters its fragments to establish mythologies. This dialogue is not the reappropriation of a memory that will nuance history. It wants to confront the confusion between the event and its representations, between history and its narratives, between history and micro-history, between power and its mythologies, in other words, to go against what the postmodern media erect as truth, which encourages a form of forgetful consciousness. Following Foucault's argument, this project is not an attempt to make history of the past, but to make history through the present, to understand how one became what one is, and how these events inform our present.



Figure 28: Film still from Cinétract 017.

Similarly, to *Cinétract 009*, *Cinétract 017* is an extract from a clip found online. Extracted from a pornographic web site, this two-minute clip of a woman masturbating conceals a conceptual matrix which interrogates feminine sexual imagery in film, and the medium of film in the context of sex. Facing a grainy image, which seems at first abstract, the viewer soon recognizes the curve of a woman (Figs. 28 and 29). The sound is low, but this does not cause any ambiguity as to what the sequence features. Its naturalist soundtrack encourages the imagination to believe in the reality of the scene's illusion.

Intentionally presenting crude imagery, this *Cinétract* appears to be crossing the line of acceptability, and designs a place for the viewer, who is soon filled with conflicting feelings. Picturing in full frame, the self-pleasure of a faceless woman immediately evokes the subjugation of women as an instrument of pleasure, and it is likely to provoke a rejection of the ostensible offence that it forefronts. "Once again cinematic spectacle and woman as spectacle can come together in a new version of the voyeuristic gaze" is what comes to mind here.⁶⁸ In fact, turned into potential peepers, the viewers will seek to legitimate their position, and may wonder if the woman knows someone is watching her - if she is intentionally submitting herself to the gaze of others.

The displeasing feeling lies in that the intention of this *Cinétract* appears at first to be unclear, and the possibility that it could be deliberate, accentuates its arrogance and the autocracy of the scene. In the context of an art exhibition, where viewers are aware that images are used reflexively, they may raise questions in order to clear this intention, in the hope of finding a resolution that will legitimate such an insolent take on the depiction of pleasure. They may search for the elements in the film that indicate a critical reflection on the representation of feminine pleasures, so as to undo the normative combination that weaves together film and the commodification of femininity. They will be deceived,

⁶⁸ Sassatelli, Roberta: 'Interview with Laura Mulvey: Gender, Gaze and Technology in Film Culture,' Article in *Theory Culture and Society*, September 2011, p.131.

as they won't find any critical elements, at least at the beginning of the film. Then, the viewer will possibly move on to address the question of 'the gaze'; and, specifically, of the male gaze. Can this imagery escape it? Could there be another way of looking at this *Cinétract*, a position that may be one of pleasure, but not of dominance, not a voyeuristic position either, but a substitute one that is freed from the tangled association between pleasure and film? In other words, could this imagery constitute a depiction of pleasure which is exempted from the political, in which the viewer won't be subordinated, nor will the woman represented, but both will be dialectically engaged in an exchange of another kind? That position might "involve a shift away from the magic and fascination of the look, the subject position that was established by the aesthetic of the film itself, into a position which could be one of pleasure, but that would also suggest an alternative and self-conscious spectatorship."⁶⁹

Looking for alternative ways 'to be a woman', in order to renew expressions of feminism in the promissory world of consumerism and liberal democracy, implies attacking the so-called liberating and emancipatory opportunities which tie a woman's sexuality to the capitalist logic of self-promotion and constant availability. Angela Davis argues that 'hetero-sexuality', which regulates relations between men and women, is a political project that is inherent to the rise of capitalism and should be organised in a different

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.128.

way than according to the vertical dynamics of patriarchy.⁷⁰ The sexual imaginary that surrounds women leaves them to exist on the margins of the dominant ideology, with little chance to break the chain of thoughts their presence triggers and to regain what is left of their reflection, which is invested by the masculine, to perceive themselves.



Figure 29: Film still from *Cinétract 017*.

⁷⁰ Davis, Angela Y: *Femmes, Race et Classe, Des Femmes*, ed. Des Femmes, Paris, France, 1983.

This *Cinétract* intends to confront this undermining cultural frame, which finds its expression in a sense of guilt that is associated with women's pleasure. However, attempting to undo this affiliation so as to rebuild a free feminine imagery requires an imperative: the images have to be commensurate with women's submission and to rethink the logic of the 'exchange' – the ties of this interdependence between the gazing man and the gazed upon woman. What is at stake here is to understand whether the imagery of this *Cinétract* can thwart the sexual objectification of the male gaze so that it manipulates the sexist norms to the benefit of the woman here represented in the context of pornography. Trying to chip the corner of the normative cultural representation of femininity so that the exchange is balanced and the benefits equal, entails reconsidering the relationships between desire and capital.

Film, from this perspective, which offers a participatory and empathic perception of the world, may be accused of formalising a vision that subjectifies and transforms both objects and subjects into desirable assets, into potential merchandise. As such, capitalism, which has instigated a dominant-dominated relationship, is inherently prone to racism and sexism. Since contemporary women's imagery, sadly, still conforms to this ideology and this socio-economic order, the dubious relationship between desire and capital can then legitimate the following question: is representation always colonisation and domination?

If woman, in sexual images, implies subordination, it is interesting to consider that another kind of servitude is in place: that of the images to the subject they depict. Any image which alludes to sex formalises a particular economy. Of all subjects, sex is the one that subordinates the image's labour to the most radical and exhausting regime. Their work is to shatter all of the innocence of what they depict, so the expectations of those who are looking are fulfilled. This is to say that pornographic images are inherently exploitative: the terms of the contract are that the image is used by the subject and, in turn, the subject is exploited by the viewer who, for the time of the experience, feels that he owns what he sees. We might wonder to what extent film, which extracts from reality the shadow of things, participates in a politics of extraction that is at the core of capitalism. Film's history is linked to the rise of that economic and political system and its participation in the commodification of the world, has found its paroxysm in pornography. Images are due to reflect our phantasm - in this case of domination, and to make sure that the climax is worth the wait.

This was useful when considering what is seen in this *Cinétract*, and how else it might be perceived. The fact that the woman is not returning the look subverts the power game that is at play between the male and the female gaze. The libidinal investment is not entirely fulfilled, as the distance between them creates a vacuum in which none of them can account for the consent and/or attest for the profit that is made from the situation. This connection, which is denied to the viewer, is balanced by the fact that the woman

featured shows everything in plain sight with no shame or guilt, confronting what is repressed with the intention of redesigning the ideological frame that surrounds it, is effectively what is, in military terms, called a 'clear and hold'. It is a counter insurgency strategy, in which a driving force first wins the support of the people for the government, and its policies to clear an area of any dominance. What capitalism has instigated between genders is here the target, that is, "the pharmaco-pornographic control of subjectivity."⁷¹

The way in which this *Cinétract* achieves this counter insurgency paradoxically lies in using the reason for which woman are held under dominance. The invisibility of their organ, and the possible untruthful expression of their pleasure, have made them appear to be ungraspable, baffling, cryptic, mysterious, puzzling, unintelligible, opaque, (the list is sadly long!), and this delusion has fomented their dominance as an inane response through which to come to terms with their nature. With this in mind, everything is on show in this *Cinétract* except the irrefutable: her jouissance. It remains intangible, and the viewer is left to hope that what is seen is not faked. Nothing is offered as reassurance; the viewer has to wait for the climax to confirm the nature of what is seen.

What happens by the end of the film comes to the viewer as a surprise. Soon, the black

⁷¹ Preciado, Paul B: *Techno Junky, Sexe, drogue et politique*, Grasset, Paris, p.37 (author's own translation).

and white image shifts entirely to colour, so as to match her jouissance (Fig. 30). The emotion depicted in the scene is what changes the image. It reacts to her pleasure, as if the film was organically connected to her. This shift to colour articulates a possible bridge between the materiality of images and their subject.



Figure 30: Film still from Cinétract 017.

The viewer is caught in an entirely new problematic of visibility and materiality, in which film is understood as a reactive and receptive material. If film can be transformed by the narrative it features, then film will not only convey stories, it will be 'in history'.

The fact that this colour takes the images over, as it were, redefines the terms of the exploitative exchange in this sex scene. The artefact of colour embodies the distance to the reflected self, it is the binder that brings all reflections into one point in time. It formalises a point of resolution which bypasses the expectations of the spectator who wanted to own and possess her entirely. She merges with what conveys her image, and she conquers what enslaves her. This leaves the viewer either puzzled, or, possibly, feeling dispossessed, excluded from the game, or the opposite: drawn 'into' this moment, into an appeased space of reconciliation, where both parties can come together, abandoning their dominant and dominated roles. The climax in this *Cinétract* is a heightened moment of viscosity, which allows us to see the present-ness of pure release, as if a "vision had pared into a dazzle of pure instantaneity into a new condition with no before and no after."⁷²

Either way, the viewer is no longer the sole receptacle; the sole consumer of her pleasure, nor the sole instigator of it, and this forces the viewer to take another stand in order to exist within this exchange. To follow up on the 'clear and hold' strategy, the woman featured has subtly subdued the policies that regulate her dominance, offering the viewer a glimpse of how unalienated pornography may look.

⁷² Krauss, Rosalind, *The Im/pulse to see, in Vision and Visuality*, Ed Hal Foster, DIA Foundation, Washington, 1988, p.52.



Figure 31: Film still from Cinétract 032.

Cinétract 032 is the last of the Winter series. Produced by Monaco's Oceanic Museum (France, 2017), this short film features a live octopus, which is challenged to find its food through a compartmentalised plexiglass box. A punk rock musical soundtrack, by 100% Beefcock and the Titsburters, was my addition to this clip.⁷³

⁷³100% Beefcock and the Titsburters is a music group led by two women from Cardiff, who formed it in 2008. They famously played on the steps of Sarah Lucas' Venice UK Pavilion in 2015.

The first sequence opens up to a colourful back-lit aquarium. A plexiglass cage is inserted into it. It is a three-compartment cage, and two of its dividers have holes, which are the only points of passage from one section to the next. The sequence cuts to reveal the appendages of a soft bodied, eight limbed mollusc. It is followed by the moment in which the octopus has located the hole in the first partition of the plexiglass cage. The invertebrate rapidly alters its shape and squeezes itself through it. Once in the first section of the cage, its arms locate the next hole, and again manages to get itself through it. Now, in the last section of the cage, it finds a glass pot with a cork lid. It quickly understands the challenge and manages to open it to get the small crab within, which waits hopelessly for its fate. The final sequences cuts to the octopus gazing at us, looking fed and content (Figs 31, 32 and 33).

The maze and problem-solving experiments that are featured in this *Cinétract* intends to show evidence of their learning capabilities. This has been a long-standing enquiry in zoology, ever since Darwin brought back an *Octopus Vulgaris* from the Cape Verde Islands in 1832.⁷⁴ Their half a billion neurones set octopuses close to dogs, and they offer to biologists an impressive and baffling display of brainpower.

⁷⁴ See Godfrey-Smith, Peter: *Other Mind, the Octopus, the Sea and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 2016

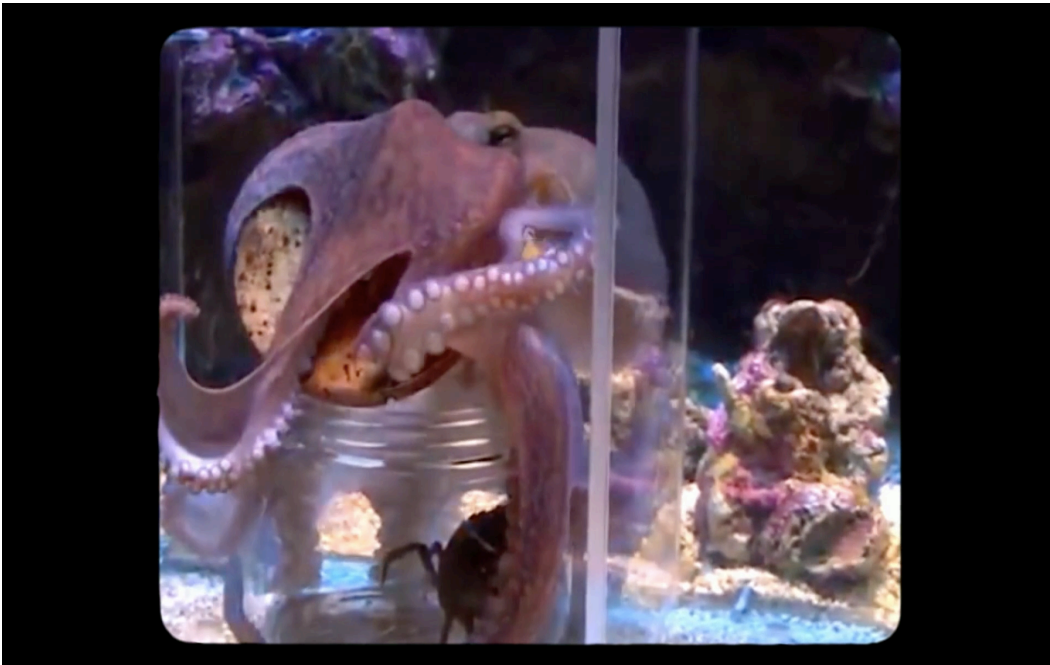


Figure 32 and 33: Film still from Cinétract 032.

My interest in this sequence did not lie in the experiment itself, but in that it was mediated through film. My intention here was to examine the animal's agency in the context of films, the conscious effect that is determined by the position in which it is placed by humans, and how its presence in film demands a reconsideration of filmic genres. In other words, we know that animals have a lack of power in relation to what humans want them to be, mean or do. Our impact on the way in which they are perceived is culturally framed, so we see them through the scope of what we want them to be, and their existence and reason are submitted to what we think they are. However, in reverse, might it be possible to argue about the impact that animals have on humans and on film when it mediates their representation?

The octopus in the clip certainly opens up to this thought process and calls for a reconsideration of the relationship between humans and animals. I am not assuming that the octopus has a subjectivity or an interiority and consciously plays out its role in this clip. Rather, I am thinking that the display of its intelligence might imply a shared alienation. It may or may not be obvious that this experiment was rehearsed by the Museum prior to its recording. In other words, it was staged, and the film was edited in such a way as to shorten the hesitations of the octopus's soft body to make its intelligence and succession of actions seem quicker and more vivid. However, if we want to consider what it means for an animal to act - this would include the training and the interactions that are necessary to obtain the desired action - it seems important to

consider how an octopus senses itself. "The arms contain tension sensors so the octopus knows whether its arms are stretched out, but this is not sufficient for the brain to determine the position of the octopus's body. It does not possess stereognosis; that is, it does not form a mental image of the overall shape of the object it is handling. It can detect local texture variations, but cannot integrate the information into a larger picture. It has a poor proprioceptive sense, and it knows what exact motions were made only by observing the arms visually."⁷⁵ Considering this, it is apparent that the octopus's understanding of the context of the plexiglass cage is limited, and far from the effect the Oceanic Museum wants to have on its audience, which is to create the illusion of a mutual gaze; a common understanding between the viewer and the octopus. The distance between the observed and the observer is here intended to create a point of contact; it is the shared alienation which the film and its components (editing and sound) want to create, at the cost of creating a lure. The octopus, in this clip, becomes the vector by which one recognizes, and wants to believe, that it is closer to humans than it actually is. It also implies that the octopus consciously lends its capacities, understands the expectations that are wanted, manipulates the audience and its emotional response, so that its movements appear instinctive and natural. This shared alienation does not necessarily mean that a point of contact between humans and animals does not exist

⁷⁵ Godfrey-Smith, Peter: *Other Mind, the Octopus, the Sea and the Deep Origins of Consciousness*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 2016, p.24.

overall, it is the pretention of the Oceanic Museum's film to show it, and to dictate our understanding of it, which must be questioned.

The film ends with the octopus gazing at the audience. The interpretation of this look, between the audience and the octopus, is intentionally constructed so that it displays a sense of recognition between human and animal and assumes that this shared glance is a look "into" nature and not "at" nature. With this in mind, it creates the possibility to engage with nature's nature. This constructed gaze suggests the reinforcement of a bond between human and animals. This implies that this mutual gaze is owed to conveying something like an emotion, when it is unlikely that it actually does, in order to prove that some form of communication is possible.

In a sense, the octopus becomes the resolution of this projection, the receptacle of a narcissistic effort to erase the distance between the observer and the observed. Its indifference to this mechanism is the guarantee that this construction is active. The audience is configured by this indifference, or what I would call its "animality", so the impact of the octopus on humans is working fully. Its otherness is the vector by which the viewer will look for a possible way to reduce the gap between them.

The second dimension to this 'impact' is to argue that the presence of the octopus or, for that matter, of any animal who is featured in a film, demands a reconsideration of filmic genres. In films, animals are not *per se* acting, as they have no capacity to incarnate or play out emotions. In training and on set they react to stimuli which trigger patterned

responses, as the octopus did in the Oceanic Museum's film. Their movements, dictated by their instincts, do not conform to a script. It is the reverse, in fact; their instincts are what dictate the script. These instincts are the rigid framework that the director or trainer has to take into consideration in order for them to do what they need to do. However, the animal's response to a set of stimuli does not necessarily mean that their response will be the same every time. The presence of animals in films always displays a sense of a lack of control. They suspend the flow of the illusion, create a disruption, operate a disturbance. In the case of documentaries, this inaugurates another kind of realism, which challenges the boundaries of this category. The ontological nature of animals always "shows", affects, infuses, and permeates the reality depicted. Their otherness creates a different kind of reality that refuses to represent and reflect. In their presence, reality is somewhat altered, and features something 'truer', as it were, - rawer than what is claimed to be 'captured'.

In the case of fiction, the disturbance created by their appearance is even more perceptible. The genre does not stand as such, since fiction cannot completely fictionalize animals. Their presence in fiction immediately perverts the genre, operates a corruption of some sort, as they inevitably infuse the fabric of fiction with a rupture, since what is shown disrupts the flow of the illusion. This disruption instigates a change of status, in which images wobble, as it were. A soft corruption takes place, and this changes the relationship between the viewer and what is seen, where vision is not

subordinated to the autocracies of what is depicted. This dissension has to do with the kind of look animals on film imply, which sets up a distinction between vision and sight; between a “visual perception (seeing as scrutinizing, demonstrating, differentiating)” and an “embodied perception (seeing as participatory, inclusive, empathetic).”⁷⁶ Our octopus, in the *Cinétract*, breaks the spell, as it were. Its presence calls for a differentiation, not only from every film genre, but with us as humans. It operates a subversion and offers a rethinking of the condition of animals - a way to overthrow and reverse the alienated look which has enslaved them.

The subversive effect of the octopus is reinforced by the music that has been added to the Oceanic Museum’s film. The musical “Team Weirdness Show Excerpt”, by 100 % Beefcock and the Titsburster, is a distorted bass and drum piece with no chorus or verse.⁷⁷ Formed by two women, who come from Lyon, France, and Newcastle, UK, they are a loud anti-establishment and anti-sentimental powerhouse, whose controversial looks and pornographic moves appear to be confrontational. The combination of the Oceanic Museum’s film and this feminist and anarchistic music offer our octopus a sense of exaltation and liberation.

⁷⁶ Elsaesser, Thomas and Hagener, Malte: *Film Theory*, Apple Books, p.469

⁷⁷ See footnote n.78

Conclusion

This commentary has examined some of the significant aspects of the overlap between aesthetics and politics in filmic representations. It constitutes an insight into my practice, which, as a whole, embraces a 'promise of politics' and, as such, explores the ambivalence between the autonomy and the independence of artistic endeavour, and the heteronomy of aesthetic experience.

My twenty-year interest in film is recapitulated here. Although I have narrowed my enquiry to researching the specific mode of visibility and the regime of images that are featured in the four films selected, it is interesting, in retrospect, to acknowledge that they are symptomatic of my practice at large, in that it systematically searches for a critical distance from image making procedure and images. This critical stand is the result of a dangerous and passionate relationship with the luring and narcotic effect of images. The goal of my research is to deconstruct the inherent complicity between the gaze and political ideology and, as such, it outlines the profile of an artistic practice, which understands filmmaking as a transformative and seditious act.

This commentary has been a way to explore the dialectic between film and capitalism, to decompose the oppressive gaze that is laid upon animals and women, and it has ventured to bring within the realm of aesthetic, journalism and media news. This has led me to expose the artifice of those specific filmic images and to consider how, and why,

every project is an attempt to overthrow film mechanisms and the authority of cultural archetypes. What these works have in common is a restless desire to subvert images – their work and capacities, as well as to counter the viewer’s expectations, to raise questions and challenge the normative policies that regulate the conventions of representations. What bounds these film works is an enquiry about the economy of the gaze, which continuously challenges my practice. Each project is a path along which to reassess and undo the constrained framework that is imposed by film’s technicity and materiality, which formalise a peculiar image of the world, that still serves the rational project of the Renaissance.

The filmic experience is understood through this commentary to be a double-sided space between fascination and alienation. This constant doubt that is shed upon the effect and the work of images, creates a speculative zone in which my films are the symptoms of a thought process, which has kept aside the well debated question of art and its political engagements and, instead, attempts to explore the relationships between aesthetics and politics, in hope of finding a reordering of what vision and sight entail.

This commentary has provided a contextual and theoretical frame for the four films, in which, for example, post-humanist theory is considered as a background to the reading of the inter-relationships between animals and humans. From the perspective of film, this position was examined through thinking that the boundaries between nature and

cultural, which are thought of in terms of self-organisation or “auto-poietic”, may shed a new light on the distance to the other; build a different critical space, and call for a different cinematography.⁷⁸

This commentary has identified how film’s allure necessarily calls for the demystification of the forces of sorcery that images deploy before our eyes, in which movement and stillness, pleasure and death, are rivals in the forming of the core of filmic experience. A feminist and Marxist perspective were woven throughout this text in an attempt to rupture the normative gaze, to form resistance, and formulate a clear claim for a cinema that stays on the side of the experiment – an experimental cinema, which experience leads the way to progressive thinking.

⁷⁸ Braidotti, Rosi: *The Post-Human*, Polity Press, 2013, p.3

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