CRITICAL IMAGES
CRITICAL IMAGES
2018/2019

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Critical Images is a response to the urgent need for artists to advance and expand their skills in order to rethink the representations of injustices in the world.

The course builds on the Syrian film collective Abounaddara’s framework of The Right to the Image as a universal human right:

“The right to the image is a vital necessity in this twenty-first century, where humans live more in the world of images than in the world itself. It is a condition for the possibility of enjoying our fundamental rights in a world shaped on every side by cameras and screens. It is a holy corpus that guarantees freedom, dignity and the right to self-determination for those faced by power that films perpetually.”

During the past two years, Critical Images has gathered artists and scholars to investigate how fair representation can be guaranteed in a hyper-mediated world. This question becomes increasingly urgent when some are, in effect, denied the means to produce their own image, having to face political conditions for image production and distribution in a hyper-visible world. This question becomes increasingly urgent when some are, in effect, denied the means to produce their own image, having to face political conditions for image production and distribution in a hyper-visible world.

Another entry point to the right to the image is to try to distinguish the relationship between visibility, hypervisibility and invisibility in the construction of gaze. The historian, Sylvie Lindeperg’s research on Alain Resnais’ struggle with images of the atrocities of WWII in the making of Night and Fog (1965) has been an essential reference for us to approach this question. Lindeperg stresses the importance of looking into the path of images to examine how archive images are used and misused in our time of hyper-visibility, and to be attentive to details and small signs. Nathalie Delbard’s research constituted a key contribution to the question, revealing how the construction of the orientalist gaze was shaped already in the first photographs taken by Europeans in the Middle East. Art historian, Åsa Bharathi Larsson brought forth examples of representations of pain and vulnerability in art and visual culture, and how they are connected to ideas of heroism, sacrifice, courage, contemplation and martyrdom. Bharathi Larsson proposes an understanding of theme of pain in art history as a history of audience; it visualizes power relations in the spectacularization of watching suffering and death.

How to make history visible in a time dominated by the aesthetics of hypervisibility, then?

During one of our seminars, two approaches were presented in regards to the struggle of rendering visible the oppressiveness of images while protecting human dignity: the (dis)comfort of images in the mapping of the motifs that lead to sympathies with fascism in Death and Devil (Nestler, 2009), and the film collective Abounaddara’s short films, proposing a fragmentary approach to address injuries of history.

The entry points and references mentioned above are just a few of all the guest lecturers we’ve hosted, and all film screenings, seminars, workshops, readings and discussions conducted throughout these two years. Together, they constitute a humble beginning of the work that remains in order to establish the foundation for a new approach to the production and distribution of images of injustices in our time.

This publication consists of the first attempts to investigate and thereby contribute to the question of the right to the image by the participants of Critical Images 2018/19. Arriving from various disciplinary backgrounds, the participants’ approaches and entry points has led to critical reflections and investigations on the power of and conditions for image production and distribution in our time, and what images do to us and with us:

Gonçalo Bira unravels how history is made invisible by the presence of a highly visible public monument. Ania Domanska points at the challenge for a filmmaker to avoid the traps of repeating a stigma when portraying a person in a context which already categorized her as a victim. Tuiuca Haapakorpi proposes a way for the algorithms of role-playing games to become a domain for developers to defy the visual representation of binary gender roles in the fictive worlds they set the conditions for. Amra Heco shares an unexpected meeting with an image which brought back a memory that until then had been obscured by the internalisation of a dominant visual narrative. Baptiste Joyeck takes us on a cinematic journey on the militarization of photography through the invention of the Panorama. Siriol Joyner is making a parallel between choreography and ethnography, posing the question of what we are inscribing in others and what is being inscribed in us through these practices. Anna Knappe shows how the overflow of one kind of imagery from a specific place or country makes it difficult to see or even imagine this place as more, or something else. Mateusz Kula, is tracing the imagery mirroring the ideology of fascism through the monologue of a person who is equally very close and distant. Charlotte Landelius found an image which reached through with an important message in the investigation of the circumstances for its becoming. Gloria Luca reflects on how the function of visual representation has been instrumentalized for domination purposes for centuries. Chafic Najem is contesting the dominant gaze on incarceration and the image of its subject by reflecting on the dominant discourses and sensational images and their ability to render prison testimonies invisible. Marie Silkeberg finds a way for human dignity to become visible in the tension between images and language challenging each other. Sandra Vitalič brings forth glimpses of the mundane through stories of women struggling for the right to a dignified life in a new environment.

The works are in progress, presented at their current stage. To be continued.

Katarina Nitsch, artist, initiator and leader of the advanced level course Critical Images in collaboration with Charif Kiwan from the Syrian film collective Abounaddara.

Stockholm, April 2019
STONE(S) OF ABSENCE

Gonçalo Birra
or maybe;

Ausência Ausente, Padrão de pedra; per-da
Loss (+32 others)

The Stone of Loss(es)

A Pattern

Mapping loss, Mapear Perdas
Un-mapping stones

Desmontamentos
Disassemblings

A speculative reading on:

invasion (Oxford Dictionary)
—an unwelcome intrusion into another’s domain.
“random drug testing of employees is an unwarranted invasion of privacy”
synonyms:
violation, infringement, interruption, disturbance, disruption, breach, infraction;

Padrão dos Descobrimentos is a 53 meter tall monument to the expansion of the Portuguese territory. It was first built as an ephemeral structure for the International Exhibition of the Portuguese World in 1940, under the dictatorial regime of Estado Novo (New State). It was in 1960, still under the fascist regime headed by António de Oliveira Salazar, that this structure became a permanent feature of Lisbon’s waterfront, marking the commemorations of the 500 years since the death of Infante D. Henrique (Prince Henry the Navigator)—the mastermind behind the early stages of what came to be (painfully) known as the Age of Discoveries and the Portuguese Empire(s).

Built on a affluent location by the Tagus River, in the parish of Belém, facing south (Africa?), the monument takes the shape of a modernist Caravela (Caravel), with Prince Henry at its prow. This limestone ship carries the lineage of knights, pilots, astronomers, preachers, kings and a queen, cartographers and artists, that follow the lead of Prince Henry.

“Slavery too brutally robbed people of their worlds, their lands, their knowledges, languages, and relations, creating legacies of dehumanisation and death, as well as accumulations of wealth out of unfree labour, the structures of which are still at work today.”

Here, language cannot be left untouched or unaltered, for language has claimed territories too. The territories of those who were always already silenced (not mute). For that reason I am writing differently, I am addressing history through a different frame, making my own translations as I write. I am considering an ongoing crime—the re-production and perpetuation of the undignified lack of images (its ongoing-ness). I am looking at accomplices.

wake (Oxford Dictionary)
noun: wake; plural noun: wakes
—a trail of disturbed water or air left by the passage of a ship or aircraft.
synonyms:
backwash, wash, slipstream, turbulence;

In the wake of the Caravel (calçada) hammered into the soil; the monument’s shadows surface the unseen, the untold and unheard. The wake of the ship inundates the shores of Portugal with the burden of an imperial past—becoming ever-present through those who were given shape in stone. A national anthem, a flag, a language, cities and sounds—all invested in the cementing of an historicised grandeur. A sense of national identity that extends from its roots in the so-called discoveries, all the way up its branches into today’s ‘Portuguese-ness’ and vastly distributed tourist guides.

The monumental composition of limestone sculptures highlights a lacking; an absence that overlooks the very need to image those who were brutally robbed of their worlds, their lands, their knowledges, languages, and relations (Clarke, Haraway; 2018), as if they had never existed in the first place—still unrecognised, still un-imaged. The non-presence of some (most), is ‘staged’ by those who are still, today, made heroes; as the national anthem goes. It is in this lacking, in the scarcity of images (languages, et al), of those who were colonised, that the crimes of the past become ever-present. Such undignifying crimes can only produce undignifying absences; historical ‘black-holes’. In not addressing those who were robbed, we risk perpetuating a gaze that keeps on robbing. The undignified representation of injustices in the world (worlds), takes place, in this instance, in the lack of presentation. We are yet to be presented with words and images to be able to re-present; to produce the dignifying representations that will give us a fairer account of our histories.

But I am also intruded by you—I have not chosen to feel this way and now I must unlearn it. I must free myself from this pride so I must cry out the tears of Fado and let them dry hard (as stone?) on my face, for my tears will never fill the hole between here and there, the oceans we have named after ourselves.

1. Clarke & Haraway, 2018
EAST flank (former page)
(images of; what we see)

* Estêvão da Gama; captain, son of Vasco da Gama. Accomplice.
* Bartolomeu Dias; navigator, commandant of the fleet that crossed and named the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa). Helps carry the Padrão, symbol of colonial and religious rule. Accomplice.
* Diogo Cão; navigator, carries the Padrão, symbol which he left on the territories he encountered (robbed?). Accomplice.
* António de Abreu; navigator. Accomplice.
* Portuguese colonial map super-imposed over Europe for educational purposes. All schools in Portugal studied this map—"Portugal isn’t a small country" (my translation). Designed by Henrique Galvão, 1934. Accomplice.
* António de Oliveira Salazar (1968); Dictator. Overlooking through (via) the landmark (the lands colonised and the marks left—Padrão), cornerstone of his fascist regime. Perpetrator and accomplice.
* Angolan War of Independence (1961-1974); initiated by an uprising against the Portuguese who forced locals to work on cotton fields, soon becoming a uprise against the rule of Lisbon over Angola. The war, as we know it, ended with the Revolution, 1974, overthrowing Salazar’s fascist and imperialist regime. The conflicts in Angola continued as the structural societal fractures created by colonial rule surfaced—the wake.

EAST flank (next page)
(images of; what we see)

* Speculative erasure of the East flank of the re-imagined Padrão da Ausência.
* Screenshot of the chronological unfolding of Portuguese rule and abandonment of Angolan territories.
EAST (front to rear): Prince Henry; navigator, coloniser of Northern African territories. Accomplice. • King Afonso V; known as ‘The African’ for occupying African territories. Accomplice. • Vasco da Gama; navigator, known for sailing to India, later aiming to be crowned Vice-King of the territory. Accomplice. • Afonso Gonçalves Baldaia; navigator. Accomplice. • Pedro Álvares Cabral; navigator, known for sailing and colonising western South American territories, naming them Terra de Vera Cruz (today’s Brazil). Accomplice. • Fernão de Magalhães; navigator, participating in the colonial project in the Indian Ocean, and invading (referred to as conquering) Sofala and Quiloa. Died during his attempt to decimate the Indigenous Populations of the Philippines. Accomplice. • Nicolau Coelho; navigator and commandant of maritime connections between the Kingdom of Portugal and India. Holds the first known Portuguese flag. Accomplice. • Gaspar Côrte-Real; navigator. Accomplice. • Martim Afonso de Sousa; navigator, responsible for the defence of the invaded Brazilian western coast under King João III. Accomplice. • João de Barros; writer, administrator of overseas colonies. Accomplice. • Estevão da Gama; captain, son of Vasco da Gama. Accomplice. • Bartolomeu Dias; navigator, commandant of the fleet that crossed and named the Cape of Good Hope (South Africa). Helps carry the Padrão, symbol of colonial and religious rule. Accomplice. • Diogo Cão; navigator, carries the Padrão, symbol which he is known to have left on every territory robbed. Accomplice. • António de Abreu; navigator. Accomplice. • Afonso de Albuquerque; governor, invaded and settled in Goa, Malaca and Ormuz. Known as the ‘creator’ of the Portuguese Empire in the ‘Orient’, being the second governor of India. Accomplice. • São Francisco Xavier; missionary, enforcing Christian conversion in the ‘Orient’. Accomplice. • Cristovão da Gama; captain, 4th son of Vasco da Gama. Accomplice.
WEST (front to rear): Prince Henry; navigator, coloniser of Northern African territories. • Infante D. Fernando; accomplice in the proliferation of Christian doctrine and supporter of Portuguese presence and in Morocco. Accomplise. • João Gonçalves Zarco; navigator, symbol for the settlement of the Portuguese in the archipelagoes of the Atlantic (Madeira). Accomplise. • Gil Eanes; navigator. Accomplise. • Pêro de Alenquer; navigator. Accomplise. • Pedro Nunes; mathematician, cosmographer, astronomer. Accomplise. • Pêro de Escobar; pilot. Accomplise. • Jácomo de Maiorca; cosmographer, responsible for bettering the colonisers’ understanding of the Mediterranean map and adding newly invaded territories. Accomplise. • Pêro da Covilhã; traveller, known for his political and economical influence across the territories. Accomplise. • Gomes Eanes de Zurara; chronicler, responsible for writing the historiography of the kingdom, keeper of the royal archives. Accomplise. • Nuno Gonçalves; painter, known for depicting the hierarchical structures of 15th century Portuguese society. Accomplise. • Luiz Vaz de Camões; poet known for writing Os Lusíadas, work which narrated the journeys of Vasco da Gama. Accomplise. • Frei Henrique de Coimbra; Franciscan, known for having conducted the first Christian mass in Brazil. Accomplise. • Frei Gonçalo de Carvalho; preacher of the Dominican order. Accomplise. • Fernão Mendes Pinto; sculptor, know for his literary work narrating the cultures he encountered. Accomplise. • Rainha Dona Filipa de Lencastre (Queen Filipa); known for her piety and for encouraging the crusades against the so-called ‘unfaithful’ in Ceuta; a territory which she aimed to claim for Portugal (today’s Spanish territory in Northern Africa). Accomplise. • Infante D. Pedro; coloniser, participated in the conquering of the territory of Ceuta. Accomplise.
the beginning of us and them—‘the age of human (and otherwise) trading’.

The age of maritime exploitation, ‘exploration’
Expansion overboard,
over-load,
Those bleeding (bloody) borders.

What is it that we see?
* Heroes of the sea (Heróis do mar)?
  Why do we see it and why do we keep on seeing it?
  Why doesn’t it ‘hurt’ anymore and why is IT so enormous?

Who isn’t speaking?
What are their languages?

WEST flank
(images of; what we see)
* Police brutality against Black citizens reported (2019) at Jamaica’s neighbourhood in Lisbon (Bairro da Jamaica); segregated communities living precariously on the outskirts of the capital. Past made present-continuous; continuum.
* António de Oliveira Salazar (1968); Dictator. Overlooking through (via) the landmark (the lands colonised and the marks left—Padrão), cornerstone of his fascist regime. Perpetrator and accomplice.
* Desembarque de Pedro Álvares Cabral em Porto Seguro, 1500—painting by Brazilian painter Oscar Pereira da Silva, 1900. Part of the Museu Paulista’s archive (Paulista Museum—my translation). Depiction of the arrival of the Portuguese in Porto Seguro (today’s Brazil). Depiction of the glorification of the past; the rhetoric of national identity given shape by the colonisers; Brazilian identity being perpetuated as a continuum of the ‘arrivals’ by the ‘colonised’ themselves.
* Halloween Massacre; October 30 to November 1, 1992 in Luanda, Angola—event of the Angolan Civil War. Internal conflict initiated after Angola held its first legislative and presidential elections. Due to unclear majority, the different parties involved initiated their claim power, attacking each other’s offices. The marks left by colonial rule led to a highly divided and volatile political landscape.
BREAKING THE FRAME?

Ania Domanska
In 2017, I worked on a documentary film entitled “Learning Greece” that focuses on educational initiatives that support migrant communities in Greece. At that time, over 60,000 people, who hoped to reach Western Europe in search of asylum, were stuck in Greece as a result of borders closures of several Balkans countries and Hungary in 2016. The situation was dire. A country drained by nearly a decade of economic crisis, struggling to provide accommodation and basic services, not to mention, long term solutions. Alongside the failure of the authorities, I observed an outburst of grassroots solidarity. Due to their long experience of austerity, Greeks were forced to innovate, and developed alternative ways of supporting each other. There were many grassroots initiatives and small organizations led by locals and international volunteers that offered various kinds of humanitarian support, including within the field of education. Many of these initiatives were inventive, inspiring, exceptional, and - I believed - worth sharing with the world.

At this point, however, only two years after the "refugee crisis" hit the headlines, media and public attention had drifted away and there was no more demand for stories from Greece. Nevertheless, I was determined to tell this story and I wanted to reach a wider audience. I calculated the best ways to reach this goal. The idea of the film was to present a variety of challenges, approaches, and methods which in the end comprised of four different educational projects. A repetitive narrative pattern was implemented at each project shooting: lesson scenes with original, dynamic sound, an interview with a teacher, an interview with one or two students. I endeavored to create a balance between informative objectives, personal stories and dynamic, lively scenes. Despite my optimistic expectation and all the effort I put into the production, there was little interest in the film. In 2015, photograph of Alan Kurdi triggered public outcry and political decisions. Calls for solidarity were coming from various sides, warm clothes and funds were collected, and volunteers from all over the world took off for Greece and Balkan countries in order to support people on the move. I was one of the many volunteers.

But empathy resources of Europeans seemed to be overstretched. "Compassion is an unstable emotion. It needs to be translated into action, or it withers"1. With no solution in sight, in a matter of months things began to change; alarming voices became more vocal and the rhetoric around migration to Europe turned away from humanitarian towards security issues. Solution driven and balanced reporting became superfluous in the increasingly polarized discourse.

Populist politicians took advantage of this. Although Poland was far away from migration trails and in no way was a destination, during a parliamentary campaign at the end of 2015, refugees were used to scare voters and to gain support. It was a success. The governing Law and Justice party continued with their hard stance on immigration policies, they refused to grant asylum to a single person despite the relocation agreement signed by the previous government (relocation of 7000 to 38.000 population country). Opinion polls show that the number of Poles against accepting asylum seekers from war-torn countries had doubled within a few months2.

In Poland, asylum seekers and migrants were an imaginary threat, phantom entities and, therefore, it required creating stories and visual representation to maintain fear-based narration3. Images played a huge role in building hostile attitudes. The most commonly depicted were big groups or crowds of single men, portrayed as invaders. Distinctive visual features, the difference between “us and them”, created the figure of an enemy. The people, who came to Europe in search of safety, were described as “terrorist”, “invaders”, “rapists”, “strangers” who transmit diseases. The narrative revolved around their inability to become one of us; therefore all necessary measures have to be taken to protect the host societies (at best they could be treated as an economic asset). Such a narrative deprived of dignity and degraded their rights, and therefore suffering and their legitimate need for protection were questioned. In this narrative, the Polish Catholic society was in a vulnerable position and required protection. Polish politicians and hence Polish society became hostile towards asylum seekers so this negative imaginary pattern depicting flight may not be so sharp in other countries, but is surely no exception.

Framing spectrum of distant strangers is diverse and includes various narratives. As the opposite to those which demonize, there are images that call for compassion and aim to create empathy in the name of humanitarian values. The asylum seeker is constructed as an object in need of hospitality, he/she is passively waiting to be welcomed. This way of portraying also deprives of agency and helps create sufficient distance. Poor and hungry people living in miserable conditions cannot be confused with members of the host society. The relation between us and them is always conditioned and hierarchical.

There are exercises that oppose to this discriminative gaze which aim to escape perpetuating stereotypes and categorization. There are image-makers who actively search for a fair way to represent people on the move while respecting their agency and dignity. This is also my struggle as I was appalled by what I’ve observed in Polish media. As a filmmaker, I would like to contribute in a more accurate and respectful way to media landscape and discussions on migration. When I initially approached this topic I believed that I would be able to give individuals who have fled to Europe platform to transmit their own voice through filmmaking tools. My enthusiasm has gradually declined. I have realized that, despite all the efforts, representing and seeing an individual person and individual story is very hard, if not, impossible.

The notion of identity has recently become one of the most significant points of reference to determine the trajectory of political and social relationships. The compound of ethnic, racial, cultural and religious identities seems to entitle groups to claim a broader range of rights that, despite all the efforts, representing and seeing an individual person and individual story is very hard, if not, impossible.

The compound of ethnic, racial, cultural and religious identities seems to entitle groups to claim a broader range of rights that, despite all the efforts, representing and seeing an individual person and individual story is very hard, if not, impossible.

their status and dignity. “The human rights charters tell us that dignity is inherent in the human person; they also command us to make heroic efforts to establish everyone’s dignity. Is this an equivocation?” asks Jeremy Waldron reflecting on human dignity as a notion of legal and moral order and its dependence on variety of limitation and circumstances. Throughout history, dignity was related to rank and status and modern hope expressed in various conventions and declarations strive to make dignity an unconditional, universal status is questioned. Identity-based narratives create simplistic explanations in order to justify a hierarchy of rights and discriminative practices based on an imposed order. Images are significant elements of shaping discourse and atmosphere, and as a filmmaker I feel responsibility for contributing to circulation of visual storytelling. Unfortunately, the more I work with disfavoured groups, the more I feel paralyzed. How can image-producers get out of a daunting task of expressing nuanced stories and voices when everybody becomes labelled in the top-down imposed category? How is it possible to represent an individual or a group that is excluded on the basis of widely accepted notion of identity and the hierarchical distribution of dignity?

I joined Critical Images with hope to find solutions and to develop methods to overcome discriminatory framing. Although I’ve met sensitive and dedicated people in the group, our discussions and exercises only deepened my concern. I cannot see the possibility to escape from the western gaze, which aspires to be universal. The West produces knowledge and posses all component narratives. Those, who are identified as outsiders occupy the position of the object, and individual attempts to break this narratives are doomed to failure.

My film “Learning Greece” has been screened on various occasions, mostly in the so-called social bubble of people supporting solidarity actions. Access to the more varied public has been limited. Its reception was quite positive. The audience was surprised and inspired by the difficult yet vibrant and colourful solidarity life in Athens. Besides the usual reactions during the screening, several people pointed to one particular student interview. Due to a recurrent technical failure during the shoot, I was forced to conduct the interview on several occasions, which led the discussion to move beyond the main topic; education. During the interview, the student said:

“Through my journeys, through all the different countries that I’ve been to, I gained so many experiences and knowledge. And that’s why I consider myself an international. Not a refugee. “Refugee” is just a single story, not the whole of who I am.”

I ask him to meet
Agrees to consider.
An invitation to become real.
Doesn’t say yes doesn’t say no.
Two weeks. Not clear to him.
But somewhere in the footage I have her out of focus presence.
The microphone doesn’t work. Other frequencies.
Noises again. Meeting again.
Error. Real presence.

Montage leftovers.
The focus of my camera separates from existence.
It always does, but this time more.
I don’t want to push him. Exploitation repeated.
Erasing the camera from the past.
Making our meeting real.
Too late.
Generosity of the gaze.
She rejects

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THE NERD AND THE NON-BINARY GAMER

Tuukka Haapakorpi
The Nerd and the Non-Binary Gamer

The production of agency through non-binary imagery in Role-playing Games

How to critically look at violence, replacing heroism with agency?

The gaming industry affects millions of people. There is more money and consumers in the gaming industry than in the movie industry. The products of the gaming industry are produced for an audience consisting mostly of men. Besides the products themselves, there are many side economies built around gamer blogs, gamer videos and fan fiction. However, a culture that was formerly known for being composed of socially awkward nerds, has slowly started to get followers from other societal groups. Gaming has become mainstream, but the image of the nerd still haunts its 3d-modelled hallways.

The image that games often produce, is based on resolution of conflict through violence and heroism. The Gamergate came to be known as a phenomenon shedding light on hidden toxicity and alt-right attitudes within gamer culture. Female game developers like Anita Sarkeesian, Zoe Quinn and Brianna Wu, became targets for harassment, receiving death threats and sexual violence for calling out the gamer culture to better represent female tropes in games. The increasing influence of feminism has encouraged a culture war, as it became known, between the progressives and the gamers.

In Gamergate, the misreading of positive female and non-binary tropes as a threatening addition to gamer culture, revealed a confusion between heroism and agency. Games operate by a logic of winning and triumph, which has little to do with agency as a facet of an autonomous and independent agent in a given environment.

Role-playing games (RPG), are often confused with live-action Roleplaying games. The significant difference between these two is that RPGs work with pen, paper, dice and resolution through conversation. In RPGs the players create characters in the world of the RPG. The game is led by a game master who represents the world and its inhabitants—narrating the events, the non-player characters and the off-game rules.

In RPGs there is in-game and off-game world. This means that implicit and explicit events, in relation to the fictional narrative, take place in the minds of the players, created by the interactions in conversation. A common example of in-game, would be when a player talks how the character would actually speak in a given situation. The same can be done off-game, when the player announces that his/her character will speak, and then proceeding to describe the content of the speech, and possible tone of voice, etc.

Inventing a character

The first event of a RPG is 'Who are you?'. The character creation in a role-playing game can take many sessions, and each session can last for hours. The newly created character then made will be the player's avatar in the world of the game. However, the character does not represent the player's ideas, political opinions, gender or other attributes. It is, but instead, a construct of the system present in the rules of the game in

https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/dec/01/gamergate-alt-right-hate-trump
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The 'build-up' of a character is comprised of attributes like intelligence, background (such as family history), skills (like driving a car) and personality (whether the character is afraid of spiders or not, etc.).

RPGs are built on a sensation of progress in the world of the game. The experience system in RPGs creates a structure of a curated and mediated individual.

Unlike in real life, players/individuals can make themselves better in the world of the game. This means that the standard structure of an RPG works by earning experience points that "level up" the character; earning new skills, power and gaining abilities. A common way to gain experience points is to kill other creatures, in the world of the game, while taking their possessions and earning experience points—getting better by repeating this line of action. The notion of colonisation is hardly necessary here, although it is good to keep in mind regarding RPGs as a game form. The pattern unveiled in this line of actions resembles a lot of the colonial efforts from western countries towards the ‘3rd world’ ones. It is often said that the products of the culture industry become the image of the reality it inhabits.

**The structure and algorithm**

The construction of the games’ rule system dictates the representations one can take in the world of the game. The diversity of characters is determined by pre-existing models and categories that are known by the player but not the character. In a sense, the RPG can be thought of as a magic circle, inside which cognition is built around an expectation of what the characters know. The player is present in two worlds at the same time, knowing things that the character does not. What takes place in the game is a combination of these two. For example, the player might know that in the world of the game, there are monsters that cause wind to arise, but the character perceives it only as the wind only as per the game master’s description.

The construction of rules in RPGs is similar to that of video games, for in both cases the system decides the outcome of the narrative from the perspective of the player. In the case of RPGs, it is the mechanics of the probabilities in the rules of game, which are often solved by dice. In the case of video games, the structure of the game is built by the algorithm which dictates everything that can happen in the world of the game.

The image of gaming culture was for a long time associated with low social status. Gamers had the stigma of social seclusion while seeming fail to meet the requirements of becoming adult. Curiously, despite changes in recent years, most gamers have been, and still are, men.

Gamergate consisted of progressive thinking female game designers who challenged the industry to produce more positive tropes, aiming to represent female and other gender tropes in video games. The image of women in games has mostly been constructed of stereotypes. This created a backlash of trolls attacking and threatening the ones challenging their culture. The invisible sphere of gamers suddenly appeared as an uprising of the manosphere (blogs, forums and websites that focus on issues regarding men, perceived sometimes as spaces for men related to the alt-right) against their perception of what was their right to the freedom of speech and way of life as consumers of games.  

**The image of man**

Although positive tropes have entered the field, the image of male gamers in gamer culture still suffers from the stigma of being perceived as a nerd. Various memes related to the failure of masculinity and the inferiority features rendered effeminate, create a network of irony around the male gamer. Memes such as the #cuckshed depict the male gamer as an emasculated and feminized failure in manhood, unable to meet the sexual needs of his partner.

The "cuckshed" is a combination of the words ‘cuckold’ and ‘shed’. The word ‘cuckold’ comes from the cuckoo bird that replaces the eggs of another bird with its own, making the victim bird raise its offspring. Cuckold has been adapted in porn, becoming a sexualised fantasy of failure in manhood—to give one’s wife, that is the property of a man, to the use of other men, unable to satisfy the presumed sexual needs of the wife. Furthermore, in the US the word "cuckservative" has been implemented by a group of conservative republican voters as a pejorative term to conservatives that are not...

2. Alexander, Leigh, ""Gamers' don't have to be your audience. 'Gamers' are over." Gamasutra, 28th Aug. 2014, 19th April, 2019
http://www.gamasutra.com/view/news/224400/Gamers_dont_have_to_be_your_audience_Gamers_are_over.php
against immigration, abortion ban or Thatcherian social politics.

The Cuckshed is a construct into which the male who has failed goes to hide while "The Bull," "The Real Man," goes to bed with his wife. In the 'cuckshed,' the 'cuckold' indulges in crafty substitute activities like painting miniatures—reminiscent of crafts as something that only women usually do: an effeminate, emasculated exercise. But in the secrecy of the shed and his gaming community, the 'cuck' can have his revenge on the fantasy battlefield, to decimate his enemies on a fictional level, symbolically being a man in his own perceived way.

The armies and lists of battle skills permeating the rule-heavy universe of gaming, are an everyday business for all who have indulged in gaming—be it video, table top or other kinds of games. The fantasy of violence, heroism and triumph by decimating the opponent, is prevalent in all game genres throughout the industry. Furthermore, this facet of competition lies in the culture of games where the word rape is used as a superlative for victory in online games. The rebuttal of gaming culture is not only about positive tropes of both females and LGBTQI+ people, but also a part of a bigger crisis surrounding the masculine gamer identity. If males are culturally conditioned to the binary of decimation and triumph, how can a healthy identity be found, when the available role is shrouded in irony? The stigmatization of gamers is one of social reclusion and failure in life. It is used in an ironic context, where gamers refer to themselves as failures in the sphere of masculinity; in not being socially savvy or successful, the underlying toxicity is reflected on a model of a supposed ironical male supremacy. The identity that this irony creates, is the one of a shared failure in masculinity, which, contradictorily, is the central building block of toxic masculinity: to never achieve something that exists only in irony.

Online games and exclusive RPG culture have been thought of as safe places for men that are not able to mix with modernity in a compatible manner. The identity created is the one where anonymity serves as a structure to propagate victimisation. In the anonymity and invisibility of this position, things invisible to the propagator take over. This identity can be used as a legitimisation of humour and rhetorics that artificially respiurate the manufactured body of the alfa-male.

Cases of how to work with identities inside the standard ruleset of RPG

In a campaign that has lasted for approximately two years, I've created a character out of a historical figure in 17th century Italy. The campaign is set in a vampire context, running from Neolithic age towards the present, staging the making process of each of the characters from human into vampire. My character is Elisabetta Sirani, an Italian female painter who died in the age of 27 of unknown cause. There are theories that she might have been poisoned, but no single reason has been confirmed.

Elisabetta Sirani took over her dad’s responsibilities as a breadwinner for the family. The father, being an artist himself, was incapacitated by arthritis and allowed Elisabetta to take over his position as a teacher. Elisabetta was also a successful painter, said to be one of the best female painters during that era. My character is a fantasy of how her life would’ve continued after she died in the ‘real world.’

I made Elisabetta a feminist vampire set out for revenge. Her focus as a vampire was to build up a network of females she had turned into vampires, building out a safe place for her children throughout centuries.

In RPGs the rule system stipulates identity by a pre-existing setting of social order that adheres to the minuses and plusses certain facets of the character’s personality reflect on the probability system. One of my characters, called Markku, was a photographic journalist dealing with a fragile identity in 1980’s Finland. In the making of the character, I chose the facet “dark secret”, which is a -10 or –15 point flaw in the total character point pool, from which the characters strengths and vulnerabilities are built on.

The “dark secret” trait works to enable the Game Master to decide the trait for you, handing it out on a piece of paper so that other players aren’t aware of it. In Markku’s case, the choice the Game Master gave me regarding the trait, was to choose between heroin addiction and homosexuality. It is clear that these two cannot be synonymous as a flaw, although

in the world of the game they meant the same amount of numeral values representing the severity of the "flaw" in the personality. This calls into question the objectivity of having numeric (objective) values as a system of perception inside the game.

**Reversal of rules**

Modularity is an increasing trend in RPGs, meaning that many releases in the past 15 years comprise of a handful of core rules that can be applied to any world. However, I think that both the franchise and the structure of the game itself can be subject to alterations. The desirable outcome of a game is that it hooks the player as fast as possible, creating an immersive playing experience. When breaking the rules of games, such an outcome might not be what is sought after. Instead I am proposing a reversal of rules: that the character rules and that the reality of the game would be built according to the choices the player makes. This turns the attention towards the construction of reality itself: with no fixed rules there can not be fixed attributes.

The problem of games is an Ontological one: whether the qualities of perceived objects rely on a said objective account of quantifiable properties, or whether they rely on personal opinion, which is not objective. However, as philosophy of science has proved, mathematical models also are dependent on the viewer. What makes RPGs so enticing apart from the experiential content is the philosophical disparity between what is perceived in both off- and in-game situations. Apart from the audio visual immediacy of video games, in the world of RPGs, the algorithm is open and has to be understood at its most basics by every participant.

RPGs have developed from war games in which two armies fight for victory. This is reflected in the present, as combat rules are still the most modelled and detailed part of the game system. There is a predetermination that comes with this structure, as the most detailed description becomes the focal point of interest and resolution in the narrative of the game, controlling its trajectory.

The reversal of character improvement has to begin with an annulment of mathematically perceivable pre-existing properties. An alternative approach would be to make the game about the unknowability of the character and its numeral properties defined by actions taking place in the game. This way, a character would receive a non-withstanding numerical value representing the action that took place in the game. This will make the game heavier for the players, as there is more to write down during the game.

The main problem of creating a game system is the amount of control it imposes on what is possible in the world of the game. A linear game structure has an established mathematically perceivable system of reality, in which objects have specific properties in order for them to be understood and handled effectively by the players. Thus, in creating a more fluid and open-ended system, there has to be a resignation of both objectivity and linearity in terms of what is an enjoyable gaming experience. However, to erase the concepts of triumph and violence is to eliminate 99.9% of the classic target group of RPGs, a new audience, maybe.
THE RIGHT TO RE-MEMBER
Amra Heco
THE RIGHT TO RE-MEMBER

Many of the issues we are facing within the field of image production today have been traced back to the approach of the image maker, who is bound to act within a set cultural framework, which is embedded within a particular socio-economic and historical discourse. The effort to engage critically with image production is thus an effort to actively scrutinize the practices of the operational field one acts within.

Regardless of whether we are in the role of a producer or a consumer, we feel uncertain about the most adequate response to the images we encounter. This places us in a constant state of aftermath—responses, which more often than not, lack proper response decorum. The camera has become the cultural symbol of a technological shift that has distanced us from the world and placed us in the position of a voyeur. The act of photographing was described by Susan Sontag as a way of handling existential anxiety and insecurities about our place in the world (akin to the behavior of a tourist on an excursion), rather than taking it straight on: “Most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is.

Romanyshyn likens this new way of gazing upon the world to the one-eyed Cyclopes, whose immobile eye keeps watch upon the world: “What is coded here is the idea that the infinitive vision of the spectator eye is a monocular vision, which, freed of the living flesh is able to become a free floating eye, an eye that can roam and wander over the infinite expanse of the world.”

Today, it seems as if our whole environment is adjusted for the perspective of the onlooker. At the cinema, we sit and relax while watching a film, letting the world come to us in a series of images and sounds; while the computer screen opens up as a nearly infinite expanse of digital space, to a user that configures him/herself into a disembodied avatar, poised to launch ahead into the infinite world of possibilities.

Romanyshyn finds an analogy in the image of the astronaut as the epipom of our collective cultural technological dream, which has distanced us from our environment: “In our distance from matter something of the wish to depart and the need to escape the earth shows through,” but “what we have done with (to?) ourselves we have also done with (to?) the world. […] the window of linear perspective vision has effectively transformed the world into a spectacle.”

Transforming ourselves and our world into a spectacle, unearthing an attempt to handle the existential anxiety that Sontag highlights, suggests that we might be losing our access to that which she describes as “a social rite” and “a tool for power”, which gives shape to our experiences. It might mean that we are losing a sense of what is essential to our very existence and survival as a species.

Romanyshyn suggests that in each departure a return is implied — “a psychic law of gravity,” which marks a return with the index of necessity. This opportunity of returning is a journey of re-entry into the earth plane where: “The high and up are shadowed by the low and down, our cheerfulness by depression, and the high frontier of space by the low frontier of soul.” It is in this tension between distancing and disconnecting with the world through the lens of the camera (and other screens), and our visceral experience of it, that I decided to explore further in my work.

I was researching an idea for a documentary film I wanted to do about my maternal grandparents’ hometown in Bosnia and Herzegovina — the place where I spent most of my school breaks during childhood. I typed the name Telanj into YouTube’s search engine, curious to see what images and videos would come up. I expected to encounter images of what I already knew about the town: those familiar streets, traditional Bosnian houses and cultural landmarks, the hustle and bustle of everyday life and the cheerfulness of its people. The probability of encountering footage of the collateral damage carved into the landscapes and people of post-war Bosnia was a disconcerting one. On the other hand, I somehow hoped to discover something that could help transcend the current state of affairs, allowing me to access the ‘soul of the place’.

As I watched the different videos, I came across a series of links to footage filmed in 1983 by what seemed to be a local videographer. The sounds of the horses’ hooves tapping against the cobblestone pavement sent me back in time to my childhood holiday breaks and how life seemed to unfold unhurriedly and the cheerfulness of its people. The probability of encountering footage of the collateral damage carved into the landscapes and people of post-war Bosnia was a disconcerting one. On the other hand, I somehow hoped to discover something that could help transcend the current state of affairs, allowing me to access the ‘soul of the place’.

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2. Psychoanalyst Robert Romanyshyn has argued this, together with art historian Samuel Y. Edgerton and cultural historian William Ivins in his book Technology as symptom and dream.
3. Robert D Romanyshyn, Technology as Symptom and Dream, Routlage, 2000, p.32f
4. Ibid., p.9f
6. Rane Willerslev, Transcultural Montage, Berghan Books, 2013, p.79
8. Ibid., p.176
10. Robert D Romanyshyn, Technology as Symptom and Dream, Routlage, 2000, p.199ff
the object of the camera into the very subject of this encounter. He turned his head back to his original route, only to look towards the camera again, one last time, as almost an afterthought.

The encounter between them seemed somehow different from those the videographer had earlier. I showed it to many people who didn’t know that the man was my grandfather and they also responded to the encounter. When I first saw it, intense mixed emotions of sadness, excitement, and joy, arrose in me as I saw my grandfather in the inhabited world of Tešanj of ’83. There was still something more though, something deeper being stirred by this unexpected encounter. It seemed as if his gaze was directed straight at me. Even though a gulf of four decades stood between us, with death and life on separate shores, for that very moment when he looked at the camera, the boundaries of time and space collapsed between us. That soul-reaching glance was loaded with meaning, sending me a telepathic message.

The art historian Kaja Silverman writes about how an image does not end when the relationship to its referent is exposed, but rather when it is looking at the object of the camera into the very subject of this encounter. He turned his head back to his original route, only to look towards the camera again, one last time, as almost an afterthought.

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The analogy that comes into existence when a photograph locates one of its relatives is historical in nature; it links the past to the present. It remains in the state of latency, though, until we recognize it. Fortunately for us, photographs do not passively await this recognition; instead, they actively solicit it by “dropping” on the “doormat,” like advertising flyers.

But I kept the material at bay, reducing it to the happy occasion of having found a precious video document of my beloved. After, until I was bid to resease, once again, my experience of the encounter. I went back to the footage and replayed it in my mind’s eye over and over again. My grandfather’s body language struck me as significant. There was something about his smooth movement through the space of the screen – that unencumbered assertive step forward, the affirmative body posture, his gaze firm and steadfast – that pulled me out of the hazy wartime memory of him.

The image captured by the videographer was different from the memory of him I had been replaying in my mind ever since the war ended. I began to realize that my memory of my grandfather was tainted by the pain we felt, by the unjustified aggression on our country and its people, and by how the war echoed across our grandparent’s lives.

At the old age of 81, my grandfather was facing war for the third time in his life. On previous occasions, he took up arms to defend his home and his family, but this time he was too old to do so. My grandparents finally had to leave the town due to heavy shelling and look for a safer place to stay in the nearby villages. Very soon upon his arrival, he, who was never ill, ended up dying of pneumonia in my grandmother’s arms. We all believed that the true cause of his death was that of a broken heart.

We mourned my grandfather as a man defeated by a cruel destiny — as one of the victims of the war. In my memory, which was constructed out of the vacuum of living in exile, I imagined how he held a small bag in his hands while looking back at his house, believing he was seeing it for the last time. He was old and frail, hunched over as he walked with his cane, his step uneven and uncertain, eyes barely looking up, filled with profound sadness. After being forced to leave his home, he had nothing more to say to the world. In my memory, I saw him closing into himself, wanting to vanish into the centre of his being. Such is the image of him that I had frozen into my mind.

With the aid of this unexpected encounter, other memories of my grandfather started surfacing, like the fact that he was one of the most beloved people in his hometown, a beautiful soul of humble pleasures. His passions were football, tobacco, and drinking coffee with his buddies. Upon hearing the news of his passing, the local brigade sent out a troop to bring his body back home. They buried him in the ground where five generations of his ancestors laid before him, though the war was raging more fiercely than ever, and Tešanj was barely holding its ground against the enemy’s assaults. I was later told by one of the people of Tešanj that for them, he represented the very essence of town’s spirit, and if his body had been buried anywhere else, it would have been like accepting the possibility that they could lose the stronghold over the town to their attackers. This remarkable triumph of will and love, that prevailed in the midst of those impossible circumstances, began to come to life in my mind.

Robert Romanyshyn has called the work of remembering as the work of the ‘unfinished business’ of those who came before us. He describes this kind of research as research with soul in mind, where a work, then, the transference field is a complex and imaginal intermediate place where imagina- tion as a mode of knowing plays with the possibilities of the world.

That returned glance was my grandfather’s invitation for me to re-imagine him as he truly was in the space of that footage, and go beyond the image my war-torn memory had transfigured him into. It was an invitation to come home to that place which once imprinted its ways and values on me. My grandfather was dignified, present, soulful, and always content with what he received out of life. To recognize that, was to recognize my AhA in that backward glance. The whole history of my happy childhood was contained in that glance — the stories he told me, the cards we played, the freshly baked buns he brought home every morning from the bakery, the pigeons we fed, his filigree silver pocket watch he let me play with.

The documentary essayist Jonas Mekas, who was also a displaced person, had found deep philosophical meaning in the celebration of the world contained in a human face. He proclaimed: “Let's
watch the face of a man on the screen, [...] as it changes, reacts. No drama, no ideas, but a human face in all its nakedness — something that no other art can do. Let’s watch this face, its movements, its shades; it is this face, [...] that is the whole world, in fact.14

It is through the body that we experience our world, and the more we separate ourselves from it, the more it separates itself from us. The body is the medium through which the visual, haptic, acoustic, and aromatic properties of our environment are processed and integrated.15 Thus, in order for us to impede the images that act reductively on our senses, we need to tend to them through all of our senses.

An ongoing consequences of being a body in the world is the formation and juxtaposition of sensory experience — sometimes complementing and seamlessly intertwining, on other occasions discordant or jarring — that are continuously generated through the body’s senses, organs, and nervous activity.16

We need to relearn to see both through our body and our psyche. And it is in the everyday-ness of the world that this is best practiced — by focusing on the apparently “trivial” details of life, the camera-world that this is best practiced — by focusing on the images that flood our media is how we tend to interpret and Marleu-Ponty discussed "the notion of the visible as the necessary precondi-
tion for all human perception, but also that this invis-
ibility needs to remain invisible in order to do its work.” Emmanuel Levines and Marleu-Ponty discussed the invisible face beneath the forehead of the head conveys an ‘excess of otherness’, and Marleu-Ponty discussed the invisible as “the imposible, but ever-present 'view from everywhere'.17

Similarly, Robert Romanyshyn describes this invisible as the absent:

When the researcher becomes too identified with what he or she thinks the work is all about, an impasse often occurs, followed by an effort to willfully forge ahead. In such moments, what lies unsaid in the work, what is present as an absence, calls for an ongoing consequences of being a body in the world is the formation and juxtaposition of sensory experience — sometimes complementing and seamlessly intertwining, on other occasions discordant or jarring — that are continuously generated through the body’s senses, organs, and nervous activity.16

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ITINERARY OF A BATTLEFIELD

Baptiste Jopeck
ITINERARY OF A BATTLEFIELD

Solferino 1859.
the colonel-painter Jean-Charles Langlois
came three years after the battle, 1862.
Sent by the Panorama company
and by its main shareholder Napoleon III.
The future panorama of the Battle of Solferino will replace
the panorama of the Battle of Sevastopol
in the rotunda provided for this purpose on the Champs Elysées.
The battlefield was visible to the naked eye
it had no set, no length, no width,
no depth, no dimension, no shape.
It was composed of nothing.

The first battlefield photographs were taken
in order to carry out the panoramic overview of the battlefields,
double victory of the Napoleonic campaigns.
The panorama glorifies the battle since Waterloo's defeat.
Military ideology facing its own nostalgia.
War is no longer visible. The colonel-painter Langlois photographs a bucolic landscape, vineyards, mulberry trees, silkworm breeding, landscape of an eternal Italy.

Photographs of the Solferino battlefield were taken between two types of war photography. Between the photographs of the Crimean War, theatrical photographs of ruins and of a frozen war and the photographs of the Civil War, post-mortem photographs of numerous bodies.
These battles are usually based on older battles that resemble the past, the library, the erudition, the etymology, the aristocracy of new battles.

A battlefield has not been or will not be through centuries the field of a single battle.

Solferino to replace Sevastopol
Sevastopol to replace Algiers,
Algiers to replace Borodino.

Each battlefield is an image that ages.
Castiglione, 1796.
Battlefield of another century, of another emperor,
field that we see from Solferino.
Same region at the border of Lombardy and Veneto,
north region of Mantua,
from where we can see Lake Garda, the Mincio,
mount Medolano, mount Alto, San Martino.

In these heroic times, it was said in black and white,
a man’s activity can be only the activity of a machine
and that his very activity transforms him into a machine.
At a time when it was not yet known that this new image technology
was not only the reverberation of a glass on albumen paper
or a sunburn caught by a mechanic
but already an imperial gaze.
Colonel-painter Langlois takes landscape photographs in the same way as workers, sick and madmen were photographed in 1860, in the same way as Nadar takes pictures of the workers in the Catacombs of Paris substituted by plastic models.

Only painting will raise the dead.
Back from Solferino,
Langlois layed down a grid on his photographs, like Vedutisti painters did with the camera obscura.
Jean-Charles Langlois is the painter and photographer of a war he didn’t fight, returning ghost from an old empire, painter and photographer of a battle he didn’t see.
And the images that he captures as if he was governing on the visible and smuggling to a power in need of ideology.

Fantasmatic observer of history, sent to military deserts as if they were national sanctuaries by Napoleon and the shareholders of the Panorama Company founded, the year of the battle in 1859 by M. Le Pays de Bourjolly, major General, Senator. M. Camou, major General. M. Vauvilliers, former State councillor. M. Coffinières, Brigadier general. M. Pélissier, artillery Colonel. M. Delamare, Chef d’escadron.
In military art, the « coup d'œil » is the art of knowing the nature and different situations of the country.

It is where one makes and wants to wage war.

Dated June 19, 1797. « La Nature à Coup d'Œil »
was the name of the patent granted to Mr. Robert Barker,
portrait-painter for his invention of an entire new Contrivance or Apparatus,
for the purpose of displaying views of Nature at large,
by oil-painting, fresco, water-colours, crayons,
or any other mode of painting or drawing.

This invention has been since called the Panorama.
WATCHING THE LABEL IS TEACHING ME HOW TO LOOK

Siriol Joyner
WATCHING THE LABEL IS TEACHING ME HOW TO LOOK
A developing practice

Homepage: Etnografiska Stockholm
19 April 2019

“In this sense of rootlessness, we are all equal” is an attempt at a performative statement: it tries to act on us, to label us as rootless and therefore equal. But equal in what sense? Equally encased within a glass vitrine? Equally part of the Museum collection? Equally bereft of our “own culture”? Surely not equal in dignity: in the right to self determination and representation. The cranium labelled ‘i.u.’ (inga uppgifter- the category of unknown) is not rootless and neither is it equal to the visitors’ cranium nor the ethnographers’ cranium.

I am a choreographer and sometimes I work with dancers and performers, people trained to articulate movement and dance practices or scores usually through their bodies. Often I dance in my own work, but the principle remains the same, whoever is dancing is not only a ‘body’ performing a task. They are a person with their own experiences, histories and relations. Even within a dance performed in unison by a number of dancers the dancers are still individuated, and in this individuation both the dance and the dancers show their independent and multiple lives. The dancer is also not the dance and this differentiating gap is what allows for both dancer and the dance to be seen as subjects rather than objects within the practice of choreography.

As a historical term, ‘Choreography’ refers explicitly to the written notation of the movement of bodies. This ‘writing’ moves in two directions. It both inscribes or writes the movement of bodies, and it is concurrently inscribed by the movement of bodies. The question of dignity arises here in that we must be attentive to what we are inscribing and what is being inscribed in us and others through the practices of choreographing and dancing. What is this writing that is being written into the body and what does it do to the person dancing as well as the person watching? Ethnography can also be approached in these terms, as a practice of ‘writing’ onto and into ‘ethnos’, a race, people or cultural group. Ethnography writes into and onto the movement of items (often including people’s bodies) from one place to another and their organisation within the framework of a collection, it inscribes the dynamic narrative of history.

In their paper “Dignity has never been photographed” Abounaddara refer to the case of Soleyman El-Halaby, a Syrian writer who is known to have assassinated General Kléber, leader of the French colonial campaign in Egypt and Syria, in Cairo in 1800. After his capture and execution, “the young writer’s remains were brought back to Paris by the French Army and his skeleton was exhibited at the Museum of Natural History in Paris, as a specimen of a fanatic. Exhibited at the museum since the beginning of the nineteenth century, the skeleton became the first sensory referent for generations of intellectuals, journalists, and artists (including the Lumière Brothers), which would inscribe the image of a modern Syrian.”

2. Abounaddara. “Dignity has never been photographed” January 2017
Watching the label is teaching me how to look. Yes. When we go to the museum, the label tells us what we’re seeing. It makes us into eye witnesses who can leave and say “I saw the skull of a fanatic with my own eyes.”

At the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm, I am engaged in a process of studying the way in which the museum uses text to contextualise and re-contextualise the items within the collections, particularly the titles and categorisations that the museum visitor encounters through the medium of the label that is included in the display of the object or item. I focus on details of the material of the labels as well as the words and numbers that have been given to each item. I watch the label as a way to learn how to look at the items.

The practice is formed by my proximity to the items and a proximity to their titling and retitling at the museum. The attempt is not to correct or write better labels, rather to “speak nearby and in proximity to” the museum’s labelling and to practice a particular attention to the titling and retitling within the museum. I do this by going there to the museum and spending time with, and in proximity to the items. I also do this by appropriating another colonial trope: repetition. I repeat the act of titling and retitling the items myself. I spend time being there, at the museum, speaking the numbers and words aloud and making field notes.

A score to practice watching the label

1. Go to the Museum.
2. Spend time nearby, in proximity to the items within the Museum collection. You might choose stay with a particular room or vitrine.
3. Be attentive to what it is to be in proximity to and nearby.
4. Study the labelling of the items, speaking aloud what you read and your observations. Be as detailed as possible. Use a measuring tool.
5. Repeat.
6. Speak a list of alternative labels and details nearby and in proximity to the items.
7. Note what happens, let the practice transform.

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4. In reference to the voiceover in her film Reassemblage, the artist Trinh T. Minh Ha says “when you decide to speak nearby, rather than speak about, the first thing you need to do is to acknowledge the possible gap between you and those who populate your film: in other words, to leave the space for representation open so that, although you’re very close to your subject, you’re also committed to not speaking on their behalf, in their place or on top of them. You can only speak nearby, in proximity (whether the other is physically present or absent), which requires that you deliberately suspend meaning, preventing it from merely closing and hence leaving a gap in the formation process.”
Field Notes from The Museum of Ethnography Stockholm
January 2019 – ongoing

I guess that the building is part of a former military complex. Red shed. Lithuanian poles in the garden. A Japanese tea house. It has that pedagogical feel- schoolish.

The ‘Magasinet’ area is a maze of cabinets and drawers. The labels are actually tied to the items, sometimes also the numbers painted onto them in tiny white strokes. Everything is organised according to material, rather than origin or use. Rootless? Equal?

There is just so much stuff.

I find aisle ‘H’: ‘H Animalisk, Organisk/ Animalisk, Organisk’
Craniums in white boxes.
Craniums made into bowls.
A pelvic bone? With red writing on it.
Human teeth necklaces.
A bone is a bone even if it’s also something else.

‘kranium; ben ‘skelett; ben ‘kranium; ben i.u. i.u. i.u.
1906.01.0545'  1932.08.6904' 1897.09.0045'

Reality is delicate. 5

I do a study of the labels in ‘Magasinet’.
I read them aloud. I say what I see: colour, typeface, material, what is written, size, how it is attached.
Pathology of the label.

People move through quickly.
I stay close to the kraniums and underkäke.

As I leave on the first day I eavesdrop on a conversation between reception staff and a visitor, catching some fragments:
“…..well the history of Finland and Sweden is all mixed up: no one really knows where it comes from…..”
“someone should ask him where he wants to be buried when he dies…”
“…..it’s very annoying. And he’s so aggressive…”
“repatriation is important but it can’t be just because a private person asks for something back…..”

I have conversations with Linda the librarian and with reception staff about my research.
They seem interested and offer suggestions of references and previous exhibitions.

Colonisers of the world, we want everything to speak to us: the beast, the dead, the statues.6

I’m practicing how to look and how to be looked at by the items in Magasinet.

I always sit in the same spot, facing a full length mirror at the end of the corridor of vitrines.
To sit facing myself. To look for the hand that wrote on these items.
Numbers.
One day I name them all ‘1’.
Peripheral vision.

I layer the image of my face onto the bones, using the reflection of the glass vitrine.
The dust on the hair shelf must be human too.
Who can look here? Why do we look? Who looks back?
I watch myself watching. Should I carry a mirror instead of a tape measure?

James Clifford said that ethnography looks obliquely at all collective arrangements. ⁷ Roland Barthes said that interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.⁸ Does the interdisciplinarity of the ethnographic aid a notion of “rootlessness”? 

Again, I go to the same spot. Now it’s always ‘H’ and the vitrines with human remains.

I make small movements today.

The horror of it touches me. ‘Arswyd y peth,’ I write. The flesh of the bones.

I stay close to the kraniums and the underkäke. A visitor walks past ‘H’ while I’m practicing and makes a quick step-step to pass. A small physical stutter, slight stumble. Like when we try to say a word and we can’t.

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THE MORE I SEARCH, THE LESS I SEE

Anna Knappe
AFGHANISTAN 100
PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINT ON DIASEC
25 x 47 cm
2018
I have never seen Afghanistan.
The more I search for images, the less I see.

I wrote the word ‘Afghanistan’ on Google image search. The first four search results display soldiers marching, shooting and posing with their guns. The soldiers belong to NATO, Taliban or Daesh, and the few local people present in the photographs are wearing blue burqas. The soldiers all look alike. The thirteenth image is the map of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the fourteenth is its national flag. After these images, another ten images of soldiers follow, one showing fresh blood on the ground, then another map, followed by ten more images of soldiers and helicopters. Around the 100th image, I see the first non-military image: a school class of girls studying, illustrating the webpage of an American aid organisation.

The same search with the word ‘Afghanistan’ on the image bank Getty Images produces a similar result, with the exception that the images of soldiers also show mountainous landscapes in their background. The first image in the list of search results is a photograph of a young brown-eyed woman wearing a scarf covering her face. The image caption reads: “Young arabian woman in hijab”. Afghanistan is not an Arab country and Afghan Arabs normally refer to Arab Islamist mujahideen who fought alongside the Afghan mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War, not young religious women. Afghan women are again wearing burqas, the visual symbols of Taliban oppression against women in Afghanistan during the Taliban rule. The images of burqas remind me how Afghan women were victimised to gain the American public’s support before the invasion to Afghanistan. The idea of “saving the Afghan women from their oppressors”, meaning the Muslim men, helped popularising the view that the war was for Afghanistan’s own good. (Hirschkind & Mahmood 2002)

As the German artist and researcher Hito Steyerl (2007) writes, the domination of remote people has been closely linked to reporting the so-called war about them and that photography and military technology have always been linked together. In this case, the burqas represent the so-called truth of the people of Afghanistan, mixing Afghans with Arabs, suggesting Islamic fundamentalism as the root of all problems and creating a visible sign of an invisible enemy that threatens us. (Hirschkind & Mahmood 2002)

The algorithm of Getty image’s search engine also suggests other search words related to the word Afghanistan: Iraq, Kabul, and War. Google suggests the words: map, war, killed, nato, peace, soldiers killed, troops, troops killed, army, taliban, kabul, afghan, afghan war, kandahar, afghanistan, police, and military. I have never been in Afghanistan and never seen what the war really looks like. However, I know that there has been an on-going conflict in Afghanistan for almost 40 years, and that its latest episodes, Operation Enduring Freedom and its sequel Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, starting in 2001, are now running their 18th season. To a Western spectator like me, the war in Afghanistan is portrayed with the images of the ones in power: the US military.

Afghanistan 100 is a photographic collage I made from the first 100 images of the Google image search for Afghanistan. For Google, the name Afghanistan is associated with the word ‘war’ and the image search results reflect this. The constant flow of military images associated with the country partake in normalising the conflict as something that simply belongs to Afghanistan: Afghanistan is war and war is Afghanistan. There are no other images of Afghanistan easily available to the Western audience, only images of Western warfare.

The Land of the Enlightened, a film by the Belgian filmmaker Pieter-Jan De Pue, attempts to utilise the images of US military in Afghanistan and to break the documentary “truth” produced by them through mixing documentary and fiction into what De Pue calls “a hybrid-documentary”. Filming of The Land of the Enlightened took 7 years to make and De Pue spent time in Afghanistan first by being embedded in the US army filming the soldiers, and secondly working on the mountains with a group of Kuchi children — filming a fictional story of the children’s dreams to accompany the documentary footage of the army. In the film, the US soldiers look like children playing a video game. They laugh and joke and shoot their rockets towards the mountains. The camera follows them failing to interact with the locals, who don’t seem to appreciate their colonisers. The film creates a timeless atmosphere in which the war is only a temporary visitor. The soldiers are out of place and the children are the only ones acting like adults, unearthing old Soviet land mines and other leftovers from the previous wars, while waiting for their turn to take over and start cleaning the land after the current invaders. Yet, perhaps unintentionally, the filmmaker’s decision to mix documentary and fiction footage amplifies the typical practice of seeing the military images as representing reality, and the Afghans being portrayed as fictional characters who are not in control of their own land.

It is noticeable that the so-called documentary war images of Afghanistan in the media and image banks, are actually not documentary images of the war, but images of visual symbols of war. They are metonyms for war, showing weapons, tanks, helicopters, and soldiers, but no killing, death, suffering or other consequences of war. Even the photos captured in combat show only one side of the battle and that side doesn’t get hurt. The images are often staged and posed, showing the actors of the war but not the act or the victims of the war. They are staged because the real images of the war wouldn’t have good quality, they would look messy and wouldn’t illustrate news articles very well. Even a Google image search for ‘War in Afghanistan’ returns search results of the same posing NATO soldiers and only a few images of the Afghan victims. The images are seductive: young, strong, and mostly white soldiers
in beautiful scenery, photographed against the sunset with bright colours, shining metal, and camo patterns. They are advertisement for a fantasy war where there is no death but only heroes, and when there are no victims of the war, we identify with the heroes, for they are who we see as real and their experience as authentic. (Steyerl 2007)

In Regarding the Pain of Others, Susan Sontag questions if there is an antidote, a counter-image, to the seductiveness of war. Sontag replies to her own question with an example by the Canadian artist Jeff Wall, a photograph entitled Dead Troops Talk (A Vision After an Ambush of a Red Army Patrol Near Moxor, Afghanistan, Winter 1986), in which a group of injured Red Army soldiers is photographed lying and sitting on a sandy ground after a battle. They are dead but they do not seem to know it themselves. The image is not documentary, it is staged in Wall’s studio, who himself has never been in Afghanistan. According to Sontag, what makes the image so powerful is the soldier’s disinterest in the viewer. They are not looking at us and they are not interested in our gaze. We have not experienced what they have, and we cannot understand or imagine it. (Sontag 2004) Both Jeff Wall’s photograph of soldiers and the illustrative images of warfare in my image search results are constructed. The difference is that the media images offer an easy and polished answer to what war is. They claim that by looking at the representations of war we could understand the war itself. But the devastating consequences of war is death and destruction, and we never see the Western soldiers dead in the images, only Afghans.

In Afghanistan 100, representational images disappear into a blurry mess in which the violence of the original images is present but not comprehensible. The image is almost abstract, yet, it contains a link to its origin but simultaneously hides it. It multiplies the experience of watching masses of individual images that represent the war but tell nothing of the reality of the war. Hito Steyerl (2007) describes a news broadcast from Iraq in 2003, in which a CNN correspondent was using a mobile phone camera to live broadcast the view from an armoured vehicle. Very little was present in the image due to low resolution and the general bad quality of the filming, resulting in an abstract footage of blobs of colours moving on the screen, which Steyerl calls a sort of military abstract expressionism. Steyerl asks what this kind of abstract documentarism might tell about documentarism as such, and proposes that perhaps this blurry and unfocused image expresses the truth of the situation much better than any objectivist report could, precisely because it doesn’t represent anything. After going through all the images, I still haven’t seen Afghanistan, but I can finally grasp something, even if it only is my inability to see Afghanistan.
STUDY OF A MODERN FASCIST SUBJECTIVITY – HOW THINGS WENT TERRIBLY WRONG.

Mateusz Kula
STUDY OF A MODERN FASCIST SUBJECTIVITY – HOW THINGS WENT TERRIBLY WRONG.

How to make a representation of a disappointed, frustrated and aggressive, chauvinist, fascist/perpetrator with whom a viewer can identify instead of judging? The second question included in previous one is: What is fascism today? And foremost how is it connected with our contemporary culture? Usually we deal with an image of a perpetrator or aggressor, or a criminal in a clear way: we know who is bad and who is to blame, without considering the genesis of this evil. What I am interested in, is to trace back the roots of a political crime called fascism and ground it in the common life of all of us at its generic point. It is already a banal truth that has been repeated in many crime studies: criminals are a test for the society in which they appear. In this sense, problematic political positions/traditions like fascism are a test for a culture from which they emerge. Among many inspirations the most important ones are films by Peter Nestler (from which I have learned how to take a position without making a judgment, how to listen to the story although I do not accept what is being said) and the film “Stalker” by Andrei Tarkovsky. In particular the construction of the protagonist who is a proto-fascist character. I think that in “Stalker”, Tarkovsky managed to unfold a secret link that grounds so-called “fascist happiness” with capitalist society. In this sense, fascism is a product of the religious consumption of the sublime. Quote from Tarkovsky’s diaries, 28 January 1979: “Stalker starts forcibly to drag people to the Room and turns Votary into ‘fascist’. ‘Bullying them into happiness’. Can it be done that way? Bullying them into happiness. Those who shatter the very foundations — how are they engendered? There is something in all this, without any doubt. I must think about it”.

With protagonists of the film we have started meeting after more than twenty years. One day being in Vienna and reading about Wandervogel,1 I recalled our childhood. I called them and we have met next month. Then I found a photograph that became very significant — showing two 12 year old kids re-enacting medieval warriors. Since then we are meeting from time to time. Some meetings are recorded and some are not. We all agree that the time we spent as kids, was formative for us. With one of them I often joke that we have met even before we were born because our mothers spent time together and studied together during pregnancy. He was born one day after me.

During childhood we spent time like typical nerdy kids: playing computer, board and role-playing games, wandering around a city, reading fantasy and weird-tales, then discovering metal music. Afterwards our paths went in different directions. Some of them finished their studies at the local university and started writing to radical far-right political magazines. I went to study film theory and philosophy in different departments of the same university. Then I went to an art school. What is also worth mentioning is that meetings with old friends made an interesting twist in the methodology of the project itself: very often they brought ideas and theories from their field and that had an impact on how I worked. The most important impact they brought was conservative revolution in Germany (also called Munich, November Revolution) which was a pre-nazi time when many traditions with unexpected roots were born. Today’s visual and intellectual culture seems unexpectedly similar to that times.

Regarding my method: first there is always a meeting and an interview. I always use an audio recording and I transcribe it. Then I re-read it and edit. Then I try to connect what has been said with other traditions, characters or objects from mass culture. In this way I am trying to stay in a dialectical tension between imagination, memory and bare facts.


2. Wandervogel – the name adopted by a popular movement of German youth groups from 1896 onwards. Ethos of the group was to shake off the restriction of society and get back to nature and freedom. The name can be translated as rambling, hiking wandering bird. Many groups within the movement were anti-Semitic or close to Nazi government. One can find prominent members subscribing to the Third Reich and other prominent members resisting it. From 1933 the Nazis outlawed Wandervogel along with other youth groups independent of the Hitler Jugend.
The beginnings

The anchor point is the year 1994. At that time, we started meeting in my house. My family occupied a large, over a 100 meters square, old apartment inherited from my grandfather in a Neo–Gothic building. At the age of early adolescence, these were the simplest associations: interest in history, knights, the Middle Ages. Then I went for fantasy and weird fiction, creepy atmosphere. This is probably the time when my interest in metal music and games arose. Mysterious music, the atmosphere of terror, which was associated with entering the new political system after 1989. The whole reality created a certain arrangement: covers of tapes, books and magazines. I remember, for example, the Emperor band. It looked like dark–fantasy book covers. It was a new phenomenon. In Poland, it coincided with the political transformation. It was such a subculture in which all postulates consisted of withdrawal. It was not something like skins or punks. The form of rebellion was misanthropy without declaratory postulates, without specific political positions. All this paganism attracted us, some primeval wildness, a return to nature, which was fuelled by wild vegetation in the city. It was a reaction to this characteristic post–communist reality. It’s hard to even call it a subculture because it was just a few people who met to play games, talk about books and listen to music. Then a great energy was released, all this colourful, Western world appeared. The apartments filled with completely new products, other colours and other shapes. It was something completely different. In the opposite direction.

With a friend of mine I was visiting a store for gamers. We went there for board games and card games like Doom Trooper. We sold and painted figurines. It looked like that: I was calling him from school. He usually sat at home playing truant. At school, I urged my friends to buy some figurines from him or screw them in, that he has unique cards. He was coming to school and we were selling at the break. Such actions were. Such a business.

The city played a big role in all this. The appearance of the houses corresponded with music, music corresponded with games and literature. Especially my house where we were meeting played an important role. Once, we even organised a LARP game in the cellars. The whole neighbourhood had Neo–Gothic architecture. Such ruins. Very damaged, cracked walls with early graffiti and some political and football hooligan scrawls. One should also mention the wild vegetation in which everything was sunk. It was a bit like medieval monasteries. As a matter of fact, the Neo–Gothic monastery was on the opposite side of the street. We watched the garden of this monastery from the windows of my father’s room. Computers have come to this. My father was a complete maniac. He spent all days in front of the monitor. I had my own computer which he made for me. 486DX/2 8Mb RAM. Computer games appeared. I particularly remember the game Quake: its textures corresponded to the colour and style of the apartment’s furnishings and facades of buildings. The furniture in my house were mainly veneered and polished. Everything drowned in dark brown which suited the textures of the game. Quake was also very brutal and embedded in the realities of Lovecraft’s mythology. When you read it in this environment, it created a very specific atmosphere. That was something very characteristic in those times. Such architecture of ruins. Aesthetic total project. Very interesting.

At that time, in Poland there was a great deal of movements of new spirituality, new–age groups, sects etc. A lot of leaflets were distributed around schools. This was mainly done by Catholic anti–sect organisations. As declared haters of church we began to be interested in Aleister...
Crowley\(^3\). I remember that during this period we went to the Catholic Centre for Countering Sects to make childish jokes. It was a meeting with a priest and an exorcist. There were retired people, sitting there who were talking about the occult aspects of early graffiti. Out of nowhere I asked a question:

- Why does the Catholic Church condemn Aleister Crowley’s activities?

A question like “why does the Catholic Church condemn Stalin’s activities?” It seemed very funny to me back then. Priest and those old farts were shocked. A goal was achieved.

I went to two high schools. The first one was a bad school, full of bullying. There were several skinheads there. My friend went to the same high school. We were often clung with football hooligans and skins. It was such skinhead–hooligans, a few were in All–Polish Youth\(^5\) and a few were skaters, rap fans. Today, it seems strange, but back then skaters, rap fans were not so popular ... besides, computers are one, but networked computers!

Everything I am discussing here has an impact on what I do. I am surrounded by old objects, old books. As a child, I was most interested in history and not in a literal sense, but in a bare fact that something is old. I was a child at the castle and since then I have stayed that way. It is the same now in my home. I am surrounded with artefacts... because these are artefacts, such as an old leaflet, an old book or an old chair. These are unique things. People are able to pay a really high price for these things. Take, for example, an old book, e.g. Grabiński\(^6\). They pay me a few hundred for it, despite it is destroyed. They pay so well because the time is set in it. My buyers know that the same pages they touch have been touched by someone else, many years before. There is such a tendency. This is what this whole antiquarianism is all about. This is collecting the time signature. Fixing time. As for me, I hid in a niche related to such pearls, with such archaic, true, creations. However, we look at them, they all have something unique in themselves. Something different. Today, the book interests me more as a physical object, especially a used book, which has its own unique features. Specific deformations caused by its use by many people who today are already corpses.

A very interesting thing in the context of political transformation and black–metal is the feeling of time. In black–metal we deal with slowed down riffs or riffs accelerated so much that they seem to be one sound. I thought about it a lot. The two main things that changed the whole system are the sense of time and the sense of community. My generation was immersed in a completely different sense of time. The whole elementary school you were doing something. You went to some activity and you just did it. Of course, then we were children and this is something other than adulthood, but even when I think about studies or high school when computers were not so popular ... besides, computers are one, but networked computers!
CRITICAL IMAGES 2018/19

Paradoxically, this networked society, which is a symptom of modern disenchantment, is the best vehicle for cultivating the antiquarian passion. I mean things like online sales, auctions. The larger the network is, the better people are connected, therefore exchange of goods is more efficient. The rotation of these artefacts is maintained, the whole history circulates in the cloud. However, there is a price you pay for it: accessibility kills uniqueness. Because everything becomes easily available, nothing is really special anymore. The Internet—related change is a bit like the one in the world of travel. Dispersion of such inventions as a car or train. Here I am reminded of Grabinski and his collection of stories, “The Motion Demon”. In his days there was a lot of literature whose main theme was railroad. Because it was the railroad that was the carrier of weird sensations. Moving quickly from one place to another caused dizziness. It was not just moving in space, but also moving in time. I use it myself today, but in a reverse way: I like to go to places like small, somewhat backward towns. Because of this backwardness I have the impression that I am travelling back to the time of my childhood.

New Materialism

In my second high school everyone was interested in literature. Although I came from an environment where I was surrounded by games and fantasy, it was shameful to admit. It was embarrassing. I had a few friends with whom we exchanged poetry. Baudelaire and Rimbaud were especially important. Huysmans! Ewers and Poe! Jack London!

I used to read a lot of Jack London. He had a very cool metaphysical insights, even though he was a materialist. He was the advocate of life force in matter and evolution. Something eternal, some external element. At that time, genetics was very popular. His protagonists, often in critical moments, hear an inner voice, something talking to them, the voice of the race. This is a combination of metaphysics and materialism. The element of the whole is in part. Paradoxical connection, but in his radical materialism London inscribed an element of traditionalism. This materialism is kind of a theatre.

Capitalism and religion

Back then, it seems to me that there was such a feeling that something had value in itself, for example, a conversation. Today there is pressure for calculation, and this is a question of capitalism. Everything needs to be squeezed out, specifically money or... contacts. Everything must have a function. I catch myself on it. The extreme form of capitalism is present in all these training programmes, personal programmes. These could be a diet, for example. This is an extremely pathological form of capitalisation of a substitute for religion. This is a way of life, which is really a lie since it’s all based on a desire for profit. All care for oneself. I got to know it well because I started practicing in the gym. Then there was the martial arts. By practicing martial arts, which is a great pleasure, you learn skills and after some time you want more and more. You do not want to lose what you have already achieved. I admit, it is fun. And you are constantly comparing yourself to others, you feel remorse if you let yourself go. There are people for whom this is their way of life. They count calories, micro and macro elements in the diet. They keep their journals when they go to sleep, when they get up, how many hours they slept, how many hours they have spent online, how many at the gym, how many beers they have had on Friday, or if they drink them at all.

Manifesto of Theodor Kaczynski, Unabomber: this is a great book! He is one of the few who managed to point our problems so well, psycho-sociologically. He pointed to the fact that we live in a civilisation of substitute activities. The main problem is the technique. The more primitive civilisation is the better. Basically, all there is now are the primitive feelings of sublime encapsulated with substitute activities. For example, in the past we risked our lives at war or to get food, then we felt adrenaline because it was necessary to undertake such an effort, therefore, today we have extreme sports instead. By the way, the explosion of the popularity of extreme sports has much to do with the crisis of religion. Let’s think about a figure of a runner who runs aimlessly. Some even think that these are mystical experiences because the movement releases endorphins. In an extreme form, such a movement leads to mystical experiences. These are interesting things. It’s a bit like yoga – unification with the universe. The problem is that there is no higher thought in all this replacement versions. However, what is present in all of them is a preserved form of ritual. These are secular forms of ritual in contemporary society. I like the way Limonov talked about it. Once he asked himself: why do I get involved in politics? He replied that Man is a being enclosed in time. In my opinion, it was quite shallow, but it meant that politics is not about politics alone, it’s about revolution. In this sense, Limonov does not support politics – he supports eternal revolution. In a revolution one day you are an ordinary soldier or rebel and on the second day you can become a general, enter a higher level. From zero to hero, ha ha ha. There is one task: you have to slaughter the old ones who bar you from reaching this goal. I liked it very much when Limonov went to the city with the national–Bolshevik flag and some old farts, some old Muscovites stood in his way and indignantly spoke to him:

– Dear Sir, what is this flag? Do you know how we associate such flag?

Limonov replied:

– Your generation will die soon!

I really like it!

Power and apocalypse

I also like very much Thomas Hobbes and his theory of power. Very cynical, but very true: power is born of fear! Besides, Hobbes was quite important for the circle of authors gathered around a post–conservatist journal with which I strongly sympathised with, Machiavelli and Hobbes! In post–conservatism there are no religious dreams alone: people are afraid, so you have to grab them by the muzzle! I really like it! The last issue of the journal was very nice. I quote from memory:

"The post–conservatist observes how categories, concepts and languages die. As everything that is permanent disappears and melts in the air, but he also knows – and this reveals him in his attachment to his work."

9. Theodor John Kaczynski – American domestic terrorist, former mathematics professor and anarchist author. In 1971 moved to a remote cabin without electricity or running water where he lived as a recluse while learning survival skills and constructing bombs. Between 1978 and 1995, he killed three people and injured 23 others in an attempt to start a revolution by conducting a nationwide bombing campaign targeting people involved with modern technology.

10. Eduard Limonov – Russian writer, poet, publicist and dissident. Together with Aleksandr Drugin he co–founded the National Bolshevik Party. Formerly an opponent of Vladimir Putin, however following the 2014 pro–Russian annexation in Ukraine, he has expressed support for the Russian president policy.

11. Thomas Hobbes – an English philosopher, considered to be one of the founders of modern political philosophy.
to conservative anthropology – that people in the deepest layers of their existence remain the same. Traditionalism, integral conservatism, this or that... post-conservativus – when he recovered from the Ragnarok that took place the previous weekend – stretches out comfortably on the chair, sets the record with the music of Beethoven, Bruckner or 2Pac and looks back at the end of the world. When did the rational vision of the world destroy prior irritation in the Homeric world of gods or natural religions? When did the books replace tradi-
tion by large T? When did the medieval Christian Revolution collapse? When was the Templar Order broken down? The post-conservativus does not wonder whether the moment of the negative breakthrough was the Renaissance, the invention of printing, the Reformation, the French Revolution, the invention of the steam engine, the industrial revolution, the revolt of May 68 or counter-culture. For peace, the post-conservativus is ready to agree with all, without exception, the end of the fall.*

Transgressions

I’m interested in transgressive concepts. In England, the Order of Nine Angles was created, a somewhat psychopathic organisation, abbreviated O.N.A.

12. David Myatt – British author and philosopher, a former British Muslim and a former neo-Nazi. Myatt is an example of the axis between right-wing extremism and Al-Qaeda propaganda, described as an extremely virile, intelligent, dark and complex individual. Before conver-
sion to Islam in 1998 Myatt was the first leader of the British National Socialist Movement and by many is identified as a one of the founders of a neo-Nazi, pu-ra-military, terrorist organization Combat 18.

13. David Irving – an English author and Holocaust denier who has written on the political and military history of II World War, with a focus on Nazi Germany. In his works, he argued that Adolf Hitler did not know of the extermination of the Jews or, if he did, he opposed it. Irving’s reputation as a historian was discredited by other authors and was shown to have deliberately misrepresented historical evidence to promote Holocaust denial.

14. Belzec – a Nazi German extermination camp located in Poland in Lublin Voivodeship. Built for the purpose of implementing Operation Reinhard, the plan to eradicate Polish Jews. A key part of the Final Solution.

15. Christian Wirth – a German policeman and SS officer who was one of the architects of the program of extermination of Jewish people of Poland, known as Operation Reinhard. He was the first Commandant of Belzec extermination camp.

The Sun etc. Such things were very popular back then. The main postulate of his organisation was a return to nature and the disintegration of civilisation by creating a network of independent entities. A grid of groups, independent of each other. The idea was to release such an idea in which everyone responds for themselves. The main task was to penetrate the system and take it from the inside. The Order proclaimed the transformation of civilisation. Priority concept was a glorification of the powers of chaos. The diagnosis was as follows: the world we live in is too orderly, so we need to introduce an element of chaos that will bring it to a higher level. Political or ideological identities are not important, members of the order penetrate both neo–Nazi and anti–fascist groups. Nazism or communism – everything is good if it serves to sow chaos. Although it must be admitted that Myatt was defi-
nitely more involved with neo–Nazis. He under-
stood neo–Nazi as a contemporary herey. He himself promoted many skinheads. Consequently, he spent several years in prison. There have been several bombings that he inspired but he never did anything himself. Many manifestos and textbooks have been created to act. The main idea was: create a set of units that are responsible for themselves and are self–disciplined. Such ubermensch who create independent points and continue preparation for evolution that will arrive with a new aeon. This is interesting because the theories contained in these textbooks are based on gnostic seven–steps path. These are tasks such as testing physical and mental condition, training various spiritual and practical abilities. The most interesting point is self–recruitment, which consists in the fact that, at the culmi-
nating moment of initiation, an adept must enter into structures that are opposite to his predisposi-
tion. So, for example, if you are calm, then you have to tie up with a gang, open a club, become a dealer.

In turn, if you have been living a party lifestyle, you should go to the convent or become a paramedic in the old people’s home. You have to stand it for a year. As a trained unit, your task is to enter various social groups, into business, into uniformed services, into various structures and sabotage them from within. The goal is to bring everyone to war. These texts were great.

I liked the tasks, for example, you had to endure three months in solitude. The tasks were modelled on the training of Spartan warriors. The idea was to regain contact with yourself, to return to the sources and recognise yourself. It is interesting that such esoteric doctrines, such as this, or as primitivism, or tribalism, or ones that deal with the study of the subconscious, e.g. The Left Hand Path or Satanism (strongly related to metal, by the way), are – in my opinion – the answer to the civilisation of the day. A civilisation in which there are no questions. A civi-

Nazism

David Irving13, the most famous living holocaust denier, finally admitted that concentration camps existed. They had to press him badly. It came to the fact that the security services wanted to demol-
ish him. In the end, he bought a truck and distrib-
uted his books himself. He definitely earned a lot of money. Back in the day, he earned 10,000€ for guided tours in Auschwitz. He told his version of history on the spot. I have a friend who lives now in England and who is obsessed with these themes. He is not a holocaust denier himself, but he is simply interested in the apocalypse. In Holocaust as such. He knows all dates, he will tell you how many cars, when, how, who. Apparently there is such a forum on the Internet, where different enthusiasts from all over Europe are debating about it. They meet, measure, compare railway tracks, types of trains etc. A full-time hobby. I found there a famous picture from Belzec14 which supposedly proves that the camp was not there.

There is a professor from England. He came to Poland in the seventies. He moved, quit his job at an English university and became a custodian of the Belzec museum. He learned Polish to conduct research in Poland. He was mainly interested in Christian Wirth15, the commandant of this camp. He wrote a monograph about him. This comman-
dant was an authentic psychopath. He participated in the first world war. He was a war hero; he was awarded with the Iron Cross. Such a thoughtful SS officer. Apparently he personally drove children...
He was killed by Italians, somewhere in the mountains, bald, with moustache and in such funny glasses. The truth! Although his face was awful, such an old man. He even wrote an open letter to our Pope, John Paul II. He did not believe in the Holocaust.

He talked a lot with Hitler, who reportedly once said that if he had a son, he would like him to be like Leon Degrelle. Touching story.

Leon was a real fanatic! The loss in his division was about 60%! There is also a history of how Degrelle and his soldiers were paving the way for Wehrmacht so that they could cross the river. It was called the “human bridge”. They simply filled the whole width of the river with bodies. He had such style!

Leon Degrelle!

His books are pure apotheosis. I have read them all. There are such exalted memories, especially from Ukraine where there was nothing to eat, no drinking water. Such a story, for instance: soldiers wanted to drink and they came to some cottage house. From that house comes the Ukrainian woman with a great, full breasts. And these soldiers, as Degrelle describes it, began to drink straight from her tits! This is a truly Bruegelian scene. Funny.

Another funny story was when they were in Italy. Degrelle describes how beautiful Italian plumes and uniforms were!

One day, Leon and his soldiers took back a post station which was occupied by the Bolsheviks who left behind them Italian carcasses dispersed by tanks. They were cut into pieces and Degrelle goes like this, crying:

– This Bolshevik savages did this to our boys!

He was a truly pompous idealist! Leon Degrelle! What a guy!

There is a song of a national–Catholic band, Legion, entitled “Leon Degrelle”. Or a song, “National Socialism” by the Honor band. I know it too very well!

Closing remarks on method, mythology, fascism and capitalism

Mythology was always a big part of fascism, its long-ing for pre-modern times. Today we deal with a very different reality that is multiplied with signs, producing something that has been called a spectacle many times. I’m referring here to the famous work by Roland Barthes, “Mythologies”,18, where he states that our demythologised times have its own mythologies. Barthes famous structural formula of myth as a secondary order of sign is very important for understanding current ideology and how it is reproduced in its forms of resistance. Fascism is obviously one of them. As we see modern mythologies, this world which overlaps products and images, links to whole traditions or – to put it a little more poetically – worlds. Nothing is “just like that” (and probably never was). Doubled reality grounds itself not on a material base but rather in symbolic surplus. As Eric Santner observed in his reinterpretation of a Marxist labour theory of value19, it is not about abstract value around which the prices of objects oscillate, but about glamour and glory, about the ritual value of objects. In this sense we deal today with a religious aspect of the market and consumption (vide. Tarkovsky’s “Stalker”) which – as I will try to show in my work – are strongly connected with the emergence of fascist subjectivity. The methodology of my work is mythological montage. It is a method of composition of set objects and images that refers to different imaginary worlds recognisable by users of the market (all of us). Meaning is produced by connection. Let’s say we deal with a fantasy role playing game figure (neomedia mythology), a Nike fitness/gym suit (fitness mythology) and a fragment of a spoken narration where the protagonist declares his disgust with modern food production and pollution caused by capitalism (environmentalist mythology). By this connection strange aura, something is generated that is impossible to describe in any other way. With this method, I try to avoid illustrative function of images in relation to the narration. Mythological montage works as a pretext for further speculations and meaning creation. Following Barthes’ observations, mythology – and mythological montage – is a parasite order of meaning, existing on a previously present system of signs. To be accurate, mythological montage relies on the already existing mythology, which is a secondary order, while montage based on this level is a third one. But those are technical details that should be discussed elsewhere, the most important thing to say is that it is a method for depicting auratic/symbolic values of products and their involvement in the creation of a ideology. Products understood in a wide sense, not only as a commodity.

16. Oskar Dirlewanger – a German SS officer, war criminal. His name is linked to some of the worst crimes in the history of military conflicts. Described by historians as “violently sadistic psychopathic killer”.

17. Leon Degrelle – a Belgian politician and Nazi collaborator. Leader of the Catholic authoritarian Rexist Party. During II World War fought enlisted in the German army in the Walloon Legion in Eastern Front.


19. Santner L. E., „The Royal Remains. The people’s two bodies and the endgames of sovereignty“, Chicago 2011
DUTY TO TESTIFY

Charlotte Landelius
A picture of Lithuanian prisoners sent to working camp in the Siberian tundra, taken by the son of a prison guard.

The very act of taking this picture can be considered a violation on the human dignity of the prisoners. But today, this picture taken by the guard's son, constitutes an important witness to Lithuanian prisoners' terrible fate and the experiences they have had. I find that correlation interesting.

In June 1941, around 132,000 Lithuanians were deported to remote areas of the USSR: to Siberia, the Arctic Circle areas, and Central Asia. The aim of the deportations was to get rid of the political opponents of the Soviet government. More than 70 percent of the deportees were women and children. Around one third of them would never return.

The woman in the far left in the image, Hilda Tautvaisienė, is my grandmother's sister. She was held in a working camp in the far north of Siberia near the Baltic Sea, for 15 years. A place where temperature can reach minus 40 degrees Celsius during the winter. From October to June, the temperature remains below zero. Only July is free from morning frost.

In 1956, Hilda Tautvaisienė regained freedom and returned to Lithuania. One year later she migrated to Sweden. Hilda Tautvaisienė later wrote about her misfortunes from Siberia and her testimony was published by the Lithuanian Social Democratic Union of America.

She writes:

I hold it my duty to testify and tell people about persons, women, and children, for the most part who have suffered unjust privations, who fell victim to misfortunes and a terrible fate. What I have written down should be made known to our Baltic neighbors and the women of the free world.

I found the original photo in the Museum of Occupations and Freedom fights in Vilnius, Lithuania. The museum received the picture as a donation from one of the women in the picture. There is no further information about who took it and why.

I donated the book by Hilda Tautvaisienė to the museum. They did not have any knowledge about the book before. The testimony of Hilda Tautvaisienė has found its way back to Lithuania and contributed to her will of making her story known to our Baltic neighbors and the women of the free world.
THE SILENCED NEXT DOOR—IMAGE-BASED ABUSES AND THE ASSUMPTION OF JUSTICE

Gloria Luca and Tudor Pătrașcu
Vlad III, also known as Vlad Țepeș (in English: Vlad the Impaler), was the most fearful Voivode of Wallachia during the XV century. He remained widely known for his reign of terror, punishing both the body and the image of those who did not obey his rules – from Ottoman invaders, traitors, to landowners and burglars.

One of the most famous engravings from that time illustrates Vlad the Impaler having dinner surrounded by the impaled bodies of the citizens of Brasso (Brașov) while someone cuts corpses in front of him.

Historical documents reveal that such practices were commonly spread in the Middle Ages – to which the history of Romania makes no exception. Also, according to some denigratory letters that were circulated at that time, Vlad the Impaler’s (more) educated enemies sometimes exaggerated the representations of his brutal acts, which reveals that the function of visual representation has been instrumented for domination purposes for centuries.

Regarding Vlad the Impaler’s reputation, chronicles of that time mention indeed (and describe in detail) a wide range of brutal punishment forms carried under his ruthless rule, however, the impaling remained the most referenced method until today. Nowadays, many voices that refer to Vlad the Impaler suggest that he was an undeniable ruler – a real man of justice, dedicated to his people and fearless in the face of any kind of attacks.

A news article published on the online platform Ziare.com in January 2019, informs about the recent initiative of three Romanian citizens who filled an official request of founding a new political party, named “Dracula’s Spike”. On a similar note, three years ago, an initiative of The United Romania Party, called “Vlad the Impaler’s Patrol” was subject to many news articles. These recent cases allow us to remark that behind the historical reference, the idea of fair justice is hiding a predisposition to overlook the image-based abuses.

The visual archive that encapsulates the 20th Century History of the country contains countless unbearable images of human cruelty, for example the images of the Holocaust in Romania during WWII. In addition to the information they provide for historians, these image-documents also demand a critical reading on undignified representations.

A more recent example took place in 1989 when Romania’s first steps towards democratic ideals were guided by the televised trial of President Nicolae Ceauşescu and his wife, Elena Ceauşescu, who were condemned to death and executed the same day – despite having the right to appeal. Although Ceauşescu contested the trial from a juridical point of view, the sentence was executed after a few minutes. The undignified footage of the dictator’s execution was broadcasted the same day.

The execution footage of Nicolae and Elena Ceauşescu is of striking similarity to the one of the Romanian fascist political leader, Ion Antonescu.
who was responsible for the deportation of Jewish and Roma ethnic groups during World War II. Antonescu was sentenced to death and executed in 1946, a year before King Mihai I of Romania was forced by Communists to abdicate.

It is well-known that during the last years of Ceaușescu’s rule, the access to the television was limited to two hours per day, only during the evening, and the content of the programs was highly censored – in accordance with his propagandistic agenda. Ceaușescu’s great concern regarding his own imperious image eventually turned against himself. The question we are driven by is what psychosocial implications the act of seeing the abused body of their once glorified dictator had on the Romanian citizens? We consider that the undignified images of the execution broadcast on December 25, 1989, made the whole country witness to an abuse of power that still has repercussions today.

The most recent world history recorded several similar events that generated a global spectacle by publishing undignified images of Saddam Hussein’s execution in 2006, the dead body of Velupillai Prabhakaran – the Sri Lankan leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam – in 2009, the assassinated body of Muammar al-Gaddafi in 2011, and the display of Osama bin Laden’s body also in 2011.

In the case of Prabhakaran, a Colombo–based diplomat draw a direct analogy with the filmed execution for the BBC, saying that “The government is eager to present this as its Ceaușescu moment – with photographs of the body of the tyrant widely released to give the impression that a defining moment has been reached”.

While such events generated various debates and even conspiracy theories, the authenticity of the images is not of relevance for our research as we are exploring the potential implications of their “mass–consumption” on the citizens in a fragile and confusing context, and how they have influenced the people’s relation to the right to the image.

The Right to the Image

In Romania, recent writings on the right to the image are not easily accessible to a wide audience. The one we managed to consult is the book written by the advocate and law arbiter, Bogdan Ionescu. In his introduction to “Dreptul la propria imagine. O perspectivă practică” (2013), the book title translation is “The Right to The Image. A Practical Perspective”, Ionescu claims that the purpose of his book is to “create the levers of a solid mental morality, anchored in reality” in relation to the topic. Ionescu argues that, currently, in Romania, there is not a correct public perception towards the right to the image as this human right is been claimed usually in ordinary conversations, where the classic argument to the offender’s demand of not being photographed or filmed is that they are on public space. As reflected by the Romania’s Media, although protected by the law system, it is not been claimed often by citizens who have suffered damaging experiences. In fact, most of the court cases related to the right to the image are initiated by public people, such as celebrities, politicians, etc., which points out that those who sue over unauthorized use of their identity are usually privileged citizens.

Ionescu reveals that this human right was integrated into the 54–46 article, grouped under the chapter “The Protection of non–patrimonial rights” in the Decree no. 31 from January 30, 1954, “regarding any natural or juridical person”. In spite of that law regulation, the collective character of the country’s politics at that time lacked content any personal “non–patrimonial” right, as individuality was regarded as an affront to the system.

History highlights that Romania recorded plenty of bloody episodes throughout centuries, which, according to the most recent monography on the psychosocial profile of Romania, enables us to understand why the country is still culturally defined by a collectivist dimension.

Based on a study conducted by the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede and his collaborators, Romania scored 30 out of 100 (between 0 – collectivism and 100 – individualism), results that still indicate an inclination towards equilibrium. The terms must be regarded for their psychological meaning only. Daniel David, professor of clinical cognitive science, explains that in Hofstede’s research the notion of individualism stands for the individual’s autonomy, which is associated to “competition, unicity, innovation and responsibility”. On the other hand, David clarifies that “collectivism is been associated especially to harmony and consensus”. Also, he asserts that within a collectivist culture one’s position within a group is the determinant factor in one’s behavior – which means that Hofstede’s study scores indicate that one’s group nexus and its identity is still more significant than one’s autonomy.

David’s experimental cognitive monograph of the Romanians psychologic profile analyses existing research conducted in relation to the USA and Western societies and provides us valuable data on other important matters as well. For instance, the score on autonomy as an emancipatory value is fairly low compared to countries where the psychological profile is inclined to individualism but higher than in the typical collectivist countries. However, we are not evaluating the scores as good or bad, but we are referring to them as part of our endeavor to understand better the context we are living and operating into.
According to an analysis commissioned and published by the Adevărul newspaper in 2015, from all the citizens asked if they would give up to some of their rights and freedoms to improve their sense of personal safety, 31.7% said that they would do it, and 13.6% didn’t know what to respond or didn’t respond at all. In the light of these scores, we can assert that human rights are been approached in a hierarchical way, thus subject to negotiation.

David’s research also points out that in Romania the rewards–based system is almost non–functioning, which makes the punishment an influential social norm. This behavioral pattern in particular leads us to examine to what extent footage of the execution functioned as a metaphor (an example) on the country’s psychosocial profile.

**Execution as a metaphor**

First consider the British art critic John Berger’s contribution that allows us to decode how photography fundamentally shape perception. Elaborating on Walter Benjamin’s essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1935), Berger highlights that “the means of production are used politically and commercially to disguise or deny what their existence makes possible.” This remark is particularly important as it puts visual conventions of perspective in a different light that indicates why one should no longer address culturally formed photographs as observed realities.

In her essay “Photographs and Histories” (2001), visual and historical anthropologist, Elizabeth Edwards relates her reflections to Berger’s contribution and explains that in family photographs, for example, their private reading is adjacent with the life from which they are extracted from, which means that the meaning and memory stay with the photographs. However, in the public reading of an image, the meaning “is free–floating, externally generated and read in terms of symbol and metaphor”.

To detail the mechanisms behind the psychological and representational discursive practices, researchers in cognitive science, Amitash Ojha and Bipin Indurkhya assert that “during metaphor comprehension, perceptual experiences are evoked and the success of a metaphor partially depends on the vividness of the experience it produces in the reader’s imagination”.

According to the German art historian Horst Bredekamp, visual representations and bodies play a substitutive role in what he calls “pictorial punishment”. Bredekamp explains that “in the expectation that images and bodies enter, to a certain degree, into a relationship of reciprocal identity, representation may be seen to tip over into substitution. For one is here concerned with a sphere in which images and bodies may well be treated in a substitutive manner.”

**Does a dictator benefit of the right to the image?**

Responding this question in a conventional way can put one’s dignity at risk, as the understanding of dignity in a hierarchical sense allows us to think of human beings in terms of how superior or inferior they are within a certain group. Human rights are non–negotiable, yet why do we still need to question whether an oppressor’s right to the image must be respected? This latter question points to the limitations of dignity in the juridical systems of Western countries, as well as of Romania.

In their statement made during the opening conference for documenta 14, the anonymous Syrian film collective Abounaddara defined themselves as “artisans working on the image of a society fighting for dignity”. Their claim for dignity is essential to our investigation on the potential impact of the images that marked Romania’s moment of zero democracy. As history reveals, no ideological, material or rank based understanding seems to allow democratic societies to move forward in a safe way. For this reason, we consider that only a reading of the existing critical imagery based on dignity could contribute to a right to the image based on self–determination.

The legal scholar, Jeremy Waldron, highlights that “the idea of human dignity keeps faith with the old hierarchical system of dignity as noble or official rank, and we should view it in its modern form as equalization of high status rather than something that eschews talk of status altogether.” Waldron’s reflections on dignity from a juridical point of view indicate the missing element in our endeavor of validating Abounaddara’s axiom that the right to the image should be based on dignity, not on property. Therefore, making dignity a universal privilege would improve any law system to extend this...
privilege to any single citizen. Or, in Waldron’s words, “Everyone’s maltreatment – maltreatment of the lowest criminal, abuse of the most despised of terror suspects – can be regarded as a sacrilege, a violation of human dignity”.\(^{15}\)

The footage of Ceauşescu captured, judged and his punished body influenced opinion regarding the right to a dignified image. Therefore, instead of accepting or simply ignoring such images, one should reflect on the prejudices they bring on dignity, as well as their deep psychological implications.

Daniel David’s analysis of the recent studies on the distribution vs the concentration of power highlights that Romania scored 90 (between 0 – distributed power and 100 – undistributed power). According to the authors of the research, Hofstede and his collaborators think that a high concentration of power in the legal system of a society is associated with corruption and the unequal distribution of natural resources and “accept hierarchies easily, considering them normal, without questioning or demanding many justifications for their existence”.\(^{16}\) Moreover, the chronic historical lack of safety has developed a psychosocial defensive profile that generated very complex coping mechanisms, such as the fundamental distrust in people.\(^{17}\)

Considering the country’s residual sense of insecurity, cognitive psychology research reveals a wide range of adaptation strategies. For example, if we refer to Romanian citizens’ perception of themselves, we find out that they think they belong to a country of survivors. The scores on this aspect, however, also report that a counter intention has come into play in the sense that people often deny negative aspects and amplify the positive things about themselves. This coping mechanism has led to exaggerated self-evaluations to the extent that the people are psychologically modifying their past in order to justify their present – sometimes unintentionally and even unconsciously.\(^{17}\) Manifested in order to maintain the self-esteem of the group they belong to, the effects of such a mechanism also applies to dignity. Therefore, although coping mechanisms are efficient on a short-term, the risk is that they become mechanisms which might distort reality through overrated opinions and thus they might have profound consequences on dignity – currently articulated rather as a distributed quality within society than a human right based on self-determination.\(^{18}\)

If there is a certain thing about the footage of Elena and Nicolae Ceauşescu is that they are The Silenced Next Door in our title and their pictorial punishment was absorbed in the psychosocial profile of the country. It is precisely the echo of this visual silence on a collective consciousness level that needs to be finally addressed as, to paraphrase the African American writer Audre Lorde, our silence will neither protect nor stop us from faking the past to justify and make the present acceptable.

In this social landscape and cultural profile of Romania, we reclaim dignity as the foundation of the right to the image by relating the undignified images of the execution to Elizabeth Edwards idea of “points of fracture”. Edwards stresses that “photographs are painful, not only in their content matter sometimes (we can all think of such examples); but sometimes their truth-telling, their performance of histories, their reality has a painfulness – rawness”.\(^{19}\) Edwards considers the rawness of a photograph as its “points of fracture”. In relation to the right to the image, we interrogate the footage of Elena and Nicolae Ceauşescu’s execution as such, while claiming for a reconsideration of the country’s vestiges and commitment to an ideology of differential dignity.

According to the historical imagery of Romania, the practice of punishing both the body and the image of an individual is deeply rooted in the country’s past. In the light of the visual references analyzed in this article, our most important reflection on the socio-psychological impact of the undignified images of Ceauşescu’s abused body is that they distorted the understanding of dignity as a pillar of democracy. The day when the country stopped sharing the collective trauma of living under Ceauşescu’s dictatorship became a key moment in many respects as the historical circumstances of the country determined a complex relation to the right to the image.

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15. Ibidem, 253
17. Ibidem, p.135
18. Ibid., p.313
MAZLOUM – SILENCED IMAGES OF INCARCERATION

Chafic Najem
MAZLOUM
SILENCED IMAGES OF INCARCERATION

Opening shot: a news reporting team dramatically enters the most notorious prison in Lebanon, Roumieh prison. They walk between the cells and the prisoners. A news reporter holds his microphone in the prisoners’ faces, probing them with questions and asking them to speak while the camera captures close up shots of their faces, postures, and reactions. Some prisoners use this opportunity to channel their frustrations, some interact playfully, others gaze phlegmatically into the camera reflecting on the absurdity of this situation. As audience, we are placed side-by-side with the news reporting team, we follow them as they lead the way into the discovery of the “real truth” of this uncharted territory known as the prison.

This unusual mode of journalistic prison reporting became normalized after it was implemented by few local Lebanese TV stations reporting the situation of the prisons in Lebanon. Incarceration is a controversial yet attractive subject for the mainstream media all around the world and prison stories are often sensationalized constructed. However, the case study I raise comes with its own particularities. It raises vital questions regarding the way we look at images of incarceration and the construction of such images, the normalized gaze on incarceration, the undignified portrayal of subjects, the unusual relation between a prisoner and a reporter/camera, and the ecology and discourses of the media. I ask what kind of gaze is constructed here? What is made hyper-visible and what is made silent? To what extent does news reporting adopt aesthetics of sensational reporting? What is the role of the sensational image and its effect on prisoners’ testimonies? These questions inform my essay and they lead my attempt to understand the criticality of this phenomenon.

In this work I examine this trend of prison news reporting. I am mostly concerned with contesting the dominant gaze and the historical view around incarceration and the image of its subject, the prisoner. I reflect on the constructed image of the incarcerated subject, its visuality, and the contingency between the visibility and the invisibility of that very subject within the context of Lebanon.

Throughout my research on incarceration and visual culture I came across many instances of problematic and challenging images produced around prison and prisoners. However, I believe the case study which I discuss in this essay is highly significant because of its criticality and its ability to mask itself behind notions of human rights and objective reporting. Its ability to argue that the reporting conducted is utterly humanitarian in its capacity to “give a voice” for the incarcerated individuals. Yet, I believe that the construction of the image in scenarios such as these are no different than the other victimizing and sensational discourses of the media around the prison. The news media capitalizes on its ability to make one thing hyper-visible and another invisible by playing on the contrast between image and sound, softening a political message into a humorous anecdote, dissolving a testimony within a sea of partisan discourses.

One of the examined news reports starts by covering the situation at the prison clinic before the reporter decides to step into the “reality of the prison” as he describes it. The camera cuts to several shots of thick metallic doors being unlocked. The reporter walks slowly towards the camera in a dark ambient alley with dim lighting addressing the audience, he opens a metallic door, steps through it, shuts it behind him, and does not seem to notice the two inmates walking slowly behind him. As soon as he exists the cadre and closes the door, the two inmates lean onto the metallic door, staring irately into the camera. This choreographed scene is a great example of the mainstream media’s approach to portraying and covering prison stories. The door separates the two worlds, the prison is seen as this distant place where time and space don’t matter. These semiotics help construct the prison and the prisoner as the “other”, or as not one of us. The heroic antagonist stepping into the danger to investigate and report, the dim lights and the bars reflecting the mysterious and precarious nature of the prison, and finally the incarcerated subjects instructed by the reporting team to act and feed into this whole narrative by looking angry and vicious. They do not follow the reporter on his journey of investigation, but their role is merely to terrorize and act out their stereotypes. Then, the camera starts capturing the dire and shocking conditions on the prison, prisoners lying on the floor using cardboard as mattresses. There is no voice over at this point of the news report. We see several shots of overcrowded spaces with prisoners sleeping on the floor juxtaposed with almost industrial dramatic sounds. Camera cuts into a dark tunnel, filming an elderly prisoner, approximately 80 years of age, slowly walking towards the camera. The news report shows no regard for human dignity or present any consideration of the prisoners as subjects, the prisoners are treated as yet another aesthetic component within this journalistic reporting.

A lot could be written about the opening scenes alone and the obvious construction and choreographed movements of the characters in front of the camera, both the inmates and the reporter. It is important to reflect here on the extent to which the news report is willing to go to create the dramatic and sensational feel. This constructed aesthetic has nothing to do with what the news reporting team was set out to do, it does not contribute to the coverage of the story, but rather to the creation of a visual culture, a way of seeing and perceiving incarceration. We are subjected to sensational images of the situation of the prison, one shot after another, no context is presented by the reporter, no explanation of how, why, or what are we seeing. This speaks to a certain obsession with documenting and archiving instead of representing or telling a story. The main intention here is to create an image to shock and evoke emotions instead of creating an image which is relevant to the story being told, as journalism sets out to do. As audience, we get the feeling that the powerful and emotional images we are experiencing are necessary for the proper representation of the prisoners in this situation. On the other hand, the mainstream media is urged to produce similar images for...
the media ecology which praises such production and the ideological belief that absolute representa-
tion through documentation is possible, especially in instances of war, conflict, and violence. This is an ongoing discussion in documentary studies, a discussion which extends well beyond this essay and often refers to the emergence of testimonies and footage of the Holocaust and concentration camps, and the possibilities of such footage to be consid-
ered a proof, a documentation, or an accurate repre-
sentation to what actually happened. It is important to note here that, by accusing the news media’s reporting of being misleading, I am by no means denying the authenticity of this footage. Roumieh prison is a dire place suffering from overcrowd-
ing, corruption, illnesses, and breaches of basic human rights. It is an issue that is vital and should be pushed onto the public agenda. Even though the mainstream media has an important role to play, sensational representation will only feed a shallow discourse interested in shocking images and attrac-
tive news headlines.

The Image; between its right and its ecology

Moving further, the sensational footage presented by the news reports under study is usually inter-
rupted by a significant and powerful image, the image of a microphone or a camera placed in front of a prisoner after they are instructed to “speak”. This image is essential; it embodies two major points. The first is the illusion that the news report is creating an opportunity for prisoners to appear on national TV and voice their concerns, and the second is the political messages and the testi-
monies embedded in the speech of the prisoners which are rendered invisible by the whole narrative of the news report.

“All the water is dirty” calmly expressed a group of inmates to the reporter, “we shower from the toilet water, and we drink from it as well” they added.

“Everybody here is getting convicted for five years for stealing a Man’oushe. And they (the others) are selling buildings and sucking the blood of the masses and they are barely being punished” expressed one inmate.

“Place a dog, excuse my language, place a dog in this building where we are sitting, as soon as it will experience the smell, it will escape. I’m not going to say anything more” another inmate yells in frustration into the camera.

The camera jumps between pictures of the pris-
oners talking and more shocking images from the prison. Our focus, as an audience, fluctuates between the prisoners’ statements and the continu-
ous shocking images. The experience is over-
whelming and there is no reflection or comment from the reporter about why and what we are hear-
ing and seeing. The absence of contextual anal-
ysis renders the prisoners’ statements detached from the story of the news report. Instead of
being grounded within the story, the statements
float as yet another sensational element to be used and captured by the camera.

I would like to address here, first and foremost, the presence of the inmate in front of a camera and what that entails to the parties involved. In this situation, the subjects are incarcerated in a confined space, there are limitations to their move-
ments, placement, decisions, and actions. The camera within this context is intrusive, it imposes itself aggressively within the space of the prisoner, demanding attention and reaction. There is no consideration for the subjects’ right to their image, they are in a vulnerable position, their identities are exposed (most of time the news report does not conceal their faces), and most importantly they are separated from the final product they are involved in and help produce. They are made into an essential part of the creation of the sensational investigative news report. Their labor is exploited to feed the mainstream visual culture of incarcera-
tion, and most importantly they are separated from the final product i.e. the final news report. They are unable to have access or have a say into what goes into and what is left out of the final cut and they don’t have the luxury to voice their concerns once this product is made public. It is an intense statement after another, fast cuts, no consideration of the content of the statements or any consid-
eration to the people voicing them. This reflects the exploitative nature of the neo-liberal ecology of the media in, but not exclusive to, Lebanon. In this situation, the Lebanese media ecology sepa-
rates the subjects of incarceration from their image removing all possible agency and dignity from that image. The media ecology becomes interested only in the sensational aspect of this image, while using both the speech and the image itself to reinforce the dominant hegemonic discourse around incar-
ceration without challenging it. The subject in this case is rendered into yet another tool within this media ecology detached from their “real” voice and rendered as a mere body subjugated to the gaze of the viewer.

Naturally, not all prisoners would react in the same way once faced with the intrusive camera. One of the most iconic and memorable reactions is that of an elderly prisoner. Once faced by the reporting team, the weary prisoner disregards the camera, looks straight into the reporter, his face reflects the excruciating distress and the unbearable pain of confinement, his eyes carry discomfort, indifference, and apathy, and with a long agonizing stare he utters “humiliation...humiliation” before turn-
ing his back and walking away from the camera. He exercises his agency by recognizing the abu-
dity of the situation and by rejecting the false hope brought through the camera. He says what needs to be said and does not give in to the attractive nature of the situation, he walks away. This instance did make it to the final cut of the news report, yet the news report capitalized on this instance to feed into the sensational reporting. As he is about to turn his back, the news report introduces slow and low dramatic music and edits the rest of the pris-
oner’s movements in slow motion, rendering this brief act of agency into yet another sensational
element in the report. The news reports’ use of the editing after filming strips away the political meaning and the authenticity from the prisoner’s action. As an audience we experience the prisoner as part of the aesthetic constructed by the whole news report and not as a human being with specific sentiments and reactions. The use of aesthetics detaches the prisoner from his image, eradicating the very right for this image.

**Invisible Testimonies**

I argue that the statements voiced by the prisoners should be treated as political messages and as testimonies reflecting the reality of incarceration, the suffering which comes with it, and the countless breaches of basic human rights. As seen in the statements I raised above, prisoners are expressing their frustration in a straightforward manner, they are speaking in a manner that represents their situation. However, due to the silence of the news report on this issue and the shift that the news reporter makes, these testimonies get lost within a sea of sensationalism.

“Here, in Roumieh prison, there is no room for a crime. Everybody is innocent” one reporter states in between the statements of the prisoners. The prisoners’ statement about their innocence lost part of its political meaning due to the narrative constructed by the reporter. This is much more significant within the context of Lebanon. One of the main problems within Roumieh prison is the fact that some incarcerated individuals are confined for a long period of time while awaiting their trials and others have served their sentence and still are not released.

Another example of the media’s discursive power is the news report’s adoption of a sectarian discourse in order to feed a sectarian agenda. To elaborate more, a Lebanese TV channel with specific partisan orientation would use the voices of the prisoners, highlight their statements, then create a causation between the problem they are suffering from and another opposing political party. A common problem within most of the prisons in the world is the difference in treatment of prisoners. Through corrupt channels, certain prisoners, whether they are rich or have political power, can have better treatment than others. When a couple of prisoners highlighted this issue in one of the news reports, their statements were taken out of context and re-contextualized through the use of the voice over of the reporter to elude that the people receiving the “better” treatment belong to a different sect, a different one than that of the TV channel conducting the investigative reporting. In cases like these, the voice of the prisoner gets appropriated within the discourse of the TV channel, it cases to be a statement about imprisonment and becomes a brick in the wall of the sectarian agenda. This act of appropriation renders invisible the meaning of the prisoners’ statement and gives a new and different meaning within the Lebanese context.

Not every reaction is straightforward as I have shown in previous examples and the use of aesthetics is not always a technique of silencing used by the hegemonic system.

An inmate sits on the floor, the reporter sits facing him holding a microphone to his face. The inmate seems calm, collected, cracking a smirk once in a while. Surrounded by other prisoners, the inmate starts singing. The tune can be described as Mouwal, a Middle Eastern tune which has an oriental melody with a bluesy feel often melancholic. The words often recount an incident or a story and the melodies emphasize the melancholic nature of the Ateha.

“Who will I hurt if I snorted a bit? they slammed me into hundreds of walls and everybody around me “knew”, our Masonite government, is respectful and cute, I’ve been arrested for five years and I’m still not convicted (didn’t receive a trial).”

“They took the “zih” away from me in the middle of the night, and in a second they handcuffed me, they humiliated me all the way to “Hbeich”, they hanged me in the “Farouj”.”

The above lyrics sung by the inmate are not only politically dense, they are a testimony of imprisonment, criminalization, and torture; the words are filled with political meaning. By the use of certain slang terminology, the inmate tells the story of what happened to him. There is reference to the reason behind his imprisonment; drug use. One can tell by the words that he does not pretend to be innocent, however he challenges the notion of criminalizing the drug. He refers to the notion of humiliation couple of times. The fact that he tells us that everybody around him “knew” about it, is a reference to the shame this arrest has brought to him. He touches on an essential problem I have highlighted earlier, confinement without a fair trial. And finally, he refers to his torture. “Hbeich” is one of the most notorious police stations known for drug abusers, and “Farouj”, Arabic for “roasted chicken”, is a torture tool whereby the subject is tied by their hands and feet to a horizontal pole and beaten.

The news reporter describes all of the above as “a coping mechanism,” referring to the cheerful nature of the delivery of the song. He approaches the situation in a humorous way, smiling to the prisoner and ignoring the underlying politics of the song. By doing that, the news report strips the prisoner of his dignity and the opportunity to communicate a political message and silences the messages behind the aesthetics of the Mouwal. The Mouwal is taken at face value by rendering it “anecdotal” as described by the reporter.

Can the prisoner speak?

To conclude, throughout this essay I advocate the right for the incarcerated subject to a dignified image, an image that is not appropriated, re-contextualized, taken advantage of, or interpreted in order...
to feed a specific discursive hegemonic narrative. I am not suggesting a limitation on investigative journalism, however I am advocating taking a step back and a re-assessment of our pre-conceived notions of hearing and understanding a marginalized subject. There is a necessity to respect that subject’s dignity and while their language might be different, it should not be ignored or manipulated, as is seen in some of the examples presented earlier. If we cannot hear the prisoner, it does not mean that they are not speaking. It could very well mean that the medium which we hold and trust to carry this speech is filtering and hindering our ability to hear it.

At the same time, we have to keep a critical distance towards such media production. It is important to re-think our perception of such news reports as bearers of truths and acknowledge the aesthetics that go into the production of such sensational products. It is vital to examine under which umbrella such media products are operating and who benefits from them the most, whether from an economical, ideological, or socio-political perspective. It is also vital to reflect on the visibility and invisibility of testimony vis-à-vis the image. The constructed image of the incarcerated subject within the frame seems distracting, the more sensational is the image, the less we seem to hear the reality and the political extent of the testimonies. This dynamic within this specific case study makes the image extremely critical, and renders the work of the image makers significant in creating a discourse and in constructing an explicit gaze. The news report is interested in this case in formulating violence as aesthetic, rendering the image of the prison and stories around it as spectacle.

Throughout my essay, I have highlighted some of the statements and testimonies voiced by prisoners and I attempted to reflect on them as a researcher on the subject matter. I do not possess any special ability to decode these messages, however by separating these statements from the sensational rhetoric they were carried in, the inherent political messages surfaced. I’m not imposing my reading or my interpretation, I’m advocating a reconsideration of our ways of looking at testimonial messages outside the sensational delivery often constructed and performed by mainstream media, a delivery that only serves to separate the real subject from its image.
HANDS ACTS - EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN

Marie Silkeberg
the first title of the poem that follows: Ghost/Host
I took it from a Russian artist, a night we were speaking about ghosts
she stumbled on the pronunciation of the word ghost
the title of the book from where the poem
is taken is To Damascus – as a direction,
of something that keeps moving towards an event. We started working on the book when the Syrian uprising began in 2011, and continued while it escalated to Assad’s war on his own population

the slash sign / written into it
the main character in this story is both lexical item and infant, each equally in search of syntax, as a word “igitur” cannot stand alone, and cries out for nouns and verbs, as a young hero must search for a diction, for if he is to communicate his crisis he must put it into language
equally a sign of a cut or a shift
the idea that a ghost could be a host, hosting, containing suppressed historical real events, hovering somewhere in the present, or returning as revenants, not exactly located, not precise in memory

someone told me the sign looks like an open palm
connecting the divide by a gesture of holding like a stroke equally
to pronounce. a name when it has become a ghost. in relation. to the world and the words. the images. at a loss for words. at a loss for words. at a loss

a dedication to the city, an allusion to the conversion of Saul/ St. Paul blinded while hearing a voice saying: while on his way to Damascus
other images in the poem refer to photos or movies from events in Syria we watched together, as part of a dialogue, an exchange

the text by Jean Genet quoted in the poem, was a starting point for it what struck me hard with the Genet text was its use of repetition, the repeated image of hands –

the act of seeing twice, how he imagines, relives the violent scene in his imagination. Watching the mutilated body opens his imagination for the scene, demands, calls for

works to project the future out of the past. The photograph is a forward-looking
document, so to speak, anticipating a future viewer who will recognize it a
spark of contingency that cannot be contained to one temporal moment. As

today I made the animation with gun on one nail and it was shooting - - - - -

still. ghost. host. clear as crystal. several white cloths. rarely. a kind of
erotic relation of resistance and abandonment. that was no ghost that
came up the stairs. without wings. formulae of pathos. with the outside
serving as soul. interpreted the oracle too interminably. an i with an
insatiable appetite for the non-i. what hides. in time. that the space
cannot show. these weird flashbacks. not even the circle
tomorrow the technical specialist will come to me and I go to Moscow

violent blow-ups, dilated pupil, fall asleep in a few microseconds. as if the brain was switched off: in long English sentences. for the first time. the first hand. the vision. the throng. at the lock of civilization. to sleep in the holes beneath the buildings. keep mobile. you know all this. no. I don’t know. the little hole where it enters. the exit where it tears apart the skull. the pointing hand. the body on the other side of the street. a grey heap. if you run in zigzags. maybe. the movement. one of a kind. one kind. it is snowing. large snowflakes. in every tone. her voice. not the animal’s. not the street’s. the shards of glass. the waking at night. his night. that everything gets mixed in fiction. reality. in the memory of the massacre. what happened. who was responsible. oblivion. repression. denial. spectral analysis. as spectral analysis. objects of comparison. to do justice. I don’t know. I don’t know. the art of making one word speak several times. bloody cultural isn’t it?

parallel texts. sections

the main is the rhythm of glimmer with sound (your voice, old vinyl, noise of city et cetera) the letters on hands and faces
she talked about the stratum. kept in balance by the authorities. to maintain this elite at a level the authorities could accept. can accept. generations of the elite. she says. I love the gestures of her hands. when she speaks. as she depicts with such incisiveness how thin that stratum is. geopolitical rupture. in the dense matter. the tunnel. to be buried alive. to make your way out. a single ray of light. to become this primitive force. out. up. becoming one with it. recovering within it. when everything is flickering. sliding. the external images penetrate far too far into the internal ones. to just widen and widen. striking the same spot. or an ever more gentle movement. supple. quick. unpredictable. suddenly without a landscape. I envy her landscape. yes. I search for those places where the coating of language is not as thick she says. where there is a thinner membrane. I was totally in your hands. secret connection. the word she uses. connections. almost. the broken language. the broken narrative. Germany. Russia. the history of empires. the sensitivity. the intelligence. the calm relationship. to genius. hypersensitivity. the passion of language. the suffering. where no one wanted to understand. no one wanted to add. the space of reading. yellow stars-of-Bethlehem. Sigurd. the lamentation. the vengeance. floods of refugees into turkey. Russian special forces inside the country. Syria. burning outlines. as. as you are. in mine

a woman in a bright red dress is standing in the middle of the street with a banner. all on her own. stop the killing. she waves the cloth between the cars. rain on the streets. damp in the air. obscurity of tedium. not the quickness of humour. its quicksilver movement. rising quickly. thirty peace observers. eighteen dead. one day. in the course of one day. during the truce. watched the weapon pierce the steel. the airless triangle. the gas forming. the spinning bullet. the way it passed through the four-inch thick steel. the armour plating. the armoured vehicle. it is whirling. in the April night. the undead. around the heart. the torso. the film she says several times. the moving image. a black lacquered blinking membrane. long silences. foghorns. fusions. there is no repeat. ahead is only. the silence and the wounds of language. taboo. vacuum. the language of gestures. of the guests. that will pierce the skin. the empty gaze. surveillance equipment. money with blood. the systematic rapes. sixty thousand. figures. not names
a scream she says. voicelessness. when your voice disappears. why don't you write about the photographer? to read the detail. carefully. intensely. mimicry. to mimic. disappear. in the text. under. again. against. filth. debris. abject. somewhere in between. how frightened. screams. screaming. va dans le mystère. move on. keep moving. all willpower. to shoot yourself through brains. darkness. straight. through. no walking in that. I don’t remember. grief. shock. a monster in my body she said. fear. power. life. death. there is no. scale

1000 days in Sweden. extended family. the shocking distance. spectacle. a man walking. for three hours. in the snow. freezing darkness. from work. back to the camp. his waiting family. distance she says. zoom in and out. back. back off. denkraum. enter elsewhere. details. fingers. not even hands. innocent. or especially. I said so. what the frame contains. denial. maybe. disavowal. to repeat the words. a denial too deep. to wake up from the slumber. the time of fascism. rising right. wing. radical. extreme. what do you say. resist the temptation of totalitarianism. its compulsion. the tyrant's coercion. kill the tyrant. the frame. embedded journalists in Iraq. war technology. wartime. to write. wholly. from inside. mimesis. mimicry. enter. deeper. distinct. pulsate outwards. pictures. words. a captured thought. acute. acuate. double. sharp. links

[April, 2019]

our love comes back in the middle of the night

move on. yes. appropriated words. assimilated. it’s a false bridge. no. just a bridge. saw her beautiful face. just imagine. few days ago. nothing had happened. everything actually. but not inside. the people involved. we were just in the middle of it. still not. in the wild attempt. to get over it. the constant shocks. in the fragile fabric. her voice. our voices. as an image maker. a creator of images. chaos' wind. blowing. do just anything. with ignorance. inability. lack of knowledge. skills. amateur. does it look amateurish? who wants to be a professional. anyway. these days. of mechanical reproduction. digital reproduction. almost impossible. not to be. an object. abject. or desire. traces. to write. inscribe. engrave. in the hyper speed. omnipresent. present. missing. how bright the moment. the photo's moment. history as it flows. and when it's frozen. raw histories. the performativity of the photograph. what it looks like. what combination. which image. in search. for which one. in waiting. traces. material community. at the loss. dead. living. dear people

[July, 2012]
SILENT STORIES
Sandra Vitaljić
SILENT STORIES

Immigrants—what a dirty word. It feels almost as if there are no positive associations with it. I came to Sweden to study, and my partner is working, so the whole family has moved to a new environment. I started to think of myself as an immigrant. I tried to cope with the negative connotations of the term. I struggled with the indignity of it. I tried to justify myself when people asked why we came. There is a certain acceptance for people who come as political immigrants or refugees from war-torn countries. They have no choice, they run to safety. But what about us, who have chosen to leave our countries of origin in our own terms; do our stories matter? Are these experiences so insignificant they should remain invisible?

I started to collect stories about the everyday struggles of women that just moved to a new county. Usually, we meet over a cup of coffee. We talk like friends, share our experiences. It is not an interview with a set of questions. I ask them about living in Sweden, the good and bad things they encounter every day, how they feel about it; how it reflects in their relationships, family life. Do they feel undignified by any situation? What do they feel good about? I write down excerpts that I find most telling.

These stories reflect a struggle for dignity in precarious circumstances while becoming a mirror of society.
The most beautiful story is with our landlords. We live with them in the house, they are upstairs and we are downstairs. They received us like a family. All, but all we needed they got for us. They have kids a little older than ours and all the clothes their children outgrew they have passed on to us. Whenever I asked them where I could buy something, the first answer was: don’t buy, we got it! They really gave us all, we are grateful to them for the rest of our lives.

I am going to a language school for immigrants. I feel like a child in a primary school again. It is fun to see how some of my classmates, all grown men and women are eager to write on the board. They often volunteer. I only do it when I have to. I was the same in my childhood. Although I was always an excellent student I never liked to stand out. We have to write simple sentences. I struggle to find words to express even the simplest things like describing your average day or summer vacation. Yesterday we watched a Youtube video which explained how to write a basic essay. Those instructions are the same in any language: to write in full sentences, to give a title, to use punctuation and capital letters at the beginning of sentences. It was narrated by a child.
My daughter is very sensitive. She has a communication problem, so it is even more difficult for her to adjust to a new environment. It is not just about the language that she doesn’t understand, she has difficulties making connections with other kids. It was the same in our home country. We scheduled a meeting with a paediatrician to seek help. It was suggested by her preschool teacher. She is very kind, dedicated and supportive. We are really happy that she cares so much. One of the reasons we decided to come to Sweden is to put our kids in a more supportive environment. It is hard to watch my daughter cry when I leave her in pre-school. I was crying too while I was walking away. I can still see the expression on her face when we were waving goodbye. I wonder if we have put her through too much. In the very next moment, I thought of the bullying that takes place in the schools in our home country. I hope she will have the strength to overcome this language barrier and adjust. I believe this society addresses issues like bullying. I hope she will not be stigmatised for being an immigrant.

I think when you express yourself in a language different to yours, your personality also changes. My personality, when I interact in English, is more self-secure. In my native tongue, my body is recalling that feeling of “staying at your place”. Be respectful, respect hierarchy, especially in my work environment, medicine. In Sweden I feel I can be myself. I can say what I want and I am respected, relationships with superiors are horizontal and my gender is not regarded as less powerful. In my home country, you can feel it. Many women experience discrimination in workplaces: ‘you are a woman, you will become a problem because you will get pregnant and I will have to substitute you’. Here, there is none of that. I really love my work environment in Sweden. When I got pregnant with my first child I was afraid to tell my boss because I had been working for just a couple of months. I was expecting a bad reaction. But my boss was very supportive, and, by the way, my boss is a woman in career and a mother of two sons. The second time I got pregnant, I was worried she might react differently. But no, she surprised me again, being very encouraging and positive. She said “this is the perfect age to have children, then you can dedicate to your career”.
When I first came to Sweden and got my Personal number (Personnummer) I was told to register at Arbetsformedlingen (unemployment office), because they could help me find a job in my area, which is architecture. So I grabbed my degree certificates and academic history, together with all the documents that prove that I was educated in architecture, and made my way there. A person that was supposed to be my supervisor didn’t want to see any of my documents, saying straight to me that I wasn’t going to be able to find a job in architecture because I didn’t speak Swedish. He said I should look for jobs in cleaning. It is fine, that is a job like any other, but still, he didn’t even look at any of my certificates. As I was leaving, I offered him a handshake, to thank him for his time, but he refused, stating it was his personal policy not to do it. That really hit me. I was already feeling low and he refused to shake my hand like I was inferior to him. I just felt unwelcome. It was a bad experience. It was even worse because I was already depressed. I arrived in October and the days were getting shorter. It was getting darker. And I come from Brasil which is sunny all year round. I didn’t know how to meet people, I didn’t have friends. I was just home by myself doing nothing while my boyfriend was working. I started to feel depressed. I went to the unemployment office only to find out that the only job they suggest I can do is cleaning. I started to question my decision to come here. I left everything behind. I had my job, my salary, my life. Now I am here with the person I love but at the same time, I asked myself what am I doing here?

I cry every day now. For no particular reason. The tears just surprise me while I ride the bus or walk home. Those are brief moments that I am with myself. Time in between errands: taking kids to preschool, going to school, walking home. The time when my tears are not going to make my kids confused and my partner worried. My tears are only met by strangers. I bow my head in shame. Emotions are not meant for public spaces. Yet, I cannot help myself. Deep sadness comes from within. I still feel strong and I know I can do it. I am not ready to give up.
I was desperate to get a job. Although I am highly educated, I took a job as a cleaner. I haven’t told anyone, I was too embarrassed. I had trial work and induction days. My mentor was an older Romanian woman. She was like a mother figure to me. She showed me how to work, corrected me and hurried me up. I was trying too hard. I really wanted to do my best. When she complained how slow I was I cried. I tried to hide my tears, felt so stupid. She looked at me in disbelief. I bet she never had someone crying before. I think it was obvious I am coming from a different world. She tried to comfort me. She was really nice, gave me a chocolate. She said when she first came to Sweden she had two rough years, also cried a lot. We had to go to another client’s house. We took a bus to another location where a woman had to pick us up by car. We didn’t have time to sit and eat lunch at some decent place so I was sitting on a fence by the parking lot in the middle of nowhere, eating my lunch. We were picked up by a coworker, a younger Romanian woman in a Volvo. She played loud Romanian pop on her radio and drove very fast. I was sitting on the back seat watching Swedish pristine landscapes and nice houses. I felt like I was in some parallel reality, it had nothing to do with my life as it was by now. We came to the house we were supposed to clean. It was a nice red wooden house, a typical Swedish house with a nice view of the water. I could imagine my family living there. The house was incredibly dirty, it took me two hours just to clean the fridge with everything inside. It seemed like the person who lived there never cleaned anything. Even my experienced mentor said she never had a case like that before. Five hours later, four of us left the house clean and beautiful. I was heading home and had to wait for a bus for another 20 minutes, so I went to the grocery store, bought some groceries and a bouquet of tulips for myself. That was my first working day as a cleaner. When I got home it was half-past 8pm, and I had left at 7 in the morning.
Right after my first year in Sweden, we started to think about what should we do. I gave birth to my son and I stopped thinking just for myself.

We have connections mostly with the Italian community in Stockholm. When I first arrived I met an Italian girl and she introduced me to her group of friends. Luckily we were a good match and we became friends. This is why I never felt alone here in Sweden. Nevertheless, I got to know that Swedish people are not easy to connect with. It seems difficult to reach the core. It is like being on the surface of a planet. You rotate around it for a while but you never get in and soon enough you can take different directions and never meet again. I think it is difficult in general to start new important friendships when you are in your 30-40s. And it might be even more difficult when you have different cultural codes.

Anyways, this is not a reason to think about leaving. It’s just that I really miss people that I left behind. I want to go back to them. Also, I want my kids to grow up as Italians and not as Swedes. This is what we are. This is who I am and all my childhood and adolescence memories are related to those places, smells, voices, gestures. I would like my kids to experience the same, to have the same background.

When I am considering to leave I am aware I am considering leaving probably the most advanced society in the world at the moment. Sweden is really on top of everything, women rights, gender equality, egalitarian access to benefits, everything is already one step forward. It’s the society where I most feel the presence of a supporting state, the Welfare state in its most functioning form. It is hard to decide. Italy nowadays is in complete shit, we have a government coalition where half of the parties are xenophobic and homophobic and ignorance spreads irradiated by populism. I am a bit afraid. It is difficult to decide. My heart is there but if I have to decide with my brain, I would stay here. Also for my kids. Mainly for them. They could grow up in a society that reflects progress and the direction that the world should follow. Or should they go back to their home country, to their roots, to the core but be soaked in a society that risk to go backward, that fear the poor instead of helping them, that reject the differences instead of integrating them and make them become a value.

On a weekend we went to visit a Christmas market at a popular local farm. It was lots of fun for the kids. They also wanted hot dogs but the only payment method was Swish. In Sweden it is very difficult to open a bank account if you don’t have Personnummer, so we didn’t have Swish. We could not buy hot dogs because they don’t take credit cards or cash. Kids were so disappointed.
My husband found a job in a gardening company. His boss is young and seemed very nice. He said he takes good care of his workers. They can choose their working time; it is either 7-15 or 10-18. But when my husband started working he received an email in the evening informing him he doesn’t have a paid break but has to work an extra hour to compensate for his lunch break. He usually took only a 20 minutes break. My husband was very upset about this email and couldn’t even fall asleep. He found this to be very exploitative. They usually work in private gardens where they don’t even have access to restrooms during their working time.

I live in an apartment block and I have a neighbour. I always bring cakes and invite her to come to my house. She has never invited me to hers. I ring her bell and she opens the door just a little bit, greets me and receives what I brought her. Usually, I bring some of our national dishes or cakes that I made myself. She is always excited and thankful, but only takes the food and closes the door, never inviting me in. When I invited her to my house, I tried to bring her closer to what our customs and mentality are. I explained that, in my country, neighbours are like family. I told her that whenever she feels sad or under stress, or whenever she needs something, she can come to my house for a coffee and a chat. She didn’t understand how we do it, it is so different from customs here, but she has come a few times and that was nice. Then she reported that my washing machine was too loud and that there were cigarette buds under my balcony. She did not tell me anything but filed an official complaint. I would have preferred if she had told me first what was bothering her.
It was autumn, the days were still long. I decided to go to a viewpoint to watch the sunset. I was watching the city and it felt so good. It was my dream to come here and here I was. I realised it right there, at that moment. It was a good day. Nothing special, but just to be there and to realise I am here now felt really good.

Yesterday I sat in an expensive cafe. I treated myself to a latte and a kardamombulle. I watched the snow fall through the window while enjoying my coffee. It was only the second time I have sat in a cafe since I came here, 6 months ago. I really needed to feel normal. The coffee and the pastry tasted great. I really enjoyed it.
As an activist, Critical Images reminded me that talking about human rights is not old-fashioned. As an artist, Critical Images have encouraged me to formulate a response to dignified representations, and not only stay within the realms of problematizing. As an artist and researcher concerned with the ethics of representation, Critical Images have pushed me to rethink and reevaluate my work and confirm and extend my ethical principles. As an artist who felt that the work I do is not important, Critical Images offered me support and reassurance that being critical towards my own practice is important. As a choreographer, Critical Images has expanded my notion of the performative of the photograph. As a citizen of the world, Critical Images have made me determined to reflect upon the ways in which we can make dignity a universal privilege.

As a citizen of a country with a heavy colonial past, Critical Images highlighted how apparently distant pasts manifest themselves on the everyday lives of the people. As a citizen of a Nordic welfare state, Critical Images taught me to look into my own country’s colonial past. As a critical person, Critical Images added more critical tools to my shed. As a critical thinker and maker, Critical Images supported my belief that there is no innocence—that we are all involved in the injustices of all places, all cultures, all geographies. As a curator dealing with war photography, Critical Images reminded me of how important it is to start every research first from the perspective of human dignity. As a critical person, Critical Images have made me think of what a more bodily based image practice would be like. As a foreigner, Critical Images have made me more alert when I relate to, and address, questions of identity, nationality and geographical borders. As a filmmaker, Critical Images have challenged me to constantly test, seek out and experiment with methods that allow us to see beyond the horizontal plane of image production. As a filmmaker, Critical Images have given me the opportunity to discuss tools and methods. As a foreigner, Critical Images have changed how I relate to, and address, questions of identity, nationality and geographical borders. As a friend of "others", Critical Images have supported my struggle with a growing sense of estrangement. As a Harun Farocki fan, the work and films of Catarina Simão impressed me deeply. As a homosexual person, Critical Images has alerted me to the fact that no one is safe from injustice until everyone is safe from suffering. As an image-maker, Critical Images confirmed my belief that there are no easy answers to the question of the relationship between images, art, and dignity but also emphasized it is a question that must be repeatedly asked.

As an immigrant struggling to maintain my integrity and dignity in precarious circumstances, Critical Images provided a supportive space where I felt accepted and connected. As an interdisciplinary person, Critical Images has exposed me to the importance of many more disciplines and how to put them in relation to one another. As a knowledge producer, Critical Images has made me aware that an image should respect dignity and give the people a voice to express their points of view. As a lonely artist, Critical Images gave me a community. As a mother, Critical Images made me think in silence. As a person, Critical Images has reminded me that it is my responsibility to include my emotions in my response to undignified images. As a person being brought up in an environment of hetero masculine heroism and the glorification of violence, Critical Images has made me more aware of the effects it has on my person and the language I use. As a person conditioned to self-victimization by my family history, Critical Images has made me acknowledge more clearly the ambivalent nature of suffering. As a person living in an interracial relation, Critical Images renewed my hope in thinking of whiteness as a contract that can be broken. As a person who does not identify with geographical borders, Critical Images emphasized the significance of many new transnational struggles and made me relate to them. As a refugee, Critical Images showed me that one must take back the power over one's image. As a reserved person, Critical Images taught me that it is fine to share emotions within a professional setting. As somebody afraid of stepping outside their comfort zone, Critical Images provided a safe space for experimentation. As someone who is aware of the power of the image, Critical Images showed me the importance of finding a community of peers who actively and critically engage with image production in the field of research, arts and media. As a student, Critical Images has legitimated my presence at secret archives and closed libraries. As a student, Critical Images made me appreciate Katarina Nitsch and Abounaddara’s struggle for human dignity and an educational process through which they created an international network of concerned artists, researchers, and image-makers. As a teacher, Critical Images has showed me how important it is to create a safe space for engaging students across different platforms to think critically about images. As a viewer, Critical Images has brought my attention to a relationship between seeing and touching. As a visual artist, Critical Images has played an important role in my practice by making me more alert when perceiving images of pain and suffering. As a visual artist, Critical Images helped me be critical to practices that do not respect dignity and use others’ suffering as means, instead of an end. As a white Queer artist, Critical Images opened my eyes to the seemingly invisible, yet ever-present, internalized racism, xenophobia and homophobia. As a word worker, Critical Images made me think of what a more bodily based image practice would be like. As a writer, Critical Images pushed me to dissect what I write so to make space for others to be heard, seen and read—in my own words and silences.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Guest and Contributors
- Critical Images 2018/19

Rebecca Adami, associate professor of education,
Åsa Bharathi Larsson, art historian
Nathalie Delbard, professor of visual arts
Maryam Fanni, graphic designer
Marie Hållander, writer and doctor of pedagogy
Charif Kiwan, filmmaker
Peter Nestler, filmmaker
Katarina Nitsch, artist
Stefan Ramstedt, film scholar and critic
Klas Roth, professor of education
Catarina Simão, filmmaker
Rebecka Thor, art critic and doctor of aesthetics
Malin Wahlberg, professor of cinema studies
Raya Yamisha, film editor

CRITICAL IMAGES

Critical Images is an advanced level course which aims to establish an interdisciplinary discourse and contribute to a universal reflection on the right to the image by building on the Syrian film collective Abounaddara’s framework of the right to a dignified image as a universal human right.

The course is initiated and led by the artist Katarina Nitsch in collaboration with Charif Kiwan from the Syrian film collective Abounaddara. It is additionally taught by national and international guest lecturers; artists, filmmakers, and researchers within visual media, philosophy, aesthetics and law.

The course approaches the right to the image in terms of its practical application as a quotidian and professional practice to be implemented by artists. We try as well to promote a universal debate on the dignity of representation in dialogue with researchers, lawyers, activists and media.
WORKS BY PARTICIPANTS OF CRITICAL IMAGES 2018/19

Gonçalo Birra unravels how history is made invisible by the presence of a highly visible public monument, Ania Domanska points at the challenge for a filmmaker to avoid the traps of repeating a stigma when portraying a person in a context which already categorized her as a victim, Tuukka Haapakorpi proposes a way for the algorithms of role-playing games to become a domain for developers to defy the visual representation of binary gender roles in the fictive worlds they set the conditions for, Amra Heco shares an unexpected meeting with an image which brought back a memory that until then had been obscured by the internalisation of a dominant visual narrative, Baptiste Jopeck takes us on a cinematic journey on the militarization of photography through the invention of the Panorama, Siriol Joyner is making a parallel between choreography and ethnography, posing the question of what we are inscribing in others and what is being inscribed in us through these practices, Anna Knappe shows how the overflow of one kind of imagery from a specific place or country makes it difficult to see or even imagine this place as more, or something else, Mateusz Kula, is tracing the imagery mirroring the ideology of fascism through the monologue of a person who is equally very close and distant, Charlotte Landelius found an image which reached through with an important message in the investigation of the circumstances for its becoming, Gloria Luca reflects on how the function of visual representation has been instrumentalized for domination purposes for centuries, Chafic Najem is contesting the dominant gaze on incarceration and the image of its subject by reflecting on the dominant discourses and sensational images and their ability to render prison testimonies invisible, Marie Silkeberg finds a way for human dignity to become visible in the tension between images and language challenging each other, Sandra Vitaljic brings forth glimpses of the mundane through stories of women struggling for the right to a dignified life in a new environment.

The works are in progress, presented at their current stage. To be continued.