Mapping images – when words don’t work

During a project I prefer to work with image rather than text. Words can be very dominating and determinative. My thoughts easily become too concrete and fixed when I write them down. The descriptions give the images a too early diagnosis: You know what they are, but you don’t know what to do with them. Therefore my working process is very limited in words, which makes writing this text kind of counter-intuitive.

Almost every film project I do begins with some kind of mood board, with images collected mostly from searching the Internet. In the selection process I let myself be seduced by color, motive, framing or lighting. I look for images that reek, pulsate or have a whiff of something eerie. The images are not facts or truths or even ideas. It is something that I cannot decipher using words, but by letting the images form different patterns and pathways I start to understand where I’m going. When juxtaposing the different images I look for patterns that are indefinite, with no beginning or end. Together the images form a kind of map, a navigation tool to gather or search for stories and connections. It is a way for me to zoom in and out.

The mapping process is a way for me to try to “make” the images “speak” to – and contrast each other. I try to extract meanings that I cannot
formulate with words. When the images interact or pull off in different directions I start to discover clues to the stories that the images are telling. This process helps me find my way through a story I don’t really know yet. The images form new images in my mind, and new relations and ideas appear. The mapping process deals with my visual information synchronously. It is a non-linear process where I move the images around and try out different constellations and visual pathways. With all images gathered, many different connections or constellations are possible. Some images will stand out through repetition, color, size, and so on. Others will operate as a choir, a perspective or a contrast.

The works I make and present are generally films/videos with a narrative and, to some extent, a linear structure. The mapping process on the other hand is a montage that is not linear. When I edit, I work on a timeline, the images follow one after another, and at that stage many selections and rejections have already been made. When I map my pictures on a wall it is still an open-ended process.

When the German art historian Aby Warburg (1866-1929) experimented with juxtaposing images in big clusters, he discovered that they revealed something more when positioned together. Ties created in the togetherness of the chosen images provided a different kind of knowledge or meaning that a single image would not provide.
I share this view upon the visual and not yet formulated knowledge. I work with incoherent sensations and with implicit connections. By juxtaposing pictures in my montages I look for these sensations and connections. When you put an image close to another, the combination provokes an affect that makes a specific kind of knowledge accessible – knowledge through imagination.

It is a sort of unconscious recollection, a kind of cognitive knowledge that is carried by the combination of images. The images are not obvious associations between different things; they are rather a way to grasp the unconscious. For me it is like when you recognize something that you didn’t know you knew.

My image selection is not directed at a specific part of a film project: The images are used as a thematic overview, as a development tool, e.g. the construction of the film set for my current project and as inspiration. There is no ranking between them. The route from inspiration to construction is not linear either: My pictures of props and backdrops for the film intermingle with the images that are already part of the map. These new images produce new associations and connections. Even as I gather and construct the

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1 This idea has been brought forward by the French art historian and philosopher Georges Didi-Huberman. For example he elaborates on it in an interview in connection to the exhibition “How to Carry the World on One’s Back”, curated by him at Reina Sofia, Madrid, in 2011.
different parts of the film, these elements feed back into the thematic and inspirational mapping. The map becomes multi-functional.

Some pictures gain more authority than others, get singled out somewhat and start to have their autonomous life and carry their independent stories. It is easy for me to get seduced by the stories that stand out in the images – even though – or maybe because they diverge from the overall story of the entire map. This can be a difficult process. Should I let myself be tempted by new connections and the autonomous stories I keep finding in the images? Or do I have to follow a plan? To what extent should the different elements determine the outcome and how much do I force a definite construction upon the images? It can be exiting to see one thing turn into another, just by replacing its neighboring image. All I have to do is change my focus or framing of the collected images. This can easily become a long, confusing and messy affair, but if I want out I stay and go with the most pushy images and I start planning, constructing and filming. However getting out of the messy affair requires some timing; the narrative needs to mature, but it can’t get to old or lost in thought.

Only after I’m well into the film editing process and have an overview of the footage, I begin to formulate issues that I recognize in both the film edit and in my map. I organize the most recognizable issues in themes or subdivisions. In that way I get an even clearer overview of the narrative.
For the map accompanying this essay, the subdivisions are as following:

1) Lies, stories and misrepresentations
2) Liminality, multifunctional, insecurity and confinement
3) Nowhere and anywhere
4) Control and chaos

Each of these subdivisions includes a group of pictures on the accompanying map. Each picture is indicated by a number, which can be seen on the graphic representation of the map in the following page. The comments for the images, which follow on the next pages, illustrate the loose connections and themes the images have provided me with. It can be questions, statements, quotes, wonderings, explanations, associations or descriptions – whatever the images led me to think.

The accompanying map and its four subdivisions have guided my current film project, which yet has no title. It involves two characters, incoherent conversations and multiple screens. The filmic narrative is set in eerie and uncanny, semi-recognizable but yet strange settings.

With the presentation of the film work at Gallery Mejan in mid October 2015, this process, which has begun November 2014, will be concluded.
Lies, stories and misrepresentations

1. This image reminds me of the movie “The talented Mr. Ripley”. To pretend to be something you are not in order to get something from others. But what does it mean to be genuine and why is that a good thing?

25. 104. 105. 106. The white van has become an urban legend. Most reports of children being snatched off the streets by men in white vans are false. It is a story that plays on parents’ worst nightmare and the reports increase in number at the beginning
of school start. The myth probably began when the American FBI created a profile for organized killers. The typical profile had duct tape, knife, scissors and that sort of stuff and drove around in a white van with no windows. Media tends to reproduce this image.

120. Incomprehensible information, perhaps it is an accurate representation, but the images are somehow foreign.

49. Erect skirting boards. Sitting on the wall along the floor where it covers any gap between the floor and wall while making a neat and practical completion and also a way to hide electrical cords.

53. Trinkets make rooms look like home; somehow the trinkets share the memories or become a collective of memories. The trinkets are sometimes forced to take on a symbolic meaning by the owner.

87. Patterned fabric is a practical choice if you want to hide stains.
Liminality, multifunctional, insecure and confined

3. 11. 16. 21. 30. 85. 99. 100.
The anthropological meaning of liminality is a transition phase between an established order of defined differences between one and the other and a state where you are neither one nor the other. This phase is characterized by risk and chaos.
The empty room is uncanny in a way. It is nothing and lacks performativity. There is a potential but it is not fulfilled. Emptiness spins the imagination without limitations.

4.
Maybe it is a secondary home?
There is stiffness in the room; — an awkwardness —, like holding your breath. It is put on pause.

90.
Sparse function, entertainment, pastime, isolation or practicing the talent for looking ahead, keeping calm, having an overview, being able to figure out the opponent.

32.
Reminds me of this quote from my dad:
“I do not believe in anything, I’m not superstitious, I’m really an atheist. When I get buried I will in advance have written down what I want to say to all the people I love. And I want to have some festive music as well. Do you want sadness or a party? For me it is important to say all the good things before it is too late. Some Indians told me once that at their
funerals nobody cried or were sad, because you should have said the right things while time was. It is somehow natural you know?“

15. 119.

27.
Isolation, punishment, waiting, alone, unjust power relations, hysteria.

10.
A multifunctional and basic room
Somehow it is both personal and impersonal. Obviously it is not a permanent accommodation or housing. It is probably used for a limited period. It is gloomy and has a heavy atmosphere. The image of the room pretty quickly sets a tone; it is nauseating, delightful and thrilling.

34. 35.
A storm is brewing or something from the outside is threatening. Barricading oneself. Dissolution. Uncertainty and danger.

111.
Velvet and sun, heavy and light, color.

91. 95.
The multi-functionality of the room – bedroom and living room – gets misunderstood because of the small space. The awkward positioning of the chair next to the bed reminds me of a scene, where someone is watching over the dying.
“April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.
Winter kept us warm, covering
Earth in forgetful snow, feeding
A little life with dried tubers.”

T.S Eliot – The Waste land

A shaky snapshot, nice color details, a potentially unsafe situation. Something is lurking.

A secret room, no identification of where you are, nothing reveals it, bewilderment. The emptiness is threatening and there is no place to hide.

Hidden control in the coziness, lines and light.

Nowhere and anywhere

Carefree, Indian summer, good times, sound of old 16 mill. camera.
Shady business, experiments. Hidden away from others because of embarrassment or possible retribution.

26. 108.
A need to get lost or to be invisible.
Choose the smaller roads instead, and the dark.
You have to be patient and not in a hurry.

29.
Passivity, paralyzed, possessed, the unknown, anxiety, fear, acceptance.

31.
In some cases the dark and confined spaces are more inviting than the big and bright ones.

39. 121.
Audience or judges? Either way it is many who want something from one (few) person(s).
Assessments and evaluations. Forced or desired?

107.
In a dream, it can be different places/spaces or different scenarios. The one thing, which always is the same, is that I can’t see anything. Everything is foggy and blurry and I don’t know where I am. I exert myself to see but never succeed.

123. 126.
Limited intimate sphere, acceptance of being a number, accepting social codes. The back against the wall, and a lot of open space in front of you, and a lot of possibilities for awkward sounds and glances which involuntary will meet.
Control and chaos

8. Surveillance, stationary speed. Harmless or creepy?

9. The moment just before or after something unpleasant happens. It is unclear what is actually going on. I guess and speculate and I have my prejudices.

6. To put your life in the hands of someone else, maybe the authorities. To be examined and taken care of puts you in a vulnerable position. Naivety and blind trust. Power relations.

12. Not to be able to read certain situations. Not to know how to handle certain things. Confusion, isolation, anger; disbelief in oneself, in someone else or in a system.

13. Placing judgment at an all you can eat.

17. 18. 89. 103. Lavishness, euphoria and exaggerated needs, lead to loss of control. Possibility for addiction; first it is good times, then hard times.
“Dog eat dog world”. Social codes and expected behavior. It is never enough and it will make you weary.

19. 37. 98. The brain can be a treacherous ally; known territory can suddenly seem foreign in the dark. The night is the time of thoughts; it is the time of an inner enlightenment, however the brain can deceive that enlightenment. And out of nothing comes a monster, a sense of someone is watching you. When should you trust your gut, when is it paranoia?

22. 36. Expect the worse and don’t trust anybody. Every story involving more than one person will have different viewpoints and outcomes.

41. 42. 50. 55. Try to make sense of it all by organizing and getting an overview. The feeling of having control can prevent drowning, when you have to gather anything of a large quantity. It is empowering to feel in control and horrible when the opposite applies.

38. 114. Control demands a great overview and discipline, you have to be able to obtain a lot of information at one time, but there will always be something that you miss. It may lead to power and powerlessness.

75. 77. 78. 79. 84.
Control or lack thereof over the light.

46. 57. 64. 66. 72. 80.
Construction.
Parts of the scenography, organizing and naming walls, a puzzle, efficiency, planning ahead. Do the fragments serve the function of the whole?

86. 127.
Control and repetitions, infinite focus point.

96.
Selection requires overview and patience.
109. 110.
Distance and surveillance, envy and loneliness, the uncomfortable silence.

113.
Repetitions and patterns.

40. 115. 122.
Neat and tightly – to feel clean, right, accepted and belonging. Try to blend in and not make a scene.
Making something unpleasant look nice calms the mind.

116.
Neutral, inviting and authoritarian.

117.
Incomplete information, the situation can be read in more than one way, both negative and positive.
102.
"Man vill bli älskad, i brist därpå beundrad, i brist därpå fruktad, i brist därpå avskydd och föraktad. Man vill ingiva människorna något slags känsla. Själen ryser för tomrummet och vill kontakt till vad pris som helst.”

Hjalmar Söderberg – Doktor Glas

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2 “One wants to be loved, in lack thereof admired, in lack thereof feared, in lack thereof loathed and despised. One wants to instill some kind of emotion in people. The soul trembles before emptiness and desires contact at any price.”