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THematics: hosting texts up to 1000 words or artists’ contributions focusing on a single theme or practise.

Expecting Future: sub section of THematics, hosting texts envisioning possibilities for the future and positioning the potentials of the to-come-true. As expecting future requires awareness of the present, this section will gather a variety of contemporary practices, attitudes and tendencies.

Artists’ Special: hosting texts on, interviews with and conversations between artists.

Critics’ Corner: hosting reviews on exhibitions, performances, publications, events, screenings.
Internet Holocaust
Panda Fuck
Crossing Dystopia
Martini Metal
Urine Bottle
I969II
: BLACK EYES
U(RiN2)
GREECE no MORE
No MORE fat
Vegan Vagina
Fug into your Lips
Cunt Hope Failure
Smoking Ash
No Eternal Plastic Bottle
Stamp my Art
ART do not save you, believe me
Market is my salvation
No Global
Zero is THE Number you Need
Get closer
Post my Tongue
Tongue Into Eternity
Orange Adobe Flesh
Don't 't 't THINK secure
It's Over

My Body is not my Temple
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Opium Free Press
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Number Humiliation
EU Totemic Culture
Voice Bombing Actions
UV Glass
L'Oreal Scream
Post Post Post
Blood Blogs
Record Proust Masturbation
Wikisperm
Hybrid Atrial
Fearless Whiskey
Pink Eugene
Surreal Techno
MCMXXXV
The Rebirth of Dialogue

If we were apprentices of listening rather than masters of discourse we might perhaps promote a different sort of coexistence among humans: not so much in the form of a utopian ideal but rather as an incipient philosophical solidarity capable of envisaging the common destiny of the species. (Fiumara 1990, p. 57).

My own shift in interest from the active/production side of the creative process to the receptive/perceptive side seems to coincide with an ethical turn in the arts. This ethical turn revalorizes the act of listening in a dialogical practice that uses the sentient body to reconnect with its environment.

Since Bakthin, there has been a re-evaluation and re-orientation of the importance of dialogue within the classical, rhetorical tradition dating from Socrates and Plato. In The Rebirth of Dialogue (2004), James P. Zappen gives an overview of how "the emergence of dialogue as a response to cultural values embedded within printed texts, beginning as early as Bakthin and extending to recent discussion of the new digital media" (Zappen 2004, p. 3) mirrors the way in which Socratic dialogue had been a response to an older, oral tradition. In order for dialogue – as an exchange of utterances – not to become cacophony, each participant in the dialogue also has to practice 'an active viewing of each utterance from the perspective of the other' (id, p. 43). The dialogue is in opposition to monologic rhetoric. It proposes "openness and incompleteness, becoming rather than being, the created rather than the given, the unfinished rather than the finished." (id, p. 42) This form of dialogue also clearly differentiates itself from the dialectic. Its purpose is not to persuade the other but to let new ideas emerge out of a creative interaction between many voices.

Gemma Corradi Fiumara is a contemporary philosopher who looks at the same Socratic tradition but through the lenses of such 20th century philosophers as Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Gadamer. In The Other Side of Language, A Philosophy of Listening (1990), she pleads for a reappraisal of the receptive act of listening within a dialogical practice. Fiumara opens her book with the observation that in the history of Western thought, 'logos' is mainly aimed at 'saying', which is often the equivalent of 'defining' (Corradi Fiumara 1990, p. 8) and has no 'recognisable references to the notion and capacity of 'listening' (id, p.1). This lack of a practice of listening, according to Fiumara, is also responsible...
for the growing subdivision and fragmentation of our knowledge. As we institutionalize we tend to listen to and support only our own areas of interest and lose the ability to listen to the larger frames of life. For her, the lack of listening has severe ecological consequences (cf. the quote above) and she continues to argue that listening is the precondition of good research (id., p. 151) and of creative thinking itself.

The art of listening and a dialogical practice are fundamental to my work as a dance dramaturg. Out of the ongoing conversations I had with artists arose the desire to make some of these dialogues public and to offer them a stage to be ‘performed’ upon.

The body:language talks

The idea for the body:language talks came out of a number of conversations with Emma Gladstone, one of the producers and dance curators at Sadler’s Wells London. The idea was to have an in-depth conversation with an artist/choreographer that was not linked to a particular performance, like conventional pre- or post-performance talks, but that would stand on its own and would raise a public interest for an audience willing to buy a ticket for it. We decided on an hour and a half format, always on a Monday evening at 7pm. The talk would be illustrated with video fragments from the ‘body of work’ of the artist, or from sources that inspired them, and I would also pre-select a number of quotes that I would bring in at random, depending on which direction the talk would go, to illustrate or further nurture it and to bring the oral conversation into a dialogue with a corpus of written texts.

The talks were presented on the stage of the Lilian Baylis Studio in a simple, yet staged scenography. We also expressly decided not to hold a Q&A session with the audience afterwards, but instead to always offer the opportunity of joining us on stage at the end and addressing the artist in a more personal and intimate way. We decided that the overall theme of the talks would be the place of the body in the work of the artist, and relating this to a wider debate on the body in philosophy, science, medicine, anthropology, the arts… Depending on the affinities of the artist, a more specific theme would be defined for each individual talk. Finally I found it very important to know the artists personally very well, either because I had collaborated with them as a dance dramaturg or curator or because I had a strong personal friendship with them.

Richard Sennett develops a similar argument to Fiumara in Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation (2012) and discusses how the lack of dialogical practice and the failure to exercise one’s listening skills is one of the main reasons for the diminishing social cohesion in the workplace. As a sociologist, Sennett has been conducting extensive research on both the working conditions of back-office workers on Wall Street and those of computer programmers in Silicon Valley. His research provides both quantitative and qualitative data on how a short-term perspective has taken over on all levels of work, and how ‘stability in the work has become a stigma’ with ‘project labour acting as an acid solvent, eating away at authority, trust and cooperation’ (Sennett 2012, pp. 162-163). Sennett describes several new pathologies such as anxiety and withdrawal, either into narcissism or complacency, that arise as a result of this process. He not only criticizes, but also tries to offer a vision and strategies for reversing or transforming the current state of affairs. One of the main strategies he proposes, besides reviving rituals, is to practice dialogic skills such as ‘listening well’, ‘managing disagreement’ or ‘behaving tactfully’. He also underlines the importance of recognizing the listener’s share in a discussion, realizing that receptivity means paying attention to both verbal and non-verbal concrete details in order to understand not only what is said but the underlying assumptions as well. Cooperation requires listening and only by doing so, are we able to ‘weave’ the complexities, whether of society, of life in the city, of a group gathering or a choreography.

The first series of talks took place in November-December 2008, when as part of the six-month sabbatical, I was on a month-long residency at the October Gallery in London. There were four talks on four consecutive Mondays and I spent the weeks leading up to each talk preparing for it: rereading the ‘body of work’ of the artist; rereading everything that had been written about it; meeting up with the artist. For the first two talks, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui and Akram Khan were the obvious choices. They were the artists I had collaborated with most intensively as a production dramaturg and they were both associate artists of Sadler’s Wells. Since Sidi Larbi’s work is very much a contemporary form of storytelling with the body, I decided the overall theme for his talk would be The Mythic Body (body:language #1). We had worked very closely on a large group piece, Myth, in

The Mythic Body (body:language #1)
Jonathan Burrows: The Musical Body

The Musical Body (body:language to its edges. And for any experience, not emotionally but spatially, literary reflection on space. In the talk Rosemary reflected on introduced by a quote by Gaston Bachelard, whose was called The Spatial Body (body:language #3)

strong friendships out of this. Rosemary's talk, which Vooruit in Ghent in the 1990s and had developed latter in close collaboration with the composer Matteo Fargion, with whom I had also collaborated during my years in Caspersen, William Forsythe's artistic and life partner, other bodies'. The second guest that season was Dana Kien, we explored The Poetic Body

The spaces in between utterances

In On Dialogue (1996), the physicist David Bohm follows a similar line of thinking to Sennett. Social coherence in contemporary society is poor because there is a lack of 'shared meaning' (Bohm 1996, p. 32). This lack of shared meaning is the result of meaning being fixed in individually held positions. What we need to do, according to him, is to restore 'the flow of meaning' by allowing different voices to co-exist. For this we have to practice dialogue. Bohm underlines the importance of listening skills for successful dialogue and acknowledges that new meaning can also arise out of mis-perception, as well as inevitable gaps in the flow. The lack is very much related to Derrida's notion of the interval.

The success of this first season, both in terms of quality of content and audience attendance, prompted Sadler's Wells to decide to continue the series. A second season took place in the autumn of 2010.1 I decided to stick to the principle of only inviting artists I had a close relationship with, but I allowed myself to look beyond the disciplinary borders of dance. My first guest was Tim Etchells, the artistic director of the performance collective Forced Entertainment, whom I had befriended during their first visits to Belgium in the mid-eighties. In order to prepare the talk, I revisited Tim in Sheffield, his home base, and out of that visit the theme of The Imaginative Body (body:language #5) was born, or 'how language has the power to invoke other bodies'. The second guest that season was Dana Caspersen, William Forsythe's artistic and life partner, with whom I had also collaborated during my years in Vooruit. She is very articulate and has an articulate sense writing on the body and the collaborative processes within a contemporary dance company. The Transformative Body (body:language #6) explored amongst others the "ability to imagine multiple versions of the self", a proliferating, projective equation that moves out from where the body is to where the body might be" (Caspersen 2011, pp. 96-97). The last talk of the second season introduced by Alain Platel, under the wings of whose company, Les Ballets C de la B, I had formed my own identity as a dance dramaturg. With Alain, the obvious choice was to talk about The Political Body (body:language #7) or how "the political potential of art lies only in its own aesthetic dimensions" (Marcuse 1978, pp. XII-XIII).

Tim Etchells: But the possibility that language gives you to invoke another body is an abiding interest, partly because it does this weird performative manoeuvre on the spectator. Those pieces – Starfucker and Dirty Work – have a habit of getting you to picture relatively benign things, but as time goes on they will ask you to picture things that perhaps you might not want to picture, and then it gets into a very interesting territory: because you've read it, or heard it, you have already pictured it, but you kind of wish you hadn't. It tests the relationship between the viewer and the work.

"The body organizes sensation that arise out of tissue metabolism, and this is what we call consciousness. This somatic process is the matrix for the stories and images of myth." (Kelemen 1999, p. 5)

Guy Cools: You say that language has the capacity to make non-existing realities present. Does it also work the other way round – is the physicality of the body also a source for stories and imagination? I am thinking particularly about the autobiographical elements in your earlier work.

Tim: Yes, even though the work with Forced Entertainment has its conceptual basis, it is essentially made by a bunch of people being in a room together for very long periods of time – five month's worth of rehearsals. So the focus becomes less about your idea, but more about concrete things like how many chairs, how many people, all of those things. What interests me is the actuality of things – learning to pay attention to what is really there in front of you, people, bodies, juxtapositions, space.

Elizabeth LeCompte, the director of the Wooster Group, said that she has to go to the rehearsal studio in order to see how it doesn't work. She might have a great idea in her mind, but when she goes to the studio she finds out that it's crap. That is truth. You spend an awful lot of time looking at stuff that doesn't work. (From body:language #5, pp.1-13).

Tim Ingold offers a valuable semantic alternative to the term 'dialogue' In Making, Anthropology, Archæology, Art and Architecture (2013), by introducing the notion of ‘correspondence’, which can take place not only between humans but also between humans and their animate or inanimate environment, as well as between the craftsman/artist and his materials. Ingold borrows the term ‘correspondence’ from the increasingly obsolete art of letter writing. He defines two fundamental qualities of it. Firstly, it is always ‘a movement in real time’, which takes time and which ‘may go back and forth, without a clear starting point or end point’. Secondly, this ‘movement is sensitive’. The act of letter writing also implies a certain intimacy. Maybe we are losing our listening skills because we are afraid of that intimacy.

All the talks had been recorded, originally only to archive them, but after the continuing success of the second series, the desire grew to also publish them. Both Sadler’s Wells and the Jerwood Foundation, with the support of the Research Institute in Arts in Society of the Foyts School of Performing Arts in the Netherlands, raised the money to make a beautiful, bibliophile edition.

In editing this contribution for Nowiswere, Veronica Hauer rightly pointed out that the desire to publish the talks also arose in order to extend the intimate relationship of the ‘correspondence’ of the partners in the dialogue/talk to a third party, the reader. With the reader becoming a listener/witness of two or more people sharing their thoughts on artistic practices.

Meanwhile, a third season had already been planned for the autumn of 2012, continuing to expand the range of artist and subjects. With Joni D, one of the founders of the hip hop culture in the UK, and Soweto Kinch, we explored The Poetic Body – how, in hip hop culture, dance, music, poetry and political engagement are intrinsically related. With the puppeteer Sue Buckmaster we explored The Subversive Body or how puppets and objects allow the body to be treated in an ‘uncanny’ way. The final talk of this third season was with the London-based Israeli choreographer/ composer Hosh Flesher. In The Rhythmic Body we continued to explore the essential nature of rhythm as the main formal principle of editing the work.

Jonathan Burrows: It reminded me why I like working with scores, and it has to do with quieting the sensory experience of the body, which can often draw you back into a place that is familiar. Body patterning is so powerful that it will draw you back to what you always do. The graphic experience – something to do with the act of writing or drawing – seems to release an imagination different to the imagination released by moving or researching movement.

Matteo Fargion: The composer Morton Feldman often talked about notating music in order to slow him down, because of course you go to a piano and your fingers will play the chord you are familar with playing, and it is very hard to break those patterns. I have even tried things like playing the piano backwards. Feldman worked very much at the piano, but notating as he went along, in order to avoid those habits. So even for musicians I think the act of notating, and thinking about how to notate something clearly, gives you ideas of how to go on. (From body:language #4, pp.26-27).

The Musical Body (body:language #2).
Guy Cools: When I first prepared this talk I gave it the title 'The Urban Body', but then it felt as though that was too limited. And when I saw the show, I changed it to 'The Poetic Body'. It reminded me of one of my favourite philosophical quotes ever, by Foucault, in which he makes a link between poetry, dance and drunkenness as being three related 'art forms' in the Dionysian style: "Noisy ear, unstable repetitions, passionate violence and desires [...] of intoxication and dance, of organic gesticulation: the flash of poetry and of abolished time, repeated."

Jonz D: Well, let's see... "Noisy ear" – I think you have to turn up the music a bit more; "Unstable repetitions" – um-ch-ch-ch-um-ch... That's what makes me dance; "Passionate violence and desires" – Hey, we all love that, don't we; "Intoxication and dance" – I don't know if intoxication is the right word, but I would definitely say that once you get into the cipher, you know that you've just got to keep going and you connect to something uncontrollable that happens there; "Organic gesticulation" – [giggling] Yeah... there's a few people that understand what I'm getting at now...; "The flash of poetry and of abolished time repeated" – Soweto, maybe you've got an angle on that?

Soweto Kinch: I think it neglects the kind of restraint and control that you need to pull off a lot of Hip Hop disciplines successfully – you're not abolishing time at all, actually, you are very conscious of the metre and the constrains of time when you're dancing or emceeing, certainly when you're DJing. But I do like the allusion to being intoxicated – being possessed, if you like, by something else. (From body:language # 8, unpublished)

In his book *Conversation. Community + Communication in Modern Art* (2004), the art historian and critic Grant H. Kester introduces the term ‘dialogical art practices’ for contemporary art practices that ‘share a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange’, where ‘the conversation is an integral part of the work’ (Kester 2004, p. 8). As such, a dialogical art practice always ‘unfolds through a process of performative interaction’ (id, p. 10) and again shifts its focus from the productive to the receptive side of the creative cycle.

Finally, in the autumn of 2013 a fourth season was added with talks on Body and Light, with the choreographer Russell Maliphant and his long term collaborator, lighting designer Michael Hulls.
It is only when you are able 'to tell your story', as Ingold states, that you own it. It is how transmission of knowledge happens, and has long happened, in Eastern cultures and traditions such as the Buddhist or yogic one. What I also see in my work with a younger generation of artists, as well as the internet and its phenomena such as the TED-lectures, is a similar reevaluation of oral transmission without lacking the necessary rigour or depth. The dialogical nature of the body:language talks would always vary in degrees, depending with whom I was 'corresponding' and how our interaction would develop, with me always practicing my listening skills. If successful, it would create openings for new insights to arise in-between the utterances.


Notes
2 Emma recently left Sadler’s Wells to become the artistic director of the Dance Umbrella Festival. As a result Sadler’s Wells decided to replace the body:language talks by another format from autumn 2014 onwards.
3 In 2009 I wasn’t available to do a series, because I was primarily based and working in Canada.
4 The graphic designers of the book publication, Valle Walkley, received a national print design award for them.
5 Author’s translation from French. Original in Michel Foucault (1986), Sept Propos sur le septième Ange. Montpellier: Fata Morgana. p. 52.

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The first seven body:language talks can be ordered online at the web shop of Sadler’s Wells: www.sadlerswells.com/shop-online/
Today is the 24th April 2014. I am sitting in a cozy café in the first district of Vienna, reminiscing about my recent experiences in the US. I have just returned after a six months stay in Los Angeles as artist in residence and recipient of the MAK Schindler Scholarship. Sipping my beloved mélange, a typically Austrian coffee variety, which was served to me by a (typically) grumpy Viennese waiter, I re-play images I recorded in Los Angeles in my mind and take notes for the editing.

Today is the 99th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian genocide. The massacre and deportation of around 1.5 million Armenians living in the then Ottoman Empire has been marked by the 24th April 1915. As a “halfie” of mixed Turkish-German/Austrian ancestry with Anatolian great/grandparents who had witnessed the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, I feel as troubled by this unacknowledged tragedy as by the ever-haunting presence of the Holocaust in Vienna. Here I am, sitting silently on my own, as a Turkish-Austrian “halfie” in a Viennese café – lacking the words to commemorate a tragedy beyond my imagination.

Given the time difference, commemorations and protests for the recognition of the Armenian genocide will only start in a few hours in Los Angeles – in the part of town officially designated as Little Armenia. This historic hub of Armenian migration is located in East Hollywood, geographically overlapping with Thai Town.

From my Austrian perspective, it was fascinating to encounter the phenomenon of official designated ethnic enclaves, such as Thai Town and Little Armenia in the city of Los Angeles. One can’t imagine an officially designated Turkish Town or Little Istanbul in Vienna or Berlin – and perhaps that isn’t desirable either.

Long before my departure to Los Angeles, I had been curious what “official multiculturalism” – adopting Sara Ahmed’s concept referring to “a set of official responses to cultural diversity” – meant in the US and how it differs from the European context. Given the opportunity to conceive a research-based art project in Los Angeles, I set out to explore the city through its ethnic enclaves. In retrospect, I was rather naive and ignorant about the complexity of the subject.

Best described as a “conglomeration of small villages” by the British-born architectural critic Reyner Banham in the 1970s or as “72 suburbs in search of a city” by the writer Dorothy Parker, Los Angeles seemed spectacularly diverse at first and turned out to be profoundly segregated.

My audio-visual urban research of “official multiculturalism” in this fragmented metropolis led to an automotive odyssey through various parts of the city: from downtown, where Little Tokyo and Chinatown are located, to historic Filipinotown northwest of Downtown, then from Korea Town (K-town), which much to my surprise encompassed the more recently inaugurated enclaves Little Bangladesh and El Salvador Corridor, all the way down to Cambodian Town in Long beach, back to Little Ethiopia in West Los Angeles and from there to Little Armenia and Thai Town in Hollywood.
Despite the prominently placed municipal designations my initial assumptions of (ethnic) homogeneity within any of these areas proved fatally wrong. It did not take long until I realized that it could take several years to complete the project I had in mind. Due to my limited time in Los Angeles I had no choice but to select an area, which would allow me to explore the micro, aiming to reflect on the macro in my exploration of the “meso-cosm” of LA, as Edward W. Soja calls it. Since it is said to be one of LA’s most diverse neighborhoods, I decided to focus my research on Little Armenia and Thai Town in East Hollywood.

As a tourist you are most likely to end up visiting another part of Hollywood, where you are expected to take selfies in front of the Chinese theatre or shots of your favorite stars on the walk of fame. Perhaps you will even book one of the countless Hollywood bus tours on offer to have a glimpse at the house where Michael Jackson died. Another highlight of the tour would be the stop at a vista point, where you’d be given five minutes to take pictures of yourself and whoever is next to you in front of the Hollywood sign, surrounded by dozens of other tourists, posing for a new facebook profile picture.

Not too far off the tourist track, driving a little further East on Hollywood Boulevard, you can experience a totally different version of Hollywood. An area where young hip Angelenos would only come to lunch or dinner dates at one of the enticing Thai or Armenian restaurants, perhaps stopping to get a Thai massage or a fluid-check at one of the Armenian-owned auto shops, or buying some weed at one of the medical marihuana dispensaries on Sunset before leaving.

This area, also known as East Hollywood, a low-income working-class neighborhood, mainly home to Armenian, Latino and Thai immigrants is said to be the historic hub of Thai and Armenian migration to California.

If you come here early morning on a Saturday, you can witness busloads of Buddhist monks in bright orange robes, arriving from the nearby Wat Thai in North Hollywood, collecting offerings of food and locals praying for blessings in front of the spirit house adjacent to Thailand Plaza on Hollywood Boulevard.

Chanchanit (Chancee) Martorell, founder and executive director of the Thai Community Development Center, claims that Thai immigrants in the late 1960s first decided to settle here primarily because Hollywood was the only destination they knew in the United States. Obviously, they quickly found out that housing was cheaper in the Eastern part of Hollywood, which is why they moved there. Others followed in chain migrations.

Due to the Thai Community Development Center’s persistent efforts, a six-block stretch along Hollywood Boulevard – between Normandie and Western Avenue – was officially designated the world’s first and only Thai Town by the Los Angeles City Council in 1999. According to Thai CDC the designation of Thai Town served as a strategy to revitalize an otherwise neglected section of East Hollywood through cultural tourism.

If you walk down Alexandria Avenue from Hollywood Boulevard on a weekday you are likely...
going to meet Peter, a Lebanese-Armenian armed guard. It is his job to protect the pupils of the Rose and Alex Pilbos Armenian school while they cross the street to St. Garabed Armenian Apostolic Church. The church was built in the late 1970s and according to many is still the heart of the Armenian community in Hollywood. Inside, you may encounter a choir of elderly ladies wearing headscarves, praying and chanting ancient religious songs in Armenian.

The initiative for the creation of Little Armenia was started soon after the municipal designation of Thai Town by one of the local Armenian business owners, who preferred not to be interviewed in the framework of my project. In 2000 the LA City Council approved an area which bounded on the north by Hollywood Boulevard and Santa Monica Boulevard on the South to be designated Little Armenia, regardless of substantial spatial overlapping with Thai Town.

Editing the audio-visual material I had gathered, I chose to compose a triptych, hoping to transmit my somewhat stereoscopic experience of East Hollywood. As are my reflective field notes, the montage of Trans Angeles is still in-progress.

I remember sitting in a Thai coffee shop in East Hollywood, taking a break from filming in Little Armenia. Sipping my beloved Thai Iced Coffee, which was generously re-filled by the waitress, I would re-play images I had already recorded in my mind and take notes about what was yet to be filmed.

Suddenly I find myself in a place at about thirteen flight hours away from East Hollywood, sitting in a cozy café in the first district of Vienna. Sipping my beloved mélange, a typically Austrian coffee variety, I re-play images I had recorded in Los Angeles in my mind and take notes for the editing.

In exactly one year, on the 24th April 2015 will be the 100th anniversary commemoration of the Armenian genocide. I will be commemorating it in Istanbul.

1 Lila Abu-Lughod used the term “halfie” referring to “people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage” from Kirin Narayan (personal communication), see: Abu-Lughod, Lila: “Writing Against Culture”, in Fox , R.G. (ed.) 1991: Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present, Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, p. 466
Matthias Sohr

Play

2014

Lacquer on copper, epoxy resin and glassfiber, media player

Installation view „Plattform 14“, EWZ-Unterwerk Selna, Zurich:
Stefan Altenburger
Exhibiting Italian Experimental Film

A Review of the Off & Pop Retrospective at Centre Pompidou

The experimental film scene in Italy remains a largely unexplored field, as well as a deeply fragmented one. During the last few years though, some efforts, both from a scholarly point of view and from a curatorial perspective, have been carried out in order to clarify this complex history. Most recently, the film programme curated by Sergio Toffetti and Annamaria Lizzandell has directed the attention towards a specific historical moment of this production. The programme, entitled Off & Pop, first shown in Italy and then presented in a different configuration at Centre Pompidou earlier this year (January 8 – March 12), focused on the years before and after 1968 aiming to compare the Italian context to both the American underground scene and the (inter)national art world, as the title aptly suggests. This operation, albeit quite understandable, already carries within it a simplification of that panorama. Contrary to what happened with the brilliant and ambitious programme curated in 2011 by Giulio Bursi and Federico Rossin at the Vienna Filmuseum (The Night and the Day: Italian Experimental 1905-2010), in which the definition of experimental was stretched in time and spread across different genres, Off & Pop is framed historically and presents itself as a rather classical overview of the Italian scene around the 1960s. Even approaching the scene through this well delimited view on the past, the subject appears to be extremely complex and resists all attempts at possible simplifications and systematisation.

One of the difficulties that emerge from the programme is the intertwining of different contexts when considering Italian “underground” film, or more broadly “independent” film production. The most striking example is given by the beautiful short films by Mario Schifano, presented in 16mm prints preserved by the Cineteca Nazionale in Rome, and first presented at the Venice film festival in 2011. A crucial figure of the 1960s, Schifano has been considered the leading artist of what is often referred to as “Italian Pop Art.”“His importance though is not merely linked to such movement but spreads across different contexts, making him stand out as a key figure to understand the Italian context. To draw a parallel, one would think of Warhol as a reference, not so much for his artwork (even if there might be some similarities, most notably in the use of repetition of the same iconographic motif) but rather for the ability of gathering around him a whole scene of artists. Schifano happened to be the bridge for all of them to be involved (here four) once more and arranges them so that they partially overlap. Here, the interaction of the four images and their overlapping presence aims to produce a broken, elliptic narrative. Narrative in fact, even if mined by such devices, seems to be one of the distinctive features of De Bernardi’s work, as it is the same for another key figure of the Turin scene, lesser known abroad: Ugo Nespolo. Nespolo divided his film work between a strange blend of exploitation-camp movies (Un supersmaschio, 1975) and more art related production.

By not chance then, both De Bernardi and Nespolo made two portraits of Piedmontese artist Michelangelo Pistoletto. This series of film was commissioned by De Bernardi (co-directed with Paolo Menzio) and Pino Pascali (again all artists represented by L’Attilo) with the intention to work with a double screen. In Il mostro verde (1967), a film by De Bernardi (co-directed with Paolo Menzio) couple most notably the performance element with the typical American underground taste for kitsch or camp. Conceived as homage to Universal horror movies, not far from the work of Jack Smith, Il mostro verde also features Allen Ginsberg and Warhol's superstar Taylor Mead. De Bernardi recalled the influence of Warhol on his work, although he interestingly mentioned that the idea of working with a double screen came directly from Chelsea Girls (Andy Warhol, 1966) at the time that audiences in Italy had only read about it, and the film had not been actually seen. Due to technical difficulties, Il mostro verde, originally shot in 8mm, is now transferred onto video, thus fixing the work in a precise state, avoiding all the aleatory element of the double projection. Destinio (1968) multiplies the number of screens involved (here four) once more and arranges them so that they partially overlap. Here, the interaction of the four images and their overlapping presence aims to produce a broken, elliptic narrative. Narrative in fact, even if mined by such devices, seems to be one of the distinctive features of De Bernardi’s work, as it is the same for another key figure of the Turin scene, lesser known abroad: Ugo Nespolo. Nespolo divided his film work between a strange blend of exploitation-camp movies (Un supersmaschio, 1975) and more art related production.

Not by chance then, both De Bernardi and Nespolo made two portraits of Piedmontese artist Michelangelo Pistoletto. This series of film was commissioned by the artist in 1968 when he was having a solo show at the gallery L’Attico in Rome, run by Fabio Sargentini. As curator, Dominique Paini pointed out, introducing the screening on January 15, the episode by De Bernardi (entitled La vestizione) is probably closer to Carmelo Bene and Werner Schroeter (or even Philippe Garrel) than to the American underground. Pursuing an almost baroque-like aesthetic ideal, De Bernardi underlines the “traditional” roots of Pistoletto’s artworks, referring most notably all the classic religious iconography. On the other hand however, Nespolo’s film appears much more mundane, and follows the artist in his daily actions, and then in the streets of Turin carrying one of his sculptures in his car. This ambiguous and uncertain grey zone between documentation and mise-en-scène is one of the characteristics of Italian artist’s films of the time, so that one can say that the aim is precisely to blur the distinction between documentary and more staged situations. This is something clearly readable in other works of the era that recall the uses of film made in the Land Art context. The films by Luca Patella fall entirely within that category. In SKM2 (1968), for instance the artist documents one of his own performances plus other by Jannis Kounellis, Elio Mattiacci, and Pino Pascali (again all artists represented by L’Attilo gallery), but such documentation is staged for the camera, and Patella subsequently applied coloured filters to the different sequences, showing how the film could be considered itself an original artwork.

Another way of displaying artworks can be found in an interesting independent production directed by Sandro Francesca entitled Marie gravis (1968). Francesca, who starred as a child in Roberto Rossellini’s...
Europa 51 (1951), worked during some time as an assistant to French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch, a major influence of the French New Wave, most notably on Godard. Morire Gratis could be considered as some sort of Italian “new wave” film, much inspired by the French one, but the work has to be understood by looking at the contemporary art scene of the time. 

The main character of the film is an artist and the actor happens to be an artist himself: Franco Angeli. A key role is indeed played by one of his sculptures: the Roman wolf that Angeli produced twice in his career. In the film the sculpture is used as a hiding place for Marcella, an isolate one. Trained as a painter at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, Gioli moved to New York at the end of the 1960s, where he discovered Columbia University. He produced a series of films that can be considered as a peculiar form of lyrical/subjective film. Bacigalupo had seen films by Stan Brakhage and would later (in 1970) also translate his Metaphors on Vision in Italian, but his own strategies of filmmaking seem entirely different. Versus (1968), Sesanta Metri per il 31 Marzo (1968), Last Summer, (1970), and Cado (1970), were presented by the artist in dialogue with filmmaker and theorist Erik Bullot on February 26. They all formed a coherent body of work, and displayed an inventive use of superimpositions, close-ups (that from time to time recall the work of Nathaniel Dorsky) as well as an editing system that constantly pairs shots of natural, mundane elements, or even home movies up with cultural references (poems or images drawn from illustrated books). The subde blend of these elements make Bacigalupo stand out as one of the most over-looked figures in Italian experimental film. After a few years the artist quit his activity, choosing instead the academic path, becoming professor of English at the University of Genova.

Another figure who stands among the most original personalities of the Italian scene, with an entirely different career, is Paolo Gioli, whose films were screened on the opening night (January 8, introduced by scholar Philippe Dubois). Gioli is probably the most well-known Italian experimental filmmaker, and his work has been widely exhibited. Strangely enough though, his photographic work, which is extremely closely tied to the filmic one, is rarely shown together with his cinematic production. Gioli has been experimenting throughout his entire career with photographic and filmic devices, a practice we might read by bringing it close to Claude Lévi-Strauss’ definition of the “bricolage”. In fact, Gioli seems to draw the inspiration for his inventions from daily objects – from “whatever is at hand” as Lévi-Strauss would say – and turn them into cameras, projectors, printers, etc. He started his career with “cameraless” films, printing traces of his body and fingerprints onto transparent film leader (see Tracce di tracce, 1969). He eventually focused on an inquiry in the technological history of film, with an eye always turned to the pioneers of capturing motion (most notably Marey and Muybridge) or to key figures of the avant-garde (such as Dziga Vertov, Sergei Eisenstein, Luis Buñuel, to name but a few). Gioli proves to be one of the most prolific figures of the Italian scene, and yet, as it often happens, is an isolated one. Trained as a painter at the Academy of Fine Arts in Venice, Gioli moved to New York at the end of the 1960s, where he discovered the American experimental film. Once he got back to Italy, from 1970 onwards he was part of the Filmstudio in Rome, a cultural association and screening space devoted to the promotion of avant-garde film. Gioli’s production, however, has been distanced itself significantly from other filmmakers of the group, being more interested in an analytical approach to the filmic apparatus and to its genealogy rather than in poetic/lyrical, or diary film. The overview of his production found in the Off & Pop programme allowed to see the many facets of the artist’s filmography and, significant, was the only programme to include contemporary works (Quando i volti si toccano, 2012), thus stating the extreme coherence of Gioli’s oeuvre. His most celebrated work Film Stenopeico (1973-1981-1989) made without a movie camera, using a perforated (pinhole) stock containing 16mm film, produces a peculiar effect as if, in the author’s words, “it was made before the invention of cinema.” Here we find one of Gioli’s recurrent themes, an inventive form of media-archaeology. Gioli seeks to explore the unrevealed possibilities of the characteristics of film, constantly re-arranging and re-working the filmic apparatus. No wonder then that he found footage an elective affinity. Hence the artist was also represented in the thematic programme devoted to matters of appropriation and re-use of film with the beautiful short L’operatore perfetto (1979) in which he renders visible – and makes a screen out of – the central sprocket hole of a found Pathé Baby 9.5mm film.

Although the term is largely imprecise, “found footage” is a recurring trope in Italian experimental film. The thematic programme introduced by filmmaker and film historian Marco Bertozzi on March 5 featured some legendary works from the Italian underground. La verifica incerta (1964-1965) by Alberto Grifi and Gianfranco Baruchello is probably one of the key works of the era. Originally made from scraps of 35mm Hollywood films in Cinemascop and meant to be projected without the use of the anamorphic lens (so that the ratio of the image would not be correct), the film is a humorous and deconstructive play on the language of classic Hollywod, as well as an elegy for the elements discarded by the film industry. Considered as a homage to Marcel Duchamp (who also stars in a few shots of the film), La verifica incerta is the most accomplished result of the ready-made aesthetic applied to film in the Italian context. Some similar but lesser known experiments in the same vein had been carried out around that time by members of the “visual poetry” group Lamberto Pignotti and Lucia Marucci. Bassi, Pignotti, and Sparratore (1966-1967) are three catalogues of recurrent topics in classical cinema (kisses, fights, and gun shots). They present the established language of film as one of repetition and variation on the same themes, with a humorous hint accompanying the display of these materials. But the most original example of appropriation of existing film materials probably remains Piero Bar-gellini’s Trasferimento di modulazione (1969). Bargellini reworked a found porn movie by passing it into several chemical baths and reprocessing it. As a result, the obs-cene subject matter is given an uncanny nuance, since other images seems to appear on the emulsion. At one point, quite clearly, the shot of a man and a woman having sex are superimposed with the image of a skull, thus recalling the established link between Eros and Thanatos. But instead of being a deliberate superimpo-sition of another image, the visual effect comes from the peculiar reworking of the chemicals of film, which are supposed to charge on the original print, since the emulsion is reactivated by the heat of the projector’s lamp. The original print was meant, in the artist’s in-
tention, to decay and eventually disappear after repeat-
ted screenings, and a new “stabilised” version has been
produced by the Cineteca Nazionale for preservation
purposes. Bargellini, as Grifi and Baruchello, embracing
a poetic of decay, are not far from some other Europe-
an experiences such as the German and Austrian Mo-
terialfilme, which relied in great part on the fleeting na-

ture of the material components of the moving image.

The film programme closed with the screening of an-
other work by Alberto Grifi (co-directed with Massi-
mo Sarchielli), Anna (1975). The choice of ending the
retrospective with such a work is certainly meaning-
ful. Considered one of the masterpieces of Italian film
of the 1970s Anna closes a certain era of filmmaking
and inaugurates a new one. Massimo Sarchielli found
a pregnant junky teenager named Anna in Rome’s Pi-
aza Navona in 1972. Out of compassion, he brought
her home and fascinated by her character called up
filmmaker Alberto Grifi to shoot a film about her. Grifi
decided to use one of the first video recorders availab-
le to document the girl’s life thus allowing longer shoo-
ting time and limiting production costs. This immersive
experience resulted in 11 hours of video recordings,
which document the girl’s living situation, her life, her
ideas, and the whole environment surrounding her, but
breaking all boundaries between the subject obser-
v ed and the team of the shooting. The 11 hour video
was then transferred by Alberto Grifi on 16mm film,
through a device that he designed specifically for this
purpose, in order to screen it. Cut to the length of al-
most 4 hours, it was released in 1975 and shown at the
Venice film festival, where it was critically acclaimed.

This grandiloquent and touching portrait of a wo-
man and of the social environment that surrounds
her seems to end somehow a season of film experi-
ences in Italy’s scene. Whereas until the beginning of
the Seventies the primary concerns were devoted to
more formal matters of art making, the mid-seventies
become the turning point of a new sensibility. The in-
creasingly violent context in the country, the significant
political struggles, and the need for action significantly
changed the filmmaking activity and brought “experi-
mental” or “underground” film into the realm of the
militant documentary. Although the political and social
context does not necessarily determine all the chan-
ges in art making, it can be said that other types of
production were still carried on but would receive less
attention, from the point of view of both visibility (cir-
culation and distribution) and of the critical reception.

Anna, shot and produced by Grifi, who was a key figure
of the avant-garde of the 1960s, therefore stands as a
milestone of this change. The film, according to cura-
tor Sergio Toffetti, proves to be a dramatic and radical
experience that closes forever the Off & Pop era and
encapsulates it into the past. However, such statement
cannot be considered entirely true — and here again
we find part of the problems we have encountered so
far in our overview of the retrospective. Italian “expe-

timental” filmmaking did not end in 1975, but rather
took different paths, as the counterpoint programme
The Night and the Day by Bursi and Rossin has proved.
These other paths could be read as displacements or
side-steps both in a geographical meaning (as Italian
artists working abroad) as well as in terms of chan-
ging artistic practices. Ultimately, the two programmes
could be considered as complementary, rather than
opposed. Although a historical frame might be needed
to clarify the complex panorama of this production, in
order to fully understand the Italian scene, all bounda-
ries prove to be just obstacles to a clearer overview of
a rich and diverse multiplicity of practices.
Veronika Hauer
Cuckoo
2013/14
Pages: 40/41

Cuckoo
2012/14
Pages: 42/43
Cuckoo
A Jester
Always
Needs
A Stage

She does not exist outside her performance. Her humour is anarchic, dedicated only to an end in itself. A jester is amoral. Her pose always on the go.
One could neither pay too much nor too little attention to the jesters. If one paid them too much attention they would become audacious and start to swear at the citizens, who would in return start chasing the cuckoos through the city. If one paid too little attention, they would soon grow tired, mean and bored, forget their duties and beat the men standing nearby with their women watching.

For their offspring there were specially established jester schools, where children with a certain character were sent very early in their childhood. It was not the rule that a jester must also have a jester as a parent. But sometimes talent was passed on from one generation to the next.

In general, both the people and the court made a distinction between natural and artificial fools. While the artificial jester had some performative talent, which made showmanship and entertaining a breeze for them, the natural fools had some bodily peculiarities. The citizens watched those from a distance both with delight and disgust. In contrast, people almost sought out the company of the artificial fools, as they appreciated their talent to entertain.

As soon as the audience forgot its regulatory function and took their eyes off the jesters, there was chaos in town, the bells were ringing and all hell broke lose.

They never talked about what would happen if one of them left the company. There were five of them, but even though they spent day and night together, no bonds had grown between them. They had no future plans. Rather they had developed a common survival strategy for the present moment. I went back into the kitchen where the other four were sitting, pretending they had not listened to my conversation.

"Who wanted you for what?", finally, the smallest cuckoo broke the silence.
"A call from the administrative authority from a town up north. They saw me in Hamburg and want me to entertain urban dwellers. They tell me they got this sustainability program for preserving inner city peace and need some jester to reflexively hold a mirror up to the people. That is why I should be the court jester. A fixed institution in the community, board and lodging and voting rights in the district council. They are also politically motivated. They said I gotta come right away. I am their first choice, but there are still others and hesitating they said, was a character flaw that would only do damage to me, both here and elsewhere."

Sitting by the desk they watch me pack my bag, arranging bells, mirrors, a mi-parti club, shirts and trousers on the bed.

"So you are leaving? And what happens to the carnival tonight? How do you imagine the formation to march in, as a foursome? Without a female the arrow will not hit the bull’s eye."

They are certainly right. A bombastic entrance is the center of our performance strategy: As soon as we arrive we jump out of the bus into our costumes and out of the blue run through the gate hitting the city’s main road. As we cannot expect any discipline from our audience, which is basically carnivalesque, we rapidly march from the upper part of the street from left to right and form an arrow with just one person up front. This human arrow darts down the road at a racy tempo, past the masses to the left and right.

Instead of an answer, I form a gun with my middle and forefinger and consecutively shoot the first three of them, who fall over the table with loud sighs. Then I hit the last one, who interrupts his laughter with a cry, before falling down the floor from his chair.

Posterwork (42x29cms)
Text: Veronika Hauer. Translation: Christoph Marek.
Photographs: Veronika Hauer, Rudolf Steckholzer.
Another version of this work was first published in German in: Auto, September 2012.
http://www.theselection.net/zeitschrift/
Christopher Richmond:
I recently re-watched Au Hasard Balthazar (1966). Although Bresson’s films are narrative, I think he had an aversion to plot. His films have a series of events, which have a rise and fall, but he doesn’t seem particularly interested in creating a dramatic story; rather, his interest seems to be in evoking emotions through the manipulation of gesture and events. Au Hasard Balthazar is told mostly through the eyes of the donkey Balthazar and follows his life from birth to death. Balthazar is an observer in the film. I don’t know Balthazar’s thoughts, but through his eyes I can bring my own conclusions to the characters. Bresson leaves the viewer to deduce what’s occurring outside the frame; he includes shots of parts of bodies and objects instead of showing the whole. A doorknob instead of a door, a wheel instead of an automobile, or a foot or hand instead of a person. Hands and feet are more important than faces and Bresson uses an array of lower-body shots emphasizing the hands and feet of his characters and Balthazar’s hoofs. We see hands embracing Balthazar with love and hands whipping him. We see hands finger-printing in the police station, hands slapping each other and hands on the Bible. We are first introduced to characters through their hands.

I’ve always been drawn to Bresson’s work because several important narrative events occur beyond the frame. With his focus on cropping and cutting away, he shows that the part can evoke an image with greater precision and mystery than the whole. In an interview I re-read after watching the film again, Bresson explains why hands and gestures are so important. “The hand is autonomous, our gestures, our limbs are nearly autonomous. We no longer control them.” In Au Hasard Balthazar and many of Bresson’s films, movement and gesture seem automatic, and not a result of conscious understanding. In another interview, he explained, “gestures discover us.” This I find to be a marvelous idea. In many ways I think this defines the ideas we are just starting to speak to.

Barbara Kapusta: 
Thank you for bringing up Bresson’s Au Hasard Balthazar. It is such a beautiful film. Every movement is carried out thoughtfully, as if the protagonists were constantly worried one might miss the special moment of a glimpse, a hand slowly caressing Balthazar’s forehead, or touching the handrail of the stairs as they ascend. All those careful gestures exchanged between Maria and her lover. In the night when she picks flowers...
for Balthazar, rests on a wooden bench and their hands touch for a second. Bresson’s way of staging these encounters is so simple and beautiful.

I love small precise things, objects, sentences, gestures — everything that might escape my attention. I realized that what I enjoy so much about poses, gesticulation, non verbal cues, body language and movement is how we constantly “miss” them. So often we overlook subtle changes in pace, position, posture. We always miss something. Related to that notion is the idea of the sign. I often ask myself how we distinguish random movements from signals. Everything could be a message. Everything has the potential to be one.

C.R.

“Everything could be a message. Everything has the potential to be one.” I agree.

When I first watched For Beginners (all the combinations of the thumb and fingers) I was drawn to how the work oscillates between familiar and unfamiliar gesture. I wanted to read into the extension of the index finger. “What is he pointing to?” Yet I was puzzled by the extension of a lone pinky finger. The space in between these two gestures is mesmerizing and is where the work’s potency resides. A push and pull, unwilling to settle itself or accept any gesture being read in one way or another. I agree that Available Light operates in a similar viewing space. In the piece the camera hones in on the operator, whose face is mostly obscured by a colorful, spinning pinwheel, so the gesture, not the face or its expression is in the foreground. I want the viewer to have to look for clues in long, slim fingers repeatedly pressing, twisting and turning the series of knobs appearing to control the action of machinery not visible to the viewer. Variations in the whirling of the pinwheel, quickness of finger movements and mechanical sounds appear to signal differences in the speed of off-screen machinery and demand for operator attention. The mechanical sounds and gestures redirect the eye to places it cannot find and here is where I wanted the tension to reside.

B.K.

There is another film I have watched recently - Claire Denis’ L’intrus (2003) (The Intruder). It is the cinematic adaption of Jean-Luc Nancy’s autobiographic book with the same title from 2000. The story tells the journey of Louis Trebor, who leaves his family, his lover and his beloved dogs behind in order to find something else: after illegally receiving a new heart on the black market he goes to Tahiti to find his son. This is the underlying narration the film carries, but as it develops it slowly departs from its plot. Or rather the images and the glimpse of the camera leave the “reality” of narration.

Robert Bresson, Au Hasard Balthazar, 1966, film still
(Gerard’s hands light Balthazar’s tail on fire)

Christopher Richmond, Available Light, 2013, Dual screen 16mm color film projection, sound, 20 min., 31 sec. (loop).

Installation view

Bruce Nauman, For Beginners (all the combinations of the thumb and fingers), 2010 (http://lacma.wordpress.com/2013/02/05/the-drama-of-hands-caravaggio-and-bruce-naumans-for-beginners/, 13.5.2014)

the series ‘They She We Them’, 2013, c-type print, 80 × 59.9 cm

The pace changes, continuous narration, the distinction of authentic and real time, space almost disappear. Suddenly we're left with speculation.

The intensity of the gestures and the surfaces the camera looks at in L’intrus is almost scary. It is as if these gestures would narrate the story. Not the text, not the mise en scène but the carefully observed gestures between the film's protagonists. Closeness is uncanny, whether it is between lovers, strangers, animals or objects. We see desired things: bodies, faces, lips, hands, animals, fur, breath. Trebor reaching for his heart in agony, caressing his dogs in the sunlight. Lying in bed with his lover, the camera shows us their beautiful skin in every detail: freckles, scars, birth marks and wrinkles. The camera follows their touches. Then - growling huskies, the breath of horses. The deep long and wrinkles. The camera follows their touches. Then - growling huskies, the breath of horses. The deep long and wrinkles.

What I found in the film I made, though, was that gesture was an excess. I had intended to have actual physical gesture be the only lens through which the viewer could follow the film, but instead I used it only when it needed to be there. Why? Then I realized it was really quite simple. I had infused all of this thinking into the creature, the surrogate. The gesture was its mere presence. If it is there, then everyone else is profoundly more human. Like a gesture, the surrogate is the prompt. He is the clumsy film audience.

Although the creature is passive and mute, the characters around him seem drawn to express themselves to it. They confide in it the same way that some people around him seem drawn to express themselves to the creature merely listens to the characters as they speak. Yet it is unable or unwilling to speak, because it already understands, so there's really nothing that needs to be said. The figure simply is. This is its repetition. It is content simply to be, while all the others struggle to always be something more.

TheLuxembourg
Christopher Richmond, Radical Acceptance (Prospero #2), 2013, Archival inkjet prints, 30 x 24 in.

A continuous story, I rather do small corrections and variations. I do not want those gestures to be mere additions. So I usually do not link the image to narration, plot or text. I feel there are traps along that way.

The gestures carried out by Bresson's characters are simple, sometimes even clumsy and hesitant. It does not matter if they are sketchy or only partial. They never tell too much, reveal a secret or come across as overly explanatory. A combination of gestures can unfold as a narration. At some point gesture is the only lens we can see through at the film.

I think the most important aspect of the gesture is its ability to communicate a range of ideas and emotions.

Going back as far as the 1400s, Alberi described how gestures signify emotions in On Painting. I just looked through my tattered copy of the book and looked over my notes and found this excerpt highlighted: "These movements of the soul are made known by movements of the body.
In film, we can distinguish between conventionalized gestures and body movements made without conscious intention. Conventionalized body movements are movements that are consciously performed and have a firmly established timeless meaning. Pointing with the hand and an outstretched index finger; shaking hands, etc. In contrast, gestures made without conscious intention may be made without a person even being aware of performing them. Still they communicate a message and meaning. Trembling or rigid muscles, blushing … I think you can also think about gestures in terms of their temporal nature. Gestures come and go in time and are often fleeting. Even when gestures are frozen in space in photographs, sculpture or painting, their meaning may change with differing perceptions, and I think the power of gestures also comes from the moment before the gesture or between the gestures. These moments preceding or between gestures can signal a whole number of things.

Gestures and spoken words are for the most part automatic in daily routines of life. Bresson wanted his actors to be like individuals we encounter in everyday life who simply speak, move and gesture. What was important was what their words and gestures provoked. I think this is the essence of film.

In Au Hasard Balthazar he introduces characters with gesture. This is clearest when he first introduces Marie’s cruel and rebellious boyfriend, Gerard, through his hands. There is a shot of Gerard pouring black oil on the road to cause cars to skid dangerously out of control. This gesture is a对未来 of Gerard’s cruelty to come. We see Gerard’s hands when he lights Balthazar’s tail on fire to get him to move and when he tries to seduce Marie in her car when she is unwilling. Bresson uses his camerawork to let us see things, such as gestures, that often escape human perception. Eliminating everything that is unnecessary, the camera is like Balthazar’s (or an animal’s) eye; it is a sensor that captures things that humans might miss and reveals anything that is false.

Before Bresson, gesture played a critical role in the birth of cinema. In silent films, the entire plot line needed to be translated through bodily performance. Movies were totally dependent on the facial expressions and bodily actions of leading actors. Interestingly enough, early film theorists wrote little about the movement of bodies on the screen. Instead they devoted their greatest attention to the mouth and face as the expressive sites of the body, with frequent use of facial close-ups. I know Balazs speculated that the mouth and face were privileged over bodily movement in film because we believed that we live in a largely verbal and written culture. However, bodily gestures also communicate ideas, thoughts, moods and emotions.

Gesture is a communication between two sides, the one who performs it, the acteur, and the one who receives it, the audience. In her comment Veronika structures gesture around the moments of intention of wanting and not wanting to act/perform and being able to and being unable to read/interpret/decipher gesture. Not being able to understand, derives not only conspiracy and paranoia (the detective) but from affiliations. Who is able to decipher the meaning that the gesture as bodily movement contains. Who is speaking and to whom?

If I look for the hidden codes in gestures (hidden from me) I choose to be the outsider. I am the one who is not part of the social circle that is the origin of the code. Just as the creature in your film makes the other more human, gestures only become signals if they are designed to be exclusive.

For me this is what Veronika is pointing to. And it has to do with how gestures and the body is represented in images. As a social code the gesture contains connotations that derive from mechanisms of power, belief or hierarchy.

C.R.
How do we distinguish random movement from signals? I like this word “signals.”

In film there are multiplicity of ways to distinguish random movement from signals. This is what is both problematic about the medium, but what is also its greatest strength. Temporal modes, camera angles, sound, score, editing, montage, combinations of these, can all instill a signal to “look here.” I think “look here” though is a desire more akin to other models of gesture like painting or theatre. I think a more interesting signal that good filmmaking can ask is “you might want to look here for now.” This is quite a different question. It is one that is both temporal and one that suggests an openness. An openness that can be activated, but also turned away (and it can even be a MacGuffin). Just the other day I was speaking with Jan Tumlir, a critic and writer in Los Angeles, and he had an interesting read on what the creature in the film stood for. He thought that the creature symbolized the whole series of oppositions and confrontations that have occurred in previous films between silent figures and ones with language. He described how there have always been tensions between sound and image within film history. Many critics felt that sound in cinema took film off-track in some way. It impeded its original poetic and imagistic mandate and forced it into a mode more like theater or literature with sound and dialogue guiding the flow of action. I think this relates to gesture, both performer gesture and directorial gesture.

I think your friend’s direction: “no gestures! Absolutely no gestures” was probably something Bresson might have said. It sounds very similar to his actor-model technique. Bresson wanted to separate cinema from the theater. He did not employ actors, choosing instead to use people he termed as “models” who had never acted before. Bresson instructed his models not to act out their lines, but to say them with a minimal amount of expression in movement, gesture and word. He wanted all signs of “performance” to be stripped away. He was even quoted saying, “I do not want the actor to express himself. What he gives me, he gives me without knowing. It is I who must express myself.”

1 Veronika Hauer, artist and editor of Nowhere, in an email correspondence with Barbara Kapusta, April 22, 2014.

I invited Veronika Hauer to our conversation. Due to the length of the conversation Veronika’s additions and thoughts are now partly visible in my answer.
Deniz Soezen: Little Austria, 2014, reflective vinyl on aluminum, 137 x 63 cm
Photo: Tom Sky
Enrico Camporesi is an Italian writer and curator based in Paris. He is a research fellow at Centre Pompidou and a PhD candidate in Film and Visual Studies in a joint programme between the University Sorbonne Nouvelle–Paris 3 and the University of Bologna. His writings have appeared in Fata Morgana, Nexus – European Journal of Media Studies, and La Furia Umana, and in several edited volumes. He curated screenings for Centre Pompidou, Light Cone (Paris), Cineteca di Bologna, Millennium Film Workshop, and Microscope Gallery (New York).

Guy Cools is a dance dramaturg and Associate Professor for dance studies at the research institute Arts in Society of the Fontys School of Fine and Performing Arts in Tilburg, Holland. Having previously worked as dance critic, artistic programmer and policy maker for dance in Flanders, he is now dedicating himself to production dramaturgy, contributing to work by choreographers all over Europe and Canada, amongst others with: Koen Augustijnen (Les Ballets C. de la B.), Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (B), Danièle Desnoyers (Montréal), Lia Haraki (Cyprus), Akram Khan (Londen), Christopher House (Toronto Dance Theatre). He also regularly lectures and publishes, and has developed a series of workshops that aim to support artists and choreographers in their creative process. His most recent publications include the Body:Language series (published by Sadler’s Wells, London) and The Ethics of Art: ecological turns in the performing arts, co-edited with Pascal Gielen (published by Valiz, Amsterdam). With the Canadian choreographer, Lin Snelling, he developed an improvised performance practice Rewriting Distance that focuses on the integration of movement, voice and writing. See also: www.rewritingdistance.com.

Veronika Hauer, born 1981, is an artist based in Vienna. She holds an MA from Goldsmiths, University of London and the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Her work has been shown recently at Glasgow International Programme between the University Sorbonne Nouvelle–Paris 3 and the University of Bologna. His writings have appeared in Fata Morgana, Nexus – European Journal of Media Studies, and La Furia Umana, and in several edited volumes. He curated screenings for Centre Pompidou, Light Cone (Paris), Cineteca di Bologna, Millennium Film Workshop, and Microscope Gallery (New York).

Veronika Hauer, born 1981, is an artist based in Vienna. She holds an MA from Goldsmiths, University of London and the University of Applied Arts Vienna. Her work has been shown recently at Glasgow International Festival (2014), Forum Stadtpark Graz (2014), Kunstraum Niederösterreich, Vienna (2013), Galerie Lisa Ruyter, Vienna (2012). In 2008 she founded Nowiswere together with critic/curator Fatos Ustek in London. www.veronikahauer.com


Zoe Mackler is an artist living in Brooklyn, NY. She holds an MFA in Fine Art from Goldsmiths, University of London, where her research focused on trauma, terror and the sublime. www.zoemackler.com

Lauris Paulus, born 1975 is a visual artist. His work lies at the intersection of esoteric and cryptic forms of knowledge and Mallarmean poetry, producing symbols without objective referents, hermetic and factual signs, books of sorts whose writing systems are lost. He holds an MA in Contemporary Arts Practice from Bern University of the Arts and an MA in Visual Communication and Photography from Lausanne University of the Arts (ECAL). His work has been shown at CEAAC, Strasbourg, Instituto Svizzero in Mailand, Fri-Art Fribourg, Kunsthalle Bern, Kunsthalle Basel and Galerie Milieu in Bern. As a curator, he is the co-founder of the independent space WallRiss: www.wallriss.ch. Paulus lives and works in Fribourg Switzerland.

Christopher Richmond’s work explores narrative form and qualities of time. Through film and photography his work explores the fissure between story and discourse. Inspired by philosophical theories and utilizing various film techniques, his work explores different ways of interpreting and understanding narrative’s structure and action. He has shown his work widely, including exhibitions and screenings in Los Angeles, New York, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. He has received degrees in cinematography and studio art. He received his MFA from Roski School of Art and Design in 2014. Christopher Richmond was born in 1986 in San Diego, California. He currently lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

Deniz Soezen is a Vienna-born visual artist who currently lives and works nomadically. She studied Fine Art in Vienna and London. Completing her studies Deniz worked as a tutor (University of the Arts Linz), gallery educator (Vienna Secession, d12 Kassel, Museum Rietberg Zurich) and researcher (IAE, Zurich University of the Arts). After a self-organized research residency in Istanbul, she moved to Los Angeles as a recipient of the MAK Schindler Scholarship. Currently she has embarked on another residency at the Cité des Arts in Paris. Her works have been shown in various contexts in Austria and internationally. www.denizsoezen.net

Matthias Sohr is an artist living and working in Lausanne.