Maria Lalou

Camera and the Mirror
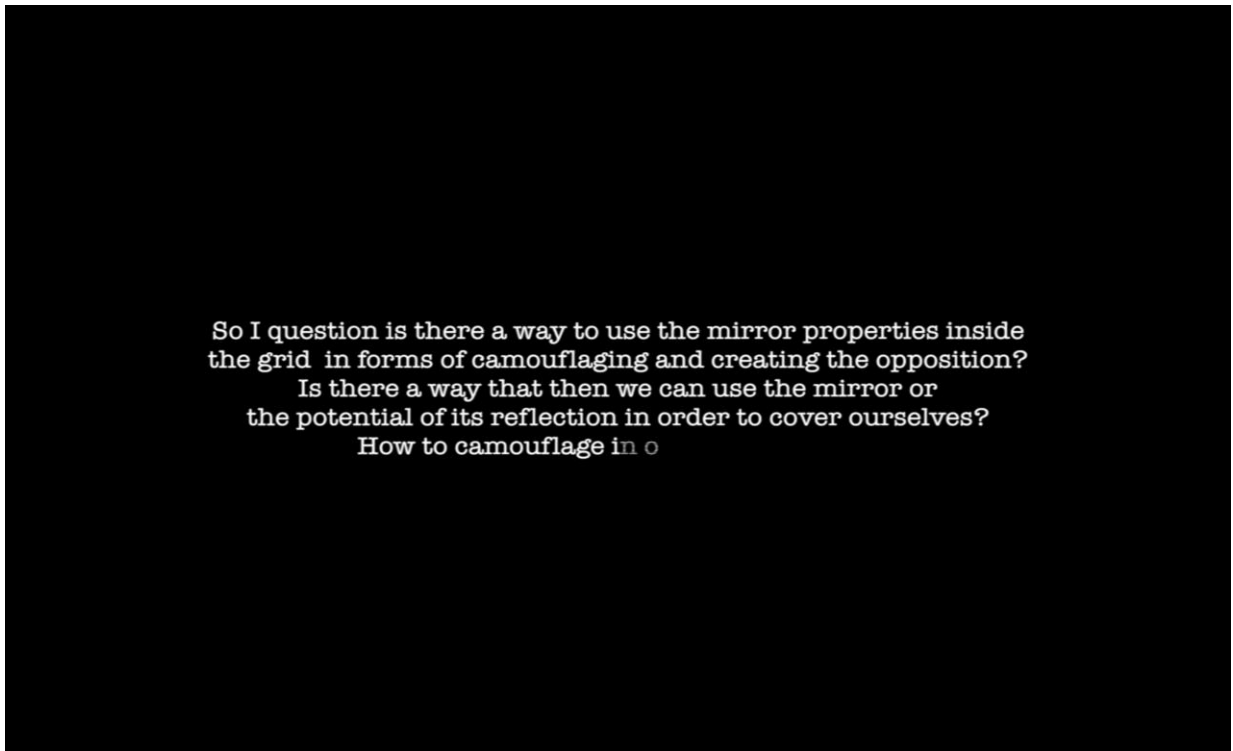
"a post-manuscript"

Figure 1: Still from *Virtual Presence* (2018), a video essay based on *The Dialogue* film

This paper is an attempt to inaugurate thoughts in discourse with Flusser's *Post-History*, and to produce a manual of resistance against algorithmic governance, while questioning "how to use the cinematic mechanisms in order to resist the authority which controls our data" by planning her slow physical death as an artist-at-work.

Virtual Presence

For the ones here who know me as being part of my own work produced live in a lab-like setting, initiating and operating the image production progressively, I would like to state that this is a moment of stepping back and replacing myself by a learning machine.

I thought of giving the algorithm the role of direction, however, I was looking for a formula to resist the authority, which controls our data.

"Algorithms are using certain types of properties and developing schemes and relational occupancies formulating specific types of representation. This representation has the typology of an image. Those representations those images could be considered as objectively determined. Whereas the notion of representation in contemporary times can only be used in such schemes as of schematic diagrams of historical facts, trends, political decision and subsequently deliver their affect as a real moment of time establishment."[1]

I am seeking for a dialogue between the seer and the seen.

How can an image allow for a notion of subjective freedom? Is it possible to act as if action were free?

The word *thea* in Greek is where the root of the word *theory* comes from. It comes from the junction of the word *thea* and *horao*. *Thea* means to view that is also the outward look, the aspect, in which something presents itself. *Horao* means to see, to look, to look at something carefully, to experience, to witness. As a spectator, one becomes *theoros* in the sense that one observes, participates and interprets the performative process from a certain perspective while being part of the performance's ontology.

"But in this image, in the programmatic image it seems, impossible even to formulate the problem of freedom."[2]

"A sense of the loss of that other interaction with our world.

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[1] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 24.
[2] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 20.

Maybe more of us are trying to opt out or whatever, I do not know, but, it is a super interesting obvious innovation in relation to 'the image'. I think that is the kind of the understanding of an image, which might not be a deep critical understanding of what images are, or what those images do to people, but it is part of an increasing understanding of the image or the use of images. And I guess it is a kind of vocabulary of using images in everyday life."[3]

Figure 2: Still from *Virtual Presence* (2018), a video essay based on The Dialogue film.

"Taking contemporary technical images as a starting point, we find two divergent trends. One moves toward a centrally programmed, totalitarian society of image receivers and image administrators, the other towards a dialogic, telematic society of image producers and image collectors. From our standpoint, both these social structures are fantastic, even though the first presents a somewhat negative; the second a positive, utopia. In any case, we are still free at this point to challenge these values. What we can no longer challenge is the dominance of technical images in the future society."[4]

"The notion that the world and human experience are programmed is relatively new. Several implicit aspects of this notion have not yet entered our consciousness."[5]

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[3] Knut Asdam, *The Dialogue*, film (2019) 00:46:06.
[4] Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, 4.
[5] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 19.

A core point of my question extrapolates the relation of social territories *vs* the idea of the intimate, our relation to the screen and our screened reality, the relation of the self being present in another space and this continuous life of our image production; our data being somewhere in an endless space. On the phenomenon of cybernetics, the self is being present in the mediated reality, in the digital mirror, and my experience resonates to the dislocation of the self, from my embodied reality.

"Experience presents itself as being part of a complex net of causal chains."[6]

"The conceptual image can be something else than that, but I'm quite occupied with this idea of experience."[7]

"So often that the actual moment of presence and actually something that involves and happens and is ontologically unfolding in a natural way is nowadays interrupted by the image taking of it and the representational architecture that is immediately being brought into it and the representational strategies that people have and so on; it's all about looking good and all that kind of stuff. And I think it profoundly changes the nature of social interaction and the nature of, at least in these highlighted moments and made a lot of it is kind of still goes on 'imaged', and you know, on Facebook and still in these moments there is this dramaturgical transformation of the everyday world where a lot of things that previously would have been naturally interacted on the fly and people would improvise on the fly, it has now become, has become a stage. So there's these 'stage-ization' of every day social life. People, um, you know, pose, do things, go to certain places, do certain kinds, meet certain people, all in order to do produce certain kinds of images. And so it's, it's, uh, I think it's actually quite profound how this changes the strategic, kind of calculate what people are doing, what they're aiming for, what they are, how they, how they go about their daily lives and I don't know, you guys are artists and so on. Um, what, what's the meaning for, for images, for the, for the very concept of an image of 'I'm representing something', if the everyday calculus becomes so profoundly transformed."[8]

So, is it then possible to define virtual presence in relation to this infinite of an image; a presence that challenges the current idea experiencing a real or simulated environment that deals essentially with perceiving objective physical features?

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[6] Ibid.
[7] Knut Asdam, *The Dialogue*, 00:28:49 (film).
[8] Andreas Wimmer, *The Dialogue*, 00:43:21.

"What I'm just talking about leads to a proliferation or acceleration of, um, might say destabilization or bifurcation of the self, the subject's relationships to the imaginary in symbolic. So, it's almost like it's constantly being re-engaged with the idea of ego, and ego idea you deal within the mirror images, that are proliferated and repeated on us and a cubist kind of sentence. So it is a constant cubist environment that's even further accelerated. So, where it was already within modernism, it's now even further amplified to be admitted minute by minute of your day to day life. So, your place of subjectivities was big, which in Lacanian terms is always related to the other, was always related in a sense to a mirror dialogue; is now even more amplified. Even more … like here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here, here. Everywhere you go under surveillance or on Facebook or wherever it may be, your distribution, so to speak."[9]

"That is something which we all experience, but it is also somewhat unclear how it is happening."[10]

"So if I'm encountering you and we're talking, we're reflecting each other's reality back to each other, what it is to be a human being. Of course, for me, you are an object right now in some not bad sentence. You're an external object, but I also am aware that your subjectivity and so I know that there's that, like Beauvoir calls it transcendence."[11]

What is happening around and in us; is it fantastic? We face the immediate future directly and all previous utopias, whether they were positive or negative and pale in comparison to it. Except as much, we cling to those structures generated by the utopia itself. Utopia means groundlessness, the absence of a point of reference.

"What characterizes programs is the fact that they are systems in which chance becomes necessity. The programmatic perspective is the point of view of the absurd. Every current tendency demonstrates that reality is progressively experienced as absurd game of chance as a happening. The challenge is what a programmatic reality represents as the need to learn to think apolitically, if we want to preserve the concept of human freedom. That is a paradox. From a programmatic perspective, politics, and therefore history comes to an end."[12]

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[9] Andrew Fremont-Smith, *The Dialogue*, 00:39:03.
[10] Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part III.
[11] Jennifer Ulemam, *The Dialogue*, 00:19:44.
[12] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 26.

"States make people and unsee certain things and is about the representation of society today, is about the representation of history, or rewriting history, also. And um, there's a, and it's not really something you either it's been part or what kind of ideological apparatus for a long time."[13]

"If society's behavior is progressively experienced and interpreted as absurdly programmed by programs without aim or purpose, the problem of freedom which is the problem of politics, becomes inconceivable.[14] Freedom will die if we continue to think political and act according to such thinking."[15]

"It's very important and indeed people have become very sophisticated in the way they manage their daily lives and how they move around in the mirror cabinet of social media. However, the organizations of control and power are moving very fast and in a very smart way as well, and artificial intelligence is still very primitive. The institutions or organizations of control are going to have massive capacities to understand actually what people are doing and have the data to make sense of it and to manipulate the whole thing."[16]

"Apparatus always functions increasingly independently from their programmers' intentions. And apparatuses that are programmed by other apparatus emerge with increasing frequency. Human programming is itself increasingly programmed by apparatus. When in reality they are nothing but functionaries who are programmed to think of themselves in this way. What if we better observe how different apparatuses progressively program individual and social behaviour?"[17]

"So that we're all staging ourselves out of fear, sometimes out of narcissism and a desire to protect a certain image. I mean, even this conversation has a certain artificiality to it because we know that we are being recorded, right? But that is a next nature because we know we are (…). But that unnaturalness can infect all kinds of spaces."[18]

"And has consequences for identity formation processes."[19]

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[13] Knut Asdam, *The Dialogue*, 00:1:21.
[14] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 24.
[15] Ibid., 26.
[16] Andreas Wimmer, *The Dialogue*, 01:00:20.
[17] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 25.
[18] Jennifer Uleman, *The Dialogue*, 01:00:00.
[19] Andreas Wimmer, *The Dialogue*, 01:00:10.

Figure 3: Still from *Virtual Presence* (edition 2020), a video essay based on The Dialogue film (edited version for "Vilém Flusser and 'His' Languages", online conference)

"Freedom is conceivable only as an absurd game with apparatus, as a game with programs. It is conceivable only after we have accepted politics and human existence in general to be an absurd game. Whether we continue to be or become robots depends on how fast we learn to play. The central problem is (…) human freedom. Can man oppose his destiny with free will, and if so, to what extent can he do this?"[20]

Mirror properties apply the erasure of space with the simultaneous projection of another space.

So I question, is there a way to use the mirror properties inside the grid in forms of camouflaging and creating the opposition? Is there a way that we can use the mirror or its reflection in order to cover ourselves? How to camouflage in order to respond? Is there a way to create a rupture in this governance against the collection of images and over our data being collected, re- produced, used and abused? And is there a way to vanish from the surface of this mediated reality?

"Mediated by social media and so on. There are infinite images of you being projected on you and images to which you have to relate so to develop your own sense of identity and so on. And the

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[20] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 26.

whole thing becomes maybe fragmented into such a degree that the whole modernist idea of identity becomes impossible. So…"[21]

"I think that's really interesting; the modernist idea, like the unity becomes fragmented. But of course, Leibnitz invents calculus to describe continuity, right?"[22]

How can the relation of camera registration and the mirror properties be combined in order to provide freedom in the post digital era?

What if it becomes like one of these eighteenth-century infinite mirror cabinets where we are all walking into endlessly mirrored, mediated, refracted, indirected interactions with each other."[23]

"To not see, blind out…"[24]

Hence, I would like to refer to the properties of a mirror and their importance. What is primarily ingenious is that a mirror has the potential to erase a space and simultaneously create another space. It is a tool that facilitates the development of another space.

"That becomes an internalized essence and then becomes sort of virtual. So in a sense, I wonder if the hall of mirrors space is so problematic for us as human beings, because we don't know where we are looking from. At one point we can see ourselves, like infinitely. We are not quite intimately but constantly ricocheting what then produces this dematerialization of the body, because we don't know from what point to look at the self. The moment you look over here you see like a shoulder; you look over there, you see like a back of my head. It's a constant disorientation, there's no clear advantage of from what point can I actually see the whole body (…)." [25]

The meaning of presence is closely linked to the concept of reality we have, for example, to the ontology that we, more or less, explicitly adopt. Different ontological stances support different criteria for presence, telepresence and virtual presence. Is it the moment to think of a cultural conception of presence that challenges the current idea of experiencing a real or a simulated environment, dealing essentially with perceiving its "objective" physical features?

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[21] Andreas Wimmer, *The Dialogue*, 00:58:49.

[22] Jennifer Uleman, *The Dialogue*, 00:42:11.

[23] Andreas Wimmer, *The Dialogue*, 00:34:39.

[24] K.Asdam & A.Wimmer, *The Dialogue*, 01:23:00.

[25] Andrew Fremont-Smith, *The Dialogue*, 00:54:22.

Animated World

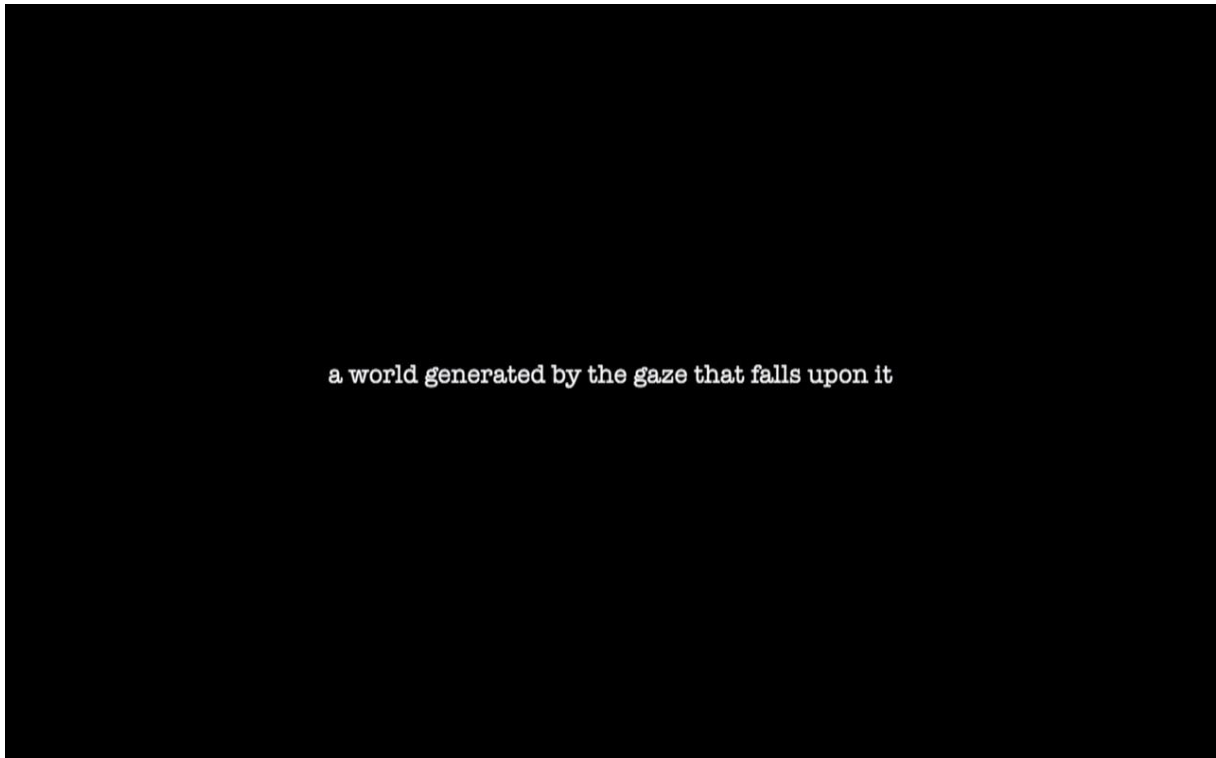a world generated by the gaze that falls upon it

Figure 4: Image still from *Animated World* (2018), video essay based on *Parallel I-IV* by Harun Farocki

"Environments, real and virtual are not private recesses but public places for meaningful social interaction mediated by artefacts."[26]

The cinematic experience has been transversed from a filmic discourse to a networked discourse. What if we evaluate the cinematic mechanisms in todays' society? What if we consider the navigator as the role of the viewer; *theoros* in Greek, using the distancing effect in order to critically establish the effect of contemporary society in the virtually constructed daily narrative. How does the narrative of image production manipulate the history of events?

"The hero is thrown into his world.
The hero has no parents and no teachers, he has to learn on its own which rules are valid by approaching other people that are twilight beings something between a person and a prop.
We can drop right in the middle of events, and with a simple command we can easily leave the place."[27]

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[26] Harun Farocki, *Parallel IV* (2008-12)
[27] Harun Farocki, *Parallel II* (2008-12)

The role of the camera its relation to the viewer, and the viewer as persistent co-narrator in the narrative structure. In Farocki's words, "[c]inema is the appropriate medium for storing and transmitting history's truth-claim, since the camera records more than any mind can remember. To appropriate history then is to appropriate the medium by studying its proper logics of recording, storing, transforming, and ordering sensory events. Cinema's deferments avert the closures of history."[28] What is the relation of the society's experience to the appropriation of an image? How about the camera's function in the image taken, and the relation of the body represented in space according to its connection to the physicality of the other objects?

"The objects have no existence beside themselves, they are by themselves nothing."[29]

There are certain methods to use the specifications of an object's nothingness while applying the mirror principles of camouflaging in virtual space. We start with the three-dimensional object in space and further translate its effect into a code vs. algorithmic governance.

"Here the camera tries to penetrate the pedestal in a public sculpture. In a special theatre mode the camera can penetrate the base, like the camera in a feature film that doles through the walls to establish the narrator's omnipotence."[30]

There are certain properties of the medium and the programmatic image in the game reality that are set in the filmic language as 'background'. The cinematic gesture by the focus of the camera is translated in the programmatic reality, in computing, in the term of 'command' during a computational narrative script.

"The world is like a board game.
Does the world exist if I am not watching it?
A child's viewpoint when taking long rides by train or car is that everything that passes by has been put there only for me, appearing out of the emptiness and then disappearing again into emptiness.
A world generated by the gaze that falls upon it.
This world appears infinite.
In this game you can break through the safety area and fall into space."[31]

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[28] Ute Holl, Farocki's Cinematic Historiography: Reconstructing the Visible, *e-flux Journal #59*
[29] Harun Farocki, *Parallel II* (2008-12)
[30] Harun Farocki, *Parallel IV* (2008-12)
[31] Harun Farocki, *Parallel III* (2008-12)

What is the relation between an image, the moment of capture and the moment of experience?

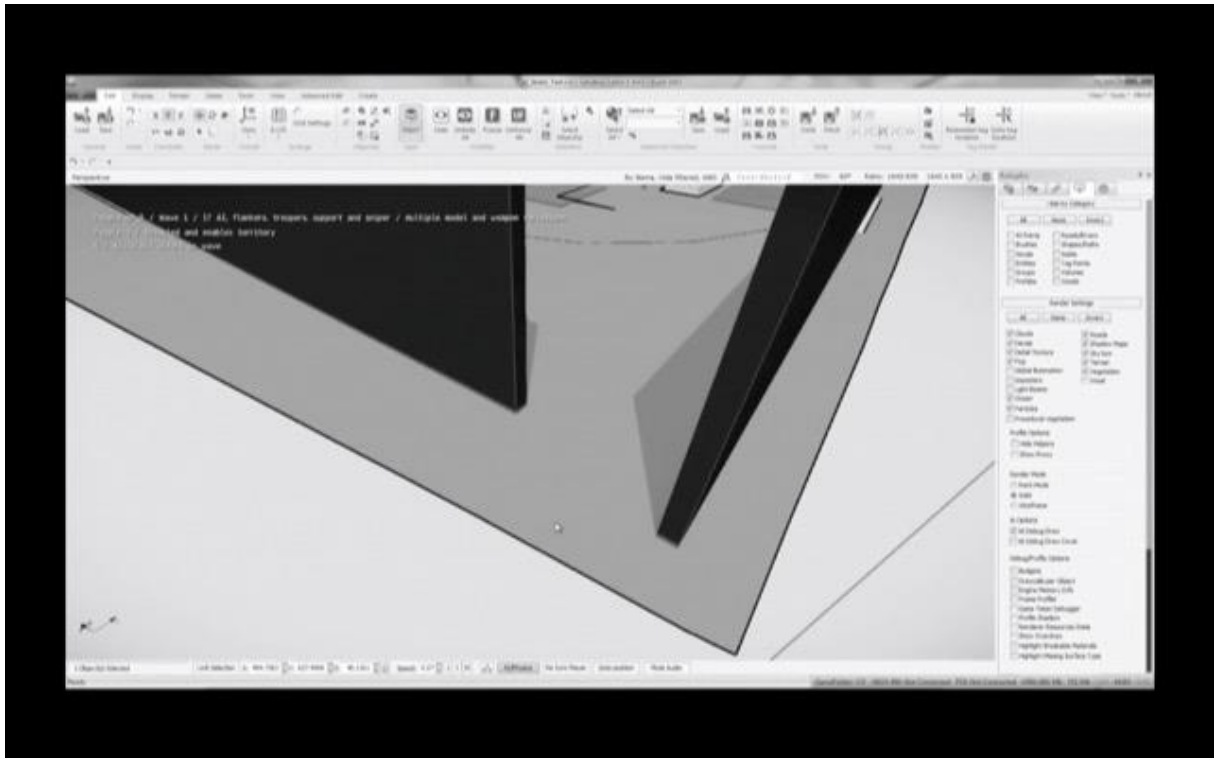"The world of a computer game can be explored individually."[32]

Figure 5: Image still from *Animated World* (2018), video essay based on *Parallel I-IV* by Harun Farocki

Farocki theorizes this "cinematography of devices" based on a large range of examples situated in both the military and the civil domain. What unites the many cases he discusses is the fading importance of the human as referential center in favor of "intelligent machines" that render decisions autonomously.

Human Agents

I would like to come back to the thought that human programming is itself increasingly programmed by apparatus.

"When in reality they, the humans, are nothing but functionaries who are programmed to think of themselves in this way."[33]

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[32] Harun Farocki, *Parallel IV* (2008-12)

[33] Vilém Flusser, *Post-History*, 25-26.

In a counter-objectified reality, meaning in a networked discourse, how do we choose who are the main actors and who is in the background. There are certain ways that the erasure of the mirror's properties can alternate what is considered in the filmic discourse as 'background' to foreground, meaning alternate the focus of the main narrative-plot.

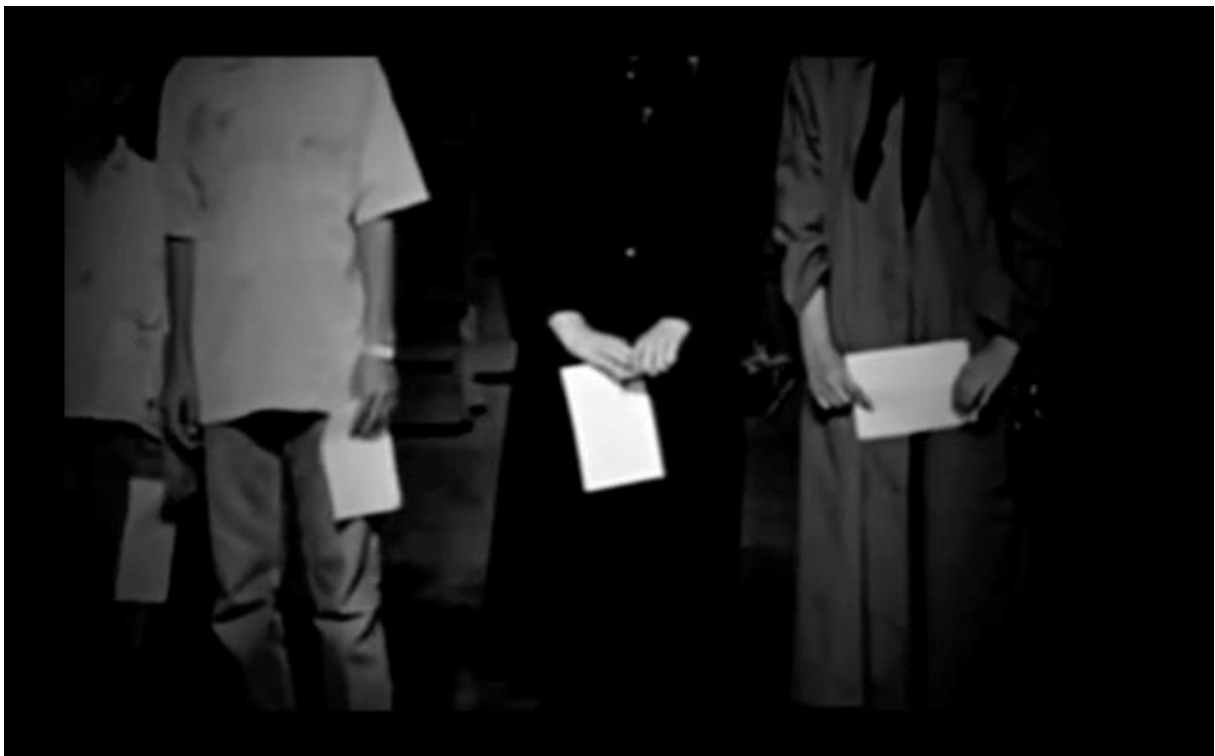

Figure 6: Image still from *Human Agents* (2018), video essay based on *Salaam Cinema* by Mohsin Makhmalbaf (1995)

The camera is visible, the director is on the stage, the cameras are on and offstage.

The counter view of the audience viewer can use both cameras.

Viewing the director and potential actors in their human entity and the camera on role is underlining the role of the document.

"'Salaam Cinema' – written, directed and edited by Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
This year is the centenary year of cinema. That is why we are making a film about people who would like to become films actors. We are already started shooting. Can hand out thousand forms, we will select about a hundred of you and some will get leading roles in the film. You are both the subject and the actors of this film. So, I would like to welcome you in your own film.

'I'll make my own film just so I can act in it.'

The one who wants to be an artist can stay.

You were in the film.

You acted in it.

If you were told to give up the cinema to stay humane person, would you rather become an actress-just being yourself?

Take it. It is called a clapperboard. Stand in lines so we can see everyone. Write on the clapperboard. Write: 'to be continued.'"[34]

Humans as the Agents.

An Agent is a person who acts on behalf of another person or group.

In grammar, the doer of an action, typically expressed as the subject of an active verb or in a phrase with a passive verb.

In computing, an independently operating Internet program is typically the one that performs background tasks such as information retrieval or processing on behalf of a user or other program.

Figure 6: Image still from *Human Agents* (2018), video essay based on *Salaam Cinema* by Mohsin Makhmalbaf (1995)

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[34] Mohsen Makhmalfbaf, *Salaam Cinema,* intro scene.

The filmic decision of the camera focusing on the body's gestures of the real human vs the facial expression of the projected image on the identity formation is a method of processing the narrative of the script's focus to the background as the main narrative.

Camera Actors

Since the 1960's, the camera apparatus significances its personification in the private, its appropriation in the surveilled networked daily encounters against its potentiality of acting. The latter one works as a weapon of truth that has been channeling the medium's function in the recording of history by its full portrait and background information as a mechanism rather than a device.

In a filmic narrative that delivers the relation of a human with one's own nature, the fictional characters are representing an index of roles in the film industry with the director of the film behind his camera on a dolly, as the prologue of the narrative being filmed.

Starting with a cinematic relation of a 2nd degree filmic narrative, the film unfolds with a main character, a French scriptwriter hired by an American film producer to make an adaptation of a classic Greek myth based on the script from a German film director, played on stage by himself. In duration of this plot, unfolding the scenario takes a 3rd degree filmic relation based on the request by the film director for an alternative script with an infusion of the personal relational drama, which is the emotional marriage-breakdown of the scriptwriters. The film addresses an extremely human topic and its dominant societal structure, which is already in the core of the original Greek tragedy yet is approached in the film from an absolute emotional distance.[35] Throughout the film, the audience can experience the pictures in a psychological depth by the camera distance and counted close-ups. What if we translate this index of 2nd and 3rd degree relations in the film to an index of camera roles, looking at the filmic stage as todays societal and networked discourse exposed to image capture and data transference as a contemporary stage for the film's narrative.

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[35] Cristina Alvarez Lopez, Adrian Martin, *Coming Apart: Jean-Luc Godard's "Contempt"*, video essay.

Figure 7: Image still from *Camera Actors* (2018), video essay based on *Le Mepris* (1963) by Jean-Luc Godard

Camera Actors is based on *Le Mepris* (1963) by Jean-Luc Godard

[moment - memory : instant camera]

In the 1940's American physicist Dr. Edwin Land, started toying with the idea of the instant camera, inspired by his 3-year-old daughter, who asked why she could not see the photo that he took of her. He created the polarization filter, which would eliminate glare and reflection from camera lenses, which lead to the introduction of instant photography. By 1948, the very first instant camera, called the Polaroid 95, was launched and sold out fast.

Instant camera as Fritz Lang (on role as himself) an Austrian-German-American filmmaker, screenwriter, and occasional film producer and actor – one of the best-known emigres from Germany's school of Expressionism. His most famous films include the groundbreaking futuristic *Metropolis* (1927).

Fritz Lang's screen adaptation of *The Odyssey*, his interest is in the relation between Paul Javal (scriptwriter) and Camille Javal, when he asks him to alternate his plan and write a new version of *The Odyssey* based on Paul and Camille's personal drama.

[distance : IP network (wifi) camera]

An Internet Protocol camera, or IP camera, is a type of digital video camera commonly utilized for surveillance, which can send and receive data via a computer network and the Internet, oppose to analog closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras.

The first centralized IP camera, the Axis Neteye 200, was released in 1996 by Axis Communications, a Swedish manufacturer of network cameras for the physical security and video surveillance industries. The camera was capable of showing a snapshot image each time the camera was accessed.

IP network camera as Giorgia Moll (on role of Francesca Vanini) an Italian film actress. She was sometimes credited as Georgia Moll and Georgia Mool.

Francesca Vanini was the secretary of Jeremy Prokosch, who is an American film producer.

[every day : mobile phone camera]

The camera phone, like many complex systems, is the result of converging and enabling technologies. There are dozens of relevant patents dating back as far as 1956. The "camera-on-a-chip" active pixel sensor was developed by Eric Fossum, an American physicist and engineer, and his team in the early 1990s achieved the first step of realizing the modern camera phone.
Camera phone can share pictures almost instantly and automatically via a sharing infrastructure integrated with the carrier network. Early developers envisioned a technology that would enable service providers to "collect a fee every time anyone snaps a photo."

Mobile camera as Jack Palance (on role of Jeremy Prokosch), an American actor and singer: He was nominated for three Academy Awards, all for Best Actor in a Supporting Role, winning an Oscar in 1992 for his role in *City Slickers*.

Jeremy Prokosch, the American Film Producer.

[narrative : cinematic camera]

One of the first was Thomas Alva Edison. His camera, called the "Kinetograph" was based on the Kinetoscope which was designed for films to be viewed by one individual at a time through a

"peephole" viewer window at the top of the device. The first public demonstration of the Kinetoscope was held at the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences on May 9, 1893. Instrumental to the birth of American movie culture, the Kinetoscope also had a major impact in Europe.

Cinematic camera as Michel Piccoli (on role of Paul Javal) is a French actor and filmmaker of Ticino descent. He has one of the longest careers in French Cinema and is regarded as worldwide symbol of France's film history, more specifically in 1960s and 1970s.

Paul Javal (Michel Piccoli) is a young French playwright who has found commercial success in Rome, accepts an offer from vulgar American producer Jeremy Prokosch (Jack Palance) to rework the script for German director Fritz Lang's screen adaptation, *The Odyssey*.

[reportage: press camera]

Invented and marketed by George Eastman (1854-1932), a former bank clerk from Rochester, New York, the Kodak was a simple box camera that came loaded with a 100-exposure roll of film. The forerunner to the photographic camera was the camera obscura.

Press camera as Brigitte Bardot (on role of Camille Javal) is a French actress, singer, dancer, and fashion model, who later became an animal rights activist. She was one of the best-known sex symbols of the 1950s and 1960s.

Paul's wife, Camille Javal, joins him on the first day of the project at Cinecittà. As the first discussions are completed, Prokosch invites the crew to join him at his villa, offering Camille a ride in his two-seat sportscar. Camille looks to Paul to decline the offer, but he submissively withdraws to follow by taxi, leaving Camille and Prokosch alone.

[the viewer :surveillance camera]

Video surveillance is not a new concept – one of the first recorded application for closed circuit television system (CCTV) was back in 1942. It was used for watching the launch of V2 rockets in Germany. In the US, commercial surveillance applications began around 1947. In 1957, a number of companies provided CCTV camera systems for educational, medical and industrial applications.

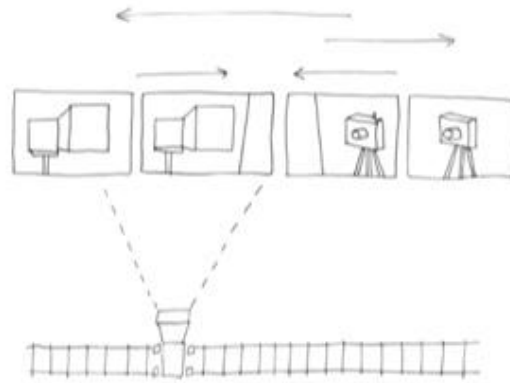The imaginative, constructive role of the viewer.

Figure 8: Image still from *Camera Actors* (2018), video essay based on *Le Mepris* (1963) by Jean-Luc Godard

Contempt Le Mepris (1963) was filmed in Italy with location shooting at the Cinecittà studios in Rome and the Casa Malaparte on Capri Island. In the sequence, the characters played by Piccoli and Bardot wonder through their apartment, alternately arguing and reconciling. Godard filmed these scenes with extended series of tracking shots in natural light and nearly real time. A tracking shot is a shot where the camera moves alongside the 'objects' it is recording. In cinematography, the term refers to a shot in which the camera is mounted on a camera dolly that is placed on rails like a railroad track. The camera is then pushed along the track while the images being filmed. While the core idea is that the camera moves parallel to its subject a tracking shot may move in the semicircular fashion, rotating around its subject while remaining equal distant.

What if we reconsider the relation of the viewer in relation to the distancing effect of the cinematic tracking shot with the cameras on main role in our fragmented every day networked discourse as the stage of our history being registered and our data becoming alternated via the camera vs camera exposure.

To be continued…

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