24

Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture

title:
Visual Lessons
authors:
Bogna Burska , Joanne Morra, Krzysztof Pijarski, Marquard Smith, Joanna Sokołowska, Magda Szcześniak
source:
Widok. Theories and Practices of Visual Culture 24 (2019)
URL:
https://www.pismowidok.org/en/archive/2019/24-de-formations/visual-lessons
doi:
https://doi.org/10.36854/widok/2019.24.1954
publisher:
Widok. Foundation for Visual Culture
affiliation:
SWPS University
University of Warsaw

keywords:

visual culture; visual pedagogy; critical pedagogy; art education; visual activism; social activism

abstract:

A transcript of the discussion Image Lessons. Visual Pedagogies in Troubled Times, which took place at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw on December 18, 2018.

Bogna Burska - Visual artist, Faculty Member at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk.

Joanne Morra - Joanne Morra is Professor of Art and Culture at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts London. Committed to an understanding of the material, historical, personal and political aspects of art, Joanne is concerned with the processes that take place in the spaces of artistic, cultural and psychoanalytic practices (the studio, the study, the classroom, the museum, and the consulting room). Her most recent publication in this area is the book Inside the Freud Museums: History, Memory and Site-Responsive Art (I.B. Tauris, 2018). Previous publications include: 'Being in Analysis: On the Intimate Art of Transference', Journal of Visual Art Practice (November 2017); 'On Use: Art Education and Psychoanalysis', Journal of Visual Culture (April 2017), 'Seemingly Empty: Freud at Berggasse 19, A Conceptual Museum in Vienna', Journal of Visual Culture (April 2013); the curatorial project Saying It (Freud Museum London 2012); and 'The Work of Research: Remembering, Repeating and Working-through', in What is Research in the Visual Arts? Obsession, Archive, Encounter (2008). Joanne is working on her next book, In the Studio and On the Couch: Art, Autobiography and Psychoanalysis.

Krzysztof Pijarski - Visual artist, researcher, educator, curator, and producer. Associate professor at the Faculty of Design / SWPS University, where he is chair of artistic and design research; member of the Visual Narratives

Laboratory (which co-founded and co-directed in 2019-2024) at the Film School in Lodz (https://vnLab.org), where he taught in 2009-2025. The vnLab is a media lab focused on the evolution of visual storytelling into such areas as XR, stereoscopic 3D, interactive web-based pieces, or the film essay. A big part of his work at the vnLab was focused on the Interactive Narratives Studio, where he worked on developing webdocs and other narrative and archival interactive pieces, especially in the transmedial space. His interests lie above all in exploring convincing visual forms of thinking by way of visual essays, atlases, analogies. He likes working between fact and fiction, with visual intelligence, distance, and the ability of going beyond the established uses and conventions of photography. Out of his engagement with bound content, he initiated the PubLab Collective around his vision for web publications as an evolution of the printed book. Recipient of a Fulbright Junior Research Grant at Hohns Hopkins University (2009-2010), and grants, among others, from the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, and the Shpilman Institute of Photography. Headed and partcipated in grants from the Polish Minister of Science and Higher Education, the National Science Centre, and the National Programme for the Development of Humanities. Authored a monograph on modernism as seen through the the dual prism of the figure of Michael Fried and photography as a technology that changed our understanding of art (Archeologia modernizmu. Michael Fried i nowoczesne doświadczenie sztuki [An Archeology of Modernism. Michael Fried, Photography, and the Modern Experience of Art], 2017), as well as (Post)Modern Fate of Images: Allan Sekula / Thomas Struth (2013). Edited the volumes Ludzie i rzeczy: „Zapis socjologiczny" Zofii Rydet (2022), Object Lessons: Zofia Rydet's „Sociological Record" (2017), and The Archive as Project (2011). A collection of his translations of essays by Allan Sekula was published by the Warsaw University Press in 2010.

Marquard Smith - Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Journal of Visual Culture; publishes widely on the visual and cultural study of bodies, technologies, and sexualities in Modernity. Program Leader for the MA Museums & Galleries in Education at UCL Institute of Education, London, and Professor of Artistic Research at the Vilnius Academy of Arts, Lithuania. He curated among others

Blood & Bones (2018), Solitary Pleasures (Freud Museum, 2018). He is a Founding Editor of KIOSK, a magazine of art, design, and architecture as well as the Cultural Studies journal parallax.

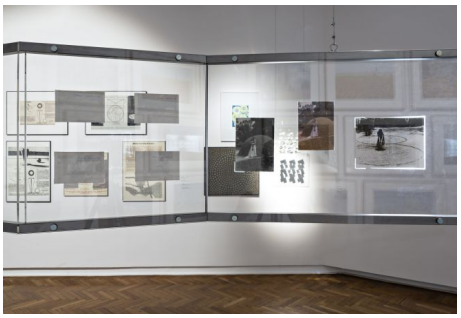
Joanna Sokołowska - Curator, works at the Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź. Her interests include contemporary art that resonates with feminist practices and the transformation of the ecological and economic imagination. Selected exhibitions:For beyond that horizon lies another horizon, Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst, Oldenburg, 2017;Exercises in Autonomy. Tamás Kaszás featuring Anikó Loránt (ex-artists' collective), Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2016;All Men Become Sisters, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, 2015/16;Workers Leaving the Workplace, Muzeum Sztuki, 2011;Another City, Another Life(co-curated with Benjamin Cope), Zachęta Narodowa Galeria Sztuki, Warsaw, 2008.

Magda Szcześniak - Born 1985. Assistant Professor at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw, leader of the MA program in visual culture. Author of books Normy widzialności. Tożsamość w czasach transformacji [Norms of Visibility. Identity in Times of Transition, 2016] and Poruszeni. Awans i emocje w socjalistycznej Polsce [Feeling Moved. Upward Mobility and Emotions in Socialist Poland, 2023], co-author of the two-volume Kultura wizualna w Polsce [Visual Culture in Poland, 2017]. Recipient of the Fulbright Foundation Junior Advanced Research Grant (2010/11, University of Rochester, Graduate Program for Visual and Cultural Studies) and the Fulbright Foundation Senior Award (2019/20, Duke University, Institute for Critical Theory). She has also received stipends and grants from the National Science Center (Preludium grant, 2013-2015; Sonata grant, 2018-2023) and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science (stipend for outstanding young scholars, 2017-2020). In 2017, she won the prestigious award for young scholars granted by the "Polityka" weekly (Nagroda Naukowa Polityki). She has published articles in numerous academic journals, including New Literary History, Oxford Art Journal, Journal of Visual Culture, Teksty Drugie, Dialog, Konteksty, Kultura i Społeczeństwo. She is currently leading a research project titled Representations of the popular classes in contemporary Polish visual culture.

Visual Lessons

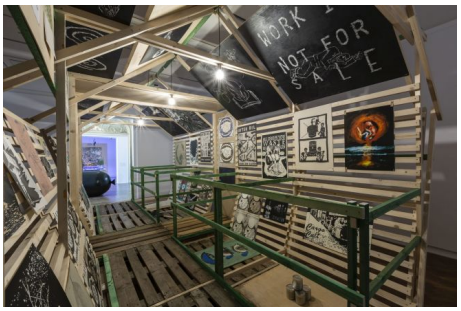
Magda Szcześniak: I'd like to open this discussion with a very general question about the concept of visual pedagogy, a term that has recently been used to describe processes of using images to intervene in the public sphere with the intention of performing change – using images as active political agents. Although this term, or the similar concept of visual activism, might be new, the ideas and intentions behind them are not. But they have recently generated a lot of interest, presumably because of this sense of urgency that we're all feeling nowadays in these times of crisis, in the face of complex and rapidly developing political situations which demand new answers and new strategies. What does the term visual pedagogy mean to you? What do you think about teaching through images and acting with images?

Joanna Sokołowska: I can start by telling you what I don't believe visual pedagogy is about, at least in my work. It is not about teaching, it is not about lecturing, it is not about monologue, and it is not about conveying static knowledge. I see my work as a curator as a way of addressing the affects, intellects, creativity, and empathy that I believe our audiences already have. Perhaps my work allows them to foster certain associations and relations between unlikely phenomena they have not yet thought of. And my greater goal is not identification, but rather dis-identification, enhancing exploring otherness in oneself and not in the "other." I often describe exhibitions as "imagination machines" – these mobile sets of diverse elements including text, discourses, images, people, production, work, humans, infrastructure, logistics, etc. And we put them all in motion to liberate an imagination that is not limited to an expression of individual desires but is trans-personal.



Pangea United exhibition view, Teresa Murak from the series *Sculpture for Earth*, 1974, fot. Piotr Tomczyk, Department of Scientific Documentation, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź.

You can see this in the titles I give my exhibitions – *All Men Become Sisters* or *Pangea United*. Of course, I know that we are not all sisters and the world is not united. But I take these utopian statements as points of departure for working with artists, putting together works that open up the imagination and help to create life-affirming visions. I like to stage encounters that never took place, connect works that are from different generations and geopolitical contexts, distant artistic and theoretical practices. They create non-linear, messy and fragmented herstories drawing on resonances between manifold, minor voices, but also on silence and difference. I believe that this method allows us to give artistic work a certain autonomy and singularity, so that is not flattened and reduced in an overarching curatorial narrative. Likewise, I assume it gives some space for visitors to conceive relations between the pieces on display. Let's take for example the juxtaposition of works by Teresa Murak from the 70s and 80s and the very recent works by Tamás Kaszás in the group exhibition *Pangea United*. Both artists share a complex, cosmic, empathic, and spiritual perspective in their apprehension of the commonality of life and death on Earth, yet they have different political and aesthetic attitudes and have worked out distant methodologies. While Murak is close to Christian spirituality, Kaszás has been connected to anarchism and politicized ecology.



Tamás Kaszás, *Lost Wisdom (Sci Fi Agit Prop)*, 2016–2019, *Pangea United* exhibition view, fot. Piotr Tomczyk, Department of Scientific Documentation, Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź.

Murak's work evolved historically in the context of neo-avant-garde experiments in the Polish People's Republic; Kaszás emerged from the contemporary post-socialist or semi-peripheral Hungarian art scene. She has worked in a processual manner and in relation to particular spaces and landscapes, employing organic materials such as cress, dust, soil, river mud, or bread leavening agents. Her own body and the sensual experience of the movement of matter is the perspective from which she has been approaching her working environments. Likewise, Kaszás's art is connected intimately to his life, relationships, and living environment, but he has developed a more speculative and socio-politically grounded reflection on ecology. While Teresa Murak invites the public to meditate on modest and marginal processes, and gestures such as hands wiping floors or planting a new life (*Visitant Nuns Floor Cloths*, 1988), Tamás Kaszás, through his displays, helps to apprehend structures for the visual culture of the future earthly society (*Lost Wisdom* [*SCI FI AGIT PROP*], 2016–2019) – the global, ecological, and political dimension of care for diverse forms of life.

MSz: Thank you. Now we move to Marq.

Marquard Smith: Today, for me, visual pedagogy or visual activism begins and ends with positionality. In the interests of being open and transparent and accountable, I feel that it's necessary to foreground my own position as an academic and a curator, as a privileged, white, straight, middle-aged man, as someone who has the power and authority (by way of higher education, cultural institutions, exhibitions, public programming, and collaborative publication projects) to create conditions where that power and authority can be shared, redistributed,

relinquished. I'm trying to be a better ally, or rather an accomplice – because at this time it seems imperative not simply to collaborate with others per se but to deliberately commit crimes against power and authority!

I do feel that sense of urgency, as Magda put it, observing Brexit Britain amplify the discord in my dis-United Kingdom. Because of this, 2018–19 becomes a crunch year for me vis-à-vis visual pedagogy or visual activism. It's a year in which three projects – three occasions for visual pedagogy, three instances of visual activism – have been initiated! They're provoked by my profound ambivalence towards being English, a British citizen, an ambivalence which demands that today, on my first ever day in Poland, I'm going to come out as "White Other," as a German-Polish-Jew! I want to be out and proud of my own mixed-up-ness! [laughs]

Being mixed up is obviously a matter of heritage (of having mixed heritage), but it's also about the invisibility of whiteness and the privilege of passing, as well as rights, choice, and belonging more generally. I'm a Londoner and do have a British passport, but over these last few years I've become ever-more estranged from this ever-more divided United Kingdom; it's a feeling exacerbated daily by ever-more unsettling, infuriating, damaging, and saddening acts of prejudice.

Historically, being mixed up is rarely not pejorative: it's to be half-caste, quarter-caste, mixed breed, half-breed. It is to have mixed blood. It is *mestizo*, *pardo*, *tisoy*. It is *kailoma*, *hāfu*, and any and every term perceived negatively to describe a person of mixed race or ethnicity that, by very dint of being mixed up, will somehow adversely influence the "purity" of a particular race or culture. (Miscegenation, derived from the Latin *mixticius*, "mixed," is also the root of *mestizo*; Caste, also from Latin, *castus*, means pure.)

Fight the Power 2019/1989: We the Ungovernable, discussion at the Research Pavilion, Venice Biennale, August 2019, photograph by Julija Navarskaite.

Fuck that! I want to talk about the benefits!

The first project I'm going to share today is entitled *Mixed Up, but in a good way...* It's a project inspired by a conversation I had with Chiara Melazzini, then a prospective student on the MA Museums & Galleries in Education, the program I administer in Art, Design and Museology at UCL in London. During her interview, Chiara spoke about what it means for her to be an Italian-Japanese citizen, and how in Japan she is known as *hāfu*, which means half, half-cast, half-breed, bi-racial. It is a particular way of thinking in derogatory terms about what it means to be mixed up – mixed up but *not* in a good way.

When Chiara arrived in London, we conceived of *Mixed Up, but in a good way...*, a project led by graduate students on our MA, and also on the MA Art and Design in Education, and the PGCE in Art and Design, for the International Association for Visual Culture (IAVC).

The project was conceived by a curatorial collective of students who are of mixed heritage, or interested in how mixed heritage might shape their activities as artists, designers, artist-educators, teachers, curators, and museum and gallery professionals. The students were curious about what happens when mixed-up-ness *is a starting point* (rather than an added extra) for thinking and doing in art, design, and museology; and thus how it might transform the workings and effects of learning and teaching, making and curating, thinking and doing in schools, universities, museums and galleries, the art world, and beyond. Put simply, how does being mixed up (and thinking mixed-up-ness) change our beginnings, the shape of our ideas, what we're

capable of realizing?

In our ever-more excitable, caustic, polarized, and yet seemingly homogenous global public culture, how might mixed-up-ness lead the activities, the projects, the programming, the exhibitions, the ambitions of these students, and their ways of being and becoming more experimental, demanding, and empathetic as colleagues, professionals, collaborators – as citizens of our global commons and advocates for social justice?

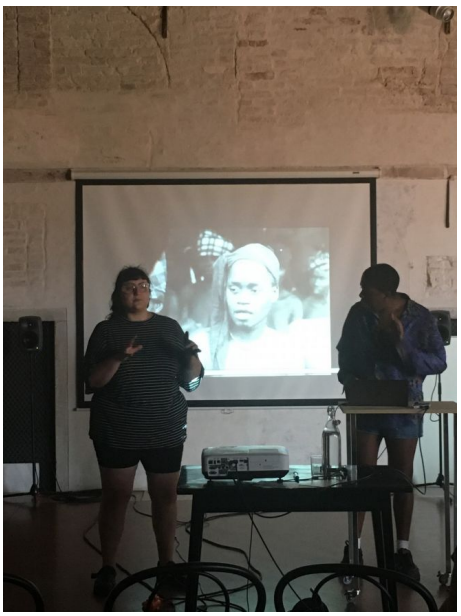
As the IAVC's first Curator-in-Residence, the idea was that this curatorial collective would "curate" the association's blog and Instagram account for three months, starting in February 2019. Building on conversations, reading groups, and meetings between students, four "chapters" of the curatorial collective wrote and posted regular blog posts (on decolonizing, on translation, on fugees/refugees, and a retort). These posts were accompanied by clusters of images that, over time, assembled to constitute an archive, a resource, a living methodology for thinking (and thinking through) mixed-up-ness.

Mixed Up, but in a good way... was an occasion to look to the future as mixed up, to a mixed-up future, to a future of mixed-up-ness, to how we as artists, designers, artist-educators, teachers, curators, and museum and gallery professionals might envisage that future, and to do so in order not only to interpret the world in various ways, but to change it. [laughs] That's Marx, obviously, from his "Theses on Feuerbach." That's visual pedagogy; that's visual activism as an act, an action, a doing! [laughs]

The second project was entitled *Do the Right Thing*. It was also a student-led project – there's a pattern here! [laughs] – composed of an exhibition of work by twenty-one PhD students in the 5,000-square-foot Titanikas Gallery at Vilnius Academy of Arts, a temporary education zone and learning resource center slap bang a public program of events and workshops, and a disco; and it included collaborations with activist groups, off-site arts organizations, a pirate radio station, and a publication

that is a living archive of the project. Its purpose was *to do* visual pedagogy or visual activism – not just in terms of content, but also form and format.

In terms of its subject matter, but also I'd say in terms of its… unconventional form and format, it was very much tied to the third project: curating the 2019 Nida Doctoral School (NDS) entitled *Fight the Power 2019/1989: We, the Ungovernable*. The NDS is an intensive program for DA and PhD candidates in the visual and performing arts, design, media, and the humanities. It's a context that enables PhD students to explore unorthodox approaches to research. Through making, performing, writing, and discussing, the doctoral school tests possibilities for generating knowledge outside of the more familiar venues and models of academic research. NDS's goal is always to provide time, space, and a conceptual framework for participants to gain insight into their research, as well as to broaden and diversify their outlook and methodological tools.



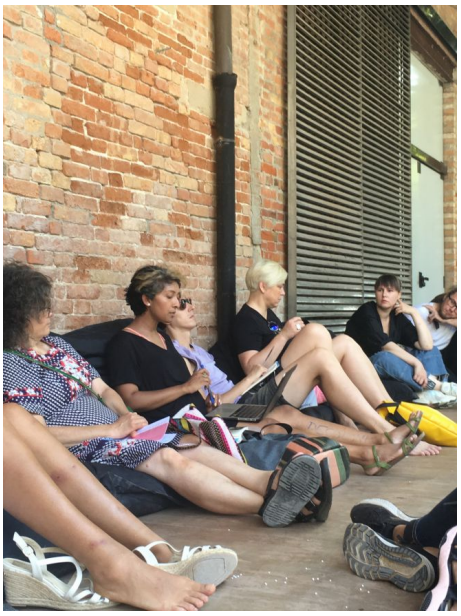
Fight the Power 2019/1989: We the Ungovernable, presentations at the Research Pavilion, Venice Biennale, August 2019. Left, Alessandra Ferrini, right, Onyeka Igwe.

As you might know, NDS is usually held in Nida on the Baltic coast, but in 2019 it was held at the 58th Venice Biennale – at the Lithuanian Pavilion (which went on to win the Golden Lion), the Research Pavilion, and the Laboratorioccupato Morion, a well-established squat and anti-fascist social center for gatherings, concerts, and parties, and for staging environmental protests.

Much like the project in Vilnius, the NDS was energized by the 30th anniversary of Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* and its

opening-credit sequence soundtracked by Public Enemy. Convinced by the radical potential of research-as-praxis, the NDS utilized this 30th anniversary to ask the simple question: what does it mean to do the right thing?

We asked: how can we as artists, designers, theorists, curators, educators, archivists, musicians, and critics engage critically with power? Where does power reside? How is it secured, consolidated, and utilized? And to what end? If power is embedded and embodied in systems – finance, education, culture, healthcare, and government – how can we discern, participate critically, and even transform such systems? If such governmentality is the organizing practice (mentalities, rationalities, and techniques) through which our society is rendered governable, how might we prove ourselves to be "ungovernable"? In our own search for justice, how – we asked – can our artistic research – our labor, communicative bodies, performative acts, conversations, commitment to communities and to our own practice – declare our resistance and dissent, our agonism and dissensus, thereby enacting our right to speak, which, in turn, enables us to not so much fight *the* power as fight *for* power, and in so doing, honor our obligation to doing the right thing?

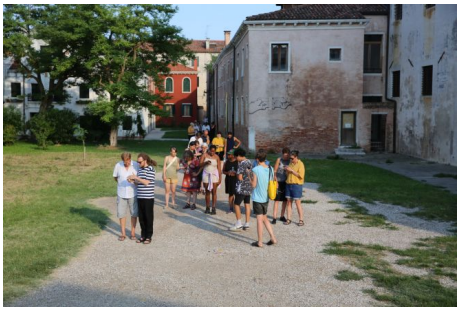


Fight the Power 2019/1989: We the Ungovernable, on-site learning at the Venice Biennale, August 2019. Centre: Michelle Williams Gamaker.

I framed the NDS very much in the context of social justice, in the present and because the present is a hinge between the past and the future. As a call to arms, for me Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* vibrates with our own climate of rising national populism and localism, #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, structural racial and gender and ableist inequalities, the global immigration crisis, civil unrest, the rise of the precariat and the gig economy, feelings of helplessness and exhaustion, and the whimsy of truth. As such, the NDS was an occasion to take stock of the present as it has come to be shaped by the historical-political-cultural events of and around 1989: the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe; the supposed demise of communism; the end of history and the beginning of the post-Cold War period; the suppression of mass political protest in Tiananmen Square; the beating of Rodney King and the LA riots; the pre-eminence of neo-liberalism; and the advent of an ethics of planetarity. Simultaneously the NDS was an occasion to look to the future, to how we might envisage the future, and to do so in order to, as I've already said, not only interpret the world in various ways but to change it! [laughs] I really do believe this is possible, and I was hugely encouraged by spending an intense week listing to and working with the eighteen PhD students in the NDS who identify as British African-Caribbean, British-Nigerian, Dutch, English, Filipino, Finnish, Indigenous Canadian, Italian, Lithuanian, Mexican, and Nicaraguan.

When it comes to visual pedagogy and visual activism, it was the subject matter of the Nida Doctoral School that "called out"

to the students, but also the form and the format of the week. And, for sure, their work, their *praxis* powerfully and profoundly "spoke to" the possibilities of being "ungovernable" – which is to say that they're familiar with these systems and practices and thus able to work with/in/against them and that culture (not just through art, but art and design and curating and criticism and programming and writing and thinking, etc.), and thereby intervene, redefine, and transform those systems and practices. Art and design can be weapons in the fight for social justice, yes; but artists, designers, critics, educators, academics, broadcasters, curators, programmers, and other "culture workers" are the agents of social justice!



Fight the Power 2019/1989: We the Ungovernable, walking presentation (by Vitalij Cerviakov), Venice Biennale, August 2019, photograph by Julija Navarskaite.

Recently I've returned to Roland Barthes's text "To the Seminar," which I've found very useful vis-à-vis visual pedagogy and visual activism.[1] Much like Ivan D. Illich and Paulo Freire before him, and so many since the emergence of critical pedagogy (see, for instance, Jane Gallop, Henry Giroux, bell hooks, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, etc.) and, later, the educational turn in art and curatorial practice, Barthes calls for participation, for plurality, for co-production, for conviviality, for reciprocity, for communities of and as difference. He writes that "as phalanstery, the seminar's work is the *production of differences*" (p. 334), as he celebrates the "unpredictable rhythm" of "listening up" as well as "speak[ing] up" (p. 336). What I've come to realize, by way of Barthes, is that *it is from my position of authority*, actually from *here*, as Joe L. Kincheloe writes after Freire, that I "demonstrate that authority in [my] actions in support of students," which is how, Kincheloe goes on, they "gain their freedom [...] the ability to become self-

directed human beings capable of producing their own knowledge[2]. Listening, learning, creating conditions where power and authority can be shared, re-distributed, and relinquished – that's how I conceive of my duty of care today.

MSz: Krzysztof?

Krzysztof Pijarski: I have a photographic background, I teach photography at the Film School, so one point of departure for me could be to ask about photography itself and the relationship between knowledge and visuality. To ask what do we actually understand from photographs, or, what do we see in photographs, how do we see the world through photographs? I have two quotes that may help in responding to these questions. The first is from Roland Barthes, who says that "Ultimately, Photography is subversive not when it frightens, repels, or even stigmatizes, but when it is *pensive*, when it thinks."[3]

Andreas Gursky, *Nha Trang*, 2004, chromogenic print mounted on Plexiglas in artist's frame, 294.64 x 207.01 cm
Copyright: Andreas Gursky, VG BILD-KUNST, Bonn, Courtesy Sprüth Magers

I think this is an important question. What does it mean for photography to be a pensive medium? Why should photography think, and not just limit itself to pointing? In my practice, I try to answer or approach this question in different ways. The other quote is from Susan Sontag, who of course was very skeptical towards photography. She said: "Photography implies that we know about the world if we accept it as the camera records it. But this is the opposite of understanding, which starts from *not* accepting the world as it looks. All possibility of understanding is rooted in the ability to say no. Strictly speaking, one never understands anything

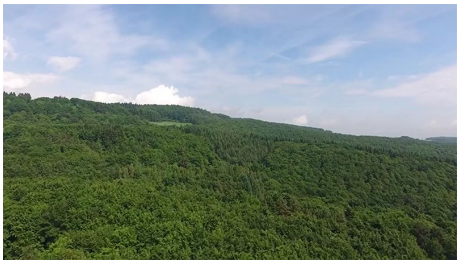
from a photograph."[4] What I find interesting in Sontag's statement is not so much the claim that photography simply cannot be critical because it is purely affirmative or declarative, but rather the suggestion that should a photograph ever lead us to a revelation in understanding anything, the catalyst or impulse must have been external to the image. Now, is it possible to imagine a picture where this stimulus is found within the field of the photographed thing? Could such a picture be considered pensive? What would the conditions of legibility of such a stimulus be?

My visual point of departure is this photograph by Andreas Gursky that became a point of contention between Michael Fried, Jacques Rancière, and Walter Benn Michaels. In the picture we see a vast factory space in Vietnam filled with workers constructing wicker furniture, seen from an elevated viewpoint (*Nha Trang*, 2004). I will be boiling a very complicated argument into one sentence, so bear with me, but Rancière's basic point of critique towards Gursky's picture, and Fried's analysis of it, was that they treat the people in it as ornament, making the workers, who are subjected to capitalist violence, disappear. They become subject to a very complex compositional structure. Then Michaels comes back to the photograph and makes a distinction between what the photograph is of and what it is about. This relationship is not obvious at all. While it is a picture of workers who we don't see and from whom we are separated very strongly in this visual structure, maybe it is a picture about the kind of separation that happens under advanced capitalism. Although this photograph might seem abstract and decorative, it is also the site of a compelling argument about the

Excerpt of 'Where the money is made' by Eline Benjaminsen (2017)

meaning and violence of capitalism.

So I am going to stay with this, with this thread of thinking, that the space of the pensive in photography unfolds in the relationship between what is visible and what's invisible. To elaborate on this idea, I would like to talk about two projects that were shown during Krakow Photomonth 2018, which was much criticized from the side of the photography community here in Poland. Many people to whom I talked to expressed their discontent that it was not enough about photography, and yet I think that this edition was very interesting, especially on the level of approaching the issues in question here. The two related projects I have in mind are *THE MARKET* (2010–) by Mark Curran and Eline Benjaminsen's *Where the Money Is Made*. Mark has embarked on this long-term project, *THE MARKET*, where he tries to think about shadow banking and high-frequency trading, aspects of the global financial markets that seem impossible to represent. I mean, high-frequency trading is making transactions in amounts of thousands of operations per second; this is something that transgresses the human possibility to even imagine. Mark's attempt at making visible some aspects of this shadowy sphere of financial operations can be described as what he calls an "anthropology of power structures."



Excerpt of 'Where the money is made' by Eline Benjaminsen (2017)

For example, he starts with a very straightforward portrait. Her name is Bethlehem, and she's a trader in Addis Ababa, at the Ethiopian stock exchange, the youngest stock exchange in the world. It was established in 2008. The important piece of information we learn from the artist is that it took him nearly two years to even be able to talk to her. Especially that Bethlehem is not a person in power who can give him inside information; all she is able to do is explain how the system works. What Mark does is

collect these testimonies and make them available in a kind of reading room that he organizes as part of the exhibition, where the viewer is left to put together her own image of the situation. Whatever he produces began with photography, but then went into this field that is not so easy to represent. These texts are also redacted – you don't have access to all the information he discovered, etc. Eline, on the other hand, focuses on the infrastructure of high-frequency trading – the radio towers, computers, and software that enable these ultra-quick exchanges that radically transcend human perception. She throws that into relief by filming long traveling shots with the help of drones, between the radio masts built expressly for this kind of information transfer, contrasting the beauty of the landscape and the pace of taking in the view with the massive data exchange cutting through it. Although high-frequency trading is not a new thing, it is only relatively recently that it has become a tool of making big money, a tool that is purely speculative, computational. Both projects I mentioned try to address this issue, to make it tangible, thinkable.

MSz: Thanks, Krzysztof. Now let's see how Joanne answers the question about visual pedagogy.

Joanne Morra: I would like to begin with a quote by Judith Butler from her "Preface" to the book *Psychosocial Imaginaries*.

> It is not that the psychic accompanies the social, but that each sphere permeates the other in ways that are not fully predictable. The social object turns out to be constituted, in part, by its psychic dimensions, and the psychological condition can hardly be separated from the social world in which it takes form. [...] Perhaps between impossible union and furious expulsion there is another region of feeling and knowing in which acknowledging what is most fearful conditions a modest breakthrough.[5]

It is this notion of a "modest breakthrough" in the interlacing of the psychic and social that interests me. It is the modest

breakthrough that may occur and that we may recognize when we teach in a classroom, when we work in a studio, when we engage with art in a gallery, or when we write in a study that is important to me as an educator in an art school context.

It's important to know that I teach art students – fine art students who are undertaking their BAs and completing their final-year dissertations, as well as PhD students working as artists or those who are invested in contemporary art and art theory.

The students I teach are almost all practitioners – students who make artworks, who write, who sometimes curate; students who work in a world which, as Magda has rightly pointed out, is a globalized culture with a rapidly changing environment. My students are aware of the canon and are also versed in discourses of feminism, queer theory, race, and privilege, and the onslaught of media images in their lives. The students I teach make work that engages with these social and political circumstances, and importantly, the students are pushed to locate themselves in this overdetermined, complex context – a context in which I too have to work to find my own place.

Recently, I have noticed a change in my ability and my students' ability to navigate this context.

In the Autumn of 2017, I was teaching BA Fine Art students at Central Saint Martins, as I have done there for over fifteen years. Sitting in the shared studio space, I was having an engaging discussion with one of my female students about her final-year dissertation. I asked her about her artistic practice and why there was nothing in her studio space. She turned to me and said that, unfortunately, she was not able to work in her studio. That she suffered from anxiety and depression and had taken a year out. She informed me that she was seeing a therapist and was on medication, but was still not able to come into college on a regular basis. She had photos of her art practice – all related to her anxiety – on her laptop, and proceeded to show them to me

and speak thoughtfully about her work, her diagnosis, and her artistic engagement with it. That day and the next I had tutorials with twenty-one students, and this student was to be the first of six female students who would inform me that they were dealing with anxiety, or depression, or body dysmorphia.

Socially and institutionally in higher education we are witnessing a serious rise in mental health issues – and I'm speaking from a UK perspective here, although this is an international situation really. Research done in this area suggests that the factors involved in this increase have to do with stress, with the pressures of social media, with tuition fees and debt, and with the uncertainty and precarity of what happens after their degrees. Anxiety, depression, stress – what are clinically called "common" mental health issues – are very real and present in my everyday working life, as are some of the more serious mental health issues such as psychotic breakdown and bipolar disorder.

Let me be clear: I am not a counselor or a psychotherapist; what I am is a committed educator and researcher.

Bringing Judith Butler back into the picture, I am concerned with the co-constitution of the psychic and social within pedagogy. Is there a "region of feeling and knowing in which acknowledging what is most fearful conditions a modest breakthrough"? What is it that I can offer my students, and what is it that I learn from them, from our pedagogical relationship to contemporary art, to culture – both shared and different from one another – and our individual concerns? What can we share?

So, let's return to my student. During our tutorial I told her that I too suffered from anxiety, and I had written an article about it. It was related to an experience I had while visiting an exhibition of Louise Bourgeois's work. An exhibition that contained many typical Bourgeois sculptures – with bodies in parts and with missing limbs, as well as a series of texts

related to Bourgeois's psychotherapy, texts that included fragments of thought and lengthy lists full of her complex understanding of emotional and psychic life as a female artist in a complicated, male-dominated world.

This is an example:

> step No 4 -
> I have failed as a wife
> as a woman
> as a mother
> as a hostess
> as an artist
> as a business woman
> and as any 47 –
> as a friend
> as a daughter
> as a sister
> I have not failed as a
> truth seeker
> lowest ebb

I sent my student the article. In her final dissertation, she referred to the article and used it – both taking it on board and challenging it. The student made clear in her dissertation that in the article I had mentioned the anxiety attack that I had during the show, but that the reasons for the attack were not clear. She picked up on the fact that there were still things missing in my analysis. And they remain so to this day. This is what the literary theorist Shoshana Felman, in her book *What Does a Woman Want?*, names the after-effect or belatedness of creative practices: "the way in which [Felman writes] I was precisely missing my own implication in the texts before me."

That experience of teaching those students in 2017 was one of the most difficult in my career. I was confronted in a very real way with the mental health of my students, as well as my own

(only partially effective) response.

Like all deeply important moments in education, and thus in my own writing and thinking, it has taken me some time to respond, and my response is only beginning to emerge.

I have come to recognize that psychoanalysis and education, as Freud noted in one of his late essays "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," are two "impossible professions." As we work, learn, and vitally "unlearn" in the consulting room and classroom – as teachers who are students and as students who are teachers – we engage in a peculiar form of speaking and listening: with oneself, with those who are in the room with us, and with those who join us through the unconscious. We recognize, following psychoanalyst Adam Phillips in his essay "Learning to Live," that "learning to speak and listen [in the consulting room and the classroom] has no pre-formed content. It has no predictable outcome."

My experience with the Bourgeois exhibition, with my student and through my own work, has made me increasingly committed to the relationship between the psychic and the social: the individual, the intersubjective, and the instability of our places within a complex and uncertain political, economic, and global context.

The image I have shared with you is of myself and my student, a real and imagined image of an experience. I have done this because I want to believe that in minor ways, through a modest breakthrough as a result of listening and speaking, of our engagement with one another, through art, visual culture, and our writing, through some form of shared recognition, using personal experience, at a local level, can be transformative.

MSz: And our last initial statement, by Bogna Burska.

Bogna Burska: My first thoughts about visual pedagogy were actually based on your question about the relationship between text-based education and visual-based education or

pedagogy. Frankly, my proper text-based education came to an end approximately a quarter of century ago, so I wouldn't really dare to compare them thoroughly. Also, setting any real divisions is impossible, since we use language when we teach. And first of all, I would rather talk about the difference between visual practice-based and theory-based than visual-based and text-based education and creative processes. I use texts often and also text-based concepts. In my studio, students often need to study selected texts, sometimes as a starting point to build an art project, more often as parallel support to their creative process. Obviously reading and studying was an important part of many of my own researches and projects. However, I pay lots of attention, personally and as an art teacher, to not losing artists' privilege and their main strength: process – intuitive, often non-linear, and at first sight not necessarily logical. We understand this intuition most often as not yet fully conscious (but already accessible) knowledge. We have to understand that the visual creative process works a bit differently to the process based on words, language, and linear logic; it is not only visible neurologically – there are different parts of the brain engaged in both processes, and also (or maybe therefore) in the visual creative process associations are built differently. They seem to appear out of nowhere, which is why normative rational thinking tends to neglect them. Fortunately, here contemporary neuroscience gives a hand to our skeptical reasoning: "This elegant finding [experiment with shogi players described in the article] links intuition with the caudate nucleus, which is part of the basal ganglia—a set of interlinked brain areas responsible for learning, executing habits and automatic behaviors. [...] In one interpretation, the cortex is associated with conscious perception and the deliberate and conscious analysis of any given situation, novel or familiar, whereas the caudate nucleus is the site where highly specialized expertise resides that allows you to come up

with an appropriate answer without conscious thought."[6]

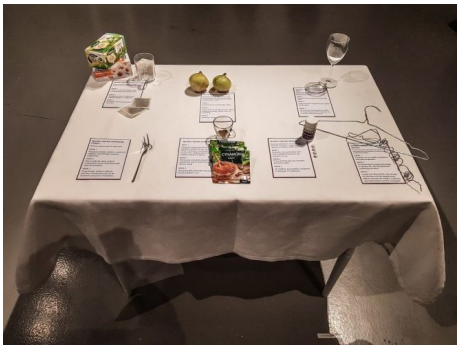
I personally experience it very clearly while writing a text or designing my own art projects – I always see an image or images; often I don't fully understand at this moment why it appeared in this particular context; these images appear at the beginning and during the working process. But as the project continues, at some point all the pieces fall into their correct places and it becomes clear why and what this image was, also for my more logical and linear mind. It is a coherent and concluding part of the project, often the most important for its sense, this very part that makes it somehow special, different, or simply interesting. Using both – visual practice and thinking as well as language-based (often theory-based) thinking – usually makes the creative process much more productive and original. I wouldn't contrast these two methods of education, but rather look for the best form of their fusion. For visual art education, visual thinking – adopting and accepting its non-linear qualities – is obviously crucial.

As a second answer to your question, I'd like to show you some examples of my students' work – the effects of visual pedagogy. The first come from my workshop on herstories. Traditionally speaking, herstorical practices are about collecting stories about women, interviewing women, publishing their stories, or maybe leading guided tours of places important for women. But of course, since we work with visual media, we decided with students that we'd visualize this concept. So it doesn't have to be a story. Here

Oliwia Kwiecień, *Wire Hanger Sculpture*, 2018.

is Julia Wierciłło's piece called *How to Do Abortion at Home*; the photograph tells you all that's going on here. Here is Oliwia Kwiecień's wire hanger sculpture, an object connected both to the historical practice of abortion and to the contemporary protests of the women's movement. And Natalia Woźniak's work on the very poorly paid labor of women working in laundries in her hometown. She presented it on hangers as well; as you see, this object has really dominated the imagination of my female students for the last two years.

Another topic I often work on is the relation of disability and perception. My assignment for students is to analyze the way space is designed – architecture, urban design, or whatever spaces humans create for themselves – from the perspective of disability. Once I ask them to look at space while thinking about disability, everything becomes denaturalized. Suddenly everything is revealed as designed. Anyone who teaches universal design knows that it's best not to do lectures on how important it is; instead it is enough to put students on wheelchairs somewhere in the city and say: "Hey, let's meet up there in half an hour." And a few hours later, having still not arrived at the meeting point, the students realize how much – and how inconvenient if in a wheelchair or with any other disability – space has been designed.



Julia Wierciłło, *How to Make an Abortion at Home*, 2018.

I think it's also worth saying that in many ways my job has gotten much easier as our political situation has been getting more and more dire. It's sad, but true. There used to be times when I had to put a lot of work into explaining the importance of social problems to my first-year BA students – feminism, the importance of concepts such as herstory, or environmental issues. Often, I didn't know where to start. Not

anymore – now they are very aware of how their lives are intensely political.

MSz: Thank you very much for all the opening statements. I am both excited that many of you have foregrounded issues that I've been thinking of while preparing for this roundtable. I'm also anxious that we won't be able to pull everything together, but I think that's precisely the challenge of dealing with visual culture. I'll try to move us in a certain direction – in the direction of teaching visual culture in a globalized and rapidly changing visual environment.

Picking up on many of the things that you have already mentioned, I'd like you to speak a bit more about the challenges of teaching visual culture – challenges intensified by two processes. First of all, the speed of change within visual culture – how rapidly new media platforms and genres appear and how quickly they gain the status of being extremely important in our daily lives. The second process I'm thinking about is the destabilization of the previously acknowledged canon that's been going on for some time now but has also recently reached a tipping point – here I'm thinking of the calls for decolonizing Western museums. Should we still be teaching the canon? Do we need to teach it to our students *before* we can decolonize it with them? And how do we function as teachers in this rapidly changing visual environment?

MS: I haven't taught or thought about the canon for twenty years! [laughs] I've never worked in an art history department, and I guess the question of the canon only really has any significance if you're working in an institution, in a department, that's shaped by, and thus constrained by, the disciplining regimes of disciplines. Like Jo, I've worked mostly in art schools, where, for me at least, art history or design history or whatever academic disciplinary formation isn't so important; artists and designers don't necessarily need to know about art history or design history as such; they need to know about how to situate

themselves and their practice in relation to histories and theories of art and design *practices*, which isn't the same thing.

I am really interested, though, in how a process like decolonization becomes an opportunity to unlearn and thus rebuild a curriculum. I like to start with the provocation and then think collectively about what the program is, who the students are, what's urgent, what *their* matters of concern might be. I like the idea of building a curriculum through the questions that are raised by competing knowledge regimes. I'm reading a lot of Achille Mbembe at the minute. He speaks in really fascinating ways for me about knowledge and systems of knowledge, the dominant traditions and tropes of post-Enlightenment, Euro-centric thought. Simultaneously, he's interested in alternative regimes of knowledge, alternative epistemes, ways of thinking and speaking between different knowledges and what that might produce. Mbembe talks about a radical cosmopolitan pluriverse, not the universal, but the pluriversal, and by extension not the university, but the pluriversity. It sounds a bit clunky, but you get the point – it's about creating a context where it's possible to think in different ways about what knowledge is and does.

KP: I haven't talked about teaching at all, but this is a good point to. My experience with curricula is that they're terribly rigid and that whatever happens, happens within this petrified and static structure. So we're working within a structure that doesn't move in a world that moves at the speed of light. And for me, this is a huge challenge. How do we cope with that? How do we address this rapid change within structures that are inherently conservative? I am not talking about the content of individual courses, but about the way the program is set up. The photography curriculum at the Film School, where I teach, for example, was set up twenty-something years ago, and I feel like we really need to ask ourselves the question of what it means

to teach, as well as to practice photography today.

BB: The Polish art education system is extremely conservative. I'm very privileged to work at the Academy of Fine Arts in Gdańsk, which houses the only department of art in Poland – the Department of Sculpture and Intermedia – where half of the staff is women. Here in Warsaw, I'm the only female art teacher who runs a contemporary art studio and it's only a visiting-professor studio. I came here with the feeling that I would address this issue. But then I only have female students, because I'm a female professor and students in this school are not used to it. So I simply proposed to work on non-dominant narratives. I asked them to define an interesting field within the system and to think what a dominant narrative is within this field, and then find non-dominant narratives that oppose it and work with it. A lot comes out immediately; everyone has a personal story where she finds herself somehow oppressed or dominated. This made the creative process extremely emotional.

JM: It's a modest breakthrough, I think.

BB: Yes.

JM: I'm divided on how I would answer the question about the canon, because I'm thinking about two different answers. On the one hand, I mean to be radical by saying something that is quite traditional. I have to mention that I was educated at the University of Toronto in a very conservative art history department. I had slide tests: this is when the tutor puts up slides of an image and then the student has to remember what it is, where the image is from, etc. I did very badly in Medieval art, because it was a very formalist type of pedagogy – and it was about being able to remember and decipher the folds of the clothes that saints wore, and different styles of manuscripts of the era. In addition, we also had to locate its place of production and origin, and I was very bad at geography, so I got everything wrong. But I did really well in the art of the Renaissance, the Reformation, and Baroque art, because I used to make up titles,

since they were often mythological and I could speculate on the narrative being depicted and which myth it could represent. Anyway, what I did obtain from that education was a fulsome mental archive of the Western canon of art. And I don't think that was necessarily a bad thing. In my teaching, I desire to do something that both educates in relation to the canon or parts of the canon, and also gives the other story that is excluded from the canon. When I give first-year lectures, that's what I try to do.

On the other hand, I agree with Bogna that it's really important to think about what students bring to the table. Our students are incredibly skilled, have politics of one persuasion or another, have things that are deeply important to them – they may want radical social change, or are interested in beauty and romanticism – and they bring these things into the classroom. I think that part of my job is to be able to engage with what my students bring, and also to think critically with them about those same interests. The idea for me is to enable my students to take whatever they bring and push it further, push it as far as we can together while still being about their project. Sometimes I'm not out of my depth, and sometimes I am, and that's the point at which I learn from them. Teaching is a two-way street for me.

JS: The questions are very complex, but I will try to reflect on my experiences. Speaking from the semi-peripheral position in regard to the Western canon, I have not worked out any fixed toolbox that would help me in challenging it. Needless to say, I don't have the institutional funds to make comprehensive research in post-colonial countries. In the past, when I was starting my work as a curator (early 2000s), I deliberately but intuitively wanted to network with artists and curators from a post-socialist, mostly Eastern European background. I think I wanted to rebel against my socialization into the globalizing art world following the masters of the Western canon. Then, when I realized that Eastern Europe is a vague concept,

I got interested in Immanuel Wallersteins ideas on peripheries, semi-peripheries, and core areas within the capitalist world economy. Simultaneously, I worked with artists such as *Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin and Tamás Kaszás,* and on concepts (in the exhibition *Untimely Stories*) that speculate about designing different world maps and suspending current hierarchies from the perspective of (semi-)peripheries. My very recent, imaginary map is the map of Earth as a common yet gendered household for different, interrelated forms of life (the exhibition *Pangea United*).

As regards the flow of images and manifold platforms of their circulation you mentioned, I often feel confused and overwhelmed. But here again I turn to visual artists who help to filter and apprehend the conditions of their production. They perform the work of cognitive mapping, to use Fredric Jameson's term, and render them intelligible anew.

MSz: In your initial presentations, some of you – Marq, Bogna, Joanna – chose images that seemed to have some sort of political agency. I was wondering whether you have any comments about the kind of factors that most contribute to the agency of images – not necessarily art, but vernacular images as well. What is it that makes a difference – the medium? The spatial conditions of presentation? The choice of public?

MS: I'm not very interested in images per se. I *am* super interested in visual, material and spatial cultures, but that's not the same thing. When it comes to images, the political right wins. The right know how to make images work for them – their functionality, their efficiency, their power. The left doesn't stand a chance. Progressive ideas are difficult to encapsulate in an image in a way that is of any use politically. Unlike conservative ideas, which are precisely about *conserving values*, which is exactly what the canon does, of course!

I'm really interested in the way that the public domain can be mobilized and can be used as a site of action. And in ways

that might be political. When I say "site of action," I guess I'm talking about how spaces and places and environments can offer themselves up, and be utilized and mobilized, as platforms of and for action. That might be a classroom, higher education, the museum and gallery, a public square, a journal or book or film, the internet, and so on and so forth. As *platforms* they all *have the capacity to institute action*, and to do that in ways that might be visual; but that's not about or because of images per se. The images are illustrative of other things that are more interesting for me.

MSz: That's a pessimistic answer. Although I certainly think recent history shows us that progressives do have a problem with creating images that would be capable of the sort of mobilization that conservative images perform. Progressive ideas – the proliferation of equally important issues and identities – are certainly much harder to visualize. But I don't think I would be as pessimistic as you are.

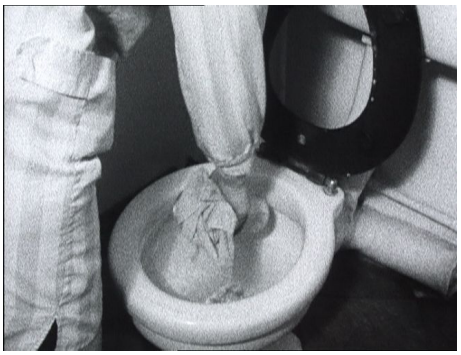
MS: I'm not pessimistic; I just don't think images are where it's at. An image of a worker is an image of a worker – it's not a worker. When I turn up for work in the morning my trash can is empty, and I know that's because a female migrant worker from East Africa has been there, working overnight, underpaid, as "casual" staff, cleaning the bins. I don't need an image from the 1970s avant-garde film tradition to convince me that night workers exist. I know that there are night workers.

MSz: But that's because you already have that knowledge. Not everyone knows or wants to know.

KP: I think that the agency of images is something totally indeterminate, unpredictable. Sometimes they have a political effect, but it's not something you can plan. I don't think it's practice-related in the sense that there is no way to figure out how to make images that will work, have an effect. In fact, the images that turn out to have agency are sometimes very weak – they become strong because of how they are used and not

because of how dense or inherently political they are themselves.

JS: I'm really interested in this question of weak and strong images; I don't really have any functioning tools to measure their efficiency and their impact. I do believe, though, that there should also be spaces for images that are sensitive and complex, and don't necessarily render themselves to being captured in mass contexts. For example, a film I included in *All Men Will be Sisters* – Berwick Street Collective's 1975 *Nightcleaners* – was actually an image that was supposed be part of a social campaign, which the filmmakers refused to make in the end, because they realized how complex the situation was. They were educated, white, mostly male cinematographers trying to make a film about female laborers cleaning London offices at night and support their struggle to unionize. But they ended up making a very ambiguous film about the contradictions inherent in that situation. They began to explore their own means of production and social class, and finally to hinder the representation and consumption of images of the labor of a feminized working class by means of the film. Ultimately, they created a work that upheld the political strategies of avant-garde cinema, which aspires to activate in its audience the practice of critical thinking. They employed certain formal measures to emphasize the incompatibility, isolation, and inaudibility of various types of statements, and the associated difficulties in building a community of workers. These techniques helped convey – without resorting to didactic commentary – the difference between the language and social capital of the union activists and that of the precarious female workers (some of whom had immigrant roots), as well as their invisibility among the traditional, white, masculine working class.



Berwick Street Film Collective, still from *Nightcleaners*, 1975.

I think that today we need – more than ever – images that foster the faculty of complex thinking and feeling. We – humans – are in the process of the violent reconfiguration of reason and affects by computation. As Achille Mbembe puts it, we are facing the mass production of commodified, algorithmized, goal-oriented subjectivities and new forms of life, whose value is reduced to that what is calculable and predictable. Simultaneously, we have to deal globally with simplified, "retronationalist," racist rationale. Employing strong images devoid of complexity is burdened with the risk of reproducing equally limited cognitive patterns for a "good" cause.

MS: I love complicated and contradictory, but it's not the way to win elections.

JS: I don't know how to win elections. I can take responsibility for working with images that may influence attitudes by appealing to sensitivity, empathy, imagination, or criticality.

KP: I wanted to go back to something Jo said, because I found it immensely interesting – the relationship between pedagogy and therapy, as well as this kind of fragility you mentioned. I am thinking above all about our students, who, it seems, are more and more often unwell, but also about the whole educational process. I've noticed this as well, and my institution has witnessed its share of difficult experiences. If I see a link between psychoanalysis and pedagogy, I think that one thing that connects them is slowness.

JM: Oh, I'm so glad you said that.

KP: The pace of the contemporary moment – the speed of visuality, of images, of engagement, of political action – is very much opposed to the desired pace of reflection, the fact that pedagogy needs a pensive moment. Speed deflates these

moments and spaces where reflection could happen.

JM: That was beautifully said. There is an excellent new book by Lisa Baraitser, a practicing psychoanalyst and professor at Birkbeck College, titled *Enduring Time*. She looks at the kinds of experiences that we have that are incredibly long in their duration and are experienced as the slowing down of time – taking care of people who are dying or who have been sentenced to life imprisonment. She examines these experiences and various artistic practices that have come out of them. Her work and the types of artistic practice she considers make me think about the various ways in which mental health issues, particularly the common ones, are dealt with through quick fixes – anything but psychoanalysis, which is very long and is quite expensive! So I'm very interested in artistic practices that are looking at the long haul in relation to mental health and the way in which people have written about their experience of being in psychoanalysis in relation to illness or breakdowns or depression. But also, the way in which artists deal with this – not in terms of quick fixes, but actually some sort of in-depth understanding of the subject and what we're experiencing socially at this point in time.

JS: Thinking about time from the perspective of the student – which I once was – I remember feeling deprived of that in school. I really wanted to have a tutor or supervisor who would listen to me and acknowledge my conditions, my financial conditions, my time, my necessary commitment to other areas of work. There was no language at the university to talk about this – the different financial circumstances of students and the amount of time they had for school, the different mental conditions. I remember the personal shame of not being able to study as much as I should have.

MSz: Speaking for teachers, I have to say that what you were saying earlier, Krzysztof, about the pace of pedagogy runs precisely counter to the model of the neoliberal university. And

the museum too. The pressure to constantly produce, constantly assess students, come up with names and categories for the skills that they are obtaining. There's really no way to slow down. Speaking of time, we should open up the discussion to include the audience.

Paweł Mościcki: I wanted to go back to the question of the canon. It seems to me that the canon appeared here as a very reduced object or concept. Because it's never just a domination. It is of course, for lots of reasons that we all know, a way to impose a certain kind of cultural sensitivity, discourses, and so on. But it's never reduced to them. The canon is never free from violence and it's never reducible to violence. So, for example, 17th-century paintings – even female nude paintings – are never just about exploitation, although they're never free of it. Since we're talking a lot about psychoanalysis, I think it's really remarkable that psychoanalysis – which is a very modern invention and very a progressive one, even at times quite revolutionary – has a very strict relation to the canon, to its own canon. Imagine a psychoanalyst who starts with the newest inventions and newest articles without going into Sigmund Freud – that's not possible. Or imagine a psychoanalyst who just doesn't give a shit about Lacan, because he was very dominating figure... So, it's a very interesting process in which we have a very limited canon – limited, because it's relatively new – and it's a very specific area of research and practice, but at the same time the strictness of this relation opens up the possibility of experimentation, because it's an experimental science in lots of ways. So, I think that it would be interesting to maybe come back to the canon not just as something that is imposed. Maybe it's something to be challenged or something to struggle with.

MSz: That was decidedly unhelpful. We wanted to dump the canon and now we're back!

KP: Do I understand that what you're saying is also that the canon – or *a* canon, maybe, rather than *the* canon – is the

condition of a common language? In the sense that without certain tropes we can refer to or meet at, there's no way we can communicate? We have to find a kind of past somehow. And when we work within certain fields of practice, the history of that field gives you a certain relay. But the other thing is something that Marq said, the question of how you mediate between different currents.

MSz: How you deal with mixed-up-ness.

KP: Mixed-up-ness, yes. This is something that is really not trivial, in the sense that I have a feeling we have imposed the Western canon on everything. I mean, in art history this is a fact. I remember one anecdote that really spoke to me. Many years ago, James Elkins was here in Poland, when he was working on the idea of global art history. While studying the Chinese painting tradition he realized that it had its own Vasari – China's own first art historian, so to speak. And basically, it is like Vasari, but the first chapter of that long book is essentially feng shui. So, it's about how a painting influences your life and where a painting should hang in the house, etc., etc. And he asked a fellow professor who taught this text in a university setting: "Well, how do you teach it?" And he replied: "Basically, it's Vasari." "Yeah, but what do you do about the first part?" "Well, I just ignore it. After that it's Vasari." How can we avoid this kind of appropriation? Can we avoid it at all?

MS: What interests me is what happens when you don't conflate the differences, you don't flatten out the intensities, and when you don't try to make the things that don't fit, fit. You don't turn it into something that's intelligible or interpretable. You sit with it, in all of its complexity, and you ask what the fuck is going on. What is it, what might it be, and do? And that's the slowing down. That's why slowing down is so important. You know – slow looking, slow thinking, slow reading. It's working out what the hell is in front of you. If you *can't* make sense of it, that's super

interesting as well.

Achille Mbembe writes about what Frantz Fanon does at the interface between psychoanalysis and postcolonialism. There's a point when, in the 1960s and 1970s, Fanon's addressing Eurocentric philosophical traditions. And nobody's listening, nobody cares, nobody gives a shit about the postcolonial, or rather, no one really "gets" that "interface." Nobody cares, and so he turns away. He loses interest in talking to those who won't listen, who can't hear, who don't care. Sartre understands what's happening. He says, and I'm paraphrasing: "Fanon is not talking to us anymore." That's a really incredible and profound moment. Fanon just stops talking to the post-Enlightenment tradition, to Eurocentric culture, to the canon, etc. He actively turns away from European tradition and thought, and turns towards Africa, away from the colonizers and towards operations of independence, internationalization, cosmopolitanism, postcoloniality, decolonization. What does it mean that he's not talking to "us" anymore?

Imagine that today this might be what's going on outside Europe (and within Europe by way of, say, discourses of Black Europeanness or Afro-Futurism): that artists and thinkers and activists are engaging in the world by way of aesthetics, words, and praxis, and producing it anew, but that when "we" engage with it we don't understand it or we're struggling to "get" it, and imagine coming to realize, finally, that fundamentally *it simply might not be for me*, for us; it's not for me, *it's not for us*! It had never occurred to me for a million years that it wasn't for *me*! [laughs] How could it *not be* for me? [laughs] But it turns out that it's *not* for me. I'm not talking about taste or judgement, that it's not my kind of thing. Rather, I mean, it's not for me epistemologically or ontologically; I wasn't in their mind; they didn't have me in mind, not even slightly! Get your head around that! Imagine you begin from this premise, and then begin to put a curriculum together from here. Let's start from: "I don't

understand this," "I don't know what to do with this," "this isn't for me." Let's spend a ten-week course working this out! It would be amazing!

MSz: I think that's a perfect ending to our discussion.

1 Roland Barthes, "To the Seminar," in: *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989 [1974]), 332-342; Joe L. Kincheloe, *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (New York: Peter Lane, 2008).

2 Joe L. Kincheloe, *Critical Pedagogy Primer* (New York: Peter Lane, 2008), 17.

3 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 38.

4 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 17.

5 Judith Butler, "Foreword: Tracking the Mechanisms of the Psychosocial," in: *Psychosocial Imaginaries. Perspectives on Temporality, Subjectivities and Activism* , ed. Stephen Frosh (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), X.

6 Christof Koch, "Intuition May Reveal Where Expertise Resides in the Brain," *Scientific American* online, May 1, 2015, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/intuition-may-reveal-where-expertise-resides-in-the-brain/.