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On timescapes

Sobre paisajes temporales

Sobre paisatges temporals

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Abstract

The article conveys and discusses selected art projects in the perspective of a practice of composting in relation to “timespace-matter”; to do do this, it refers to the collaboration with the trans-disciplinary collective Kompostistische Internationale, expressly inscribed in the concluding artwork Dissolution Table. Items of interest are the “subject”/“object” relation and strategies of “inter-subjectivity”; the interaction with toxic/sensitive materials (of the past/present/future); the practice of re-membering and a possible negation of the institution of the archive.

Keywords

Composting; spacetime matters; Media realism; art practice; archival re-turning; re-membering; toxic materials.

Resumen

El artículo transmite y discute proyectos de arte a través de la perspectiva de una práctica de compostaje en relación con el “tiempo-espacio-materia”; para ello, se remite a la colaboración con el colectivo transdisciplinar Kompostistische Internationale, expresamente inscrito en la obra final Dissolution Table. Los ítems de interés son la relación “sujeto”/“objeto” y las estrategias de “intersubjetividad”; la interacción con materiales tóxicos/sensibles (del pasado/presente/futuro); la práctica del recuerdo y una posible negación de la institución del archivo.

Palabras clave

Compostaje; materia-espacio-tiempo; Realismo mediático; práctica artística; devolución de archivos; recordar; materiales tóxicos.

Resum

L'article transmet i discuteix projectes d'art a través de la perspectiva d'una pràctica de compostatge en relació amb el “temps-espai-matèria”; per això, es remet a la col·laboració amb el col·lectiu transdisciplinar Kompostistische Internationale, expressament inscrit a l'obra final Dissolution Table. Els ítems d'interès són la relació subjecte/objecte i les estratègies d'intersubjectivitat; la interacció amb materials tòxics/sensibles (del passat/present/futur); la pràctica del record i una possible negació de la institució de l'arxiu.

Paraules clau

Compostatge; matèria-espai-temps; Realisme mediàtic; pràctica artística; devolució d'arxius; recordar; materials tòxics.

The framework of composting for the practice of re-membering

WHY do WE refer to the practice of composting, and WHAT do WE purport to compost? In this case, what are the monolithic, linear and hegemonic timescapes of the Anthropocene. Because the Anthropocene can not be just superseded or overcome; because this very logic of surpassing, of progressing and synthesizing,¹ constitutes the Anthropocene's main diet: a violent concept of time where each moment is absolutely present and then absolutely past, dead, forgotten, a succession of substitutions, each predecessor the surrogate for its descendants.

Especially Karen Barad proliferates a gesture of composting not only the Anthropocene's space, but also its time—its spacetime-matterings—by her concept of “turning it over and over again—iteratively intra-acting, re-diffracting, diffracting anew, in the making of new temporalities (spacetime-matterings), new diffraction patterns.” (Barad, 2014, 168).

To be able to re-turn, to iteratively re-diffract time, this contribution explores the aesthetic practice of remembering: “Freedom/haunting: two sides of the same experience. Conjuring a future full of pasts, a ghost-ridden freedom is both a way to move on and a way to remember.” (Lowenhaupt-Tsing, 2015, 79).

Remembering can be seen as a response-able way of never letting go, of never killing the past for a truly brighter future—where one can eventually be free and independent of the past—, but as a practice of welcoming it in its ghostly hauntings.²

At this very point, I must clarify: personally, I'm an optimist, also a cultural optimist.

Appropriation of terms and some operators of composting

Even this paper does not contain explicit references to any theoretical or speculative body of work, its narrative already adopted, disposed of, digested categories of thought and empirical observations by many authors, indispensable a.o. Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Carla Lonzi, Anna Lowenhaupt-Tsing, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Jacques Rancière, Rebecca Schneider, Astrid Schrader, Ruth Sonderegger.

The appropriated terms of spacetime-matterings and compost (both as matter and a material practice) have been put in relation to the tasks of “form finding”.

The reference to spacetime-matter intends to operate the idea of a “reality” not made by separate, discrete entities (if not negotiated in the here and now). The distinction and juxtaposition of “subjects” and “objects” is expected to be composted and operated as a relational practice: „What if we were to recognize that differentiating is a material act that is not about radical separation, but on the contrary, about making connections and commitments?“ (Barad, 2012, 47).

In this exercise the “form finding” is set as a complex of material acts of differentiation where the agents reflect “themselves” in relation to past experiences, sensory and psychic “presets”, emerging and situated response-abilities. In the same setup all the involved “material” is compost, something YOU can not

¹ This “logic of surpassing, of progressing and synthesizing” is not unlike the one proper to modernity with all its practices and political, aesthetic and scientific claims. Personally, (in the sense of a scientific affirmation, positive) I consider that the “creation” (or adaptation) of the Anthropocene as a geological metaphor of/for human history, eventually functions like a mental escape (in the future): from the formal (that is, formative) realities that shape US, from different “materialisms” (material practices and corresponding logical considerations such as optimization thoughts) related to industrialization, colonialism, capitalism, globalization as ongoing processes (which could be stopped or radically transformed).

² Until here/now, the introduction has adapted words thought with/by members of the collective *Kompostistische Internationale*. In particular, these words fit and refer to protagonists of research narratives such as the (last) Tasmanian tiger as treated by Friederike Ahrens, the main character of the novel *Never Let Me Go* as treated by Joshua Ben Pesch, and *After/Life* as treated by Fiona Schrading in their contributions to *Queerfeminist Compostings of the Anthropocene – Ecologies, SpaceTimes, ResponsAbilities* (*Kompostistische Internationale*, 2022). This text is dedicated to their sensitivity for the present (and future) of figures, agents, life forms of the past, or without an own past. *No past, no future.*

protect from changing attributes, its use and “meaning”.

The perspectives opened up by spacetime-mattering and composting have been reflected also as formal operators inside this text. The composting of certain structures of thought and text generation have been “marked”, not because they can be solved, corrected or undone; much more because they “contain” THE relation, because they can be the (spacetime)matter of negotiation around my/your cognitive situation. In particular pronouns have to be questioned, first of all the WE and the US, which establish the identity of those, who observe an external reality which the text internalizes. The capitalization of some words intends to fix the (spacetime)matter where the writer/reader has to simulate a form, which is “not really” there, which is absolutely negotiable, which can be expected to get composted. Added to that, quotation marks not only distinguish published sentences with their source; they are also applied to terms because of their contextual ambivalence or unorthodoxy, in particular if related to the making/becoming of subject and object, it means in terms of a differentiation (of entities) as a practice of connection and commitment instead of separation and exploitation.

The framework of art (techniques) and the use of time as a material (for art)

In order to highlight the possibility to experience (to act with) time as a “physical” matter, this paper refers to (six) specific artistic works using them in order to articulate some more general art practice. This more general art practice is clearly situated as European; as such, it is able to access (Western) European institutional resources and uses European socio-historical references. At the same time, the more general art practice to which this paper points, can lay claim to the designation “feminist”. Specifically, I am introducing here the idea of an art practice which already reflected and appropriated techniques and protocols of “media realism”, like surveillance, monitoring, experimental repetition, recording, playback and re-enactment.

Art practice contingent to a “creative use” of recording media, archival logic and instruments, a use “free of order”, let me think of all the wounds, gastric ulcers, sleepless hours and digestion problems of artists re-turning matter which hurts. Toxic materials, malicious instruments. Creation, transformation, refinement, instead of erasure and final undoing or material dissolution. “WE would (really) have to destroy some items of the archive” claims the artist here/today.

Narratives and the use of time as a material

This text builds on the reproduction of narratives from artistic projects and their chronologies. The projects produce the past by documenting the present (1); they evoke the past in order to create new relations to the present (2); they create a new present through an “extension” of their “own” past (3); they consider giving up pasts (4); they accept that envisioning dissolves the relation to the past (5); they create new “subjects”, new positions that negotiate their relation to the past “together” (6).

The description of chronologies serves to situate pasts in relation to one another. The present of the “subject” who acts in the artwork is no longer that of the artist who opens and closes the work.

The text uses the selected artworks in order to frame artistic action in terms of “subjectivity(ies)”. The subjectivity that means the view of herself, as well as the one which faces an “object” that she understands as simultaneously foreign and her own. Throughout the projects, the relation between subjectivity and objecthood is variable, like that between (active) memory and (passive) document. A re-turning is visible as an action, in some projects operationally central, even constitutive: without re-turning any artwork.

The selection of the works does not impose a typology, yet the works stand sometimes next to each other, sometimes in relation to each other, as if they were discrete positions on a (pluridimensional) continuum of possibilities. Thus the selection serves more to visualize a leap: between questions and strategies that

activate similarities, without wanting to form a system from them.

As far as (these cases of) artistic work do(es) not intend to prove any thesis, nor to produce a message as such, this article is not going to formulate any conclusion to the case studies presentation. Interest and motivation of this contribution refer to the property of artistic work to formalize questions, affections and relations, so that art practice can improve on its own methods.³ The more “technical” methods these art projects apply, can visualize relevant issues of possible “inter-subjective” relations:

the way the agent/s is/are situating herself/themselves;

the production and reproduction of multiple points of views;

the transformation of relations;

the transfer of action;

the time-related dynamic of affects, which means the setup of time-related operations, first of all repetitions;

the offensive use of textuality in order to present an inversion of the process of “objectification”.

The selected art projects are going to be discussed as follows:

La Filature (The Shadow)

ohne Title/senza titolo (untitled)

states of documents

Abysse—performing the archive

Douleur exquise (Exquisite Pain)

Dissolution Table.

Dissolution Table is a project I have produced between 2018 and 2022, that explicitly refers to a practice of composting as discussed and

imagined by a group of scholars. The interaction of contingency and intention in the discussion of relational objects is inscribed in the situative AV-recording which delivered the initial “material” for the “piece”. Apart from the methodological choices realized in the subsequent developments of the becoming artwork, it was rather affection-related “insights” that led me to the selection of the further art projects. In particular I identified the conceptual piece *Douleur exquise* by Sophie Calle as a useful counterpoint to *Dissolution Table* in order to reflect the field of tension between subjectivity, pain and time, and the possibility to “use” it as a material for aesthetic formalizations. All the presented projects are intended to contribute to a vision of “realism” as a “form finding” strategy which is not unique, but adaptive; together they seem to diffract their “subjects”, first of all the (epistemic) position of the artist herself.

Timescape 1: 1981, after 1979, seven years after 1972

“In April 1981, at my request, my mother went to a detective agency. She hired them to follow me, to report my daily activities, and to provide photographic evidence of my existence.” (Calle, 2002, 6-7)

After returning to Paris as a stranger, following unknown people on the street⁴ to rediscover the city in 1979, the becoming artist Sophie Calle arranged herself to be pursued (for one day). In *La Filature (The Shadow)* Sophie Calle juxtaposes the detective’s photographic account and textual report to her own observations. As third witness, the art viewer experiments some designed superposition, capable of reflecting the simultaneity of the “subjective” expectation (of the female artist) and object-making relation (of the male detective).

³ The improvement of methods means in my perspective that the work of art develops its “readability”; such a readability is not a performativity “for the viewer” (there are not better readable artworks for neither universal nor situated viewers), but a relational quality between the artist work and its formal “objectification”. Readability answers the (rhetorical) question of how much or what exactly the process of relation between the artist(s) and the materials

they use, is going to be “inscribed” in something else. In the perspective of the artist(s), readability results from their response-ability to their materials.

⁴ Sophie Calle started combining observation, surveillance, photographic evidence and textual narrative with *Filatures Parisiennes*, collected texts and photographs of 1978/1979, anticipating works like *Suite Vénitienne*, also realized in 1979.

“Thursday, 16th of April. 10 am. I am getting ready to go out. Outside, in the street, a man is waiting for me. He is a private detective. He is paid to follow me. I hired him to follow me, but he does not know that. At 10:20 am I got out.” (Calle, 2002, 2)

„At 10:00 am we take up our position in front of the residence of the subject (...). At 10:20 am the subject leaves the house. She is wearing a grey raincoat, a pair of grey pants, black shoes, tights of the same color. She carries a yellow shoulder bag.“ (Calle, 2002, 9)

“Then I walked towards Luxembourg Gardens. I want to show “him” the streets, the places I love. I want “him” to be with me (...). I keep my eyes lowered. I am afraid to see “him””. (Calle, 2002, 3)

For few days the artist also arranged a friend, named François M., to wait for her at the same time/spot in order to observe if she is being followed. On April 16 around 5:15 pm the added witness observes Sophie Calle followed by a young man—twenty-five of age, wearing a leather jacket, carrying a camera around his neck—, who is taking a picture of her. François M. documents himself his target taking a picture, and follows him as long as he enters a movie theater and loses track of his target, Sophie Calle.

That the detective has been watched himself is the condition that clarifies the transfer of relational “toxicity”: while the (female) “subject” is staging herself in order to structure someone's day, the (male) “observer” does not know of her knowing about being watched, nor about himself being watched. As a formal reduction, and an inverted transfer, to be watching someone unknowing of being watched, performs here the point about (relational) toxicity in generating (“objective”) reality.

The artist forces another person to observe her, to perceive and document her existence. She projects onto this gaze on herself an act of dependence and love; she writes in her reports,

she wants to please this gaze, she wants to exist in relation to this person.

She records her expectations and her observations, she writes about “him” even before she has seen “him”. In the English translation of the detective's documents, the artist is called the “subject”. The collected material evidence includes the notes of the artist dated 16.4.1981 and those of the detective, the pictures of the artist taken by the detective, and a short report by François M., who on 16.4.1981 observed the detective and photographed “him”.⁵

The mode of presentation of this and several of the artist's works combining photographic evidence with text, oscillates between the book artifact and a kind of raffinate “posters presentation” dedicated to getting viewers to read while standing in an exhibition space. Apart from the presentation as an installation, I would like here to focus on her, the artist and first target of observation, looking at the report pages and pictures of herself taken from the back or from the distance. To think of the physical reality of her touching pages and or photographic paper. And to reflect here the question of simultaneity. The established description of Sophie Calle's practice as one of “self-fictioning” means technically a representation of (constructed) simultaneity, where the main artist's instrument is the application of “femininity” (as a form of active/passive worlding).



Sophie Calle, *The Shadow* (1981): Detail photographed from page 10 of the catalog (Calle, 2003, 10)

⁵ The different sources of documentation make clear, that the relation between the main agents was interrupted quite early, around 6 pm, when Sophie Calle left the cinema alone, without being observed by the detective, who had

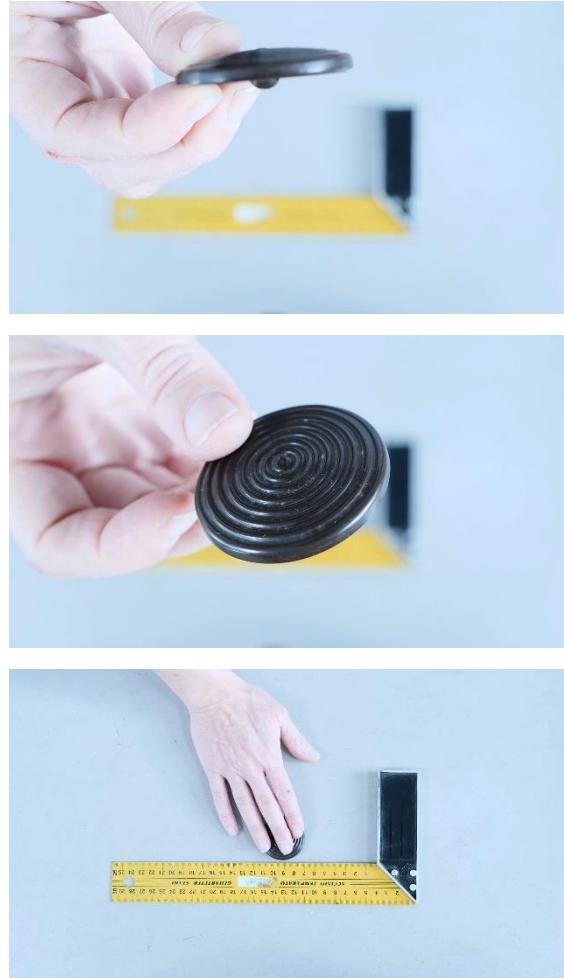
later been following someone else, and concluded the surveillance at 8 pm. So the artist kept unobserved until 5 am when she went to sleep in a hotel room, drunk and not alone.

The haptic aspect remains the most acute: that a document of reality—with its perspective and attitude—is disposable, physically, and can be touched (or monumentalized). The past, even the artist's own past, is physically disposable.

This as a timescape presented art project is based on the “object-making” of the artist who makes herself available as a material; to do this, the artist involves a relation operated by an adapted practice of stalking. The strategy, specific to the artist, aims at the emergence of new narratives both as a result of her conceptual work and her contextual and situated sensitivities. From the perspective of this text, the most interesting “reality” inscribed in the artwork is that a past has been generated, combining “subjective” expectations and intentions with “objectifying” instruments, and that the core setup of these “objectifying” instruments can not be called cooperative nor seen as negotiated on the basis of shared or common interests. Effectively, it is exactly this “misuse” of the “objectifying” agent that anticipates a relation to the audience.

Timescape 2: In 2017, referring to objects already existing in 1938, obtained after 2009

After my grandmother died at the age of almost 101, I took over very few items from her last flat. Among these things, mainly related to embroidery and sewing, is a transparent plastic bag, where 235 buckles have been stored. They have been stashed for decades, moved from/to different regions and houses: their common origin is the introduction of the racial law in Austria and Italy in 1938. With an audio/video-work titled as *ohne Titel | senza titolo (untitled)* I set up a textual exercise related to the shocking experience of my aunt saying, grandmother took them from her “Jewish friend”, staging the trial to use these physical objects and their visual qualities as matter which haunts me, re-turning a past that I cannot control. The text applies repetition as a central aesthetic instrument (repetition of words as sounds, but also as meanings and visual gestures), and makes very literal observations evoking the attitudes of counting, measuring or indexing.



Susanna Schoenberg, *untitled* (2018), frames from the video

The objects—functioning as pieces of evidence—can be treated as items of the biographical imagination archive of “my” personality. I can associate their physical integrity to the impossibility to compost what they mediate: (im)possible narratives about the relation to Italian and German fascism that my relatives have censored (forever).

In fact, the study of these objects is still incomplete. Within the study complex, there are excursions to collections and archives in order to identify materials and date objects. Hand sketches of the objects have been drawn and an inventory has been set up. The buckles have been digitally scanned to develop printable 3D-files. The leading idea is/was to work on the scale, that is, to use an oversizing of the archived objects as the allegory of a (self-)lie. The video recordings of *untitled* were produced in 2017, a text was written, first in German then in Italian, and recorded as spoken in both

languages. The video and audio tracks are supposed to be presented in a projection and amplification setup without designed synchronicity, temporarily loose.

The text refers to the materiality of the buckles—to the information conveyed by markings and engravings on them, the fragments of writing and numbers on their labels, the descriptiveness of color, shape, seriality of forms, material—to establish relationship with their temporal location: What language, what currency are involved; in particular, where does the material come from (from which manufacturing process). The text presupposes that the existence of this bag and its contents in grandmother's inheritance is related to the dispossession and/or escape of a Jewish friend, that is, a known person who is said to have had her haberdashery store either in Austria (Villach) or Italy (Tarvis).

“Grandmother was in Tarvis, 32 kilometers from Villach. 69 kilometers from Klagenfurt. She keeps 235 pieces in a bag, which probably came later. After 1938 she moved completely at least twice. She used to tailor her own clothes. Partly. Anyway, she collected a lot for sewing, also for embroidery. And this bag, the contents of which she supposedly bought because her friend had to close up the store because she was Jewish.

Are the prices in Reichsmark? Many buckles are made in AUSTRIA. The made in designation is a British invention from 1887 that made cheap imported products from Germany recognizable.

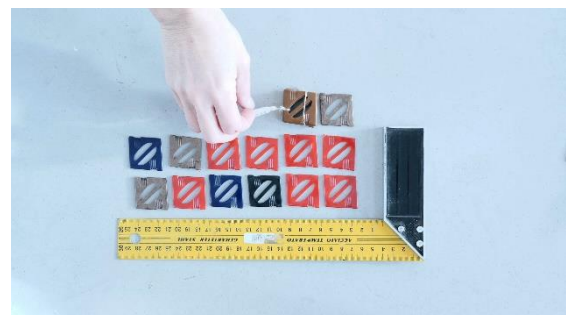
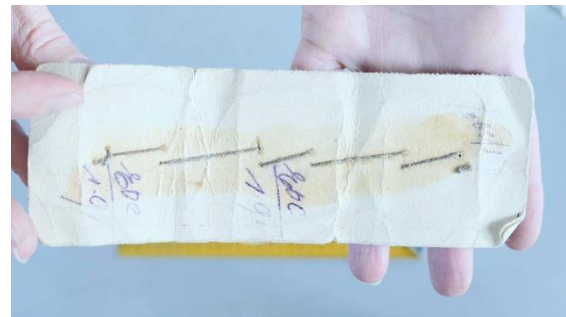
Were the buckles also purchased in Austria, or were they purchased in Italy, on this side of the border?

Which racial law made the Jewess sell, that of the 3rd Reich, or the Italian one, introduced without being asked for in July 1938?

What kind of friend is the Jewess whose buckles grandmother buys, 235 pieces, made of a plastic not yet identified, or even of several ones. Does she speak German, Italian, Slovenian?” (Susanna Schoenberg, 2017)

The work laments a non-relationship to the family's past, as well as to a time that is fundamentally a non-relationship to one's

grandparents. The present is informed that Jews who tried to escape could not sell their belongings according to the real value; if they got to it at all, and had not been expropriated, or simply robbed. The collection of buckles corresponds to a market value at that time of about 180-330 RM, which means a purchase value of at least 800 euros. The impossibility of knowing “by herself” how much grandmother paid for these buckles, the fact of not being able to imagine an honest purchase, allow a “subjectivity” to emerge that perceives herself as alienated in these objects, in the attraction for the things that grandmother kept, for their seriality, and for collecting and hoarding them herself.



Susanna Schoenberg, *untitled* (2018), frames from the video

In terms of a timescape, this art project treats a past that is not available (to the artist). The found objects are expected to contain a relation to past realities, so that their indifference to time—their non-ageing and their persistence in the same family—is equated as the impossibility of composting their (relational) meaning. If timescape 1 happens by monumentalizing the “subject”—made more appealing and interesting by inventing some (toxic) objects related to it—, this timescape presents a vanishing, unsafe “subject” monumentalizing its relation to objects which is felt as ambivalent (and toxic).

Timescape 3: In 2012, referring to recordings from 2011 dedicated to medical and legal documents from the 1970s found in an abandoned building at the mining plant San Giovanni in Iglesias on the island of Sardinia

In the context of an artist-in-residence focussed on the methodological idea of returnability⁶ as a particular attitude for artistic intervention, during a visit to the mining plant San Giovanni in Iglesias, I walked unobserved into an abandoned building, where I found bags full of old documents, in particular reports of accidents made by the company medical officer, and an official brochure published in 1977 by INPS, the Italian national institute for social security, concerning the rules of retirement for mining workers (and their surviving family members).

Excerpts from these documents have been read and video-recorded at their find spots immediately, on November 27 in 2011. The attitude of the camera is as uninvolved as possible in the determination of what WE see; it operates as an extension of hand and voice rather than a (re)production of the gaze. But the camera is THERE, recording a time of browsing through files and the artist's voice trying to decipher mostly handwritten words on printed forms.⁷



Susanna Schoenberg, *States of Documents* (2012), frames from the video

These fragments of past realities, the workers's files, the situations—accidents, in particular—they were involved in, the implicit hard facts behind the rules of early retirement or pension after death, e.g., become then an off-text for more video footage, played-back or re-read on two different locations: the almost abandoned miners village of Montevecchio, where the play-back is choked down by the wind despite the use of a megaphone, and the community of Buggerru, a former miners foundation as well, where the text is read by a municipal employee in charge for official public announcements, and amplified through the local public voice system. The repeated “public making”—or technical amplification—of the documents is an exercise of reenactment, the repeated trial to get in relation with the timespace of the “subjects/objects” signified in the documents. The linear video-work edited from the situational footage is titled *States of Documents* (*SoD*) and is made by eleven (mostly one-shot) sequences of one minute in duration each. The editing structure refers to the idea of indexing

⁶ Artistic intervention is here focussing “form finding” strategies in public or accessible spaces with the goal of re-feeding (amplifying, strengthening..) the found form “on site”: <http://susanna-schoenberg.net/e-concepts/returnable>

⁷ The (documentarian) strategy of copying by reading creates two very different associations. On the one hand I would like to point to some hypothetical need of transferring (factual) contents (of the past) to speech (and oral

transmission) to preserve them from censorship and destruction. On the other hand I underline the juxtaposition between the (written, thus material) objectivity of facts produced and recorded by a state-similar authority, and their (verbal, performative) (mis-)appropriation (by the artist): the artist's archive in this case does not appropriate the very same archival items, and the artist deliberately leaves the found documents to decay.

the footage, as far as different states of the documents (performed timespace version of them) are capable of corresponding to each other as anchor-points on a multi-track timeline.



Susanna Schoenberg, *States of Documents* (2012), frames from the video

Added to the different time layers the issue of translation is used in order to produce new (linguistic) states of the documents. The translation is fragmented and visualized by selected written words and numbers; the gesture of translation intentionally does not fully serve a literal comprehensibility for viewers who do not understand Italian: it much more intends the process of reading documents in the present, right now, where the single document does not possess any (objective) authority any longer. The gesture of reading is the only possible practice (in the present) of reproducing documents with a (subjective) authority.⁸

⁸ *States of Documents* was edited with text frames in three different bilingual versions: English/traditional Chinese, English/Korean, English/Spanish.

⁹ A sequence of the video-work explicitly addresses the meaning of a practice of “infiltration” (or even

accident source

意外事故來源

his leg

他的腳

Susanna Schoenberg, *States of Documents* (2012), frames from the video

In terms of a timescape, this art project introduces the element of an “external” authority situated in the past, where it is superordinate (as an objectifying agency) both to the artist and to the persons involved in the documents. But in the present of the documents finding moment, their being abandoned—their being like waste—testifies this authority to be deactivated. The physical availability of the documents (with their implicit narratives) stands for a ruin of agents, a gap in power in the interpretation and use of these evidences of past circumstances (of subordination).

The use of access⁹ is the ignition for the successive practice of appropriation and sharing; the reenactment of the documents—their “playback”—intends a more poetic than informative gesture, a gesture of re-turning: it produces fragments and associations made by time specifications, injured body parts, words related to materials and instruments.

The (found) materials for this artwork convey in a very “natural” way the idea of compost: modernity itself as based on extractive (and colonial) practices and economies, emerges in

insubordination, if related to the public making of something which is corporate property) as something out-of-its-time, showing a train ride through a tunnel of the abandoned mine.

a “state of compost”, like its economic agents and their abandoned documents. The artistic intervention is not needed for deconstructing or dissolving anything: it just presents dissolving relational forms, it produces something like an echo.

Timescape 4: In 2021, recording on video collected printed media, many of them produced during World War II

Abysses—performing the archive was conceived by the end of 2020 and realized at the beginning of 2021. The video-work was first presented as part of a collective art piece¹⁰ titled *Calling the anthropomorphic cabinet*—a project responding to Salvador Dalí’s painting *Le cabinet anthropomorphique* of 1936, an emblematic representation of psychoanalysis, as the artist intended.

The approach of the video-collage treats (material) images as images inscribed into the (artist’s) psyche, and formulates the need of some practice of exorcism, asking the permission to eventually erase, remove, destroy some items out of (HER) psychic archive. Repetition is used as a technique.

“Added technical operators are the free fall, hysteria and the abyss itself. Realistic practices. History, as well as all the matter of culture and civilization – things which do not belong to her: they act her, they have already thought her before. She has started collecting their evidences. In her drawers, folders, albums, boxes: items so alien to her. Unavoidable. It horrifies her. There are shapes, they can talk to her. They talked to her even before she could think of a thing as a message. An intended infrastructure for thinking. Pictures of horror. Resonators of being an other. Shoes. Hands. Mouths.

It’s not just about pictures. Of course not. Techno-imagination. There has to be a reason for all this archival matter. Language. Everything she can imagine as being reenacted. Reseen. With shame. She

has to perform all these things. Her being aged, for example. Or the color of her skin. She cannot undo this part of herself. Ourselves. Cut out. Recombined.” (Schoenberg, 2022, 96-104)

The video *Abysses* presents the situation of disposing of (toxic) images and touching them as a concrete sensory transmission of the psychological burden of phenomena that have been normalized for US, first of all in the form of images. Apart from some black and white photographs belonging to “post-colonial” French socio-geographic magazines from the late 1960s dedicated to Africa, the most “sensitive materials” are taken from a Nazi photographic magazine named *Signal* published by the Wehrmacht between 1940 and 1945, specifically addressed to readers in allied and occupied countries.¹¹

Making pictures of pictures, their context is partly censored: the hand and the lens look for motifs that can unsafely affect, more technical details, and representations of women and art. As a compensation for the exposure to the (psychic, interiorized) images which can’t be destroyed, the soundtrack is made of words and phrases spoken in French by a text-to-speech program. The selected textual fragments mirror and extend some visual contents, and repeatedly they proclaim the dimension of horror of OUR abyss, disaster, hysteria, obsession, fraud, oblivion, fetishism:

“obsession / viscéralement / brillant / bleu brillant / brillant avenir / briller / le brillant fut retailé / imposteur / dénoncer qc. à qn. / il a trahi son ami / accident mortel / désastre / catastrophe / calamité / accident / feu / fournée / mettre le feu / il a échappé à ce désastre d’extrême justesse / suicidaire / mythomanie / beaux-arts / culture / dans les règles de l’art / technique / cité / ville / dispositif / municipalité / ville ouverte / machine / passer par une ville / machine / beaucoup de monde / technologie / émigrer vers les villes / en ville” (Schoenberg, 2021)

¹⁰ The project related art collective is named \mathbb{D}_1 and was initiated by artist Samuel Ferstl.

¹¹ As a propaganda instrument *Signal* embodies the European vision of Nazi Germany; at the beginning the magazine was produced in four languages (German,

Italian, French, English), which later became 25. It leaned on the layout of *LIFE* and made generous use of full-page color plates. It was published fortnightly and in May 1943 it achieved a circulation of 2,500,000 copies.



Susanna Schoenberg, *Abysses – performing the archive* (2021), frames from the video

The (forced) connections between image content, image context, literal content, and word context or extension intend to visualize the (difficult? unarticulated?) practice of situating OURselves in relation to “objects” like disciplines and practices of resource and human exploitation, technology, medical sciences, war industry, servile arts and

sciences, and the normalization of “subjects” in relation to them.

Stronger than all the others, this timescape disposes of “objects”. These “objects” have been searched in a (material) past, because of their “unaccountable” performativity in “shaping a subject” (out of synch). These “objects of vision” are at the same time products and instruments of an ongoing media revolution; to enter a relationship with them was unavoidable (for the artist), to undo their effect in terms of affection, seems to be impossible. In the video-work motifs of such an objectification of vision are shown, touched, turned over. Full of presets, the “subject” reflects herself in her relation to the collected objects; some kind of “abyssal intimacy” resonates in the title, the practiced encounter with herself as an alien.

Timescape 5: 2003 referring to 100 days in 1985, but the narrative starts in October 1984

Sophie Calle again. Her *Douleur exquisite*: “In 1984 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted me a three-month fellowship in Japan. I left on October 25 not knowing that this date would mark the start of a ninety-two day countdown that would end in a breakup, which ... felt like one of the most painful moments of my life. I held this trip responsible. Back in France, on January 28, 1985, I chose to tell my suffering rather than my journey. In return, I asked my interlocutors, friends or chance encounters, When did you suffer the most? This exchange would cease when I had exhausted my own story by dint of telling it, or relativized my pain in the face of others'. The method was radical: In three months [99 days] I was healed. The exorcism succeeded, and in fear of a relapse, I abandoned my project. To exhume it fifteen years later.” (Calle, 2003, 13)

Douleur exquisite (exquisite pain, a French expression which refers to the particular agony of wanting someone who doesn't want you) intends to describe a pain that is very acute. The project intends to address the most intense experiences of pain in a human life; it refers to moments that are unique and “localized”¹²—connected to a concrete time and space, of which the details are (forever?)

(*have you seen me?*) at Centre Pompidou in Paris in 2003. (Masschelein, 2007)

¹² A “douleur vive et nettement localisé” as described by Christine Macel, curator of the exhibition *M'as-tu vue?*

inscribed in memory—. But the narratives, the re-turning and re-remembering of the own punctual psychic state, will corrode. The expression *douleur exquise* also recalls the Surrealist *corps exquis* (or *cadavre exquis*), the technique of collage in which several authors collaborate to create a poem or painting by each folding over a portion of a piece of paper. The “exquisite collaboration” here is evident both in the juxtaposition of subjects and in the spatial unfolding of the work. (Masschelein, 2007, 2)

Sophie Calle's localized pain is generated on January 24, 1985 between the airport of New Delhi and room 261 of the Imperial Hotel where she was supposed to reunite with “him”. A red phone on her bed is the more comprehensive object of her pain, the body of evidence of her lover's absence. Every day, for 99 days, she rebuilds the narrative of her pain: each day-narrative accompanied by the narrative of someone else, like two pages in the same book: Calle's narrative is white on dark, the other is dark on white. In the repetition there is the trial to prove the intensity of her own shock—to keep it under observation, extending it and at the same time watching its downfall—, but it is the juxtaposition with the shocking pain experience of someone else that finally operates the “transfer”. Sophie Calle appropriated the pain of others, translating their narratives into her language, generating the photographs that objectified their timespaces of pain.

On the 15th day after the break-up the accompanying text is introduced by a photograph of two nails, one with severed head: “(..) Something brutal, barbaric is going to happen. There is a local tradition that the men of the family are the ones who put the deceased in their coffin. So we — my father, my uncle and me — carried my grandfather's body from the bed to the coffin. We pulled back the sheet, put the lid on. We took a screwdriver, put in the screws and, most importantly, broke off the screw heads so that no one could open it again.

A quick, decisive act. Like saying: I accept. Worse than the last look.” (Calle, 2004, 36)

While timescape 4 means non compostable relations to “objects” as far as they are fixing an “affected subject”, this timescape is made by the process of transformation and dissolution of a “self” after the shock. This acute and localized pain meant in the art project works as a metaphor for the ability to face death as such, for knowing about (OUR own) mortality and the terminability of any conscious relation.

Timescape 6: In 2022, referring to 2018, facing a murder of 2005, because of unsolved judicial proceedings

The video work *Dissolution Table* and all the related artifacts perform the shocking experience of a working group finding “haunting material” on a table cloth. And it hides the spoken unspeakable word with the German sound “Schw*rzafrikaner”, where *schwarz* means black.

The work has its origin in the situational AV-recording of a workshop,¹³ generated by the camera as well as by the subjects who shared that particular time-space-cut and formed a specific techno-ecological setup in the sense of a more-than-human world (that no one had at their disposal).



Susanna Schoenberg with Kompostistische Internationale, *Dissolution Table* (2022), frame from the video

The text emerges from the revision, appropriation and reflection of the speech transcript of a specific work situation around a table. The recordings (2018) were not

founding project of the collective Kompostistische Internationale.

¹³ The workshop *We Are Compost, Not Post-Human - Queer-feminist Compostings of the Anthropocene* was held at the University of Cologne in April 2018, and is the

focussed, the original sound has been processed to be used as sound-without-literal-meaning (2021). The spoken text was reenacted (2020) by persons who have been involved in the “original” situation (2018) and/or in the process of writing a “new” dialogical, choral narrative (2020-22). This text is remembering a situation of contents made by thoughts, relations, (non)articulations of subjects exercising a queer inter-subjectivity. Because they have been invited to express their speculative process with the support of material acts—using paint, glue, water, condoms—they were contingently forced to relate to sheets of newspapers, in particular to one page of the German newspaper *DIE ZEIT (the time)* presenting an article on the status of the investigation into the circumstances of the death of Oury Jalloh, which happened 2005 in Dessau, while the young man was in police custody.

The question about what to do with the materiality of this narrative encounter corresponded to the question about permissible material for discussion: Is it possible to compost this page of a newspaper? Is it possible to declare specific materiality as neutral (non-affecting), non-belonging to the humus of the past/present/future situation of the “subjects” involved?

“Shall we just discuss?”

I would like to talk about the materials.

Shall we talk about the materials first?

I would have thought now that the materials have to do with queer temporality: with the HIV question and no future.

What is THIS here? Is IT something WE put down, did someone bring IT?

IT belongs to the material.

In fact, IT is meant to be a tablecloth.

Is IT considered a working material?

There is material on this table and there are impulses. It is clear to US what is what; but if someone says, I see the newsprint as an impulse... Nevertheless it is a coincidence that this content emerges here.

This page cannot pass as a coincidence.

THAT is indeed a coincidence. We have distributed colors and newspapers as working material.

It's good that the article fits us so well.

Probably any article would have fit well. Aren't we so conditioned by narrative impulses that we see them even where they are not meant?

How can WE call something work material that is not meant to tell US anything. Are you saying the working material doesn't give impulses? Which neutrality of the working material should I assume? Some kind of practical expediency, perhaps? Don't you think such an assumption is a bit unrealistic?

I see the article as an impulse.

I've only seen the condoms.

I didn't read the article, but the picture immediately caught my eye.

The colors are everywhere, but different colors. Green is not everywhere. Red isn't either.

But colors and leaves are everywhere.

We can write, paint, do crafts, play.

Leave the paper...

But THIS is for working...

No...

But I want to work with it. You can't take the paper away from me. Do you think I'm using it up?

I think that if we have this image now, which was not planned, then we should use it as an image as well.

It refers to Oury Jalloh. ” (Schoenberg, 2022 b)



Susanna Schoenberg with Kompostistische Internationale, *Dissolution Table* (2022), frame from the video

The viewing of the recorded footage revealed how intense the re-turning of concern experiences related to racism offered during the workshop, already destabilized the perspective of “subjects” who had and have to call themselves “white persons”. It was the one remembering the occurrence of Oury Jalloh’s death¹⁴ who concluded their report saying, THIS (narrative? occurrence? existential reality? article?) belongs to the categories “racism against bl*ckAfricans” and “institutional violence against individuals”. The perspective “that spoke”, did not belong to anyone, but there was nor is any evidence of any reaction or relation—with the exception of some appearance of autism or numbness—to the presence of this one word, which absolutely belongs to the legacy of German colonialism.

The phrase including the word which was kept unheard, was not included in the video.¹⁵

It was the genealogy of this art project with its inscribed attributes that inspired me first to adapt the readability of works of art to the idea of a timescape, because of the (specific) processuality of the artistic work, but also for the temporal depth of the field of relations between materials and forms, and their reflection as practiced by the artist and the involved “subjectivities”. The project is based on the “infiltration” of (recording) media and the

“introduction” of a differentiated form of authority into a situation that was not sketched by the artist. From the original recordings to the finalization of an experimental text and the related video-artwork, the commitment of the artist was dedicated to the exchange with the other members of the collective *Kompostistische Internationale* and to the contribution to their common work. The further development of the “form finding” for *Dissolution Table* applied most of the questioning and discussion that was practiced within the working group. From the very first viewing of the originally recorded footage, which happened some months after starting the collaboration, the artist set the indeterminacy of the “subject” as an “emerging” material: WHO exactly is thinking when WE are thinking with others? The operated/operating “subject” was thought as a “matter of compost”: all the “sublimation” applied to the original recorded material refers to this (diffracted/diffracting) “image”.

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¹⁴ After fleeing from Sierra Leone, Oury Jalloh had applied for political asylum in Germany. His application was declined, but he received an exceptional leave to remain in the country. He was found burnt to death in a police jail cell

in Dessau in 2005. The responsibilities for his death are still under investigation.

¹⁵ An excerpt of 5 minutes of the video work is published here: <https://vimeo.com/731740967>.

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