

But you, you're not cinema. (Sorry I have to tell you this)

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LANGUAGE

English

SEARCH

search...

>>> I thought I had written this down somewhere in my notebook, but it's not there. Maybe I wrote it somewhere else.

>>> Maybe you dreamed it, or maybe you should make sure no one's ripping pages out of your notebooks. They could be stealing your ideas.

>>> In any case, I am interested in the camera. Or what it means to see a camera; the frame that is presumed when one sees a camera.

>>> If you catch these thieves, you might ask them how vision is affected by the mass-distribution of images — images captured by cameras, framed by lenses, operated by camera operators and directed by directors and paid for by producers, translated into emulsion, magnetic waves or digital bits, edited by editors and distributed massively by entities with an enormous reach into the spaces we inhabit and travel through?

>>> You're not talking about seeing a camera, you're talking about just seeing, right? Do you mean how they see the world differently because of the images that exist in it as well as of it? In-and-of the world?

>>> And the structure of those images. What they picture and what they conceal; what they postulate and what they shut down; where they place you and who they ask you to be. Similarly, how do these technological images in turn structure how we see the world? Is our vision technologized?

>>> Okay, I'll do that. Should I record their answers?

>>> Please.

>>> By now, most people know how a camera works, how it "sees," or at least most people feel they know this. They don't just see the black piece of equipment on the tripod or the shoulder of the camera-operator, they see something else too: They see a space in front of the camera, a space defined by the framework of the lens and what can be seen through that lens; what can be recorded.



>>> Maybe. Maybe they think about that. But I would tell you that the ubiquitous presence of cameras on streets and houses and apartments and on trains and in businesses does not tell me how a camera works. Before I ever stole away with my parents' early model consumer video camera I hadn't really thought about shooting things out of sequence and re-sequencing them in post-production. To this day I'm fascinated by the different meanings that the same moving image transmits when paired with contrasting pieces of music. Still I get surprised by how different my eye sees a space and then, how that same space looks through a viewfinder, not to mention then how it looks on a TV, surveillance monitor or cellphone, or projected or compressed into a quicktime movie. I would say that learning to use a camera means learning how a camera sees. To see like a camera. To understand that the camera and the eye do not see in the same way.

>>> One of them produces images? Is that the difference, the recording? You mean learning to see an image?

>>> Yes, images with different capacities and different implications. The camera can mimic different ways of seeing: a gaze of power versus the gaze of a victim; the fly on the wall or an embodied point of view; distanced like an outsider or a god, or intimate like a lover or scientist. It can switch more freely between different eyes and also different "I's".

>>> I think a lot of films try to bridge the gap between these two, to blur the difference between a camera and an eye, trying to convince you that the camera is your eye, even if just for a moment; that the camera does not produce images, or that the eye does; either way, that they merge.

>>> Yes. And when you leave the cinema after one of those films and filter back into the streets, you often carry traces of it with you. You see the atmosphere and the relations of the film extend out onto everything. You are still a little bit in love with the protagonist.

>>> I fall in love within the villain.

>>> You are consumed with the victory at the end.
>>> Order restored. Homeostasis.
>>> Can you stop interrupting? You think the car coming around the corner is driven by kidnappers, or you see monsters hiding in the shadows.
>>> But remember the genealogy of the camera and it's lens, invented as a prosthesis for the eye.
>>> More a prosthesis than a technology.
>>> The difference, however, is not only the way the lens works, it is also the production and distribution of the image.
>>> A social prosthesis — memory.
>>> The difference is that a camera offers up an optical field that can be shared socially, by more than one person at a time. Are you wondering if the presence of such apparatuses everywhere and always makes us think that our personal vision is being shared socially as well? That our own field of vision can be monitored or tuned in to?
>>> Any image always already carries within it a proposal for a way of seeing. Every image brings with it a manual, so to speak, a set of instructions for how to see it. This is partly what makes them images.
>>> How to read it; it's what makes them language.
>>> A set of instructions, a prosthetic subject.
>>> Let's talk about that in terms of editing, placing different sequences next to each other, constructing chains of seeing-instructions: sets, subsets and classes. Weren't you mentioning editing?
>>> When my brother and I began playing with my father's precious Hi8 video-camera, we made films directly in the camera, by pressing start and stop — "in-camera editing" before knowing that term. We had no concept of editing as a separate process. We had no idea of an editing table or an edit bay. We only knew the camera itself, what we saw in the viewfinder. That was the film! Right there in the viewfinder. We would spend hours just sitting and looking through it, at anything. It felt like no matter where the camera pointed, it was a film.
>>> I found a way to hook up two decks and record scenes out of sequence, one after the other, and then to run audio in separately from a cassette player for soundtrack.
>>> Oooh.
>>> Precisely. Once it was no longer mere chronology, editing became a way of thinking across images. Continuity, for example, would become one mode of thinking (or of reducing it), of relating images and thereby one mode of reading them. Dialectical montage would of course be another.
>>> Editing is not just a partitioning in time, it is also a partitioning of space.
>>> Or suggesting relationships between spaces. A partition is one kind of relation — one of friction and difference, as opposed to flow and similarity. Not only in form, but in social-political terms: resistance, capitulation, pushing and pulling; complying, revolting, trying to become something 'other-than.'
>>> I think that learning to use a camera means also learning what people see in the camera itself, that apparatus, the partitions it creates, what they expect from it. The people I put in front of the camera — as well as those who avoid it — what does the camera mean to them?
>>> Are you talking about setting up the camera in a public space, where people don't know the reason for it?
>>> I'm talking about setting it up in a space that is not totally created or controlled in relation to the camera, like a film or TV studio. I'm talking about just filming down a street or something, something easy.
>>> That's not so easy, you'll need tons of permits. An environment created specifically for the camera is much easier.
>>> You don't think cities are constructed for cinema? That they don't pose for the camera, ready to be an establishing shot for the world's narratives? Their imaging has been anticipated. A backdrop for news stories, politics, press conferences; a stage for spectacle. They lure film productions with tax breaks and non-unionized labor to be a part of the picture of the cosmopolitan.
>>> Yes, of course. But you, you're not cinema. Cinema is all the money, the stars, the crew, the special effects and most of all: the distribution system and the institution of seeing that we have all learned so well.
>>> The more precious the area, the more you will need permission to shoot. Ironically, these are the areas with the highest concentration of security cameras. The more security cameras, the less the chance for you to be able to film. So what are they actually securing? The images?
>>> You can't picture the exterior of the New York Stock Exchange, it's copyrighted, intellectual property of a private corporation (the New York Stock Exchange). That's why I put images of it in my film.
>>> That's exactly what I mean! That is what makes you not Cinema. Sorry to have to tell you this.
>>> But those security cameras, they also exist in sequence, more or less hidden on walls and under roofs, constantly recording — a sequence of images in space, next to each other, in a certain order, to be seen in a certain way.
>>> The sequence of images in a bank of surveillance monitors, this too is a kind of editing, a sequence of instructions about how to read order and disorder, the law and transgression; it consoles the viewer who, desiring power, wants to see all, but betrays them just the same — the gaps in its syntax, the blind spots imposed by limits of each image, the coherence across them is ideology and fiction. Just like editing.
>>> And don't forget the fake cameras, the decoys in many big cities now where they just don't have the time or eye-power to monitor every street corner. They're placed out in plain view to make you think you're being watched. This doesn't create an image on a monitor, but on the street: an image of order the local power wants performed in that counterfeit spotlight.
>>> The camera as image, itself a set of instructions.
>>> This is about the relationship a camera establishes in a room: As soon as it is set up, there is an "in front of the camera" and a "behind the camera." What is that partition the camera produces? I think we

— you and me — know well the behind-the-camera, because we are often there. Each time we set up the camera to begin an interview, we have articulated a reason to put this apparatus here and stand behind it. But what about the person in front of it? What is this space as it is understood by those positioned there? What is it that the camera promises, how is that promise established, kept or broken? What is expected, what is imagined to be seen through the lens when one is front of the camera?

>>> Do you mean whether they picture the way a camera wrenches a fragment of a space away from its (social) context?

>>> I think there is a general knowledge of what a camera is and what it does, an imaginary that goes very deep in our culture by now, like a shadow along cast by all things: each thing in the world and the potential of its becoming an image.

>>> People often strike me as very conscious of how a camera interpolates, not through a specialized knowledge of cameras and production, but in relation to the categorizations of people, a catalogue of types of characters — fiction and non-fiction alike — they know as possible in mass images. If they're used to having those who they identify with represented as heroes, as good guys, then they'll regard the camera as a friend. If they're used to seeing them portrayed as villains, as criminals or crooks, then your camera is a threat. It also has to do with you, or me, behind the camera, who they perceive us to be and how they presume we recognize them, this has a great deal to do with whether they trust that camera or not; the point being that people recognize a range of subjectivities as possible on the screen, and anticipate that they'll be interpolated into one of them — hailed by the camera but also by the subjectivity behind it, placed within the order of an image.

>>> This is the camera's promise and also its betrayal. But this imaginary, is this a meeting of the seeing of the eye and seeing of cinema? Does one shape the other? Are they contaminated by one another in the formation of memories?

>>> They might tell you there's no difference, that they inform one another — the more one is exposed to spectacle and shared, public imagery, the more likely the presumption that their private, intimate vision will be witnessed by others; one's scopophilic desire as a spectacle.

>>> But can't you also use this same technology in the reverse? Not to turn daily life into cinematic triumph of the individual, but to render visible what we are conditioned to disavow in that daily life?

>>> This is a question of the viewer that is produced by the image, by the instructions: How to be seen, how to be desired and negotiated, a certain subject, in a certain relationship.

>>> Of course. And if we consider the way in which film, or the sequencing of images — in its techniques, tropes, references, modes of address and so forth — calls forth a certain kind of viewer, we arrive at the question of how that viewer is then positioned, within what relations and what possibilities, capacities, expectation and limitations, and with what knowledge of the historical circumstances that have positioned them as such.

>>> Don't forget the medium that has positioned them as such.

>>> Sometimes I wish I could look at these images without understanding this. But no matter how much I dislike it, I always recognize it. Once there, it can't be undone so easily. Do you think it can be learned?

>>> You're positioned as a certain subject — subject of history or subject to history? With what possibilities and what limitations? With what expectations of power? Of freedom? For whom what levels of hardship are tolerable? Are people who look like you punished or made president? Are they dimensional characters or foils? Subjects or objects? Are you told to face adversity with struggle or prayer? Are you riled-up by propaganda or placed symbolically within a set of relations and the tools to interpret them? Are you told what to think or asked to think?

>>> Maybe that frame you're asking about, that imaginary, is less about framing the appearance of physical spaces.

>>> ...I think we established that already...

>>> And more about a framing of relationships and possibilities, a constellation of political effects, whose representations have great importance and a great deal at stake.

Katya Sander and Ashley Hunt are part of collective together with David Thorne, Sharon Hayes and Andrea Geyer that recently produced the video installation "9 Scripts from a Nation at War", on show at documenta 12.

Katya Sander lives and works in Copenhagen and Berlin. In her work, she questions issues of space, narration, desire and order through film, text, architecture, constructions and interventions. Together with Simon Shiekh she is moreover a series editor of *OE-Critical Readers*.

Ashley Hunt is an interdisciplinary artist and activist who works to engage the ideas of social movements, modes of learning and public discourse. Recent works include the ongoing "Corrections Documentary Project" (correctionsproject.com) Recent publications include the *Journal of Aesthetics and Protest* (2007) and *Rethinking Marxism* (2006).

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