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## Homeland, History and Tales: Narrative Strategies and the Moving Image in Contemporary Art

“There is no doubt fiction makes a better job of the truth.”

Doris Lessing (1994)

**Abstract:** This essay aims to understand how the question of narration became central in contemporary art moving image production paying specific attention to the relationship between historiography and fictionalisation. Starting from the so called “historiographical turn in art” (Roelstraete 2009) it embraces the analysis of several productions, showing how history has been fictionalised in contemporary art. The core of the essay is the identification of mechanisms in contemporary art that have made possible the transition or the passage from a state of non-fiction to a stage of narrative fiction. It tries to identify “epidemic” and “endemic” factors that have brought to this change considering social and political context of the last twenty years. In the text the attraction, monstration and narration in visual arts is going to be questioned starting from the concept of “documentality” (Hito Steyerl 2003) and in relation with hypertrophic production of documents in the context of mass media communication. Considering the use and the abuse of past for the definition and identification of homeland, the text aims to identify the twists of historiographic method in the mass media production. While doing that the notion of historical narration in contemporary art moving image will be considered in order to find if it might ever be an alternative or a mnemonic strategy that able to fight against reactionary storytelling. Thus the final question will lead the reader to consider how and why the relation between monstration and narration may create alternative attractions for themes of history and how the audience plays a pivotal role in the narrative construction.

**Keywords:** history, documentality, fiction, storytelling, audience.

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In one of the first frames of Omer Fast’s video *Continuity* (2012)<sup>1</sup> there are a table with a cake and two characters who soon will reveal themselves as the parents of a young German soldier coming back from Afghanistan. The cake is in the middle of the frame, both characters turn their back to the



Image 1

camera, the kitchen is very quiet and the only communication directed to the viewer is the one coming from the cake, carrying a German flag and the message: “Herzlich Willkommen”. It’s only been a few minutes since the movie started, and the viewer is already faced with a complicated family drama. Behind that cake lies a strategy that will lead us to dive into a contemporary history issue. A strategy founded on a changeable narrative that makes use of several visual techniques and practices in order to achieve different goals each and every time. In order to understand the “special” types of narrations employed in the field of contemporary moving image production, several elucidations are needed. Artistic video, experimental film, and time-based installations – as largely syncretistic, hybrid, and multi-medial forms of aesthetic communication – bear a number of generic characteristics tied to the history and different capacities of its narrative constituents. Thus, this essay will point out some of those “epidemic” and “endemic” factors that have contributed to make these kinds of narration unique. First, it needs to be clarified that the object of this essay are those video productions that deal with “history-telling” (Roelstraete 2013, 18). In the following lines, the so-called “historiographic turn in art” (Roelstraete 2009) will be introduced. After a brief background familiarisation, it might be easier for the reader to grasp the kind of narrative strategies that these kinds of productions embody. In the aim to define several relevant features of these art practices, it could be argued that they are investigative, narrative, documentary, and that they put history at the core of their research. Undoubtedly, not the least of the questions raised by these kinds of productions involves their reception. Are these works accessible to an audience that has not been schooled in theoretical debates about narratology, authorship, ethnography, or documentary practice? The answers to each of these questions cannot be unequivocal; indeed, an interdisciplinary argumentation is needed. In the following text, we will try to respond to all these questions point by point, starting from the historiographical issue to end with audience involvement in contemporary art productions.

### Historiographical turn

In 2007, Mark Godfrey published the essay *The Artist as Historian*. The peculiarity of Godfrey's text is in the comparison of the figure of the artist to that of the historian. With his work, Godfrey didn't simply add a new entry to the already busy list of "artist as",<sup>2</sup> he actually promoted a step forward in the definition of a new kind of research-based art practice.<sup>3</sup> Godfrey uses history, linking the formal strategies of certain contemporary art practices (among the others, the essay mentions Jeremy Deller, Francis Alÿs, Tacita Dean and Anri Sala) to 60's and 70's Conceptual Art as well as to the *Pictures'* artists of the late 70's and early 80's (Crimp 1979).<sup>4</sup> Nowadays, according to the American author, artists are using visual media in order to analyse modes of historical representation. In the perspective of the artist as historian, the "enigma" of historical representation of the past (Paul Ricoeur 2004, 189-191) has to be solved technically as well as creatively.<sup>5</sup> In order to achieve multiple steps we must affirm that there is not a unique way of dealing with historical materials through moving images – this is also true for written text – but it is possible to distinguish different modes of representation of the past.<sup>6</sup> After analysing the historical representation in the context of contemporary art, it is possible to encounter a variety of ways and practices in which the cinematic *dispositif* becomes a complex tool able to depict facts of the past. In this path emerges the pluralistic nature of the relationship between cinema and art. A mode of past representation in which various types of discourse combine together to give productions in which historical documents are conveyed with dramatic experimentations. These types of productions blend innovative documentary practices with fiction, they evoke the past through an aggregate of documents and archive materials (archival footage, photographs, documents, etc.) with original footage. A representational way that, at the same time, puts into question those same historical materials, and operates a self-reflexive experimentation on cinematic language. Although the transmission of the facts of the past is a priority, these contemporary artists' attitude towards history is aimed at complicating the notion that identities are stable and representation can be authoritative. In this perspective, there is no conflict between the work of artists and that of professional historians, because the former do not impose themselves authoritatively.<sup>8</sup> They rather aim to produce a number of analyses concerning what may have been and how history has been passed down. With the definition "historiographical turn in art" Dieter Roelstraete meant to describe: "the obsession with archiving, forgetfulness, memoirs and memorials, nostalgia, oblivion, re-enactment, remembrance, reminiscence, retrospection – in short, with the past – that seems to drive much of the work done by some of the best (and most highly regarded) artists active today, from Gerard Byrne and Tacita Dean, via Felix Gmelin and Joachim Koester, to Goshka Macuga and Deimantas Narkevicius" (Roelstraete 2009b). The "historiographical turn in art" is a trend occurred in the first decade of the twenty-first century: "inaugurated by the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent *war on terror*" (ibid.). According to Roelstraete, the artist may be considered

as a historiographer rather than a historian (Godfrey 2007), because in the process of art production the role and importance of writing, or more broadly the centrality of narration, are more crucial (Roelstraete 2013, 20). The definition “historiographical turn in art” then stresses the importance of the organization of narrative materials, following Ricoeur’s theories about the importance of narration as moment of thought in historical research (1984).<sup>9</sup>

### Text(s) and media

The image of that cake with a German flag and a message written on its top layer introduces the viewer to a familiar context and, at the same time, starts to whisper tacit information. After a few seconds, the viewer “meets” the young soldier and starts to collect more knowledge about the work. At the very beginning, *Continuity* seems like a bourgeois family drama, but the plain narration is interrupted by uneasy repetition and the presence of ghostly, surreal apparitions from the war-zone. Structurally, the video recalls Pasolini’s film *Teorema* (1968) with the mysterious figure of a son appearing in the lives of a couple. The son’s arrival is heralded by an



Image 2

SMS. The enigmatic son’s figure (the character changes every time he arrives home) soon engages in sexual affairs with his mother. Fast’s work questions the very nature of truth and narrative. The comprehension of this kind of narration entails a direct engagement of the viewer and a kind of familiarity with a non-linear explanation. The understanding of these works must be contextualized within an interconnected system of relations, internal and external to the text. From a technical and expressive point of view, the video is a syncretic<sup>10</sup> text because on the one hand it contains heterogeneous languages, and on the other it may display a unitary communication strategy. In a wider perspective, we may say that the medium of video deals with the notion of plurality, and in the field of contemporary art this variety has been expressed through the hybridization of different *genres*, while assuming the aspect of

critical approaches at the same time. This process of redefinition of the art statement as problematisation of the concept of art itself (Kosuth 1969) has begun in the 60's and is still going. Different styles are getting mixed with each other in order to produce persuasive and original narrations. This kind of process has marked the recent history of contemporary art with the proliferation of "technical media" and the increment of "expressive media" (Saba 2013, 128-129). All the "expressive media" are under constant revision in a dialectic relationship between specificity and generality that, according to Rosalind Krauss (1999), is the core of art nowadays. The dialog among cinema, literature, theatre, dance, television is central to artistic culture. Several works of art combine "technical media" in order to achieve innovative aesthetic solutions. In the case of historical narration, this behaviour represents an additional resource.

### Cinema and art

In the field of contemporary art, moving image productions that deal with narration are first of all the result of that tendency identified as "new cinematic" or "cinematic turn". There is a great deal of artists who utilize film in their practice. Once, within this group, a clear distinction was made between the ones who employed the medium in the field of contemporary art, and the ones who have been working in the cinematic industry. In the 90's this distinction started to become irrelevant and nowadays the British artist Steve McQueen received the Best Picture Academy Award for his feature-length film, *12 Years a Slave* (2013). Willing to find the origin of this contemporary tendency, we may trace back the roots of the narrative productions we see today to the "representational video art" of the 70's: "rebuilt representational and narrative spaces, as well as filmic formats" [my translation] (Costa 1999, 253). In the US, these kinds of productions created a small network of exhibitors for film and video. A number of non-profit media arts centres have contributed to offer a low-cost access to film and video equipment, and at the same time have been representing a meeting point between the world of cinema and the world of art.<sup>11</sup> The work of Woody Vasulka is an example of early video art dealing with narration. In *The Commision* (1983) the artist employs video effects and electronically manipulated sound with stylized docudrama. In the video *Art of Memory* (1987) Vasulka manipulated a variety of sources and used creative imaging tools to situate historical images against Southwestern landscapes. The video includes material drawn from World War II and its rehearsals, the Spanish Civil War and the Russian Revolution. "Art of Memory" could be considered as one of the first examples of media production dealing with history rearranging new types of historical narration. Marita Sturken argues that in this videotape the role of video as technology of memory is evident (in Renov and Suderburg 1996, 4). This "lineage" underlines how narration has always been important in contemporary art's moving image production. Despite what Costa said, since its inception video has been considered almost exclusively in the context of art. Film studies scholars have rarely acknowledged video as research object. For many of them it was hard to apply film studies theories to video art. In the 60's and 70's, video

art had often been branded as an abstract expression close to late modernist art and without any narrative structure.<sup>12</sup> The scenario suddenly changed in the 90's with the "new cinematic", a set of heterogeneous experiences that has seen many visual artists make use of cinematic techniques and, in parallel, a massive migration or relocation of feature films to contemporary art spaces (Leighton 2008, 7-40; Connolly 2009, 9-15; Bordina, Estremo, Federici 2016, 3-15).<sup>13</sup> The convergence of cinema and art has produced a substantial reduction of the aesthetic distance between film and video, as well as a substantial increase of narration in the context of art.<sup>14</sup> Figures such as Harun Farocki made the dialog between cinema and art more easy thanks to their artistic and cinematic production. Video works like *Episode III: Enjoy The Poverty* (2008), realised by the Dutch artist Renzo Martens, reduced again and again the distance between cinema and art. Martens' work has been distributed and has circulated equally in the film industry and in the contemporary art circuit. Lastly, a worldwide success like Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno's *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait* (2006) allowed a wider audience to become familiar with the language of moving images in contemporary art.

### (video) Narration and "politics of truth"

All these results were achieved also thanks to the technological revolution of the last twenty years that produced a substantial convergence culture (Jenkins 2006). Since the first decade of the twenty-first century, the quantitative spread of computers has made possible the normalization of aesthetic experiences that were previously considered sectarian and inaccessible. Computer and mobile devices are media containers that are able to produce images, sounds, digital effects – as an immediate result, the convergence produced a proliferation of *data*.<sup>15</sup> These binary codes flow in an indefinable temporality and bring editable contents. Other than an ontological change, the digital "revolution" brought a narrative swing. Omer Fast makes use of temporality in determination when he forces the story of the young German soldier to a sort of loop.<sup>16</sup> The soldier embraces his homeland several times, and every time he comes back something has been changed. This form of "montage" based on unequal repetition engenders a series of differences that emigrates from the formal level towards the content (Deleuze 1990, 90). The digital repetition produces the reality instead of documenting it. *Data* are hypertrophic, they are set out of history and as we have seen with Omer Fast, they affect the way a story may be narrated. These *data* are "weak documents",<sup>17</sup> they are inscriptions possessing social relevance and value, embodying essential and prototypical features of any social object. In his research about "documentality" Ferraris argues that social objects are "social acts that have been inscribed on some kind of support" (2009a, 236). In the case of digital *data* we are dealing with documents (social acts) inscribed on a support without support. Thus, dematerialisation brings on the one hand a huge manipulation risk, and new possibilities in the narrative creation on the other. Hito Steyerl, for instance, approached to these *data* with self-reflexive documentarian strategy, that documents and analyses at the same time. These documentary forms have changed the art production of these

last years. Steyerl elaborates her definition of “documentality” (Steyerl 2003) starting from observing the relationship between digital documentation and document. The artist derives her concept from Foucault’s “governmentality” (in Graham, Colin and Miller 1991, 87-104) that defines the guidelines to an exercise of power carried out through the production of truth. Digital media production of images constitutes the “major” narration of events nowadays and it can be a form of government. Hito Steyerl calls “documentality” the interface process between Foucault’s concept of “governmentality” and the production of documentary truth.<sup>18</sup> Talking about the *media* coverage of the Iraq war, the German artist suggests that the “hysterical” CNN images represent the general ambiguity and uncertainty of our era, which is defined by more and more images on which less and less can be seen (Steyerl 2008). Appealing directly to the producers of such images, Steyerl demands “an ethics of the documentary in art, from which more conclusions can be drawn”. This concept is embodied, according to Steyerl, in the complicity of dominant forms of political network as a function of the production of truth. In our contemporary world, the manipulation of *data* creates narrative strategies that have political weight. Like the dossiers produced in 2003 by the US administration, that intended to demonstrate a political truth in order to justify their military invasion of Iraq (Steyerl 2003). Here it is assumed that the institutional politic message is concerned in promoting and spreading a message of truthfulness even by recurring to documents manipulation. This narrative deception is alimeted by communication strategies. Against this kind of political strategies, contemporary moving image production provides counterbalance. Looking at the side of art, Steyerl (2003) sustains that documentary practice is a form of power as well. Since the early cinema experiences, with Dziga Vertov’s *Kinoki*, the aim was to revolutionize practices of reception and production of images through film. The Russian director wished to organize images following a “constructivist-revolutionary” logic (Michelson 1984). The narration behind this kind of documentary practice has to be taken as a critical activity. “Documentarism” is a creative practice, it might be “authentic” but also might be able to go beyond its supposed documentary narration. According to Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (2008) “documentarism” might also seek to change the “politics of truth” on which its own representation is based:

It is not about representation at all, but about actualising whatever the things have to say in the present. And to do so is not a matter of realism, but rather of relationalism – it is a matter of presencing and thus transforming the social, historical and also material relations, which determine things. And if we focus on this aspect of presencing instead of representation, we also leave behind the endless debate about representation, which has left documentary theory stuck in a dead end. (Steyerl 2006)

In this scenario, a creative approach towards historical contents that want to be expressed is also a hermeneutic process, an interpretation of the world around us. While identifying narrative strategies, we acknowledge art as a visual language able to articulate complex narratives about the world. The action of recalling past

events, starting from traces and documents, is never a neutral reconstruction. This backward path requires critical distance from its historical object. This kind of contemporary moving image narration takes into account the contradictory nature of contemporary communication. First of all, it is a critique to the technological pretence aiming at documenting and transmitting in real-time everything that happened in the world. Many contemporary artworks reflect on the notion of witness, and on the impossibility of an “Ideal Chronicle” (Danto 1965, 149).<sup>19</sup> These art practices seem to overtake any residual hope in an ideal chronicle, and start to elaborate (in narrative way) documents of reality. This process leads us to consider how fiction – the reconstruction and re-articulation of narrative traces – may be an alternative way to tell a story and to document the real.<sup>20</sup> One of the most interesting video productions of the last year is the one realised by the Lebanese artist Rabih Mroué and named *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), that consists of a non-academic lecture in which the artist presents digital video footage downloaded from video sharing platforms. The work is a multimedia installation; it combines performance with video and some still images. Mroué’s project is, first of all, an archival research about footage uploaded from cell-phone cameras. The particularity of this footage is that it was produced by “cameramen” who died while shooting it. The artist starts his lecture stating: “Syrians are filming their own death”. This work let us consider if the truthfulness of those images – Steyerl would call them “poor images” (2009) – is in the fact that they have been produced by “field witnesses” or because the cameramen died while filming. What we can point out is how the artist uses the potentiality of those images. Mroué, through a very smart narration, reflects on one of today’s most problematic civil wars (the civil war in



Image 3



Image 4

Syria: 15, March 2011 – present) and on the production of truth via visual media. The narration of *The Pixelated Revolution* is at the same time hermeneutic and ontological, as it deals with the reason those images have been produced, and with the way “new new media” (Levinson 2009) are transforming our culture, our life, and suddenly our death. *The Pixelated Revolution* may sound as a warning to a media scholar who’s been incredibly enthusiastic of the possibilities opened by new media (Gerbaudo 2011, 11-15). An admonishment that may sound like: *social media might kill you!* At the same time, the video shows how useful the “weak documents” produced by social media can be. The story that comes out from this dialectic puts what we see under investigation, but at the same time promotes the role of images in the construction of contemporary history. In *The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a Time of Terror* Mitchell says that some images condense all the unspeakable scenarios into eloquent forms whose simplicity and directness makes it ideal for duplication and repetition (2005, 305). These images condense multiple narratives into a single gestalt. This conception takes on the dichotomy between words and images in Western thought and argues that both are simultaneously involved in the production of meaning (ibid., 291).

### (Counter-) Storytelling and strategies

As pointed out before, since the 1990s, a narrative approach has been growing in contemporary art moving image production, parallel to the so-called “new cinematic”. A way marked by the international proliferation of storytelling. In contemporary art nowadays the conception of storytelling is broader and allows an expanded interpretation, since the narrated story, as well as the politics, races, gender and personal experiences of both the artist and the viewer all intertwine. Thus, artists have committed themselves to tell stories that confront events related to social, political and historical issues. The models of storytelling they employ are, according to T.J. Demos: “couched in subjective presentations, are experimental and memory-based, and involve various modalities of the sayable and visible that tend to reject history’s official, definitive, and objective character” (in Gilman and Sundell 2010, 85). This kind of storytelling is allegorical for the simultaneity of “narrative engagement and representational breakdown” (ibid., 96). These kinds of stories develop polycentric links among text, images and audience. However, improved visualization techniques are required for the representation of these video productions (behavioural trend, historical details, internal relationships with other elements and external relationship with other references are weaved in order to explore and produce knowledge). For instance in 2007, in the middle of the US election campaign between Barack Obama and John McCain, the Italian artist Francesco Vezzoli presented *Democracy* at the 51th Venice Biennale. Vezzoli’s work reflects on how audience is manipulated by strategies of political communication, and the role that issues such as fame and the power of media play in this dynamic. Vezzoli articulates a narration based on a fictional election campaign with two imaginary candidates. The ads in the video were produced in collaboration with teams of political experts, one led by Mark

McKinnon, George W. Bush's media advisor in 2004, and the other by Jim Mulhall, part of Bill Clinton's creative team in 1996. The storytelling of Vezzoli's *Democracy* questions the role of democracy in a challenge that seems to belong more to showbiz than to politics. According to Bourriaud (2009) this kind of narrative forms is able to develop historical complexity starting from the capability of being narrated through an immersive cinematic *dispositif*, generating a kind of participatory experience based on the psychological involvement of the audience. Employing interactive technology is no longer a necessary condition for a work to succeed in this genre of immersive contemplation. Like in Francis Alÿs' work *The Silence of Ani*. The installation – the one at the 2015 Istanbul Biennale<sup>21</sup> – was made by one video projection in a normal midsize room. The video displays long black and white sequences and emits grating natural noises, but is not set up to be interactive. The success of the environment as a dysfunctional whole depends upon the visitor's contemplation of some aspects of the environment, like the windows, positioned in front of the projection and in which the artist has enclosed different kinds of birdcalls used during the shooting. Only through immersion or survey of the space, the video narration can be completed. The artist working as a storyteller uses the structures of narration to feed and disrupt his work. The results are moving image productions that criss-cross through documentary, fiction, fantasy and realism, while maintaining a healthy measure of comedy. In Omer Fast's work is possible to observe how the artist brings together accounts that may be real or not, but always engage the viewer and lead to what one might call a productive uncertainty (Allen 2003, 216). The author's trafficking in structural manipulation leaves a critical, and even ethical, space for the viewer to wallow into the narrative articulation. These ways of telling stories question the process of modelling the truth instead of paying exclusive attention to the audience's engagement with the tale. The audience is not immune of responsibilities, contemporary artists have reserved for their viewers tasks that contribute to the developing story.

### **Audience needs and audience tasks**

If it's true that fiction helps narrative openness, the main contributor to that openness is the audience. In this kind of contemporary moving image, the production of meaning exceeds the narrative text because it is linked to several other causes. The role of the audience in contemporary art is symptomatic of the increment of expressive possibilities and its participation is a fundamental part of narrative construction. Recently, artists have given the audience an active role. The type of audience is, first of all, a member of the art community and not an accidental spectator. The audience is constantly challenged, it has to face several difficulties in order to understand where the narration is positioned. These contemporary moving image productions present a fragmentary tale, lack of a permanent main character, and non-linear editing. This implies that the audience needs to have a good knowledge of what is going on, because they may be required to contribute to the construction of its meaning. Assessing whether a specific image provides useful information for the development of the

story may be a demanding task, as judgement is subjective and it may be difficult to retrospectively assess a previous judgement of necessity or usefulness. In some cases, one has to organise the chaos and the complexity of the temporalities in the work, and in other cases one has to find information out of the text. According to Roger Odin (2000, 50) in audiovisual productions the balance between operations of fictionalization determines different types of identification of the viewer with the text.<sup>22</sup> In some circumstances a simplified narrative morphology does not guarantee the audience will enter into the world of the story. Yet the film structure makes the so-called *mise-en phase* (Odin 2000, 43-44) harder.<sup>23</sup> Artists may set up a cinematic environment that facilitates the viewer's independent reflections to be produced outside of the (video) text. A mental space where the narration finds its fulfilment:

Artists like to build the stage where the manifestation and the effect of their competences become dubious as they frame the story of a new adventure in a new idiom. The effect of the idiom cannot be anticipated. It calls for spectators who are active interpreters, who render their own translation, who appropriate the story for themselves, and who ultimately make their own story out of it. An emancipated community is in fact a community of storytellers and translators. (Ranciere 2007, 208)

This kind of interaction between artists and viewers may be used in order to build narrative strategies, as in the case of the monumental video performance of the Catalan artist Albert Serra. *The Three Little Pigs* (2012), a 116-hour long video projection, is a work where the extreme autonomy of monstration from narrativisation leads the viewer to a monstration *déphasage*.<sup>24</sup> According to Odin (2000, 51), in the cinematic construction of the story the prevalence of one parameter over the other produces a condition of *déphasage*.<sup>25</sup>

As we have seen in this last section, one of these artists' goal is to make the audience independent in the narrative articulation. This act brings some consequences to the openness of the story's structure and leads us to a process of cultural and political awareness. Thus audience becomes like an analyst, and they may take an active part in what Marchiori defined the "hermeneutic circle" (in Hediger, Saba, and Le Maitre 2013, 138). Questions are raised, when a story does not give any "logical" response, and when the artist pushes you out of the safest option a productive kind of confusion is generated. For example in *Continuity*, when the family is driving once again to pick up their son, they (and we) are in the same familiar German forest but suddenly a camel appears in the middle of the street. They (and we) follow the animal through an unfamiliar way, conifers disappear, an open space appears instead of trees. They converge on what seems to be a dirt road that cuts through forestland and reaches a basin. On the shores of the pool of water, bodies of German soldiers are laying down. Young men who were mutilated, shot dead, weapons still on their side, until a boy takes them all. The route the family takes is everything but logical, the narration (and many other narrations like this one) directs the audience toward paths still largely unmarked, and encourages (pushes) them to proceed.



Image 5

### Image Credits

**Images 1, 2, 5.** Omer Fast, *Continuity*, (2012) Single channel, HD Video, color, sound 40' loop Credit/Courtesy: Commissioned by dOCUMENTA (13) and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, with the support of 3sat, Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg GmbH, Berlin, and OK Offenes Kulturhaus Oberösterreich Linz. Produced by Filmgalerie 451, Berlin, Courtesy the artist; gb agency, Paris; Arratia, Beer, Berlin, Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv Film Still by Bernhard Keller.

**Images 3 and 4.** Rabih Mroué, *The Pixelated Revolution* (2012), Video (color, sound) 22', Credit/Courtesy: Fund for the Twenty-First Century. Commissioned and produced by dOCUMENTA (13) / with the support of Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut/Hamburg. Courtesy the artist and Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Beirut - Hamburg.

### Notes

- 1 In this essay we will deal with *Continuity* (2012) a 41' video released for Documenta Kassel (13). On November 17th Omer Fast's feature film *Continuity* (2016) – length 81' – has had its theatrical release in occasion of 66th Berlin International Film Festival and will be distributed in Europe by Filmgalerie 451.
- 2 The Artist as Curator; the artist as Anthropologist; The Artist as Ethnographer, these are only few definition of the expression “the Artist as”. The expression comes from the James Joyce's novel: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1917).
- 3 Art practice as research it is a way to argue that the creative and cultural inquiry undertaken by artists is a form of research. Arts-based research may allow researchers to call upon perspectives and sensitivities developed over a lifetime of involvement in the arts in ways that shape both the generation and the presentation of data: “the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research” (Sullivan 2005, 223).
- 4 *Pictures* is an exhibition curated by Douglas Crimp in September 1977 at Artists Space in New York. The exhibition gathered a large group of artists including Troy Brauntuch, Jack Goldstein, Sherrie Levine, Robert Longo and Philip Smith. These artists have launched a reflection on the notion of the author, raising questions about the artistic practices of image appropriation. Between the end of the 70's and the 80's of 20th century artists started to work with a systematic re-use of images from the past.

- 5 In this case the word "enigma" is used quoting the enigma of the past representation. The enigma, according to Paul Ricoeur, can be solved in first rate thanks to a mnemotical effort or anamnesis.
- 6 In the case of "historical films" Robert Rosenstone suggests three modes: "history as drama, history as document and history as experiment" (1995, 6).
- 7 The french term "dispositif" comes from the Latin dispositio in english it usually translated as "aparatus" but the latin root of the word underlines the tecnicl actions of: arrage, stage, set up. Thus with the "cinematic dispositif" are underlined architectural (the conditions for image projection), technological (production, transmission and distribution) and discursive (cutting, editing, etc.) dimensions of moving images (Parente and de Carvalho 2008, 38).
- 8 Quite often, according to regular historigraphers, artists' theoretical argument lacks grounding in historical fact, which makes thei narration more provocative than insightful.
- 9 In Hayden White's essay *The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality* (1987) the american historian states that: "Narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate knowing into telling, the problem of fashioning human experiance into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific"
- 10 Semiotically it is defined "syncretic" a text that presents syntactic, semantic and pragmatic marks of cohesion and consistency. This text usually refers to the same instance of enunciation (Hjelmslev 1961).
- 11 It is important to point out that these centers had also played a political rule, as matter of fact they were able to reach out to youth, people of color, artists, women, Native Americans, prisoners, and activists, and encouraged them to tell their own stories. These informal networks have to be considered not only an alternative media, but also an important and early "institutional critique" example leaded by activist and artists using the medium of video.
- 12 In actual fact, since the 60's, there is a strong relationship between exponents of video and cinema. Video artists and filmmakers of experimental cinema were paying attention to each other. As in the case of Jean-Luc Godard, Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas that have been taken under consideration the importance of "cinematic" production coming from the art context. As well as the experiences of "expanded cinema", as defined by Gene Youngblood (1970), practiced by experimental filmmakers such as Stan Van Der Beek, Henry Jacobs and Jordan Belson, Paul Sharits (also a member of Fluxus), Ernie Gehr, John Whitney, Pat O'Neill, and many other experimental filmmakers extremely interested in the language and on the aesthetic possibilities of the video.
- 13 Michael Rush identified the source of "new cinematic" in the critical attitude of many artists towards mainstream cinema (Rush 2012, 112-113).
- 14 Within the institutional context of Museums, Biennale and Documenta, there's been, since the early years 2000, a growing of spaces dedicated to display of moving images (moving theater or black box). It should also be noted how the process of digitization of moving images has practically eliminated several technical differences between film and video art.
- 15 *Data* is the plural form of latin word *datum*. However, although controversial, *data* is becoming acceptable as both singular and plural. In this text *data* has been used as plural form of latin *datum*.
- 16 Omer Fast has quite often conceived his works as loop structure: *Nostalgia I-II-II* (2009); *5,000 feet is the best* (2011).

- 17 According to Maurizio Ferraris weak documents (recordings of facts) are secondary derivatives and lesser importance compared with strong documents (inscriptions of acts), which make up social objects in the full sense (2007; 2009a; 2009b).
- 18 Steyerl assumes that the documentary form is always interested in producing truth and speaks in this context of “documentality”. The truth is made and built via documentary codes: photos, datas, images. The “documentality” operates with authentication strategies. According to Steyerl many contemporary art works adopt this style and act as if they are interested in the truth rather than examining causes. The artist differentiates between two documentary types which refer to historical events: the realistic form and the reflexive form.
- 19 According to Danto the “Ideal Chronicle” is supposed to contain categorical depiction of past events, which are “complete in the way in which a witness might describe them, even an Ideal Witness, capable of seeing all at once everything that happens, as it happens, the way it happens” (1965, 151).
- 20 The discourse is strictly connected with the question raised by Hayden White about the differences and the similarity between historiography and literature. In White, and more widely in a narrativism prospective, the border between historiography and literature is blurred (White 1984, 5), both disciplines combine and select events in a very particular story. The factuality of historiography depends on a practice of historical investigation and not on the way the fact are narrativised.
- 21 Istanbul Biennale 2015 *SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms* has been drafted by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.
- 22 Fictionalization refers to the process by which the spectator is made to resonate to the ction, the process which moves us and leads us to identify the character with love or hate. Odin has established seven types of operations within the Fictionalization: Figurativization; Diegeticization; Narrativizations; Monstraction; Belief; Mise-En Phase; Fictivization.
- 23 *Mise-en phase* (literally the “placing-in-phase” or “phasing-in” of the spectator) is an operation which enlists all the filmic instances in the service of the narration, mobilizing the rhythmic and musical work, the play of looks and framing, to make the spectator vibrate to the rhythm of the filmic events. In common language instead of “placing-in phase” we may use the expression “being engrossed”.
- 24 Narrativization is the temporalization of events involving antagonistic subjects. Monstraction is the designation of the diegetic world, either actual or constructed as real.
- 25 *Déphasage* or “phase displacement”, simply designates the relation manifest in the diegesis (conjunction or disjunction) is not mirrored in the film spectator relation. The spectator does not, therefore, resonate with the diegetic events.

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