

Mediating Uncertainties

A lot has happened in the course of the research process leading up to the completion of *Mediating Uncertainties*. While the thematic focus of the project has remained consistent, experiences gathered on the way made it necessary for the methods of artistic inquiry and production to change. Thematically, the project, in all of its stages, looks to strategies of aesthetic resistance, confronting means and motifs that dominant media channels use to fabricate, and proliferate, repeat, naturalise and normalise dominant notions of a people's past, present and future, shaping collective memories. Methodologically, however the project underwent a crucial shift: it started off primarily focusing on my own critical examination, intervening in *archival materials* saturated with nationalist ideologies, and provocatively recasting them for public screen interventions, montaging and compositing the archival with contemporary materials. As the project unfolded, however, the *relational dimension* of engaging with practitioners involved in parallel projects of media critique (from artists and theorists to journalists and activists) gained more and more importance. The project in fact turned into a medium for bringing together people with similar concerns, but different backgrounds. It thereby set to work a micro-politics of building alliances and shaping shared realities in the process of talking back to dominant media imagery, its montages, and its circulation.

In this introduction, I will give an overview of how the methodological shift—from the critical use of archival materials to the work testifying to a micro-politics of relations built in its making—has played out over the different stages of the project and defined the character of its different artistic manifestations. This overview will thereby also provide a map for navigating the structure of this text, by delineating the two trajectories which emerged, in parallel, during the development of the PhD project. Chapter 1 reflects on how, in Oslo, the site-specific instalment *Do I accept that the Future is Looped?* as well as the event *Under the Park* (2021) accompanying it, evolved from its prologue *The Feedback Loop* (2018). Chapter 2 recounts how the different chapters that form the spatial essay-film and multi-screen installation, *Images [and talking back to them]* (2023), the last instalment of the PhD project, came together, in ongoing conversations

with artists, activists, journalists, and theorists in Mexico, on oppositional strategies working to challenge the link between state and media power, and its corporate ties and wider implications.

The character of the ideologies which the project addresses in Norway and Mexico is geopolitically specific. What sets the trajectories of *how* the work addresses them in parallel, however, is that my methods of critique undergo a similar shift—from an archival to a relational mode—in both contexts, inspired by experiences of collaboration and conversation. The starting point for *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped?*, was to use the defunct Oslo metro station Valkyrie plass as a site for an intervention consisting of a moving image work that challenged the questionable ideologies surrounding attempts to revive Norse mythologies and isolate mythic national origins in Norway in the 1920s, and 1930s by reworking artistic motifs from local art history, and techniques from the archives of propaganda cinema. At the same time, *Images [and talking back to them]* began with research into how artists in Mexico employed subversive strategies of image-making and circulation, to counter the media narrative spread by the Mexican government in the aftermath of the unresolved murder and forced disappearance of students from the Raúl Isidro Burgos Normal School of Ayotzinapa¹, commonly known as the Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School, in 2014. What commenced with a focus on *how to fight images with images* and interrupt their circulation, on both trajectories, then led to an intensified engagement with *how people get organised* over a shared stance against dominant media power.

Do I Accept that the Future is Looped? culminated in *Under the Park*, a night of film screenings, sounds, performances, and discursive presentations in the metro station (through which trains still pass without stopping, however with a break between from 00:00 to 04:00 am), that momentarily created a community of audiences and contributors from different backgrounds, addressing the need to challenge the resurgence of media narratives propagating cultural supremacy, and how the canon of inscribed master narratives of the past is premediating futures. In parallel, the long-term process of first casually conducting, and eventually recording, individual conversations with

¹ The Raúl Isidro Burgos Normal School of Ayotzinapa is part of a network known as the *normales*. Students—or ‘*normalistas*’—come from Mexico’s most impoverished areas and are trained to become teachers in rural communities. The Fault Lines Digital Team, “Ayotzinapa Graduate: I’d Be a Dishwasher in US If Not for This School,” Al Jazeera America, February 20, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/fault-lines/articles/2015/2/20/ayotzinapa-graduate-if-not-for-this-school-id-be-a-dishwasher-in-us.html>.

artists, activists, journalists, and thinkers on how they challenge media's implication in the violence in Mexico, and how media productions of fear takes part in premediating a violent and uncertain future, culminated in a site-specific assembly held and recorded in a cultural centre and symbolic place (adjacent to the square on which the protests took place that the Ayotzinapa students were going to join when they were assailed). This event assembled the conversation partners—who individually come from different backgrounds and communities—for a collective viewing of video material from my conversations with them. This assembly was a communal discussion on what perspectives for critique and survival the current situation asks for and allows, in a Mexican context but also more broadly. The last instalment of the project, *Images [and talking back to them]* reflects on this process by unfolding its different aspects in the form of a multi-screen installation and spatial essay film: Five of six screens open up my archive of individual conversations, and the sixth and largest screen showing the documentation of the collective event, functioning as an additional commentary track for the other chapters presented on the screens in the installation. It conveys the critical knowledge the contributors share, but also very much an insight into *how* the practitioners with different political approaches (from engaged journalism to feminist activism) *relate* to each other, as they formulate their common concerns.

In order to, in more detail, phrase the thematic focus, and trace the methodological shift, I will argue that the key questions guiding the overall project has been: How can image and screen materials be used to question and counter dominant versions of recent histories and produced facts, with the explicit aim of contesting collective memory production? Following the insight of Mark Fisher writing in *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009): “An ideological position can never be really successful until it is naturalized... and it cannot be naturalized while it is still thought of as a value, rather than a fact,”² my PhD project reflects upon the crucial role contemporary images and screen materials play in naturalizing processes of dominant ideologies in order to ask what modes of aesthetic resistance could, in turn, be mobilized today? How to *interrupt* the insidious procedures by which contemporary media convert ongoing events into representations that fit pre-existing and normative narratives, mobilising fear and desire. Using concepts media theorist Richard Grusin provides, this question can be reformulated like this: Dominant media constantly "remediate" political realities to confirm "premediated" accounts of

² Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009) 16.

the future (i.e. dominant media represent and reinterpret ongoing events in accordance with firmly established and normative narratives and hierarchies; reinserting imagery into the existing stream of information, entertainment, advertising, self-presentations on social media, and so forth.) What the future may bring is therefore already prefigured and pre-empted by the narrative propagated from the past to the present. If that means that media effectively keeps feeding its own past back into its machinery, helped by distribution circuits, presenting, and creating, daily life and reality in a loop, then how, where, and by whom could an interruption of this logic be performed?

As Chapter 1 of this text recounts, the initial response was to try interrupt the seamless looping, by feeding decidedly uncontemporary, yet deeply thematically resonant, and reworked, archival material into the loop, on public displays, so as to cause a disturbance in the loop: *The Feedback Loop* (2018), immediately preceding the PhD project, used this methodology, and *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped?* and *Under the Park* (2021), as part of the PhD project, pushed it further: Both works sought to attack premediated nationalist ideals and their ceaseless remediation (normalisation and naturalisation) present in Norwegian film history, as well as in public space. To this end, both projects tapped into archival film material and historical motifs that evince ties between beliefs — regarding the need of a people to unify around the revival of its ‘true’ origins — inherent to both German National Socialism as well as the ideologies governing the early period of Norwegian nation building in the 1920s and 1930s. *The Feedback Loop*, and *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped?* both used screens in strategically chosen locations of the Oslo public transport grid to display clips of reworked historical material, and for *The Feedback Loop* this happened in a surrounding dominated by current advertising, incessantly propagating ideals of healthy, agile, sportive consumers, and prospering nuclear families. The aim was to provide a link between the material on the screens and the unholy origins of the norms that dominant media are naturalizing and possibly also provoke the casual viewer to absorb this link, at least for later reflection.

The doubt, however, that remained was whether the work, despite its intention to create interruptions, not only added more disposable content to big media's premediated loops? On the macro-political level alone, this doubt is difficult to dispel. Meanwhile, a different perspective emerged from the ongoing conversations with practitioners of media critique in Mexico. A

growing awareness that prospered from many of the exchanges was: be aware of the macro-political developments, but the need for this to be accompanied by the micro-politics of creating social networks and smaller organisations that can sustain critique and resistance in your surroundings. Through these insights, different methods of circulation and audiences was considered, and the various instalments have explored different channels of distribution and circulation of the work, with different viewers and audiences in mind.

Guided by the experience mentioned above, I chose to use *Under the Park* as an occasion for experimenting with a shift in method, by combining the archival with a relational approach. As mentioned above, the work had two components. One was a site-specific installation engaging the macro-politics of Norwegian identity. The duration of the installation was for a week, and the work addressed an anonymous urban audience of people on the trains passing digital screens installed on the platforms. The second part consisted of a one-off event, held during the time when train traffic is interrupted every night from 00:00 to 04:00, featuring a series of screenings, talks, and live performances that voiced different takes on how to confront neo-nationalist myth-making and history writing, within an international horizon. While the event expanded the thematic focus from a local to a global debate, the situation of assembling for a night-time gathering gave a particular *momentum* to the debate: It was that of an interpretative community, with a commitment to confronting a shared urgency (in a place of suspended traffic, at an exceptional hour) coming together to hear each other out, and experience the micro-politics of gathering locally around a global concern and possible countering approaches.

Chapter 2 recounts how the key thematic question—of how to interrupt the seamless loops of pre- and remediated ideologies produced by dominant media today—formed the point of departure for the second parallel trajectory of artistic research in Mexico. Quite specifically, searching for fellow artists who practice the interruption of premediated narratives, in particular aiming to construct a narrative around a specific media and political incident. This led to an encounter with the work of Mexican film collective Colectivo Los Ingrávidos. One of their pieces stood out in particular: their viral video *Rostridad / Éstas son las versiones que nos propone* (Eng: *These are the Versions Proposed us*) (1min 58sec, 2014). Produced in response to the killing and forced disappearance of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Normal Rural Teachers' School mentioned above, the video used grainy archival footage of a devilishly grinning mask hovering before the

camera—borrowed from, or made to look like it was from an old horror B-movie—to offset a sound-clip on the audio taken from a notorious speech by Mexican state-attorney Jesús Murillo Karam, in which he proclaimed what was soon exposed to be lies about what supposedly happened on the night of the students' killing and disappearance. Lies, that repeated a premediated narrative of local cartel crime and student troublemakers to cover up the involvement of state military and police forces in the situation. What arrested me was how Colectivo Los Ingrávidos used the power of montage of remediated media material in order to undercut the media narrative advanced by the state. Engaging in conversation with different colleagues in Mexico helped me understand how oppressive power structures can be built around a logic that pairs the *hypervisibility* of violence in the media (photos of mutilated corpses being regular front-page items) with a traumatic *invisibility* of causes and connections, playing its part in producing fears that uphold a status quo of violent realities and uncertain futures. The ongoing conversations with colleagues on how they, as makers of images, producers of critique, and organisers of protest, navigate this tension between hyper visible violence and dissimulated backgrounds, pointed to the particular character of the micro-politics they were engaged in, in their daily practice. Something in which has informed both the parallel trajectories of this research project.

In closing this PhD project with this reflection paper and thinking through the various instalments, choices made and conversations had along the course of the artistic research, many of the insights shared in this paper comes from conversations had with participants in the project, as well with my two supervisors Dora Garcia and Susan Schuppli who have followed the project through. As well as from the research environment at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts—Academy of Fine Arts, research leader Jan Verwoert and peer PhD fellows at KHiO, and also colleagues from outside the institution, in Norway and Mexico. I will use this paper to present the various reflections and insights that have come about from the work, conversations, and process that has taken place throughout the years of conducting the artistic research project *Mediating Uncertainties*.

Website for Mediating Uncertainties, with material and documentation from the various artistic instalments in the project:

locked.mediatinguncertainties.com



Note that this locked version of the website will be deleted as of November 2023. The website will continue as mediatinguncertainties.com. However, this website be subject to change after November 2023. The exact material and documentation from the various instalments in the project are available in KHIODA as the PDF **Mediating Uncertainties portfolio**.

On looping events, images, and times

PROLOGUE: *THE FEEDBACK LOOP*

The Feedback Loop took place in Oslo throughout 2018. While it technically is not part of the PhD project *Mediating Uncertainties*, it nevertheless seems necessary to include a discussion of this work in this text, because—in terms of the conceptual questions raised and techniques employed—it was instrumental to the artistic research and production developed in the context of the PhD. In this sense *The Feedback Loop* effectively became a prologue to the project *Do I Accept That the Future is Looped / Under the Park* (2021) realized as part of the PhD. In this first section I will therefore describe the work in terms of how it initially introduced themes and methods that the PhD project then fully developed. Material from the *The Feedback Loop* is also included on the project web-site for *Mediating Uncertainties*.

The Feedback Loop (part of Munchmuseet on the Move – Contemporary Art) was inquiring into the circulation of images and screen materials in public space. It consisted of an intervention into the video content shown on commercial screens in and around Oslo Central Train Station. It was accompanied by an exhibition at Munchmuseet on the Move – Kunsthall Oslo with invited guests, *The Feedback Loop: Fragmented*, as well as a screening and lecture program. The project took as its starting point the research into cinema material from the 1920s and 1930s in Norway and Europe. This period was chosen in regard to its relevance as a time when cinema and political history closely intersect, and when the prominent usage of cinema for propaganda purposes was advancing montage techniques in cinema production.

Searching through the film archive at the National Library of Norway in 2018, I found the footage around which the video material in *The Feedback Loop* would be developed: The movie *Symfonie Des Nordens* directed by Julius Sandmeyer, a 1938 German-Norwegian co-production, part of a series of films named *Norgesfilmene*. *Norgesfilmene* were produced in the 1920s and 1930s. At the time they were understood as national branding films. As such they depicted the country's entry into modernity, in the light of the nation-building taking place at this very

moment in history. (While the independence of Norway from Denmark was formally declared in 1814, its subsequent ties to Sweden were only dissolved in 1905.) In the films, depictions of the expanding industry were offset by imagery celebrating monumental nature, national folklore, the country's relationship to the sea and so forth. *Norgesfilmene* were hence a product of a moment when the project of nation building and the cinematic language of propaganda were working in tandem. In *Breathing* (2019) Franco Berardi writes: "The nation is the identitarian particularity against those who do not belong."³ Indeed, in their function as national branding films, *Norgesfilmene*, echo developments in dominant propaganda cinema at the time, establishing hierarchies around binaries of us / them, enemy / friend, and the inside / outside of national borders, systematically producing desire and fears in order to make viewers identify with these ideas.

In its final realization as a site-specific screen intervention on 23 screens in and around Oslo Central Train Station (with a total of 67000 screenings), *The Feedback Loop* featured a series of 30-second-long video vignettes that played, un-synced, in the same rotation as the advertising clips playing on the screens: an ice cream commercial, an ad for a telephone company and so forth. The vignettes were a montage of footage appropriated from *Symfonie Des Nordens* mixed with live action shots taken of a young man facing the very screen, in and around the station, that the vignette would be playing on. (The locations the screens were installed in, in and around the station, could roughly be divided in three types, so shots from three places and viewing angles were taken to mirror the view a person standing in this place would have on the screen in this location while watching the respective screen). The montage of the short video vignettes is centred around the way the shots of the young man facing the screen are interlaced with the *Norgesfilmene* propaganda footage. In a sudden twist the man is transported into the image, and looks back from within the historical imagery, at himself (or the viewer). The visual montage in the vignettes could be described like this:

The Norwegian flag in black and white fills the screen. Then a woman with a head scarf Norwegian folkloric style appears. The Norwegian flag is in her background. She turns her head and looks at a bigger flag (a soft transition), and at the same time as she shifts her focus, the

³ Berardi Franco. 2019. *Breathing: Chaos and Poetry*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).

camera starts to zoom out of the image (an analogue zoom done with camera moving backwards on a crane), revealing that we have been watching an image of a screen on a wall outside of Oslo Central Train Station. Revealed is the frame of the screen, its embeddedness on the wall—the move happens quickly and as the camera moves further back, zooming out, we see that the building is on a square in front of the train station. In the final “action” of the first image, a young man is revealed in the foreground of the camera. In the background the image of the flag on the large screen; in this very moment transitioning to a white Norwegian mountain. Then comes the digital: Cut to the counter shot, the point of view of the screen itself; looking down from above towards the young man, the camera already in movement downwards, zooming (this time digitally), into the face of the young man, into his eye. Inside of his eye an image is immediately revealed, that of the very same image on the screen: the Norwegian snow-covered mountain. The “camera” is by now completely inside his eye and the image of the mountain fills our screen. Digital compositing: the young man suddenly reappears in the mountains, as a pixel that grows into a full-scale human.

There are different questions the work could be understood to, conceptually and politically, be raising. Using footage recognizable as what I would argue to be nationalist propaganda from a different time (by virtue of its glorifying aesthetics of the Norwegian landscape, folklore, flags and growing industry, and high contrast black and white texture) first of all put questions regarding the history and contemporaneity of propaganda front and centre. In their analysis, Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman, in the late 1980s defined propaganda as a “manufacturing of consent”⁴ which invades daily life to such an extent that it establishes a normative reality conforming to the interests of the elites in power. In *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century*, Jonas Staal draws on this definition, stating “Propaganda is aimed not only at communicating a message, but at constructing reality itself.”⁵ He further goes on saying that propaganda is not just used in the service of totalitarian states, but, in a more general sense, finds a widespread use in contemporary media cultures, in imagery and narratives circulated with the aim to rewire

⁴ Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (Random House, 1994).

⁵ Jonas Staal, *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century* (The MIT Press, 2019), 2.

sensibilities through which we see the world.⁶ Propaganda, in this sense, communicates not just *to* us, but *through* us.

Against the backdrop of a change in media culture from analogue cinema projection to the ubiquitous presence of digital screens, *The Feedback Loop* (in materially engaging both cinema and digital screen culture) was inquiring into how propaganda had changed throughout times and media usage. On the one hand, it could be argued that the cinema of the 1920s and 1930s laid the very foundations for the way images forcefully elicit affective identification. Along these lines, Jonathan Crary argues in *Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory* (1989) that Guy Debord was right to date the birth of the spectacle to the late 1920s.⁷ So Crary too marks out this period as a historical threshold, pointing to the development of sound sync cinema and the premiere of the first “talkie” in 1927. I would shift the emphasis on the perfection of cinematic montage and its ties to propaganda cinema. Besides working with footage from this crucial period, the decision to represent the moment of the viewer’s transportation into the image, seemed like a way to acknowledge the legacy of cinema as a technology of identification, with the power to literally pull you into the reality it creates, for many, but prominently also ideological reasons.

However, the transition from analogue projection to digital screen presence did ask for a different critical perspective. In *What is Media Archaeology?* Jussi Parikka characterizes the archive as “...a key institutional ‘site’ of memory with an intertwined history with modernity and the birth of the state apparatus, but which now is increasingly being rearticulated less as a *place* of history, memory and power, and more as a dynamic and temporal network, a software environment, and a social platform for memory—but also for remixing.”⁸ Taking the lead from this description of digital cultures dissolving archives into “dynamic and temporal networks”, *The Feedback Loop* took on the form of a multi-channelled montage engaging the interlacing realities at the train station: spectator, images, screen infrastructure, and site. Considering what it would mean to feedback present and archival images into the circuits of this very reality, while at the same time potentially implicating the viewers’ bodies in the loop.

⁶ Staal, *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century*,

⁷ Jonathan Crary, “Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory,” *October* 50 (January 23, 1989): 96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/778858>.

⁸ Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 14.

With this in mind, the montage sought to invoke a sense of a young man trapped in a loop that ties his present position (as a spectator) at Oslo Central Station into imagery repeating the past. As he traverses screens and historical periods, he gets pulled into a loop of *recursive time*: here and now and there and then blend into each other. Referring to what Gregory Bateson has called “recursive epistemology,” as mentioned in Luciana Parisi and Ezekiel Dixon-Román’s essay “Recursive Colonialism and Cosmo-computation”: “The process of the past becoming reconfigured in the present, is a mythopoetics that shapes the collective cultural ways of knowing.”⁹ Following this observation, it could be argued that myth in general, and in particular the myth of a nation’s birth, relies on looped time, which ceaselessly and seamlessly blends ideas of origins with visions of futures, and thereby creates what is effectively a timeless continuum of repetitions in which the specificity of actual historical referents becomes lost. On one hand, I was hoping to produce a critical moment of intervening the loop by glancing back, marking out the lost referent (in the form of the quaint footage from *Symfonie Des Nordens*) and reworking its problematic legacy through self-reflection. And with that, tainting the very material that was already playing on the screen, before and after my own vignettes. On the other hand, knowing I was doing so on digital screens for casual visual consumption, inserting material into the ongoing flow of information existing as zeroes and ones, made me question: Was I not just adding more zeroes and ones to the loop?

Pasi Valiaho’s echoed this doubt in the essay “Who Thought They Saw Something?” published in the catalogue accompanying the project: “Screens are part of our environment, and, therefore, a matter of the environment, of the milieu. (...) Even the extreme close-ups of the boy’s face and of the pupil of his eye, which visually scream at spectators in their impressive size, wanting to burst out of their frame, don’t seem to be able to make many heads turn. But should we still today consider the significance of screens in terms of their purported effects, in their apparent immediacy, in their capacity to attract awareness?”¹⁰ In my efforts to document the work (with a 16mm camera in the attempt to grasp the digital through the analogue, using a historical medium

⁹ “Recursive Colonialism and Cosmo-Computation – Social Text,” n.d., https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/recursive-colonialism-and-cosmo-computation/.

¹⁰ Pasi Valiaho, “Who Thought They Saw Something” in *Sara Eliassen: The Feedback Loop*, ed. Natalie Hope O’Donnell (Munchmuseet, 2018). 55.

to return the work to the archive), on the one hand, meant that I got fully immersed in how the image flow on the screens interlaced with the way time flows in the train station. To capture the moment when the vignettes appeared amongst the ads, I learned the timing of the video rotation on the different screens by heart, using pauses to changing film spools with the camera hidden under my jacket, for fear of being spotted and removed by security guards for filming on a highly surveilled site, while reading the time of the switchboard announcing arrivals and departures, as the day went by. On the other hand, I could clearly see how people traversing the station or passing time, hurried past the screens, perhaps with a quick glance at the vignettes. But most of the material I shot clearly showed people that hardly paid any attention to the screens at all, neither to the ads nor the vignettes.

If the initial hope had been that inserting an element of site-specific media-reflexivity into the otherwise generic flow of digital imagery could prompt a slight interruption, and at the same time producing a moment of awareness, experience forced me to partially reconsider. I would be ready to concede to Katherine Hayles that, as she writes “Reflexivity is the movement whereby that which has been used to generate a system is made through a changed perspective, to become part of the system it generates.”¹¹ But in an age of smart advertising, it’s undeniable that media-reflexivity hardly presents an obstacle to the seamless flow of imagery, when it effectively has become one common ingredient, among many, for creating fleeting stimuli, and thus the moment of critical awareness in the transient viewer would get lost. On the other hand, I hold on to the conviction that self-reflexivity can indeed make a difference and cause disruptive effects into the flow of material itself. And my attempt of achieving this, happened through forms of layering (or compositing) images upon images, media upon media, and times upon times (the vignettes in *The Feedback Loop* layering 85 years in 30 seconds), entering into a montage with the other materials presented on the screens in and around the train station: the young man in *The Feedback Loop* on site at the station, transported into a giant onscreen version of himself, echoing the grotesque humour of characters in Nintendo’s *Super Mario Bros* games growing in scale exponentially, after consuming a digital mushroom, becoming super-versions of themselves. The intervention

¹¹ Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 8.

being a generator of noise, adding layers, or disruptive humour. Could self-reflexivity not interrupt the seamless working of recursive media loops after all?

Reflections and artistic approaches from *The Feedback Loop* hence kept informing the work undertaken in the context of the PhD project *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped?*, *Under the Park* and eventually also *Images [and Talking Back to Them]*. While the methods I employ may have gradually undergone a shift from the archival and reflexive, to the relational and micro-politically engaged, what stayed central was the question raised by Luciana Parisi and Ezekiel Dixon-Román: How might we efficiently reject recursive notions of history?¹²

¹² “Recursive Colonialism and Cosmo-Computation – Social Text.”

1.

DO I ACCEPT THAT THE FUTURE IS LOOPED?

The material: Vigeland / Riefenstahl (2018)

The site-specific video-installation *Do I accept that the future is looped?* was realised in the context of the PhD project, in the defunct underground station Valkyrie plass, in Oslo, in 2021. On a series of nine large-scale screens, installed along the platform's edge, it displayed a zoetrope-like¹³ video montage that reworked footage originally intended to be displayed as a video triptych titled *Vigeland / Riefenstahl* (2018). The questions raised in the material directly lead on from the inquiries into the myths of Norwegian nation building, and use of recursive (i.e., looped) time, advanced by *The Feedback Loop*. Since the 2021 installation in the underground was built around this footage, I will use this section to discuss the themes addressed and methods used in the making of this material.

The footage for *Vigeland / Riefenstahl* (2018) was produced in two consecutive steps: First, three selected pairs of granite sculptures by Norwegian sculptor Gustav Vigeland (1869–1943) were individually filmed, against a green screen, with the video camera rotating around the sculptures on a half circular track. Characteristically for Vigeland, the sculptures are dynamic and heroic in style, and often display two or more bodies tightly bound together in situations of intimate struggle, or mutual aid. Using green screen and technology and digital compositing, the sculptural pairs were then isolated from their backgrounds. Secondly, a group of actors and dancers were cast to try and not only imitate the sculptures' frozen poses but speculate further on what kind of actions were implied by the poses, and spell them out, between the camera and the greenscreen. Three video clips from the experiments were edited together with the sculpture shots, and the erased backgrounds were filled in with monochrome colour fields, using the three colours used in the Norwegian national flag: red, white, and blue.

¹³ “a cylinder-shaped toy with a sequence of pictures on its inner surface which, when viewed through the vertical slits spaced regularly around it while the toy is rotated, produce an illusion of animation.” “Definition of Zoetrope,” in *Www.Dictionary.Com*, n.d., <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/zoetrope>.

The aim of *Vigeland / Riefenstahl* was to bring out the ideologies inscribed into Vigeland's sculptural language, by means of physical re-enactment on the one hand, and the re-use of a specific cinematic effect, prominently employed by Leni Riefenstahl (1902–2003) in her 1938 propaganda film *Olympia*, on the other. The physical re-enactment resulted in videos that, in one sense, bordered on physical comedy, as the performers failed to approximate, or speculate, the heroic postures of Vigeland's sculptures, and, in another sense succeeded in spelling out some of the subtext inherent to the sculptures, ranging from the striking brutality of a man hurling a woman over his hip to the ground, and the potential homo-eroticism of two male bodies locked together in intimate and repeated struggle. The very method of animating heroic sculptures by using live-action re-enactment of these in front of the camera, in turn referenced the use of this technique by Riefenstahl in her 1938 propaganda film *Olympia*. The movie begins with a montage that creates a fluid transition from images of heroic and perfectly formed ancient Greek sculptures, to superimposed images of live athletes taking their pose and place; idealized bodies soon to run through Europe and to the Olympic stadium in Berlin. The animation of the sculptures suggests a rebirth of antique ideals in the shape of the German athletes' agile bodies, via the power of cinema. The impression the sequence produces, could be described like this:

Camera passes a floating bust of a woman and moves onto the sculpture of a discus thrower emerging from the dark. By the superimposition of images, the discus thrower is transformed into a young white man, soon to run throughout Europe and to the Olympic stadium in Berlin, holding a torch.

In teasing out resonances between Vigeland and Riefenstahl, the material was seeking to articulate the unacknowledged problematics in the *ideological legacy* I would argue that one could historically associate with the artistic vision Vigeland developed in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the *continuing influence* that Vigeland's work exerts on the definition of Norwegian national identity, by virtue of the iconic status attributed to his work, not least due to the fact that the Vigeland Park (from which the sculptures in the videos are taken) is today marketed as one of Oslo's main tourist attractions. The park is situated in Frogner, one of the more affluent parts of the city, with streets and squares named after Norse deities such as Odin, Tor, Balder, and the Valkyries. The park includes 214 of Vigeland's sculptures and was built with support from the

City of Oslo, starting in the 1920s and reaching completion in 1943 during Nazi-Germany's occupation of Norway.

As art historian Kesia Eidesen Halvorsrud elaborated on in her contribution to the event *Under the Park* organised in 2021 (described and analysed in detail below), the development of Vigeland's artistic vision implied a wider interest in Norwegian mythologies and folklore, looking to old Norse mythology as a source of inspiration for his classicist ideals. In a reference Eidesen made to notes made by the art historian Hans Dedekam (1872–1928) from conversations had with Vigeland, he opined that the male type depicted in his sculptures, with their high nose bridges was related to the men of the Norse sagas, to the original and noble aristocratic types in *Rigstula* (The Norse Edda sagas).¹⁴ I consider this as a belief in—the possibility of discovering and reviving—a national origin, contributing to normative body politics defining Norway as one people, facing one common fate of struggle and aid. Both in terms of its overall concept, and the consistent style in which the sculptures depict (the) people. As writer Jan Verwoert emphasised in this contribution to *Under the Park*, the depiction of intimate struggle—and prominently the central obelisk of the park dramatically depicting countless bodies wrapped up in each other (literally one “mortal coil”) to form one big column—seems consistent with the millennial beliefs found at the heart of Nazi ideology: Namely that the common “fate” of a nation lay in “cleansing” itself from the aberrations of international modernity, through an “apocalyptic” struggle in which its true origin was to be revealed, so it would (in a loop of recursive time rebooting the future from the past) be reborn as one nation, one body, one people.

Mark Fischer has written: “An ideological position can never be really successful until it is naturalized... and it cannot be naturalized while it is still thought of as a value, rather than a fact.”¹⁵ One could argue that Vigeland's artistic project lay in this: literally naturalising the ideological fiction that a nation could have a single origin by portraying the assumed physiognomy of ancient Nordic nobility as the “naturally” given norm for the past, present and future identity of a whole people, and repeating this construct, as if it was a given, throughout

¹⁴ Hans Dedekam, “Dagbokopptegnelser.” Håndskrevet manuskript og avskrift i Vigeland-museet, 66. “Han mente hans egne mandstyper, med den høie næseryg, var i slekt med sagalitteraturens mænd, med de edle aristokratiske typer i Rigspula [sic].”

¹⁵ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 16.

sculptures filling a prominent park in the nation's capital. Along similar lines, Paul B. Preciado describes the power of public monuments to shape collective consciousness in *When Statues Fall*: "We collectively inhabit an iconic landscape that is saturated with signs of power endorsed by historical and epic narratives and aestheticized and naturalized to the extent that we are no longer able to perceive their cognitive violence."¹⁶

Against the backdrop of these critical observations, the aim of *Vigeland / Riefenstahl* was precisely to try and challenge their status of Vigeland's sculptures as neutral and national icons, exposing their status as constructs, isolating the sculptures' shapes from their "natural" surroundings by virtue of the obviously artificial use of green screen technology to create this effect, a technique appropriated from a contemporary, also looking backwards (cinematically and conceptually) to the origins of a folk, idealized. Modelling the animation on a sequence from Riefenstahl's *Olympia* was to further introduce a moment of "noisy" reflexivity: pointing to the *crude* cinematic means by which a mythic recursive temporality (of national futures reborn from ancient origins) is produced. The original motivation was for the triptych to be inserted in a public space, in proximity to the site from where the material was filmed, so as to insert a reflexive loop into the city's daily life, in which a recourse to history (and via Riefenstahl to the archives of cinema) would create an interruption in the unquestioned celebration of Vigeland and proliferation of the ideologies inherent to his work in the capital's self-presentation. In the final instance, however, realised in the site-specific installation *Do I accept that the future is looped?* as well as the event *Under the Park* in 2021, I decided this time to intervene into an unused pocket of the city, the defunct underground station Valkyrie plass, reclaiming a territory below the commercialized streets and active train stations, both to insert the video piece as a hopefully disruptively reflexive intervention, as well as to bring together a community of critical practitioners, and host wider discussions around the topics the piece evoked.

¹⁶ Paul B. Preciado, "When Statues Fall," *Wwww.Artforum.Com*, January 11, 2020, <https://www.artforum.com/print/202009/paul-b-preciado-84375>.

Back to That Future

The underground station Valkyrie plass in Oslo was in use from 1928 to 1985. It was built (and got its name) around the same time the building of the Vigeland Park began. The station moreover is located in very close proximity to the park, in a traditionally more affluent part of Oslo. The station was closed in 1985 because its platforms turned out to be too short for new underground trains introduced at the time (with more cars than the platforms could accommodate). As the station, however, is located on one of the main underground lines crossing Oslo, so the tracks couldn't be moved, trains still pass the station most frequently, they just don't stop, but briefly slow down their speed, for security reason, as they run by the platform. Entering the Valkyrie plass underground station today is like entering a time capsule, remnants of bygone times are everywhere: As you descend stairways from 1928, you encounter a Poco Loco ad from the 1980s. The lightbox-sign still announcing the name of the station stems from the 1950s and was never de-installed after the station's closure. Deprived of its actual function, the sign has become an ominous memorial of sorts, as it dedicates the defunct site to the memory of the Valkyrie: In Nordic mythology, the Valkyrie women warriors have the power to choose who of those on the battlefield are to live, and who are to die, in order to join the ultimate battle in Valhalla at the end of days, on the day of the Ragnarok.

The site-specific characteristics listed above seemed to qualify the station as an ideal location to install a revised version of *Vigeland / Riefenstahl*, and further develop the contextual frame of the work to more precisely address the issues at stake. In its defunct state, with its name glowing ominously in the dark, as trains pass through slowly, the station as a whole seemed like an archival artifact testifying to the ideologies of nation building—in the key of a return to, and revival of Nordic mythology—governing the spirit of the time, and construction of the underground station in tandem with the building of the nearby Vigeland Park. Given the violent character of the divinities invoked, the apocalyptic battle they preside over, and the recursive time they exist in (choosing the heroes in the present that will die to fight at the end of days), the station's name on the surviving lightbox seemed highly significant. As did the fact that the station becoming a time-capsule the day it closed, and continued to exist without renovations, old ads lining its staircase walls, as an artefact in its own right, literally turned it into an example of

history existing as a “multi-layered construction”, as Parikka writes in *What is Media Archaeology*.¹⁷ After contacting different people in the Oslo city traffic administration, I had the good fortune of being introduced to Geir Røer from Oslo Sporveier (the tram and underground system of the city) who supported the project and gave us access to the station.

At the time, I was in dialogue with several artists and thinkers. These conversations fed into my considerations for reworking and reframing the video material from *Vigeland / Riefstahl*. One of the artist groups I was in touch with at the time, was the collective New Red Order (NRO) who characterise themselves as “a public secret society with a rotating and expanding cast, working with networks of informants and accomplices to create grounds for Indigenous futures.”¹⁸ One of the subjects NRO consistently address is the toxic legacy and future of monuments (predominantly in the US), glorifying the supposed triumph of colonial settlers over the indigenous people. Adam Khalil, a core contributor to the group, next to Zack Khalil, and Jackson Polys, introduced me to a term the group was working with: *additive defacement*, explaining that they considered histories malleable entities, and insisted on the value of engaging with artifacts from the past (even if grotesquely so) rather than erasing them. It echoed my commitment to not shun away from problematic archival material. At the same time, I was in dialogue with Peter Bøckmann, a biologist at the University of Oslo. I asked what biological entity, material, or process, could possibly have the power to *deface* the granite sculptures of Gustav Vigeland. He told me that granite would last for millions of years, and that only a human hand with a human machine could break down the solid material.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 11.

¹⁸ Kunsthal Charlottenborg, “New Red Order Presents:,” Kunsthal Charlottenborg, n.d., <https://kunsthalcharlottenborg.dk/en/exhibitions/new-red-order/>.

¹⁹ Creative footnote: The last time I visited Valkyrie plass when it was still operating as an underground station was during one of those rare hot summer days in Oslo in the early 80s. It was a Sunday, and my mom was with my friend Tjabo and me. We couldn’t agree on how to spend the day, as Tjabo wanted to go to the outdoor pool in the park, and I wanted to go to the movies and see a film about a car living a life on its own. My mother decided on the pool. I was probably sulking as only an only child could do, as we walked towards the large outdoor pool situated on the fringe of the Vigeland Park. Entering through the gates of the park, we walked along a path by the ice-skating rink and to the pool—which was closed. I was likely hiding my grin poorly, as we walked over to Valkyrie plass, and took the train to the empty and cool cinema darkness to watch a film about Herbie, a Beetle with agency.

Inspired by both conversations, I tried to find a visual language for alluding to such a process of defacement: Digitally reworking the shots taken of the Vigeland sculptures, as well as the performers imitating them, what brought about their gradual defacement turned out to be the artifacts the digital medium itself could generate when you mangled the imagery in the software Flame, in this case helped by a skilled operator. The sequence of the images would then be the following: A Vigeland sculpture would appear with distortion lines appearing in random places and stretching across the image in disruptive ways, dissolving contours. This would gradually shift towards a clear image of the sculpture, then transitioning to the human body that would reversely undergo the process of distorting the shapes of the depicted bodies, blending in with the background of the images. Repeatedly for the blue, the red, and the white sequence. This way of processing the material visibly *denaturalised* it further, reflexively exposing it as a media construct riddled with artifacts. The addition of digital noise, if you will, inspired by the ideas suggested by Khalil.

Furthermore, I resolved to make use of another site-specific feature of the underground station, and take recourse to another historical medium from the archive of moving image technologies, the zoetrope: Along nearly the full length of the station's platform, a series of large-scale screens were set up, in such a way that the now still images would flicker across the viewer passing by on trains, at a pace that suggests the illusion of motion, in the manner zoetropes do. What added to the resemblance was the effect of the trains slowing down, somewhat matching the pace of the flicker, while passing the platform and the window-frames of the underground carriages cutting through your view, not unlike the slits in a zoetrope. (Not to forget that in the early days of cinema, the kinetic force of the moving image was often metaphorised in iconic shots of modern means of transportation in motion, notably trains and trams, as in the Lumière brothers' *Arrivée d'un train (à la Ciotat)* in Southern France in 1895, or Dziga Vertov's tram ride across the modern metropolis in *The Man with the Movie Camera* (1929)). Built on many layers of reworked footage and media-reflexive "noise", this installation would now, for the duration of the week, address the casual urban audience of commuters passing from centre east to and from centre west of the city.

To more precisely reframe the piece conceptually I changed its title to *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped?* To address the public, one of the two signs on the platforms of the Valkyrie plass underground station was transformed. The words VALKYRIE PLASS were covered and replaced by FUTURE LOOPED. (This new layer on the sign, at the date of writing, has still not been removed.) In a series of slots inside the underground line's carriages normally reserved for advertising and information banners; Oslo Sporveier announced the project on a banner that included its full title *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped?* accompanied by an image of the sculptures transforming into people, as well as a QR-code that would lead to a temporary website with information about the project and its collaborators. (The banners were placed in the ceiling of a number of train carriages crossing the city: apparently an unpopular slot for ads that could be rented for a low price, due to the increase in activity on personal digital devices by commuters).

The zoetrope subsequently became the backdrop for the next instalment aiming to transform the station into an alternative channel for the distribution of media critique, and creation of interpretative communities dedicated to this challenge of complicating mythologies of nation-building, defacing oppressive monumentality, and hacking the recursive looping of futures onto fictions of origin in public environment saturated with digital media. I wanted to bring other artists and thinkers' approaches into the project, in an attempt to break up the singular voice and open up for a multiplicity of approaches and techniques to address the common concerns.

So, for the early hours of a Saturday, October 16, in 2021 in the middle of the seven-day period the zoetrope installation was up (from Wednesday to Wednesday) the collective manifestation *Under the Park* was held. During the times from 00:00 to 04:00 am, while train traffic stopped, the underground station was temporarily transformed into a cinema, performance, and lecture stage, with the audience seated on one platform, and (the majority of the) presentations happening on the opposite platform.

The preparations for and programming of the event to no small degree reflected on the ongoing conversations I had meanwhile been engaging in with artists, activists, journalists, and theorists in Mexico over their response to the power of contemporary media to dictate narratives of the nation's future, and approaches to disrupting such master narratives. As detailed in the

introduction, the Mexican Colectivo los Ingrávidos played a crucial role in this regard, as their prolific practice in creating videos to interrupt dominant political narratives strongly appealed to me, and resonated with the efforts I was making in my own work and research. So one main element in the programming of *Under The Park* was commissioning the film collective to contribute a new video piece to the event which (as detailed later in this text), they did by composing the film *Sensemaya*. Furthermore, the Mexican writer and media thinker Irmgard Emmelhainz, with whom I had been engaged in close exchange, contributed a video lecture on the issues at stake. Adam Khalil came to do a live lecture performance for NRO. From my immediate academic environment at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, I invited further dialogue partners, graduating student Lesia Vasylchenko, and her performing partner Nikhil Vettakuttil, as well as theory professor Jan Verwoert for further lecture performances. Connecting the challenge to ideological narratives of nation building, and national romanticism to the discourse on how imperialist nations extended these narratives to their projections onto countries they colonised, Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa opened the night with a screening of her film *Promised Land* (2015). The following section will offer a more detailed discussion of the event, and its contributions.

UNDER THE PARK

For one night, after the last train passed and until the first train was arriving, the defunct metro station Valkyrie Plass underground station became the site for the event *Under the Park*, which sought to build a temporary community in the very early hours of the morning from 00:00 to 04:00 am. Artists, thinkers, performers, and audiences were gathered to a nightly symposium, with lectures, performances, screenings, and music. The event presented itself as a montage of artistic and scholarly invocations, the audience being asked to join in a nightly session of collective critical noisemaking. Exploring screen materials together, with the zoetrope and Vigeland as a backdrop, the night staged a moment of interruption, literally during the intermission in the metro traffic—looking backwards and forwards—rhetorically asking whether we accept that the future *is* looped?

An important aspect of this instalment was to ask for contributions by thinkers and artists whose work was tackling questions that my overarching project touched upon. Such as the practice of New Red Order described above. Being a Norwegian artist with access to a public funding system, I also wanted to test out a form of redistribution, exemplified by the commissioning of a new film by Colectivo Los Ingrávidos. (*Sensemayá*, now playing on the project website.) The night came together with artistic and discursive contributions by Emma Wolukau-Wanamba, Jan Verwoert, DJ Global Drama, Lesia Vasylenko & Nikhil Vettakuttil, Irmgard Emmelhainz, Kesia Halvorsrud / Valborg Frøysnes, Adam Khalil / New Red Order, and Colectivo Los Ingrávidos. I put together a team for developing and producing the project further, including Antonio Cataldo, artistic director at Fotogalleriet in Oslo, KORO curator Bo Krister Wallstrøm, (both Fotogalleriet and KORO (Public Art Norway) having contributed with funding for the project), as well as Magnus Holmen who worked with me as an artist assistant, the independent curator Kristine Jærn Pilgaard, and Jan Verwoert, with whom I moderated the event. Assuming the role of the mediator in this context was a very meaningful step to take, as it meant stepping out from behind the camera, or the position of the producer behind the scenes respectively, and visibly gathering people as a form of artistic agency. A close ally from the infra-structure of the city of Oslo was Geir Røer from Oslo Sporveier (the tram and underground system of the city). He facilitated access to the station for preparations, the installation process of the video work,

rehearsals for the event, and finally its realisation. In conversations on the night of the event, we moreover learned that he was literally the voice of the underground: being in charge of the communication system on trains, he had personally recorded most of the announcements of upcoming stations on the subway. As Lesia Vasylchenko & Nikhil Vettakuttil was replaying samples from some of these station announcements on underground rides, serendipitously, Geir's very voice was resonating from the sound montage around which they built their spoken word performance.

Montage indeed emerged as a method with many implications during this night: artistic montage of sounds and images; the montage of critical perspectives embodied by the line-up of people gathered; montage of screens, performance stage and subway architecture, montage of provocations and reactions in the interplay of presenters and audience, brought close by their mutual commitment to being up together, for this, in the early hours of the morning. It was a moment where a collective dedication to critique was shared, however ephemeral.

Under the Park started outside the gates of the Vigeland Park with two lecture performances: The actress Valborg Frøysnes from Setesdal did a reading of an essay commissioned from art historian Kesia Eidesen Halvorsrud. As discussed above, Eidesen Halvorsrud elaborated on Vigeland's interest in Norse mythologies, and how this had worked as inspiration for his sculptures, referring to certain physiognomic features that could be isolated in some of his sculptural language. As I interpret this, a gesture in order to evoke the original nobility of the Nordic people. Then followed a lecture by Jan Verwoert on the history of a toxic myth of recursive temporality, namely the belief popular among right-wing thinkers like Oswald Spengler or Martin Heidegger that a people (*Volk*) could overcome the alienations of global modernity by completing the "fateful cycle" of its "demise" (fight to the death), its "return" to the "origins" of their "authentic (*völkisch*) being", and "rebirth" as unified.

Entering the derelict metro station, the audience was met with sounds from DJ Global Drama / Dahir, creating an uncanny montage of techno beats, urban ambient sounds, and recordings from his personal archive, before screenings and performances, in the breaks between them, and at the end of the event. The screenings consisted of a series of short films by Colectivo Los Ingrávidos,

as well as *Promised Lands* by Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa, a film essay delineating the contrast between Imperialist Romanticist ideas projected onto colonized lands, and testimonies voiced by people living there, remembering violence, yet mocking the colonial gaze. At the end of the programme, New Red Order's Adam Khalil performed the lecture *Savage Philosophy*.

He provoked the audience, by mirroring back to the audience a lack of understanding of the constructed term "savage", and how the desire to see "savage philosophy" performed betrayed a readiness to think beyond the dichotomies that the ideology of the modern nation is built around. Referencing Norway's own colonial history, and dichotomies of inside/outside, self/other, and citizen/savage. As a confrontational, intense, and necessary ending to a night discussing how past paradigms perpetuate futures, Khalil's act functioning as an interruption within the interruption, itself, pointing to the active effort needed in order to hack the looped future. It led up to the New Red Order's film *Culture Capture: Crimes Against Reality*, which digitally deface monuments in the US celebrating the supposed "triumph" of colonial settlers over the indigenous people, crumbling, cracking, and disintegrating into shapes resembling a lively pulsing fleshy mess. The impression it leaves could be described like this:

Opening with a somewhat synthetic landscape and a public monument crumbling into digital pieces. The sonic presence of a musical score and shutter clicks. Then 3D imagery and archival material from public monuments and museal objects, gradually taken over by a fleshy substance. The video at one point interrupted by the statement: "To erect a statue is to take revenge on Reality. And reality in turn exacts its due."

In *When Statues Fall*, Paul Preciado, writes: "This process of material resignification of urban space generates chaos but also political joy and eventually critical justice."²⁰ He continues: "One characteristic of a radical democracy is its capacity to understand the critical reinterpretation of its own history as a source of creativity and collective emancipation, instead of hastening to homogenize voices and contain dissidence."²¹ Preciado was writing the essay *When Statues Fall*

²⁰ Paul B. Preciado, "When Statues Fall," *Www.Artforum.Com*, January 11, 2030, <https://www.artforum.com/print/202009/paul-b-preciado-84375>.

²¹ Preciado, "When Statues Fall."

in Spring 2020, in the aftermath of George Floyd’s murder and as the toppling of statues or their defacement became a prominent means of protest. Discussing this strategy, he writes: “In the meantime, while the toppled and relocated statues melt away, let’s use the empty pedestals left behind in all cities as performative platforms that other, living bodies can stand atop. We do not suffer from a forgetting of normative history but from a systematic erasure of the history of oppression and resistance. We do not need any more statues. Let’s not ask for marble or metal to fill those pedestals. Let’s climb up on them and tell our own stories of survival and liberation.”²² Taking cues from Preciado here, I would argue that the defacement of national romanticism—from underground stations named after mythic war gods to parks filled with granite depictions of “noble Nordic” features pointing back to a mythic origin—in *Under the Park* effectively turned the defunct station into an open platform: Somewhat like the vacated pedestal Preciado invoked, artists, thinkers, performers, and image-makers took over the site together, not to propose *one* counter-narrative, but to advance an approach of resistance as a multiplicity of critical methods and techniques instead.

While the starting point for the project and its installation component was a strongly self-reflexive appropriation of historical symbols, as well as techniques and media from the archives of cinema—staged in the hope of interrupting the repetitive remediation of nation building myths—the project arguably culminated, if only for a night, in the micro-political gesture of creating an interpretative community, in the underground, spending time together, and sharing the experience of looking, listening, and responding, in a nightly poetic and performative symposium.

In *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11*, Richard Grusin borrows Bruno Latour’s distinction between intermediaries and mediators, in order to emphasise that mediators are never neutral but actively involved in shaping what they mediate: “Mediation operates through what Latour characterizes as “translation”, not by neutrally reproducing meaning or information but by actively transforming conceptual and affective states.”²³ In my work so far, I had mainly relied on imagery—and the noisily self-reflexive ways I inserted them into the media loops of public

²² Preciado, “When Statues Fall.”

²³ R. Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (Springer, 2010), 6.

image circulation—to act as transformative mediators, at Oslo Central Station, or the defunct underground station.

Taking on the role of moderating *Under the Park*, introducing the contributions, suggesting links and connections, and articulating some of the overall choreography, by addressing the audience before and between contributions meant I acknowledged—and consciously experimented with—my own presence as a mediator (in the overall montage) between the images and ideas presented and the people present watching them. As a mediator, voicing my critical interest in media histories and the act of looking into the future without amnesia, confronting the power the past holds over the present. This step of acknowledging and embracing mediation as a transformative process, as well as my role as a mediator, became for now central to this research project. Something which had very much been inspired by the way I had experienced my agency during repeated longer visits to Mexico at the time: as an outsider entering into conversations with people sharing critical concerns at first, but then increasingly also as a mediator between people from different backgrounds and scenes whom I independently got to know in my attempts to connect, but then ended up connecting, via the social network slowly taking shape around my research and inquiry.

This was evolving out of the experiences I was making in Mexico, and it was realised on the platforms *Under the Park*, and it continued now to consciously inform the way I was interpreting my artistic methods, function, and agency in the way my research developed in Mexico and resulted in the installation *Images [and Talking Back to Them]* as the final instalment of the PhD artistic research project.

Descriptions of actions undertaken in the course of developing *Images [and Talking Back to Them]*: returning to sites into which collective memories are being inscribed. The going back and back. Searching for the real, by mapping out realities and the production of them, with people on the ground. A filmmaker, researcher and recorder meeting other filmmakers, artists, journalists, and independent agents of media. Asking questions—looking at images, asking again, listening. Then, gathering a group, asking, listening again. As a mediator, and also as a filmmaker.

2.

IMAGES [AND TALKING BACK TO THEM]

The investigation into contemporary images and screen material from a Mexican context, partially happened in parallel with the investigation into archival materials and cultural production from the 1920s and 1930s Europe and Norway. This investigation opens up the second trajectory for working through the key concerns of the project.

The opening scene of *La noche de Iguala* (2015): *Dark night and a dirt road. A truck appears from afar. The light from the vehicle is the only thing lightening up the road. The truck is coming closer, sound of crickets is growing in intensity. Camera being slightly under-angled, and as the truck passes there's a hard cut to the back door of the truck. Fade to an intense fire, shadows of men throwing fuel onto the flames. Fade in of a text superimposed on the fire: "He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby becomes a monster. And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee." Nietzsche. Back to the truck arriving at a site in the forest: Wide-shot frontal truck, a man exits driver seat and walks to the back of the truck. We can see the back door opening. An under-angled image reveals legs standing by the back door. A corpse falls to the ground in slow motion, dust is whirling. Fade to black. An animated title reveals: "La Noche De Iguala." Black. And then a text, stating: "These events are based on facts, but some might be fictitious."*

The docudrama described above, was produced in the aftermath of the forced disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa Rural Normal School, in Guerrero in Mexico in 2014. On September

26, 2014, students from Ayotzinapa were attacked in the city of Iguala around two and a half hours from Mexico City. The students were headed to Mexico City in buses, for a commemoration of a student massacre that happened at Tlatelolco in 1968, when their buses were intercepted at various points in the city of Iguala. At the end of the night, six people were found dead, 40 wounded, and 43 students were forcibly disappeared. Conflicting narratives around what took place on that very night in Iguala immediately flourished and became part of a collective trauma revolving around the incident. Even though various details around the case have unfolded in the most brutal ways, the case still remains unresolved.

The docudrama from the year following the incident, was directed by Raúl Quintanilla and written by Jorge Fernández Menéndez, but the funding body of the project was not disclosed. The narrative of the film aligns itself closely with the official version of what happened to the 43 students the night of September 26, what became known as the so-called *La Verdad Historica* (The Historical Truth)—a version that was disseminated by the Mexican government at the time regarding what had happened on the night, claiming that several of the students had been involved with local drug criminals, and as the result of a dispute between competing criminal organizations in Guerrero, the missing students had been attacked and killed on a nearby garbage dump, with the help of a huge fire, as described in the docudrama above. The stated and official historical truth, being a classic narco-narrative, obfuscating any possible implication by the state in the matter. The *Verdad Historica*, was protested by many, and later contested by an international forensic committee established to investigate the incident, dismantling the version propagated by the government, concluding that various national and local security forces had been informed about the incident as it was happening throughout the night, without interfering.

In October 2014, I was sent an image by a friend in Mexico City. I was in Oslo, watching it on my phone: Thousands of people protesting outside the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City, and a huge fire in the centre of the square. People were protesting, asking for truth and justice, in anger about the obfuscation of information and the forced disappearances, echoing a history of related and repeated incidents, since the initiation of *the war on drugs* under Felipe Calderón's government in 2006, and even earlier. I had never been to Mexico at this point, and I didn't know that I would become familiar with that very site in front of the Palacio Nacional, and that I would

be there six years later, still working on this material, running around another huge fire with only women on March 8, just days before the global pandemic broke out. But on that day in October, I was an observer from afar. The image sent by my friend held my attention, followed by hours of browsing international news search engines, reading what I could of international coverage on the case, watching residues of protests in social media, reading twitter messages in a language I didn't understand, watching short videos and blurry images of projections on street buildings, listening to statements shouted and following hashtags.

I had for a while been working on national narratives and the myth-making of nations in cinema, or rather cinema's complicity in this, searching for a form to use as a filmmaker to interrupt the naturalizing loop of produced realities and premediated futures, considering cinema's early ties to propaganda and its ideologically driven montages. Following the case from afar, and media revolving around the case, I was wondering if this was a moment when people were finding new ways of using moving images; creating a language that could account for what was happening but without becoming propaganda on its own. Was this a moment where digital technology and audio-visual strategies were used particularly against neatly sutured truth production, in this case: countering the proclaimed historical truth and the state (and its allies) attempted production of a reality? Achieving at least a momentary justice of lies uncovered, as well as revealing their means and methods. Was it at all possible to find a cinematic form freed from its early promise of propagating ideologies and nationalist desires? It started with these questions, and later came travels, encounters, and an archival find.

The investigation started by observing screen materials disseminated on social media after *the historical truth*. My initial inquiry was to examine whether the massive social mobilization following the incident, was leading to new and alternative ways of subverting official narratives constructed to shape public opinion, especially media works. However, the image sparked a larger artistic investigation—looking for screen-based works and aesthetic resistance, confronting, questioning, and fighting the propagated historical truth, also considering whether tools and methods possibly could travel and traverse contexts in order to unmask the real behind premediated and naturalized narratives in other situations and urgencies. *In Capitalist Realism: Is there No Reality?* Mark Fisher describes the real versus reality, invoking Lacan: “It is precisely

here that we should be the most alert to the functioning of ideology. For Lacan, the Real is what any ‘reality’ must suppress; indeed, reality constitutes itself through just this repression. The Real is an unrepresentable X, a traumatic void that can only be glimpsed in the fractures and inconsistencies in the field of apparent reality.”²⁴ Considering how the described docudrama of *Noche de Iguala* literally was putting images and sound together in a masking of the real, I saw the film as an attempt to produce a reality and a collective memory of a nation at a particular moment, by evoking fear and remediate a well-known narrative and imagery. This also echoed the earlier mentioned statement by Jonas Staal in his update on Chomsky’s propaganda definition: “Propaganda is aimed not only at communicating a message, but at constructing reality itself.”²⁵ The docudrama and the propagated *historical truth* were aspiring to *be* reality by literally masking the real.

Starting out with researching for an article, I travelled to Mexico City on a journalist grant from Fritt Ord in 2015. Since then I have documented conversations and gathered media material; works and practices aiming to counter fabricated narratives and collective memory production, an investigation stemming from the Ayotzinapa incident, and what was initially thought to be an article, had now turned into an essayistic film exploration, and later also finding its way into my PhD project in artistic research.

Ex Teresa Arte Actual, Mexico City:

Black screen, and a distorted soundscape: possibly squeaking wheels of a car, with a dark violin-based music and audial noise. A face appears in the darkness, a masked Jokerish face floating in and out of the darkness. A low male voice is layered on top of the noise, speaking continuously. Background distorted sound comes and goes, violins grow in intensity. The speech of the male voice continues throughout.

The 1 minute and 58 seconds long video *Rostridad / Estas son las versiones que nos propone* (*These are the Versions Proposed us*) described above, was made in 2014 by the Mexican film collective Colectivo Los Ingrávidos just a few months after the forced disappearance of the

²⁴ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 24.

²⁵ Jonas Staal, *Propaganda Art in the 21st Century* (MIT Press, 2019), 2.

students. The film includes the voice belonging to Jesús Murillo Karam, the Mexican state attorney under the Enrique Peña Nieto's government (2012–2018) who first presented *la verdad histórica*. The voice of Murillo Karam is taken from extracts of a speech given about a month after the tragic incident, where he in part discusses what supposedly happened to the students. It would take seven years for Karam to be legally processed for the possible implication in the cover-up of the case, a legal process that has as yet shown no results. With their video, Colectivo Los Ingrávidos exposes his mask, cracking his speech with noise.

Starting in 2015, I was talking to people who referred me to other people, and who pointed me to institutions, projects, initiatives, and to archives. I kept coming back, and in 2016 I was directed towards the archive at Ex Teresa Arte Actual, a former Carmelite convent built in the seventeenth century that had been turned into a contemporary art space focusing on experimental art and performance practices. It was still one of my first trips to Mexico City, and I justified taxi rides throughout the city by practicing Spanish phrases with the drivers, observing my surroundings from the inside of a car and from behind a camera. At this moment, exploring an archive in Spanish was a stretch. Booklets, images, and publications were haphazardly presented on a table; feminist performance practices from the Mexican art scene, and I went by images. I photographed whatever drew my attention, only years later to discover that several of these people now had become my friends, and some also part of this project in one way or another.

Looking for media, I gravitated towards the one computer in the room. I found some files from an exhibition held earlier that year, revolving around practices of aesthetic resistance related to the missing students. There were images of video projections and performances that had taken place in the courtyard, amongst them a short accompanying text that caught my attention: “The television empire ideologically resolves its contradictions through a huge propaganda machinery. The ‘neutral’ aesthetization of immediacy is the procedure generalized by Televisa to formulate and promote a ‘self-consistent,’ totalitarian and ‘traditional’ image. What means do we possess to unmask the transfer and concealment of the conflicts and contradictions implied by the ‘neutralized’ immediacy?”²⁶ This text turned out to be a manifesto by the film collective Colectivo

²⁶ Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, *Manifiesto*, 2012.

Los Ingrávidos, referring to FN Grupo Televisa, the largest Mexican multimedia mass media company and a major Latin American media corporation.

I was intrigued by how the collective, in their manifesto, so directly addressed the process by which media naturalize narratives, concealing the real conflict, by the appeal of produced immediacy, hooking the receiver (e.g. in the case of real time reporting); the work of Colectivo Los Ingrávidos clearly drew from a tradition of avant-garde filmmakers as makers of histories, and contenders to how collective memories are produced. The collective pointed to what was hidden behind mediated immediacies of so-called historical truths. With their image of the face of the joker in *Rostridad / Éstas son las versiones que nos propone* floating in and out of darkness, like a mask from a B-horror film, they were confronting and exposing the attempt to inscribe a fabricated narrative into the collective memory of a nation. They were revealing how the ideological power employed by the state (and its alliances), to use the terms of Mark Fisher cited above, was aimed at masking the real. Experiencing their work was an encounter with an exemplary practice of aesthetic resistance and screen resistance. This encounter, of all places, happened in a former convent turned into an experimental art space, at Ex Teresa Arte Actual, Spring 2016. This rather archival find drew me further into an inquiry which would combine my own image-making with a practice of an active mediator of social relations and programming of other artists' work.

I proceeded to watch Colectivo Los Ingrávidos' videos on Vimeo, hundreds of them, going through all the works I could find: Colourful, filmic, shamanic, and trance-like, a large variety of works capturing images of sites and nature; digital grabs and found footage, outcomes of performing an archaeology of the wide web, establishing no hierarchies between expensively produced imagery and "poor images"; including numerous references to film historical and political events, employing both digital and analogue image technologies, montage, and digital compositing—treating media as material historical formations that can be layered in a video montage. The film collective was producing audio-visual reflections on history making as history was being made, and formulating responses to socio-political incidents in their local Mexican context, as well as to global recurring injustices, opening present times to critical histories, screen presences to screen histories, and present cases of violence to their historic precedents. They

worked on the case of the 43 missing students, as well as that of the students massacred at Tlatelolco in 1968²⁷. Insisting on political content, they always also reflect audio-visually upon the very media regime they are part of. Their practice seemed deeply embedded in a critique of mediatic production in terms of how, on the level of content, they challenge premediated narratives, but very much also in terms of how, on the level of form, they expose the materiality of the medium and its means of circulation. Many of their videos in fact acquire an intensely hypnotic quality, as they take the repetition of images and sounds to such extremes (in long incessant streams of footage cycling back on itself, again and again, faster and faster) that the video culminates in a sense of facing a flickering screen. On one hand, this emphasis on repetition would seem to directly mimic, if not mock the way how dominant media incessantly repeat imagery. On the other hand, the culmination of the work's hypnotic character in the experience of a flickering screen, cuts ties with any claim to representing outside “realities,” and makes the screen (and flicker of light) itself appear as the ‘real’ materiality underpinning the image stream. Colectivo Los Ingrávidos perform the work of self-reflexive re-mediation, while mangling pre-mediated tropes circulated by dominant media, so as to confront the regime of fabricated immediacy obscuring the real.

In terms of their ways of employing radical style of image making and montage, Colectivo Los Ingrávidos could be understood as drawing from an avant-garde tradition of political filmmakers in Europe of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. The image of the joker of *Rostridad / Éstas son las versiones que nos propone* evoking an image from *Que Viva Mexico* (1932/1979) by Eisenstein and Grigoriy Aleksandrov: A Pre-Colombian skull-like figure with the superimposed text: “Where the past dominates the present.” In the case of Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, pointing to the Mexican state and the media apparatus remediating well-known narratives of rebellious, and poor, students and drug-cartels, pre-mediating a future and a status quo of hierarchical structures of power and economy in the country. But instead of following the trajectory of Eisensteins’ political project in Mexico—to propagate an unambiguous vision of Mexico as a country of lush landscapes and glorified folklore, threatened by evil oppressors

²⁷ Student massacre in 1968, on the square outside the Tlatelolco housing complex.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2008/10/no-truth-no-justice-40-years-after-mexico-city-massacre-20081002/>

spreading fear, prompting the anger and uprising of revolutionary subjects—Colectivo Los Ingrávidos takes a different path that brings them closer to the media-reflexive approach of Dziga Vertov: Where a filmmaker like Eisenstein produced well sutured political histories aiming to become collective memories, Vertov included the gaze of the filmmaker and material presence of the camera in his own making of histories: Pointing the camera at both the reality being filmed and the reality of film making. In his famous film *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) for example he portrays cinema technology as a part of the overall mechanical infrastructure of the modern metropolis. Colectivo Los Ingrávidos updates Vertov's reflections on image production being part of a larger infrastructure. They not only point to the new conditions set by digital ecologies of image production, storage, and circulation. They *inhabit* this condition by drawing much of their material from the large digital pool of images circulating, mixing in analogue footage, reconnecting different media materialities to their specific histories, before returning them into a larger ecology where they circulate through multiple screens, and their surrounding milieus.

Richard Grusin argues that the way contemporary media translate ongoing events into mediated narratives at great speed, and then proliferate their output across all spheres of daily life creates a condition of “hyper-mediation” marked by “the inseparability of mediation and reality.”²⁸ Stating that: “Remediation no longer operates within the binary logic of reality versus mediation, concerning itself instead with mobility, connectivity, and flow. The real is no longer that which is free from mediation, but that which is thoroughly enmeshed with networks of social, technical, aesthetic, political, cultural, or economic mediation. The real is defined not in terms of representational accuracy, but in terms of liquidity or mobility.”²⁹ It was precisely the way Colectivo Los Ingrávidos inhabited and interpreted this condition of “liquidity and mobility” that impressed me most; how they were using whatever dissemination channel at hand, for feeding back their noisy, sensory, hypnotically materially reflexive materials back into the loops of media circulation; hacking established virtual dissemination structures, tapping their liquidity as viral videos, acknowledging their part in the remediation but adding noise—cracking open “realities”

²⁸ R. Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11* (Springer, 2010), 6.

²⁹ Grusin, *Premediation: Affect and Mediality After 9/11*. 3.

and making media histories perceivable as layers—reperforming the role of the avant-garde as a contender to the fight over how histories are written, in an age of hyper-mediation.

From the researching for an article, I was now mapping out a context, histories, and art histories. Watching Colectivo Los Ingrávidos flickering imagery for hours. Talking with artists and activist collectives. Getting to know people who pointed me to other people. Watching counter-documentaries for “the other side” (with the same means and methods as dominant media, however pointing to different perpetrators.) Meeting photographers who had photographed the students’ families. Going to the book presentation in a theatre perhaps somewhere in Coyoacán (followed by a satirical theatre play about Peña Nieto that I did not understand.) Understanding that the 43 was merely one incident of many, however brutal. Understanding that I had to understand more and look further back. Reading Galiano on a bus to Acapulco. Events as repetitions. Organizing charts and big papers on walls, drawing connections from various points in recent Mexican history of violence and lies. Learning about NAFTA and thinking around parallel processes of neo-liberal policies implemented in other places, such as Norway. Having long conversations with Beatriz Paz, research assistant and interpreter. Digging up conferences, watching the Mexican film canon. Reading a language I slowly came to learn. Building relations and new relations, having long lunches under the pretext of meetings. Going back and back, some years spending more time in Mexico than elsewhere. Doing presentations of previous works at various institutions as a pretext for travels, sometimes also presenting my investigation in process. Going to symposiums, in bookshops, on the Zócalo, SITAC—inside the artworld, outside. Running to catch a screening on the other side of the vast Mexico City, interviewing lawyers from Artículo 19 on the situation for journalists in the country, meeting Marxist filmmakers in their 70s talking about their films on Tlatelolco or Los Halcones. Taking notes, sometimes not. Recording conversations on my phone. Buying a microphone. Watching memes. Doing a masterclass at the film school and getting access to their archive. Starting a PhD. Buying a Sony A7 and somewhat learning how to operate it. Making friends. Taking an intensive Spanish course at UNAM, private classes on zoom during the pandemic. Gathering materials; articles, texts, books, DVDs even. Conversations recorded and conversations never recorded. All intended for an article that was written.

And as I got more and more embedded in the context and the art community, relations developed, and collaborations and friendships formed. Encounters happened, people acted as mediators and introduced me to new contexts. My position as an outsider had gradually shifted, and I was slowly realizing that the positions of mediations became reciprocal, however not equal. Having started from images, particularly those of Colectivo Los Ingrávidos, playing the part of a mediator, I was now also starting to inhabit that role.

Installation / Chapters / Assembly

The investigation for *Images [and Talking Back to Them]* had started out as an endeavour of examining and organizing media materials and looking at other artists' practices and bringing works by Mexican artists into dialogue with material in a Norwegian context soon followed, such as commissioning and programming the works of Colectivo Los Ingrávidos for the various instalments mentioned earlier. (A series of films and their manifesto exhibited at Kunsthall Oslo for *The Feedback Loop: Fragmented* (2018), and later also the commissioned film *Sensemayá* for *Under the Park* (2021). I had travelled to Mexico in 2015 in order to write an article on media resistance in the aftermath of the forced disappearances of the Ayotzinapa students. This had led me to encounters and researching of physical and digital archives, which again had led me to the programming of other artists' works.

But coming back and spending longer stretches of time on the ground, conversations with practitioners had happened, and I had gotten to know communities and people. And as such, relations had formed and my knowledge of the context had expanded. The inquiry was slowly turning into an essayistic film exploration, also with myself sometimes present. Materials and research now spanned from the incident of the 43 students and into recent, and less recent, Mexican history, also reflecting upon media's complicity in the production of fear and desensitizing violence in a Mexican context.

Materials accumulated to this date as part of the investigation, are a set of documents: audio-visual works and video and sound recordings of conversations with media practitioners and

artists, media scientists, human rights lawyers, feminists, and others. As well as video documentation from my own journeys and sometimes unforeseen encounters. As the investigation happened partially in parallel with the artistic research process related to the Nordic material, the methods with which I approached this very investigation started to change: Informed by the temporary community formed *Under the Park* in the underground but also by the very nature of my encounters as the project in Mexico expanded, the archival method had turned relational. I decided for the final gathering of material to be an organized assembly where I invited key people from the investigation over the years to meet for a collective conversation at the Centro Cultural Universitario, Tlatelolco, in Mexico City, in the spring of 2022. I was for this assembly taking the role of the mediator further, exploring a different form of self-reflexivity than the other parts of *Mediating Uncertainties*, playing a selection of material I had gathered and produced throughout the years of the investigation, asking the group to collectively talk back to the very images. And with this, opening up the process for comments and also to new conversations, by setting the framework for a mediation of the uncertain ground of the situation that the material was delving into.

I kept the processual approach in the working towards the presentation of this material at Kunstneres Hus, April 2023, titled *Images [and Talking Back to Them]*. I was thinking of it being like an open-ended essay unfolding on different parallel screens in an exhibition setting: The final work presented—being in itself a reflection—on the form and content of my research process, on one hand in terms of the careful selection I made in editing the individual video footage of encounters, conversations and travels. On the other hand, the layout of the installation was to render it tangible that the whole work was the outcome of many relations being shaped over time, and that these relations were indeed presently reflected in the way the footage on the different screens in the installation was speaking back to each other, across the room:

In its final form, the multiscreen installation consisted of six large-scale flat-screens mounted on two metal poles each, and arranged in a somewhat triangular pattern of three screens in the first row, opening up to two screens in the second, and one screen in the final row. While most screens were turned towards the entrance of the space, addressing the viewer somewhat frontally, some were arranged at parallel angles, suggesting a more diagonal motion crossing the field outlined by

the others. The positioning of the works was carefully choreographed, so as to offer viewers a sense of orientation and choice as to which path to follow in exploring the individual content, and relation between the footage on the screens (with an emphasis on journeying to sites inscribed with violence on the left axis, a central axis focussing on collective resistance and debate, and the right axis offering theoretical reflections on media, urbanity, and systemic violence). The metal poles providing the support structure for the monitors were reaching from floor to ceiling. While sober and functional as such, the array of metal poles, with a nod to Vertov, did convey a sense that media not only *needs* but *is* (a form of) infrastructure. Headphones for five of the six screens were suspended on long leads from the ceiling. The sixth screen was somewhat bigger and equipped with speakers, giving it a somewhat central position in the arrangement. It showed (the edit of) the collective conversation at the Centro Cultural Universitario, Tlatelolco, in Mexico City. Its voice-over of animated exchanges between the speakers was audible, not loudly, but distinctively across the space, giving a tangible presence of the ongoing discourse.

The five peripheral screens each displayed an edited “chapter” of material playing in parallel, yet un-synced, on their respective screens. These chapters were built around footage from my archive of encounters and travels recorded over the years. Some of the chapters had been edited for presentations in Mexico and elsewhere at different points in time, which paved the way for these documents eventually becoming the components of the final work. Throughout the footage in the chapters, the presentation emphasises the experiential quality of travelling and seeking out conversations, gaining insights on journeys, and performing reflections in close exchange with people I met. In the multiscreen installation, the various chapters were put in dialogue with each other. As a larger montage of parallel paths and trajectories they undercut the idea of a single linear master-narrative, embracing a sense of becoming an embodied mediator instead, as I had been, for the viewer walking in between the screens, making connections between multiple voices and approaches in the course of the viewing and listening experience. Momentarily, connections would also manifest between the footage of individual chapters and the collective conversation piece on the central screen: Since we had viewed passages from the chapters in the collective session — with the conversation partners from the chapters present at the table — and I had chosen to include these passages in the edit of the session, there would be instances in the installation where a sequence presently running on one of the individual screens would also be

playing on the central screen. These overlaps would occur unsynched, time and again, and add to the sense of a layered experiences, of thoughts shared and reviewed, in the course of relations building over time.

The different videos and encounters, speaking to the political and social conversations had as the years proceeded, and relations evolved, spanned from topics such as the missing students, to the feminist struggle, to landgrabs by international mining corporations and the implications of the North American Free Trade Agreement from 1994 (NAFTA), to border politics and immigration issues, and moreover to images, their potential violence, and the idea of the constructing of a national narrative and history. I was aiming for the selection of material to form an overall image of the discourse in Mexico over these past seven years, seen from the perspective of an outsider, and I will in the following section discuss some of the materials from the various chapters present in the installation, as well as from the filmed assembly.

30 seconds of a red image, with the following text:

'Pixel

extracted from the image

of the flayed face of student Julio César Mondragon

Teatro Ojo, 2016'

When I first began thinking about media material of this case, the image of the dead *normalista* student Julio Cesar Mondragon kept entering conversations. Only a few hours after the students had disappeared from Iguala in 2014, the image of his face had been circulating in social media, displaying one of the immediate consequences of the brutal crime that had taken place. I had been wondering how to talk about that image in a film without showing it, when I was introduced to *Pixel* by Helena Chavez Mac Gregor. Helena had been one of the curators for the project that Teatro Ojo's *Pixel* had been part of, *And Many Images Came upon me*³⁰, the title of the larger project referring to the words spoken by Mondragon's widow when seeing the image of her dead husband on social media. She had recognized him by his clothes.

³⁰ Interdisciplinary forum, MUAC Auditorium, Mexico City, 21–22 January 2016. Curatorship: Helena Chávez Mac Gregor IIE, UNAM and Cuauhtémoc Medina IIE-MUAC UNAM.

In *Gore Capitalism*, the Mexican philosopher, poet and transfeminist Sayak Valencia considers media's active role in the feedback of systemic violence in Mexico: "The media functions as over-expositors of violence, which they naturalize for viewers through a constant bombardment of images to the point where they turn violence itself into a kind of manifest destiny, to which we can only think to resign ourselves."³¹ Sayak Valencia, describes how it gets increasingly harder to distinguish between reality and fiction as media prepares the spectator for the presence of violence, desensitizing the viewers and contributing to creating an a-critical and passive position within the civil population. Normalizing, what she has coined "gore practices", without really depicting the consequences of the presence of everyday violence. Contributing to "la normalization de la muerte."³²

Sayak's writing was echoing other remediation processes I had been studying, of ideologies being naturalized for the upholding of a status quo through remediation, and I decided to start our collective conversation at Tlatelolco with the video *Pixel* by Teatro Ojo. The short video was one of 40 videos of 30 seconds each, produced two years after the Ayotzinapa incident and disseminated as interruptions into the programming of TV UNAM over a week. Or as Laura Furlan of Teatro Ojo mentioned when discussing the questions at the core of their project in the conversation that followed the screening of *Pixel* at the assembly: "How to break into the legitimization or naturalization of images of violence? [...] to interrupt the flow of public media images of normality? How to give back the same images but from another narrative?" *Pixel* was an index, "a certain metonymy of one of the most violent images," disseminated as an attempt for the viewer to not close their eyes to the violence and the real, but without perpetuating the violence further by disseminating the full image of the dead *normalista* student laying on the ground in a junction in Iguala in Guerrero.

Guerrero, 2017 / 2022: 13 min 30 sec

Traveling with Sergio Ocampo.

³¹ Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* (MIT Press, 2018), 146.

³² Valencia, *Gore Capitalism*.

I had not expected to actually travel to Guerrero when I first started looking at media material contesting the so-called *Historical Truth* regarding what supposedly had taken place that night in Iguala and talking to people working to confront this. But meeting Sergio, I realized I needed to get one step closer to the actual event itself, or at least its various sites, expanding my learning about methods of the media practitioners I was talking to, beyond their mediations. Sergio was one of the first journalists arriving one of the sites where the students were attacked and forcefully disappeared from, in Iguala on September 26, in 2014. I heard him on a panel for journalism and violence in Mexico City in 2017 and asked him if I could join him for some days in Guerrero. The video included, is an edited selection of moments from the journey and our many conversations during 48 hours of driving together in and around Iguala in Guerrero, Fall 2017.

We drove to the various sites of the crime scene of the night of the incident, and we eventually went to the garbage dump in Cocula, the site of a non-crime, yet crime. The garbage dump included remains of an event, but not remains of the actual event, but rather the other event, *The Historical Truth*, proclaimed by the former state attorney Jesus Murillo Karam few days after the incident. A *truth* that had included the narrative of a large fire of which the students seemingly had been incinerated: A narrative that soon after was depicted in the docudrama *La Noche de Iguala*, described in the beginning of this chapter. If I consider historical events as ruptures, lies would be the second rupture, the first were the disappearances. But if an event is not really a rupture in history, but rather a point in a continuum of things, of conditions and situations leading to situations to resurface, makes us (the less aware) aware, of what was already happening, this could be said of the case of the 43 missing students. As I was learning, this was not the first time people had disappeared in the years of the “war on drugs” in Mexico, or national security forces being involved and high ranking politicians covering facts. Or protests happening, for then not so much to be happening. And situations where dirty money was part, pointing to the US and a long-standing asymmetrical relationship between the northern and southern part of America; on Mexico’s part, exacerbated since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada, and Mexico in 1994.

Tijuana, 2022: 10 min 45 sec

Driving with Sayak Valencia.

Gore Capitalism by Sayak Valencia has been one of the key texts for my understanding of dissemination of images and its relation to violence in a Mexican context, and as I spent Spring 2022 with Mexico City as my base, I went to Tijuana to meet with her. Valencia is writing from the context of the Mexican-US border, and I wanted to discuss her book with her in order to further understand the relationship between the US and Mexico, as well as her perspectives on the feedback loop of violence in Mexico. Over three days we drove in and around the city, while Sayak shared of her research behind *Gore Capitalism*. Among the many things we discussed, she was talking about how the border functioned as a surveillance device for the entire South America, but also how the border could be thought of as a way of thinking, echoing Gloria Anzaldua, and other Chicana writers of the 1980s and 1990s. Something which is exemplified in Valencia's reading of her own poem *This is Tijuana*, in the video chapter included in the installation.

Valencia uses the term “necroempowerment”, drawing of Achilles Mbembe's concept of *necropolitics* and *necropower*, referring to it as processes where vulnerable subalternity is transformed into self-empowerment through violent means, well aided by re- and pre-mediated narratives of “endriago subjects” (which could roughly be translated as proudly monstrous performers of violence) presented in both social, as well as in mainstream Mexican media. “Necroempowerment cannot be eradicated, neither can the Mexican drug cartels, as long as structural inequality, hyperconsumerism and the spectacle of violence consist to exist.” Valencia connects this to a “necro-masculinity”, saying that a political discourse based on male supremacy needs to be contested: “A discourse upholding the display of violence as an element of masculine self-affirmation.” Valencia explained to me how she considered the machismo culture in Mexico to be deeply connected to the construction of Mexican identity, referring to the concept of manliness, which gained widespread use in the post-revolutionary times; strongly rooted in the working class, peasantry, and revolutionary male ideas with a strong contempt for feminine virtues and indifference in the face of danger.

As a solution to combat misogyny and gore capitalism, Valencia posits transfeminism, being both a system of thought as well as a form of social resistance. The *trans* referring to something which cuts through and exists in between, again echoing Anzaldua and her peers, making transfeminism into something which allows for thinking beyond the limits of options currently at hand: "...we seek the creation of our own discourses that nurture a transfeminism that confronts and questions our contemporary situation, a situation that is invariably circumscribed by the logic of gore capitalism."³³

Mexico City, 2020: 5 min

Meeting with women from Disidencias y Mujeres Organizadas FFyL, at School of Philosophy and Literature of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).

Five and a half years after the image of Julio Cesar Mondragon's body had flooded the internet, protests by women erupted against Mexican *nota rojas*, tabloid newspapers which had (once again) displayed images of the mutilated body of a woman, Ingrid Escamilla: Another victim of femicides in Mexico. She had been killed by her partner, and protesters were attacking the vehicles of one of the media houses that published leaked images of her mutilated body. On Valentine's day, the journal *Pásala* published images of Ingrid Escamilla's mutilated body on the front cover, with the title "It was Cupid's Fault." Women burnt newspapers of *La Prensa* and *Pásala* in the streets of Mexico City, and a few weeks later came March 8. The 2020 version of the women's march was unprecedented in Mexican history, and just days before the world shut down for a global pandemic 80 000 women were marching towards the Zócalo in front of the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City. "March 2020 was the last moment of feminist struggle in all its power, when we had managed to put what is happening in this country at the centre of the national conversation. [...] and that lasted exactly one week, before the emergency was another. The pandemic came and dissolved it." Artist and activist Lorena Wolffer's response after watching the video clip from Mexico City in the filmed assembly.

³³ Sayak Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* (MIT Press, 2018), 11.

I did not expect for the feminist struggle to have such a presence in my material when I started this investigation in 2015. Having just finished a film reflecting around the production of the gendered gaze, I was perhaps naively with this investigation looking for a language of aesthetic resistance that could work more broadly to destabilize the productions of realities and collective memories through audiovisual mediations. But since 2017, my focus in this material started to gradually turn more and more towards questions on gender and the struggle against gender violence in Mexico. The issues had, however, been there all the time, in the material, in my encounters, and also in my own being. In waiting for the English translation of Sergio González Rodríguez *Los 43 de Iguala*, I had started reading his book *The Femicide Machine: About Ciudad Juárez, femicides, the forced disappearances of women, and the increase of these cases over the last 30 years, coinciding with the implementation of the 1994 NAFTA agreement*. As Lorena Wolffer mentioned in the filmed assembly “...this 2022 will be the 30th anniversary of the first femicides registered in Juárez and this is not commented upon by anyone.[...] there has not been a single note that I have come across in this time that talks about the fact that it has been three decades of a culture of death and rape for women in this country.”

I was in the city in February and March 2020, and as conversations on gender struggles in Mexico was becoming very present, I had a conversation with Lorena Wolffer some days before the women’s march, where she pointed me to a group of young women who had occupied the School of Philosophy and Literature at UNAM for months, in order to protest the violence they had experienced at the university and in their department. The video chapter contains conversations with anonymous women from this group, images from their barricaded department, and filmed moments from the 2020 march on March 8: women dancing around a fire in front of the national palace. An image echoing an image I already had been watching on my phone six years earlier.

DF / Ullevål / Cuernavaca, 2014 / 2016 / 2022: 6 min 50 sec

Meeting with Felipe Ehrenberg.

Extract from voice over:

00:02:27,560 --> 00:02:29,440

A friend sent me an image.

00:02:30,200 --> 00:02:33,080

I had been at the hospital for five days,

after a spinal puncture

00:02:33,080 --> 00:02:36,400

and couldn't lift my head

without getting splitting headaches.

00:02:37,200 --> 00:02:38,640

I was scrolling, laying down.

00:02:39,000 --> 00:02:43,080

Tweets, videos, slogans,

short messages, projections on buildings,

00:02:44,120 --> 00:02:47,620

the number 43, "Me cansé",

"Fue el estado".

00:02:47,720 --> 00:02:49,600

It was fall 2014.

For a first edit of the material gathered over the years, I experimented with writing a voice over. In order to emphasize the embodied character of my inquiries, being on the road, making encounters, building relations, I wrote the voice-over with a personal mode of address. The only chapter that still has remains of this voice-over is the video with the meeting with Felipe Ehrenberg. The words to the voice-over are cited in the introduction to this section. In the multi-screen installation this chapter documenting conversations with Ehrenberg, featuring the voice-over in its intro, was playing on a screen in the first row. It was slightly tilted towards the room. So it would be on your side, addressing you laterally, as you entered the installation space. It offered an alternative possible point of entrance to the spatial essay film, alluding to other, possibly personal reasons for my travels, inquiries and encounters. I perceive the chapters included in the overall presentation as experiential rather than journalistic; subjective, however, through encounters, the video with Felipe being an example of this. I had never perceived our filmed meeting as an interview, I had just recorded some moments of us hanging out in his home.

I happened to meet Felipe Ehrenberg through a friend from my master's studies in San Francisco. As I told her about my researching for this article, she said I had to meet Felipe, an artist and a provocateur, a publisher and Fluxus-artist, self-exiled in London after being part of Mexico's 1968 student movement, the Cultural Attaché for Mexico in Brazil (From 2001-2006), the founder of a muralist school, a brilliant host, and much, much more. We hung out quite often during my many visits to Mexico City, and eventually Cuernavaca, where he just had moved before sadly passing away in 2017. In our encounters, we (he) would talk about nationhood and Mexico as a country in a continuous civil war and how the country was puppeteered by the US. When asking him about film makers and media activists working to confront the propaganda from the government regarding the Ayotzinapa case, he frowned and said that nobody is doing anything anymore, people are scared. He sarcastically wished me good luck with my investigation and suggested we'd rather watch one of his favourite films.

Michoacán, 2017: 07 min 40 sec

Traveling with Beto Paredes and visiting *autodefensas* (self-defence groups) of Ostula.

The continuation of the voice over in the above-mentioned chapter, further points to my position as an outsider in working with this material, something in which is present in all the chapters in the installation, to various degrees. This aspect of the investigation is probably the most articulated in an encounter with a group of *autodefensas* on a journey with Heriberto Paredes to Michoacán.

One of the independent media platforms I had been following from afar in the aftermath of the students' disappearances in 2014, was *Subversiones*. Beto Paredes was one of the founders of the platform, and we came to know each other early on in my investigation. I had been interested in learning how Beto worked as an independent photojournalist, opposing the mainstream media channels in the country, and we were supposed to travel to Guerrero, but Beto had received a threat. Something I learned was quite common for journalists covering troubled areas in Mexico. Beto invited me to join him for a trip to Michoacán instead, and together with him and his colleague Rodrigo, we drove from Mexico City through Tierra Caliente and to Santa María

Ostula on the coast of Michoacán. Beto had been reporting from Ostula for several years, mostly working with the Nahua community who was struggling to protect their land from cartels, paramilitary groups, and international mining companies.

The chapter lingers on an encounter that happened just after Beto left. I decided to stay some more days with a friend of his, Irene Alvarez, a sociologist working on a research project on the impact of everyday violence on the civil population in the area. Irene was to meet with an autodefensa-group patrolling the border of Colima and Michoacán, and I came along. I was somewhat familiar with the unofficial security forces operating in Michoacán, also known as vigilant groups and autodefensas; groups, protecting their land in lack of governmental support. We ended up in a somewhat secret meeting, between a rich landowner aiming to get an important local political position, and the man currently in control. The autodefensa was there to protect the meeting and as I was not allowed to film the conversations, I walked around, talking with the men guarding the meeting in my very limited Spanish at the time.

In later looking through the material, I realized that at a moment I was being filmed back by a man in the background with his cell phone, observing me in conversation with his colleague in the foreground of the image. Was this a reciprocal instrumentalization by filmmaker and subject, and where was this video now? I did a presentation of my project in 2018 at Obrera Centro, an artist run space in Mexico City, and I included the material from this encounter. In the conversation that followed, a comment was made: “Being there, with your skin, your accent... you will have a very different rapport with these guys, than let’s say, Anabel Hernandez.” Anabel Hernandez was a fierce Mexican investigative journalist, and I respected her work, but I did not have the intention of becoming a Norwegian Hernandez operating in Mexico. I had no intention of really being a journalist, my approach to this inquiry had always been something else; looking into how constructed realities were constructing uncertain times, and most of all how the production of these realities could be contested, and uncertainties mediated. I had to admit that I had let the journey lead me and suddenly I found myself in this situation, with access to this site, these men, these images. The comment, pointing to the position of the outsider, something which had been on my mind all the time in working with this material, and tapping into a key question regarding with what mode, approach, and voice I could possibly present this work.

In one of many conversations had with Susan Schuppli, one of my supervisors, Susan had introduced me to the term “denaturalizing images.” She had exemplified this with the use of reworked, and amplified, diegetic sound in relation to her own images. In relation to the particular material mentioned above, I was thinking that a form of denaturalizing could be to articulate that which was on the outside of the frame. Doing this spatially had been a trope in counter-cinema since the 1960s, but I was also thinking about this in chronological terms, bringing forth the itinerary that had happened leading up to a very image being taken. In this case, the story of entering an unfamiliar context and dealing with issues that touch upon a collective trauma that I was not a direct part of. What was it that constituted for that image to be taken at that very moment in time, at that very place: Me traveling from Norway, time spent in Mexico over years, buying that camera, getting into a car, driving from Mexico City and through Tierra Caliente, moving through situations and locations based on social rapport and trust built over time with different practitioners, media activists and now friends—realizing that my itinerary needed to be somewhat visible in the material itself.

In *The Reality-based Community*, Erika Balsom writes “With a frequency not found in other forms of nonfiction image-making, documentary reflects on its relationship to truth. And unlike the written word, it partakes of an indexical bond to the real, offering a mediated encounter with physical reality in which a heightened attunement to the actuality of our shared worlds becomes possible. But precisely for these same reasons, documentary is simultaneously a battleground, a terrain upon which commitments to reality are challenged and interrogated.”³⁴ I decided for these reasons to stay with the initial research material for the presentation of *Images [and Talking Back to Them]* rather than using it as a basis for a film built around staged and scripted takes. Differing from *The Feedback Loop*, *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped* and partially also from *Under the Park*, the video material for the various edited chapters, at times tangibly marked by the contingent circumstances of the encounters, are more being *residues* from my investigation and encounters rather than pristine audiovisual materials planned for a public presentation.

³⁴ “The Reality-Based Community - Journal #83,” n.d., <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/>.

As I made the decision to trust the initial recordings to carry the work, a sense of indexicality is definitely tangible in *Images [and Talking Back to Them]*. I had never thought of myself as a documentary filmmaker and never fully trusted documentary filmmaking, precisely because of the claim to truth that has traditionally been made with recourse to indexicality. Balsom however complicates the notion so that it no longer (only or primarily) points to the truth value conventionally ascribed to the recording of ‘hard facts’ with ‘objective technologies’ (contested by the critical theories I have been citing throughout this text), but to a set of *relations* that underpin the way people interact with media technologies: “For, following Bazin and Barthes, the power of the index must be understood as a relation to the spectator bound up in time, desire, and finitude. Heidegger suggested that ‘the essence of technology is nothing technological,’ meaning that technologies cannot be understood in terms of their functionality but must instead be understood in terms of their culturally produced meanings and usages. The same is true of indexicality. The index is a matter of discourse as much as of the mute registration of the real,”³⁵ Balsom writes in *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*.

This is the angle of which I decided to pick Balsom up, by understanding indexicality as the very quality that might be found in how relations towards media take shape, and a collective stance towards them might form, in encounters actualizing shared worlds, perhaps even making them possible. Realizing that one of the reasons that the material is kept as is (edited research material becoming the work), is a testament to the experiential and the shared worlds that opened up through the many encounters and relations that came to be throughout the process of this project. The filmed encounters and materials, had turned into a method of getting to know people, contexts and worlds—the indexicality of my material, being carefully selected materials, however needing another round of mediation, a micro-political remediation—taking the role of the mediator one step further, I set the frame work for a collective conversation for the filmed assembly and final gathering of material for the project, for the index to be discussed and interrogations of the images to happen. And drawing experience from *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped*, the filmed assembly became to *Images and Talking Back to Them* what *Under the Park* had been to *Do I Accept that the Future is Looped*.

³⁵ Erika Balsom, *Exhibiting Cinema in Contemporary Art*, 2013, 79.

Assembly, Tlatelolco, 2022: 01 h 27 min

Collective viewing and discussion at Centro Cultural Universitario Tlatelolco, UNAM.

With: Beatriz Paz, Sergio Ocampo, Beto Paredes, Sayak Valencia, Lorena Wolffer, Julio García Murillo, Laura Furlan / Teatro Ojo, Camila Pizaña / Disidencias y Mujeres Organizadas FFyL.

Including works by Teatro Ojo and Colectivo Los Ingrávidos.

The assembly at CCU Tlatelolco was a gathering of people that had been central to my investigation and conversations had throughout these years, getting together on my invitation for a collective discussion and viewing: participants who had stakes in the production of images and realities in the Mexican context, or in the very project itself. As such, the gathering was another site-specific event, an exercise in micro-politics, where a temporal community was formed based on relations built over years and shared concerns. The participants involved represented various backgrounds and standpoints, and it was a moment for images to be discussed and together exploring the production of realities and collective memories, and various approaches to counter these. My role was that of a mediator, bringing the people together and organizing the event together with a team, around selections of my own archived material gathered from these years: testing out a different form of self-reflexivity than the other instalments in the overarching research project.

As a group portrait displayed on the central screen in the back of the installation *Images [and talking back to them]*, the film dedicated to the collective discussion featured a comprehensive edit of footage recorded during the event. It communicated the participants' responses and reflections, yet also included passages from the film materials we watched together. Instead of having my own voice narrate the material for the larger essay film installation, the sound playing from speakers into the room of the exhibition space is mostly that of the participants. Their responses becoming a possible voice over for the entire installation, functioning as a guidance and contextualization, their words bleeding into the various chapters playing on the other screens in the installation.

Throughout these years, I have done various presentations of my material in educational, PhD or art contexts, and I started thinking about these presentations as live essay films, the

accompanying text I was writing and reading for these presentations slowly turning into a voice over. However, when thinking around how to present a project concerned with the construction of realities through and with media, I inevitably had to question how my own narration would be a form of exceeding control over the material. As I got more experienced with performative lectures³⁶, I started playing with the dissonance between sound and image as a way to subvert this control, studying voice-overs by essay filmmakers like Chris Marker, Harun Farocki, and also Sky Hopinka, Hollis Frampton, Tatiana Huezo and others. But letting the voice for the exhibition to be predominantly that of the other participants, seemed like a better way of letting go of this control, considering the context and stakes in the matters discussed in this specific geopolitical context, also taking into consideration that this material was not originally shot with the idea of a final presentation, as stated before—my edited chapters were more residue of research, encounters, and travels.

As the artist behind the installation, and the mediator of the material, I was, however, obviously forging connections by constructing a montage of materials, screens, and questions for the installation and the filmed conversation. In *Cross Influence / Soft Montage*, Harun Farocki wrote about montage in relation to his own work *Eye/Machine*: “A montage must hold together with invisible forces the things that would otherwise become muddled.”³⁷ I was thinking around how to make a montage in the very exhibition space itself, not muddling the material, but not overly holding the material together either, rather holding the material up as a not fully closed process. Along these lines, I was thinking of each video chapter as existing by itself, but simultaneously being in a polyphonic relationship to the rest of the materials, sounds, and screens: linking disparate material and conversations through the architectural positioning of the screens, and the sometimes echoing of material in the sixth screen (the edited assembly), the videos playing un-synced together in the space.

After watching Colectivo Los Ingrávidos’ *Rostridad / Estas son las versiones que nos propone* in the assembly, a conversation followed, revolving around media montages, during which Sayak

³⁶ Example of Mediating Uncertainties performed lecture included on the project website.

³⁷ Farocki, Harun. “Cross Influence / Soft Montage.” *Harun Farocki, Against What? Against Whom*. Edited by Antje Ehmman and Kodwo Eshun. Walther Konig Verlag, 2009. 74

Valencia said: "... the work of the media montage is precisely to un-memorize, and un-hear and de-visualize, by creating other super-linear narratives. Social media also do that, they remove memory. Instants, instants... overproducing images." She was referring to the concept of *the live-streaming regime* she uses to reflect on the new political dimension of the governance of emotions by hooking us in through instants and instants: "... once you get involved in the image, then you can't stop looking at it, but in reality, the work is the opposite. The work is to make sure we have no memory. That's what the dirty war was about and that's what the new (digital) wars are about. Digital capitalism has to do with this destruction of memory, because if we had a memory we would be out in the streets." With her thoughts in mind, I designed the space for the installation *Images [and talking back to them]* in the hope that the chapters composing the piece would work as *containers of memories*—personal memories and screen memories—tapping into a contemporary Mexican discourse on politics, images, and aesthetic resistance, as it developed and changed throughout the time period of my research. The installation aiming to function as a possible antidote to the mainstream and social media channels' production of linear narratives hooking you into a premediated moment through desires and fears, but rather holding up the material as elements of a process, potentially also for the viewer.

As I was in the installation a few days after the opening adjusting the sound, doubts were running through my mind. On the opening night, many people had curiously engaged with the work, studied the material on the different screens, and staid to listen. Yes, but what if there was something to the critique my own work, and other artists with self-reflexive practices often can be met with, that it was somehow not engaging enough, because it didn't deliver hooklines to pull viewers in forcefully? Was it wrong to trust viewers to find the reflections and relations the work offered? Still, I can't make myself deny the knowledge that seduction through fear and desires is precisely the methods dominant media and traditional (documentary) filmmaking use, and I was aiming to do the opposite—talk about images as violence without showing and sensationalize it, and rather attempt to create memories when dominant media produce amnesia and vertigo in their attempt to maximize the power of images to produce the 'neutralized immediacy' Colectivo Los Ingrávidos were attacking.

Along these same lines, towards the end of *Capitalist Materialism*, Mark Fischer comments on the fast-paced editing of the Jason Bourne films: “In the films, Bourne’s transnational nomadism is rendered in an ultra-fast cutting style which functions as a kind of anti-memory, pitching the viewer into the vertiginous ‘continuous present’ which Jameson argues is characteristic of post-modern temporality. [...] Bereft of personal memory, Bourne lacks *narrative* memory, but retains what we might call *formal* memory: a memory — of techniques, practices, actions — that is literally embodied in a series of physical reflexes and tics.”³⁸ Indeed my only remaining memory of a particular Jason Bourne film was a physical sense of nausea. In opposition to these techniques of proliferating “anti-memory” I cannot help but stand by my commitment to not overpowering the spectator with the means cinematic displays and digital media would have to offer, and insist on the art institution as a site for critical reflection. In this particular exhibition the decisions I took based on this conviction was to suspend parts of the power of the medium, by partially leaving the window blinds open, not darkening the space fully, allowing for the support structures, the whole apparatus of screens, metal poles, headphones and cables visible, rather than producing the illusions of screens hovering in the dark, using isolated screens, instead of projections covering walls, for the viewer precisely *not* to be fully sucked into the materials, and rather exist in the blur between material and mediation. In line with Grusin’s analysis of no realities being free from mediation, I was hoping for the very act of mediation to be an object of scrutiny in itself. And for the reception of the multiple and non-linear narratives present in the material to open up along paths that would be different depending on when viewers entered the room and when they decided to leave. I did not want to control their experience, but rather create a space for questions and doubt, aiming for the material to stay with them, rather than being digested there and then as an immediate experience.

³⁸ Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (John Hunt Publishing, 2009), 58.

CONCLUSION

When thinking of the material I had gathered over these years in my investigation in Mexico when planning for the assembly, I realized I was approaching these various documents by way of a concept I found in a quote from filmmaker Ursula Biemann stating that “the essayist does not seek to document realities but to organize complexities”³⁹; fragmented narratives moving towards truth, not as facts but as a process. The ongoing conversations with colleagues in Mexico on how they, as makers of images, producers of critique, and organisers of protest, navigate the tension between hyper visible violence and dissimulated backgrounds, pointed to the particular character of the micro-politics they were engaged in, in their daily practice. And I realized this was echoing the idea of a “truth-process.”

French philosopher Alain Badiou characterises a “truth process” as an open-ended process set in motion by a community formed around realising the need to address (name) an event that presently is painfully unaddressed (unnameable), and might remain so, to some extent (in a traumatic manner) despite the struggle to seek truth, and justice.⁴⁰ Beyond, and effectively often in direct opposition to the power invested in institutions of the state to determine truth and deliver justice, Badiou characterises *truth processes* in terms of an embodied politics of convening around an experience that existentially affects people, yet remains painfully unresolved, and hence asks for a shared commitment to working things through. Without wanting to categorize political practices with philosophical concepts it nonetheless struck me that the artists, activists, journalists, and thinkers I got the chance to be in exchange with, as part of my project over the past years, in Mexico, but also for the parallel investigation, seemed to be engaged in work that resonates with the notion of a *truth process*. This eventually also inspired the final instalment of

³⁹ Ursula Biemann cited by Carles Guerra in “Negatives of Europe: Video Essays and Collective Pedagogies” in Marian Lind and Hito Steyerl (ed.): *the green room—Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art #1*, Sternberg Press (Berlin) and CCS Bard (Annandale-on-Hudson), 2009, 144-165, 150.

⁴⁰ The concept is present throughout Badiou’s philosophy. One possible point of access to his use of the concept is given in Alain Badiou: “On the Truth-Process” Lecture given at the European Graduate School in August 2002, accessed via <https://www.lacan.com/badeurope.htm> on 16 April, 2023.

the PhD project at view at Kunsternes Hus in Oslo, as *Images [and Talking Back to Them]*, realizing that it has informed my decisions towards the space of interaction that I am aiming to hold up for the viewer—a site for a process to unfold, where the materials on display function as an organized complexity to engage with, question, doubt and consider, rather than a documented reality providing a linear narrative of uncertain times.

The first time I came across Badiou's concept of a "truth process" being mobilized in relation to documentary practices was in the essay "Documentary/Verité" by art curator, writer and educator Okwui Enwezor.⁴¹ He argues that cinema vérité is not providing non-negotiable facts to the spectator, but rather creates a possible space for an ethical encounter between the film and its spectators, a dynamically unfolding relation which he qualifies by referring to Badiou's notion of the truth process. This characterisation echoed the very conversations I had with different practitioners of the project, as well as the planted seed for a possible experience in the exhibition space, however successful or not. His statement also echoes the relational aspects becoming more and more important throughout the various instalments of the project and its parallel trajectories.

I have been drawing from a history of the montage as in linking disparate elements together to make them communicate, expanding the idea of montage into a contemporary moment as a way to mediate materials; on screens, in space, in the city, between archival material and material shot today. As well as considering myself as a mediator, organizing and programming as part of the overall montage. As exemplified through this paper, my methods have moved from the archival to the relational, as the emphasis shifted from remediating archives with self-reflexivity, on to the organizing of encounters where I invited other practices and thinkers into my project. As such, different forms of collective engagement and redistribution have been explored through this: Exemplified both through the lecture and screenings organized as part of the different instalments, as well as for the very artistic instalments that have taken place throughout the duration of the PhD project. As such, I believe that the response to the research questions posed in the overarching project, has followed through with the addressing of a multiplicity of

⁴¹ Okwui Enwezor, "Documentary/Verité: Bio-politics, Human Rights, and the Figure of 'Truth' in Contemporary Art," in *The Green Room: Reconsidering the Documentary and Contemporary Art*, vol. 1, ed. Maria Lind and Hito Steyerl (Berlin: Sternberg Press/III CCS Bard, 2008), 77. Essay first published in *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art 4-5 (2003-2004): 11-42*.

approaches, methods, and techniques, rather than delivering one presentation of a linear counter-narrative as a conclusion for the project. Thinking of this, as a mediation of uncertain times, and dominant media's implication in producing and upholding these very uncertainties, masked by constructed and remediated realities, and premediated futures.

Both dominant and alternative channels of image circulation and distribution of materials have been explored for the various instalments of the project, made with different receivers in mind, at times, the very people gathered for a specific event, at other times, the passerby on a commuting underground train, and sometimes the very circuit of imagery in itself. Or, as in the last case, the receivers being a specific audience belonging to a circuit of art interested people or art professionals, with the sometime additional local teenager passing through. With the project web site, I am adding an additional layer of distribution to the project, where I have uploaded materials: videos, images, and some presentations from the project's various instalments (including *The Feedback Loop*) up for virtual display. This project site functions primarily as a portfolio of material and experiences, but also includes a space for continuous programming (gallery) of other artists' works, now exemplified with the commissioned film *Sensemaya* by Colectivo los Ingrávidos. Included in the site, is also a small selection of the many notes, drawings, and thoughts that have been part of my artistic process, and as such the site functions as the beginning of a larger archive of an inquiry that I intend to continue on in my artistic research and practice.

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