



Social Documents

The Ethics of Encounter

Part 1: Saturday 7 November – Sunday 28 November 2010

Renzo Martens
Artur Żmijewski
Frederick Wiseman

Part 2: Saturday 11 December 2010 – Sunday 13 March 2011

The Atlas Group
François Bucher
Dani Marti
Artur Żmijewski

These films contain challenging content, for more information please ask staff.

When artists site their practice within the fabric of social relations, documentary modes often play a central role in mediating events and experiences. Though the resulting material often bears a close resemblance to ethnographic mapping, investigative journalism or even community work, in contrast to the strict ethical codes to which these disciplines adhere many of today's artists operate in somewhat murkier waters. Working outside - or even deliberately corrupting - accepted conventions and frameworks, the artists participating in this two-part exhibition find alternative means to engage with social realities in situations of war, sex and political urgency.

A series of three week-long presentations of documentary films that interrogate the operations and effects of power launched *The Ethics of Encounter* programme. Returning to the format of a group exhibition, Part 2 includes photography and video works by five artists who place storytelling at the heart of their practice. Re-imagining the format of the first person interview, they move from the grainy hostage-tape aesthetic adopted by The Atlas Group to Dani Marti's intimate post-coital portraits, creating captivating, and occasionally deeply disturbing, narratives. Whether folding fact into fiction or constructing complex games and experiments, these reality driven practices produce new types of knowledge and challenge the coordinates by which we live.

With over two-and-a-half-hours worth of video material this exhibition is not designed to be experienced in one visit. Instead we hope that visitors will keep returning over time to consider why these artists adopt strategies which brush against the grain of socially-engaged or community art to adopt a set of approaches whereby subjects are manipulated, participants used and viewers find themselves deceived.

The Atlas Group

My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Engines, (2000-2003), photograph and ink on paper
Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (English Version), (2001), video, 16 minutes

The Atlas Group Archive website states that the project was established in 1999 'to research and document the contemporary history of Lebanon', particularly focusing on the period of the Lebanese civil wars which began in 1975 and consumed the country for 16 years until 1991. The archives are said to contain an immense range of documentary items from photography, video recordings and other visual artefacts to audio files, notebooks and literary materials all of which are located, preserved, produced and studied by a group of individuals from various contexts and disciplines. But The Atlas Group is an imaginary foundation, the collective, its characters and their peculiar enquiries, a construct.

My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Engines is part of an ongoing investigation by The Atlas Group into the events and experiences surrounding the use of car bombs in the Lebanese conflicts. Each of the 100 plates in this series shows the front and back of a black and white photograph depicting the identifiable remains of a car engine. The obverse is decorated with official-looking stamps and handwritten notes in Arabic dating the event. On the wall opposite the tightly gridded documents a printed text accounts for the proliferation of images, stating that they are the result of a game whereby photojournalists race to be the first to record the burnt-out engine carcasses.

Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (English Version) Tape #17 (2001-2002) is a video addition to Archive, part of a file which ostensibly contains 53 such recordings only two of which are made available for viewing outside Lebanon. Focusing on the testimony of Souheil Bachar, the videos refer to 'The Western Hostage Crisis' of the 1980s and early 1990s during which nearly 100 men were the victims of a systematic kidnapping campaign in Lebanon. Bachar relates his personal experiences as the solitary Lebanese hostage imprisoned alongside five American men for 27 weeks in 1985. Addressing the camera in a manner that mimics hostage videos he begins: 'Yes, our story is tragic. Yes it is sordid. But you have to remember that it is first and foremost a story and in this way it is familiar to you'. What follows is a mixture of visceral descriptions of his time in captivity, philosophising about the psychological reactions of his fellow inmates and emotional recollections. Roughly spliced together with montaged news clips, blank screens, video 'snow' and a repeated monologue recounting the facts of the incident, the effect is one of fits-and-starts, a visual and aural cacophony of layers mixed together with abstract drones, electronic interference, gaps and silences.

The Lebanese-born artist Walid Raad is the founder of The Atlas Group. Approaching his fraught subject obliquely through absurdist fable and poetic accounts, he excavates his semi-fictional material to further examine the psychological aspects of both war and its images. By producing documents which address the peculiar, the senseless and the fantastic he attempts to communicate something of the overlooked aspects of conflict which accumulate beneath the sanctioned, rational versions of history, aspects which are considered impossible to record. These are not simply personal accounts or witness statements, so often the staple of the conventional documentary film – they refuse even the 'truth' of this authoritative position – rather they aspire to a collective memory which sits between the subjective and the objective, connecting history with experience. Raad often employs the term 'hysterical symptoms' to describe the documents in The Atlas Group Archive, underlining their function as expressions of the unconscious effects of trauma, operating in the realms of both memory and fantasy. The imaginative and the irrational are presented as equally constitutive of a history which is permanently under development.

My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Engines, Tate: Purchased using funds provided by the 2004 Outset / Frieze Art Fair Fund to benefit the Tate Collection 2005.

Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (English Version), courtesy of Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London.

Artur Żmijewski (Poland)

80064, (2004), video, 11 minutes

'I don't create entertainment for the mass public. Seeing to the well-being and comfort of viewers isn't my intention. I don't care if someone gets a headache after watching this film. The world isn't a safe place...'

Artur Żmijewski's re-staging of the Stanford Prison Experiment *Repetition* was one of three films presented in Part 1 of *The Ethics of Encounter*. In the disturbing film *80064*, the artist once again returns to the subject of power relations, this time coercing a 92 year-old Auschwitz survivor into having his identification tattoo refreshed, despite his clear protestations. The eleven-minute film adheres to a traditional documentary structure, taking the form of a two-part interview during which the detached artist calmly interrogates the subject, Jozef Tarnawa, about his experiences in the camp and his attitude towards his identification number. Anecdotes about the horrific abuses of Auschwitz and the inevitable submission of the prisoners are duly recounted before the artist insists on carrying out the 'renovation' of his tattoo. Tarnawa's response conflates the artist's position with that of the Auschwitz authorities: 'I'd have never expected that something like this will happen to me again... that they would renew my number.' Through this small-scale re-enactment, Żmijewski presents a 'live' interrogation of human responses to the exercise of authority that is reminiscent of the infamous social psychology experiments conducted by Stanley Milgrim in the 1960s.

As with Żmijewski's other video documentations, *80064* reveals his fascination with real bodies in social space. By approaching politics through the body, violence (whether explicit or subcutaneous) regularly features in Żmijewski's special brand of realism.

Courtesy of the Foksal Gallery Foundation.

Dani Marti (Scotland)

Time is the fire in which we burn, (2009), video, 67 minutes

Bacon's Dog, (2010), video, 11 minutes

Artur Żmijewski's relentless focus on the physicality of social relationships is mirrored in Dani Marti's intimate video portraits which draw out closed encounters into the public sphere. Slicing a line through the centre of the gallery, a narrow screen viscerally depicts the first sexual experience of Peter Fay, a 65 year-old writer, curator and art collector from Sydney, Australia. The email exchanges which precede and follow their encounters can be found downstairs in Stills' information space. In these, Peter is devastatingly honest about his situation, going into some detail about his childhood medical problems, their harrowing impact and the liberating effect of Marti's project. In contrast to these narrative documents, *Bacon's Dog* adopts an almost abstract approach, dwelling on close-up shots of skin, clasped hands and caressing fingers, condensing footage captured over a five-month period into an oppressive 11 minute vignette.

To the right, *Time is the fire in which we burn* documents a post-coitus conversation with John, a porn actor and male prostitute. Lying in bed in a Glasgow flat, he talks frankly about his experiences for over an hour, often addressing the camera directly in a form of confessional storytelling. Marti himself is once again in the frame, we see him gently question his friend, touching him, reassuring him and getting up to adjust the camera angle. The duration of the work and the intimacy of this three-way exchange between artist, subject and camera produces an intense, yet ultimately unstable, portrait which hovers ambiguously between homespun therapy and hints of exploitation.

This will be Dani Marti's first exhibition in Scotland since his work was removed from the Gallery of Modern Art's *Sh[OUT]* programme in 2009, a decision which attracted a great deal of international media attention. At the time he argued: "art should be a protected forum. If we don't protect it as an independent platform, where transgression and the questioning of ethics, morals, politics and sexuality is allowed, then society won't be given the permission to grow."

As part of *The Ethics of Encounter* programme Dani Marti is in residence at Stills from September 2010 until March 2011. As well as presenting works as part of the exhibition he is developing two new projects and will present a screening and artist talk on Wednesday 16 February.

François Bucher (Colombia/Germany)

Haute Surveillance, (2007), video, 36 minutes

'The ethical individual may need to break moral standards.'

At a particularly turbulent point in Colombia's political history, when violence regularly incurred into the everyday lives of the population, two students tasked with presenting a seminar on the life and work of the French author and activist Jean Genet conducted a theatrical experiment. *Haute Surveillance* documents the fall-out of their intervention which set out to capture the spirit of Genet's work by staging an armed kidnapping of their classmates. Bucher's dual screen montage reconstructs the events through the testimonies of those involved to examine the tipping point when the boundary between staged and real violence becomes indistinct.

Focus Space: Daniel Rutter

Focus Space is a unique exhibition platform for local artists who use Stills' production facilities. Photographer Daniel Rutter has been in residence at Stills since September and will present three works as part of *The Ethics of Encounter* programme. His documentary photographs record everyday encounters at his work place, local streets in Edinburgh and abroad in Germany. These works have been produced using Stills' Epson 4800 ink-jet colour printer.

F I L M L O U N G E***Romantic Realism***

Monday 8 November - Sunday 23 January, open daily

The romantic impulse in ethnographic films is examined in a selection of historical films presented downstairs in Film Lounge. Moving image has long been used as part of the scientific description of individual peoples and cultures, recording rituals and relationships together with the spaces and practices of everyday life. What happens when the camera attempts to capture the exotic and the unfamiliar?

Ethics, Nationalism and the Theatrics of Documentation

Monday 24 January 2011 - Sunday 13 March 2011

Presenting the work of contemporary artists who have turned their attentions to issues of nationalism, migration and borders, this programme examines the ways in which documentary modes have been used to mediate ethical debates. Curated by Harry Weeks and Nea Ehrlich.

Events Programme (free)**Cockburn Street Christmas Party & Preview**

Friday 10 December 2010, 7pm -9pm

Film Lounge event: Agnès Varda

Thursday 13 January 2011, 6.30pm

An introduction Agnès Varda's short documentary films. Following an introduction and screening Stills' Programme Fellow Debi Banerjee and artist Morwenna Kearsley will discuss Varda's distinctive film-making style, her musings on photography and the playful way in which she constructs narrative.

Film Lounge preview event, 'Ethics, Nationalism and the Theatrics of Documentation'

Thursday 20 January 2011, 6.30pm

A special preview event for the next Film Lounge programme. Nea Ehrlich and Harry Weeks will discuss the work of artists who have turned their attentions to issues of nationalism, migration and borders including Shlomi Yaffe (Israel), Kristina Norman (Estonia), and Avi Mograbi (Israel).

Dis[h]course with Dani Marti at Spoon

Thursday 10 February 2011, 6.30pm

Join us for an informal discussion about the exhibition and a bite to eat with the artist Dani Marti. Spoon Café have kindly offered us a special discounted menu for this event, participants will be offered either a vegetable antipasti plate with glass of prosecco for £7.95 or soup and fish of the day for £12.95. For more information and to book a place please call or email info@stills.org

Artist talk & Screening: Dani Marti

Wednesday 16 February 2011, 6.30pm

To mark the end of his residency at Stills, Dani Marti will present a screening of his latest video works and discuss his practice with curator, Kirsten Lloyd.

Artist talk: François Bucher

Wednesday 2 March 2011, 6.30pm

François Bucher will discuss his video work *Haute Surveillance* together with other recent projects. Kindly supported by The Goethe Institut Glasgow.

The Ethics of Encounter Research Workshop

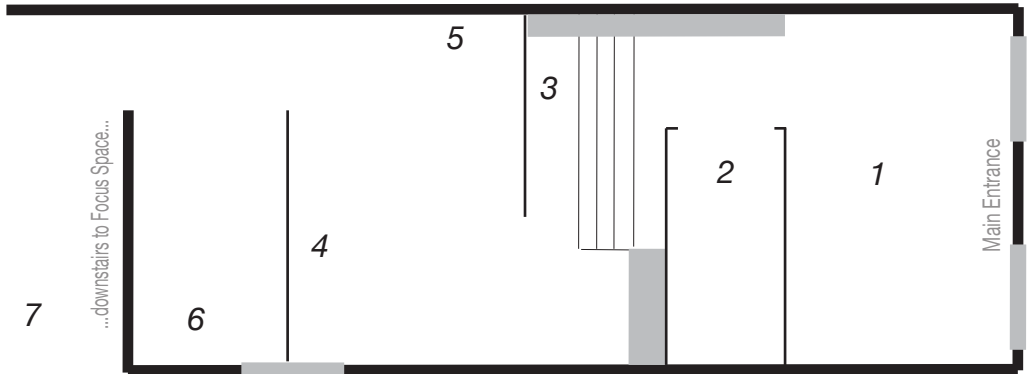
Thursday 3 March 2011, 6.00pm

A public roundtable discussion considering the complex interfaces which have emerged between aesthetics, politics and ethics in art's most recent social turn will be held at The University of Edinburgh's History of Art department, Minto House, 20 Chambers Street. Speakers include Carla Cruz (Goldsmiths University of London), Angela Dimitrakaki (The University of Edinburgh), Anthony Downey (Sotheby's Institute of Art), Alana Jelinek (University of Cambridge), Kirsten Lloyd (Stills / The University of Edinburgh), Tracy Mackenna (Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design) & Ken Neil (Glasgow School of Art), Mark Miller (Tate Britain) & Victoria Walsh (Tate Britain), Dominic Paterson (University of Glasgow), Michaela Ross (Chelsea College of Art and Design), Harry Weeks (The University of Edinburgh) and Stephen Wright (European School of Visual Arts). *All welcome.*

Work Titles:

1. The Atlas Group, *My Neck is Thinner than a Hair: Engines*, (2000-2003)
2. The Atlas Group, *Hostage: The Bachar Tapes (English Version)*, (2001), video, 16 minutes
3. Artur Żmijewski, *80064*, (2004) video, 11 minutes,
4. Dani Marti, *Time is the fire in which we burn*, (2009), video, 67 minutes
5. Dani Marti, *Bacon's Dog*, (2010), video, 11 minutes
6. François Bucher, *Haute Surveillance*, (2007), video, 36 minutes
7. Daniel Rutter, Focus Space

More detailed information on each of the artists can be found in the information space set up downstairs next to the Film Lounge.



The Ethics of Encounter is part of Stills' Social Documents series, a three-year programme of exhibitions, screenings, workshops and courses which explores artists' fascination with documentary modes and processes. Curated by Kirsten Lloyd.

Presented with generous support from The University of Edinburgh's History of Art Department, The Goethe Institut, Glasgow, Spoon Café, and New Media Scotland. We would also like to thank The Fruitmarket Gallery and Collective.

