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VIDEO ARTICLE

Poetics of Relations: A Manifesto on Performance-Based Filmmaking

Verena Stenke and Andrea Pagnes

VestAndPage, DE

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This video article expands upon the Poetics of Relations, the embodied research of VestAndPage (Verena Stenke and Andrea Pagnes), which informs their performance-based filmmaking theory and practice. Since 2010, the artist duo inquires into the pillars that constitute the cross-contamination of the two art forms of time-based live art and filmmaking. Their films have been produced geo-psychologically in a variety of locations around the world: from the remote regions of Chilean Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego to the Antarctica; from socio-cultural areas of conflict like Kashmir and North-West India to the volcanic island of Formentera; and during a month-long performance walk through Germany, Poland and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Each of the films focuses upon a particular research and artistic subject. In this video article, their film projects are taken under the pinhole to look into what could constitute a manifesto of sorts in which the embodied research process identifies the essentials constituents of their practice, and elaborates on the integration of filming, story, time, space, character, action, objects, text, sound, effects, atmosphere, production and editing.

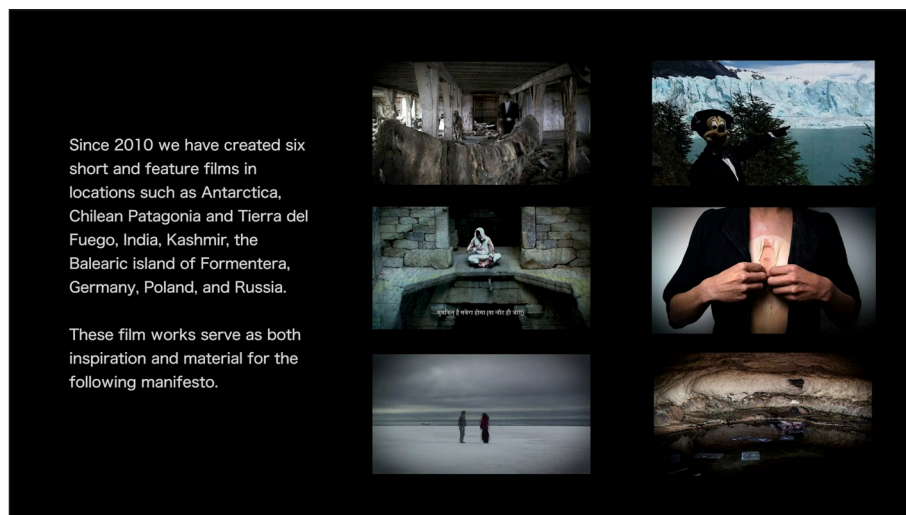
Keywords: Embodied Practices; Filmmaking; Performance art; Manifesto; Geo-psychology; Artistic collaboration; Socio-Cultural spheres; History; War; Environment

VIDEO ARTICLE

Available to view here: <https://doi.org/10.16995/jer.37>.

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STILLS FROM THE VIDEO ARTICLE





VIDEO ARTICLE TRANSCRIPT

[00:12]

We cry our cry of poetry.

Édouard Glissant

[01:50]

We are two artists who met 14 years ago, with backgrounds in literature, philosophy, theatre, visual art, glass art design and mask-making. Andrea was born in Venice, Verena in the southern woods of Germany. These histories play a fundamental role in our work and lives together.

Like two streams coming together to make a third stream.

Gilles Deleuze

We have merged our knowledge of art, crafts, and theory to develop what we call a «Poetics of Relations». For us, the poetic is to be found in the interconnectedness of bodies, beings, spaces, objects, and matter, as well as thoughts, actions, and emotions.

Since 2010 we have created six short and feature films in locations such as Antarctica, Chilean Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, India, Kashmir, the Balearic island of Formentera, Germany, Poland, and Russia.

These film works serve as both inspiration and material for the following manifesto.

Our process is a tight collaboration between the two of us, at all stages of a film project's conception, execution, and post-production. We develop the theoretical research and logistical preparations and produce the materials, costumes, and masks. Sometimes, we invite artistic collaborators.

Because the world is our studio, production begins as soon as we venture into new places, where we encounter sites that inspire us to react and respond with performative action.

In a backpack, we carry with us our basic performance costumes and materials, as well as a tripod, handycam, camera, and sound recorder. With these tools, we are

ready to perform whenever inspiration strikes. One of us films the other, usually without any rehearsal.

Along the way, we collect additional visual and audio material and write process-related poetry, which may later become the voiceover of the film.

We take all this material home and, in the next accretive step, let it all fall into place, editing it into a film work. As in an alchemical operation, the confluence of our cultural backgrounds, artistic visions, collaborative practice, and union in life make up our artistic creation.

[05:20]

POETICS OF RELATIONS

A manifesto on performance-based filmmaking

By VestAndPage — Verena Stenke & Andrea Pagnes

[05:45]

On Film

[VS] Film as a medium is mnemonic of the potential, catalyst of the manifest, and shrine to the residual— insects of time, prepared and skewed. Performance art can challenge it by not adhering to pre-ordered linearity. Each performance and each film are an answer to the question: How do we read reality?

[AP] Life's matters lie around and within us as scattered shards. Taken only as shards they are but mere fragments of what was once whole. And yet, taken precisely as shards they lend themselves to continuous reassembly.

[VS] This is how we make our films. We collect single fragments that we find along the way and compose with them new relations. That which the newly correlated shards reflect, gives the film its meanings.

[07:46]

On Story

[VS] No rhetoric. No more new myths, glorifications, idols, icons. There is no script, no storyboard, neither a priori nor during production. Everything is subject to change until the very end of editing. The alacrity in accepting ongoing change, our ability, duty, responsibility and readiness to respond to it. A topic or a concept is the frame within which, inside, across and throughout which our co-creative processes move.

[AP] The emotional structure of the content is based on our memories and the experiences made during production, translated real-time into moving images. What we have learnt, kept and what we had to let go.

[VS] No links or connection between the shards are made until the moment of editing, where the final composition through recollection takes place. Through the same process of editing, a non-linear narrative can come into being – one of the many possible configurations of the shattered shards. If ever a story arises, it tells of itself. The process of making needs no explanation, needs no justification.

[10:19]

On Time

[VS] Process and relations reveal themselves in the time passing. A film can function as a kind of wormhole where space-time deludes and reveals the connection of apparently disconnected things and situations.

[AP] The combination of both art forms allows us to question our perceptive processing of reality, and how we organize and store information in our minds, bodies and souls.

[11:22]

On Space

[AP] Space is original and real. Space is no studio if not the world itself.

[VS] Space is a social context, natural surroundings, a historical site, an architecture or an urban ruin.

[AP] Space bears its history, and yet it is like a page with a few left blank spaces that can host our own moment within. Space is innocent. Space is sacred.

[VS] Space is a companion with its own nature. We do not abuse or impress our intentions upon our companion. Space holds in itself the impulse for our action to occur – this is site-responsiveness. Space proposes, and we respond.

[AP] We propose to space, and it responds. Therewith, we create a dialogue.

[13:34]

On Character

[VS] The persons are original and real. There are no actors other than persons in action. From their nature springs the impulse for the action to occur, which manifests momentum as action – this is authenticity.

[AP] The other person is a companion with his, her, their own nature. We do not abuse or impress our intentions upon our companion. The other person proposes, and we respond. We propose to the other person and welcome the response. Therewith we create a dialogue.

[15:02]

On Action

[VS] The actions represent nothing more and no other than what they are. Actions are ephemeral and unrepeatable. There is no such thing as rehearsal. At the moment that an action happens, it has already happened and can be no more.

[AP] Actions unfold as life: each action births the next. No two moments are ever equal. Nothing can exist alone. Every after needs a before.

[VS] Nothing comes from nothing – *ex nihilo nihil*.

[16:22]

On Matter

[VS] Objects and matters are original and real. If they exist in the image, there is a reason for them to be exactly there and not somewhere else. The slow regard of silent things. Every object and every matter play a part. Objects and matters are innocent. Objects and matters are sacred. Often, they are found objects on site.

[AP] Objects and matters are companions with their own nature. We do not abuse or impress our intentions upon our companion. Objects and matters propose, and we respond. We propose to them, and they respond. Therewith we create a dialogue.

[18:03]

On Text

[AP] The text is thought-matter. It is not a script. It is not a statement. The text takes shape from splinters of stream-of-consciousness and

paraphernalia of poetic recall that we gather along the production process. The text is not pinned down *a priori*. It grows organically through making.

[VS] The text is malleable. It can be your words, my words, just as it can be the words of all of us.

[From the quoted film work:] That which is not here, it does not exist anywhere else.

[AP] The text reveals its full meaning only once it falls onto the image of action it is unknowingly written for.

[19:22]

On Sound

[VS] Sound is parallel to the dimension of the image in time. It consists of the natural soundscape, the sonic, music compositions, and voice-over. It is not illustrative or decorative. It is dimensional.

[20:11]

On Effects

[AP] Effects are not decorative devices or cunning *escamotage*, trickery to seduce or fool the audience.

[VS] Effects are only for making visible that which is still unperceivable by the commonly defined five human senses, and not expressible with any of the previous shards.

[AP] Time can turn backwards; the future is the past. Elements dissolve, decompose and re-integrate.

[21:42]

On Atmosphere

[AP] The atmosphere is nothing to be made. It is not artificially created. It already exists. It reveals itself in the film through the decision of doing this thing in this place at this time.

[VS] The pervading tone and mood of a place and situation are companions with their own nature. We do not abuse or impress our intentions upon our companion.

[AP] The atmosphere proposes, and we respond. We propose to it, and it hosts our proposal. Therewith we create a dialogue.

[22:44]

On Collecting

[AP] Production is collecting the shards that are shattered around and within us. We need to look carefully and collect that which we find. Production is not planned. We have to be prepared.

[From the quoted film work:] An action begins and dies, framed by gestures and history.

[Subtitle from the quoted film work:] Una acción comienza y muere, enmarcados por los gestos y la historia.

[VS] Production can be done anywhere, at any time, with anything, if it needs to: this is the economy of means. Production happens intuitively, site- and situation-responsively.

[23:43]

On Composing

[AP] A place for everything and everything in its place.

[VS] Editing is composing, subjectively recollecting, the scattered shards into a new whole. Our poetic approach to editing: taking off the unnecessary in a process of poetic subtraction. The shards can have more than one potential place and, as a result, will never reassemble the shattered past. Every collected shard is reconfigured. Editing reveals the intimate connections between the single shards that did or did not exist before. In the final act of the Poetics of Relations, the shards are composed to build *de novo*: a film.

[25:17]

POETICS OF RELATIONS

A manifesto on performance-based filmmaking

Written, narrated and edited by Verena Stenke & Andrea Pagnes – VestAndPage
2020

ABSTRACT

This video article expands upon the Poetics of Relations, the embodied research of VestAndPage (Verena Stenke and Andrea Pagnes), which informs their performance-based filmmaking theory and practice. Since 2010, the artist duo inquires into the pillars that constitute the cross-contamination of the two art forms of time-based live art and filmmaking. Their films have been produced geo-psychologically in a variety of locations around the world: from the remote regions of Chilean Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego to the Antarctica; from socio-cultural areas of conflict like Kashmir and North-West India to the volcanic island of Formentera; and during a month-long

performance walk through Germany, Poland and the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Each of the films focuses upon a particular research and artistic subject. In this video article, their film projects are taken under the pinhole to look into what could constitute a manifesto of sorts in which the embodied research process identifies the essentials constituents of their practice, and elaborates on the integration of filming, story, time, space, character, action, objects, text, sound, effects, atmosphere, production and editing.

KEYWORDS

Embodied Practices, Filmmaking, Performance art, Manifesto, Geo-psychology, Artistic collaboration, Socio-Cultural spheres, History, War, Environment

With original scenes from the following films by VestAndPage:

PLANTAIN

A VestAndPage production, Germany/Poland/Russia, 2018

A film by and with Verena Stenke and Andrea Pagnes

Month-long performance on behalf of the Centre for Cultural Heritage of East Prussia
Funded by the German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media

In cooperation with Heart of the City Bureau Kaliningrad, Dom Samok Foundation
Chernyakhovsk, Georgenburg Association Mayovka

Original music by Josephine Macrì, Katarina & Ljubica Duo, Andreas Bauer Karnabas,
Stephan Knies, Mauro Sambo, Angie Seah, White Noise Generator

Production audio by Douglas Quin

www.plantain-themovie.de

SIN[∞]FIN THE TRILOGY

A VestAndPage production, Germany/Chile/India/Antarctica, 2010–2012

A film by and with Verena Stenke and Andrea Pagnes

In co-production with Confl!cta Contemporary Art and Science Research, Punta Arenas (CL), Sarai Centre for the Studies of Developing Societies, Delhi (IN),

DNA Argentine National Antarctic Direction, Buenos Aires (AR) and Thetis Spa, Venice (IT)

Presented by Zonadeartenaccion (AR), Residencias del Sur (AR), SpinConecadoras (AR) and Fundacion ProAntartida (AR)

With the support of Museo Regional de Magellanes-dibam (CL), Cemeterio Municipal, Punta Arenas (CL), Charles Darwin College, Punta Arenas (CL), Estancia Los Copihues, Tierra del Fuego (CL), Raqs Media Collective (IN), SSARL Saariy (IN), Samav Aksey Razi Lamav (Kashmir), Academy of Electronic Arts (IN), Argentine Antarctic Base Esperanza (AR), CoCo Antar (AR), Argentine Antarctic Base Jubany (AR), Argentine Antarctic Base Marambio (AR), Urugayan Base (AR), Argentine Air Force and Navy (AR), ARA Canal de Beagle (AR), ARA Aviso Castillo (AR), Vasily Golovnin (AR).

Original music by Angie Seah, Zai Kuning, Black Seah Hotel, Lola Kiepjia, diF_ ISh S and Konrad Bayer, and hydrophone recordings of Weddell seals callings under the ice courtesy of Douglas Quin

www.sinfin-themovie.de

SIGNUM

Germany/Spain, 2018

A film by and with Verena Stenke and Andrea Pagnes

A VestAndPage production

In co-production with Collective Signatures, Formentera (ES) and Studio Contemporaneo Cultural Association, Venice (IT)

Original music and sound by Ralf Peters, Agnes Pollner, Guillermo Gómez-Peña

TRAVERSAL #10: ANDREA

By daz disley

In occasion of the Venice International Performance Art Week: *Anam Cara – Dwelling Bodies*

European Cultural Centre, Palazzo Mora, Venice (IT)

December 15, 2018

Original music in order of appearance

Stephan Knies, "Andante", *Sonata for Violin Solo No. 2 in A Minor, BWV 1003*

Composition by J. S. Bach

Angie Seah, *Water Bowl*

Zai Kuning, *Gospel From A Strange Flower 2141* from the album *Gospel From a Strange Flower Who Grows Stubbornly: Zai Kuning Live In Tokyo 2009*

Douglas Quin, *Hydrophone recordings of Weddell seals calling under the ice*

Ralf Peters, *Befreiungsversuche* from the album *Momentaufnahme | Stimme Solo*

Stephan Knies, *Sound of Hope*

White Noise Generator, *Essenziale era l'attesa* from the album *Echi lontani*

Josephine Macrì, *Toglietemi la vita ancor* by Alessandro Scarlatti

VestAndPage, *SUITEnovus*. Sound poetry from the live performance

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Our lasting gratitude goes to our masters and mentors, without whom VestAndPage would not exist: Alessandro Fantechi, Elena Turchi, Kassim Bayatly, Marilyn Arsem, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Yoko Ono – thank you for trusting in our voice and encouraging us to go beyond commodities.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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Glissant, E. 1997. *Poetic of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, p. 9.

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