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Critical Visuality: Workshops for the Examination of Media

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CRITICAL VISUALITY:
WORKSHOPS FOR THE EXAMINATION OF MEDIA

by

AILY NASH

A master's capstone submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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Aily Nash

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal
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Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

Critical Visuality:

Workshops for the Examination of Media

by

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Critical Visuality is a series of public workshops that introduce critical moving image works and practices to engage audiences in political, historical, and social inquiry. My project consists of the conception, design, and implementation of two public workshops: the first, “The Operative Image,” took place in London, UK at the Institute of Contemporary Art and at LUX in February of 2019, and the second workshop is called “Critical Visuality” and will take place in December 2019 at Union Docs in Brooklyn, NY. My aim is for these workshops to invite audiences to think critically about the images they encounter and produce. The workshop will focus on viewing and discussing non-fiction moving image works made by contemporary artists and filmmakers whose practice is dedicated to a critical employment of the moving image. The workshops will employ documentary as a critical method, one which will be used to reflect more deeply on the power of the image to convey, manipulate, question, and provoke us to look anew at the world we inhabit.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	iv
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vi
Chapter 1: Relationship to Track and Previous Course of Study	1
Chapter 2: Narrative Description	3
Chapter 3: Workshop I: The Operative Image	5
Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Operative Image Workshop	8
Chapter 5: Workshop II: Critical Visuality	11
Chapter 6: Challenges and Continuation of the Project	17
Bibliography	22

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Schedule for The Operative Image Workshop	20
Figure 2. Schedule for Critical Visuality Workshop	20
Figure 3. Announcement for The Operative Image Workshop on LUX website	21

CHAPTER 1: RELATIONSHIP TO CONCENTRATION AND PREVIOUS COURSE OF STUDY

Prior to my time at the Graduate Center and outside of the academic context, I was interested in alternative pedagogical models. I taught at a free and public art school called BHQFU founded by the artist collective Bruce High Quality Foundation in the Lower East Side, and have organized public documentary film seminars including Doc's Kingdom in Arcos de Valdevez, Portugal, and Tabakalera, Center for Contemporary Culture in San Sebastian, Spain, both of which were inspired by the Flaherty Film Seminar, and have adapted their model. I will discuss the importance of the Flaherty Film Seminar model to the design of my Capstone in the next section.

The impetus for this Capstone project first came about in the course Teaching Race and Gender Theory in the Undergraduate Humanities Classroom course that I took in the spring of 2017. In this course, we focused on critically thinking through class design so as to create a student-centered learning environment. This included methods for establishing a non-hierarchical seminar environment in which the educator is not the sole authority on the subjects being taught but it is their role to offer the texts that will be examined, and they situate their own perspective on the texts alongside those of their students. This approach was influential in the way I thought about my own curatorial practice and engagement with the public. I became interested in a horizontal conversation that shifts the creation of meaning onto the student, spectator, or audience, rather than something that is delivered didactically by the presenter, educator, or author.

After taking this class I taught a course in the CCNY MFA in Digital & Interdisciplinary Art Practice program in the fall of 2017 called “The Operative Image: approaches to the political in contemporary moving image practices,” which was an early draft of ideas that led to the first part of the Capstone which took the form of a workshop in London in February under the same name. It was important to bring together the tools and ideas I had developed during my time at the Graduate Center, as well as in my own curatorial practice, to create a program that would engage with questions around the ethics of representation, access to these works, artistic practices, and critical approaches to the public.

Other courses that were central to my concentration which informed this project included Political Ecology of Social and Environmental Justice, in which we examined the relationship between social justice and people’s relationship to place. For my final project, I focused on questions related to contemporary indigeneity including the position of the image-maker as “informant,” as a cultural and anthropological translator, as well as recognizing the form of narrative storytelling and its relationship to non-linear, non-western, non-teleological conceptions of history and time.

One of the many crucial texts that I encountered in the Art History department’s Methods of Research was Hayden White’s “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality” (1980). This text gave me an important foundation for how to think about the role of narrativity in representation and the importance of questioning narrative cohesion as always being constructed in relation to authority. This text was crucial for examining the narrative of non-fiction films, both within the form of the work, as well as offering a way to think about the narrative content, specifically, how a historical event is constructed and represented in documentaries.

In the Cultural Studies and the Law: Critical Refugee Studies course from fall 2018, I focused on how the refugee experience was represented in film. In the class, we watched many conventional documentaries including Ai Wei Wei's *Human Flow* (2017), and *Welcome to Refugeestan* (2017), which I read through a very critical lens for how the filmmakers depicted this crisis. I found that these works failed to engage in any formal consideration with the ethics of representation. This is where I found the need to theorize what a "critical visuality" might look like through the examination of artists' practices that contend with such questions, and this thinking became the basis for the second workshop and further research that ensued in my thesis tutorial with Prof Siona Wilson in the spring of 2019.

CHAPTER 2: NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The contemporary media spectator faces a constant inundation with images, the proliferation of its sources, platforms, and formats, and the collapse of the distinction between the roles of consumer, user and producer. A critical understanding of one's participation within this complex system is necessary in order to attain agency in how one operates within it. Therefore, gaining media literacy to comprehend how images are produced, how they signify, and what they do, has become increasingly more crucial for viewers. With the accelerated and democratized production and dissemination of all forms of media, the stakes of spectatorship have shifted, and viewers need critical tools for thinking through how they read, create, and distribute images.

My aim is for these workshops to invite audiences to think critically about the images they encounter and produce. The workshop will focus on viewing and discussing non-fiction moving image works made by contemporary artists and filmmakers whose practice is dedicated

to a critical employment of the moving image. In step with Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg's approach in their book *Documentary Across Disciplines* (2016), this project, "looks to documentary not as a category or genre—not as a label that one might bestow on one particular practice and refuse another – but as a critical method. Above all, documentary emerges as an attitude—a way of doing, engaging, and creating that accords primacy to the multiple and mutable realities of our world" (Balsom, Peleg 18). The workshops will employ documentary as a critical method, one which will be used to reflect more deeply on the power of the image to convey, manipulate, question, and provoke us to look anew at the world we inhabit.

Currently, critical non-fiction film and video work is broadly inaccessible, their presentation and discussion are siloed within the niches of the film and art worlds. It is a practice and conversation that pertains mostly to experts: artists, curators, critics, scholars, and students. Engagement with these films and practices can open up this critical method for viewers to apply more generally—beyond how to examine art, but to how to read and question all the media that one encounters. These tools have the potential to be used more widely, and this capstone project experiments with creating a platform for sharing these critical methods with audiences. I consider the two workshops as starting points for thinking through how this format can be modified for future use in other contexts as well.

This project is specifically designed to be a non-academic workshop, one that is greatly inspired by the Flaherty Film Seminar model. The Flaherty Film Seminar, now in its 65th year, is an annual week-long seminar on documentary film which is dedicated to the intensive screening and discussion of films. Each edition is curated by an invited film programmer, curator, scholar, or filmmaker, around a particular theme or question, with a requirement that all the artists and filmmakers whose work is being screened be present at the seminar. There is a proposition put forth by the curator through their selection of artists and works, but the meaning of the films and

the program as a whole, as well as the discussions themselves, are determined by the participants. I have not curated the Flaherty Seminar myself, but as I have mentioned, I have curated two seminars that were inspired by the Flaherty format, and these experiences were significant influences on my capstone project. As a curator, my approach to these workshops draws much more from the Flaherty Seminar tradition, as well as my position as a curator within a public film programming context, rather than from academic conventions of the role of an educator. I see my role in these workshops as an organizer and curator rather than as a teacher. I will offer a program—a collection of works and concerns—but the meaning that is drawn from it is open to the group’s interpretation. I see the participants roles in these workshops as that of engaged spectators rather than as students.

CHAPTER 3: WORKSHOP I: THE OPERATIVE IMAGE

As previously mentioned, the first workshop took place in London in February and was co-presented by the Institute of Contemporary Art and LUX, a distributor and educator specializing in artists’ moving image. The Operative Image workshop presented politically engaged contemporary moving image work drawing mostly from artist’s practices that are not under market pressures to sell as art commodities or entertainment. The workshop consisted of viewing and discussing the films and videos that are screened. The workshop description was publicly circulated by both institutions and was open to anyone to sign up. Below is the description:

What can an image do? How does the image represent? How does the image convey a historical narrative or event? This workshop will focus on viewing and discussing various contemporary artists’ moving image works that reflect on the political. We will

investigate the complexity of media and consider the production and employment of images to reveal both its power and its highly malleable nature. Formal experimentation and innovation will be central to this course. The works presented will provide a broad view of artistic political moving image-making, considering experimental approaches to production, the performance, and retelling of history, the personal perspective, witnessing, the forensic, postcolonialism, post-ethnography, representation, the Anthropocene among other topics.

The first day was designed to bring awareness to how images are produced and employed, and to think about what it means to make work politically, rather than *about* politics. Jean Luc Godard's text *What is to be done?* (1970) is useful for inspiring a dialogue about what form political filmmaking can take. Harun Farocki's seminal film *Images of the World and the Inscription of War* (1989) lucidly reflects on the inextricable relationship between image production and ideology by examining the ways in which the violent trace of the state apparatus and its war machine are perceptible if scrutinized closely enough and rendered visible through photographic representation. Alongside Farocki, Oraib Toukan and Belit Sag's contemporary videos consider the political and social conditions of making political images. Sag's video *Ayhan and Me* (2016) reflects on her discussion of Turkish political leaders in her art practice and the subsequent censorship that was imposed on her work by the Turkish government. While Toukan's *When Things Occur* (2016) explores the backstory of photographs of atrocities taken in Palestine through conversations with the Gaza-based war photographers who shot them. Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Rubber Coated Steel* (2016) is produced as part of Forensic Architecture, a research lab at Goldsmiths that works with various NGOs to visualize human rights violations, forensically reconstructing evidence through media. The film takes the form of

a trial in which the sonic trace of a steel bullet is analyzed to reveal that in this instance, Israeli soldiers were not using non-lethal rubber coated bullets.

On the second day, we looked at works that reimagine how histories are told. It was focused on developing a critical understanding of historical narratives, including an acknowledgment of their construction, the subjective perspective from which it is framed, and the agency subjects attain through the act of telling. Kevin Jerome Everson and Claudrena Harold's film *Sugar Coated Arsenic* (2014) performs a historical reenactment which is based on research on the history of African American life at the University of Virginia. It was inspired by an old roll of 16mm film that they discovered in their archives. This roll was not what they thought it was, so instead, they made a film that became a speculative version of the historical document that they thought they had uncovered. Akram Zaatari's *Letter to a Refusing Pilot* (2013) takes an idiosyncratic visual approach to tell the story of an Israeli pilot during the Israeli-Lebanese conflict in the late '70s who dropped a bomb into the ocean that was intended for Zaatari's own primary school.

On the second day of the workshop, I also showed the group a program entitled *The Informants* (earlier iterations were entitled *Anti-Ethnography*), a radical critique of ethnography by artists Adam and Zach Khalil and Jackson Polys', which looks at the representation and desire for indigeneity in the Americas, and considers the violence of idealization and the depiction of indigenous people as those of a historical past, rather than recognizing their contemporary identities. This program includes Thomas Edison's *Sioux Ghost Dance* from 1894 to Shelly Niro and Diane Burns's poetic video art from the '90s, to a recent New York Times video on Native American fetish festivals in the former GDR. The Khalil brothers and Polys's approach to gathering a diverse array of media and forms of indigenous representation—both self-produced and produced by settler-colonial perspectives—is groundbreaking in its manner of assembly,

enacting a kind of curating-as-montage, a meta configuration of “found material” collected to express their thesis on the appearance of a “spectral indigeneity that is removed from actual indigenous people” (Khalil, Khalil, Polys).

In the final session of the workshop I presented *Home Movies Gaza* (2013) by the Palestinian-American artist Basma Alsharif. Taking on the genre of home movies, the video asserts the possibility of calling Gaza home, and the complexities, dangers, and anxieties involved, and what it looks like to live within conflict. The work presents the daily rhythms of life that persist through conditions of political turmoil and war. Within her depictions of intimate moments, there are inevitable traces of destruction and interruption, seen both in her documentary footage of Gaza and that which is applied through digital effects by the artist herself.

CHAPTER 4: EVALUATION OF THE OPERATIVE IMAGE WORKSHOP

There was overwhelmingly positive feedback from the participants of the workshop that took place in London in February. The workshop was at capacity within a week of the announcement, and there were many people on the waitlist. We capped the group at fifteen participants, but there ended up being seventeen in the end. The group consisted of artists, filmmakers, scholars, and Master’s students in London, from a range of backgrounds and ages (25-60).

Before the workshop began, I had asked everyone to read a chapter from Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life* (2004), as well as Hayden White’s “The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality.” Unfortunately, there wasn’t ample time to go deeply into discussion of the texts, but ideas from both came up throughout the conversation around the films, so it was

useful that they came in having read it.

In one of our discussions, there was a dialectic between a majority of the group who read Godard and Mieville's *Ici et Ailleurs* (1976) as a work that dissects filmmaking and questions the possibility of making a film about Palestine, whereas others read it at face value as a work that was actually about the conflict in Palestine. The discussion that ensued from this divide was quite productive, with participants arguing for and against explicit and implicit representational approaches, as well as a conversation around didacticism versus open, question-provoking narratives.

Whenever I show Akram Zaatari's *Letter to a Refusing Pilot*, students and participants are always struck by its fluidity of form. Zaatari manages to bring together a personal story about having his school spared, and then eventually bombed by Israeli fighter jets, yet articulates it through a performance of his personal archival material—photographs, newspaper clippings, diary entries—situating the incident through his own lens, yet also recreating life in a Beirut high school through the use of actors. Workshop participants were particularly interested in how he managed to bring together various visual and narrative styles into one work.

The seminar discussions were very engaged, and participants were enthusiastic about sharing their responses to the work. The group dynamic was varied and quite balanced, with everyone participating in the conversation. There was one participant whose views were quite divergent from that of the rest of the group, but she stimulated discussion through her antagonism which was ultimately quite productive.

I received a lot of emails with feedback from the participants after the workshop. Many were stimulated and shared that they found the variety of methodologies presented in the program to be inspiring for their own artistic practices. Through their feedback, I realized that the various practitioners who participated in the workshop do not readily have communities for

engaged viewing, and discussion and exchange. This kind of engagement is predominantly found within a formalized academic context and it was evident that there was a great desire and need for artists, filmmakers, writers, and curators to continue to be part of contexts that facilitate rigorous viewership and discussion. The interdisciplinarity and non-academic atmosphere is also unique in a workshop such as this, because with most focused study groups there is a tendency for conversations, meetings, and events to only occur within one's designated field and with one's colleagues and peers. The public and open nature of this workshop allowed for many different kinds of participants to gather in one space.

The success of the first project made it clear that it was important to continue to refine and adapt this format for other contexts. I realized that this first workshop, although it took place at a public organization, and was quite diverse in the make up of participants, is still within the niche that I'm trying to go beyond. It has raised the questions: What is a public? How can we define the make-up of this public and determine whether it is too narrow or broad enough? What kind of diversity is being sought? Economic? Racial? Educational? Occupational? Or is the participation of whoever is interested and committed enough of criteria for inclusion? The design of these workshops requires intimacy, and the scale of a seminar (under twenty participants). A larger group would become a public program rather than a focused workshop. I believe the seminar setting requires engaged participants rather than a dabbling public.

My hope with the second workshop through Union Docs is to partner with a more accessible institution such as the Brooklyn Public Library to offer it within a context that can reach a broader audience, yet still require the commitment and engagement that is necessary to have a productive seminar.

CHAPTER 5: WORKSHOP II: CRITICAL VISUALITY

For my final paper in the Critical Refugee Studies course I took in the fall of 2018, I wrote about a concept I called *critical visibility*. This concept examines moving image work that articulates the unique positions of the artist/filmmaker, subject, and spectator; presents the limits of the work's frame and its failure to represent all the while making visible a subject who or which would otherwise remain invisible. This critical approach is a means of providing an alternative to the grand historical and contemporary narratives that mass media and broad-strokes documentaries provide. It is also looking to film works that lay bare the production of the work itself, acknowledging and signaling to the viewer that all representations are constructed. When the work's artifice is made apparent, a more conscious, active viewing is possible for the spectator. Critical visibility forefronts the formal approach taken to produce the representations that we contend with in order to understand *how* it conveys rather than relying solely on the content it provides.

Critical visibility evolved from questions and concerns from the Operative Image workshop, but was a chance for further elaboration and refinement of these ideas. It asks: What are the stakes of spectatorship? What are the potential relations between maker, subject, and spectator? It strives to make apparent the mechanisms of criticality experienced through cinema that enables viewers to be active participants in the construction of the meaning of the work. Marxist media theory, drawn from theories such as Althusser's concept of the Ideological State Apparatus, which he published in 1970, has articulated that commercial cinema does not activate viewers, rather feeds them regurgitated narratives that perpetuate the ideologies of capitalism. In contrast, critical cinema, or politically engaged art practices, have the capacity to bring awareness to the spectator. Following from these Marxist traditions, artists and thinkers such as

Allan Sekula spoke to a need to go beyond art practice. In *Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary (Notes on the Politics of Representation)* (1976), Sekula writes: “A critical representational art, an art that points openly to the social world and to possibilities of concrete social transformation, could develop. But we will also have to work toward a redefined pragmatics, towards modes of address based on dialogical pedagogy, and toward a different and significantly wider notion of audience...” (Sekula, 56). Sekula insists that beyond the creation of critical art, there must be a practice that places emphasis on the audience. I hope that these workshops can serve as such a dialogical pedagogy. They aim to present works beyond simply an exhibition context, with an emphasis on engagement and close reading, yet they are not conducted within an academic context. Instead, they are open to the public and for a cross-section of audiences which can include, but is not limited to artists, scholars, curators, students, educators, as well as laypeople with an interest.

Jacques Ranciere’s *The Emancipated Spectator* (2011), which is a sustained critique of the aforementioned Althusserian position, has also been quite revelatory for the conceptualization of this project. Ranciere argues that there is no gap to be filled between intellectuals and workers, actors and spectators. He writes: “That is what the word ‘emancipation’ means: the blurring of the boundary between those who act and those who look; between individuals and members of a collective body” (Ranciere, 19). I’m very interested in putting into action this notion of emancipation, creating a forum in which the artist or the educator is not the sole authority on the meaning of the work at hand, as is predominantly the case in art and academic spheres. In these workshops, the participants engage from their own set of experiences and backgrounds through key works that are designed to place the audience’s experience of the work at the center.

Another idea that became important to this project was the realization that news media, conventional documentaries, and the greater humanitarian discourse at large is predominantly still drawing from enlightenment thinking. This was articulated in Thomas Keenan's text, "Mobilizing Shame" (2004), and was one of the more useful things that I gleaned from Pooja Rangan's book *Immediations* (2017). Keenan asserts that humanitarian causes maintain a naive faith that simply exposing people to images of atrocity will activate change. He writes: "The lockstep logic of if-then, in which knowledge generates action (reaction), seems to suggest a wishful fusion of an Enlightenment faith in the power of reason and knowledge with a realistic pessimism that retreats to the shame appropriate to the unenlightened." (Keenan, 437). With the overexposure to violent images in contemporary culture, Keenan argues that we must recognize that violent acts are no longer exposed through photography, but rather, these acts are weaponized through their performance in front of it. He debunks the enlightenment logic that simply seeing images of atrocity will incite change. Rangan also makes the point that the documentaries she critiques in her book (such as *Born into Brothels* (2004), and *Trouble the Water* (2008)) engage with a vague notion that humanity is "the ultimate imagined community," she cites Dominic Pettman's phrase— therefore perpetuating "the ritual, tropic performances of belonging to this community" (Rangan, 19). I was initially very excited to engage with Rangan's text as I felt it was responding to similar questions I had around issue-based documentaries that I encountered in the Critical Refugee Studies course. I wanted to know what a socially-engaged documentary practice might look like if it were as committed to the politics and ethics of image-making as it is to the issues at hand. Although Rangan posed many crucial questions, her book only dealt with bad objects, examples of films that failed, rather than trying to think through practices that attempt a more critical approach to image making. My hope for the workshop is to

present works which I feel *do* indeed make this attempt, even though they may not fully succeed. I find that engaging with propositions for how this might be achieved is more productive.

These theoretical texts—all drawing from a Marxist tradition, reflect on critical image viewing practices developed in the 1970s, with Sekula and Althusser, to Keenan writing in the early 2000s, with more recent applications of this theory by Ranciere and Rangan—were crucial for me to contend with for my own understanding of the shifts in how media was examined in different historical and technological moments. The texts themselves will not be brought into the workshop as material to be discussed, rather the films will be the primary material that the participants will engage with. Ideas around the spectator’s participation in the production and dissemination of images have greatly transformed since the time in which Sekula and Keenan’s texts were written, and the films presented in the workshop will present more contemporary conditions and concerns around media.

This brings me to the discussion of a selection of films which will be featured in the workshop. We will begin with a session that examines the use of landscape as a critical method in documentary filmmaking. Initially developed by Japanese radical activist and filmmaker, Masao Adach, his “theory of landscape” or “fukei-ron,” proposes that the infrastructure of the state apparatus reflects the social and political systems of power that subjects live under. His 1969 film *AKA Serial Killer* depicted the environment in which a teenage serial killer was raised, to see if his living context could reveal something about the violence he committed. Contemporary French artist and filmmaker Eric Baudelaire’s recent work *AKA Jihadi* (2017) applies Adachi’s theory yet in the context of a jihadist who was raised in the suburbs of Paris and eventually made his way to Syria to become radicalized. These works do not look to the subject for answers for their behavior, nor do they ever represent visual representations of them, but

through this formal device of focusing solely on landscape footage, Baudelaire and Adachi look outward at the infrastructures of power that impacted who these subjects became.

Continuing with the focus on landscape examined in the first session, the second session will feature Brett Story's *Prison in Twelve Landscapes* (2016). Similar to Adachi and Baudelaire, Story insists through her formal method that viewers think about the prison industrial complex beyond the typical representation of prisoners—mostly black and brown men within the carceral setting—to see the ways in which this system affects society at large. All three of these films ask the viewer to think beyond the given subject matter, to question how a subject is being visualized, clearly indicating the limit of the work's frame, and thus opening up space for the spectator to enter.

Another feature film I will include in this workshop is Shengze Zhu's recent documentary *Present.Perfect* (2019), which follows several Chinese live-streaming anchors who are empowered through the possibility of making themselves and their working and living conditions visible. From a single mother who works in a underwear factory twenty-nine days a month, to a street dancer who streams his performances, and a man whose development was stilted by growth hormone deficiency, these subjects are also their own producers, transmitting their experience and partaking in a community of fellow anchors, where the distinction between image-maker, subject, and spectator is radically reimagined. Shengze Zhu's film encourages a discussion about how we as spectators must also content with our role in making and sharing media within the online platforms that we participate in.

There will also be a unit on contemporary critical ethnographic film practices. This will feature the films of the Karrabing Film Collective who define themselves as a grassroots indigenous media group based in Darwin, Australia. Their collective filmmaking project has been a means of relaying their ancestral stories, depicting their precarious positions as

indigenous people living in relation to a settler-colonial state, and expressing their agency as autonomous people who create their own representation of their indigeneity. Their 2016 film *Wutharr, Saltwater Dreams* brings to the fore the Karrabing's non-linear and non-teleological storytelling and conception of time as expressed through a narrative which overlaps the community's contemporary struggles of land sovereignty with the intervention of their ancestor's presence and the depiction of their dreaming. The work reveals an intersection of their ancestral stories and beliefs with that of their Christian faith and the challenges and limits placed on them by the Australian state. We will also watch a recent conversation with the Karrabing Collective which was held at the Kadist Art Foundation in San Francisco in May 2019, which places into context their motivations and the artistic intentions of the collective in their own words.

The second part of the critical ethnography segment will look to what artist Ben Russell calls his Psychedelic Ethnography practice. His approach proposes that the audience think about themselves as the subject of his films through their own phenomenological experience of it. Russell's films promote a conception of cinema that puts the viewer at the center of the meaning of the work. The strategy of his Psychedelic Ethnography, is to not allow for a stable identity position on either the part of the subject, author or audience—but to call all of these positions into question in a generative way. In a lecture on his practice at Sonic Acts festival, Russell said, “Cinema suffers when we ask it to be representative of the world, and it expands when we ask it to be something else” (Russell). His 2014 film *Atlantis*, shot on the island of Malta, a remnant of the lost continent of Atlantis, is premised on reflecting and challenging the mythic or fabled nature of a place, the lost utopia versus the mutable realities of contemporary island life. Utopia, a frequent theme in his work, is provisionally manifested in the space of the cinema—Russell writes, “Cinema is the only site where utopia can be truly realized” (Russell).

Brazilian artist and filmmaker Ana Vaz's work also questions and reflects upon ethnographic filmmaking in new ways. *Occidente* (2015) looks at the post-colonial myth of the "discovery of the Americas" and proposes a reverse ethnography—from Brazil looking back to Portugal. The work draws on the notion from Oswald de Andrade's *Anthropophagic Manifesto* (1928)—echoing his question "Who devours who?" in cinematic terms. Vaz blends various image sources from Google Street View footage of Lisbon's historic Praça do Comércio, to extreme surf videos found on YouTube and her own hand-held 16mm film "ethnographic footage," to create, in her words, "A continuous rupture, a constant mash-up of materials that disrupt the possibility of a historicizing or mastered logic" (Vaz). The piece also employs a formal strategy of imparting a visceral trembling, through the soundtrack, which is taken from recordings from the Zoró indigenous community in the lower Amazon, and that of an abstract blue analogue film image that induces a sense of unease and tension. Vaz was interested in imparting this anxiety as a means of expressing her approach to ethnography, she writes: "To be ethical is to be anxious and this is the anxiety of the ethnographer or the anthropologist, the anxiety of history, the threat of shining too much light or casting too much shade—the anxious movement of ethical thinking" (Vaz).

CHAPTER 6: CHALLENGES AND CONTINUATION OF THE PROJECT

The primary challenge of this project as a whole is the question of how to make these works accessible and of interest to non-niche audiences. Why is this work relevant to anyone beyond the art and film worlds? Is gaining a critical perspective on media something that is valued or prioritized by a lay audience? In many ways, I see this as an idealistic project, one that hopes to close a gap between art and politics, attempting to bring art works to an outside world

where their powers for radical experimentation and promoting critical thought can reach more people, and perhaps inform how they think about the images they encounter. I realize that teaching small-scale workshops might not be the most impactful approach, but I believe that this kind of pedagogy needs to remain intimate, and a workshop seems like an appropriate starting point.

As mentioned, for the second workshop, Critical Visuality, which will be hosted by Union Docs, my plan is to create a partnership with the Brooklyn Public Library. The outreach that this partnership would harness, through the library's access to a much wider audience, and the context of the library itself, will surely bring in a different participant pool than the one that gathered in London. It is hard to speculate on what the make-up of the Brooklyn workshop will be, but I believe the publicity through a non-art institution will help to broaden the reach of who hears about it. The first workshop was administered solely by LUX in London, and as a distributor of artist's moving image, their audience is definitely self-selected and specific. This certainly limited the kinds of participants that could have been part of the workshop. Even if the outreach and sign up had been managed by the Institute of Contemporary Art, the other partner institution, it would have more likely resulted in a broader audience (though still predominantly an art audience) being aware of the workshop being offered. LUX also registered the workshop on a first-come-first-served basis, and with the limited number of slots, it quickly filled up. For the second workshop in Brooklyn, I would request that we receive sign up requests from interested parties and have them send a short paragraph (200 words maximum) stating their background and interest in participating in the workshop. This would allow me to have more control over the make-up of the participants, selecting not for the most experienced members, but looking to fill out the group with a diverse range of interests and backgrounds.

For the second workshop, I'd also change the format to include visits from some of the featured artists and filmmakers. Brett Story, Elisabeth Subrin, Meriem Bennani, and Elizabeth Povinelli, one of the members of the Karrabing Film Collective, are all based in New York. I would invite each of them to join the workshop for the discussion that pertains to their work. This would expand the possibilities for the seminar discussion to include a dialogue with the artists themselves within an intimate setting.

Down the line, my ultimate aim for this project is to find a way to incorporate it into public school curriculum, perhaps through the National Endowment for the Humanities' Summer Seminars and Institutes for K-12 Educators program where public school teachers can be trained to integrate critical documentary films into their curriculum. The two workshops that are designed and enacted through this capstone project will serve as prototypes for this teacher training.

The Operative Image Workshop			
Schedule	Saturday - ICA		Sunday - LUX
10:00-10:30	Introductions	10:00-11:00	
10:30-12:30	Oraib Toukan WHEN THINGS OCCUR 28m Belit Sag AYHAN & ME 14m Harun Farocki IMAGES OF THE WORLD AND THE INSCRIPCION OF WAR 75m (117m)	11:00-11:45	The Informants (61 min) Discussion
12:30-1:30	Discussion	11:45-12:45	Akram Zaatari LETTER TO A REFUSING PILOT 34m Kevin Everson & Claudrena Harold, Sugarcoated Arsenic , 20m (57 min)
1:30-2:00	Lunch	12:45-1:30	Discussion
		1:30-2:00	Lunch
2:00-4:00	Godard & Mieville ICI ET AILLEURS 53m Camilo Restrepo, La Impression de una guerra 27m Lawrence Abu Hamdan RUBBER COATED STEEL 21m Lucy Raven, Curtains , 50m (16m excerpt) (117 m)	2:00-3:30	Basma Alsharif, Home Movies Gaza , 2013, 25 min James N. Kienitz Wilkins, B-ROLL with Andre , 2016, 19 min Laura Huertas Milan, El Laberinto , 21m Stephanie Comilang, Come to me, Paradise 25m (90m)
4:00-5:00	Discussion	3:30-5:00	Discussion

Figure 1. Schedule for The Operative Image Workshop

Critical Visuality Workshop			
Schedule	Day 1		Day 2
	Landscape theory Eric Baudelaire, AKA Jihadi , 2017, 99 min Masao Adachi, AKA Serial Killer , 1969, 86 min (excerpt)		Reenactment Close-up, Abbas Kiarostami, 1990, 98 min Elisabeth Subrin, Shulie , 1997, 37 mins
	Discussion		Discussion
	Brett Story, Prison in Twelve Landscapes , 2016		Shengze Zhu, Present.Perfect , 2019, 124 min
	Discussion		Discussion
	Lunch		Lunch
	Post-colonial / Post-Ethnographic narratives Trinh T. Minh-ha, Reassemblage , 1983, 40 mins Ana Vaz, Occidente , 2015, 15 min Ben Russell, Atlantis , 2015, 23 min Karrabing Film Collective, Wurtharr, Saltwater Dreams , 2016, 30 min		The Personal is Political Meriem Bennani, Party on the CAPS , 2018, 15 min Sky Hopinka, Dislocation Blues , 2017, 13 min Kevin Jerome Everson, Ears, Nose and Throat , 2016, 10 min Arthur Jafa, Love is the message, The message is Death , 2016, 7 min
	Discussion		Discussion

Figure 2. Schedule for Critical Visuality Workshop

Workshop

The Operative Image – approaches to the political in contemporary moving image practices with Aily Nash

Sat 2 - Sun 3 Feb 2019 / 10am - 5pm

ICA & LUX

£65 / £55 (+fees)

[Book online](#)

Part of [Professional Practice](#)

2 February 2019, 10am – 5pm at ICA

3 February 2019, 10am – 5pm at LUX

What can an image do? How does the image represent? How does the image convey a historical narrative or event?

This workshop will focus on viewing and discussing various contemporary artists' moving image works that reflect on contemporary political thought.

We will investigate the complexity of media and consider the production and employment of images to reveal both its power and its highly malleable nature. Formal experimentation and innovation will be central to the works, including the consideration of performance and retelling of histories, the personal perspective, witnessing, the forensic, colonialism, post-ethnography, and issues around representation.

This two-day workshop led by curator Aily Nash is a collaboration between LUX and the Institute of Contemporary Arts. It will take place at the ICA on Saturday 2 February and at LUX on Sunday 3 February (LUX is situated at Waterloo Park Centre, Dartmouth Park Hill, London N19 5JF)

The workshop ticket includes free entry to the public screening *Provisional Presents and Speculative Futures* at the ICA on Saturday 2 February, 7pm.

Lunch will be provided on both days.

[About Aily Nash](#)



Curtains, Lucy Raven, 2014

Figure 3. Announcement for The Operative Image Workshop on LUX website

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