

GHOST STORIES

FILM PROGRAMME
CURATED BY TOBIAS HERING

September 2nd, 2009
(Šiuolaikinio meno centras, Vilnius)

- 18.00 *2006 – 1892 = 114 ans/Jahre*
Germany, 2006, 7 min, video loop installation,
German, French w/ English subtitles
À travers l'encoche d'un voyage dans la
bibliothèque coloniale. Notes pittoresque
Germany, 2009, 25 min, video, German, French
w/ English subtitles
by Brigitta Kuster and Moise Merlin Mabouna
- 18.45 *The Halfmoon Files – A Ghost Story*
Germany, 2007, 87 min, video, German w/
English subtitles
by Philip Scheffner

September 3rd, 2009
(Šiuolaikinio meno centras, Vilnius)

- 18.00 *Invisible City*
Singapore 2007, 59 min, video, Mandarin,
English, Japanese w/ English subtitles
by Tan Pin Pin
- 19.15 *Die leere Mitte (The Empty Center)*
Germany 1998, 57 min, video, German w/
English subtitles
by Hito Steyerl

September 4th, 2009
(G. Jokūbonis Sculpture Studio, Vilnius)

- 19.30 *Lenas Gespenster (Lena's Ghosts)*
Germany, 2007, 35 min, video, Russian
w/ English subtitles
Lenin fou
Germany, 2006/2008, 16 min, video
by bankleer

The ghost is not simply a dead or a missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life.

(Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*)

I don't have the history that my appearance suggests.

(A woman quoted in Grada Ferreira, *Placing the Black, Colonizing the Self*)



Still from *The Halfmoon Files*

Ghost Stories is about “haunting” as a way in which the past remains present in daily social life. The films and videos in this programme provide “a hospitable memory for ghosts out of a concern for justice” and they invite the audience to discuss the idea that haunting is “neither pre-modern superstition nor individual psychosis”, but rather “a generalizable social phenomenon of great import.”

This is using quotes from Avery Gordon’s study *Ghostly Matters* (1997) in which she boldly suggests that “to study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it”. For Gordon, welcoming ghosts to appear and to raise their voices becomes a matter of justice for the reason that haunting is not only “a paradigmatic way in which life is more complicated than those of us who study it have usually granted”, but more acutely a way “in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with”. *Ghost Stories* is therefore not meant to deliver thrills and shivers, but rather to seek out ways to deal with the thrills and shivers that haunt our present societies - whether we like them or not.

A project like this finds itself grappling with what Jacques Derrida has described as the “responsibility of the heirs”. Himself struggling with the *Specters of Marx* (1993), Derrida realized that our mode of existence is fundamentally that of a heritage - whether we want it or not. A heritage – colonialism, communism, fascism, a liberation, a revolution, or more specifically, a name, a robe, a building, a graveyard, a shopping mall, a code of laws, or a coat of arms – always comes down to us as a mystery and as an obligation to filter, criticize, and select among the different possibilities evoked by it. A heritage therefore engages us with the future as much as it does with the past.

The films and videos in this programme are concerned with different contexts and heritages, and they use an eclectic range of narrative strategies and aesthetic approaches. Spanning these differences, however, is a shared scepticism that what is broadly accepted as History at any given moment is really the whole story, or the one that really matters. These works were urged into existence by the assumption that some of the most pertinent and reality-shaping aspects of the past are those which are not represented in the dominating narrative, which are denied, forgotten, repressed, forged, or romanticized. These are the ones most likely to come haunting; they demand visibility where we usually don’t look, because we believe, or have been told, that there is nothing (to see).

Much like ghosts and spectres, films and videos also exist by their ambivalent relation to visibility. When ghosts are things visible but not there, they share this fragile mode of existence with films: visible but not there; or there, yes, but in what sense? In fact (but what does it mean?), Derrida’s description of the spectre can also be read like an accurate characterization of film: “It is the frequency of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible.” It “is, among other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects - on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see. Not even the screen sometimes.”

For a film therefore, to provide a hospitable memory for ghosts does not always mean to share its worn blanket of visibility with them. It can also mean, as we see in these films, to spread this blanket like a veil behind which the ghost will dare to speak, or to dye this blanket the abstract white of a screen. Because there is nothing to see, except this invisibility.

Tobias Hering

Tobias Hering is a free-lance film curator and writer living in Berlin.

2006 – 1892 = 114 ANS/JAHRE

GERMANY, 2006, 7 MIN,
VIDEO LOOP INSTALLATION

À TRAVERS L'ENCOCHE D'UN VOYAGE DANS
LA BIBLIOTHÈQUE COLONIALE.
NOTES PITTORESQUES

GERMANY, 2009, 25 MIN,
VIDEO

BY BRIGITTA KUSTER AND
MOISE MERLIN MABOUNA



Koloniales Bildarchiv (Bildbestand der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft), UB Frankfurt/Main:
Bildnummer: 025-0284-094 | Text auf dem Bild: kein Text | Text auf der Hülle: - | Format Bildträger: 8,5x10 | formale Bemerkung: -
| Entstehungsjahr: - | Entstehungsjahr
Vorlage: - | Photograph: - | Region: / Afrika, Westafrika, Kamerun (?) / Afrika, Deutsch Afrika | Völker: - | Sachgruppe: / Siedlung, Siedlungstopographie, Straße, Allee / Verkehr, Landverkehr, Verkehrswege, Straße | Schlagwort: - | betroffene Person: - | Kommentar Inhalt: - | Infos zum Inhalt: - | Bildbeschreibung: -

Brigitta Kuster and Moise Merlin Mabouna met in 2001 in the asylum seekers camp Zerbst, about an hour outside Berlin, to which Mabouna had been assigned when he came to Germany from Cameroon. Brigitta Kuster was about to make a documentary video with the residents of the camp. The video became the first chapter of an ongoing collaboration between Kuster and Mabouna that investigates the largely concealed heritage of Germany's colonial engagement in Cameroon. The videos shown are the second and third instalments of their project *choix d'un passé: traits d'union* which brings forth works in different media and formats.

Excerpt from *L'avenir est un long passé* (*The future is a long past*), a lecture delivered by Brigitta Kuster during an art residency in Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen (Innsbruck, Austria) in 2008:

"Especially in Germany, the colonial past is barely present. Yet it is not a question of an absence following an active erasure of the traces of this past; rather it is subject to a non-remembering—as if there existed an agreement on its

apparent meaninglessness and insignificance for life lived here in the present. Initially one could say that the presence of such a developed absence might represent a perfect precondition for the manifestation of specters, since the affective conditioning of colonial history nevertheless continues. Or, in other words: in such a situation, formed as it is by latency, the function of spectral intrusion could lie in pointing out this non-remembering, which is simultaneously not a "happy forgetting" in order to bring the German colonial past up to date and locate it. [...]

Specters and the spectral play a central role in *choix d'un passé: traits d'union*. A kind of haunting formed the actual beginning of the project. On the one hand, it arose from the sudden, and at the time unclear, emergence of the memory of the murder of Moïse Merlin Maboua's great-grandfather at the hands of 'the Germans' while we were realizing a video work that dealt with the German/European migration regime: a lost memory returns; its image has survived and can be recognized in something that has seemingly nothing to do with the history of colonialism. Concerning myself, a shock formed the departure point for the project — the shock that I did not have the foggiest idea, the vaguest comprehension in my knowledge, of how to classify this diffuse memory, this history of the ancestor of a friend or, if you will, his potential cultural experiential background. So the issue became somehow important. And, subsequently, voices of those long dead began to emerge, eye witnesses who claim to attest to the murder in



Koloniales Bildarchiv (Bildbestand der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft), UB Frankfurt/Main:
 Bildnummer: 039-7029-21 Text auf dem Bild: -
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 | Photograph: - | Region: / Af-rika, Westafrika,
 Togo/ Afrika, Westafrika, Kamerun/ Afrika,
 Deutsch Afrika | Völker: - | Sachgruppe:
 / Architektur, Gebäudefunktion, Wohnhaus,
 Villa (?) / Wirtschaft, Energie- versorgung,
 Wasserversorgung, Brunnen | Schlagwort: - |
 betroffene Person: - | Kommentar Inhalt: - |
 Infos zum Inhalt: - | Bildbeschreibung: -

their present age, which far exceeds their actual, lived age. These testimonies come from the oral archive. However, my research also took me to libraries and archives. And that is when the 'mess' began. Mess because the specters did not become fewer as a result, but rather they virtually multiplied. For that reason, I think coming up with a story that absorbs and directs a reader by adhering to certain narrative rules, such as the progressive unfolding of sense and meaning, would be an inappropriate form for approaching the question at the beginning of our haunting: What happened? A question, however, definitely in search of an answer and demanding to tell a history/story, yet barely capable of finding a coherent sequential narrative of increasingly more decipherable and developing facts that might join to form the history/story."

Brigitta Kuster was born in Switzerland and lives in Berlin. She is a curator and artist mostly working with video. Moïse Merlin Maboua was born in Cameroon, came to Germany in 2001 and lives in Berlin. Besides his collaboration with Brigitta Kuster he co-authored other video projects and works as a sound technician.

THE HALFMOON FILES – A GHOST STORY

GERMANY, 2007, 87 MIN,
VIDEO

BY PHILIP SCHEFFNER



The Halfmoon Files – A Ghost Story is a documentary essay around the forgotten story of the “Halfmoon Camp”, a German Prisoner of War camp outside Berlin which during WWI had been especially designed for inmates from India and other parts of the “orient”, who were fighting in the ranks of the British troops.

Excerpt from *'I'm already in a sort of tomb': Some thoughts on war, prisoners, and casting shadow*, a lecture given by Avery F. Gordon in Berlin in 2008 relating her sociological studies on haunting to Philip Scheffner's film *The Halfmoon Files*:

"The scientists are not interested in personal stories...The unforeseen is not desired. It endangers scientific comparability and creates additional work....The scientists are not interested in the personal stories of their object of study but they depend on the stories that are told to them. (Philip Scheffner, *The Halfmoon Files*) Almost everything about the beauty and grace of Philip Scheffner's film begins with its standpoint, its unwavering, gentle care for the fate, the destiny, of Mall Singh and the other men. Many other things are discussed and analyzed. Certain mysteries are solved: the Kaiser really did see ghosts, for one. Other voices are raised. But the film would not be as it is, would not be able to carry its story so weightlessly, without this singular and abiding attention, like one would pay

to a loved one or a dear friend, to looking after and settling lost accounts. Storytellers often lend themselves to the stories of others but it is rare for the documentarian to work so hard to reverse the normal scientific relationship of exchange, which more commonly exploits a dependence whose existence and cost remain repressed. *The scientists are not interested in the personal stories of their object of study but they depend on the stories that are told to them.*

What is a ghost? How does he live? How many types of ghosts exist? How does he become a ghost? This is what I will tell you. Lots of ghosts take the form of an old tattered rag lying in the street. It just lies in the street most of the time and people walking by get trapped in it. The ghost is constantly moving about... He can go everywhere. (Bhawan Singh 1917, quoted in *The Halfmoon Files*) What is a ghost? How does he live? How many types of ghosts exist? How does he become a ghost? This is what I will tell you. These are complex questions not easily answerable. One thing I can tell you, though, is that the ghosts themselves will not help you find the answers unless you show respect for their fate, their destiny. For as much as the storyteller might have an interest in or even a need for the ghost story, the ghost always has his or her own designs, a strategy towards us. In *The Halfmoon Files* these designs can be seen (for reasons I'm not competent to explain) in the beautiful rustling trees that sway with time itself. In *The Halfmoon Files* these designs can be heard in certain voices: in the pathos of Mall Singh's recitation, his desire stumbling repetition: He wishes to go to India. He wants to go to India; in Bhavan Singh's griot craft struggling with the new technology, breathless rushing intonation into chanting; in the stray fugitive messages, all staccato; in my favorite theft of the power of the scientist's phonograph. That mad laughter heard after a prisoner exclaims: *The German King is looking well after me. HA HA HA!* That laughter, it seems to me, breaks the scientific relation of exchange that brings to us the voices in the first place, to thus fruitfully endanger scientific comparability, even if also creating a certain amount of additional work (like the film itself!). This laughter registers an ontological and political challenge to the reductionism of rank-ordered species. This laughter boldly invites us into a different relationship to the destiny of the world's peoples than the regime of fate and fatality racism installs and enforces. This laughter is like a breath of fresh air. *The ghost is constantly moving about. He can go everywhere."*

Watching *The Halfmoon Files* and reading Avery Gordon's study *Ghostly Matters* (1997) were both initiating experiences for the film programme "Ghost Stories". A book that called for "a hospitable memory for ghosts out of a concern for justice"; a film that seriously let its own space be haunted by ghosts, sharing with them its thin blanket of visibility. Both were startling, provocative endeavours for their respective surroundings. Calls for a new way to see things which Avery Gordon knew "can make you a bit crazy and imprecise and wary of shorthands". Siding with the ghosts and providing them a hospitable memory can easily compromise one's own visibility in the field where one was once at home; turning this home uncanny, unhomey. Sociology, documentary filmmaking, or political debate. "To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities is to write ghost stories. To write ghost stories implies that ghosts are real, that is to say, that they produce material effects." (Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*)

Excerpt from an interview with Philip Scheffner for the journal of the Festival International du Documentaire (FID) Marseille 2007:

Could you tell us about the discovery of the archive at the beginning of your movie?

During the research for another film project, I came across an article about Indian soldiers who have been detained in a German prisoner of war camp close to Berlin during WWI. German scientists were recording their voices on shellac records, and these records still exist in a Berlin archive. So I went to the archive, took a headphone and listened to some of the recordings. For me, this was like a shock. It felt as if I had encountered an in-between world. I can simply open a drawer, remove a record and get access to a real person, a historical individual, who tells a story. What have been his feelings, when he spoke into the recording funnel? Why does he speak at all? What would he think seeing me – sitting there and listening to his voice? 90 years later. So I wanted to find out more about these voices and why they have been recorded. This was the starting point for the project "The Halfmoon Files" which has different forms of presentation: a lecture, a film and an exhibition project.

Halfmoon Files: A ghost story... ?

Listening to the voices in the archive was a ghostly experience. You are surrounded by voices of dead persons who are telling stories. The people who are speaking are invisible, but their presence can be felt in the air. So to some extent they appear as ghosts. As someone working in documentary filmmaking, I am obviously facing a problem when it comes to ghosts: Ghosts rarely let themselves be filmed, let alone be interviewed. They elude your gaze and go through walls. They are not bound to a particular place or a specific time. They hover somewhere between life and death. They come from the past and break into the present. They always carry a secret with them, which needs to be disclosed. All this creates a very specific narrative: the narrative of a ghost story. There is a ghost – and there is someone who is searching for it, through whom we finally get to know that there exists a ghost at all. The film is somehow following this narrative structure; that is only one reason why I would call it a “ghost story”, or more precisely: a story about how someone is being made a ghost. But the ghost is powerful and not a mere victim. He escapes the control of the narrator. The ghost is like air; he can go everywhere.

Philip Scheffner lives and works as a filmmaker, video and sound artist in Berlin. From 1991 to 1999 he was a member of the Berlin authors and production group “dogfilm” (together with Jörg Heitmann, Bettina Ellerkamp, Ed van Megen, Merle Kröger). In 2001 he founded the production group “pong”, together with Merle Kröger. Since 2001, a main focus of Scheffners’ work lies in the field of experimental music / sound art. - www.pong-berlin.de

INVISIBLE CITY

SINGAPORE 2007, 59 MIN,
VIDEO

BY TAN PIN PIN



Stills from *Invisible City*

“Memories are evoked better when you are at the site itself,” says a young man in Tan Pin Pin’s *Invisible City*. But what if the site transforms more quickly than memory fades? Singapore’s “leap from the Third World into the First” not only caused the old to disappear physically, the present has plastered over the past even in memory. Like an archaeologist Tan Pin Pin collects pieces and fragments of Singapore’s history, visiting and interviewing people who were witnesses to crucial

phases of change. But even though her archaeology is dealing with only the last five decades - since Singapore's independence in 1965 -, the resulting image is full of blanks, cracks, and parts that look like they have been painted over so many times that the original layer is inaccessible.

Invisible City is a documentary about documents and those who seek them, work with them, struggle with them, and sometimes live their lives under their spell. Their individual stories defy integration into a "grand narrative", a collective History. What they all share, however, is the uncanny feeling of being alone with one's memories; of living in a world cleared of all evidence that what has shaped their lives has ever existed.

Tan Pin Pin's director's statement as printed in the catalogue of the Forum, Berlin International Filmfestival 2008:

"I decided to seek out people who, like me, choose Singapore as the topic of their work. I don't mean where Singapore is the setting for their work, but where Singapore is the main subject. I was curious about whether I was the only person who found Singapore interesting enough to spend most of their professional life making films about its unknown aspects. I also wanted to express my gratitude and appreciation to those whose work on Singapore I admire and have benefited from. I sought out photographers, journalists, film directors and archaeologists who were observers and documenters of this city, past and present. The result of our interactions is *Invisible City*. It is a documentary about people who looked for a Singapore for themselves, on their own terms. *Invisible City* is about the basic human need to search, to question, to preserve evidence and to share one's discoveries with others. It is about the need to be remembered for what one has seen and experienced, and about the fear of being forgotten or unnoted. In the end, *Invisible City* documents the fight against the passing of time and the atrophy of memory."

Tan Pin Pin was born in Singapore where she also lives today. She studied film in the United States at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and went on to work as a writer and director of films and videos. In 2004 she was Artist-in-Residence at the University of Technology in Sydney, Australia. She is co-organizer of the Fly By Night video competition aimed at supporting independent filmmaking in Singapore, and a fellow at the Institute of Policy, a Singapore think tank.

DIE LEERE MITTE (THE EMPTY CENTER)

GERMANY 1998, 57 MIN,
VIDEO

BY HITO STEYERL



“And then there’s the fact that I am not seen as a German but rather as somebody exotic, especially by men. I know they want to hear an exotic tale; they want to hear that I am from Africa or Brazil or wherever. I don’t have the history that my appearance suggests. I feel as if I have no history at all, because my history – the German story, the Afro-German story – is not appreciated. They don’t want to hear it, or learn anything about it. I somehow find this question – ‘Where are you from?’ – extremely racist; I find it indiscreet and offensive. I think, it is a silly question, because they know that there are black people who are Germans and that some of these speak better German than they do (laughs), but they render us invisible, they refuse to see us.”

From the account of a woman interviewed by Grada Ferreira in the course of her study “Placing the Black, Colonizing the Self”, quoted from: *Spricht die Subalterne deutsch? (Does the subaltern speak German?)*, edited by Hito Steyerl & Gutiérrez Rodríguez (Münster 2003)

This is not a quote from *The Empty Centre*, but from a book that filmmaker and essayist Hito Steyerl has co-edited and contributed to in 2003. To “not have the history that my appearance suggests” describes an ambivalent feeling of self; ambivalence and alienation produced by a violent gaze and its power to determine what is to appear and what is to remain invisible; what allies with the eye and what eyes close on. What comes out of this is “identity”, often as a shared phantasma, an imposed history, or an empty space organized by exclusion. “To not have the history

that the appearance suggests' speaks about the working of exclusion as it cuts into an individual biography. The phrase, however, also describes a quite common yet often unsettling quality of our cultural landscapes, our inner cities, redeveloped urban sites, buildings, railway tracks, and wide open spaces. What does their appearance suggest? And what has been made to disappear in order to set up this suggestive appearance?

Hito Steyerl's film is a multilayered reflection on the shaping and preserving of a presumably homogenous German identity. The field where she digs and discovers is Potsdamer Platz, a site that had always been a crucial stage for performing Germany's hybrid imaginary, and is today, once again, the self-proclaimed "new heart" of Berlin. Filmed by Steyerl again and again from 1989 till 1997, during a time when it was a massive construction site, the geographical centre of the city becomes transparent as a place where appearance and disappearance go hand in hand, directed by new and old powers, following new and old scripts. Working with overlapping images, cross-fades, and conflicting narratives, the film traces and visualizes the transformations of the "Nachwendejahre" (post-turnover years), a process introduced as: "The empty centre returns." The revitalization of the pre-war city centre, its repopulation and redevelopment, after the reunification of the country, finally. A lot of "re" in this return, a lot of repetition, a lot of ghosts haunting a place whose function as "death strip" has marked the way Berlin and Berliners thought of themselves for three decades. While the death strip has long made it into folklore, Steyerl suggests that other wounds were not so easily touristified and keep reopening no matter how busy builders and architects are wiring up the city's new heart.

Excerpt from: Siegfried Kracauer, *Die Angestellten – Aus dem neuesten Deutschland* (Frankfurt 1929) - *The Salaried Masses: Duty and Distraction in Weimar Germany*, translated by Quintin Hoare (London/New York 1998). Parts of this excerpt are also quoted in *The Empty Centre*:

"An official in a Berlin job centre explains to me how people with physical defects – people who limp, for instance, or even who write lefthanded – are regarded as disabled and are particularly hard to place. They are frequently restrained. The official makes no bones about the reduced marketability of wrinkles and grey hair. I try to learn from him what magical properties a person's appearance must possess in order to open the gates of the firm. The terms 'nice' and 'friendly' recur like stock phrases in his reply. [...] One piece of information that I obtain in a well-known Berlin department store is particularly instructive: 'When taking on sales and office staff', says an influential gentleman from the personnel department, 'we attach most importance to a pleasant appearance.' I ask him what he understands by 'pleasant' – saucy or pretty. 'Not exactly pretty. What's far more crucial is... oh, you know, a morally pink complexion.' I do know. A morally pink complexion – this combination of concepts at a stroke renders transparent the everyday life that is fleshed out by window displays, salary-earners and illustrated papers. Its morality must have a pink hue, its pink a moral grounding. That is what the people responsible for selection want. They would like to cover life with a varnish concealing its far-from-rosy reality. But beware, if morality should penetrate beneath the skin, and the pink be not quite moral enough to prevent the eruption of desires! [...] The same system that requires the aptitude test also produces this nice, friendly mixture; and the more rationalization progresses, the more the morally pink appearance gains ground. It is scarcely too hazardous to assert that in Berlin a salaried type is developing, standardized in the direction of the desired complexion. Speech, clothes, gestures and countenances become assimilated and the result of the process is that very same pleasant appearance, which with the help of photographs can be widely reproduced. A selective breeding that is carried out under the pressure of social relations, and that is necessarily supported by the economy through the arousal of corresponding consumer needs."

Hito Steyerl is a video artist, documentary filmmaker, essayist, and lecturer. Her work is presented in various exhibitions and institutions worldwide. She lives in Berlin.

LENAS GESPENSTER (LENA'S GHOSTS)

GERMANY, 2007, 35 MIN,
VIDEO

LENIN FOU

GERMANY, 2006/2008,
16 MIN, VIDEO

BY BANKLEER



Still from *Lena's Ghosts* (*Lena's Ghosts*)

"If there is some connection between dreams and life then all is well." (Lenin, quoting Pisarev in *What is to be done?* / *Chto delat?*, 1902)

"Our project began by questioning the potential of failed social utopias, and we found that these were aptly symbolized in the spectre of Lenin. In the early 20th century Russia saw numerous attempts to develop new communal forms of society. Anarcho-futurism, annihilation of gender differences, immortality, resurrection of the dead, or biokosmonism were tokens of the time. After the February revolution in 1917, Russia was for a short period of time the 'most democratic country in Europe'. Mass mobilization, the freedom to assemble and the freedom of the press were gaining ground with breathtaking speed. A myriad of mystic speculations, and a wave of experiments aiming to transgress the border between life and art were turning up everywhere. Art was called to the duty to 'make the world complete'. The time for a merely symbolical art was over; instead the whole of society became and object for artistic creation. This was taken to the extreme demand to transform life into a museal eternity and to overcome the finality of death. Lenin is the most prominent example for this: his brain was preserved in 30,953 micro slices and

the mummified corpse has been exhibited in a glass sarcophagus in a mausoleum in Moscow since 1924. His body functions as a 'precious reliquia' of the 'propaganda for the materialistic view on the development of men's creative potential'. In order to get in touch with Lenin's ghost-like incarnation, we headed towards Samara, together with Alex Filutya, a Russian friend and translator."

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"In 1924, precisely on January 27th, the coffin of the Russian revolution is carried to its grave on the shoulders of Stalin and – still – Sinowjew, who are leading this enormous mourning march side by side. It's carried to its grave, but not buried; instead, it is elevated and presented in a palace hastily erected at 30 degrees below zero, a wooden hut right in the centre of the Red Square. Inside the coffin, scarcely protected against the weather and accompanied by thousands of communists, lies the corpse of the great revolutionary, as if it was the corpse of the revolution itself, the corpse whose name is written in capital letters on the wall of this first, improvised mausoleum, LENIN. Immortal victim of a more or less natural death, whose still mortal body already shows signs of decay. The skin colour is fading to a brownish grey; the whole body is covered with death-marks the colour of parchment, and the lips have already parted by one millimetre. (...)

Crawling from this tomb a specific mourning policy, sanctioned by the state, will take its departure. A specific mourning policy sanctioning who must be mourned and who shall not be mourned by any means. A memory policy erasing memories like names from books and faces from pictures. A mourning policy, therefore, with the power not only to prevent a life after death, but also to delete the life before death. It was to culminate in a bombastic finale during Stalin's burial in 1953, and had one of its peak events in the mourning march for Kirov in 1934, lined by torches and flags, scarlet red velvet and palm trees. Dramatically kissing his former comrade on the forehead, Stalin would move everyone watching to tears when in the ensuing silence he whispered into the dead's ear: 'Farewell, dear friend, we will avenge your death' – and the terror began. (...)

The end of history means nothing less but that today – after 1989 – by far the larger part of the future already lies in the past. It means that the slogan (coined by Popper) that 'the world to defend might not be the best of all possible worlds, but the best of all existing ones' has become the state of affairs everywhere. Compared to the lies about happiness mindlessly repeated in Stalinist praise, one might even sympathize with this predicament. The slogan, however, despite its attempt to present the rhetoric of compromise as cold-headed rationality, is suffering from a devastating blow of sadness. It is not satisfaction that makes them stop, but the lack of courage to walk on. Movement is useless. This is why the victory roars of the Cold War winners aren't convincing; there is no joy in them. They feed on embittered mischief, rather than on relief over a threat defeated or a joy shared with the formerly suppressed (Russia's nouveaux riches?) about their newfound bliss. It is the pathetic contention of those who had confined themselves to home grinding their teeth in jealousy, while their sisters had ventured out into sea. Thus victory itself is marked by a defeat that preceded it. Anti-communism didn't win, but it has turned itself in - in to the fatality of fate itself. Anti-communists don't win, they give up: their dreams. (...)"

Bini Adamczak

Both texts are excerpts translated from the publication *Lenas Gespenster (Lena's ghosts)*, edited by bankleer on the occasion of the exhibition by the same name at Motorenhalle Dresden, 2008.

"'We should dream!' I wrote these words and became alarmed. I imagined myself sitting at a 'unity conference' and opposite me were the 'Rabocheye Dyelo' editors and contributors. Comrade Martynov rises and, turning to me, says sternly: 'Permit me to ask you: has an autonomous editorial board the right to dream without first soliciting the opinion of the Party committees?' He is followed by Comrade Krichevsky who (philosophically deepening Comrade Martynov, who long ago rendered Comrade Plekhanov more profound) continues even more sternly: 'I go further. I ask, has a Marxist any right at all to dream, knowing that according to Marx, mankind always sets itself the tasks it can solve and that tactics is a process of the growth of Party tasks which grow together with the Party?'

The very thought of these stern questions sends a cold shiver down my spine and makes me wish for nothing but

a place to hide in. I shall try to hide behind the back of Pisarev. 'There are rifts and rifts,' wrote Pisarev of the rift between dreams and reality. 'My dream may run ahead of the natural march of events or may fly off at a tangent in a direction in which no natural march of events will ever proceed. In the first case my dream will not cause any harm; it may even support and augment the energy of the working men. (...) There is nothing in such dreams that would distort or paralyse labour-power. On the contrary, if man were completely deprived of the ability to dream in this way, if he could not from time to time run ahead and mentally conceive, in an entire and completed picture, the product to which his hands are only just beginning to lend shape, then I cannot at all imagine what stimulus there would be to induce man to undertake and complete extensive and strenuous work in the sphere of art, science, and practical endeavour. (...) The rift between dreams and reality causes no harm if only the person dreaming believes seriously in his dream, if he attentively observes life, compares his observations with his castles in the air, and if, generally speaking, he works conscientiously for the achievement of his fantasies. If there is some connection between dreams and life then all is well.'


Excerpt from Vladimir Lenin, *What is to be done? / Chto delat?*, 1902



Still from *Lenin Fou*

bankleer are Karin Kasböck and Christoph Leitner, a Berlin-based artist group whose work combines video, performance, and re-enactment to visualize social transformations under the reign of capitalism, their mechanisms of exclusion and their often devastating results.

Lenas Gespenster and *Lenin fou* are two videos from a larger body of work dealing with the symbolic meaning of Lenin and the potential of utopian practices today.



This booklet was printed on the occasion of *Ghost Stories - The haunting presence of the past in contemporary films and videos* presented in Vilnius in September 2009.

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Vilnius

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Vilnius