

## Reseach Plan

Christoph Oeschger, 25<sup>th</sup> June 2021

### How to take a Picture of Wind? - How to Survey the World with Images.

*The only “objective” truth that photographs offer is the assertion that somebody or something... was somewhere and took a picture. Everything else, everything beyond the imprinting of a trace, is up for grabs “*  
Allan Sekula

*“The camera is just as capable of lying as the typewriter. “*  
Bertolt Brecht, *War Primer* (1955)

Photographic images have been and are often used as proof of reality. If there is a photo or a film, there must be something in front of the camera, and that must be true. This understanding of images can be observed in the use of images in photojournalistic contexts, but also in the use of photography / film in forensics and science film / science photography. The digital revolution completely shifted these prerequisites with the handling of photographic images. In some disciplines, such as jurisprudence, the photographic image is questioned as evidence and replaced by digital models or surveying films. Digital photography and digital film have made it much easier to manipulate images to the same extent that it has also become easier to use cameras as surveying instruments and to obtain (apparently) objective data from photographic images (moving and still), because images are no longer merely images but rather a set of data.

The boundaries between the concepts of Logic and Image described by Peter Galison become completely blurred, since each image becomes a (possible) “Surveying Image”<sup>1</sup>.

The image data enables machines to evaluate images and make autonomous decisions based on them, images then become operative images. This implies that in our time every digital picture is a “Surveying Image“ and through that a possible operational image.

In this logic new imaging technologies were developed mainly for military purposes, but are used now from marketing analysis, to the new division of land and sea, social media up to the use of private pictures for surveillance purposes. Remarkably, most of these technologies are based on existing knowledge from the 19th and the early 20th century, such as photogrammetry, which was developed as a technique for creating maps. This is especially interesting because maps can be seen as a first form of “Surveying image”. But not just the used technologies appear in different forms, but also the power structures where they are used are often similar. This new use of images also shapes our perception of the world. My practical work spans a loose web about the use of „Surveying Images“. My work – practical and the written part- has no claim to completeness of the subject, but intended to show exemplary the influence of scientific images but also that every image that is used now as a “Surveying Image” on our perception of the world.

### Windtunnel as a starting point. And about “Luftbilder/Lichtbilder”

I am part as an artistic researcher in Florian Dombois research project “Lufbilder/ Lichtbilder“ (Images of Air/Images of Light: The Moving Image and the Camera as a Scaling and Analytical Instrument) where the wind tunnel is the central place of knowledge acquisition.

My project starts with a wind tunnel, an experimental setup that has hardly changed since its invention, an experimental setup in which moving images were used for scientific purposes for the first time, an experimental setup in which was important for the development of moving images.

This is also why my PHD is structured somewhat differently than that of my colleagues at KuvA. I am part of the team around Florian Dombois` research project „Luftbilder/ Lichtbilder“ („Images of Air/Images of Light: The Moving Image and the Camera as a Scaling and Analytical Instrument „), where the wind tunnel is the central place of knowledge acquisition. It is from the questions arising from this project that I develop my own research, which I pursue and explore through my artistic practice.

The main aim of “Luftbilder/Lichtbilder“ is to recreate historical experiments in the wind tunnel and create an archive and historiography of the science and technology films in the wind tunnel. Both old and new cameras are used to readjust the experiments. The further developments of the cameras allow new insights, new findings are emerging. This means that the newly generated images and the predecessor images contradict each other in terms of the knowledge gained through them. This opens up a conflict in our consideration of images and in our claim to truth that we have towards images.

On the one hand, (film) material that was created in the context of my work for Dombois` research project flows into my own artistic projects. On the other hand, there are theoretical questions that arise or have already arisen during my work in the wind tunnel. These questions are particularly exciting for my personal research, as the wind tunnel can be seen as one of the birthplaces of the „Surveying film” These questions are negotiated in my first film “Memories of a Past Future”

I want to make this examination of the scientific image and the image as a surveying instrument productive for my artistic research. For my PhD, three films have been made so far, one further film is in production, and beyond that I am working on a photo series about the industrialization of the Arctic and the role science and their imaging technologies play .

The planned set of works included in my PhD project is:

- 1) 3-Channal HD Video “Memories of a Past Future”, preexamination in 2019
- 2) Essayfilm “Unlearning Flow”, preexamination in 2019
- 3) Essayfilm “2°”, is proposed for preexamination in 2020
- 4) Photo series and textes from „The other side of Ice“on, first part examined with this dossier
- 5) Essayfilm “ANTIBODY!” (working title), work in progress

Thematically, the works seem to be very far apart at first glance, ranging from self-produced images of flow experiments, the historical use of film for scientific purposes, to cognitive vision (Erkennendes Sehen) and today’s surveying (and redistribution) of the sea floor in the Arctic. However, I am much less interested in pursuing a research question posed as a problem with the outcome as a solution than in defining a field in which my artistic work moves. The basis of my research is always the artistic work, which then forms the narration of my written work. Common to all topics is the respective use of the image as a measuring and narrative instrument and the power structures resulting from that use.

### Problems?

<sup>1</sup> The term „Surveying Image“ is a direct translation of the German word „Messbild“. An image in which of the representation of something is in the foreground but rather the image itself provides numerical values, i.e. measurement data. “Surveying Image” can therefore also be thought of as a prototype for the „Operative Image“. The „Surveying Image“ delivers data but does not always trigger a direct action by machine or human as the “Operative Image” does. But in this sense, „Operative Images“ are always first „Surveying Image“.

## No Problems as a Method

### 1. Problem

With my written thesis am not following a classical research question, foremost, because I think art is not the proper discipline to provide answers than raising questions and open up a poetic realm to approach subjects differently than natural sciences and the humanities can do. For me, artistic research is more that I have to focus on my own discipline's strength rather than imitate other fields. From this, a key question arose, who I am writing for? And who am I researching for? And with whom do I share the outcome of the research, and in what way? For whom is this research outcome of use?

But there is also the understanding that I – as an artist- cannot solve problems through art or provide answers 2.

### 2. Form

The text „Writing Cannot Tell Everything“ by Jan Beatens<sup>3</sup> provided me with the tool to develop an idea how writing in artistic research could be productive for my research my practical work but also the written thesis. Beatens proposes a form what he calls mixt. A form of writing that includes different text formats that allows to work in form with intertextuality and the montage of different ways of writing. Including theory without losing the poetic realm.

My written thesis will be structured after the 5 body of works I submitted or will submit for pre examinations, every work will be one chapter.

### 1. Memories of a Past Future

### 2. Unlearning Flow

### 3. 2°

### 4. The Other Side of Ice (This pre examination)

### 5. Antibody (submitted in spring 2022)

For every of this chapters will be an introduction, the film text or the text belonging to the work, a glossary and a short talk between me and another artist about my work.

<sup>2</sup> «Art with some T», Florian Dombois

<sup>3</sup> «This chapter addresses the topic of the mixte (English: the mixt), a type of writing that combines very different, sometimes perhaps even incompatible types of writing, such as fiction and non-fiction or, in a more singular manner, fiction and writing on fiction (the term of mixt has been coined by author and theoretician Jean Ricardou). However, the present chapter does not just present or examine Ricardou's theory and practice of the mixt but takes it as its starting point to reflect on the status of the author's self-commentary in a research-oriented fictional practice. More precisely, the chapter makes a plea, not for the merger but the articulation (and thus the relative separation) of fiction and writing on fiction in practice-based artistic research.» Jan Baetens in Writing Cannot Tell Everything

<sup>3</sup>«Labyrinth, Ein Buch in vier Vorträgen», Olaf Nicolai & Jan Wenzel, Leipzig/Zürich, 2012 (German version)

<sup>4</sup>«Labyrinth, Four times through the labyrinth», Olaf Nicolai & Jan Wenzel, Zürich/Leipzig 2013

«Opaque Presence Manual of Latent invisibilities», Zürich/Berlin, 2010

The individual works are linked to each other primarily via the glossary. Keywords are repeated in different chapters. The text work loosely links the works with each other and thus creates a field in which the works move rather than a fixed scientific structure.

This is in my opinion achieved most helpfully when I as an artist provide a collection of raw materials . An example of this kind of working method is Olaf Nicolais book «Labyrinth»<sup>3</sup>, the artist book by Knowbotic Research «Opaque Presence Manual for latent invisibilities»<sup>4</sup> or the Chris Markers «Commentaires»<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>«Labyrinth, Ein Buch in vier Vorträgen», Olaf Nicolai & Jan Wenzel, Leipzig/Zürich, 2012 (German version)

<sup>4</sup>«Labyrinth, Four times through the labyrinth», Olaf Nicolai & Jan Wenzel, Zürich/Leipzig 2013

«Opaque Presence Manual of Latent invisibilities» Knowbotic Research, Zürich/Berlin, 2010

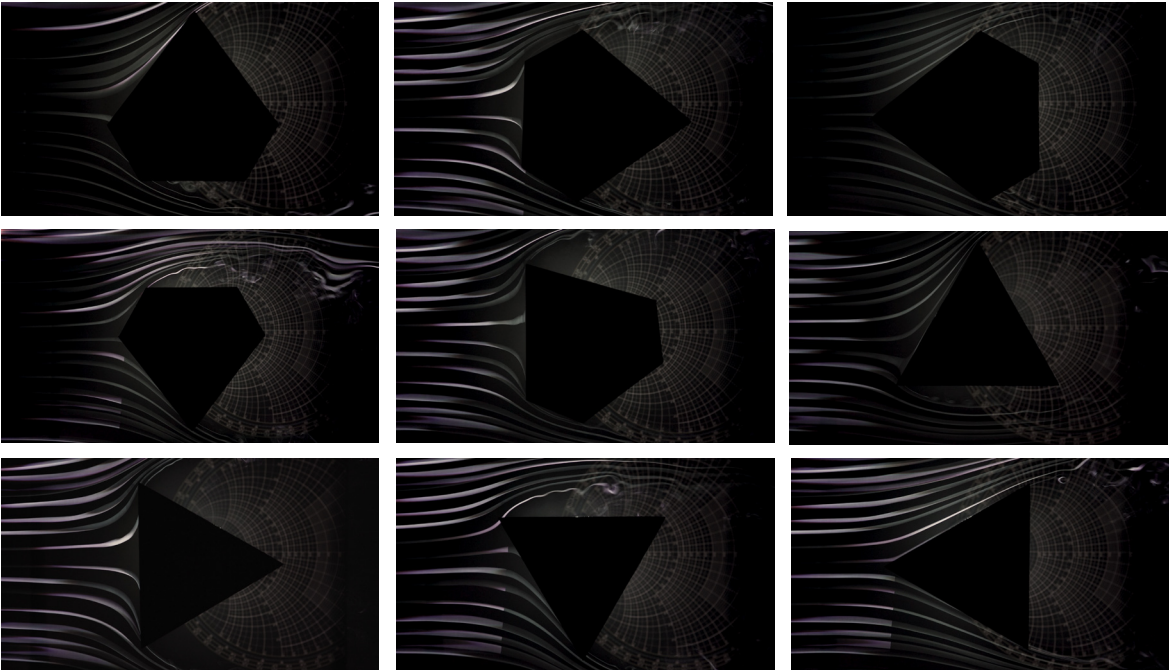
<sup>5</sup>«Commentaires», Chris Marker, 1961 Paris

Memoires of a Past Future

If you believe the film scientist Bazin, the origins of cinema can be found in science films. Due to the inadequacy of the eye in perceiving fast sequences, flow researchers took advantage of (static) photographic images very early on and with Marey’s chronophotography it was also the wind tunnel that played a certain role in the invention of cinema. The photographic image was from the beginning an important instrument in gaining knowledge about the behavior of fluids. In countless essays, Marey praised the advantages of this “graphic method“, which, according to him, made it possible in the laboratory to make the phenomena of life speak, or better, draw “in their own language“. The images created in this laboratory situation claim to depict “reality“, while their emergence in an artificial situation makes them highly abstract at the same time. The pictures created in the beginning of the 1900 had a great influence on avant-garde art movements such as the Cubists and later also on the Futurists. The films from the wind tunnel constitute the basis for the use of images as a „measuring instrument“ in the 19th century, but the technical means of scientifically evaluating the images was missing.

In the wind tunnel of the ZHdK we produced various film clips in the course of the last year under similar conditions as Marey. This material forms the basis for my three-channel video installation “Memories of a Past Future”. The film was first shown in November 2019 in conjunction with “Unlearning Flow“. In the exhibition “Filme des Windes” at the Kunstraum Lüneburg, where it was pre-examined.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/387687534>  
PW: greenland





2°

At the beginning of the film, first-person narrator asks, how she might manage to get a picture of global warming. She starts a journey through Alpine Switzerland, starts researching in archives, travels to research stations, but the representative image of global warming always escapes her. Through the various stories the narration approaches global warming through film and images.

At the same time, the film deals with the idealized landscape of alpine Switzerland through the touristic Gaze that reflects our relationship with nature.

A landscape that has been idealized and exaggerated again and again, which has also led to the appropriation of the right-wing parties. But the alpine landscape is also a landscape that is strongly affected by global warming. The warming of recent years is becoming increasingly obvious. My goal was to get a different approach to this landscape through various thought experiments. To break up old patterns and to come to a new landscape picture.

The film sound is based on recordings made for the MELTING LANDSCAPES research project at ETH Zurich. Sound recordings of the melting Mortaratsch glacier. The artist and musician Fabian Gutscher cut a sound track from this raw material, adding sounds of melting ice.

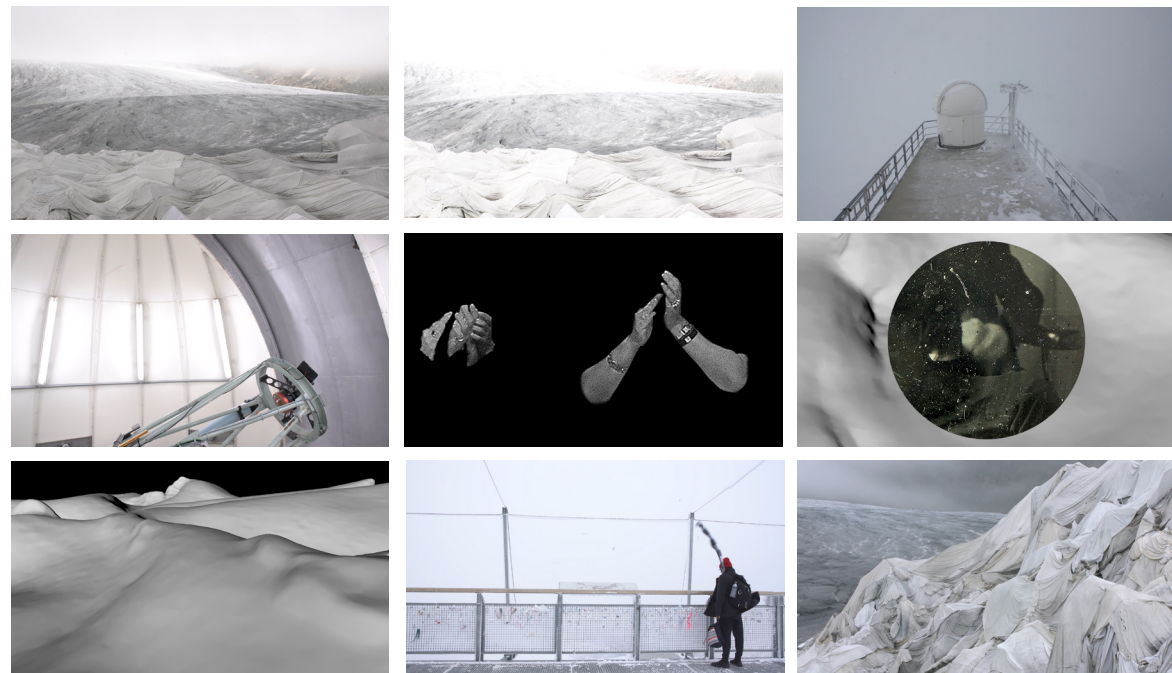
From August 2020 to January 2021 the film is exhibited together with some tableaux and research images from the series in three different museums in China (Design Society, Shenzen, Modern Art Base, Shanghai, Three Shadows Photography Centre, Beijing) an exhibition about the landscape of Switzerland. The work was produced remotely. I've sent the data and the instructions so that my physical presence is not required. I am still waiting for the installation shots.

The film was completed by July 2020 and will be submitted to various festivals such as, Visions du Réel, Nyon and others.

2° is one of the first cpress films productions; an agency, an exchange platform and a production company for artist films I founded together with Christof Nüssli according to our publishing house cpress.

Screening Link: <https://vimeo.com/435678590>

PW: aletsch



## Unlearning Flow

“Machining of Steel”, “Mating of Two Males”, “Dumdum Bullet Effect” and “String Figures” played by the Inuit, the Krahô or the Taulipang in Guyana exemplify that the Institute for Scientific Film (IWF) in Göttingen aimed at capturing all the movement processes of the world on celluloid. The biological, technical and ethnological films that the IWF produced, archived and distributed worldwide were supposed to be “documents of reality”. Without using commentary, they should make movements visible, storable and re-analyzable at any time.

Can there be pictures that are more real than others? The essay film “unlearning flow” examines both National Socialist prehistory and the legacy of the IWF. It reveals the ideology of the distant, objectifying camera view and also the active white washing of the Institute's history after World War II. In addition, it establishes a link to the history of the building in which the institute was located until 1961. After the closure of the IWF, the building first became an object of speculation and then a shelter for refugees.

With their film, filmmaker Christoph Oeschger and the historians of media and knowledge, Sarine Waltenspül and Mario Schulze, touch only the tip of the iceberg: (war) research with film, the (re-)production of colonial power relations and the creation of (a lack of) knowledge through film.

The film was produced in July 2019 and released in November 2019 in conjunction with “Memories of a Past Future“. In the exhibition “Filme des Windes” at the Kunstraum Lüneburg, where it was pre-examined. The film was also shown at “Kurfilmtage Winterthur” and “Kasseler Dokfest” where it was nominated for the newcomer award the “Goldene Schlüssel”

Screening Link: <https://vimeo.com/388229890>

PW: Tiertaeenze



## Timeframe of the PhD

- From October 2020 to May 2021 finishing all the studies at the Uniarts.
- April - June 2021 Part of the Exhibition “Zirkuliere!” at Helmhaus Zürich,
- July 2021 filming in Turino for Antibody!
- September 2021 visit of Marum (Bremen), Alfred Wegener Instiute (Bremerhaven), Geus (Copenhagen), Cinia Arctic Subsea Cable (Helsinki) (all depending on the development around the Corona pandemic.
- January 2022 finalising the film Antibody!, pre - examination
- January 2022 first version of the written part of the thesis
- Conference in Zurich. To be specified later.
- February 2022 pre - examination of Antibody! after fixing a screenings in one of the museums
- May 2022 last pre - examination Palais de Rumine Lausanne

## References:

“Who does the lamp communicate with? The mountain? The fox?”  
*Walter Benjamin*

## Videos/Films:

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All Watched Over by Machines Full of Loving Grace, Adam Curtis 2011 (GB)  
Auge Maschine II, Harun Farocki 2002 (DE)  
Expression of the Hands, 1997, Harun Farocki (DE)  
The Forgotten Space, Noel Burch/ Allan Sekula 2010 (AT)  
Gambling, Gods and LSD, Peter Mettler, 2002, (CAN/CH)  
Hypernormalisation, Adam Curtis 2016 (GB)  
Leviathan, Casting-Taylor/Paravel, 2012 (USA)  
The Man with a Movie Camera, Dziga Vertov  
La Jetée, Chris Marker 1962 (FR)  
Picture of Light, Peter Mettler, 1994, (CAN/CH)  
The Radiant, The Otolith Group (2012)  
Sans Soleil, Chris Marker 1983, (FR)  
Le Petit Soldat, Jean Luc Godard, 1960

## LPs

Ludwig Berger, MELTING LANDSCAPES (Field recordings, 2016-2018)

## Artist Books/Exhibition Catalogues:

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Bilderatlas MNEMOSYNE, Aby Warburg, Ostfildern 2020 (new edition)  
Fish Story, Allan Sekula, London 2017 (first published 1995)  
A Long Time Between Suns, The Otolith Group, Frankfurt 2009  
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Prospecting Oceans, Stephanie Hessler und Armin Linke, Boston 2019  
Rules Without Exception, Lewis Baltz, Zürich 1993  
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## Essays/Text:

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Art with Some T? A 35-Minute Essay, Florian Dombois  
The New Dark Age, James Bridle 2018  
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The Language of Things, Hito Steyerl, 2006  
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Mare Liberum, Hugo Grotius, 1609  
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Nichts als Sprache, (Adaptierte deutsche Fassung des in Grief 3 (2016) 193 ff. erschienen Artikels »Je n'ai plus que ma voix« Observer la relation entre l'État et le droit avec Mariella Mehr et les victimes des placements administratifs en Suisse.) Ruegger Vanessa 2016  
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Surface, Interface, Subface. Three Cases of Interaction and One Concept, Frieder Nike 2008  
Die Sprache der Dinge. Walter Benjamin und die dokumentarische Form als Übersetzung. Hito Steyerl 2006  
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Written on the Body, Susan Zieger in Cabinet Magazine  
Writing Cannot Tell Everything, Jan Baetens

## Radioplays/Podcasts

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Ammer, Andreas: Bayrischer Rundfunk; „Austern und Aura, einge Zutaten zur Philosophie des Fressens“  
Bridle, James: BBC Radio 4, Episodes 1-4, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000458l>