Sisters!

Making Films, Doing Politics

Petra Bauer

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An Exploration in Artistic Research

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This dissertation includes four films that are distributed via sistersmakingfilms@gmail.com.

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Choreography for the Giants
(Petra Bauer and Marius Dybwad Brandrud, 2013)

Acknowledgements

This dissertation consists of two main parts: a text and the four films *Sisters!* (2011), *Mutual Matters* (2012), *Choreography for the Giants* (2013) and *Conversations: Stina Lundberg Dabrowski Meets Petra Bauer* (2010). In the process of writing the text and making the films, I discussed the contents and form of the dissertation with many colleagues and friends. Our conversations were enjoyable, challenging, unexpected, stimulating and indispensible for my work. While the films were created in a medium that I have years of experience in, the opposite is true of the text. My limited writing experience has at times led me on detours, some of which have been unexpectedly rewarding, while others just made me feel lost. However, whenever I complained, support and constructive criticism from colleagues and

friends gave me the energy to go on and approach the issues and the material in new ways. The finished text is the outcome of generous and tireless contributions of knowledge, experiences, opinions, comments, reflections, thoughts, encouragement and support from many different people. Without them this dissertation project would not have been possible.

Introduction

I am sitting in an archive in central London watching a film. The first frame of the film is black with white text on it. It reads: 'November 1970'. The camera pans slowly over the face of a woman. The image is grainy and in black-and-white. Fragments of a text are superimposed onto the face. 'Night, Week, 12 pounds, Cover.' Cut to black. A woman in a white cleaner's uniform is sitting at a desk. The clothes, the furniture, as well as the quality of the film itself suggest a time other than my own. A clapperboard enters the frame. A male voice: 'Take one'. The woman picks up the phone. Cut to black. She sits with the receiver held to her ear. Nothing is said. Cut to black. The woman: 'I have bent the bone, and I could hardly use it tonight.' Only now do I notice that she has a bandage around her hand. Cut to black. An office environment. A lone woman

in a cleaner's uniform and plastic gloves dragging a rubbish bag. A male voice: 'I think that in terms of employees we are about the fifth largest cleaning company in London.' Cut to black. A close-up of the man whose voice we heard previously. He continues: 'It is such a vast industry now. We have naturally been approached by these large organisations to sell to them.' Someone asks: 'How many employees do you have?' The man answers: 'We have only about 1,200.' Cut to black. A woman dusting a desk. Cut to black. The same room, but now there are two people dusting. Cut to black. I am aware of the rhythm of the film now. All the scenes are very short and between every scene there are a few seconds of black screen. Before I am drawn into the plot, the scene is again interrupted by a black frame. The same principle does not seem to apply to the sound, even though it is also conveyed in a fragmentary form. More close-ups of hands dusting a desk. Cut to black. The series of clips continues with short fragmentary sequences showing women cleaning, alternating with black screen. A woman is scrubbing a toilet, while at the same time I hear parts of a conversation. A man: 'We live in a competitive world.' Some frames later I hear a female voice: 'We had to make politics that came out of our own experience of childhood. We had to make politics about how we have been conditioned to be feminine.' The voice falls silent and the woman in the frame continues to empty bins in the deserted office.

This film fragment is the introduction to the film *Nightcleaners* from 1975, made by the Berwick Street Film Collective.[1] The film is about female night cleaners in London and the campaign that was started together with the women's movement in order to improve the cleaners' working conditions. In the film, women's work is politicised by relating it to the prevailing political conditions of the time and its patriarchal structures. Power relations are made visible: between the employee and the employer, working class and middle class, men and women, and cleaning women and activists within the women's movement.

I saw *Nightcleaners* for the first time in London in 2009. I was there because the art institution The Showroom had invited me to develop an art project.[2] I had long been interested in the ability of film to have political effect, which in turn awakened my interest in collective and feminist filmmaking. I already knew that in the 1970s there had been several documentary filmmakers in the UK who had used film as an instrument for participation in political debate and action. I knew that as part of this they had wanted to voice the concerns of marginalized groups and tell forgotten and hidden stories – narratives that differed from prevailing conventions in the UK. I also knew that some of these filmmakers had joined forces, forming film collectives to fight for social and political change. But I didn't know *how* the filmmakers had intended to tell these stories, nor what it entailed for the actual film production and the choice of aesthetic strategies. Neither did I know how they had intended to change the prevailing conditions and power relations. In order to acquire more knowledge of this and thus broaden my understanding of what can constitute a political film practice, I proposed an artistic research project to The Showroom in which I took a closer look at a number of British film collectives that had used film to make politics.

Nightcleaners was one of the first films I saw when I started looking for material about and by British documentary film collectives that had been active in the UK in the 1970s. The film touched me and raised my expectations of the other films that I hoped to see. But, as it turned out, *Nightcleaners* set itself apart from the other films. Most of the other films I subsequently researched had a clear political message that was visualized with realistic aesthetic strategies.[3] *Nightcleaners,* on the other hand, mixed social content and a political message with experimental aesthetic strategies.[4] In addition, the film avoided giving clear answers to the political problems it presented. There were of course other films that combined an experimental approach with overt political content, for example the films of Lis Rhodes, Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen.[5] They were, however, produced by individual filmmakers and thus fell outside the parameters of this particular study. Apart from the fact that *Nightcleaners* was produced by a collective, there was also something else that particularly caught my attention. Already when it was released in 1975 it led to discussion among filmmakers, film theorists and political activists regarding its choice of topic in combination with the experimental aesthetic strategies. Since the film's frag-mentary form makes it demanding to watch, one of the topics of discussion was which audience the film was in fact meant for. The cleaners? Members of the women's movement? Politicians? Filmmakers? Critics and intellectuals? And in what way was the film in fact political?

I examined the film from all perspectives. I reflected on the strategies that the filmmakers had used and thought about what these strategies entailed, what they did and whether this could be described as political action. In the course of the project I returned to this particular film many times.

Film as Political Action

When I write that I am interested in the ability of film to act politically I am not primarily referring to the so-called realpolitikal discussions that take place in parliament, within political parties or other societal institutions that are responsible for making or changing laws, shaping ideologies and doctrines or regulating society in different ways. Instead I mean the space that emerges when we relate to one another through speech and action, that is what the philosopher Hannah Arendt called 'the space of appearance'. According to Arendt it is in this space that we form our political communities. The existence of the political space (the space of appearance) presupposes that people can act and speak, but also that the person who acts – the so-called actor or agent – can be seen and heard by other speaking and acting people. The space of appearance, which consists of many different positions and perspectives, is unpredictable; we can never anticipate what will happen there.[6] For Arendt it is the very plurality and unpredictability that are the fundamental conditions for political action.[7]

> [But] unlike the spaces, which are the work of our hands, [the space of appearance] does not survive the actuality of the movement which brought it into being, but disappears not only with the dispersal of men […] but with the disappearance or arrest of the activities themselves. Where people gather together, it is potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever. […]. What first undermines and then kills political communities is loss of power and final impotence; and power cannot be stored up and kept in reserve for emergencies, like the instruments of violence, but exists only in its actualization. […] Power is actualized only where word and deed have not parted company, where words are not empty and deeds not brutal, where words are not used to veil intentions but to disclose realities, and deeds are not used to violate and destroy but to establish relations and create new realities.[8]

Can we speak of film as political action in the sense that Arendt intends in the paragraph above? That is to say: does the potential agency of a film consist in the creation of a space of appearance of the kind she describes, in which communities are enabled and societal changes can be perceived in their potentiality?[9] What, in that case, are the aesthetic instruments that film uses to constitute that space? These are two of this dissertation's central questions. Before I address these questions in more detail I would like to provide some examples of how film as a political practice has been discussed among other influential theorists and filmmakers through history. The French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard, for example, claimed that there was a difference between making films about politics and making film politically. In his eyes, making film politically required that one also took into consideration how the film was produced and that one reflected on the choice of aesthetic strategies.[10] The

cultural theorist Walter Benjamin in turn argued, very much inspired by the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, that a political film must include a learning situation of some kind. A non-political film can only show political force but cannot demonstrate a method that could be used in order to achieve societal change.[11] For the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, to name another example, the relationship with the audience was the most important aspect of a political film.[12] With these short references I want to highlight the fact that different filmmakers and theoreticians choose different aspects of a film project or a film when describing its ability to constitute a political act: some stress the production conditions, others the aesthetic strategies, still others the contents or the distribution. The different approaches need not exclude one another.

There are of course also a large number of contemporary filmmakers and artists who use film to engage in politics, both formally and in terms of content, and who are important points of reference for my own work. These include Chantal Akerman, John Akomfrah, Ursula Biemann, Black Audio Film Collective, Harun Farocki, Amar Kanwar, Renate Lorenz/Pauline Boudry, Avi Mograbi, Steve McQueen, the Otolith Group, Anja Kirschner/David Panos, Lina Selander, Hito Steyerl, Peter Watkins and Akram Zaatari, to name a few. Together these groups and individuals create a complex discourse about the ability of film to act politically. What they have in common is, however, that the political narrative that emerges in the films is constituted in the intersection between the films' contents and their aesthetic strategies. In other words, the films' imagery and sound are meticulously constructed and composed in relation to the contents, and are hence impossible to separate from the whole without reducing the power of the films and what they are in fact capable of doing when they are shown in the public realm. For example, in Hito Steyerl's most recent films, such as *The Factory of the Sun* (2015) and *Liquidity Inc.* (2014), there is a discussion of the political processes and imagery that today's digital, fragmentary condition engenders. Steyerl does not only use words to discuss the political implications of a digital world, but implements digitally generated imagery that in its fragmentary form is tied together in a montage, and that can be compared to a digital wave. As a viewer I am flooded with sound, light, words, simulated violence and life stories. I am quickly transported between different states, continents and narratives, without necessarily understanding how the fragments fit together. I would liken the flow of imagery to a digital tsunami that forces me to grab hold of whatever I can to create my own cohesion, generate connections and construct a narrative. The aesthetics of the films function like a digital force of attraction that makes it impossible for me as a viewer to tear myself away from the screen – I stay in the hope of seeing a denouement, a resolution that, however, never comes. I am seduced and carried away by the digital wave, and catch myself intently and curiously looking at the same images over and over again. To separate the films' aesthetics from their contents would be to reduce Steyerl's films to uninteresting, incoherent and shallow stories about the dealings of individuals.

In the 1986 film *Handsworth Songs* by the Black Audio Film Collective, it is also the conscious assemblage of imagery linked to music and words that creates the critical political narrative of black people's experiences in British

society. Moving images from the UK in the 1960s that express the expectations of migrants for a better life in the new country are juxtaposed with images from the riots in 1980s Handsworth and London. Again it is precisely the conscious composition of imagery and sound that gives the story its political form.[13]

In this dissertation I will not expand further on these two film practitioners. However, I will refer to films made by Chantal Akerman, Avi Mograbi and Peter Watkins. Hence, even though only a few of the filmmakers named above are discussed in the text I want to stress their significance to my thinking and my own filmmaking practice.

My research questions regarding the ability of film to act are specifically based on Hannah Arendt's ideas about political action and its prerequisites. Here it is important to note that I will investigate film as political action in two ways. Firstly historically, by looking more closely at three film collectives that were active in the 1970s in the UK and that were inspired by Marxist and feminist theory and practice. And secondly, through my own film practice and an analysis of my process, where the work on the film *Sisters!* is the main focus. My research into the film collectives is, however, not just historically interesting but also yields methodical and aesthetic approaches and ideas that have affected the investigation as a whole. Thus, the discussion of the three film collectives functions both as a historical frame of reference and a methodological source that enables me to connect the aesthetics of film with questions about the political that Arendt raises in her theory of the space of appearance. In this way I also hope to fulfil the dissertation's overarching purpose: to explore which discussions about and methods for making political film are made possible by first looking at Arendt's theories about political action, then analysing the three film collectives and lastly relating the results to my own filmmaking practice. Since Arendt's and the British film collectives' respective approaches belong to different historical contexts I hope that they can also demonstrate how the discussion of film as political action and filmic strategies and methods can be shifted, changed and developed. Before I return to Arendt's thoughts on political action, I will first say something about the choice of the three film collectives.

The Film Collectives

When it comes to the historical film collectives, I will discuss the Berwick Street Film Collective, who made *Nightcleaners,* as well as Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group. All three believed that they acted politically through film. Over and above these three there were of course more film collectives that operated in other ways and in other places in the UK. That said, a different selection may have led to a different discussion. My choice of these three film collectives was in part governed by what source material was available in 2009 when I started my research; not many film collectives of the 1970s had the interest, the possibility or the means to archive their work for the future. The films, documents and other material are thus not collected in one place, but spread out among different institutions, organisations and individuals. A large part of my preparatory work therefore consisted in finding relevant material, and I am convinced that there is more that could be uncovered. My access to information has also been affected by whom of the former members of the

collectives I succeeded in contacting and establishing a relationship with. The link to the former members was vital in gaining access to films and stories about the politics that the different collectives tried to implement through their film practice. But my selection was also governed by other criteria besides the availability of material. I have consciously chosen three film collectives that were inspired by Marxist and feminist theory, but where the strategies that the different collectives developed differed in several important aspects. In the 1970s, Marxism and feminism were often used to develop film as a critical project since they provided tools that engaged with the entire film process and its relation to prevailing political and economic systems. Thus, with the help of Marxist and feminist theories, filmmakers and film theorists questioned and re-evaluated all the aspects of the filmmaking process: the production conditions, aesthetic approach, screening situation and distribution. Roughly speaking one could say that in this context the fundamental criterion for political film was considered to be its *critical potential*. This meant that film should comment on, draw attention to and change prevailing power relations. One of the questions that I will pose in the following section is how the critical potential was defined and how it was constituted in the film through different strategies and methods.

Even if the general theoretical cultural debate in the 1970s was strongly inspired by Marxism and feminism, there were of course filmmakers and groups who based their work on other philosophical and political traditions. But without a doubt it was the groups and individuals who were based in Marxist and feminist theory who advanced the most interesting and influential ideas regarding political aesthetics in the UK in those days (the situation was fairly similar in the rest of Western world). Those who, like me, are interested in the renewal of political film thus naturally find themselves turning their attention to the film collectives that were influenced by Marxism and feminism.

In the first chapter of this dissertation I will present the three film collectives' political film projects. The results of the historical research constitute an important historical frame of reference for the dissertation, and a form of grounding for coming chapters in which I expand on my thoughts relating to collective and political filmmaking linked to Hannah Arendt's ideas of political action. The historical survey has, in other words, at least two purposes: it provides the ideological and historical frame of reference that the dissertation is based on and relates to, while it also provides me with methodological tools that I use in the subsequent discussion of political action in film. By exploring the strategies and methods that the film collectives used, I have been able to generate a number of theoretical and practical devices. I have brought these questions, strategies and methods – such as questions about the relationship between production, aesthetics and distribution – with me both into the film projects that are dealt with in this dissertation and into the reflections that are expressed in this text.

In the chapter about the film collectives, I start by expanding on Cinema Action's film practice. Cinema Action saw themselves as part of the labour movement and the members of the collective primarily wanted their films to be used to create alliances between workers and promote activism beyond the screening room. The founders of Berwick Street Film Collective had all been members of Cinema Action. They had left because they were more interested in experimenting with aesthetic strategies than in producing campaign films for the labour movement.

The Berwick Street Film Collective's work on the film *Nightcleaners* and the subsequent discussion after its premiere in 1975 have been central to the analysis of the work on the films that are included in this dissertation. This applies most of all to *Sisters!,* which was made in collaboration with the London-based feminist organisation Southall Black Sisters. The third collective that is addressed in the chapter is the London Women's Film Group, which chiefly wanted to use its films to spread the message of the feminist movement, as well as working actively towards changing the working conditions for women in the film industry. Although my discussion of the London Women's Film Group is short in relation to my treatment of the two other collectives, their views regarding film production and work have been vital to my own thinking concerning the conditions and possibilities of filmmaking.

What is interesting about these three collectives is that they had clear but different ideas regarding what it meant to use film as a political tool, from the research phase all the way through to the screening situation. I am particularly interested in what the filmmakers meant when they claimed to engage in politics through film and how that found its expression in the organisation, production, aesthetic strategies and distribution as well as in relation to both the intended and actual audience. I am, however, not interested in determining whether the film collectives succeeded in making political films; neither am I chiefly interested in analysing the contents of the films. Instead I want to explore political film through its filmic strategies. By processing the material that the film collectives left behind – in the form of texts, films, interviews, etc. – as well as the theories that they themselves subscribed to, I want to identify specific issues that I will then proceed to analyse through the lens of Arendt's theory of political action.

Political Action According to Hannah Arendt

In the following I will briefly address some of the terms and arguments in Hannah Arendt's writing about political action that are central to this dissertation.[14]

Fundamental to Arendt's political theory is the difference between what she calls the 'private' and the 'political' sphere. In the public political sphere one's words and actions can potentially be perceived by an infinite number of people. The private sphere on the other hand is dependent on neither the number of people, nor transparency or visibility. As opposed to the public political sphere, the work that is performed in the private sphere – such as paid labour, production or reproduction – mostly has a specific purpose. In other words, the doings in the private sphere are predictable and can be measured in terms such as success and failure. According to Arendt, however, an action must be unpredictable and purposeless for it to be political. This means that in the private sphere no political acts are performed, only labour and work. It follows that if we try to control acts – through decrees or prohibition – they stop being political and the space of appearance is disintegrated.[15] The action is then, at best, performed to uphold the status quo. In Arendt's terminology we cannot even call this instrumental doing an action, since an action is political by definition. It is also important to remember that the space of appearance does not exist independently of people, but rather it is constituted by actions and activities

that are performed.[16] Arendt was, for example, very critical of many European states that through their realpolitikal ambitions simultaneously limited the possibility of establishing political spaces. Instead, expanding private spheres were established but under management of the state. These so-called social spheres were intended to take care of the economy of the society and households, as well as the wellbeing of the individual. For Arendt this has nothing to do with the political, but is a part of the necessities of life that belong in the private or social sphere.[17]

What is central to this dissertation is that Arendt makes a clear distinction between the activities that are performed to sustain life, and speech and action whose primary purpose is to create human interaction. In the private sphere it is thus the aim that is of utmost importance, while action in the political sphere always occurs in the now, and towards the horizon of an uncertain future. A person can certainly have a purpose with their actions, but since they always occur in a community with other people it is impossible to predict the consequences of the actions at the time when they occur. Arendt claims further that it is only when we have the possibility to act that we potentially can become free political beings. In other words, the private sphere and its life-sustaining duties entail a lack of freedom for humankind, since everything is done out of necessity and is thus fundamentally predictable.[18] Arendt here looks to Aristotle's notion of *polis*: while the men had access to both the private and the public political sphere, the women, children and slaves were restricted to the private sphere. But the men were also dependent on the women, children and slaves doing their work in the private sphere in order for the necessities of life to be secured and life to continue. Arendt emphasises, in other words, that the spheres are of equal importance for a person: it is quite simply not possible to survive on interaction alone, while those who are restricted to the private realm and its endless chores never will become political beings.

A lot can be and has been said about this division and about whether or not the work that is performed in the private sphere should be considered to be political. This was one of the major topics of discussion amongst second-wave feminists in the USA and Europe.[19] In this context I am, however, chiefly interested in Arendt's thoughts on what makes political action possible, that is its basic conditions. On this point I believe she has something important to say that we need to keep in mind when we discuss the preconditions for political action.

Arendt argues that the political sphere arises in the interaction between people. This space – what Arendt calls the space of appearance – can, however, disappear just as fast as it has arisen. It is, in other words, a space that constantly has to be renegotiated and re-established between people. Action, which comprises both 'words and deeds', hence always takes place in a plurality where it can be seen and heard by others. But it is a dual movement; the acting subject must also be able to see and hear and thus be prepared to listen and react to other actions. To Arendt the notion of intersubjectivity is central to the creation of a political space. People stand in relation to each other and their possibilities for action are dependent on this relation. It is this interaction between people that makes the individual action unpredictable; we never know how the other person will act and react. It is also precisely this unpredictability that enables new processes

and occurrences.[20] I would even go so far as to claim that Arendt means that it is the unpredictability of the interaction that allows for the idea of an alternative world and future.

Over and above the fact that the political space is by definition public, relational and unpredictable it is also vital to understand that it potentially consists of an infinite number of perspectives and positions. This can be considered to be part of the definition of the public domain, but as many feminist and postcolonial theoreticians have proved, the actual public domain is much too often conditional, to the advantage of certain groups.[21] The theory would in other words be incapable of telling us something about the world we live in. But even if there is no space that is unconditional and thus no space that is accessible to everybody, I believe that Arendt – in her emphasis on the importance of a political space potentially consisting of an infinite number of perspectives – raises important theoretical and political questions about who and what can be heard in a specific context. Here the theory serves to help us understand historical conditions. The notion of the transitory space of appearance also means that all the historical political spaces must continuously be renegotiated and changed. When we conclude that the historical space no longer potentially contains an endless number of perspectives, the space ceases to be a political space in the Arendtian sense. Then the so-called space of appearance has certainly been moved to other places and other times. In order for the space to once again become political, the relations must be renewed and again open up for a potentially infinite number of perspectives. Here Arendt stresses the *potential*, since it is inherent in the nature of the thing that it is not possible to fix a political space. It is rather more a matter of picturing the possibility of infinite positions and perspectives. This of course means that we most likely have different conceptions of the potential of the political space, which in turn could be the beginning of a negotiation and a possible change of a specific space.

To describe the acting human being, Hannah Arendt uses the terms *what* and *who*. The *what* of a person is something that can be communicated through words, such as character traits and qualities that we share with other people. But every person is also unique, which manifests as a *who* when we speak and act. This unique 'who-somebody-is' is, however, impossible to unambiguously capture in words, 'as it [only] shows in the flux of action and speech [that occur between people]'.[22] 'Through them [speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct.'[23] According to Arendt, a person's *who* is always ambiguous and unreliable, which results in uncertainty in all politics.[24]

Hannah Arendt also separates action from thought and reflection. An action always occurs in a community with others. Thinking on the other hand is performed in isolation – it is the self's inner dialogue.[25] Reflection on the other hand is based on perceptions about an event that has happened and the action is thus generated by someone other than the person reflecting. Moreover, the ability to critically reflect and judge presupposes that the person in question can imagine the world from several different perspectives and positions in order to be able to compare their own reflection and interpretation with the possible reflections of others. It is, however, not about comparing an opinion with the actual opinions of others but about imagined opinions. This ability to be able to imagine the world from other perspectives, what Arendt calls representative thinking, is

central for her when it comes to morality, empathy and, not least, the establishment of political relations with one another. Arendt stresses, however, that many people have misunderstood the idea of representative thinking. According to her it is not about *knowing* what other people think but about the ability to *imagine* what they think. Observing, reflecting and judging, however, does not determine how one should act. That is to say, how we think about and interpret an event does not need to be associated with how we would have acted or act in similar situations. For Arendt this is an important distinction. Based on Immanuel Kant's thoughts on critique, she argues that action and reflection are governed by different principles that are not linked to one another. How we act and how we reflect can even be in conflict with each other.[26]

The basic condition for political action according to Arendt is hence that the space in which the actions appear must potentially consist – in its public, relational, unpredictable, purposeless and potential nature – of an infinite number of perspectives and positions. The acting subject, who consists of *who* and *what,* must be able to perceive and be perceived by other acting subjects. For Arendt, intersubjective relations are a prerequisite for representative political thinking; that is the capability of seeing the world from a perspective other than my own, but without giving up my identity.

Questions
Posed

Before I delve further into a discussion of the dissertation's central issues, it is important to remember that Hannah Arendt didn't present a comprehensive aesthetic theory or aesthetic approach linked to political action, although she sometimes dealt with the role of culture in society and even the occasional artistic and literary work.[27] But, like the theorist Cecilia Sjöholm,[28] I believe that there is a line of reasoning in Arendt's notion of the space of appearance that potentially ties together a political and an aesthetic approach,[29] and in so doing gives rise to reflections that can contribute towards deepening the discussion about the relation between aesthetics and politics, or in my case, film as political action. Immanuel Kant's analyses of aesthetic judgement and our human ability to imagine what is not present are the basis of Arendt's theories and terms relating to the public sphere.[30] According to Sjöholm, in Arendt's later works 'political action and freedom are rooted in the sensible world […] Therefore, politics and aesthetics are linked in terms of a structural similarity between political and aesthetic judgement.'[31] This is crucial to an understanding of how Arendt's theories can be applied to aesthetic forms of expression such as film. But even if the human imagination is of utmost importance to Arendt's theories, Sjöholm argues that the Arendtian public sphere cannot define subjects, but rather enables appearances per se, regardless of whether it is a human subject or an artistic object. In other words, Arendt's theory 'does not put into focus the making of political subjects, but the conditions under which appearances interact with thinking and acting.'[32] Since it is the public realm's conditions that enable political action and the emergence of the political subject, not the human individual per se, it means that the space of appearance enables different forms of agency. Sjöholm writes:

> Works of art are constitutive of a particular form of agency. It is a thought that is unique – immaterial and somehow personal at the same time. It may be a thing, but it is not a dead object. It will present a unique voice or shape in the environment in which it is presented. Plurality does not only consist of a certain number of voices coming from equal positions or representing similar individuals. It is heterogeneous and differentiated – coming from people, novels, films, or visual works, presenting itself through appearances that may be spectral, audible, or tangible.[33]

This quote leads me to the questions that I will deal with further on. Which discussions and methods are enabled if Arendt's notions of the space of appearance and political action are applied specifically to film? Could they for example give rise to strategies that are rather based on the premises of the community than the individual filmmaker's intentions?

In order to discuss this, I have formulated two overarching questions based on Arendt's theories of political action. Firstly, what constitutes the political action of film, that is what are the conditions for political film? Secondly, wherein lies the political in film in the Arendtian sense? I have then broken down these two

questions into a number of more manageable specific questions: Does the agency that a film can have consist in the creation of a space of appearance of the kind that Arendt describes, where communities become possible and societal changes are perceivable in their potentiality? Where and how in that case can such a space of appearance be constituted in filmmaking? What are the aesthetic instruments that film uses to constitute this space? Arendt claims that actions can be seen as reactions and consequences of a particular political situation, and they always occur in a now where the future from the perspective of the action is always uncertain. Can this be related to film and film production? That is to say, how is it possible to speak of unpredictability, uncertainty, an infinite number of perspectives and intersubjectivity in relation to filmmaking? Can a film be purposeless? In what way can one see and hear and be seen and heard in a film production? How can terms such as Arendt's *what* and *who* be applied to film? Would we, with the help of Arendt, be able to critically discuss ideas regarding collective production? These are the questions that I will discuss in the text and attempt to answer in the final chapter.

Artistic Research

I work as an artist and use the moving image as material to try to understand and challenge contemporary social and political events and processes. Many of my films have revolved around the consequences of the historical colonial and patriarchal world order, traces of which can still be found in our times, both in the political and social structures and the role and possibilities of film. I am primarily interested in approaching these issues from the perspective of feminist practice and theory that challenges the relationship between production conditions, narrative structures, authorship, aesthetic strategies and political processes. More particularly, this dissertation deals with the relationship between aesthetics and politics, with what it means to use the moving image as an artistic form of expression in order to take part in political debate. There are two aspects to this as I see it: the one is about the political involvement and activism that is expressed in the film on the level of its content, while the other aspect is about the artistic political act, in other words in what way the actual film or artwork is a political act in itself.[34]

Conducting an investigation into film as political action as part of artistic research implies that my own artistic practice plays a crucial role; it is in the *doing* that I explore the potential for film to act politically, but it is also in *doing* that new thoughts and questions arise. I use the experiences from making films to think about theoretical approaches and practical methods. The *doing* is thus a very important part of the research.[35] Reflections and arguments regarding theoretical and historical contexts that have affected the film practice of other artists and filmmakers have also been of central importance to this thesis. The following investigation hence consists of two main parts: one text and four films – *Sisters!* (2011), *Mutual Matters* (2012), *Choreography for the Giants* (2013) and *Conversations: Stina Lundberg Dabrowski Meets Petra Bauer* (2010).[36] The two parts, the text and the films, have different functions but are, in my view, of equal importance to a discussion of film as a political act.

Like many other investigations, this dissertation also addresses many different issues and aspects of filmmaking. I see the dissertation as consisting of several layers, in which the parts are tied together to form a complex pattern of reflections, analyses, statements and experiments. It is further complicated by the fact that the dissertation consists of two parts that have completely different preconditions and starting points. To simplify somewhat, the text has functioned as a platform for theoretical and historical reflections on film as political action, while the purpose of the film projects and the films has been to develop methods and perform political acts. I want to, however, emphasise from the very beginning that I do not believe that I as the initiator of the films can discern what the films do or what the meaning of the potential action of the films could be once they enter the public realm. As one of the makers of the films I cannot take the position of the so-called viewer, critic or film historian. It is thus impossible for me to determine whether the films do in fact act. But, then again, this is not the purpose of the dissertation; the films that I have named

should, in other words not be seen as examples of film as political action. I am rather interested in discussing the necessary conditions for a film to be considered a political act. This difference is important. I focus on the process of the film production, not the finished film or its reception. In the text I have thus not analysed the films, but considered the approach and the processes that have led up to them: which issues were important, which theories and filmmakers the films relate to and which methods were used, and, not least, I have tried to engage in a theoretical discussion – based on my practice – of film as political action. The film projects are in themselves expressions of probing and thinking rather than products that illustrate a theory. This could be seen as self-evident, but it must be stated plainly here since it is fundamental to my investigation. Just as important to state is that this text is not an artwork, but a discursive and investigative text focusing on theories, histories, methodologies and strategies that can shed light on the discussion of film as political action. If I was to use Hannah Arendt's terminology here already, I would venture that the dissertation will be the space to which I withdraw from the public realm and community in order to contemplate filmic methods and approaches based on the film collectives' practices and Arendt's theories of political action. In the film productions I have, however, been an active actor in collaboration with others. This 'in collaboration with others' has been key to all film productions that this dissertation encompasses, and is an important aspect of the discussion of film as political action. In the same breath, I ask myself what it actually means to draw attention to one's own position, and simultaneously reflect on how one's presence affects what is being investigated and the relations that have been established in the investigation. Is that even possible? Judith Butler argues, for example, that the self, the 'I', cannot speak of its own emergence without violating an ethical code that is based on a relational approach.[37] But what is this ethical code? How can I in my artistic practice adopt an ethical approach that is based on the notion of the importance of relations for the constitution of the subject? What does this mean for my choice of method? What impact does it have on the aesthetics and the filmic expression? I will also use my own work as a basis for reflection on these questions focusing on the relationship between methodology and ethics.

Even though the text moves between situations and theoretical perspectives from different historical contexts, I am not concerned with presenting a linear account of political film from the 1920s through the 1970s to today. Rather, I would like to examine what we can learn *right now* from the political film strategies that were used *then*, and deliberate over similarities and differences. This is a method that is in part inspired by Walter Benjamin who asserted that historical thinking always has to base itself on a constructed relationship between then and now, where the contemporary can meet the past in one and the same constructed present: 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger […] For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.'[38]

From this perspective one can see my commentary, and perhaps especially the films themselves, as attempts to create a present in which the political actions and film practices of the past are also given a place and space, in order to show

their continued relevance to today's attempts at thinking of film as political action.

In the same vein, I also want to stress that even the text itself is a production of how I have moved between different places, times and arguments, which has had an impact on which strategies the text deals with and how occurrences have been interpreted. The transposition of body and thoughts has determined which historical arguments I have brought with me into the production of films, there being confronted with the perspectives and ideas of others. In short, I want to emphasise that the knowledge that has been produced in this context is *situated knowledge*, dependent on a specific place, specific relations and a specific time.[39]

Another important motivation behind this dissertation is my wish to reach beyond a discussion of representation in film. Rather than speaking of what the film depicts, I am interested in discussing the conditions of filmmaking, as well as what the film 'does' and 'suggests'. In this I see an important shift of focus within documentary film, from a narrative about the society that *is* to one about the society that *could be*, which in itself is a radical political act. The dissertation is an attempt at investigating what conditions this kind of 'doing'.

Overview

The chapter 'The British Film Collectives' of the thesis deals with the Berwick Street Film Collective, Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group, that were formed at the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s. These three film collectives examined and tried out different strategies to create new forms of political participation through the moving image. I will describe more fully what that entailed – against the background of the historical situation – with regards to organisation, production conditions, choice of aesthetic strategies and screening. The chapter 'Sisters!' is about the work on the film *Sisters!*. I describe the working process on the film project and its different stages in approximately the same order as they were executed, from the research and planning of the shoot to the choice of aesthetic strategies and post-production. Here I will focus on the organisation of the production and the choice of aesthetic strategies in relation to the content. In the presentation of the work on *Sisters!* I use questions generated by the historical material about the three film collectives as my starting point, but I also relate to Hannah Arendt's theories of political action and introduce her concept of *who* and *what* in relation to film. In short, the *what* of a film is what can be described in words, such as the characters and the plot, while the *who* of a film is just as impossible to express in words as the *who* of a person. The *who* of a film is the film's unique way of dealing with an event, for example through its aesthetics. I argue that like a person's *who,* the *who* of a film is ambiguous. Using the terms *what* and *who* I proceed to discuss what it is that constitutes an *action* in film. In the chapter 'The Politics of the Camera' I develop my line of reasoning related to the role of the camera in the film projects and expand the discussion of the terms *what* and *who* in the constitution of a filmic action. The chapter revolves around films made by filmmakers in Palestine and Israel, as well as the production of *Mutual Matters* that was produced parallel to *Sisters!*. Like *Sisters!* the work on *Mutual Matters* had its starting point in questions regarding production conditions and aesthetic strategies, which were also of central importance to the British film collectives. In the chapter 'A Relational Film Practice' I write about the art project *Choreography for the Giants*. Here I move my focus away from what constitutes an action in film to speaking about film as a constituting scene for ethical and political relations based on Judith Butler's concept of the 'scene of address'. Lastly, in the final chapter 'Filmmaking as an Ethical and Political Relation' I return to the relationship between collectivity and film as political action, which means that I use arguments from the examination of the film collectives, the experiences gained from producing *Sisters!* and Arendt's notions of political action. I also ask myself what role listening plays in a filmic process, and if one can see listening as a part of political action in film. And at the very end I point out the conditions that must be met for us to be able to speak of film as a political act in the Arendtian sense. Here, in other words, I summarise my investigation into the relationship between filmmaking and political action in a number of conclusions.

The British Film Collectives

In the following chapter I will engage with three film collectives that were formed at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s: Berwick Street Film Collective, Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group. The three film collectives explored and experimented with different strategies in order to create new forms of political participation using the moving image. I will explain more closely what that entailed in terms of organisation, production conditions, choice of aesthetic strategies and screening. But first a few words to recall the prevailing political situation in Britain in the 1970s that the film collectives worked under.

A Time of Societal Conflict and Change

The 1960s and '70s were a turbulent period in the UK with many political conflicts.[40] The conflicts were about industrial politics, the Vietnam War, the UK's presence in Ireland and the position of women in society. Women, workers, students and other marginalised groups actively took part in the political discussions. In this period many of the new and young activists had started moving away from the traditional political parties. Instead, they became active in informal networks characterised by participation rather than membership and working on consensus rather than the majority principle.[41]

In this period the feminist movement also grew and became a political force. In 1970 the women's movement held its first national congress in the UK. The same year, however, the conservative party, the Tories, came to power, which intensified the political conflict. Inflation rose and unemployment soared. The governmental cost-cutting programmes had a negative impact on publicly financed education and healthcare. The trade unions became more militant and strikes were often used to achieve improved working conditions and higher wages. Two miners' strikes, in 1972 and 1974, even managed to shake up the government. The 1974 miners' strike led the government to implement the so-called Three-Day Week to save energy; for a period of time the British population only had access to electricity a few days a week. This of course provoked further outrage. In 1974, Prime Minister Edward Heath called for an early general election in the hope of strengthening his mandate, but he lost. This was seen as a victory among political activists and it gave them the strength to continue their struggle for an alternative society and a politics that aimed at distributing power, wealth and cultural capital more equally.[42]

Many cultural workers and academics were positive towards the establishment of new political and social networks. Inspired by the political development, filmmakers who worked on the fringes of the commercial film industry got together and formed groups with alternative production conditions. One of the aims was to create the basis for a different kind of filmic narration and alternative TV productions. In this period of time the film collectives Berwick Street Film Collective, Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group were founded. The collectives experimented with aesthetic strategies to help marginalised groups such as working-class women, blacks, students and the unemployed to make themselves heard. Many independent filmmakers also worked actively towards changing the production conditions and distribution structures in the film world. They tried, for example, to democratise the film industry by questioning its financing system, work distribution, decision-making processes and distribution channels. To achieve this the Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA) was founded in 1974, becoming an important political force for non-commercial film.[43]

Around the same time, filmmakers and theorists also started questioning the dominant theory expounded in magazines and other writing about film. Film theories and practices were developed that moved away from the notion of the *auteur* – the omnipotent director as the creator of the cinematically framed world – and towards a more critical, self-reflexive and collective attitude to production and reception. This development was inspired by the leading French film criticism of the 1960s.[44] In the UK the annual film festival in Edinburgh, especially between 1975 and 1979, became a platform for debate and discussion about new film theory and practice. In 1976, for example, the film theoreticians Phil Hardy, Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen wrote an introductory text in the film festival's catalogue in which they emphasised that it was no longer interesting or satisfying to focus on film as an autonomous object of study. According to them, film should be viewed as an ideological practice in which the understanding of the film couldn't be differentiated from its so-called 'text'.[45] As part of this theoretical shift, the film festival collaborated with *Screen Magazine* in 1975, organising a seminar based on Bertolt Brecht's theoretical texts where the participants discussed what constituted film as a political practice. One of the ideas they focused on was film as a carrier of meaning rather than an object of consumption. Inspired by the Frankfurt School, amongst others, they stressed that social film practice lay in the dialectical relation between production and viewing. An important question that was posed at the seminar dealt with how one can make films in a way that they are perceived as social arguments instead of fictitious narratives.[46] Films produced by the Berwick Street Film Collective and the London Women's Film Group were screened and discussed at the festival.

The Historical Background

It will become apparent in this dissertation that I find the notion of *documentary* film highly problematic, even dubious, although I neither can nor want to deny the immense importance of the documentary tradition. Documentary film as a concept and genre has been strongly connected with conventions and strategies that can be seen to be ideologically conditioned or expressions of naïve realism. Amongst other things they often presuppose a clear indexical relation between the historical world and the constructed image. Many feminist and postcolonial theorists have critically engaged with this point and the impossibility of representing the world beyond ideology, norms and conventions. For example in 'The Spectacle of Actuality', the feminist theoretician Elisabeth Cowie writes that the perception of the 'real' is governed by changeable conventions of how we define reality. In order for us to experience a filmic narrative as 'real' or 'true' we hence first have to know the rules, principles and norms that make it real and true.[47] The postcolonial theoretician and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha also stresses that there is no such thing as a true depiction per se; there are only truth claims that are controlled by different strategies and conventions that in turn are part of a prevailing power structure. She is prepared to call a film political if it consciously avoids fixing meaning and making itself dependent on the authority of a source. She maintains that aesthetics and politics cannot be separated and that political film should emphasise paradoxes and contradictions. Aesthetics should, according to Trinh, be used as a tool to create images of the world that the viewer is not yet familiar with.[48] It is precisely through a set of theoretical and practical investigations of the conditions and conventions underlying documentary film that it has become possible to bring to the fore and question the politics of representation and develop alternative histories and film strategies. Subjective and performative documentary film, for example, developed out of this criticism.[49]

Several aspects of the critical discussion that was developed in the 1980s and '90s in Europe and the USA can be linked to the ongoing discussion among filmmakers and theoreticians in the UK in the 1970s. The film theoretician Claire Johnston, for example, developed a critique of realistic representational strategies that several of the film collectives harnessed. Since this critique is central to my argument regarding film as a political act, I will take care in explaining how it was expressed. There were several other theoreticians and filmmakers apart from Claire Johnston who also criticised realistic representational strategies, such as Peter Gidal, Laura Mulvey, Lis Rhodes and Peter Wollen, to name a few. I will, however, focus on the arguments that Claire Johnston developed together with Paul Willemen, since they were directly linked to the films that were produced by the three film collectives that I discuss in this chapter.

The film collectives didn't, however, only work in the documentary film tradition. Historical material and conversations also attest to the fact that the

three film collectives based their work on a Marxist tradition. Names, terms and theories turn up in the historical material: for example, critical theory as formulated by Theodor Adorno, Louis Althusser, Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Sergei Eisenstein is often referred to. Almost all the references are male, while at the same time many of the collectives' members were women and/or have made films dealing with women's issues. The London Women's Film Group, for example, saw itself as a part of the women's movement and related to the theories and practices that we nowadays call second-wave feminism, which directed radical criticism at the patriarchal society and demanded extensive change within prevailing structures and institutions. It was also the second-wave feminists who started investigating and theorising about the relationship between sex and gender. Within the framework of the women's movement, consciousness-raising groups where formed that consisted of a smaller number of women. In these groups the women shared experiences with each other in order to support one another and expand their knowledge of the other's situation.[50] It was also these second-wave feminists who established and popularised the phrase: 'the personal is political.'[51]

In this spirit, the London Women's Film Group fought to break the male dominance within the film industry. It was important to the collective that women speak for themselves and they were of the opinion that only women could convey the experience of being a woman.[52] An important issue in this context, which I will get back to at a later stage, was precisely this: *who* speaks and *who* is excluded.

What Defines a Political Film Practice, and Other Questions

The historical material raised three key questions that also resonate directly with my own film practice. The first question concerns what defines a political film practice within the documentary genre according to the British film collectives. At what point in the film production process did the political action take place? Was it in the production, in the choice of aesthetic strategies, in the distribution, in the screening situation, or was it somewhere else entirely?

The second main question deals with the theoretical discussions that the British film collectives were inspired by. I have tried to trace which theoreticians the collectives related to and how the theoretical film discussions found their expression in the three magazines that were leading in this debate: *Screen Magazine*, *Frameworks* and *Afterimage*. This is an important part of the study since the articles provide a frame of reference for the discussion. I have also used contemporary theoreticians and historians in order to understand the historical context that the British film collectives found themselves in. I have turned, amongst others, to Jane Gaines and Bill Nichols, as well as Michael Renov, who have written a lot about the history of documentary film and are important theoreticians within the genre. I do not find it relevant to refer to all of the discussions that were initiated and developed, but only to those that I view as central to a discussion of the work of the film collectives and of film as a political act.

This in turn leads to the third and last main question: how can the collectives' filmmaking practices relate to the theoretical discussions? By linking the film practice to the historical references and the theoretical discussions it becomes possible to place the working methods of the collectives within a wider context and give greater depth to the interpretations of their choice of aesthetic strategies.[3]

The three main questions have accompanied me throughout the historical research and I have posed them in relation to all the material I have come across. However, so as not to make the task of writing this text impossible for myself I have chosen to primarily focus on three films that were all released in 1975: *Nightcleaners* by the Berwick Street Film Collective, *The Miners' Film* by Cinema Action and *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* by the London Women's Film Group.[53]

It is, however, important to emphasise from the beginning that the three film collectives had quite different ideas regarding what using film politically actually meant. Although the collectives shared certain views on several different aspects, for example the importance of an active and reflective audience, they did not agree on what that implied.[54]

Cinema Action

In 1968 the film collective Cinema Action was formed. In the first years the members organised screenings of films that described the ongoing French student protests in Paris. Ann Guedes, who was one of the founders of the collective, mentioned in an interview that she had been living in France when the protests started. When she moved back to London that same year she was surprised by how uninformed the general public was about the turning political tides in France. Hence she wanted to use film to inform the people living in the UK of what was happening in France. More people became actively engaged in the collective and they started discussing the possibility of producing films about the protests that were taking place in the UK.[55]

When I looked through the film material and the documents that have been preserved from the time, it seemed as if, in the course of just one year, the collective developed from a group that screened films into a group of producers of non-commercial films within the framework of the trade union movement. In the information material about Cinema Action, the collective emphasised that the aim of the films was to stimulate active engagement and action among the sympathisers of the political projects of the labour movement.[56] The film collective wanted to give the working class a voice, produce alternative historical documents and, not least, take part in the struggle of the labour movement. The majority of the films that were made by the collective dealt with precisely this: the struggle of workers for improved working conditions and change in the society in which they lived.[57]

For Cinema Action the encounter in the presence of the camera between the filmmaker and the people that were being filmed was very important. Steve Sprung, a former member of Cinema Action, recounted in an interview that members saw the camera (as well as the film) as a catalyst for discussions and actions. Through the use of the camera, questions could be asked that perhaps otherwise wouldn't have. This in turn generated new questions and discussions between filmmakers and workers, and ideally a new political awareness. The filmmaker and the workers hence learnt from one another. Sprung found that these encounters could even be more important than the finished film. But the encounters would never have taken place if the film hadn't been made. This method was inspired by the interactive documentary mode.[58]

According to film theorist Bill Nichols it is precisely the encounter between the filmmaker and the subject of the film that is the central ingredient of the interactive mode since the encounter impacts the film's course of events. The filmmaker is an active participant who reacts to the events that he or she is documenting, and the voice of the filmmaker is heard just as much as that of the subject of the film. An interactive documentary often revolves around an interview. When the interviewee makes statements they are seen as a product of the encounter more than as a freestanding testimonial. According to this line of reasoning, film doesn't need to – or cannot – be a mechanical ear or eye that objectively registers what it sees and hears. Nichols argues that the strategy rather introduces the

notion of situated knowledge that is generated by the encounter between the filmmaker and other participants.[59]

Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch's film *Chronique d'un été* from 1961 is often cited as an early example of an interactive approach within documentary film. In the film, conversations and actions are generated by the camera and the questions posed by the filmmaker. Bill Nichols explains it as follows:

> The viewer of the interactive text expects to be witness to the historical world as represented by one who inhabits it and who makes that process of habitation a distinct dimension of the text. The text, whatever else, addresses the ethics and politics of that encounter. This is the encounter between one who wields the movie camera and one who does not. The sense of bodily presence, rather than absence, locates and holds the filmmaker to the scene, even when masked by certain strategies for interviewing or representing encounter. Viewers expect conditional information and situated or local knowledge. The extension of particular encounters into more generalized ones remains entirely possible, but the possibility remains, at least in part, one that viewers must establish through their own engagement with the text itself.[60]

The ethical aspect that is discussed in the above quote refers to the encounter that takes place between the person behind and the one in front of the camera. The interactive strategy can in part be seen as a reaction to the observational strategy that is based on the notion that the filmmaker should not influence the situation s/he is filming. The observing filmmaker acts more like a viewer and listener of the conversation taking place between the people in the room in which the recording device is assumed to document a course of events that would have taken place irrespective of the presence of the filmmakers. The observational strategy also presupposes that the filmmaker uses an editing technique in the next stage that strives to give the viewer the impression of observing events unfolding in real time.[61] The observational strategy was developed in the 1950s when camera equipment became lighter, the synchronization of sound and image became easier to achieve and film stock became more light sensitive. Only then could filmmakers keep up with unexpected events. They didn't need to first light the scene, mount the camera or be burdened with unwieldy sound equipment.

Whose Voice Are We Hearing?

In 1975 Cinema Action had just completed the *The Miners' Film* that focuses on the period just before the miners' strike in 1974. The film is structured around a series of interviews with people from the British mining community. They talk about their situation, their work and their struggle for better working conditions. The people are presented as miners, people active in the trade unions or as wives or girlfriends, without mentioning names or other personal details. The film also presents the strategies and methods that the workers were planning to use in order to change their situation. The viewer is informed that the long-term

plan of the workers was to take control over the mining production. The film emphasises throughout (mainly verbally) how important it is that the workers show solidarity with each other. Sometimes the same message is stressed visually, for example through sequences from a strike meeting. But the film doesn't only voice the workers' desire to change their unjust working conditions but also presents a political and structural analysis of the mining and coal industry as a whole. All the critical analyses are provided by the interviewees. Nobody is presented as an expert beyond their own experiences. In addition, the strike of 1972 is compared to the one that took place in 1926. The links between these two events are further strengthened in that the film combines sound from the 1970s strikes with images from the 1920s miners' strike.

Using anonymous voices and faces as representative of different social classes and to reveal political structures was a strategy developed by the socialist filmmaker and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein in 1920s Russia. Eisenstein believed that socialist film should be driven by collective action and not by individual characters, which he saw as a typical trait of bourgeois film. Eisenstein thought that it was possible to create different types in a film whose physical traits could represent the different social classes, and hence he employed amateur actors with characteristic appearances and facial expressions. The idea was that the audience would easily identify who was the bourgeois oppressor and who belonged to the oppressed proletariat.[62] Eisenstein's notions of *typage* did not survive into the 1970s. Cinema Action and other dissident filmmakers, however, continued to see individuals as representatives of a group or a political system. To put it another way, the experiences of the individual were seen to be the effect of a political structure.

The Miners' Film is shot on black-and-white 16mm film. The interviews in the film are often shot in the homes of the mineworkers and at their workplaces. The images of the homes show women who take care of the household and children, while those from the workplace show men working in the mine, or taking part in meetings or demonstrations. This stereotypical role division is neither commented on nor criticised in the film. The images can be described as observational; the camera registers but doesn't seem to directly influence the situation. Nobody depicted in the images seems to take note of the camera or the filmmakers. On the other hand, the sequences are short and the situations don't have time to develop much. In addition, voice-overs have been added to the images. I assume that they belong to the interviewees shown in earlier sequences. The images primarily serve as illustrations of the narratives and analyses that are communicated by the voices. When the voices speak of the working conditions in the mines, mineworkers in the mine are shown. When the voices stress the need for a unified labour movement, images from a strike meeting are shown. The illustrative images of the surroundings are combined into longer sequences. Without much friction the viewer is moved from one sequence to another. There are only a couple of instances when image and sound stand in opposition to each other; for example when an angry voice says that it is 'the people, not the banks' that are of national interest, while the images show fancy cars and well-dressed men and women. Another example is when images of well-dressed people are juxtaposed with images of men covered in coal dust from the mines.

In this film Cinema Action primarily used a hand-held camera. It moves quickly between different people and objects. The camera looks like it could move freely among the mineworkers and trade-union representatives. In addition the camera is very close to the people it is filming. The free movement of the hand-held camera and the many close-ups convey that there was a relationship of trust and an agreement between the film's subjects and the filmmakers. I base this conclusion on my own experiences of how difficult it is to come close with a camera if the person who is being filmed does not accept it. But, even though the conversations and the verbal analyses in the film thus can be seen as the result of an interaction between the filmmakers and the subjects of the film, the filmmakers do not reflect over that in their treatment of sound. The filmmakers never show themselves and we only vey rarely hear them speaking or asking questions. Neither does the film indicate if the subjects of the film – the mineworkers and their families – were also given the chance to influence the editing.

Using Bill Nichol's definition of interactive strategy, it is difficult to characterize *The Miners' Film* as the result of an encounter. Rather, it has the character of a political *argument* in favour of the continued fight of the mineworkers against their (oppressive) employers and against the social class that the film identifies as those in power. *The Miners' Film* is dominated by the argumentative rhetoric of the voices. The conversations in the film are interrupted as soon as the rhetorical point has been made. For example, a sequence starts with an image of a coalfield and we hear a voice that says, 'It is clear that this society has outlived itself.' This said, a sequence of images follows that show a flag, soldiers, well-dressed people, shiny cars and guards. A voice is heard that I assume represents the government: 'The government is determined to ensure the survival of the nation.' The viewer is never certain who the people in the pictures are or who the so-called 'government voice' belongs to. Nor is it clear which context the statement is taken from or what it has to do with the miners, if anything at all. Instead, the people in the sequence seem to represent a typified class at whom the miners' demands where aimed and against whom they fought. Another example: a man, who probably represents the trade union movement, says in a synchronized interview that the future of the labour movement is dependent on whether the miners will succeed with their political campaign. A sequence of images of children running around in a backyard follows without any explanation. We hear a woman speaking of the necessity to stick together. The images seem to say 'We are fighting not only so that we can have a better life, but also for the next generation. What happens today affects the workers of tomorrow.' The children become a symbol for their future and hence an element in an argument.

I would go so far as to claim that the interviews in the film aim at building, supporting and giving credibility to a specific argument. The filmic montage of images and sound seems to say: 'this is what the miners themselves think, and since it is the miners who are affected by industrial politics you should listen to them – but through us.' Or at least through the film. Via the voices, an argument was thus built up to encourage support for the struggle of the miners. Or, to say it more explicitly, through *The Miners' Film* the film collective presented their own arguments in support of the mineworkers' struggle. What the collective voiced was a narrative – their voice comes through in the choice of imagery, interviews and how the film was constructed. Film as an argument (or

'expository text', as Bill Nichols calls it) does precisely this: it predominantly emphasises the rhetorical continuity rather than the spatial and temporal. Explanatory film often addresses the audience directly with titles and voices and through these an argument is developed regarding the historical world.[63] In *The Miners' Film* there are even examples where Cinema Action addressed the viewer directly. This happens through titles that have been inserted into the film. The very first image of the film is a title: 'Working Class Films – Cinema Action', as well as the last: 'We are the people, we must seize ownership, we must take the means of production.' Since the titles are not presented as quotes we read them as directly pronounced by Cinema Action. Paradoxically *The Miners' Film* seems to have been created as an argument by Cinema Action, but through interactive aesthetic strategies. These interactive strategies can be seen to aesthetically affirm the truth, credibility and importance of the political arguments. In other words, the images function like empirical proof of the film collective's ideological convictions.

An Active Audience

In parallel with the film production, Cinema Action continued to organise screenings and debates. This was deemed important by the group since these screening gave rise to political discussions. In addition, the collective's intended audience as well as the people in the films belonged to the same group, which was made up of people who were active in the labour movement.[64] Hence, I would argue that it is not possible to discuss the work of the film collective only by analysing the filmic construction and aesthetic strategies. It is also important to see the relationships between the film collective as a production unit, the films that were produced and the audience. The collective wanted its films to be more than just a commercial product for a passive consumer. They wanted the films to work as catalysts for discussions and actions beyond the screening room.[65] The members of Cinema Action thought that they spoke from inside a political movement and used the films to inspire and inform workers of other conflicts or political movements in the country. For that purpose, Cinema Action travelled around Britain to document the ongoing campaigns. Then they took the raw material to another part of the country and showed and discussed the filmed material with a new group of workers, on the wharf, in the mines or factories. There they in turn filmed new sequences that were then transported to another workplace, and so forth. In this political touring, Cinema Action saw itself as an actor with the task of promoting solidarity among the different organisations of the labour movement.[66]

Their role models were in part found in the early days of the Soviet Union. There, artists, writers, filmmakers and journalists had formed units that set out from the cities to propagate for the ideas of the revolution among the people. This was an important part of the cultural politics and aesthetics that was given the name 'agitprop', an amalgam of 'agitation' and 'propaganda'. The Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov, for example, had already during the civil war in 1917 participated in the creation of a mobile newspaper and film unit with the aim of travelling around and informing of what had happened in the country, as well as documenting the prevailing political situation. The mobile unit consisted of a remodelled train that contained the editorial office of a newspaper, a cinema

and a production unit for film. On the train they could both develop and edit film. The overarching purpose of the so-called propaganda train was to encourage the population to take part in the revolution.[67]

Similarly, Cinema Action wanted their films to inform the workers of activities that took place in other places and to generate critical discussion. Furthermore, Cinema Action, like Dziga Vertov when he participated in the creation of the Russian propaganda train, hoped that workers would be inspired to use this knowledge in their own lives. It was precisely this combination of screening and discussion that had the potential to initiate action that could have an impact on life beyond the screen. In this process, Sprung, as a former member of Cinema Action, believed that film became a catalyst for discussions and actions, which were just as important as the film per se, if not more important.[68] In this sense the workplace became a space for both production and screening. This is where their subjects, audiences and financiers were. The films were to be produced by a collective for a collective that was defined by the labour movement.

The idea that film can generate political action can also be traced back to Sergei Eisenstein who saw film as an aesthetic instrument that could be used to influence the audience to become active participants in the construction of the socialist state. In order to create first a socialist and then a communist state, it was important that the audience didn't just act beyond the screening room, but also learn and embrace completely different physical forms of behaviour and reflex patterns, and hence a new attitude towards the political situation. Eisenstein believed that film could condition these necessary new bodily mechanical movements and reflexes.[69] The physical influence on the audience could and would, according to Eisenstein, be calculated and analysed in advance. Eisenstein stressed that 'The effect of the affective movement is achieved by the artificial mechanical setting in motion of the body as a whole and must in no way result from the emotional state of the performer.'[70] Eisenstein emphasised, in other words, that the learning of new bodily patterns was a mechanical process and wasn't about getting the viewer to become emotionally affected by a narrative performed by an actor. The actor's job was more about facilitating the development of new behaviour patterns. This was an important difference for Eisenstein. In bourgeois film the focus was on the individual and the film was driven forward by a story whose purpose was to emotionally engage the viewer. He believed that identifying oneself with a character's feelings and actions belonged to the regime of bourgeois film. For Eisenstein it was important that the films focused on a political situation and a possible change thereof. Moreover, the films should be made for a collective, both in terms of content and the choice of audience, since it was important to show the conditions common to the working class.[71] Eisenstein imagined revolutionary film to be targeted at an audience that was already positively inclined towards a socialist or communist state. He argued that the more unified an audience was, the more effective the film would be. In other words, his premise was that the audience's political, social and historical position influenced how it perceived, interpreted and reacted to a film, in terms of both its form and content. According to this argument, film did not seem to have the ability to organise a group. Film could solely affect a previously defined political group in which its members who shared political and social experiences formed a relatively homogenous group or a class.

In the 1990s the film historian Jane Gaines again took up Sergei Eisenstein's idea of an image generating action. Based on Eisenstein's theories from the 1920s she has developed an argument regarding the relationship between socially engaging documentaries and human action.[72] Gaines is interested in how images of conflict and collective actions can produce bodily affects that can potentially make us want to have an impact on the world beyond the screening room.[73] She believes that politics involves both the heart (feelings) and the head (rational thought). 'The whole rationale behind documenting political battles on film, as opposed to producing written records, is to make struggle visceral, to go beyond the abstractly intellectual, to produce bodily swelling.'[74] According to Gaines, the politicised body has an important role to play in a process of political change, but it has been overlooked and simplified in both film theory and practice. In order to reintroduce the body into Western theory she uses Eisenstein's theory of social change and film, particularly his notions regarding how the image can produce affect. Based on Eisenstein's ideas regarding bodily reactions she has coined the term 'political mimesis', which she defines as the production of a physical affect that is generated by images of struggle.[75] Broadly speaking, she shows that a film that shows a mass of bodies demonstrating can make the viewer want to imitate these actions. But she stresses that such images must be traced back to a specific political situation. The viewer must already be politically conscious for 'political mimesis' to come about.[76] The audience must, in other words, be able to relate to a political situation in order to be able to react to the film. The physical affects and reactions should hence be seen as something that adds to an already politically conscious audience.[77] As an example of what she means she mentions a film screening that was held at the State University of New York in Buffalo at the end of the 1960s.

> The radical newsletter *Rat* reports the reaction to a screening of newsreel films at the State University of New York, Buffalo, in 1969: "At the end of the second film, with no discussion, five hundred members of the audience arose and made their way to the University ROTC building. They proceeded to smash windows, tear up furniture and destroy machines until the office was a total wreck; and then they burned the remaining paper and flammable parts of the structure to charcoal." An isolated incident yet part of the history and mythology of documentary, it is this kind of spontaneous reaction, sign of the politicized body, that I want to discuss in relation to what might be called *political mimesis*.[78]

The film's realistic presentation of a fight or conflict can thus generate human action. Through imitation the image can get us to have an impact on contemporary and future actions.[79] Gaines also uses the anthropologist Michael Taussig's idea that imitation can be equated to knowledge and action. Imitation, in other words, should not necessarily be seen as an empty reproduction of structures and actions. According to Gaines, an aesthetic similarity between on the one hand the film's imagery and on the other the historical world can create a feeling of continuity between the world as it appears in the film and the world as it is experienced by the viewer. Consequently, film can inspire the individual to act.[80]

In short, Gaines claims that imitation can be used to make activists more active, or even get the viewers' bodies to resemble the bodies on the screen. Based on this point we can once again reflect on the meaning of the politics of illusion. According to Gaines's reasoning, the focus does then not rest on *how* something is presented, but on *what* is shown. But, as I mentioned previously, this 'what' must be understood on the basis of the position of an already politicised viewer.[81] 'It takes more than a highly charged image to produce bodily swellings. It demands elements in the footage that make a visceral impact, that may have a strong resonance for a particular community.'[82] As Gaines sums up, the filmmaker can use imagery of struggling bodies in order for the audience to continue the struggle beyond the film and in the actual historical world: '[The] aesthetic realism works to align the viewer emotionally with a struggle that continues beyond the frame and into his or her real historical present.'[83]

Cinema Action's aim was precisely this: to inspire the workers through the images of struggle that the film consisted of. Cinema Action emphasised that they used film as a tool to create the conditions for a political discussion and to encourage political action that could extend beyond the screening room. The encounter with activists within the labour movement was thus seen to be as important as the film itself. By 'encounter' I mean both that which took place physically between the people who participated in the shooting of the film and those who visited the screening room, as well as the encounter that took place between the film and its audience.

Even if Cinema Action emphasised the learning process, it was a learning process with a distinct ideological angle and a clear purpose – to change the prevailing power relations in favour of the workers. Cinema Action chose to voice *one* position. It is against this background that the films must be understood. They were directed at the group of people who sympathized with the politics of the labour movement and the trade unions and whose wish it was to gain more knowledge from it or be strengthened in their struggle.

Another central aspect of the work of Cinema Action is that it was the working class as a collective that was the focus and not the individual. The film was aimed at a political group and its purpose was to improve the conditions for this entire class. Certainly some specific individuals feature in the films but always as representatives of a greater collective.

The London Women's Film Group

At the beginning of the 1970s, men dominated the film industry. This applied especially to the position of director and the technical jobs such as camera or sound. The majority of the women in the film industry in turn worked as secretaries, assistants, script girls and in the film lab. The feminist film collective the London Women's Film Group was founded in 1972 as a reaction to this, amongst other things. Their express purpose was to spread the ideas of the women's movement through film and to fight for equal rights regarding the work and wages within the film industry. Only women could be part of the collective. The collective believed that the male dominance within the film industry influenced production structures, which at the time were hierarchical with a distinct work division and a strict grading of professions. At the top of the hierarchy was the scriptwriter or director, that is the individual (male) author. The film collective claimed that a change presupposed that women gained access to all positions in the film industry. But in order not to get lost in the existing structures it was important that the women created possibilities to develop their own politics, build an identity and have their own experiences in an environment that was separate from the men.[84]

For the film collective it was important that *everyone* who worked on a film production was involved in the whole film process and had as much say about it. This can be seen in contrast to the hierarchical organisation that was the prevailing form in commercial film, where people who found themselves far down in the hierarchy had very limited influence over the production. When the London Women's Film Group shot *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* (1975) the collective made an attempt at concretizing their political ideas. The collective's members, for example, would rotate their positions during the production, so that everybody at some point would handle the camera, sound, lighting, directing and editing. The idea was that everyone should have the opportunity to both learn the skills and have an influence on the film's aesthetics. Before the women rotated their positions they imparted the knowledge they had gained to the next person. In this way they accumulated collective knowledge.[85]

The collective wanted to initiate a critical discussion about their views on aesthetics, quality and knowledge by demonstrating that production conditions have an impact on and are reflected in the actual film. That is to say, access to technical knowledge and means of production have an impact on the visual expression. It sets the boundaries for what and how much the filmmaker can film, which equipment they can hire, how long the film can be, how much time can be spent on the editing process and so forth. Aspects that are central to the film's aesthetics. The collective wanted the critical discussion of working conditions not only to be presented in debates, but to be materialised in the actual film. For example, the crewmembers' skills in sound would be directly audible in the film, hence be reflected in the film's aesthetics. This means that if I as a

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crewmember have limited skills in how sound should be handled in a film shoot this will be audible in the film. The quality of the sound is influenced both by the film practitioner's skills and the available technical equipment. When the viewer could see the image and hear the sound, a discussion of the causes of the quality of the image and the sound was enabled, but also of the viewer's perception of what can be regarded as good quality. Who determines what is regarded as good skills and good aesthetics?

The film collective positioned themselves in line with feminist ideas inspired by Marxism and stressed the relationship between production conditions, aesthetics and even choice of subject matter. It is important to emphasise, amongst other things, that the London Women's Film Group saw knowledge as something structural; that is there was a political and social reason why men had more knowledge of camera technique than women, why there were fewer female directors or why women got less money for their productions. These were some of the aspects that the London Women's Film Group wanted to bring to the fore, apart from the actual content, of course.[86] The film collective was also of the opinion that the dominance of men influenced which narratives were chosen and how they were conveyed. The film collective wrote a manifesto in which they emphasised that the women filmmakers had the ability to produce other sorts of narratives and a more 'honest' image of women that was less stereotypical, precisely because they themselves shared the experiences of being a woman.[87] Their images would be produced by and for women, in contrast to the images produced for the male gaze.[88] By changing the production conditions, both how and by whom the stories were told, a new form of representation would be made possible. I see this as an important change, which made the film collective's filmmaking radical in 1970s Britain. Many feminist and women's film collectives of the period focused on women's experiences of work and daily life. One of the aspects that became important to highlight was the unpaid labour that women performed in the home. The film *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* by the London Women's Film Group was exactly that, an argument for equal pay. In the film, documentary and fictitious scenes are mixed – the fictitious scenes are constructed like some sort of cabaret with parodies of certain figures in society, for example the capitalist, the media producer, the male employer and the woman who panders to men. In a certain scene one can hear a woman speaking of the inequality of her life situation. Just like her husband she works full-time, but over and above her paid labour she also has to take care of the home and the children. She talks of how tired she is and that she is longing for another life that is built on other principles, in which the woman and the man have a more equitable situation. Through this strategy, personal narratives are related to a more overarching discussion of the social and political conditions that promote the oppression of women.

In the text 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema', however, Claire Johnston – one of the film collective's members – criticises the belief that a film's content and structure would be improved just because it was made by women.[89] For the imagery and narrative of a film to change it is rather necessary for the filmmakers to consciously adopt new strategies. The experiences of an individual do not in and of themselves lead to change, as she points out. The experiences must also consciously be channelled and construed into a narrative. Johnston stresses that we should rather see the visuals as a part of a 'process of signification' than as a

form of reproduction or representation. With this she meant that images don't just mirror the world but actively construct it for us, and influence how we perceive it.[90]

As far back as the 1920s, Sergei Eisenstein had spoken of the ability of film to construct new meaning and a different view of reality, saying that 'Film cannot be a simple presentation or demonstration of events: rather it must be a tendentious selection of, and comparison between, events, free from narrowly plot-related plans and moulding the audience in accordance with its purpose.'[91] Eisenstein meant that film was a part of an intellectual thought process; images could generate thoughts, feelings and actions. Since film could construct ideas and feelings it could even have an impact on society. According to him, critical film was not about reproducing the world as we already know it but about constructing images that point towards an alternative society, or at least generate ideas about an alternative society. The task of revolutionary film, according to Eisenstein, was to teach new methods and even influence the viewer, steering them towards a socialist society.[92]

The London Women's Film Group presented several important ideas that can be linked to discussions about film as a political act. Just like Cinema Action, the London Women's Film Group saw itself as speaking from *within* a political movement. The films that were produced were meant to both inform and support women's struggle for equality. One of the issues that they stressed was the importance of highlighting women's history and politicising topics that had long been neglected, such as the home, children, sexuality and relationships. The historical documents also seem to indicate that the London Women's Film Group was more active than Cinema Action in the struggle regarding the political situation in the film industry. The London Women's Film Group didn't only question the general production conditions in society, but directed specific criticism towards the film industry's organisation and working conditions. The collective was interested in how and who participated in the production of film. Who was included in the decision-making processes in the different parts of the film production. Which bodies were excluded in the process, and which voices were marginalised. The members of the collective demanded of filmmakers that they explored how this influenced the film's aesthetics and narrative. It was the very structure of the production of knowledge that the group investigated, reflected over but also tried to change by suggesting alternative production conditions and including women in all positions. While Cinema Action focused on class, the London Women's Film Group thus also emphasised that gender must be used as an analytical category. This is precisely what Rosalind Coward had called for when she wrote the article 'Class, "Culture" and the Social Formation'. In it she strongly criticised the orthodox (male) Marxism, which she believed her colleagues in Birmingham represented. By introducing gender as an analytical category it was possible to reveal the power relations and oppression that took place within a certain class.[93]

Berwick Street Film Collective and Nightcleaners

In 1970 some members of Cinema Action left the collective because they felt that they had not had the possibility to make the films they wanted to within its framework. Neither did they want to be tied to a movement with a distinct aim any longer. Cinema Action focused on films that could be used by workers in the struggle for improved working conditions. This meant that the film productions had tight schedules and demanded topicality, leaving only limited scope for reflection and no time for experimentation with sound or image, or for retakes. The main purpose of the films was to set in motion actions that were to take place beyond the screening itself. The films were considered successful if they encouraged political activities or had direct effect on realpolitik. Therefore Cinema Action as a group was primarily interested in the content of the films and their relation to the world around it. They were less interested in initiating public discussions on the relationship between film and aesthetics. Representational strategies were certainly important, but they were always subordinated a political aim – to participate in the labour movement's struggle for improved working conditions. The people who left Cinema Action formed the Berwick Street Film Collective, where they tried to create a structure that would allow for freer experimentation with aesthetic methods and strategies.[94]

Before long the group was approached by some activists within the women's movement and asked if they wanted to make a film about women night cleaners. Despite their reluctance to continue making campaign films, the collective agreed to take on the project. Camera in hand they followed the campaign work over the course of three years and used interactive documentary film strategies – the same strategies they had used during their time with Cinema Action. In front of the camera they spoke to the women working at night, the campaign workers and the employers about their working conditions, views on the campaign and the future.[95] The film, which I briefly described in the introduction, was entitled *Nightcleaners*. One of the topics that the film addresses is the relationship between paid and unpaid labour, and between home and work. Just as in *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* it is the experiences of women's work that is the main focus. In the film several cleaning women say that they work at night to be able to take care of their children during the day. They are tired and worn out because they don't get enough sleep, sometimes not more than an hour or two hour per night. But they have no alternative since the family needs two incomes and it is the role of the woman to take care of the household, and hence the only thing left to do is to work the night shift as a cleaner.

As opposed to Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group, the Berwick Street Film Collective did not see itself as part of a specific political movement. Their political ideas were not as pronounced and their collective organisational forms were not as strict. The collective consisted of only

four people, who together also ran the commercial production company Lucia Films. According to Humphrey Trevelyan, one of the members, they called themselves a collective, but that had more to do with the spirit of the times than with political conviction. For certain productions they invited other people to participate. For example the artist Mary Kelly participated in the production of *Nightcleaners*, but she was never a member of the collective.[96] What was important for the Berwick Street Film Collective was to examine the conditions of narration and imagery. To see what could be achieved with the film medium per se, and how it could be given political content.

Thus, when the filmmakers wanted to edit the material about the night cleaners they started to critically reflect on the film strategies they had employed. The images that the collective had recorded and documented seemed to give an inadequate view of the cleaners, as well as the campaign and the complex relationships that, through it, had developed between different positions and people. The group found it necessary to experiment with images, sound and cutting techniques during the editing process in order to find alternative forms of representation.[97]

Over and above the ambition to find an alternative aesthetics, the group members also wanted to reflect on how the editing itself impacted on the filmic narrative and its arguments. They also wanted that to become visible in the composition and materiality of the finished film. As we saw in the film fragments that I described in the introduction, there are, for example, no images or scenes in the finished film that are linked – they are all separated by a black frame. By not connecting any scenes the filmmakers wanted to get the viewer to reflect on the role of montage in film. Moreover, the black frames were meant to provide the viewer with space to relate to each image or scene as a separate unit and reflect on what they see and hear and what they don't see and hear.[98]

In this context one can remember that Bertolt Brecht's notions about epic theatre were an important source of inspiration for the Berwick Street Film Collective. One of epic theatre's objectives was to activate the audience members; to make them actively engage in the subjects that were raised on the stage and the situation that they themselves were in. Brecht wanted to provoke questions that the audience could discuss both within and beyond the space of the theatre. In order for theatre to be charged with social and political meaning it was important that the viewer had a critical distance to what was being presented on stage. The viewer should not become absorbed in the play's plot or their own feelings, because then the distance would also be lost. Thus, as a first step the playwright was forced to break with all forms of desire to create illusions of reality on the stage.

> Once the content becomes, technically speaking, an independent component, to which text, music and setting 'adopt attitudes'; once illusion is sacrificed to free discussion, and once the spectator, instead of being enabled to have an experience, is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which goes far beyond formal matters and begins for the first time to affect the theatre's social function.[99]

Brecht continued: 'Before familiarity can turn into awareness, the familiar must be stripped of its inconspicuousness; we must give up assuming that the object in question needs no explanation.'[100] Brecht developed a technique that he called 'Verfremdungseffekt'. 'Verfremdung' – estrangement – involves the displacement or shift of an event or a situation that seems to be highly mundane, familiar and ordinary to instead be perceived as strange, uncomfortable and unrecognizable. One of the techniques he used involved interrupting the play by having the actors for example suddenly stop in mid-action and start to speak of something else or address the audience directly.[101] Other methods included slow motion (the actor moves slowly) and exaggerated movements. It was important for the actors to distance themselves from the character that they were playing; they shouldn't try to 'become' the character but demonstrate the character's actions. Thus the viewer would be forced to relate to the play based on the situation that was presented as a whole, and not only based on its plot.[102] As I've mentioned before, Sergei Eisenstein, who was active around the same time in Russia, had similar ideas regarding film.

The addition of black frames to *Nightcleaners* can be viewed as the same kind of distancing method. When I watch *Nightcleaners* I am always, almost painfully, conscious of the fact that I am watching a film. I never get to know a character or become absorbed in a situation before I am abruptly propelled out of the story.

When the film *Nightcleaners* came out in 1975, the film theorists Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen wrote that it was one of the most successful political films made in Britain. This is because it revealed its own filmic construction and linked these formal aspects to the social and political situation that the cleaners found themselves in. Johnston and Willemen claimed that *Nightcleaners* did precisely what the collective had intended: it enabled critical reflection on the filmic representation of this specific political struggle. But at the same time it also explored conflicting relationships and alliances between the social and political stakeholders who are portrayed in the film.[103] The film, for example, pointed towards the relationship between sexism and class exploitation, between the middle-class traditions of the women's movement and the socialist tradition that is here represented by the trade union movement.[104] Johnston and Willemen believed that drawing attention to the conflicts between the actors and including gender as an analytical category was a way of criticizing the orthodox Marxist tradition in the UK, which, in their eyes, had failed to handle the conflicts within the working class, especially the relationship between sexism and class struggle. Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen believed that many films, such as *The Miners' Film* by Cinema Action, which claimed to speak for the working class, avoided contradictory elements and discussions. For Johnston and Willemen this was an example of a more orthodox Marxist strategy since it presupposed that the working class was a homogenous group or at least that it could be united without any greater conflict. Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen argued that the black frames in *Nightcleaners* were an aesthetic strategy that rendered impossible illusions of a diegetic homogeneity.[105] 'In this film, not only is the illusion of a diegetic homogeneity dispelled, but also the idea that reality itself is available in the form of a homogenous surface waiting to be filmed.'[106]

The reasoning is reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's conviction that political theatre is a place where the audience should be encouraged to critically compare the play with their own experiences and then learn a lesson from it. Both Brecht and Eisenstein also saw the theatre and the cinema as collective spaces, but they had different ideas regarding their importance. As opposed to Eisenstein, Brecht stressed that the creator of theatre (the director, the producer, the actor) should not treat the audience as an undifferentiated mass. They should not address everyone in the same way, but rather allow conflict in the audience. By becoming aware of the different tensions and conflicts in the social relations, the audience members could learn from one another.[107]

Inspired by Brecht, amongst others, Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen claimed that *Nightcleaners* was a film that harboured conflicts and moreover both presented and constituted a learning process. It created a kind of knowledge chain in which the female night cleaners learnt something from the participants in the campaign, where the filmmakers learnt from the interaction with the women and where the audience learns from the film.

Johnston and Willemen also developed a critique of so-called realistic representation strategies. Here they used Cinema Action as an example, which, according to them, was marked by an essentialist view on the moving image. Johnston and Willemen meant that the collective used images to document an existing world, and not to change or create a new one. The content was certainly politically radical, but they found that the film or its imagery per se was not given any agency. It was solely there to communicate the verbal political message. According to Johnston and Willemen, the radical film collective used naïvely documentary, observational or interactive film strategies, in the belief that these could reveal social structures and truths about society. 'The unproblematic, immediate transparency of the image […] legitimised by synchronous speech, constitutes a behaviorist strategy aimed at producing the impression that individuals and groups participate in some mythical unity of consciousness.' According to Johnston and Willemen, Cinema Action worked in accordance with an ideology that was based on a view of the world as transparent and easy to understand, and where truth could be made manifest in the moving image. However, what the films actually did, according to the writers, was replace one 'truth' for another. They offered no alternative ways of approaching or structuring the world. Johnston and Willemen also pointed out that film collectives such as Cinema Action used film as a tool to give people a voice but without reflecting on the politics of the image.[109] In line with the French philosopher Louis Althusser, whose presence can be felt in some of Johnston and Willemen's arguments, one could say that the films do not question the ideological departure point of the documentary film strategies, and thus these films could not function as a political force in the long run.

In *Nightcleaners* the material reflection was not only visible in the black frames but also in the editing of the film material. Extreme close-ups of women played in very slow motion are a recurring element for example. The close-up image is grainy and almost abstract. Johnston and Willemen believed that these sequences pointed out that the cinematographic image lacks naturalness and realism, and instead is a product of conscious strategies. The graininess and the slow tempo highlight the fact that the filmed image has been processed. What

the film presents is thus not a woman, nor even the image of a woman, but an image that shows that the image of the woman is just that, an image. In this way the film revealed, according to Johnston and Willemen, the construction behind the filmic illusion of reality.[110]

Johnston and Willemen's reasoning can also be linked to the cultural theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer who held that art can only be seen as a critical force as long as there is a discrepancy between the constructed image and the empirical object.[111] It is only in this discrepancy that an alternative world is conceivable. This approach becomes radical because in this interstice lies the potential for change, a conception of that which isn't yet. Only by experiencing something that we do not know can we imagine something else. This is another reason why, according to them, there cannot be any potential for change in only documenting or representing the world as we already know it because that does not stimulate our imagination about the radical other, although the voices that we hear sometimes express radical ideas.

Adorno stressed that film also consists of that which is absent and of what is found between the images. He saw certain potential in what he metaphorically called *the blind film*, a way of producing where the filmmaker would film without intention; that is to say, by distancing oneself from individual subjective decisions the film would avoid falling in the trap of realistic mimicry.[112] Correspondingly one could say that the black frames in *Nightcleaners* point towards an absence, something that cannot be represented. They make one aware of the fact that filmmaking always involves a choice of images and that choice determines how someone or something is presented.

According to this line of reasoning, against the background of what Humphrey Trevelyan told me in our conversations and if we follow Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen's analysis in the text 'Brecht in Britain', *Nightcleaners* can be seen as a reflection on the images that the filmmakers have created of the women's work and struggle, rather than a document of the women's nightly work. Or, in other words: what the film visualises is not a representation of work and struggle, but an idea of a special form of work and a special struggle. This is the vital difference that gives the film its agency. This allows us to speak of what the film *proposes* rather than what it *represents*. Since it conveys reflections through a fragmentary structure, the finished film continues to pose questions about the possibilities of film as a medium, about the images that were created and about that which cannot be visualised. Thus, I as a viewer in the year 2016 am also being addressed. I am encouraged to analyse the work and see it in relation to the struggle of the trade union, exploitation, production conditions and the feminist movement, but also in relation to contemporary notions regarding work, gender and struggles.

Critical Reflection in Different Formats

Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen argue that in *Nightcleaners* the activity of the audience is generated by the construction of the film; it is built into the film itself. This differs from Cinema Action's conception regarding the participation of the audience.

Whenever during my research I met people who had been members in the collectives, I always asked how the film screenings had been organized. Did they lead to discussions and action? Steve Sprung, once an active member of Cinema Action, told me of his first encounter with one of the collective's films.[113] Sprung has a working-class background. Most of his friends and family worked in the automotive industry in Coventry, but he chose to move to London to attend art school. One evening his father came to London to see a Cinema Action film – *Fighting the Bill* (1970) – in which Sprung's father and some of his colleagues had in fact participated. Steve Sprung remembers how impressed and moved he was by the film. This was the first time that he had heard conscious and articulate working-class voices discussing their working conditions in a film. He identified with the voices on the screen while at the same time the situation was entirely new to him. He had heard these conversations take place before, but never *in a film*. Using Bertolt Brecht's terminology the experience could be seen as a result of a *Verfremdungseffekt*. Something sounds familiar but is presented in an alternative way, which creates a critical distance. After the film screening, Sprung contacted Cinema Action and became a member. Sprung, with his working-class background, was welcomed with open arms.

Another example can be taken from the work of the London Women's Film Group. In 1972 the film *Women of the Rhondda* was completed. The film consisted of interviews with Welsh women who spoke of their experiences of living in mining families in the 1920s and 1960s in Wales. They were stories that had never been heard before. The aesthetic strategy was quite conventional in this case. Neither in its contents nor on a formal level did the film reflect about the choice of strategy. But one could still claim that a displacement took place. Like in *Fighting the Bill,* the viewers get to see something that they know very well – interviews with people who speak of their experiences – but simultaneously they also see something that they probably do not know – the historical experiences of being a woman in a mining community.[114] Thus the established interview format was used to present an unknown aspect of history, and the displacement takes place when the well-known aesthetic strategy is placed in relation to the unknown history. Or, to be more concrete: the viewer of *Women of the Rhondda* experiences a displacement when the answers of the interviewees differ from the expected, which makes the viewer aware of the construction of the interview. This happens although the film's form, structure and language are in themselves not self-reflexive. The reflection does not take place *in* the

film but, exactly as in *Fighting the Bill*, *between* the film, the audience and the historical world that the audience is a part of. In their criticism of Cinema Action's films Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen ignored precisely this in-between gap.

Thus, I speak of at least two forms of critical reflection. One defined by the film's construction, like in *Nightcleaners*, and one based on the space between the film, the audience and the historical context. This means that films of the latter kind lose their reflexivity when they are moved from one historical context to another. Michael Renov argues that it is necessary for the viewer to experience a direct relationship between the visual representation and the world they live in, in order to be convinced by the visual message. In other words, according to Renov, 'Documentary persuasion must be understood as an effect of history within precise discursive conditions.'[115] In today's UK or Sweden, where we are in a way more used to seeing women's experiences on film, we do not get as astonished (or shocked) by the stories that the *Women of the Rhondda* tell; no displacement occurs. The film's ability to generate reflection has waned. Neither *Women of the Rhondda* nor *Fighting the Bill* retain their political power when relocated in time or from one historical setting to another. It is dependent on a special situation at a specific historical moment. For that very reason it can seem as if many films produced by for example Cinema Action are simplified and propaganda-like. In actual fact they seem like that only because we nowadays lack living contact with the situation and the conflicts that charged the films with political meaning. They were not made for us. They were made for an audience within the 1970s labour movement and the battle that was fought at the time. Hence, an analysis of the films that does not simultaneously try to recreate something of the specific historical context in which they were produced easily leads to them being depoliticised. On the other hand, such films could clearly regain their political strength given a time when we can once again relate to the elements and aspects addressed in them.

Film as Political Action

What conclusions can we draw from the ideas of the film collectives regarding the making of politics through film? As I've already stated, my intention has not been to try to find out what effect the collectives' films had on the actual political situation, instead I am interested in what the collectives meant when they claimed that they made politics through film. The issue is complex, however, and there is no unambiguous answer. Besides, opinions have changed with time and history and how I have approached the question naturally mirrors my own times and interests. Nevertheless, as a filmmaker it is the intentions and choices of the film collectives that I have been most interested in, in the hope of learning something that I can use in my own practice and time. In other words, I have been interested in what it entails as a filmmaker to participate in and influence political debate through filmic work.

Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group saw themselves as being part of a greater political movement: the labour movement and the women's movement respectively. Both groups stressed the role of film as a social product and a collective act and made an effort to move away from the notion of the individual creator. When I studied the collectives it was hard to pinpoint who had been members and how they had been involved in the different film productions. Of course the different collectives' members had various roles and functions in the film productions, but for someone like me revisiting the work of the collectives from the vantage point of their future, it is difficult to ascertain what the job division looked like. The only thing one can determine is the collective authorship and the collective attempt to engage in politics. One cannot identify the individual contributions and roles. In other words, the film collectives succeeded in underscoring collective authorship to a future audience. This in itself is one of the lasting achievements of the collectives since they relativise the notion that creation – and film history as such – always can be traced back to a certain number of identifiable individuals.

Cinema Action made their films with a political aim that was defined by the activist part of the British labour movement that strove to radically change the power relations and production conditions in British society. The main function of the films was to inform, encourage action and contribute towards solidarity among workers from different parts of the country. In the actual moment of filming, the camera was a tool that enabled discussion and reflection; it simply gave the filmmakers a reason to ask questions and start discussions with the workers. It was, in other words, the camera's presence that made possible a conversation between the filmmaker and the worker in which they discussed and reflected over the prevailing political situation. On the part of Cinema Action the hope was that these reflections would encourage further action, not just in those workers whom they met in front of the camera, but also those who, at a later stage, saw the film, that is those workers who did not share their workday with the workers in the film but still lived and worked under similar

conditions. Cinema Action claimed that they brought analyses and stories to the fore that otherwise would not have been told. I am deliberately avoiding the expression 'to voice' because it was more about underscoring events, narratives and analyses based on a certain political conviction and bringing them into the public arena. For Cinema Action the work was about highlighting the relation between individual events and the structures that made them possible. These analyses would in turn inspire further political activities beyond the screening room. This formed an important political act.

There are many similarities between Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group when it comes to aesthetic strategies and the relationship with a larger political movement. The greatest and most significant difference was that the London Women's Film Group raised issues pertaining to women's living and working experiences in society. In contrast to the members of Cinema Action, the filmmakers of the London Women's Film Group also based their work on their own experiences of being a woman; the film was a way to make personal experiences public and visible, thus making it possible for them to be politicised and compared to others, and for lessons to be learnt from them. Many of the films that the group made and distributed were specifically about oppression and the discrimination that women experienced in the home and at the workplace, but they also suggested how the situation could be changed to create an alternative daily life. In this sense the films are based on the prevailing conditions but at the same time point to the future, towards a not-yet-existing society without the oppression of women. However, just as important as portraying the experiences of women in the actual films was questioning and challenging the prevailing production structures, norms and principles within the film industry. They believed that by changing the production conditions, other narratives and representational strategies would also be made possible. In other words, it was not enough to solely present alternative content, but the question had to be asked why this alternative content had not been shown until now; which structures enable or disable the telling of which stories.

The Berwick Street Film Collective did not have the same clear realpolitikal agenda that Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group expressed. As a result the relationship with the audience that the collective fostered differed from that of the other two collectives. Their general aim was not to inform or get the audience to act in a certain way but rather they were interested in the reflections of the audience regarding the film's aesthetics and content. This marks a significant difference. Cinema Action wanted to foster specific action that would lead to predefined goals, while the idea of reflection as it found its expression in the work of the Berwick Street Film Collective was more open and undefined; their aim was no more specific than to encourage the audience to think about the images and the story that the film presented. Moreover, the film was not seen primarily as a catalyst for discussion, but rather they believed that the film is suggestive in its aesthetics. Content-wise *Nightcleaners*, like other films, focuses on work that in this case is executed by the women of the working class, and the film suggests, through its critical content, another existence with better working conditions. But the film also suggests through its choice of aesthetics. Here, *how* something is presented is as central as *what* is presented. The suggestion is located in the film's own logic and construction, and not only in its content. This is precisely what Claire Johnston and

Paul Willemen choose to develop a theoretical argument around. They come to the conclusion that a film cannot achieve its goal of changing the world unless it questions the construction and narrative foundations of the medium itself. With this as their point of departure it is quite natural for Johnston and Willemen to appreciate documentary filmmakers who accommodate reflections regarding the construction of the film in the actual film material, as is the case with *Nightcleaners*. In other words they believe that when discussing the politics of film, both the content and the aesthetics of a film need to be taken into account. They dismiss the idea that the image represents the world and try instead to develop a theoretical approach in which the visual aspects can be seen as a force in the construction of the historical world, that is an approach in which it becomes apparent how the image is the creator of new meaning – a part of the signification process – rather than just reproducing an existing meaning. Johnston and Willemen further claim that the political can also be found in the contradictions that the film raises, both in terms of content and aesthetics. They believe that embracing contradiction in the world is central to an ethical approach that influences how we understand and act in the world.

For the film collectives the collective form of organisation also provided the possibility to establish alternative production and distribution structures. The collectives' filmmakers lacked the resources to rent expensive equipment, pay salaries, hire people with specialist technical know-how and market the films. Sharing one's equipment and skills was thus an important part of collective film production. Cinema Action, for example, built an editing studio that could be used by members, as well as people who wanted to try their hand at filmmaking. Sharing equipment also meant that the collectives were not dependent on the larger institutions, such as the British Film Institute (BFI) or the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and could produce and distribute film on their own terms.[116]

The independent filmmakers were successful in their struggle for change within the film industry in the 1970s. Here the Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA) was an important lobby group. The association was a driving force in the establishment of Channel 4, a new TV channel within the framework of the state-funded television networks. Channel 4 started broadcasting in 1981 and during the first years the channel offered a broad spectrum of programmes that also included political and experimental films.[117]

From a 'We'
to an 'I'

At the end of the 1970s the political climate in the UK changed and in 1979 the Tories won the national elections. With Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, state expenses were once again cut, managing at the same time to weaken the trade unions. The state and municipal funding of culture, schools and universities decreased, while the social and political movements from the 1970s were dissolved. New political networks started developing that were better equipped for the new society and the new issues on the agenda. This radical change also affected the film collectives politically, socially, culturally and financially. They had after all been closely linked to the political movements during the 1970s in terms of subject matter, audience and financing and this structure was now being dissolved. Despite these changes that were taking place, the new television channel still gave them hope of a continued platform for production and distribution. In 1984 several IFA activists worked for the channel or were financed by it. In the second half of the 1980s, however, Channel 4 also started developing in a conventional direction and cut down on its financing of independent and experimental filmmakers.[118]

In the 1970s several theoreticians had also started moving away from Marxist-orientated ideas towards psychoanalytical theories. Many feminist theorists, such as Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey, believed that psychoanalysis provided better tools for an advanced analysis of patriarchal structures in film. These analyses soon started to dominate the conversations about the role of the film image and the audience. Already in 1975 this development was noticeable in several of the presentations held at the Edinburgh Film Festival. Colin MacCabe, for example, held a presentation in which he tried to combine Bertolt Brecht's methods with psychoanalytical theories – which in part could be seen as contradictory. MacCabe's point of departure, inspired by Brecht, was that political film, like the theatre, is defined by the fact that it must involve an act of learning for the audience. According to McCabe, epic theatre was based on a radical separation of different elements such as sound, text and music. By borrowing arguments from the structuralist language theoretician Christian Metz, MacCabe distinguished between five different elements in film: the moving image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded music, recorded noises and text.[119] When the relationship between these is disturbed the viewer can start to critically relate to what they are experiencing and seeing, which for MacCabe was the precondition for learning. The aim of a disruptive element was thus to activate the audience and make the production of knowledge possible.

> Rather than a text compact with its own meaning, a text which confers a unity and gives a position to the subject, we want a text whose fissures and differences constantly demand an activity of articulation from the subject – which articulation in its constant changes and contradictions makes known – shows – the contradictions of the reader's position within and without the cinema.[120]

Using psychoanalysis as his starting point, MacCabe further argued that the ability of film to convey knowledge to a viewer presupposes a separation from what they see, since it is only then that the identification can be experienced as a set of relations. These two processes, separation and identification, are necessary for a learning process to occur. Through identification we can discover satisfaction and trust (like when a child is satisfied by the breast) and in the separation itself we find desire and knowledge (like when a child is not satisfied and the breast becomes an absent and desired object).[121] MacCabe stressed that 'the separation of which Brecht talked always takes place where there is an identity. The political question becomes then one of locating an identity which must be separated out so that it can become an object of knowledge.'[122] He also argued that 'when the world of pleasure and belief is interrupted we set up a desire and knowledge, but it is necessary to start where there is an identity in order to achieve the separation.'[123]

Thus for MacCabe film is about learning that the 'I' is historical and that this 'I' is a product of several relations. Here we can see a clear shift away from a discussion about a collective subject and the collective experience of film to a discussion of how the singular subject is created – from a 'we' to an 'I'.

What does it mean that several of the critical discussions of film started to talk about the construction of the 'I' rather than the construction of a 'we' or a collective? Can we in this context still talk about the structural oppression of women, workers and people of colour? And what happens to the experience of a collective identity based on class, gender and ethnicity?[124] However, perhaps the most important question in this context is what impact this shift could have on an ethical approach to filmmaking. How can this 'I' relate to 'the Other'? Can 'we' share a world, despite our differences? How? Let me approach these questions by first moving on to a discussion of the production of the film *Sisters!* and how it was informed by and can be seen in relation to the experiences of the British film collectives of the 1970s.

9/5/11	Stefano Berinduin	Photography	9:00	
9/5/11	Petra Bauer	artist	9:00	
9/5/11	RACHEL DOWLE	assistant	9.00	
9/5/11	Rob "Od School" Brugge	SOUND	9.00	

Sisters!

Let me again start by presenting a film fragment. First the title: 'Sisters!' Then close-ups of hands writing in a visitors' book: '9/5/11–17/5/11'. They are the hands of the members of the film team and the visitors' book belongs to the organisation Southall Black Sisters. In the visitors' book one can also read the names and job descriptions of the team members (photographer, artist, assistant and sound technician). Next frame. A woman answers a telephone: 'Southall Black Sisters'. It is a call from India. When we were filming I didn't understand what she was saying because she was speaking Hindi but I heard the words 'domestic violence'. We left the conversation untranslated in the final version of the film. She puts the call through to a colleague. The camera

pans across a wall of photographs taken at various public demonstrations. Close-up of a hand writing on a notepad. Fragments of a telephone call. Another close-up of another hand, other papers and a keyboard. Another telephone conversation. A woman's voice: 'Has he ever physically assaulted her? Did you say brother, or brother-in-law? Does she live with him?' We never let the viewer hear what the voice on the other end of the receiver answers. The camera pans slowly up towards the face belonging to the voice. The camera rests there. A close-up of the woman's face. She's wearing a headset. She's looking straight ahead at a computer screen that is off-camera. Another female voice: 'Pragna, did you have time to look at that referral for me?' The woman with the headset: 'How often does he threaten her? And how many incidents have there been?' A new image: a woman at a desk. She's talking to some other women who are not in the frame. We let the viewer enter in the middle of their conversation: 'There were hundreds of women that were tested.' Another voice: 'But that was in India and Pakistan.' The woman in the frame: 'No, no. The families did that. But the virginity tests … it is the state that was imposing… So it is different. But what I think we are going to do, we are going to do a letter to *The Guardian*. We are going to respond to this. Pragna is going to put something together. So if you got any kind of ideas, anything you may want to say. Coming to it new would be good.'

This fragment is from the introduction to our own film *Sisters!,* which was finished forty years after *Nightcleaners,* in September 2011. Like *Nightcleaners,* it was filmed in London, but in another part of the city. The focus is still on work performed by women – albeit a different kind of work – and both *Nightcleaners* and *Sisters!* deal with the struggle against structural injustices that lead to the oppression of women. Here, however, the focus is on those structures that organisations such as Southall Black Sisters see as the cause of the oppression of black women in the UK in 2011.

Early on in my research into British film collectives I had decided that the artistic project linked to my dissertation should consist of several different parts so that it would be possible to address a variety of issues and in order for the artistic research to find a range of visual expressions. At least part of it was to consist of a newly produced film since an important aspect of the research was to relate the filmic strategies of the 1970s to my own times and my own practice.[125] By researching historical methods and strategies, I wanted to examine the conditions of political film practice today. My first idea was to remake an existing film from the 1970s together with the original production team. In this way I thought I could examine the relationship between the present and the past when it came to subject matter, organisation, production conditions, aesthetics and distribution. However, after a while the idea of remaking an existing film became less interesting. There was a predictability in the method that didn't feel challenging. It's an obvious fact that society changes and thus also strategies and politics. Bertolt Brecht, who is an important source of inspiration in my research, argued that one should be prepared to develop new methods that can prove how specific power relations work and are materialised. We can of course learn from the struggles of other groups but we must adapt the methods and strategies to the times in which we live.[126] Hence, another method was needed which didn't only relate to the 1970s through its form of expression but also created links between the aesthetics, politics and organisation of the past and those of my own times, while at the same time making the difference between them distinct. It became clear to me that in this situation it would be most challenging to make an entirely new film with an existing feminist organisation, jointly asking those questions that the historical research had generated. For example I was curious about how we would approach issues such as production conditions, distribution and political and aesthetic strategies. Would we, together, be able to generate images and sound that addressed contemporary feminist issues?

In the spring of 2010 I came in contact with the feminist organisation Southall Black Sisters. Since its inception in 1979 this organisation has worked towards improving the situation of individual women and towards more overarching changes of the political, economic and social structures that disadvantage black women and those belonging to other minorities in the UK. Southall Black Sisters is an NGO located in Southall, in South West London. The organisation has approximately ten employees and is headed by a group of three to four people.[127] The women who are helped by and visit Southall Black Sisters regularly are not formally part of the organisation and hence have no decision-making power. The organisation primarily helps women from the borough of Ealing in West London, but they also take on national cases that have been referred to them because of their expertise in the area. Ideologically the organisation comes from a socialist feminist tradition. But counter to the feminist movement of the 1970s that dealt mainly with gender and class, the work of Southall Black Sisters is based on an intersectional analysis that over and above the categories of gender and class also deals with ethnicity. Thus the organisation reflects the development that took place within the Western feminist movements during the 1980s and 1990s.[128]

To Southall Black Sisters it has always been important to collaborate and show solidarity with other organisations and actors with whose political projects the organisation sympathises.[129] The organisation has had the same political goals from the very beginning, but it has changed strategies to keep up with the times.

In the early 1980s, for example, members of Southall Black Sisters organised several demonstrations and campaigns to highlight inequitable structures and acts, as well as actively participating in demonstrations organised by other political organisations, for example the national miners' strike in 1984. In the early 1990s they also started to actively influence the way in which certain legal clauses are interpreted and applied in the courts, as well as propose amendments to certain laws.[130] In the last ten years, Southall Black Sisters have worked hard to influence political decisions, educate state employees and participate in academic contexts.[131]

When I first met with Southall Black Sisters in March 2010, management was positive to my idea of making a film together dealing with feminist issues and strategies based on the organisation's current position and daily work, as well as relating to the past. We started the project in April 2010 and by September 2011 the film *Sisters!* had been completed.

The Conditions of the Collaboration

In my search for a feminist organisation interested in making a film with me I had a number of conditions that had to be fulfilled. I had to sympathize with the overarching political ideas of the organisation. And they in turn had to be interested in a longer collaboration. Another requirement I had was that the organisation should already be clearly defined and not be in need of a film to provide it with a voice. The organisation was welcome to *use* the finished film, but the film shouldn't *define* the organisation as such. One of the things I was interested in when starting this collaboration was the possibility of finding a method that would ensure that the end product, namely the film, was the result of joint work; a method guaranteeing that I as an individual artist would not have a stronger voice than the members of the organisation, and enabling us to agree on the conditions of the film together. This was an ambitious goal, perhaps even impossible, but it was the only goal imaginable to me.

Experiences from my previous films had made me aware of the position of power that the filmmaker and narrator possesses. The words of a number of filmmakers and film theorists accompanied me on this endeavour. Apart from Trinh T. Minh-ha, Claire Johnston and the works of the film collectives, I thought of Michael Renov's remark that a person who is seen and heard in a film can never speak as an autonomous subject and can never be the reference of the film. The subject of the film is always the filmmaker's construction. The 'voices' of the film's subjects are created and organised through the visual material.[132] This would mean that even though we hear someone speak about her/his life, this voice is only heard on the filmmaker's own terms. Or, to put it differently: the filmmaker always speaks from a specific position that influences the narrative. And since the narrator can never be completely transparent, the most important thing is that her/his position is clearly defined.[133]

But what happens if we cannot clearly distinguish who the filmmaker is? Would it be possible to develop a method and make a film that we – that is Southall Black Sisters, the production team and I – would feel is a joint effort without ignoring power relationships? Could the film succeed in being a collective voice and the result of a collective production? In order to answer these questions I had to think about what constituted a collective voice. Was the voice to be found in the organisation per se, as Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group claimed? In the relation to the audience? In the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject of the film?

The making of *Sisters!* was, however, not only about authorship. It was just as much about the organisation's political projects and which aspects of those could be interesting to address in a film investigating contemporary feminist issues and strategies. When we finally decided on the issues that we would address, the next important question was *how* this would be done. A discussion of the political narrative of the film thus ended up being about both *what* and *how*.

The working methods and strategies of film collectives here served as a source of inspiration rather than a set of rules that controlled the production. The historical material had made me aware of processes, arguments and choices. In order to reflect on all this, I took the questions that I had identified in the historical research with me into the production of *Sisters!*. I continuously reflected over the choice of aesthetic strategies in relation to the content and the conditions of production, and encouraged the people I worked with to do the same. This included copyright issues, division of labour, pre- and postproduction work and, not least, the relationships between those of us involved in the production – all those aspects of the film production that I have written about in relation to the work of the film collectives.

I will now outline this working process and its different parts in approximately the same order it was executed, from the research and planning of the film shoot to the choice of aesthetic strategies, postproduction and lastly the screening situation and relation to the audience. I would like to emphasise once again that it is the *organisation* of the production and the choice of aesthetic strategies in relation to the content that is my main focus, not how the film can be understood by a viewer. In other words, what I describe here is the methodology of the film and its politics.

The Production
of Sisters!

One month after my initial meeting with Southall Black Sisters in March 2010, we started the film project. Our collaboration came to be divided into different phases: research, dialogue, script development, the shooting of the film, editing and presentation.

The first five months, from April to September 2010, I was at the organisation's office about once a week. I listened to their conversations, took part in meetings, observed them as they kept their records, joined them for lunch, read their articles and looked through their video archives. I got to know them and their organisation. And they got to know me. I asked questions as they emerged, but mostly I just sat and observed, listened and read. This phase proved incredibly important, because it helped me gain insight into the daily work of the organisation. But at the same time I was also a foreign body in their space. At our first meeting we had agreed that it was the responsibility of the organisation to set boundaries when it came to my presence. I was a temporary guest.

Southall Black Sisters devote a great deal of their time and resources to helping individual black women change their social situation. Most of the women who seek help for domestic violence also have an insecure immigration status. These two things are often connected. The woman's right to stay in the country is linked to her marriage. This means that if the woman in question wanted to leave her spouse she would risk being deported, if she was not able to legally prove that she had fled her marriage because of abuse. For most women who come to the organisation for help, returning to the country they come from is not an alternative.

A large part of the organisation's activities could be compared to the work of a social worker; they take in women who need help in getting away from a violent situation, solve custody issues, get residence permits and find accommodation. Southall Black Sisters offers therapy, English lessons and other activities that the women need. In an interview, the Director Pragna Patel said that while the work with every individual is very important it is also a Sisyphean task. The number of cases will never decrease as long as the individual social work is not combined with political work that is aimed at changing those structures that are the cause of the oppression of these women. Patel also emphasised that this political work is based on the knowledge and experience that they gain from working with the individual women. The political strategies only become relevant if they are based on the individual women's needs and the prevailing situation.

According to Southall Black Sisters, changing society is a daily battle. The political work doesn't only take place on certain specific occasions such as at conferences, demonstrations, in the form of passionate political speeches, during court cases or in the corridors of power. It happens primarily in the unglamorous mundane work, when records are kept, emergency calls are answered, solicitors are contacted, cases are discussed and prepared for court,

English is taught, files are archived, receipts are collated, notes taken or when one sees to it that a taxi comes to pick up the abused woman at the correct address. The work is characterized by persistence and dedication.

When I observed the work being done at Southall Black Sisters I wasn't only reminded of the women in the film *Nightcleaners* but also of Jeanne Dielman in Chantal Akerman's film *Jeanne Dielman*, *23 Quai du Commerce*, *1080 Bruxelles* (1975). In *Jeanne Dielman* we follow a housewife and her chores in long takes. She peels potatoes, prepares the food, does the dishes, runs errands and helps her son with his homework. The film is constructed around three days in Jeanne Dielman's life. The scenes were filmed with a static camera. The woman leaves and enters the frame while performing her daily tasks. In the middle of these daily chores the doorbell rings. A man enters the apartment. He hangs up his coat and hat. They go to the bedroom together. The camera stays outside. After a while they come out again. They say nothing to each other. Jeanne hands the man his coat. He takes out his wallet and gives her money. Then he says that he'll see her again next week. As the viewer we don't know what happened in the bedroom. Jeanne goes to the sitting room and puts the money in a porcelain container on the lounge table. She walks to the bedroom and takes a towel from the tidy bed and opens the window. She goes to the bathroom to wash. Then she goes to the kitchen to continue with her chores. She performs all her chores in a calm, methodical way. She switches off the light when she leaves the room. She folds her clothes meticulously. She puts things in their place, shifts them to exactly the right position. It seems a bit like nothing touches Jeanne. Everything happens at the same speed and with the same emotionless expression. Even the interaction with her teenage son seems routine. When they speak to each other they sound monotonous and distanced, almost as if they were reading aloud from a manuscript.

On day two of the film, another man rings the doorbell. Jeanne and he go to the bedroom and the camera again stays outside. But in the following scene there is suddenly a shift in her movements. When the man has left she forgets to replace the lid of the ornamental container in which she keeps her money. Her usually tidy hair is unkempt. When her son comes home she doesn't meet him at the door. He comments on her dishevelled hair, which he, just like me the viewer, seems to be unused to. As they are sitting in the lounge after dinner it is he who has to remind her of their daily evening walk. Something has disrupted her routine and her rhythm. But she still exudes the same impassive and distanced manner to the people and things around her.

The third day starts like the second: Jeanne polishes her son's shoes and wakes him when breakfast is ready. But something has changed. Every day her movements have been exact, but now she drops things, stops in the middle of doing something and sits for long periods without doing anything. A man comes today too. This time the camera stays in the bedroom. We see that Jeanne takes off her clothes and that the man has sex with her. He lies heavily on top of her. At one point it looks like she wants to free herself, or is she having an orgasm? It's hard to tell because it is difficult to read her facial expression. The man doesn't take notice of her. It is also difficult to tell whether he is in fact having sex with her. The sex act just seems to be one of many daily chores. Afterwards Jeanne gets dressed. It all happens in silence. The man stays in bed.

He stretches. There's something about how he takes up space in the room that seems to bother her. Suddenly, she takes a pair of scissors lying on the bedside table and jabs him in the neck. He dies. Jeanne sits down in the dark living room. For several minutes we watch Jeanne sitting at the table. This is the last scene of the film.

How is the film to be understood? To me it poses questions about women's work, about paid versus unpaid labour; about the role of the woman in the home and how she is exploited and used. Jeanne is a character that doesn't seem to be filled with anything other than work. She takes care of the home, helps the woman next door, serves her almost grown son and offers male clients sexual services. But Jeanne does not seem to have any space in which to live out her own desires. Her life is driven by duties and routine. Although nobody seems to be forcing her, everybody expects her to go along with their demands and do her chores. Nobody asks her what she wants or is able to do. Her son reminds her when she forgets a chore and when she doesn't act or look the way she usually does. The film calls attention to a silent form of gender-related oppression. Can expectations be oppressive? Can one participate in one's own oppression? My thoughts go to Michel Foucault who speaks of self-disciplining as a way of maintaining power relationships,[134] but also Louis Althusser's ideas regarding how social structures influence the material structures that we are a part of.

What's particularly interesting with *Jeanne Dielman* is that the film doesn't only demonstrate oppression, but also portrays household chores as a form of knowledge. I oscillate between being appalled at the oppressive structures that her actions are a part of and being happy that the household chores are also depicted as the result of accumulated knowledge. There is a scene in which Jeanne prepares mincemeat for patties in real time. She seems to have made them many times before. She knows exactly what quantities of flour, eggs and breadcrumbs she should use. She knows exactly how long she should knead the mince. She performs her chores with a precision that comes from experience and practice. The work has an almost meditative quality. Jeanne seems to have extensive knowledge of cooking. Knowledge that isn't paid much attention in a housewife but that is highlighted in a professional chef. Akerman reinvests the work of the housewife with meaning by letting the viewer see the entire preparation process. The scene is not over until the work is done. In the scene with the mincemeat I realise that Jeanne's movements are not necessarily distanced in a negative way, rather it seems that she can perform her tasks so well that she can go about her chores while she lets her thoughts wander. What does Jeanne think about while she's working? Is this her outlet for her desires and fantasies? When the film ends with Jeanne sitting silently at the table in the dark living room, questions are left hanging in the air: What will happen now? Where will she be? What will happen to her son? What will Jeanne's day look like tomorrow?

Southall Black Sisters works with women who are subject to physical and psychological violence in the home. They are not only battered or sexually abused but they are also used as household slaves. They are expected to clean, cook and take care of the children and are often constrained in what they can do and how they can move about outside the home. The offices of Southall Black Sisters are located in a former residential building that has become a site of resistance to this. But here too daily chores must be performed: the rooms must

be cleaned, lunch must be prepared and the dishes must be washed. Sometimes the employees share a meal that one of them has brought along but mostly they eat a simple packed lunch. Everyone puts their plates in the dishwasher and they share the work of keeping the spaces clean. Everyone shares in the household chores. But the space in which the organisation is located is of course no longer a home, but a workplace with home-like characteristics. The notion of home is above all reflected in the architecture of the building.

When I was at the offices of Southall Black Sisters and observed their activities I started to read politics and resistance into every gesture. That doesn't mean that I think that every action or word has political content, rather that it is the framework that politicises the gestures. Neither does it mean that all the members are always in agreement with each other when it comes to which strategies should be used or which decisions should be made, nor that all the actions are entrenched in the organisation's decision-making structure. Rather, I think that both conflict and power games exist. But by accepting the organisation's overarching political goals the work that the members perform becomes a part of it. The gestures and the words are reconnected with the aim of changing those structures that, according to the organisation, oppress black women in the UK today. Discussions, negotiations and conflicts play a more important part in the pursuit of change. And through discussion new strategies and attitudes are developed and honed.

The daily work performed by Southall Black Sisters in turn makes their more public appearances possible. That is, it is in the public contexts such as political meetings, conversations, conferences, campaigns and demonstrations that other political activists and interested parties can find out more about the work of the organisation and its findings.[135] Southall Black Sisters has documented many of these public appearances using photography, video and sound recordings. While we were working on *Sisters!* I had access to this material and during the film shoot we followed Southall Black Sisters during a public appearance. It was a fundraising event for the organisation that Sue O'Sullivan had arranged.[136] In the course of the evening Pragna Patel held a passionate political speech in which she described the work that Southall Black Sisters has done in the past thirty years. In her ten-minute speech she succeeded in briefly summarising the history of the organisation; she spoke of the resistance of black women, the importance of continuing the political feminist struggle, and she compared our society with the way things were at the beginning of the 1980s. Patel also linked the work of the organisation to other social movements and discourses by using well-known terms, arguments and references. Thus she didn't only recount the history of the organisation but also connected it to other struggles and more overarching historical processes. While she spoke, members, supporters and clients stood behind her on the stage. With their physical presence they showed their support for her words and narrative.

The daily work is markedly different from this scene. In daily life the focus is on actions rather than words. Action can take the shape of words, but it's not about agitating or creating a narrative, but about intervening in and changing a situation. The fact that their daily work is slow and lacking in the dramatic effects present in Patel's speech doesn't mean that it is performed without passion. It simply takes another shape and has a different aim. If the function of

the speech is to relate to other political movements and events by using words, then the everyday work is legitimated by those changes they manage to achieve or those court cases they succeed in winning. It is probably the combination of those two different areas of work that makes it possible for Southall Black Sisters to succeed in changing laws, rules, norms and attitudes. It was precisely this close relationship between the individual and the collective, the practical and the theoretical, the everyday and the public, the immediate and the not yet implemented that fascinated me when I got to know the organisation. And it is also this that gradually became the focus of the film.

During the first period with Southall Black Sisters I mostly spent my time in the offices of the women who deal with individual cases. They belong to the younger generation of members. This was also the office of Shakila Maan, another woman who had been active in the organisation since the 1980s and who was responsible for this section of Southall Black Sisters. She became my contact and later coordinated the project and the film shoot together with the Showroom and me. Maan was hence also the person with whom I had the most discussions regarding content and aesthetics.

Three further members had been active in the organisation over a long period of time: Meena Patel, Pragna Patel and Hannana Siddiqui. It was difficult to establish a day-to-day relationship with them since they were very busy and often attended meetings outside the office. Our meetings were frequently cancelled or postponed. At times I was frustrated since I had taken great care to emphasise that it was important that this was a collaborative project. On the other hand I was conscious of their immense workload and their need to spend time and energy on urgent cases. To them the film project was a sideline that was given space when time permitted. But at the same time it was their articles that I read which informed me of their overarching politics and strategies. They were responsible for the long-term strategy of the organisation and for writing articles based on the organisation's activities.

From September 2010 to February 2011 I conducted interviews with all the employees of Southall Black Sisters. I asked questions about the work of the organisation, their role in the organisation, their hopes for the future and their views on the organisation's strengths and weaknesses. It was in these interview situations that I actively interacted with the different members. My questions led to discussions that we sometimes returned to on other occasions.

Our meetings always took place within the framework of the organisation. We didn't meet privately nor did we discuss personal matters. The work of the organisation was invariably the focus of our conversations. When we touched on personal experiences in the interviews, there was always a direct link with the political work. And, we never discussed the clients' stories more than necessary. The few times we touched on personal events or situations it was during lunch or while drinking a cup of tea in the kitchen.

Thus we started having an active dialogue with each other during this period, although I was always the one to initiate it. It was I who asked the questions and I sent my written reflections on the organisation, which they then reacted to. The members of Southall Black Sisters never asked me about my previous

experiences or artistic work. They showed no interest in it. This wasn't a problem of course. One of the main ideas behind the project was to have the opportunity to see society from a perspective other than my own. But this also highlights the structure of the relationship – I was there to listen to them, I was a guest in their organisation. Since I was also the one who initiated the project, it was as if there was a silent agreement that it was also my responsibility to see to it that I obtained enough knowledge of their activities. On the other hand my experiences and views appeared in the questions I asked, the discussions we had and in the film we subsequently produced. To me it was a balancing act between listening and learning on the one hand and proposing and producing on the other hand. It was my hope that the film, in addition to everything else, would also be a form of documentation of the learning process.

Had I set myself an impossible task? Could I as a temporary guest of Southall Black Sisters really develop a method that would make it possible to create a film together based on our joint voices? The premise was that *I* was the one who had knowledge of filmmaking, *I* was the one who had an overview of the entire project and, not least, *I* was the one who took responsibility for the development of the project. Furthermore, as it turns out, it wasn't so easy to keep up a dialogue with all the members of the organisation. And although I visited the organisation regularly, I was, after all, only there a couple of times a week. Was it possible to create something together under such conditions?

There was another factor that I thought a lot about at the beginning of the project. What were the implications for the project that I as a white woman living in Sweden was making a film about an organisation that defined itself as black and that worked with vulnerable black women in the UK? Had I, as a white woman, in some sort of neo-colonial spirit, against my own intentions, assumed the right to speak for the black woman?[137] At one point I asked Shakila Maan and Meena Patel what they thought about that. Both of them asked me to trust their decision. If it became problematic they would immediately speak up. To them the most important thing was that we had a functioning collaboration and that the film succeeded in addressing issues that were important to the organisation. Furthermore, although I had experience in making films, it was the members who had knowledge of the organisation's politics and the work it engaged in.

I had a similar discussion with the other members in the individual interview situations. On all of these occasions I asked what they thought was the difference between black and white feminism, and what they thought of different forms of collaboration. Everyone I spoke to emphasised that whiteness and blackness is a result of political positions and not part of an identity. Being white does not make one less capable of addressing structures that oppress black women, and vice versa. But they also went on to explain that they are careful about who they work with, since a collaboration under no circumstances should lead to Southhall Black Sisters losing credibility in the eyes of other organisations or individuals. In addition, they don't compromise when it comes to certain ideological principles, such as that whatever they do is based on an ideological tradition where feminism is combined with socialism. At the same time, they emphasised the importance of working together with other

movements and organisations in order to learn from the conditions of others and see how the same social structures impact different groups. In this way knowledge of the prevailing power relations and strategies can be developed that is more effective in the struggle against the oppression of women.[138]

Preparing the Film Shoot

Before the start of the project I had already informed Southall Black Sisters that I would not be filming, photographing or making any sound recordings during the research phase. All the filming was to take place over nine days in May 2011. Like Claire Johnston, I believe that photographing and recording sound is about creating images and narratives; cameras and microphones determine how something is incorporated into a story. A selection of angles, conversations, movements, sounds and soundscapes influence which ideas and relations can be created, criticised and negotiated. By focusing on a certain part of the organisation's activities we also chose to ignore another that is happening at the same time elsewhere on the premises. Hence the film cannot represent Southall Black Sisters as an organisation, only present certain aspects of their work and politics. It can only create fragmentary impressions of the work and the organisation. This is why I could not imagine how it would be possible to photograph or record before I knew the organisation and before we had together decided what should be the focus of the film.

A few months before the filming, I started sending suggestions for scenes that could be included in the film based on the conversations we had had. I suggested topics, narratives, development and how it could be communicated aesthetically. For example, I suggested a scene in which the members unroll the banners that the organisation has collected over the years. While doing so, they would talk about its history. This would be filmed in close-ups, so that there would be an element of uncertainty in the viewer regarding place and time, if this was a scene from then or now. The members of Southall Black Sisters responded to my script suggestions and suggested changes. After that, I made new suggestions. We sent the manuscript back and forth until it was time to shoot the film. Since I sent the manuscript via e-mail I don't really know who and how many people actually read it. I did, however, have frequent phone conversations with Shakila Maan who gave me a lot of valuable feedback. In the course of the spring of 2011 I also tried to meet all the members individually on two occasions to discuss the scenes.

A month before the shoot I visited Southall Black Sisters with the cameraman I had employed. Together we made a rough plan for the lighting and composition. It was, however, important to leave room for spontaneous changes. For example, about a week before the shoot, Shakila Maan suggested that we should film the fundraising event that had been organised by Sue O'Sullivan. I was reluctant at first because I had emphasised in our discussions that I wanted to film all the scenes at the offices of Southall Black Sisters. The reason for this was that I wanted to focus on the daily work of the organisation. But in the end I was persuaded that it could be interesting to relate scenes from the fundraiser to the other scenes we had planned to film inside the building, to let the everyday stand in relation to public appearances.

I suggested that we should use the different sites visually in the film in order to underline the relationship between the private and the public, the personal and the political. This became even more important since we decided to only focus on the work of the organisation and not on the stories of the individual women. Basically, no clients are shown on screen and we don't hear the voices of any abused women either. But despite this their presence is felt throughout the entire film: in the fragmentary telephone conversations, in the discussions that the members have with each other, in the meetings with other organisations and in the public speeches that are inserted at the end of the film.

Hence, the manuscript that emerged was the result of joint discussions, negotiation and suggestions. Some of the scenes that members of the organisation or I had suggested were removed and others were added. Thus everything that is included in the film was already present in the manuscript stage or was approved by Southall Black Sisters in retrospect.

Individual Stories and Collective Action

We made a conscious choice not to focus on individual cases. There were several reasons for this. The most apparent is out of consideration for the safety of the women. These women live in violent situations and to tell their stories could put them in danger. But the most important reason was that it was the organisation's political project that was supposed to be the focus of the film, not individual cases. The women are not just individual victims of one or other violent man – their situation has structural causes. This also makes the women who come to Southall Black Sisters into actors in a process of political change. The women who seek help at Southall Black Sisters are subjected to violence that occurs in secret. It occurs in what we call the domestic sphere. The violence is structured in a way that avoids anybody outside the domestic sphere noticing it, or at least being able to influence it. But it dominates the entire life of the woman: what she can do, what she can say and how she can relate to the world outside the home. It weighs heavily on her body and her thoughts. The film points towards these violent situations but never describes them. They can only be guessed at. At the same time, violence is constantly present, in all situations and in all conversations – it is the basis of the film, just as it is a fundamental part of Southall Black Sisters. The existence of such stories drives their work and their resistance, and is the basis of their striving towards social and political change. This can in turn lead to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls 'a redistribution of desire', that is when other players in civil society, such as politicians, judges and journalists start listening to the voices that demand a change in laws, rules and norms aimed at getting rid of the structural oppression of black women.[139] The work they do should, however, not only be seen as resistance to and criticism of our prevailing society, because it is also always striving towards a society that does not yet exist, an idea of an alternative society without the oppression of women. In other words, the work is an action that is directed at both the prevailing situation and what could be. It strives towards a new existence but bases itself in what already is.

I claim that the film also finds itself in this space, between that which is and that which is proposed. What is proposed lies beyond the frame and the film. It

is something we cannot see as yet. We can only see the work that strives towards change. In other words, I imagine that the alternative does not lie in the formal aspects of the visuals, as in the case of *Nightcleaners*, but in the imagination of the potential viewer. Or, expressed differently, it lies in that which cannot be seen and heard, in that which lies beyond the visuals and the soundtrack of the film. The visuals and the sound, however, form a relationship with what is not seen but which the visuals and the action on screen are directed at.

The Practical Work on the Film

The working method behind *Sisters!* both resembles and distinguishes itself from the method applied by the feminist film collective the London Women's Film Group. In the 1970s the London Women's Film Group highlighted the importance of collective work as an alternative to the commercial film industry's prevailing work and production systems. To the film collective it was important that everybody who worked on the film production participated in the entire film process and had equal say in it. As mentioned previously, the members of the collective rotated positions during the shooting of *The Amazing Equal Pay Show*. The aim was to provide everyone with the opportunity to obtain skills and influence the film's aesthetics.[140]

By contrast, in the making of *Sisters!* we had a clear work division where everyone took responsibility for their part of the production. We helped each other out where needed but only once we had been asked. I had overall responsibility for the contents and the aesthetics, and the producer had the overarching financial responsibility. The cameraman concentrated on the image, the sound technician on the sound, and the members of Southall Black Sisters on the contents and the performative expression. For *Sisters!* I had employed a male cameraman and a male sound technician. This would have been unthinkable to the London Women's Film Collective. It was a part of their political activism to see to it that women were employed for the technical positions. How could I then justify my choice of two men as cameraman and sound technician respectively, on top of that for a production that happened in collaboration with a separatist feminist organisation? Apart from answering that we of course live and work in different times and with different political struggles, I can also answer with a reference to the article 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema' by Claire Johnston.[141] In it she criticises the assumption that a film's construction and aesthetics change automatically just because it is produced by a group of women. Johnston claims that people do not come with a fixed identity. Women and men do not carry meaning and culture within themselves but are actors in specific historical contexts. These actors can challenge their own situations as historical subjects and propose alternative attitudes. We can observe a similar attitude with Southall Black Sisters when they emphasise that blackness is generated by political and social structures. Our skin colour does not have an inherent meaning per se, and neither does our gender.

The Performative Aspect

During the shooting of the film, Southall Black Sisters didn't have any insight into how the images were composed. The cameraman and I were in charge of that aspect. We prepared the scenes by lighting the locations, removing objects that were in the way, adding others, determining the camera's position and building the dolly tracks at every location so that the camera could be moved easily. In other words, when we were ready to shoot, strong lights and tracks were very prominent. We had set up smaller microphones in different places in the rooms in order to record parallel sounds. Sometimes the women carried wireless microphones. The camera stood very close to the person being filmed. The filming was in other words very palpable and nobody in the room was unaware of the fact that a film was being shot. The women who were filmed chose their words carefully, exaggerated their gestures or chose not to make certain gestures. Before the filming session we sometimes rehearsed movements with the people who were in the scene, for example when one of the women makes a phone call, goes through archive material or types on a keyboard. Later they enacted the movement and action that they had rehearsed in front of the rolling camera. In other words, every scene is based on an agreement between the film team and the people in front of the camera. In that aspect, our choice of aesthetic strategy differs markedly from the observational mode. To me it was important that the presence of the camera in the presentation of feminist work would be noticeable in the performative expression of the film. I wanted it to be clear that we, with the help of the camera, had chosen to focus on the daily work that nobody outside the organisation can know about since it takes place behind closed doors, but which is important to discuss and highlight in a political process.

In order to further underline the impression and analysis of political work, the cameraman and I wanted to present a fragmented image of the political work, just like in *Nightcleaners*. Thus we primarily filmed details of day-to-day work: hands typing at keyboards, telephones pressed to ears, faces that see and speak. Our strategy was to use the short depth of field of the images to emphasise the constructedness and the impossibility of giving or achieving an overview. The image is always incomplete, but therein also lies its potential. It points towards something beyond the framework that we, however, cannot see or hear. We emphasised this even more through the editing by letting a long time pass before the relationships between people, spaces, work and geography were clarified in the narrative of the film.

The movements and the conversations that were included in the manuscript were based on events and routines that I had noted during my previous visits. It happened on several occasions, for example, that members started discussing a news item that had to do with their work. They discussed if and how they should react to the articles. To actively relate to the events that take place in society is an important part of the work of the organisation. Shakila Maan decided that for the film they would use a newspaper article as a starting point to start a discussion on whether or not they would participate in a 'Slut March' demonstration that was to take place in London in June 2011. We installed the lighting and came to a decision regarding where and how they would stand and sit. The tracks were assembled and the lamps switched on.

But even though the overarching discussion and movements were planned, the conversation and the actual interactions that took place were not rehearsed – nobody knew what the others were going to say about their participation in a 'Slut March' or how they would react to the views of the others. Hence there are both staged and unpredictable aspects in all scenes.

During the shooting of the film I sat at a monitor and watched the movements of the women and listened to their words. It was just as important to give the cameraman space to try out different angles and come up with new suggestions during the shoot itself as it had been to give the members of Southall Black Sisters room for the unplanned. This trying out and testing takes time but enables an interesting negotiation when it comes to choice of angles, proximity and light, that is all the aesthetic components that influence how we experience the performative quality.

On one occasion we didn't have the possibility to prepare what we were going to film and were forced to adapt to a predetermined rhythm. This was at the fundraising event that Sue O'Sullivan had arranged. We were only aware of a few of the planned events for the evening. We knew for example that Pragna Patel would hold a speech but not when or what it would be about. We didn't have any control over the lighting either and we couldn't do any retakes or stage any aspects of the evening. Before the event, the cameraman and I had discussed several different scenarios and images that we were interested in. The camera that we were using had a small LCD screen that could be used as a monitor. I only used it on one occasion – when we filmed women dancing – to be able to influence and follow the movements of the camera.

There were other times when we as a film team had limited space, both literally and in terms of time, which influenced how we filmed and recorded sound. This was primarily when filming meetings with people from outside the organisation. These meetings were not staged and would have taken place even if the camera had not been present, but naturally our presence influenced the meeting. We did, however, try not to disrupt the meeting more than necessary and hence never asked for rehearsals or retakes. At two meetings – one with the Danish women's organisation LOKK – Landsorganisation af kvindekriscentre and the other with the British NGO Comic Relief – we shut off the camera and microphone after a while because they wanted to discuss topics that we were not allowed to record.

Hence our manuscript functioned as a framework for the scenes but we neither could nor wanted to control the exact contents. We didn't know which topics were going to be discussed, which discussions would come up, which phone calls would have to be made or how the conversations would develop in the meetings that we participated in. An average working day cannot be predicted but has to be met as it unfolds. The filming was just the same. The meeting between the film team, the members of Southall Black Sisters and me took place at the intersection between the planned and the unpredictable during the process of shooting the film. We agreed on an action plan, contents, positions and boundaries for our conversations. We thought about what can be said in front of the camera without losing its meaning. Before we started filming we came to an agreement: we were allowed to film everything that was

said but the members would have the chance before the final edit to approve all the scenes that we included. Thus the film is a performative act based on an agreement between all those involved. Nobody was unaware of the presence of the camera.

Editing

When the Berwick Street Film Collective gathered to start editing their filmed material they chose to make a different film from what they had first planned. During the editing phase they started experimenting with the recorded material and came up with the idea of constructing the film with short fragments. Since the editing is an important part of the materiality of the film it would be easy to come to the conclusion that the film *Nightcleaners* was created in the editing room. But that would be a simplification, which is something that became clear to me in our own editing process.

The film *Sisters!* was edited in Stockholm together with the filmmaker, cameraman and editor Marius Dybwad Brandrud. The material was limited since we had chosen our scenes carefully with respect to both content and aesthetics. Based on the filmed material Dybwad Brandrud and I discussed how we could best structure the film so that the everyday actions and politics would become the focus of the film. In concrete terms this meant that Dybwad Brandrud and I sent roughly edited film sequences to each other. We reacted to the sequences and came with new suggestions. Now and then we met to discuss the film. Thus we used a similar method in the editing process as the one Southall Black Sisters and I had used while working on the manuscript.

Initially I imagined two projections in the screening space with two films being projected simultaneously. On the one screen we would only show sequences filmed inside the offices, imagery that showed the everyday work. This would be a slow-moving circular film. Several actions that were performed would be shown in real time – this was how I thought I would convey the materiality of the work. On the other screen we would put a film together that was more dynamic and had a faster tempo, and that also had a distinct beginning and end. This film would be based on images from the fundraising event and the focus would be on the public, singular appearance.

After many discussions, Dybwad Brandrud and I agreed that we would only make *one* film in which we would highlight the relationship between the semi-private and the public aspects of the daily work. We would achieve this by structuring the film around a fictitious day in the organisation. This fictitious aspect would be made clear right from the beginning by us announcing in the very first frame that the film was in fact shot in the course of nine days, and not just one as the diegetic narrative would have one believe. With this I am referring to the scene in which we, the members of the film team, write our names in the organisation's visitors' book. Another gesture of this kind is that the light changes between scenes that in the running narrative lie very close together in time. One and the same person is also seen in different clothes in one and the same sequence. This is of course because the scenes were filmed on different days, and the women wore different clothes and the light changed

between those two occasions. We had decided to let this happen even before we started filming, because we wanted to make the filmic construction visible through these elements.

In the editing process we built up a narrative structure in which the fictitious morning mainly reflects the recurring daily work away from the public eye. This work consists of routine actions that do not necessitate discussion. Once the morning has passed with administration, telephone conversations and internal meetings it's time for lunch. In the lunch break we bring in fragments of private conversations. After lunch we changed the rhythm. Now we show the camera that is present at meetings with people from outside the organisation. Here the act of speaking differs from the conversations of the morning. Now the aim is to inform outsiders of the organisation's work. The members who are present recount, summarise and explain. They explain the overarching aim of their everyday work. We found that it was in the second half of the day that the relationship between the closed day-to-day work and the public work became visible. But, in order not to take the focus away from the daily work as a form of resistance, we chose to end the film with a scene that again emphasises the daily work, the private space, and not least the presence of violence.

By creating a circular narrative we could emphasise the importance of the political endurance that the organisation has shown over all the years. For thirty years they have been in constant contact or conflict with the representatives of the structures they want to change. On several occasions they have been able to celebrate success, but it has never meant that they could stop doing what they were doing. Rather, the energy gained from the moments of success has been needed for the next day's work, the next case, the next negotiation.

Thus, for us the editing process was a way of putting together different image fragments in order to clarify and amplify the politics of the film and its performative aspects. But the film was not created in the editing room; it was formed throughout the entire process. I would even claim that the different phases in the making of the film cannot be separated, as they are intimately dependant on one another. How the manuscript was written influenced how we filmed the scenes, and how we filmed the scenes in turn had an impact on our possibilities in the editing process.

Most of the discussions that Dybwad Brandrud and I had during the editing were about the effectiveness of the narrative. I felt that it was not enough to just point at a gesture or an action to convey the time and effort that goes into their work. For the same reason I didn't want the informative act of speech to dominate the film since it was precisely the daily routine work that was the focus of the film. I wanted the viewer to be sucked into the sequences that showed the day-to-day work and once there among the imagery, to wander between the details. This is why the cameraman and I had tried to light and compose the images so that they would be perceived as aesthetically pleasing; they were meant to seduce the viewer. I wanted the viewer to have the possibility to form a relationship with each image. The visuals should both be separate and stand in relation to the other imagery. But Dybwad Brandrud pointed out that it was also important to create a curiosity for the development of the story and to get the viewer to want to stay in the film itself. Hence we had intense

discussions regarding how long each image would be allowed to linger and what it should be related to. Just like in the work with the organisation, the collaboration with Dybwad Brandrud also became a process that included discussion, negotiation and compromise.

Before we started working on the final edit I sent the film to Southall Black Sisters for review and approval. After they had looked at the material we cut out a number of scenes and changed things in others. It was primarily a matter of visuals and sound that couldn't be publicised because they could endanger their clients. We replaced those scenes with others that they then approved.

The Finished Film – Distribution, Screening Venues and Audience

We knew from the beginning that the completed film would premiere at the Showroom, and be shown in the art gallery for two months in the autumn of 2011. The Showroom is a small art organisation that didn't have the means to secure the continued circulation of the film. The film *Sisters!* still does not have a professional distributor. Information about the existence of the film is spread through personal and professional contacts and recommendations. In order to get permission to screen the film the interested institution or private person has to contact the Showroom, Southall Black Sisters, me or my co-producer.[142] Despite the nature of its circulation I would still not say that distribution of the film occurs through informal channels. The distribution of films that are produced within the framework of contemporary art often occurs in a similar way. This is mainly because there is a lack of money, time and structures to promote, distribute or inform others of the film.

In the 1970s there was an ongoing debate about how an audience could be created for the political and artistic films that were produced by filmmakers who worked independently of the film industry. Several different methods were tested, with varying aims. Cinema Action and several other filmmakers and film collectives travelled with their films to the places where they were to be shown. Ann Guedes pointed out in the interview we conducted with her, that Cinema Action never used the term 'distribution'. She was firm in her belief that our question about distribution rather reflected the present situation more than the collective's attitude to filmmaking and the screening conditions.[143] Guedes emphasises that for Cinema Action it was about the screening situation providing the collective with the possibility of direct dialogue with the activist section of the labour movement. It was after the screening that they could activate the necessary debate, which in turn would inspire action beyond the world of the film. For the same reason they rarely let other organisations and individuals screen the film.[144] Of course trade unions and workers that the collective had been in touch with could arrange film screenings even without the presence of the members of the collective, but they never talked about it as taking on the role of professional distributor. Guedes is very clear on that point. Similarly she stresses that they never functioned as a commercial production house. The notion of a professional production company and distributor presupposes, according to Guedes, a commercialisation of film. Although historical documents are proof of the fact that the terms 'production company' and 'distribution' were in fact used by Cinema Action at the time,[145] the documents don't give clues to how the terms are to be understood. Guedes claims, however, that the members of Cinema Action saw themselves first and foremost as activists who used film as a medium for conveying their politics within the workers' movement. The terms and the films should be interpreted from this perspective.

Travelling with their films was, however, very time-consuming and it meant that only a limited number of people could see them. Even though Cinema Action saw it as unproblematic, other filmmakers discussed the need for a permanent space where the films could be shown continuously. The Other Cinema, for example, opened a cinema for political and artistic film. The problem was that their earnings never covered their expenditure.[146] The discussion regarding how non-commercial film should be screened and distributed is not new, in other words. In the UK today there is LUX – Artists' Moving Image, which is a distributor that has continued to focus on British film produced by artists and independent filmmakers, and which continues to think creatively about the distribution of non-commercial films.

As opposed to the British film collectives, we hadn't developed a clear method or idea regarding the future distribution of the film, or how and when it would be shown after its screening at the Showroom. This despite my belief that it is only when a film meets an audience that it can be considered to be a political act. That is, it is only when a film is heard and seen in the public sphere that we can speak of it doing something.

The Screening Venues

The British film collectives had especially emphasised the importance of screening spaces and the audience for potential political action. The aesthetics of the film and its contents were also considered to have an impact on the engagement and activism of the audience. Several films were hence made using a specific aesthetic, for a specific audience with a specific political agenda. For example, Steve Sprung recounted how some of the members of Cinema Action were critical of the Berwick Street Film Collective because they considered their films to be too experimental and ambiguous to be used in the workers' struggle. Instead, Cinema Action propagated the importance of realistic strategies. Several texts and interviews testify to a conflict between the two groups regarding their choice of aesthetic strategies in relation to their political agendas. The same conflict seems to have been common between other independent filmmakers who used experimental as opposed to realistic strategies.[148] However, in the same way as it is possible to speak of different forms of reflection, one could also assume that different strategies have different functions in different spaces. The central question then becomes, what a film with a particular content and certain aesthetics achieves in a given context.

Inspired by the different ideas of the film collectives regarding the relationship between aesthetics, the screening venue and the role of the audience, I was curious to find out whether we would be able to relate to the various potential exhibition venues already in the planning stages of the film *Sisters!*. To make the idea more concrete I suggested that we should prepare two films based on the same footage. The one film would be edited to suit the needs of Southall Black Sisters and their network. Southall Black Sisters are in contact with many different organisations, politicians and women's networks. I assumed that they would be interested in having a film that they could send around to some or all of these groups. The organisation's members would themselves be allowed to determine the aims of the film, the focus of the content and the narrative

structure, and not least at whom the film was directed. I was to act as more of an adviser and craftsman. The other film would be a film that would fit into the context of art institutions and in it I would work out the content and structure in collaboration with Southall Black Sisters. In this way I believed that we would be able to investigate the politics of the two different spaces through the materiality of the film. I saw parallels with the method that the Berwick Street Film Collective used when they wanted to make their reflections regarding the role of the image and montage visible in the film itself. Which similarities and which differences would emerge in two films that were based on the same material but structured and edited in order to suit two different networks?

In the course of the research process, however, I started asking myself how it would be possible in a not-yet-existing film to take the politics of space into account without reducing it to stereotypical expectations and prejudices. How would we know in advance what a space, a place, an audience could harbour? How were we to know what expectations a future audience would have and what they would be interested in discussing, irrespective of where the film was to be shown?

As I pointed out in my introduction, Hannah Arendt maintained that the political sphere is defined by unpredictability. We can never know for sure what will happen when people act. Any effort to control the public space in an attempt to predict events would simultaneously be de-politicising the space and the relations that may otherwise have emerged through action.[149] If I apply Arendt's reasoning to the idea of creating two different films with different aesthetic strategies adapted to two different networks and spaces, it would, at best, mean that we would be reproducing our expectations of a certain public and a certain space. Hence, in Arendt's sense the films would not take action, but only repeat, imitate and simplify relations.

Over and above the fact we cannot know how an audience will relate to a film, we don't know where those people who can form a relationship with the film are to be found. We don't know who may be interested or even inspired by the film. With this I do not mean that there is no value in using the film to speak to a pre-defined group the way the collectives chose to. For example, we could have sent the film to all the women's organisations in the UK that work with similar issues in order to inform, encourage and inspire. This could be an important act. But just as interesting is to show the film in a space where we do not know who is sitting in the audience. Structural violence against black women and everyday political action are topics and actions that concern us all. It shouldn't be aimed at a specific place, but rather at an undefined collective. At all of 'us' who are interested in being in dialogue with those aspects of life that the film addresses. Hence we slowly started abandoning the idea of making two films. Furthermore, Southall Black Sisters seemed to think that it was less and less important that they had full control over one of the films. Instead they were more curious about what our collaboration could lead to.

Southall Black Sisters has collaborated with other organisations and individuals on several occasions concerning everything from organising political demonstrations together to joint campaigns to producing texts, reportages and films. They have often seen an intrinsic value in creating and learning from

alliances with other political organisations. But they have also seen their collaborations as a possibility to speak of and promote their organisation and their work through a variety of methods and channels to different audiences. Collaborations provide one with the opportunity of seeing one's own organisation through someone else's eyes and from another perspective. This applies to both Southall Black Sisters and me as an independent artist. However, inviting someone in also makes you vulnerable, because there is also a risk of the organisation being abused or misrepresented. A collaboration of the kind that we embarked on meant that we first had to build up a feeling of mutual trust and create a situation in which we dared to rely on one another. When we had arrived at that point where we could really meet and trust each other, the idea of two films became increasingly unimportant to all of us. In the end we decided that we would only produce one film – one film that wouldn't necessarily be *for* a defined group, network or place, but rather a film *in terms of* a certain current situation seen through the work of the organisation.[150] It became less important to define exactly where we would find an audience potentially interested in this. That said, I don't really know *what the film will do*. I only know how we worked on the film and which questions we thought were important. Here I emphasise *myself* because I don't know what interests the other participants had. I can only speak of our *joint discussions* and the film that they have resulted in.

Sisters!
as a
Political Act

I have on several occasions stressed that it is filmic strategies that are the focus of my research. However, here I have to emphasise that in order to be able to make a film together with a feminist organisation about contemporary feminist issues it became just as important to think about the *what* in the film, namely how Southall Black Sisters act politically and what their political project involves. During the research stage, the discussions with Southall Black Sisters primarily revolved around the relationship between their daily work and their ambition to change society. As I wrote earlier about the production of *Sisters!*, the forms of resistance that they engaged in were embedded in their daily work. Thus, I started to view every action that took place within the organisation as a part of their political project. This doesn't mean that their politics was necessarily found in the visual gesture as such, but rather in that which the gesture pointed at. This political gesture, which linked their everyday work with the political project, came to be the *what* of the film. Subsequently, how this should be depicted became an important question. Throughout all the stages of the project the choice of aesthetic strategies came to be linked to a discussion on how we could reflect on daily actions in relation to overarching political, social and ideological projects in a film.

The fact that we emphasise the day-to-day work as part of the political resistance in *Sisters!* is an important difference between our film and *Nightcleaners*. In *Nightcleaners* the political activities to effect change take place outside working hours or during a strike. Second-wave feminism was primarily about politicising everyday work, making the personal political. By making visible how day-to-day work is part of an oppressive system they also wanted to criticise patriarchal structures. In our film *Sisters!* there is, however, no difference between political work for change and work as livelihood. Everyday work is already politicised, even if it's not always visible. Hence it became the task of the film to make the relationship between that work and politics visible. In that sense our film, just like *Nightcleaners*, was about both reasserting actions and criticising existing structures. *Sisters!* reasserts the organisation's everyday work as a form of resistance, and by showing the organisation's work and actions the film also criticises political structures and processes in British society that oppress black women.[151]

Apart from thinking about the relationship between *what* and *how*, I have raised the question regarding whose voices are heard in the film. I wanted to avoid talking *about* Southall Black Sisters, and tried all the harder to talk *with* them. This approach is in part inspired by Trinh T. Minh-ha, who in the film *Reassemblage* stresses that she doesn't speak 'about, just … near by'.[152] Despite the film project being a way of speaking *with*, it was also my ambition to, in parallel, try to develop a method in which the film as such could be seen as a joint voice, as the result of the interaction of several people. Early on in the project I became aware of the difficulties inherent in this, and I understood

that they were linked to both practical and structural circumstances, for example that we started from different political positions. This made the encounter interesting but also brought things to a head since we were forced to find common solutions based on our different experiences and entry points into the film production.

The project has, in other words, moved between two levels. On the one hand I have thought about contemporary feminist issues based on the work of the organisation and politics. On the other hand I have dealt with film as a political act, which includes both the film's *what* and its *how*. The film was hence not only meant to speak of political action, not just convey the organisation's political actions, but, above all, to be a political act in its own right.

Whose Story is Told?

Film theorist Michael Renov says, as I mentioned earlier, that the filmmaker is always present in the construction of the film, that is in how the images and the sound are produced and assembled. Therefore, he prefers to talk about documentary filmmaking using the filmmaker's expectations of the film as a point of departure instead of representational strategies. In 'Towards a Poetics of Documentary' Renov presents four tendencies within documentary film discourse that, according to him, reflect what we filmmakers *would like* a documentary film to do. In other words, the different tendencies describe the filmmaker's 'modalities of desire', which the documentary film can become a form of expression for. Renov links the first tendency to a desire to capture so-called 'reality'. It is expressed through a will to record events that take place in order to preserve them or reveal other people's actions and opinions. This desire can, according to Renov, be seen to be a desire to trick death, stop the passage of time and make up for a loss.[153] The second tendency is linked to the desire to persuade and promote, the third to the desire to analyse and interrogate, and the fourth to the desire to express oneself.[154]

With these tendencies, Michael Renov provides me with tools that help me approach documentary film from a perspective other than the one presented by Bill Nichols. They show that the relationship between the historical world and the image can never be linear, but is rather always filtered through the desires that the film is expected to fulfil. According to Renov himself, this approach opens up the field for a discussion on the aesthetic and theoretical function of documentary film at a given time and in a certain place. At the same time he places great emphasis on the filmmaker's intentions and the expectations of the audience. Up until now the investigation may have been about the filmmaker's – that is my own – points of departure, strategies and intentions (what Renov would perhaps call my 'desires') but before I proceed I would like to take a step back and discuss the issue of the voice of the film and its ability to act regardless of the filmmaker's intentions and regardless of the discussion about the film's relation to a historical event or person.

In *Sisters!* no member of the film team is ever heard speaking and our bodies are only visible in the first scene. In the film we never use words to reflect on the production or the encounter that takes place. I have often been asked

whether I have made use of the so-called 'fly-on-the-wall method', that is, what Bill Nichols calls the 'observational mode' where the filmmaker's role is that of the invisible observer. The observational strategy is based on a notion of the filmmaker as a silent mediator of that which would have occurred anyway. Also note that the question regarding whether I have used the observational strategy is also based on the assumption that *I* am the observing eye. But *we* as a film team were hardly flies on walls. We were present in what was happening in the room but also in the actual image through the equipment. How we as a film team move with the camera and the sound influences both our relationships with the women we are filming and the construction of the image. The visuals in *Sisters!* are, in other words, a consequence of how the various bodies that were present in the room moved and related to each other. Here I mean the different human bodies and the machine bodies. The movement of the camera and the sound recording equipment was in other words as important as the interaction that took place between the filmmaker and the participants in the film, and the one that took place between those who were filmed. Although our 'human' voices are not heard in the film, we are highly audible through the aesthetic strategies. To continue with the metaphor of 'voice' and 'making oneself heard', it is through the camera's and sound equipment's movements that we 'speak' to the women during the actual shooting of the film. The film *Sisters!* can thus be viewed as a result of encounters that are comprised of aesthetic strategies (that I here would like to call the aesthetic voice) as well as human voices.

In order to lead the discussion of the film *Sisters!* back to a discussion of political action, I would here like to return to Hannah Arendt. Arendt argued that a human being could only act and speak in relation to other people that also act and speak. It is only when one can see and hear other people and be seen and heard by others that one becomes a political subject. Furthermore, she held that an action can never be a narrative since it is in the nature of an action to be unpredictable. Actions can, however, be recounted. For Arendt, stories are the only palpable results of human action and human encounters. Through narratives, actions can become a part of historiography. She also emphasises that activities that occur in private can become political actions if they, via a narrative, enter into the world, that is the political realm that is delineated by the public sphere. That which Arendt calls the 'world' hence does not include the private sphere – however, the private and the political spheres are dependant on one another and influence each other.[155]

Based on this reasoning, *Sisters!* can be seen to recount actions that took place in both the private and the political arena. It is the result of an encounter between me as an artist, Southall Black Sisters, the production team, the technical equipment and other people who took part in the film. In our case the encounter materialises like a filmic narrative in order for the results of our actions to be able to enter into the world, in Arendt's sense of the word, and enter into a relationship with other narratives, opinions, positions and ideas. The materialisation of the narrative is, however, dependent on all those people who have acted, discussed and worked with and in the film, even if some of us later took responsibility for finishing the film.

Arendt suggests that a story that is created based on actions can never be assigned to only one author since it must be seen as the result of a plethora

of relations and actions.[156] In the case of *Sisters!*, several art institutions have presented it as 'Petra Bauer's latest work'. I am named as the only author of the film. Referring to Bertolt Brecht one could see the notion of the individual author or originator as a product of commercial structures[157] – a system that naturally can be questioned and deconstructed. I have, however, emphasised several times that *Sisters!* is the result of the interaction all of the relationships and people that have in some way been involved in the production, irrespective of the economic system that the film becomes a part of when it is distributed. Thus I would like to argue for a perspective that highlights those relations between different actors that have made *Sisters!* into what it is. It is this interaction that I think can be seen as collective work. It doesn't mean, however, that everyone who participated also takes responsibility for the final film. Neither does it mean that everyone has influenced the final result to the same extent. What allows us to speak of the film *Sisters!* as a potential political act in Arendt's sense is just as much those relationships that the actors and the film are a part of.

Arendt's reasoning, however, seems to be based on the fact that there is a natural relationship between the narrative and the actions that have taken place in the world. It was precisely this direct relation that Johnston and Willemen criticised. If all actions are part of a very complex pattern of relations in which they influence each other in an unpredictable way it should also mean that a narrative is only *one* of several imaginable results, that a narrative is a perspective among innumerable perspectives. In that sense the film *Sisters!* is one position among innumerable others.

In *Sisters!* the narrative is mainly about daily work addressing structural (sexualised) violence against black women in the UK. The daily routines are part of the resistance. With the help of aesthetic strategies, which I described previously, the film is used to present the resistance as something performative, with the possibility to act and change.

As I have emphasised so often before, in my collaboration with Southall Black Sisters I have been interested in the work that the organisation does away from the spotlight. With this film this is, however, lifted into the public arena where it can be seen as a political act by an undefined number of people. The film can hence potentially become a part of the public realm in which political communities are formed. My 'desire' (to link back to Michael Renov) is for the film through its entrance into the world to contribute towards the narrative of resistance. It highlights and presents actions that are used by Southall Black Sisters as an example of actions against oppression. Thus, I mean that *Sisters!* can be seen as a potential act in itself.

Arendt writes that the encounter between humans is about the ability to both speak and listen, as well as see and hear and be seen and heard. For her the political community is based on the fact that I as a human can imagine another human being's position, without losing my own identity. A film, however, cannot listen or imagine another position but just be the result of listening. Hence Arendt would probably say that the film is a thing that can function as a catalyst for human relations and as a narrative about actions that have taken place. I mean, however, that the film could be seen as an action in its own right since

it will influence other actions, that is be included in a number of unpredictable relations.[158] After all, the film *Sisters!* is the result of listening, but in its form it also challenges the viewer to listen to the film's proposed methods of working towards an alternative society without the oppression of black women.

Donna Haraway argues explicitly that objects aren't just things and resources that can generate human relationships, but objects are also actors in their own right. When an object has been generated, such as language in a literary work for example, it is liberated from the producer's intentions and body. Then the object gets a body of its own with borders that are materialised in relation to other bodies. Its borders can change and new meanings can be produced depending on what the interaction looks like at a certain point in time and at a specific place.[159] Based on Haraway's argument I could claim that we have generated a film that has become an actor, the meaning of which is materialised in relation to other actors at the very moment that the film enters the public domain.

The Film's Voice as a Who

So if the film *Sisters!* potentially acts on its own behalf, what is it then that constitutes its voice in this act? Based on Arendt's theory, I suggest that *Sisters!* reveals its *who* via its aesthetics, in how things are presented. In other words, the film is more than its contents, its *what*. It is the choice of aesthetic strategies that creates the preconditions for the intersection between the participants and how the contents are presented. A film doesn't only consist in the information that it conveys – *how* the information is communicated becomes an important part of the political action. The filmmaker's voice comes through in the aesthetics, for example in how the camera is moved, choices made in the sound recording, the editing, and how bodies move on screen and in relation to each other. These aesthetics in combination with the film's contents then go on to form the film into, a subject that has agency and can act.[160]

In the case of the film *Sisters!* I suggest that its *who* consists of three central relations. The first deals with the presence of the film team expressed through the movements of the camera, lighting and microphones. The second relation addresses the interaction between the filmmaker, the participants of the film and the technique. The third is about the performative action that the participants of the film execute in the scenes.[161] It is a combination of these that makes up the film's aesthetics, its *who*. The aesthetics linked to the contents generate a subject that distinguishes it from other actors. But this occurs only once the film is shown and thus enters into the world. It is only then that the film gains a position, can potentially be seen as an action in itself and can thus have the ability to act, propose and influence.

The Politics of the Camera

I ended the previous chapter arguing that a film can consist of a *what* and a *who* and that it is the combination of these that constitutes the potential for film to be an agent and an action. The discussion was specifically linked to the film *Sisters!*. In this chapter I will explore the implications that this line of reasoning has for a number of other films – my own as well as those of other filmmakers. Before I continue, however, I would like to remind the reader that when it comes to the film's *who* I have moved between three different relations and approaches. The first dealt with the presence of the film team expressed in the movements of the camera, the lighting and the microphone. The second was about the encounter between the filmmaker, the participants of the film and the equipment. The third mentioned the performative action that the film's participants carry out in the scenes. I argued that it was the combination of these that constituted the film's aesthetics, its *who*. The aesthetics linked to the contents then generated a subject that differentiated it from other agents.

Using Hannah Arendt's ideas as my point of departure, I will also continue to reflect on what we can consider to be film as political action by looking more closely at the difference between action and reflection. It is important to remember that the basis for these arguments is the assumption that it is only when the film has been shown and it thus enters the world that it can attain a position and potentially be seen as an action in itself with the ability to act, suggest and affect.

The films I have selected, to further explore and develop my line of reasoning regarding the *what* and *who* of film all have something to do with the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. The films that are most central to this chapter were made by Palestinians within the framework of the project HEB2 and the Camera Project that was initiated by the organisation B'tsalem in 2007, as well as a short film by the Israeli filmmaker Avi Mograbi. In my discussion of these films I will pose questions about the role of the camera in the political cinematic narrative. Thereafter, I will let these films, or rather the discussion of the films' agency, enter into a dialogue with the film *Mutual Matters,* that was made in collaboration with Kim Einarsson and Marius Dybwad Brandrud between 2008 and 2011. *Mutual Matters* consists of seven staged conversations with seven different people revolving around the political activism of individuals in Palestine and Israel. All the characters in the film are or have been active in the Swedish leftist movement in the broadest sense. As opposed to the chapter dedicated to *Sisters!,* the following section will not go into any great detail when it comes to the making of the film. It will primarily focus on those elements of the film that can be linked to a discussion of the film's *what* and *who*. However, although I only comment on it sparingly, the film as such is an integral part of the dissertation.

I start the chapter with a background description of my reasons for choosing the different films.

A
Point
of
Departure

In the spring of 2007 I was invited by the art institution Israeli Centre for Digital Art for a two-month stay in Israel in order to participate in their international studio programme.[162] I used my residency primarily to familiarise myself with the political, historical and social situation in Israel and Palestine through literature, interviews, archive material, artistic works and, not least, the physical experience of being in an area where the occupation is a part of everyday life.[163] Moreover, the Israeli Centre for Digital Art has a film archive that contains a large number of films that deal with the different conditions in Israel and Palestine. The archive does not claim to cover all genres nor all subjects but primarily reflects the curators' own interests. The films, made by artists, filmmakers and amateurs who live in the region or are interested in the political situation there, gave me a further introduction to the Israeli and Palestinian communities and how they affect each other.[164] Following my own interests, I mainly focused on the films that dealt with how the occupation manifests itself to individuals and groups in their everyday lives in both Israel and the Palestinian areas. Similar images recurred in several of the films, including checkpoints, the wall, soldiers who confront and are confronted, soldiers who forcibly enter houses and many stories of violence against and forced removals of Palestinians. In the films, these images were the most obvious traces of the many phases of a longstanding occupation.[165] The films were often made using conventional documentary strategies, such as direct interviews with those affected or a voice-over that explained the situation and posed rhetorical questions. The films also often contained shots of the surroundings that gave a general description of place. Some of the films made by Israeli artists also wanted to show a militarisation of Israeli society; in these films the strategy was rather to confront individual Israelis with provocative questions and actions.[166] Through the archive, I once again became aware of how many documentary films deal with the political situation in Palestine and Israel, and how certain types of images tend to recur. In the end it became predictable. I started to think about what these images and films do? What is manifested? What story is told? What is confirmed?

I started thinking about the traces of the occupation that could be found in daily life but that were less visible than for example the checkpoints – traces, though not violent in a conventional sense, but which could still be seen as painful consequences of the occupation. Are there – or is it possible to make – films about the political situation using imagery other than soldiers, borders, walls and physical violence? Is it at all possible for an artist or filmmaker to contribute to a public debate that is already so saturated with narratives and stories of what it is like to live and work in Palestine and Israel? Why would one add yet another voice to all the voices that already exist in the form of books, films, articles and other documents? Furthermore, despite the endless number of testimonies about the

political situation in the region and despite countless visual documents, there have been no political improvements for the Palestinians since the early 1990s. Instead, their situation seems to have gradually become worse.

In the book *Images in Spite of All,* Georges Didi-Huberman claims that one of the reasons why the genocide on Jews during the Second World War could occur was the lack of testimonies and visual proof; the mass murders thus became unthinkable for the broad German public.[167] In Palestine there is neither a lack of images, nor witnesses and proof. Despite this, the abuse against the Palestinians continues and their land continues to be confiscated and occupied. Have the images of the abuses and violations stopped working? And in that case, who are these films being made for? Who are they addressing? What is their purpose?

The Political
Conditions
of Film

Didi-Huberman claims that images cannot only be understood through what
they represent, but that the function of the photographic medium per se, as well
as the specific historical situation and the conditions that prevailed when the
image was made, must also be taken into account. Didi-Huberman speaks spe-
cifically of the existing images from the concentration camps of Nazi Germany –
images that tell different stories depending on the identity of the photographer:
SS officer or Jew from the *Sonderkommando*. Although the Nazis destroyed
many photographs before the end of the war, a large number of their images
have survived. However, according to Didi-Huberman, only four images taken
by Jewish prisoners from inside the camps during the war exist. Didi-Huberman
believes that these four images can be seen as an important act of resistance.
This act of resistance cannot be understood by simply looking at what the images
portray, however. It is linked to how the images were photographed – that which
I argue is a part of the *who* of the images – in relation to *what* they represent.
The four images taken by the Jewish prisoners are out of focus and relatively
unclear. This is, however, linked to the situation in which they were taken; the
men who took the photos risked their lives and the lives of others to do so.
Everything had to happen in great secrecy. The film had to be smuggled in, the
camera had to be created, the images had to be taken quickly and without being
discovered and then the film roll had to be smuggled out again. If their endeav-
our had been discovered it would have meant imminent danger to their lives,
but also that no photographic proof of what was happening in the camps would
have gotten out. It was the testimony of images that was considered import-
ant, because they feared that the testimony of words would not be enough, and
that the mass murder would continue to be something unimaginable for those
outside the camps. This was a deliberate strategy of the Nazis, and that is
was why it was important for them to make any form of proof or witness
impossible.[168]

Based on Didi-Huberman's reasoning I thus started thinking about the films and
images that I had seen about present-day Palestine and Israel. Can the imag-
ery of these films tell us something about the political conditions that prevailed
during the making of the film?

At the same time as I ask myself this question I am also (on the verge of painfully)
aware that in present-day Palestine and Israel the situation is the opposite to
the one described by Didi-Huberman; in Palestine and Israel abuses occur daily
as a part of the politics of the occupation, *despite* the existence of innumerable
images and testimonies. If the images no longer have any power as testimony,
what is it then that the images do?

B'tsalem

In 2007 the Israeli human rights organisation B'tsalem initiated what they called the Camera Project. Within the framework of the project, the organisation handed out cameras to Palestinians to enable them to film the abuses that the Israeli soldiers and settlers subjected them to. The idea was that the images could be used as proof in court cases, as well to inform individuals, groups, organisations and institutions of what it meant to live under the occupation. On their website informing of the project, the organisation for example mentions a film entitled *Soldier fires "rubber" bullet at handcuffed, blindfolded Palestinian* from 2008.[169] In the minute-long film, a man can be seen sitting on the ground next to an Israeli military vehicle. The man is blindfolded and his hands are tied behind his back. Suddenly one of the soldiers shoots him from very close range. The man collapses. From the title and the fact that he doesn't die I surmise that he has been shot by a rubber bullet. He does, however, look very battered. The title also tells us that the man is a Palestinian. In the film there is, however, no information regarding what happened before or after the shooting. But, since the man was tied up when he was shot he cannot have posed a threat to the soldiers, making the footage undeniable proof of abuse. Apart from being on the organisation's website, as well as in the film archive of the Israeli Centre for Digital Art, I find out through the newspaper *The Guardian* that B'tsalem sent the film to the Israeli military police, reporting the soldier who shot the man.[170] According to the article, the IDF (Israeli Defence Force) had initiated an investigation and even publicly admitted that the shooting violated the rules and principals of the Defence Force. This is a good example of how films produced within the framework of the Camera Project have been used to make abuse more visible. In this case it is the represented events that comprise the proof, that is that we have visuals in which we can see how the man is shot. The actions that are represented also provide the viewer with visual insight into what forms the occupation can take. There are several films on B'tsalem's website that in a similar way show the abuse of Palestinian individuals by Israeli soldiers.

Besides the brutal event that is captured in the film, one can also infer a lot from how the camera moves, how the event is filmed. In the first frame one can see a group of people facing the camera but not necessarily looking into it. Some people in the group also have cameras. In the background there's a white ambulance. A man in a green t-shirt is holding a Palestinian flag. He is standing in the very front. It is the man who is later shot. The person filming seems to be standing some distance away from the group. The image is out of focus. There is also something fuzzy around the edges. It looks as though the cameraman is hiding behind something, perhaps a bush. The scene that I have described is only seven seconds long. In the next frame I see the man with the flag sitting on the ground blindfolded and with his hands tied behind his back. I cannot possibly determine whether the film has been edited or if the person who filmed it has edited it in the camera. The image is wobbly and out of focus. Then a cut. In the next frame the man is standing up, still blindfolded. A soldier is holding him by the arm. Another soldier raises his weapon and aims it at the man. None of the soldiers seem to be aware of the camera filming the events. When the soldier shoots the man, the camera makes a quick movement towards the ground, as if the person filming is taking cover and/or is afraid of being discovered. Then the camera moves back again and films the man who is now lying on the ground. The camera

is, however, not still but zooms in and out. In one instance of zooming out I see at the edge of the image the corner of a room or something that resembles a corner. It looks as if the person doing the filming is standing inside a room and filming out through a window or a door. It is also possible that the person is standing next to the wall of a house. The camera is still unsteady and the image is out of focus throughout the entire sequence.

The shaky camera and the out of focus imagery can of course be due to the fact that the person filming hasn't learnt how to handle the camera yet. But the explanation can also, more probably, be found in the conditions under which the sequence was produced. The camera's movements make me think that the person who is filming is scared to be discovered and of the consequences of such a discovery, especially considering that the scene that is being filmed could be used as visual proof of the abuse of an arrested Palestinian man. This impression is reinforced by the fact that the camera moves restlessly back and forth and that the person holding the camera is most probably standing at a door or a window, ready to hide or take shelter. On B'tsalem's website I am informed that the person who did the filming was a young Palestinian woman, which reinforces my interpretation. In the background, voices speaking Arabic can be heard. The fear of being caught filming can in this case be seen as a consequence of the politics of the occupation and the power relations that prevail between the Israeli soldiers and the person who is filming. The camera's movements and the conversation thus signal that because of the situation, the filmmaker does not dare to openly direct the camera at the soldiers arresting and shooting the Palestinian man. Therefore the camera's movements express a power relation and a political situation. The camera becomes the instrument that makes this power relation that prevails in the Palestinian territories visible, in this case the young woman's relation to an event. This power relation reveals itself in the formal properties and with the technological apparatus. The other power relation, the one between the soldiers and the blindfolded man, is, on the other hand, visualised through the logic of representation. It is precisely in the intersection between these two aspects that the politics become visible.[171]

In the film archive there are also a number of films that were produced within the framework of the project HEB2, whose purpose was to use image and sound to profile personal experiences and relationships between the Arab and the Jewish communities in Hebron on the West Bank.[172] I watched two films made by the Palestinian family Sharbati in Hebron. *First Tape* starts with a camera moving around in a room. A female and a male voice are trying to figure out how the camera works at the same time as they are filming their children, furniture, paintings, ornaments and other things in the room (I assume that the woman and the man are the children's parents, but apart from the title there is nothing in the film to confirm this). In the background one can hear the TV reporting the news in Arabic about the situation in Iraq. I understand what is being said because the film has subtitles. Sometimes the camera gets switched off. When it is turned on again we are still in the same room. The children peer curiously into the camera. A major part of the sequence consists of images of the children waking up, looking into the camera and going to school. Once the children being filmed give the filmmakers advice about how to handle the camera. When the children have left, the man continues to film different details of the room. Then he starts directing the camera outside, towards the neighbours. Judging by the appearance of the

neighbouring house I draw the conclusion that it is an Israeli settlement. Just like in the film described above, the camera is not completely steady as it films out through the window. It moves back and forth and the camera seems to be partially hidden behind a curtain or a window frame. There's nothing remarkable about the images of the neighbours – they are rather mundane. A woman lifts a child into her arms and someone comes in through a door. Although this is a rather undramatic scene, the camera moves restlessly over the window as if the person holding the camera doesn't dare point the camera directly at the women. Perhaps to avoid being discovered? The way the camera moves while filming through the window differs from how it moved when filming the children, resting on each child for a long time – although it was rather shaky even then. The man talked to the children or asked them to stand still for a moment. It is clear that he was not afraid to point the camera at the children. In a later part of the film it is evening. The man once again directs the camera out of the window and once again the camera is half hidden behind a curtain or a window frame. In the frame a soldier can be seen standing behind a sitting settler. Nothing dramatic happens here either, but still the camera is nervous, moving back and forth across the window. After a while the camera is pointed back inside the room again. It is directed at the TV, which is broadcasting images of flowers. The camera rests on these images of flowers for a long time. Now, however, it is steadier than before. The man films the flowers for quite some time. These are the film's last images.

On a representational level, no abuse occurs in this film sequence. No violence is used. The visual elements that can be interpreted as traces of the occupation are for example the bars that cover the windows of the house.[173] Another visual element is the neighbouring house, which is a traditional settler's house that I see when the camera films out through the window. These elements can be understood if the viewer has information of how the occupation manifests itself in the different regions of the West Bank. Knowledge of the situation in Hebron and the information that this is a film made by a Palestinian family living in Hebron adds another interpretative layer to the film. It politicises the home. Questions arise: How is the home affected by the occupation? How are the family relationships affected by living under the occupation? What is the role of the camera in this specific situation?

In this film it is daily life that is the focus, the daily life of the occupation. Just like in the film I discussed previously, the politics of the occupation are even noticeable in the movement of the camera. This becomes clear when the man films out through the window. The camera moves back and forth as if it does not want to be discovered. The camera also moves back and forth in the room but does not try to conceal itself. It is pointed directly at the objects and the children that it films. Hiding the camera while filming is linked to a power relationship. I can think of two possible reasons for this: either a violation is occurring in using the camera and/or the person filming is afraid that the camera could be discovered because of the possible consequences of the discovery. In this film no abuse is caught on camera. It seems rather as if the person is testing the possibilities of filming. It is about getting used to filming through one's window. Familiarising oneself with the camera in relation to what is happening outside. Testing the limits of the camera's visibility and the relations between oneself, the camera and what is happening outside one's window. Thus the insecure movements of the

camera can be seen as a consequence of the political situation in Hebron, where it is not a given that a Palestinian family can openly film a settler and soldiers. On the other hand, having settlers living right outside your window is a part of everyday life.

Another Perspective

In the film archive there are also several films by the Israeli filmmaker Avi Mograbi, who also uses the medium to investigate and point out the logic and consequences of the occupation. His films, however, differ from the films I have described above. The most obvious difference is of course that Mograbi is a professional filmmaker, but there are other characteristics that are more important. Through Mograbi's film *Detail* from 2004 I will explore the impact that the difference in the filmmakers' political positions and opportunities has on image production. The film starts with the image of an Israeli soldier standing next to a van. It looks as if the soldier is checking the driver's ID. The camera's lighting is adjusted. It subsequently moves away from the car, over the ground in the direction of an approaching soldier who says to the filmmaker: 'Please switch off the camera! Don't point it at me. Switch it off!' The filmmaker asks what the problem is. The soldier repeats what he said previously and moves out of the frame. The filmmaker says that the camera is switched off and adds that the soldier should not touch the camera. He repeats this once more. The soldier asks if he has permission to film. The filmmaker explains that a general who was there earlier gave him permission. The soldier repeats once more that he has to switch off the camera. Then there is a cut. When the picture returns we see a close-up of the soldier and the filmmaker once more stresses that there is no reason for the soldier to touch the camera. The soldier answers that there is no reason for the filmmaker to point the camera at him. The filmmaker points out that the soldier is a civil servant, thus indicating that he as a filmmaker has the right to direct the camera towards the soldier. In other words, the filmmaker is not interested in the person but rather the fact that he as a soldier is a representative of the Israeli state and therefore accountable to its citizens. The conversation continues in the same way for a while: the filmmaker asserts his rights and that the soldier may not touch the camera while the soldier in turn does not want the camera pointed at him and continues to demand a permit. On one occasion the soldier tries to put his hand over the lens. More soldiers have now come up to the camera. The soldier urges the others to surround the filmmaker. The camera starts migrating from one soldier to another, all of who try to cover the lens with their hands. At the same time the filmmaker continues to assert his legal right to film civil servants. Someone says to the soldiers: 'Don't you know that what you're doing is a form of violence?' One of the soldiers makes a phone call and when he is finished he informs the filmmaker that he has the right to continue filming. The filmmaker says with malicious joy, 'So, we are allowed to film after all! Do you know the word "sorry"?' The filmmaker follows the soldier who climbs into a military vehicle while continuing to ask the soldier if he knows the word 'sorry'. Then it cuts to black. This scene ends there.

Similarly to the other films I have mentioned, this film sequence highlights how the occupation manifests itself in relations, in this case between the representatives of the State (the soldiers) and a civilian Israeli citizen (the filmmaker). Just

like in the other films, both the filmmaker and the camera are central agents in generating and making these relations visible. In *Detail* the camera and the filmmaker, however, have a completely different position than the camera that was used by the Palestinian filmmaker. This becomes especially clear in how the filmmaker approaches the soldiers and how he interacts with them. He comes close, he provokes and he engages in a discussion with the soldiers. He even goes so far as to shout at them while demanding his rights. He seems to know what he is and isn't allowed to do and where the limits are. He also challenges the soldiers, using the camera in order to show through their reactions how their power and authority find their expression. This behaviour differs radically from that of the Palestinian filmmakers who try to avoid being discovered. The movements of the Palestinian filmmakers are restless and they take cover. In Mograbi's films the camera is not only visible but also a central actor in the relation and the dialogue between filmmaker and soldier. The difference between the behaviour of the different filmmakers and the cameras' movements seems linked to their different political positions and experiences of the occupation. The Palestinian filmmakers have more reason than the Israeli filmmaker to be concerned about the consequences of a discovery – this is a central aspect of the occupation's logic.

This does not mean that the relations that have been established are fixed once and for all to the filmmakers' positions and experiences. And, in the same way as the women who visit Southall Black Sisters are not individual victims of violent men, the filmmakers are not victims of violent soldiers but of the structures that create them. The filmmakers with their camera rather become active subjects who try to highlight or defy the actions performed by the soldiers in service of the occupation. This does not only occur because of what is filmed, but also thanks to the fact *that it is filmed*. To film is to act, and in this case it is an act of resistance. In *Detail* it becomes clear that the camera can even shift positions and relations in the way that the soldier at the end of the film has to admit that Mograbi has the right to film the soldiers. It is thus the presence of the camera that makes the filmmaker's actions, provocations and negotiations possible.

A similar shift also occurs in a film with the title *Soldiers wake children up in Nabi Saleh to photograph them,* 2011.[174] A Palestinian man starts filming when Israeli soldiers knock on his door in the middle of the night and demand that the family members identify themselves. When the soldiers see the camera and the man explains that he is from B'tsalem and has the right to film it seems to have a calming effect on the soldiers and their behaviour. They even start to speak to the man in a civil tone. This could be a direct cause of the presence of the camera and the knowledge that the recorded material could be made public. The camera is, in other words, used to influence the actual situation that the filmmaker finds himself in. This means that the future image itself has agency – it can potentially achieve something in the actual act of filming, before the image even exists.

I believe that similar shifts, though perhaps not as distinct, also occur in the other two films that I have described. Like I said, in the film made by the Sharbati family, the man tests his role as filmmaker in relation to different actors and spaces. How long will he dare to aim the camera at the settlers and the soldiers? What will he dare to film? What does he want to film? These are negotiations that occur

in a situation in which he as a filmmaker takes into account and relates to several different actors and aspects, such as the camera, lighting, family, furniture in the home, soldiers and settlers. I assume that this framework and the boundaries that the filmmaker sets up will shift and change over time.

From Archive
to Production
– Imaging
the Occupation

When I sat in the archive and watched all these films it became clear that it is not enough to note that something has been captured on film or to only ask oneself what the image represents on the level of content. We have to ask ourselves what the image and not least the camera's presence are *doing* in a certain specific situation, as well as in which way the conditions of a situation influence the relations between the actors and the potential scope for action. In other words, the basic assumption is that the camera *always* does something – the question is just what. Moreover, as opposed to many other films that I saw, these films acted by in themselves manifesting political situations and political action. Like many other films, these films do of course contain images of checkpoints, soldiers and arrests, but here the images were *not* predictable and emblematic. The films brought to the fore the relations within and consequences of specific politics, instead of confirming and illustrating pre-existing beliefs. For me as a viewer it meant that I had to prepare my seeing and listening for the unpredictable and unexpected. I moved along with the film through an event; it did not speak *about* a situation, but worked *through* and *within* a situation. The great difference between the films that acted and those that illustrated thus lay in the filmmaker's position and the production conditions that were linked to the specific situation.

Mutual Matters

Despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that my residency with the Israeli Centre for Digital Art did not come with any demands on me to make an artwork, I started to think about which images and what kind of a film I as a visiting artist could possibly produce. As I have often mentioned, I see film as a medium that forms relations and that always suggests something. What could I then, in my position as visitor in a region, suggest with the help of film? And how would a possible film suggestion be understood and interpreted?

I was fully aware that I would not be able to produce images through an event as the films that I have described did. I was a visitor who had no experience of the occupation. Therefore it was not possible for me to find a strategy with which to visualise the political situation on the ground in Palestine and Israel. I would probably never get beyond the empty, emblematic images. My insight into the occupation was based on information that I accrued through listening to others' stories and memories of events, but I could not, as these films did, depict the experience of being surrounded and determined by the occupation. However, as opposed to both Palestinians and Israelis who lived in the region, my position as an artist and foreigner made it possible to move relatively freely and have discussions with both Palestinians and Israelis. Therefore I came to speak to a large number of people with different experiences and views of the

It was much simpler back when it
was all about Vietcong and the US.

About my political commitment,
do you want me to go back to...?

This is colonising, which is in
opposition to the Geneva convention.

I wanted to see what it was like
to be involved in an active conflict.

political situation in the region about their political activism. After a while it became increasingly clear that the experience and possibility of listening to others was a possible point of departure for an artwork; through the stories of others I could discern the consequences of the occupation from different perspectives and positions.

At an early stage of the project I invited Kim Einarsson and Marius Dybwad Brandrud to collaborate with me and together we saw the possibility of making a film based on conversations with a variety of different people active in Palestine and Israel. Through them we could reflect on what it is that constitutes political action and being politically engaged in connection with the Palestine and Israel issue.[175] It was through our position as listeners and viewers that we could access the experiences from Palestine and Israel. In the end we chose seven of the conversations that we had recorded.[176] However, it was also important to us that we proceeded from our own positions and experiences. We therefore decided on a common denominator for the people whose conversations we chose to stage in the film. They were all somehow connected to the leftist movement in Sweden – here I mean everything from the social democratic movement to the autonomous left – and all had a strong activist engagement in the political situation in Palestine and Israel. On the other hand, this is where the similarities end. The conversations and the characters in the film express different political ideas and notions regarding how it is possible to act and what it would take for the situation in Palestine and Israel to change. Some of the characters in the film relate their activism to overarching historical processes and events in Sweden, Palestine and Israel, while others emphasise their personal experiences. Some of these voices could be characterised as pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli respectively.

Our intention in staging the conversations was to make the political activism not only apparent in the content but also in how they were told and what the different characters chose to focus on. In our choice of conversations we were thus interested in that which was manifested in the narratives, the language and in the memory of the different events. All the characters in the film are played by the same actress but the conversations are staged in different rooms and with different costumes. We gave the film the title *Mutual Matters* (2012, 90 min).

Both Didi-Huberman's analysis of photography as testimony and the Palestinian and Israeli films I discussed above were important points of departure for our undertaking of asking questions regarding which images can possibly be created at a time when there is a surplus of images. We were conscious of the fact that our position and our possibilities differed from those of the Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers. The important thing was to make a film based on *our* political position, *not* to portray that of someone else. We needed to approach the occupation from the fact that we live and work in Sweden and think about what this means for political involvement in Palestine and Israel.

Using fictitious environments to stage some of the conversations we had had with people politically engaged in Palestine and Israel was also part of a strategy to consequently *not* create images of motifs that have become clichés – checkpoints, the wall, soldiers and angry men. By consciously excluding such images

we wanted to avoid further emptying these motifs of political content and contributing towards creating more clichés. But what was more important was that by not reproducing these images, we could approach them critically and even ask the question if other kinds of images are possible; a form of negative aesthetics. This was a pivotal formal decision.[177]

The Role
as Listener
and Viewer

In the way we processed the recorded conversations, transforming them into text and a film manuscript, we tried to avoid simplifying the characters, their stories and assertions. It was more important to allow the stories to take up space and time, to let them develop and even become contradictory. Many discussions of Palestine and Israel in the media are filled with simplified views, interpretations and polemical debates that provoke strong political opinions and feelings. In contrast to this we wanted to create a film that was complex, contradictory and uncertain. The viewer should be forced to listen to all the words, gestures and environments in order to perhaps later come to an interpretation or make an analysis. We wanted to explore Claire Johnston's theory that contradiction is fundamental to a fruitful reflection on the role of narratives and language.[178]

When we did our research in Palestine we met several people who were against so-called dialogue projects, namely cultural projects in which individuals from both Palestine and Israel took part, and/or groups and organisations financed by the Israeli state. The reason for the critique is that these dialogue projects are believed to normalise the occupation. This is seen to apply to all official relations on all levels, including exhibitions, exchanges, conversations, seminars and the like. According to this approach, the Israelis who are critical of the occupation must thus be critical *in Israel*. Of course private and unofficial relations may occur, but only on condition that they are not made public. Knowing this, we needed to thus ask ourselves the question: What does it entail that we in our film were planning to include voices from several different positions with several different opinions, not least positions that could be defined as pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian respectively? Can this be seen as normalising the occupation? According to the logic of the argument above, the answer to the question is probably 'yes'.

On the other hand, our film work only based itself on this logic to a very small extent. We were after all not interested in mediating between different positions in Palestine and Israel. Instead we were interested in stories mediated by individuals connected to Sweden and the Swedish leftist movement but politically active in Palestine and Israel. With the film we neither wanted to stress nor deny that dialogue between the partners was important in Palestine and Israel. The emphasis lay instead on reflecting over individual stories of experiences of political activism. In the course of working, our focus also shifted from an investigation into the historical development of political activism within the Swedish leftist movement to how political activism and actions of solidarity manifested themselves in language. What did someone choose to recount of their political activism when they were asked about it – and how did they talk it? Which words were used for the story to take shape, how was the story performed in terms of rhetoric and rhythm? How was the story of political activism manifested in these very surroundings, in precisely these relations? In this way we tried to include both the *what* and the *who* of the encounters in our selection, their content, and

perhaps most especially their situatedness. Or, to use Hannah Arendt's argument: we were interested in how the individual's *who* came through in the words and stories that were communicated.

Thus, creating a constructive ambiguity or emphasising contradiction should not be confused with what would be good for the prevailing realpolitikal situation in Palestine and Israel. Nor is it a matter of us being unsure of our own political convictions. The ambiguity was used to create a film that forced each viewer to actively listen before they formulated an opinion and assumed a position. In active listening all paths must be left open; the listener must be ready for unpredictability, complexity and contradiction.[179]

Referring to Arendt's thoughts on action and reflection, one can claim that films cannot suggest something in and of themselves, but rather that they enable suggestions that can be further articulated by someone who (critically) watches and reflects on the film in an imagined community with others. Just like an action demands a viewer for it to accrue meaning, the film needs viewers in order to act. Without the public it is only a potential suggestion without any force. It is of course in this sense that listeners and viewers play an enormously important political part – they carry political responsibility to act on what they hear and see.

But the question remains: can a film act, or can it only be a representation that in itself can give rise to reflections and interpretations? Is the film, seen through Arendt's reading of Kant, *instead of* an actual event, without its own agency?[180]

A film being *instead of*, an image of something that is not present and that gives rise to reflections, can of course be a very important political force. Arendt would probably go so far as to say that it is a necessity in the political arena. Despite being conscious of this, I am still interested in thinking about whether film per se also does something else, whether it has an agency beyond this. Perhaps it is time to once again remind oneself of how vital it is to differentiate between the different processes of film, between what on the one hand occurs during the production of the film, and on the other hand what the film is subsequently capable of doing when it is finished and enters the public arena. This becomes important, for example, when trying to understand what the film can do in relation to the films made by the Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers. In those films it is in the process of shooting the film, in its production conditions and in the fact that the latent images can be made public that there is the potential for political action over and above what they are later capable of accomplishing when they actually become public. In the film *Night Raid* the camera for example becomes a means of changing the threatening situation that was created when the Israeli soldiers came to do a house search in the middle of the night, and in *Detail* the camera is used to give agency to the filmmaker in his negotiation of political boundaries. *Mutual Matters,* on the other hand, did not necessarily have political power during the actual filming of it. It only becomes potentially interesting in relation to a viewer who listens, reflects and elaborates on what is said and not shown. In other words, with the help of Arendt's thoughts on action and reflection I could claim that in this way the films of the Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers *act through* an event, while *Mutual Matters* possibly only suggests something in

relation to the viewer. That is to say, in the films *Nightraid* and *Detail* the action itself happens in the filming situation, while *Mutual Matters* is a *reflection* of events that have taken place. When the films later enter the public arena these positions can, however, change. *Mutual Matters* could then potentially become an action in the Arendtian sense of the word.

Stories of the Occupation

In this chapter I have written about films that in different ways deal with Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. In the films made by the Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers I have emphasised the position of the camera as an active agent and have argued in favour of the idea that political action took place already through the camera's positioning and perspective while filming. *Mutual Matters* and its method came to differ markedly from these films. There were various reasons for this. The most obvious reason is that we as filmmakers found ourselves in a different position from the Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers, which influenced our point of departure and our possibilities of relating to political activism linked to Palestine and Israel. But just like the films from Palestine and Israel, *Mutual Matters* also describes how the politics of the occupation affect groups, individuals, other actors and the whole society in different ways. As Southall Black Sisters stress, in order to effectively work to counter oppressive mechanisms it is essential that different groups and individuals learn from one another how society and power relations impact on groups in different ways.[181] The same approach can be embraced in relation to the films that have been made of the occupation of Palestine: the different films, made from different perspectives, can teach us something about the logic and the power structures of the occupation, as well as show that this logic and its power structures affect different people in different ways depending on whether they are Palestinian, Jewish, Swedish, etc.

When Bertolt Brecht spoke of the lessons that can be learned from the formal qualities of a film, he pointed out that a film cannot be called political solely because it deals with political events. The film must also contain a method or knowledge that can be applied to other events and situations beyond the world of film and theatre. In the spirit of Brecht, I have asked myself if it is possible to understand the scope of a film's political aspects and learn a lesson from it if we do not take into account how the narrative and images are related to and affected by the production conditions, the use of aesthetic strategies and the technology, that is, the particular method of the film. In this chapter I have been specifically interested in the role of the camera in the films. In my discussion of the films made by the Palestinian and Israeli filmmakers I explored in what way the movements of the camera and the microphone are both a part and an expression of the relations that have been established between the filmmaker, the camera and the person/thing being filmed. I also asked myself if it is these specific relations that give rise to and can make visible the specific political situation and that thus form important conditions for both the film and the political story that emerges. As an extension of this line of reasoning I believe that it is very important to always take into consideration the aesthetic strategies and the role of technology when we discuss a film's ability to act politically. If we don't do this, there is a risk that the discussion of the ability of film to engage in politics is reduced to a one-dimensional question of representation, with the result that it may lose its full political potential. However, to be clear, it is not about learning how a film should be made but about what the film brings to light and says through its *who* and *what*.

The striving to bring to the fore the relations and connections between the different parts of a film production should, however, not be confused with Sergei Eisenstein's wish to be able to calculate and predict the reactions of the audience. Insofar as the film is seen as an agent in the Arendtian sense, it is impossible to know in advance how it will be understood and received or which feelings it will provoke – that is to say the consequences of the action. Unpredictability is a central aspect of political action. This is one of the reasons why I think it is important to separate what the film does once it enters into the public arena and what the creative process of making the film is capable of. If we assume that the film production and the finished film are separate phenomena, although related, and thus have the capability to do different things, I further mean that it is important to see these phenomena as belonging to different spheres with different conditions and possibilities for action. And, as I have reiterated several times in the dissertation, different conditions in turn mean that a discussion of film as political action looks different depending on which sphere we take as our point of departure. In the public screening room, for example, it is the film per se, as an independent agent with its own voice, that comes forward and that we as viewers relate to. The film is thus detached from the filmmakers' and participants' intentions and relations. This is different when it comes to the production of the film, where I believe that intentions, relations, methods and production conditions play an important part in what emerges and how it can emerge. By separating the production from the screening it is thus possible to also reflect on the role of the filmmaker and, as I have argued in this chapter, whether s/he is able to *act through* an event or rather uses filmmaking as a part of a reflection process. Another reason for differentiating between production and screening in an argument regarding political action, and discussing the different conditions of the various spheres, is that a film that has been produced as part of a process of reflection could become an action when the finished film later enters into the public arena as a voice in its own right, as an actor among other actors. The conditions of the production process are therefore not necessarily decisive for what the film can do in the public arena. In the next chapter I will continue to discuss how a division of production and screening affects a discussion of film as political action. I will focus on how a film production can be seen to be a constituting scene for ethical and political relations, which importance the different relations on this scene have for the film's aesthetic and political relations, and not least how this scene with its relations creates the conditions for action.

A Relational Film Practice

By this point it should be clear that I do not separate the *what* of a film from its production conditions, production apparatus, aesthetic strategies or distribution. That is to say, the political act cannot only be derived from the content of the films nor how successful they are in influencing the realpolitikal situation; in my opinion the processes that have led up to the creation of the film are just as important. I have in my own film work largely focused on the work that took place between us participants and how it influenced and even determined the aesthetic expression of the film. I have reflected over how the camera both brings about and makes visible political relations and situations; how the movements of the camera could be seen as a central aspect of how the film, through its aesthetics, appears in what Hannah Arendt calls the 'space of appearance'. By approaching the idea of film as a political act *in its own right* I have tried to both problematise and discuss film based on aspects other than representation; that is to say that films have more functions than to just enable what Arendt would call a critical reflection.[182] The question is, however, what 'in its own right' means in this case. In the 1970s, Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen claimed that film is ideology, and thus influences through its aesthetics and narrative structure. To them a discussion of what and how the film signifies – rather than what it represents – was thus key. This view, however, placed great importance on film as text, sign and language that needed to be decoded by the viewers. My own thinking concerning 'an act in its own right' has instead increasingly been preoccupied with what impact the relationships between the different participants within a film project have on the filmic political act. I am interested in what this approach

means for practical film work, but also how the idea of a so-called relational film practice differs from the interactive documentary film strategy.[183] What role would the intentions, wills and ambitions of individual subjects play in a relational approach? Arendt believes that an action is the result of an infinite number of processes and decisions and can thus not be traced back to *one* individual or *one* decision.[184] In line with Arendt's idea that action always is a part and the result of an unpredictable interaction between subjects, could one go so far as to say that there is a form of collectivity in films that can be seen as the result of a relational process?

In this chapter I will deepen the discussion of a relational artistic practice focusing on the production of film, as well as reflecting on how this differs from an interactive documentary film strategy. I have chosen to reflect on the art project *Choreography for the Giants* that I made together with Marius Dybwad Brandrud in 2013, and in which the meaning of the different relationships became very central, both for the content and the aesthetics of the art project. The work, which was produced within the framework of the exhibition *Moving Image Biennale* in Mechelen, Belgium in 2013, consisted of an investigation of 'Mechelse Ommegang', a traditional parade with medieval roots that is arranged every twenty-five years in Mechelen. One of the purposes of the parade in 2013, according to the organisers, was to represent and include the city's so-called 'new' multiethnic population, something they wanted to achieve by for example adding aesthetic elements to the parade that could be traced back to cultures other than the Flemish. As a part of this plan, three new figures would be created: an African, an Asian and an Arab. The new multicultural parade would in this way both reflect contemporary society and actively include Mechelen's 'new' population. The organisers' conviction that it was possible to both represent and include Mechelen's citizens through the parade caught my interest. Since the organisers believed that it was possible to represent groups of individuals in a parade through the composition of participants and objects taking part in the parade, their debate primarily revolved around which groups of individuals they should represent and include, as well as *how* this should be reflected in the content and aesthetics of the parade; that is which figures should be included and what they should look like. This is an important difference from my own point of departure that has rather been about moving the focus from a discussion of who and what can and should be represented in an image or film, to a discussion of the impact that the methods and production conditions of film have on the visual expression. It was in this encounter between our separate approaches that I saw the opportunity for an interesting investigation and discussion about the conditions of representation and action. The project was thus founded on an opposition: on the one hand my interest in critical discussion about the conditions of representation and on the other hand the organisers' positive attitude towards the promotion of societal inclusion through visual representations of population groups that are presumed to be marginalised. This discussion is linked to larger issues of the possibilities of representation that are not only about how and when people and objects are represented, but also about the conditions of representation in relation to both politics and aesthetics.

Before I develop the discussion of a relational film practice any further I want to first provide a short background to Mechelse Ommegang and the project.

De Mechelse Ommegang

Mechelen is located between Antwerp and Brussels and has 80,000 inhabitants. The city has organised a city parade under the name *Mechelse Ommegang* since the fourteenth century. In the beginning the parade was a procession that the inhabitants of the city held in honour of Saint Rimbaud. Over the centuries the procession changed; more religious symbols were added and gradually the inhabitants started to also stage biblical myths such as the story of David and Goliath. In the eighteenth century the parade was also used to mock so-called 'non-citizens', such as farmers and the poor, who lived outside the city walls. In 1736 the city decided that Mechlse Ommegang and the Catholic procession Hanswijkprocessie would take place on the same day and only every twenty-five years. This rule applies to this day. Although the parades take place on the same day, they are two separate events, with different organisations and content. The Catholic procession, Hanswijkprocessie, is organised by the Catholic Church, while Mechelse Ommegang is organised and financed by the city. Since the parades take place so rarely they are invariably large and important events for Mechelen when they do in fact take over the city's streets and squares.[185]

There are no official documents that prescribe how Mechlse Ommegang should be executed, which means that the parade must to some extent be reinvented every time it takes place. According to those who were responsible for the parade in 2013 it is of central importance that the parade while relating to its historical tradition is also a reflection of society as it is at the point in time when the parade takes place.[186] Concretely the parade consists of a number of objects, such as dragons, horses, camels and other beings, that are carried around in the city over a number of hours. In the parade there are also several human-like giant figures of different sizes that have beige faces, blue eyes and red lips. Five of these represent a family with three children. In the parade there is also a wooden wheel with eight smaller human-like giants that represent the different societal classes that existed in the nineteenth century; for example a judge, a farmer, a rich lady, a soldier and a beggar. The giants are the most important elements of the parade. The procession itself, where the giants are carried around the city, is by now even classified as 'intangible cultural heritage' by UNESCO.

The Conditions of Representation

When I heard that the people in charge of the parade in 2013 had decided to create three new giants – one African, one Asian and one Arab – to represent the 'new society' it raised several questions in me: How can three large geographical areas, Africa, Asia and the Arab world, and three stereotypes represent Mechelen's 'new population'? Why did the organisers want to encourage individuals to identify themselves with an ethnically fixed category? What is actually meant by representation and inclusion? How could these abstract terms and visions be materialised in a parade?[187]

My interest in the Mechelse Ommegang can thus neither be traced back to the history of the parade, nor its objects, nor the planned figures, but rather to what it would involve on a concrete material level to represent the society of Mechelen and its population through the parade, and which structures, relations and processes would enable that.

The cultural critic Theodor W. Adorno and the philosopher Michel Foucault have each in their own way argued that both the human subject and social expression always have to be understood against the background of the prevailing historical and social processes, which in themselves are sustained by disciplined institutions and norms. This view is based on an assumption that there is no such thing as a free subject, an independent *I* with its own free will, but that the individual is always a part of a context by which it is also constituted.[188] According to this view, it is thus less interesting what the artist in question's personal opinions are regarding what they produce and the society that the production will be a part of. What *is* interesting is what makes certain productions, figures and expressions possible (and not others) at a specific point in time. What are the structures, processes and conditions that create the framework and norms within which we as artists work and produce?

When I first met the head of the organisation in Mechelen, Eva van Hoye, in September 2012, the group who would be responsible for producing the parade had neither started making the new giants nor planning the parade itself. They had ideas, but no concrete plans. Since no decisions had been made about content or form, I saw a unique opportunity to investigate the forming of the conditions of representation by following the genesis of the parade. Hence I asked Eva von Hoye already at our first meeting whether I could follow their work on the parade over the coming year. Eva von Hoye reacted positively to my request. This came to be the beginning of the art project *Choreography for the Giants*.

In the end, the art project consisted of two parts, a book and a film with the common title *Choreography for the Giants*, which relate to one another but reflect two different processes that took place that year. Together the book and the film thus give different perspectives on the parade and its relationship with society.[189] The book revolves around conversations I had with people involved in the parade – such as the core team responsible for the parade consisting of Eva van Hoye, Michael De Cock and Inge Geens; Paul Contryn, Geneviève Hardy, Valentine Kempinck and Myriam van Gucht, who produced the figures and their costumes; the mayor Bart Somers, who represents the citizens of the city and the art historian Bart Stroobants, who had knowledge of the parade's history – about the ideas behind the parade, how one can understand notions such as representation, inclusion, participation and cultural heritage, as well as about the new figures in relation to the history of the parade. After our last meeting I transcribed all the conversations and made a selection that is presented in chronological order in the book, like a kind of diary of a work process. The transcribed conversations are reminiscent of a play in their dialogical form with my voice as an artist also included. Although the dialogues have been edited, I have tried to preserve the characteristics of spoken language as much as possible, marking pauses, hesitation and slips of the tongue. Thus the book presents a process emerging in the spoken word. The film, on the other hand, consists of images and conversations filmed days before the parade was to take place. The images that are all filmed

in the public urban space present a city in preparation; flowerbeds are planted, streets are swept and seats for the audience are assembled. The conversations in the film take place with people who are interested in the parade but not necessarily involved in the work, such as with the socially oriented journalist Geert Sels who is employed at *de Standaard*, one of Belgium's daily newspapers. The film's conversations are used as a place where Dybwad Brandrud and I, together with others, could continue reflecting over the different elements of the parade and its meaning for society.

In the following chapter I will briefly present the work on the book and the film. My primary focus, however, will be to use the experience of working on the project to investigate what could potentially constitute a relational film practice linked to a discussion of political action. I will, thus, not further develop my discussion of the parade itself and the preparations for it that are described in the book and the film *Choreography for the Giants*. What interests me is a reflection on which methods we used, which processes and relations it generated and how the two created possibilities and limitations for the content of the art project and its utterances.

The
Relational
as a Method

While reflecting on the impact that one's methods have on visual expression, a conversation I had with the art critic Fredrik Svensk in the spring of 2012 came to mind. We discussed my role as an artist in the making of the film *Der Fall Joseph* from 2003 in which I dealt with a prominent death in Sebnitz in Germany in 1997.[190] For the film I looked at the event from as many different perspectives as possible. My intention was to use the different perspectives to add a level of complexity to the case that was lacking in media reports and other documents. I also wanted to call the notion of truth into question by reflecting on how stories are constructed. In a way I created a conventional reflective narrative of an event, where my contribution was that the different stories were placed next to one another in one and the same film. Svensk challenged my seemingly distanced position; that is that I as an artist presumed to reflect over an event that I had not been a part of and that I in the film did not account for what impact my investigation had had on the case or myself. He wondered what it was that made me think that I could see the event from different sides, without needing to think about my own position and how it influenced my interpretation of the events. This could be compared to the criticism that was aimed at the observing documentary film strategy in the 1960s and '70s, which argued that it was impossible for a filmmaker and a camera to not influence the situation that is being filmed. The critics believed that filmmakers must find an approach that is based on the premise that their presence will always be a part of the relation that is established between the filmmaker and her/his subject. This was one of the factors that drove the development of the interactive documentary film strategy, which presupposes that what is captured on film is the result of an interaction between the filmmaker and the subject of the film. The way in which this interaction finds its expression is thus decisive for the content of the film.[191]

The method I used in *Der Fall Joseph,* however, was not based on the idea that it is possible to observe an event from a distance, but rather on Arendt's belief that it is precisely the ability to put oneself in the position of another without losing one's identity that is paramount in the establishing of an intersubjectivity, which is one of the fundamental conditions for representative thinking in the political sphere. According to Arendt, representative thinking is thus not about seeing the world exactly from the position that the other occupies – this she believes to be impossible – but it is about thinking about how *I* would experience it *if* I found myself in the other's person's position. Arendt, however, makes a clear difference between the possibility to reflect and to act. Reflection, according to Arendt is always about relating to an event that has already taken place, while an action always occurs in a now that is unpredictable. Thus it is not possible to reflect on an ongoing action.[192]

In the text *Giving an Account of Oneself,* Judith Butler, however, emphasises that there is no such thing as an individual independent *I*; it is always created and emerges in relation to others. As opposed to Arendt, Butler thus does

not speak of how we can see the world from someone else's perspective, but rather how we can find an ethical approach that assumes that we emerge in relation to one another. Butler claims that how this relation is formed and what it looks like depends on the 'scene of address'; namely the framework consisting of such things as norms, rules and traditions that impact the relation and thus the possibility for the emergence of the *I*. In this sense one's position is always situated since that which emerges is the result of a specific interaction. Based on this view, which is different from Arendt's line of reasoning, it is not possible to just observe and reflect over an event without at the same time participating in creating a new one. This becomes the interaction's fundamental condition. Since the *I* does not have any knowledge of its own emergence, it is impossible for one's knowledge about one's own *I* to be exhaustive – it is always fragmentary.[193]

Critics of the observing documentary film strategy pointed this out, if in other terms; that is regardless of whether the filmmaker intended it or not, s/he influenced the event with her/his own and the camera's presence. What we see and hear in a film is thus always the result of the specific situation and the specific relations that are established over this time.

Terms and Conditions

It was a small group that bore the main responsibility for the production of Mechelse Ommegang (from now on Ommegang), and thus had the power to determine the framework for the parade regarding content and aesthetic expression. The point of departure for the group was, as mentioned above, to represent and include a large number of inhabitants by striving to enable all the citizens to identify with a least one figure in the parade. As I have also mentioned before, it was initially not clear how these ideas would be materialised and executed. At the same time, all the members of the working group were careful to stress that the parade should not be seen as a product of their own interests but a reflection of a society at a certain point in time with its specific political, social and economic conditions. In this sense the parade could be seen as mimetic.

In a way the parade team and I had the same point of departure for our work: I was interested in the film's relationship to a historical world, and the team was interested in the parade's relation to society. We both assumed that prevailing conditions played an important part in a production, and not least that visual expression can influence events and experiences. The difference between us lay in the fact that I claimed that a film acts in its own right, while the team believed that the visual configuration of the parade is a reflection of the current society. Using Arendt's argument, we could even claim that there is one further position, namely that film can be a tool for critical reflection on an action or an event, which seems to be a common notion about film. What's important here, however, is that film does not mirror society as we experience it, but rather that it is a tool to enable one to imagine other perspectives.

The opposition between action and reflection has recurred several times in history and been dealt with by several filmmakers, artists and theorists, not least the British film collectives and the theorists who wrote about their films. The

question that has often been asked is precisely which role and agency the individual film and the individual practitioner have in relation to more overarching structures.[194]

Butler believes that how *I* act cannot be a reflection of a structure since it is the result of an interaction. Even if this can be interpreted as if the individual subject thus has a certain agency in relation to her/his surroundings, Butler stresses that the subject cannot choose the norms s/he relates to. The norms exist before the emergence of the subject and they in turn form the subject in relation with the other. The question for Butler is not how I should relate to you but rather how I become through you. In other words, in order for *me* to be able to speak at all and act in relation to you I first have to be accepted as a part of a structure that makes this possible. This does not mean that norms cannot shift and change through the interaction, although, admittedly, Butler isn't here referring to production conditions but to the genesis of the subject and its constitution. But I am interested in what this approach would mean for cultural production and specifically for the production of film. Inspired by Butler I thus wonder if we can assume that both the production conditions and the genesis of the film can in part be determined by the relation between the different people involved in a film project and if it in that case would mean that neither the production conditions nor the film are a reflection of the prevailing order but a part of an interaction? As I see it, this would be an important difference. I write 'in part determined'*,* since even before individuals get involved in a film project there are structures and frameworks that concern everyone. Or, to use Butler's line of argument: the people in question must first be identified as participants before they can act and relate to one another and influence the process; they must have been recognised and absorbed by the framework of the production, what Butler calls 'scene of address'. Butler also stresses that how we subsequently act and speak is revealing of both us and the structures that determine who may talk, which norms decide, as well as who has the possibility to question and change an order.[195]

I wanted to test this view in a concrete way through the project dealing with the genesis of the parade. If we assume that the terms and conditions of a production are partially formed in the interaction it should hence mean that the actions, thoughts, discussions and suggestions that emerge in the work process but are not directly evident in the final result are still vital to the understanding of how the visual expression came about. Thus, in order to understand the genesis of the parade it would not be enough to look at the stories that would be created retroactively to suit decisions that had already been made. How the parade came about can also be localised in all the incomplete thoughts, reflections and formulations that were tried out in the process. I was interested in finding out if it was possible to make these elements, as well as the machinery and the interactions that frame and produce a narrative, visible. Or, to put it another way, I was looking for a method that would allow me to produce a work that would expose the processes and elements that would impact on the way both the parade and the work were visually shaped; its *what* and *who*. The question I asked myself was what this actually entails with regards to the practical and concrete aesthetic work.

To a certain degree my wish is paradoxical; according to Butler, the constitution of the subject cannot be reconstructed in a narrative of how it was constituted. Even though this is not about a human subject but about a parade and an

artwork, the question is still relevant: what is it exactly that is emphasised in a reflexive approach? What parts do language and aesthetic strategies play? What can be communicated given the framework within which it is said and expressed?

In film history there are many works that have used a reflexive strategy to reveal the production mechanisms of the film. This has been done by making technical equipment visible in the frame, as well as through a speaker voice that verbally reflects on the conditions of the film.[196] This, however, often occurs on the terms of the representation; the images and the voices tell the story *of* the production's conditions to a viewer. What I wanted to emphasise was how the actual interaction between the team, the film equipment and me both made visible and impacted the narrative, as it did in the films of the Palestinian filmmakers.[197] In this instance it was precisely the interaction between the different participants and the technical apparatus that caused situations and stories to emerge. This is also evident in Peter Watkins's *La Commune* from 2000. *La Commune* was a restaging of the Paris commune of 1871. Over thirteen days Peter Watkins gathered a great number of people who together reflected over and staged the historical events of 1871. In the film the actors enter and exit their roles; sometimes they act and speak in character and at other times they reflect their own personal opinion. That is to say, in the film's narrative it is a TV team that follows the course of events in 1871. Thus, what we see is the images that the cameraman in the TV team has produced. We often also see the reporter who asks the characters questions. The story is literally driven forward by the camera's interaction with the characters and the actors. Just like the actors who move in and out of their roles, the camera also has a dual role; it 'acts' as a tool for the TV team's purpose of creating news, while also generating the film itself based on Watkins's instructions. The camera in *La Commune* is hence a part of the narrative and its content, and in this way it has a distinct impact on how the film is visualised and driven forward. It is always the relation of the camera – which in this case is styled as a TV camera capturing the news – to that which is happening that is central. In films that use documentary film strategies this is common, but not in films that use fictive strategies. In a certain sense the camera is of course always central, regardless of film strategy, but what becomes extra interesting here is that this relation is such a clear part of the film's *who* and *what*.

Space for Interaction

I met the parade's production group once a month for ten months. All the meetings were recorded with a tape recorder. Apart from documenting a process I was, just like in *Mutual Matters*, interested in how the people involved would choose their words and stories when they knew that parts of the conversation would be made public. The presence of the tape recorder was quite simply the link to a future audience. The people in the room commented on the presence of the tape recorder several times, even when I was not even present in person. In other words, everyone was very much aware of the fact that the words they spoke could potentially be heard by others beyond the physical space we found ourselves in. It made the fantasy of a future listener or reader possible. Even before the project was started it was decided that the recorded conversations would be transcribed and turned into a book, which would be published at the same time as the parade took place in August 2013.

In other words, I was interested in the *who* that was revealed in what was spoken and in the relationship that developed between those of us who were present on the different occasions. What would we speak about, how would we speak and when would we address the different aspects of the parade, given the circumstances? This process differs from my work on *Sisters!*, where I chose to not have a recording device present during the research process. There the idea was that we would first come to an agreement on what would be included in the film and how the film would be made. In my work on *Choreography for the Giants* I was interested in the opposite; I was interested in how things were expressed and shaped during the actual research process. If I saw *Sisters!* as the result of an interaction, I here wanted to see how the interaction and the process developed and changed over time. These are, however, not technical choices but linked to the core subjects of the films. *Sisters!* was about focusing on feminist political work aimed at changing the structures that oppress black women in the UK, while the purpose of *Choreography for the Giants* was to try to investigate the structures and processes that generate and enable a certain form of representation of different ethnic groups and individuals. At the beginning I didn't know what the figures would look like or what expression they would take. The only thing I knew was that the organisers wanted to create figures that represented an African, an Arab and an Asian. Regardless of the result, it would be interesting to follow the process and the discussions of the organisers regarding the actual production of the figures.

Power Over the Aesthetics and Ethical Choices

In my meeting with the team I became aware of their wish to have full control over the visual representation in the parade, that is the right to decide what all the elements would look like and how they would be staged. The organisers emphasised several times that it was of central importance that they had the possibility of creating a unified and professional aesthetic in the parade, while at the same time wanting all the co-workers and citizens to feel included.[198] What does the desire to retain the power while at the same time broadening the participation entail? If the team want to be the ones to decide over both the aesthetic expression and the content of the parade, does that not at the same time entail that the inclusion and representation of co-workers and citizens always occurs on the terms of the organisers, regardless of how many people participate and who they are? Is it not they who determine the framework and set the scene for the participation and thus decide under which premises a person can participate in the parade? What possibility did the participants have to influence the scene once they had accepted the invitation? Parades such as this one often take place on the terms of those in power, while carnivals are more anarchical in their expression in the sense that everyone decides for themselves *how* they want to participate. Of course, even in carnivals participation is regulated by rules and norms but the power relations are more undefined which opens up for negotiations with regards to aesthetic expression and the conditions of representation.[199] Parallels can be drawn between our different works and processes with regards to *Choreography for the Giants,* as well as other productions. Just like the team had power over the aesthetic aspects of the parade, I have largely always had the power and possibility to influence the aesthetics of the artwork. Like the organisers of the parade, I create overarching concepts that determine how and what

can be incorporated in a production. But what does it entail to have power over the aesthetics? Can an individual artist control the production, or are there other factors that determine the aesthetic expression and contents? Can the power be negotiated, questioned, redistributed?

The team believed that since the city had given them the responsibility to produce the 2013 version of the parade it was reasonable that they decide over who would have the power over the aesthetics. In the same vein, they didn't consider it to be problematic that a little group of people could determine how a large number of citizens would be represented and included in the parade. To them it was not in the interaction that the aesthetics would be made possible and produced – their focus lay on making well-considered decisions regarding *what* should be produced and represented and *how* it should be done. In that sense the team were the authors of this parade.

I, on my part, had a partially different approach. Inspired by Arendt and Butler I assumed that historical processes cannot have an author, but that they emerge as the result of many relations and interactions. Someone can certainly take on the task of creating narratives from events and give them structure but events per se cannot be traced back to *one* author.

The question is whether our different points of departure also affected our methods and the visual production – in this case the book and the film, and the parade respectively. What does it mean if one assumes that *what* and *how* something is told is dependent on the relations and processes that precede the narrator's choice? What does a method look like that opens up the possibility for potentially unpredictable actions and processes and that takes interaction into consideration? Is such a method different from a method that is based on a view that emphasises the artist or filmmaker's possibility to make independent decisions when it comes to the content and aesthetic expression of an artwork?[200] What is the significance of these different approaches for the aesthetics? Is it at all possible to use a method in projects that does *not* take into account or even limits the interaction that is taking place? I also have to ask myself what creating the possibility for interaction actually involves – that is who should initiate it? Everyone? Me? You? We? Who sets the framework for a relationship, who has the power to make a relationship possible?

To complicate the line of argument further, while the team saw it as unproblematic that they had the right to produce a representation based on their own convictions, they also stressed that the parade was not theirs. It belonged to history and the city, not any single individual. It was a product of several hundreds of years of events and decisions. In this sense it was really the result of relations that stretch over time and space. In fact, was *I* not the one guilty of acting like a high-handed artist? After all, it was I who as an individual subject was determining the framework of our interaction; I had decided to record our conversations, transcribe them and then, on top of everything else, invite experts to comment on them. In what way was this process unpredictable? What did the ethical relationship look like and, not least, what was it based on?

A Film about Becoming

When the organisers read the manuscript with the transcribed conversations some of them became incensed because they didn't think that the selection represented their work correctly. They also felt that the manuscript was too critical of the parade. The team's dissatisfaction with the book manuscript and the following conflicts greatly affected the rest of the project – for example Dybwad Brandrud and I were no longer allowed to follow the preparations of the parade or film the people who were supposed to participate in it.[201] To a certain degree there was conflict from the very beginning of the project because of our different approaches but it was precisely in the intersection of these that I had seen an opportunity for discussion, reflection and negotiation. Through the finished manuscript, our differing points of view, interpretations and approaches became even clearer.

Thus we were no longer able to complement the book with a film that focused on the people who were to help produce the representation. From a position of having more or less full insight into the production of the parade and even a measure of influence over it we were relegated to a more conventional narrator position without any privileged insight into the process. Although this position was in itself quite interesting, it entailed that we were forced to completely rethink what we were going to film and what the function of the film would be. If we wanted to use the moving image we had to work from our new position where we no longer were privy to any behind-the-scenes information about the group who saw it as their task to represent the people.

Since the working conditions with regards to the book were similar to those for working on the parade, some of the reactions and the consequences were interesting for the project. It provoked concrete questions regarding who had the right to speak for whom and who has the right to have the power over choices regarding aesthetics and content. Would the citizens have the same possibility of excluding the team as they had excluded us if the citizens weren't satisfied with the representation? From what would they in that case be excluded? Through the team's reactions to the manuscript the limitations and problems of representation were materialised. Purely artistically this exclusion and shift was thus interesting since it put into motion concrete processes that touched on issues of exclusion and inclusion, which were major themes in the conversations in the book.

One could also ask oneself whether this was a failure, whether we hadn't now been robbed of a film. It was quite apparent that our possibilities had definitely been curtailed. If we wanted to continue we would have to accept the new conditions, which meant that the production time was very short and that we lacked the possibility to film the preparations. So, what would we be able to film then? Was it even possible to continue under such circumstances? On the other hand we, just like the city's inhabitants, had access to the city's public spaces and the preparations that were taking place there. Just like everyone else we saw how the city was being tidied up for the citizens that it was to represent. Thus we would be able to approach the parade from this position instead. One week before the parade was to take place we thus started shooting sequences of these preparations instead; we filmed streets being swept, flowerbeds being tidied, seats being

assembled, infirmaries being prepared, barriers being erected, etc. We started seeing these preparations as an important part of the choreography of the parade, which also reflected our new position as spectators from a distance. Like the women who sewed costumes and the volunteers who were to dance in the parade, those who cleaned and tidied the city were also participating in the production of the parade. These were relatively mundane tasks that were performed in order to prepare the city for a spectacular event, an event that was promoted with large gestures and many words to attract both citizens and tourists. If the giants were to be the main characters of the parade, the streets of the city could be seen as the parade's set and backdrop, which also formed an important element in the *who* of the event. But so far these streets were like stages without actors and drama. They were places earmarked for something that was to occur in the near future. The imagery that we generated from these spaces can of course also be seen to point to absence, to what could have happened: a film about the participants of the parade.

To a certain degree, our work on the film followed the same logic and method as the work on the book manuscript. They were both based on the same question: what is being produced, what is being prepared, for whom and by whom? These questions guided our conversations and how we created images. In both the book and the film we also worked with a dual movement; they bear traces of something that has taken place – conversations, how the flowerbeds are tidied and the streets are swept – while at the same time anticipate the future, something that hasn't taken place yet – the parade. But even in the city's preparations there is a dual movement; while everything is possible the choices of aesthetics and content that have already been made by the organisers, both with regards to the choreography of the parade and the city, will affect that which is to come. The city and the parade are thus already becoming. We wanted this dual motion to also be reflected in the imagery, that is at the same time as the scenes are already framed and fixed they point towards something that is in a state of becoming. They reaffirm existing states with regards to form and content while they also turn towards something that has not yet happened – the parade. Thus we based our work on an existing situation but reflected over how it could be different in a future that had as yet not emerged. In a sense what is depicted in the film will always be locked in a state of becoming, it never reaches the actual parade. Is it in this becoming, this in-between, that we must prepare for the unpredictable, for that which could happen, for new actions, in the way Arendt means it?[202]

Interactive
Documentary
Strategies
and
a Relational
Film
Practice

According to the film theorist Bill Nichols, the possibilities that have been created by the use of interactive documentary film strategies give rise to a number of ethical questions, such as what it means to participate in a film project, how far-reaching the participation can be, how boundaries are negotiated between filmmakers and participants, which questions the filmmaker may ask those being filmed or interviewed, and which parts the filmmaker should use or exclude from the finished film.[203] These ethical considerations are based on the fact that *I* as a filmmaker can (and should) choose an approach towards the person *I* choose to film. Thus it's about how *I* as a filmmaker relate to and include *you* as a filmic subject, how *I* as a filmmaker position myself in the film, which conditions and terms *I* as the filmmaker set for the participation of others and under which different premises they are allowed to be heard. This can also be compared to Michael Renov's conviction that a film always gives expression to the voice of the filmmaker, even if s/he claims that they are conveying someone else's story. The crux of it according to Nichols is that this negotiating occurs between a subject with a camera and a subject without a camera. In other words, how these ethical questions are handled and answered on a practical level will have a major impact on how the work on the film and the relationships within the framework of the film project are formed and organised – interactions that the camera has the task to document. Since Nichols assumes that *I* as the filmmaker am an independent subject who can choose to interact and include people in a film, *I* also occupy a position of power. Although *I* can invite negotiation it occurs on my initiative and on my terms. Furthermore, since the interaction, according to Nichols, often happens in the form of interviews in which the filmmaker interviews the film's subject(s) this constitutes a further power relationship and hierarchy that should be taken into consideration. When Nichols outlines the interactive documentary film strategy it is in other words the filmmaker who is Nichols's point of departure and focus. If *I* use Butler's proposition, Nichols has an ethical approach that is based on the assumption that *I* can choose the norms that *I* want to guide my actions, what Butler calls 'ethics of commitment'.[204]

Even though Nichols points out important aspects that are pivotal to my work as a filmmaker, I also feel that his description simplifies my experiences of the relations that are established and made possible between the different subjects of a film project. Nichols's account makes me wonder where these people with whom

I am supposed to be negotiating are. To what extent can these people who cannot be described as filmmakers actually shape the film? What roles do the different people who interact with each other play? What voice do the different subjects participating in a film project have? Where are *we* in all this?

While working on the films that this dissertation revolves around – *Sisters!, Mutual Matters* and *Choreography for the Giants* – the relationships that were established *between* us participants played a vital part in how the respective film developed and what shape it took. Here I mean those relations that were formed in the film project that constituted the framework in which they were formed. What these relations would look like or which role the camera would play was, however, not a given and it changed in the course of the work process. In certain cases, such as in *Sisters!,* an explicit negotiation process took place between those of us participating in the film project. In other cases, such as in *Choreography for the Giants,* the negotiation was not as pronounced, although the relationships per se set well-defined limits for what and how we could film. In all three cases, however, the films can be seen to be the result of the relationships that were established within the framework of the film. Thus it was not about how I myself chose to relate to the other participants, but rather which relationships were possible within the framework of the film and how these relations in turn influenced the way the film was articulated. Therefore I believe that there was a process that was not unidirectional, but involved movement in many different directions; the framework of the project had an impact on what relations could be established, which in turn had an impact on the framework and the film's aesthetic expression. It is impossible to say what came first, where the relations end or what forms the boundaries of the project. I would go so far as to claim that I am unable to explain it. It is more about an ethical approach to filmmaking and its frameworks, than about trying to present who influenced what or what influenced whom.

A fact that did, however, become clear and that I want to emphasise, is that the camera did not occupy a given position of power, although it did play a pivotal part in the structure that enabled and limited the relationships. The camera's potential presence opened up certain spaces for us and closed others. In all the films that I have been a part of it has been the presence of the microphone and the camera that has given us the opportunity to ask questions, be present at meetings, observe a city, negotiate with those involved and influence processes. Parallels can be drawn to Cinema Action's belief that it was in fact the camera that gave rise to the discussions between the workers and the filmmaker. In their view this interaction was in some ways more important than the finished film, even though it was the idea of the film that enabled the encounter. Their approach was based on the interactive documentary film strategy where it was the encounter between the filmmaker and the filmmaker's subject that drove the film and where it was the camera's function to document this interaction. In our case it was also the recording equipment that enabled this interaction, while at the same time it is also a part of it – it interacts. But what is later manifested in sound and image is the result of these relations, *not* a representation. Thus we found that our conduct was both legitimated and generated by the equipment, just as it limited us. We met individuals whom we would otherwise not have met, we asked questions we would otherwise not have asked and we shifted positions in a way that we would otherwise not have done, at the same time as

the camera also limited us in how and with whom we interacted. In this sense the film became a specific site where specific relations and a specific content could appear.

A concrete example from *Choreography for the Giants* is as follows: some days before the parade was to take place, when the preparations of the city and the parade were in a particularly intense stage, we were contacted by a Belgian TV team who had heard about our interest in Ommegang. They wanted to conduct an interview and film us while we were working. We were interested in their suggestion provided that we could also film them while they interviewed and filmed us. The TV team responded very enthusiastically and thought it was a fun idea. They suggested that we film at the same time as the parade's team rehearsed the choreography with the youths who were to take part in the parade. We had, of course, not been informed of this rehearsal but we thought it was a good idea. We were also curious to see how it would be to meet the team again, after not having been in contact with them since the collapse in communication two months before. Since we did not know whether they knew that we would be present we were tense and apprehensive in anticipation of the shoot. At the same time our presence was legitimated by the presence of the TV team's cameras as well as our own; through the cameras we could be present and watch while they rehearsed the dances with the new figures. I also took the chance to talk to those in charge of the parade about the manuscript and the different reactions it had generated. Since the cameras filmed our interaction it was difficult for them to dismiss us. Or rather, no matter how they chose to act, these sequences could potentially be made public. Although our camera was not confrontational in the same way as in Avi Mograbi's film *Detail,*[205] it was still the camera that made the interaction possible in the first place.

From then on, whenever we were contacted by other journalists who wanted to talk to us about the parade we chose to film these interviews. We used these opportunities to reflect on the terms and conditions of the parade as well as our position, and because of the presence of the camera this occurred in front of a potential public. We contacted people whom we in turn wanted to talk to, and also filmed these conversations. Thus the recording equipment gave us the means to take action, while at the same time it was a part of the future action expressed by the film. With and through the camera we therefore continued to act and negotiate, and perhaps even influence the process, even after the collaboration had ended. The equipment made it impossible for us to occupy a passive position, instead it made us active subjects. However, the knowledge that what we were filming would be made public at an exhibition in Mechelen shortly after the parade had taken place made us even more active and inclined to take on the new situation under the newly established conditions.

Claiming that the camera was crucial to the interactions that took place does *not* mean that the camera *didn't* occupy a position of power, or that I *didn't* use the camera to exert power; this was, however, not a given from the very beginning. The power relations were renegotiated and shifted in the course of the film project. In this sense the camera is not a device that documents the encounter between filmmakers and other people. Instead the camera gives rise to a platform on which we interact with each other and knowledge is produced. The contents can, in other words, neither be separated from the framework, nor the form of the

film, which is dependent on the interaction between the camera and the different subjects.[206] According to this line of reasoning, the crux of the matter is thus not the relationship between the filmmaker *with* camera and the subject *without* camera, but rather the relationship between us as subjects and the camera. In other words, for me there were no defined boundaries between me and the others in the genesis of the film. We influenced each other – and in this 'we' I include the entire machinery involved in the production of the film. This is why I say that it is unclear whose voice and knowledge are heard, presented and seen in the film. According to Butler, one alternative to the 'ethics of commitment' is what she calls the 'ethics of responsibility', where the assumption is that I *cannot* choose the norms that determine my actions since *I* come about through *you* and *you* always come before me. Moreover, the way in which this relation finds its expression is dependent on the scene of address in which the relation is constituted. Butler points out, however, that although I cannot choose my norms I still bear responsibility towards you, precisely because of the fact that I become through you.

This view corresponds better to my experiences of filmmaking. Butler makes me aware of the fact that the central ethical question in a relational approach is not 'how should I relate to you?' but rather, 'what does a specific framework make (im)possible?' However, since Butler deals with the way the human subject is constituted, it is important to ask what the implications of that are for my own filmmaking. Or rather, what does it mean for filmmaking as such. Based on Butler's reasoning we should not be interested in how I as a filmmaker am heard, but we should rather explore what is heard, how it is heard and what has enabled this *what* and *who* that the film consists of. Thus the main point is not the individual filmmaker's intentions but how the film with its narratives comes about through the relations that are formed and, not least, which subjects are allowed into this framework and how this later determines the appearance of the film.[207]

Therefore, if one embraces the complexity of interaction it is also more productive to assume that in working on the different films there are always dual movements – the direction, content and form of the production are determined both by decisions made by individuals and by the interaction that takes place between the different participants. These dual movements, however, don't necessarily need to be consistent in rhythm but depend on how the work is shaped, structured and which interactions have taken place.

So what does it ultimately entail if we view the film as a site that is neither yours nor mine, but something that extends beyond our individual positions? How can I as filmmaker relate to the possibilities and limitations that the film project holds and the knowledge that can be produced within its framework; the stories that are made possible through subjects that are defined as participants and the relationships that are formed between them? How can I as a filmmaker take responsibility in a film practice that is based on the relational aspect of a political existence? These are questions I ask myself ahead of my next film project.

Filmmaking as an Ethical and Political Relation

How does film become a political act? That is the question that this text has revolved around. It has taken me from British film collectives active in the 1970s, inspired by Marxist and feminist theory, through a collaboration with Southall Black Sisters and films made by activists and filmmakers in Palestine and Israel, to a parade in Mechelen. The question is inspired by Hannah Arendt's ideas regarding the conditions for political coexistence and action. Arendt writes primarily about the human condition while I am interested in the conditions of filmmaking in a very concrete way. There is a very important difference between the two, the meaning and implications of which I have reflected on in the text. I have shifted between exploring what can be regarded as political action in film and how film can be considered to be a *constitutive scene* for ethical and political relations, in other words that which conditions the action. These shifts have entailed discussions of both aesthetics as methodology and ethics. There are, however, no distinct dividing lines between these arguments – they have instead

both overlapped and presupposed each other in my attempts at finding an answer to the question of how film becomes a political act. I have thereby shown that aesthetics as a methodology is crucial for the film's ethical and political content. In order to clarify the arguments, I have borrowed certain terms and notions from Arendt, such as the *what* and *who* and *intersubjectivity*, as well as Judith Butler's s*cene of address,* in order to bring to the fore the processes and methods that qualify and create the conditions for political action in film. Although I primarily tested and debated the different approaches based on my own practice, I started by posing the question to a number of British film collectives that in the 1970s claimed to engage in politics through and with film.[208] The three collectives tried to challenge the relationship between a documentary narrative style and the political and social content of the films. Their strategies were manifold, but here I want to once again emphasise the film collectives' aim to elaborate and transform the cinematic expression so as to dissolve the boundaries of the individual and move away from the individual's intentions and desires in order to promote collective action through their choice of cinematic expression. In their view joint effort of this kind could lead to political change. On the level of content this meant that the films revolved around structural causes of oppression and inequality rather than the plights of individuals. With respect to how the collectives were organised, this, on the other hand, entailed that no decisions were made before the entire group had jointly discussed the different suggestions; in fact, it was in this process of negotiation with others that the films were formulated. The collective effort also meant that the collectives could embrace alternative production and distribution structures in their work and in this way both challenge and accumulate collective knowledge with regards to technique, content and aesthetics. Even though there was a division of labour in the making of the films, as an outsider and in retrospect one cannot trace the work back to any specific individuals. Hence we have to come to the conclusion that the films are the result of a joint effort and collective action.

For Cinema Action and the London Women's Film Group the collective process was also a method that was used to achieve specific realpolitikal changes within the framework of the political movement they saw themselves as belonging to, the labour movement and the women's movement respectively. The purpose of the films was thus to raise awareness and voice experiences within the movements, as well as start discussions and actions that extended beyond the films and the screening rooms and in that sense influence a realpolitikal process. It was within the framework of the movements that the films' subjects, participants and audiences were to be found. The collective work did not of course mean that there was no power play, competition or hierarchy within the group but from the outside the only thing that could be seen and heard was the result of a joint effort.

Moving away from the individual filmmakers' intentions by forming film collectives with a common voice could be seen as a radical political method in its time. Their approach was, however, also conventional, at least viewed from our current position: the focus still lay on the filmmaker – albeit now as a group – and their striving to provide a voice for other people's stories through film. Although the collectives saw themselves as a part of a broader movement, the membership in the group was based on whether or not the individuals thought of themselves as filmmakers. In interviews with former members, for example, they mention the

negotiations that took place between the members of the group, but what is not as clear is what the negotiations looked like that took place with and between the participants that were not defined as filmmakers. That said, they still believed that there were filmmakers with equipment and film subjects without equipment; the relationships were thus established between pre-defined positions. The collective act included the collective's own members, and thus it is the collective that uses film to express *its* thoughts and present *its* political arguments. We could therefore say – supported, for example, by the film theoretician Michael Renov's claim that the subject of a film can never be its referent – that what is heard in the films of the film collectives is not necessarily the workers or the women who are interviewed, but rather the collective voice of the filmmakers.[209] Collective action can thus be seen to be limited to a number of individuals; the collectives had taken the place of individual filmmakers – only now as a group. It is possible that the ethical and aesthetic considerations were articulated in the following way: What strategies do we use in order to emphasise and problematise these political issues in the best possible way within the framework of this political movement? And, how should we relate to the individuals who become the subjects of the film?

There was, however, a certain openness towards other forms of collectivity that were expressed both in the choice of representation strategies and how the screening situations were organised. One of the members of Cinema Action, for example, mentioned in an interview that what was most important to the collective was the encounters and discussion that the presence of the camera and then the film gave rise to. Forming alliances and inspiring action that extended beyond the screening room was moreover more important than the film itself. Thus it was important to watch the films together – this applied specifically to the people whom the collective considered to be their target audience and whom they saw themselves speaking on behalf of. This could be seen as a form of collectivity that extends beyond the individual actors, their intentions, knowledge and wills – and instead creates a commonality. The idea of commonality and intersubjectivity is central to the thinking of Hannah Arendt, but it can also be traced back to both Walter Benjamin and Bertolt Brecht, who believed that the critical and collective potential of film is to be found in its production as well as its reception. The philosopher Peter Osborne has contested this view. He argues that even if the screening situation is taken into account, the film collectives' collectivity was still bound to a specific place, a specific movement and a certain number of bodies. Therefore, the collectives were incapable of reaching beyond their own specific time and geography. Or at least this form of collectivity is not relevant, not radical enough, for our times, which are based on a different global social order than the one that prevailed in the 1970s. Osborne argues further that this limited form of collectivity was also one of the reasons why the collectives didn't manage to survive when the political movements that they belonged to changed because of the new political order that was established at the end of the 1970s.[210]

Is it possible to imagine collective forms in film that are not limited to a defined group and a specific number of bodies – a collectivity that can extend beyond a specific place and time but without necessarily being fictional? What would it entail in that case? And what then happens to the argument about the film's voice? These are questions that successively emerged as the work progressed and that, towards the end, have demanded increasing focus.

On one occasion I was asked why I had chosen to use 'my own' films as a starting point and relate them to the British film collectives, considering that none of 'my' film projects had been a collective production. *We* who could be defined as filmmakers – as the creators of these projects – sooner consisted of temporarily assembled groups that had chosen to work together on these specific projects, albeit under different conditions. Not even Southall Black Sisters, who according to the film collectives' model could be considered to be a collective, define themselves as such.[211] During the film projects, we who participated in the projects rather created temporary alliances in order to be able to raise the questions and embrace the strategies that were central to us and the film projects. The films that we produced cannot be sai d to belong to a specific movement either. In that aspect our working method quite rightly differed from that of the 1970s film collectives.

A simple and significant answer to the question is that it wasn't only how the collectives were organised that was important in a discussion about film as political action or political practice. The collectives also had very interesting ideas about filmic and aesthetic strategies, as well as the screening situation itself; ideas that had been of great importance to both my work and my reflections on political action in relation to filmmaking. However, a further answer, which puts more at risk and demands a more complex explanation, is that although we neither were defined as a film collective nor thought of ourselves as belonging to a specific political movement nor even targeted a specific audience with the films, I still believe that the films potentially express a collective voice that goes beyond individual intentions and wills. I would in fact go so far as to claim that precisely the lack of a defined collective potentially paves the way for collective acts that extend beyond a number of limiting bodies, and thus also paves the way for another way of seeing the film's voice than what Michael Renov suggests.[212]
In order to develop and explain that claim I want to start by mentioning some important experiences I have had within the film projects I have worked on, particularly regarding the temporary meeting places where we as participants could interact with one another. For example, because of the decision to engage in a film project with a London-based feminist organisation in order to explore contemporary feminist issues and strategies, I came in contact with Southall Black Sisters. The film project became the framework within which we met and discussed the political and social situation in the UK and what it entails for black and minority women. We spoke of the strategies that the organisation employed to influence and change the structures that enable the oppression of women, such as the spouse visa laws. Our meetings took place both before and during the shoots and they always revolved around the organisation's view of contemporary feminist issues. It is important that the encounters took place *between* the participants, meaning that the conversations arose in the interaction between us and linked to the specific context – a film project about feminist issues. But just as much as it was about communicating with one another using verbal language, we also met in our actions, for example when the film team filmed Southall Black Sisters performing their day-to-day duties. Interaction was key even here – Southall Black Sisters performed specific work and specific gestures especially for the camera, as we had agreed on within the framework of the film project. In the footage you can primarily see the interaction, or choreography, between the movements of the camera and the participants (those participants who were in front of the camera that is). These interactions between the different

agents created the concrete meeting place during such occasions as the shooting of the film. What the film then presents is a kind of outcome of the participants' presence in the room. But agents also met within the framework of the same film project without necessarily being confronted with one another physically. In the film *Choreography for the Giants*, for example, the different people who voice their opinions are placed in relation to one another – their words meet. Several of them are conscious of the other's participation and comment on it, but without ever meeting. In a sense this is also an encounter that takes place due to the film project. Here I don't just mean the participants that can be seen in front of the camera, but rather I believe that it encompasses everyone who could be deemed a part of the film project. Naturally, an encounter also takes place between the image and the sound of the film. This is something that Sergei Eisenstein also developed in his montage theory and that several filmmakers have explored and emphasised, not least the filmmakers who work with an essayistic film narrative. Moreover, the so-called concrete meeting places included both human and non-human agents (for example camera and sound in relation to space, people in relation to camera, and the meeting of image and sound). When I speak of meetings or encounters I thus do not primarily mean the encounters that are represented visually (although they are also important) but rather the encounters that give rise to imagery, representation and narrative structure, that is, elements that then become a part of the film's *who* and are central to film as action. Furthermore, I see the meeting places that could be simultaneously abstract and physically concrete, as central to an argument about collectivism since they make a *who* possible that goes beyond individual gestures, words and actions. The film's visual expression is thus not the result of my decision – nor yours – but of all the negotiations and interactions that the film is based on. It is of course possible to see traces of individual approaches, actions and relations in the films. But the film is not the sum of the different agents' presence or absence; the voice of the films can be traced back to neither the filmmaker nor the film subjects. The voice of the films is rather to be found in the intersection between frameworks, the different agents' actions, the relations that are created, what the relationships give rise to and the aesthetic strategies that have been used – that is, the voice is to be found in the cinematic *who* and *what*.

In contrast to Cinema Action, however, I believe that the future film, in its concrete materiality, is a very important prerequisite for that which I call the encounter. The film project and the equipment were thus not only there as catalysts, as the members of Cinema Action expressed it, to enable an encounter that could be represented visually. I see the genesis of the film and the actual result as the conditions of the actual encounter and a deciding factor for the collective voice. The collective voice is to be found in the finished film and not in the individual encounters between the agents. I thus mean that the film encompasses a greater number of bodies than can be identified or inferred. It acts in its own right, even though it is influenced by the interactions that preceded it and were made possible by its framework. In this I sense a potential form of radical collectivity, precisely because neither the relations nor the film are restricted to a number of bodies nor defined by the intentions and desires of individuals. Thus the question for me is not how *I* as a filmmaker included *you* in a film project, but rather which relations were made (im)possible within a certain framework, what these relations consisted of and, not least, how the film emerged through them.

These interactions and meeting places are, however, not unconditional. The strategy has never been 'let's see what happens' – instead the film projects have had clear ideological and political foundations that can be linked to feminist issues and strategies, as well as to political and aesthetic representational criticism. The point of departure for the film *Sisters!* was for example to focus on the daily work that the members of Southall Black Sisters perform with the aim of changing society. At the same time it was key that neither the participants' words and actions nor the visual aspects were predetermined before the filming. The purpose of the film was not to illustrate or argue for a certain view but to use the camera to explore the relationship between their daily work and their political work. It was thus important to let the scenes emerge in the interaction between the camera and the participants – a relationship that, despite being limited by the film project's idea to focus on the feminist work in everyday life, was not predetermined. An example to concretise the argument is as follows: the film team and Southall Black Sisters had together decided that we would spend a day shooting a scene that focused on the so-called emergency telephone, the number that women from over the whole country can ring in order to immediately get help and counselling. One of the women in the organisation worked specifically with this. In the course of the day we followed her work with the camera. The scene was important from a political and feminist perspective since targeted advice is part of the daily struggle to put a stop to violence against women. Furthermore, it was well planned in its mis-en-scène. The framework for the scene thus had a specific meaning in its contents and aesthetics and was already incorporated into a narrative structure. At the same time, of course, we didn't know who would ring, how the telephone calls would develop or how the woman who answered the emergency line would choose to act in relation to the telephone call, the camera and the overall situation of being filmed. The element of surprise and spontaneity was also linked to how the camera and the sound equipment moved in relation to her movements, gestures and words. Within the given framework there was thus room for improvisation and negotiation, as well as for resistance and action that changed the framework and the scene itself. For example, during the shoot (as well as before and after) the members of Southall Black Sisters voiced their opinions on what could and should be filmed in which way, as well as the role that the scene played within the overarching theme. In that sense there was a dialectical interaction between the framework and the agents that were subject to it. Being able to influence the contents, aesthetics and narrative structure of a film is important to a collective claim, and the unpredictability of interaction is of utmost importance for political action. Sometimes the different negotiations occurred through an exchange of glances, sighs, gestures and other physical expressions. In other cases they occurred with the help of language, either through words spoken or held back. Sometimes these negotiations were confrontational. Some of them happened while the camera was rolling, while others took place before the camera had been switched on or after it had been turned off. Regardless of when or how they found their expression, it was always the presence of the recording equipment that brought them on. The negotiations shaped our relationships and affected the cinematic visual expression. I would even go so far as to claim that the finished film was entirely dependent on these relational processes.

Is Film
a Listening
Practice?

Throughout the text I have repeatedly emphasised that it is aesthetic strategies linked to the content that make it possible to talk of the film as a subject in its own right with its own (collective) voice that distinguishes it from other agents. Based on Arendt's theories, though, I believe that this only occurs when the film is shown in public and thus enters into the world. It is only then that the film can potentially be seen as an action in itself. The question is, however, whether 'voice' is the best term in this context. There is a risk that the possible meanings and consequences of the films become fixed if one speaks of film as voice, since it subsequently raises the questions what the film means, argues in favour of or points to. Using Arendt's arguments as her point of departure the political theorist Susan Bickford, for example, claims that speech often has a predetermined direction, that is to say that when words are spoken, regardless of whether they are spontaneous or planned, they already have a specific purpose. She places this in opposition to active listening – an activity that involves preparing oneself for the unpredictable and the unknown. The listener doesn't know which direction the other person's words will take, hence the listener must be open and actively listen to what is happening in the now and what is yet to come. There is thus a difference between listening actively and 'just' listening. The former is an activity that demands openness while the latter is based on a form of listening that is conditional or controlled. Bickford further argues that if we listen actively, we will always perceive differences, anomalies and oppositions in the speech and actions of the other, since all actions contain several meanings.[213] However, Bickford stresses that there is a political risk in listening that is linked to the possibility that what we hear demands an actual material change of us and of the place in which we operate. Listening demands, in other words, that we reflect on how we deal with and take responsibility for what we will hear; how we act and behave based on what we hear. In that sense listening, speech and action are intimately connected to one another.[214] In other words, leaving the private sphere and venturing into the unpredictable political sphere not only means that we reveal ourselves through our words and deeds, but we also have to take responsibility for the world that we become a part of since we can interrupt and affect ongoing processes through our actions, and not least initiate new ones. We cannot, however, control the world that we affect through our actions. 'We are responsible and yet not in charge; we cannot control the situation, but we are accountable. This kind of fear can lead to not-listening as well, the reluctance to admit another as a "co-builder of a common world".' But, if listening is to be understood as a political instead of a private phenomenon then listening must appear in the world. Based on this, Bickford asks an important question: 'But how can listening itself be made visible or audible? How can it appear in the public?'[215]

While working on *Mutual Matters,* I started asking myself this question in relation to filmmaking. Can the film project and the film be a place and a form of active listening or the result thereof? What would be the implications of that? Is it possible to transfer Bickford's argument and questions regarding listening

to film? Can film make listening 'visible' or 'audible' through its images and sound? Is what happened in the interaction during the film project a form of listening? What role does the recording equipment play in that case? Could one even go so far as to say that the listening is in fact made possible by the recording equipment, since its way of moving in relation to what takes place during the filming is of great importance to what is subsequently heard and seen in a film?

It is just as important, however, to ask oneself what a not-listening film practice would be. Is it when the camera and microphone are used by the initiators of the film project to look for images and sounds that confirm pre-existing opinions, perceptions and ideas? When the equipment and film projects become tools used to emphasise predetermined arguments? This procedure could be compared to the explanatory documentary film mode, which assumes that there is an obvious sender who wants to present an argument and message through film.[216] The film collective Cinema Action was, for example, criticised for precisely this: that they in their striving to present set opinions and arguments became deaf and blind to the disagreements and processes that took place between for example women and men within the labour movement.[217] Would, on the other hand, a listening strategy in that case involve recording equipment unconditionally following the potentially unpredictable events, movements, relationships that take place when the agents within the framework of a film project interact with each other? Actively listening with and through the equipment to that which we don't necessarily know anything about? What, in that case, is the difference between the notion of a *listening camera* and the criticised observing documentary mode? Bickford speaks about listening as a political practice in the sense that those who listen are in a relationship with others and can even be affected by them. Listening is an element of political action and thus not an autonomous phenomenon. In other words, as opposed to the observing mode, a listening film practice should be based on the belief that the interaction between the participants is central. I ask myself whether listening is perhaps even a prerequisite for the kind of collective action that is described above. And is it the camera's task to actively listen by interacting and relating to events and other participants that are ambiguous and contradictory? Or, to put it another way: can an aesthetic strategy be used which makes differences, anomalies and contradictions emerge, highlights them and makes them evident in image and sound during the filming itself and not just through montage constructions or a voice-over? What part do the movements and gestures of the camera and the participants play in this process of making visible?

Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen stressed that an important political aspect of the film *Nightcleaners* was that it didn't avoid contradiction. They even went so far as to state that this emphasising of contradiction was a political act in itself since the film thus made all simplified or even totalitarian interpretations of events impossible. Emphasising the unclear, the complex and the contradictory in the content, visuals, sound and narrative construction was in turn meant to encourage the audience to actively relate to the film and what was presented in it. Here parallels can also be drawn to Brecht's ideas regarding epic theatre. Could a listening strategy be a further development of this; how the 'listening' camera can make visible and audible the ambiguity and unpredictability of actions, words, gestures and movements and thus

their political potential? Does a 'listening' camera also make for a 'listening' audience that has to prepare itself for unpredictability and ambiguity? And in that case, how can arguments regarding responsibility be linked to the film? How does this line of reasoning relate to Arendt's ideas regarding action and reflection?

Conclusions –
Film as Political Action,
Right Now

In the introduction I wrote that Hannah Arendt emphasises that acting subjects must be able to see and hear, and be seen and heard by other acting subjects. The prerequisite for this is that the political arenas in which people appear must be public, subject to plurality and potentially consist of an infinite number of positions and perspectives. Moreover, each space of appearance must be unpredictable and purposeless, in the sense that the action should not be instrumentalised. Furthermore, according to Arendt, intersubjective relations are a precondition for representative political thought, that is the possibility of seeing the world from a perspective other than my own, but without giving up my identity. How does this then relate to film as political action?

Firstly, I would like to emphasise the given point of departure: what constitutes a political act with regards to film depends on the prevailing political and social situation that the film is a part of. This applies both to what can be characterised as an act as well as to what the act does at a certain point in time and thus how it appears. It is not, however, the matter of what the act does that has been of primary interest to me but rather I have concentrated my reflections on what constitutes a political act in film and where the action can be said to occur. Here the discussion has moved from a discussion of film as a political act in its own right to film as a constitutive scene for political and ethical relations and actions, and lastly to questions regarding film as a listening political practice. In the text I have explored the following conditions for film as political action.

The first fundamental condition is that the production structure, the aesthetic strategies, ethical relations and screenings are inseparable from a discussion of film as political action. The different concepts refer to practical parts of a work process that both affect and presuppose one another; how a film project is structured influences which aesthetic strategies and ethical relations are possible, which in turn determines how the film enters the public realm.

Film as a political act in its own right is constituted by a *what* and a *who*. The *what* is that which is communicated via the film's story and which can be expressed in words. The *who* of the film primarily emerges in the interaction between three different processes: the first is constituted by the presence of the film team expressed in the movements of the cameras, lights and microphones. The second process is made up of the encounter between the film's participants (which includes both filmmakers and other participants) and the equipment. The third is the performative actions that the film's participants carry out in the scenes in front of the camera. It is the combination of these that constitutes the film's aesthetics, its *who*. The aesthetics, linked to the contents, the combination of *who* and *what*, constitutes a political act that distinguishes it from others. But this only happens when the film is shown and it thus enters into the world. It is only then that the film attains a position, can potentially be seen as an act in itself and thus has the ability to act, suggest and affect.

A film project can also be a constitutive scene for ethical and political relations, which is a precondition for political action. Here I have been specifically interested in the entire apparatus of the film shoot and how the relations established during production are expressed in the film's *who* and *what*. The complex processes and relations are, however, dependent on the framework of the film project (which in turn is based on a complex interaction of politics, ideology, financial constraints, knowledge, time frames etc.) and the subjects who are part of the project. These relations and processes encompass aspects like movements, gestures, values, actions and listening. Fragments of these find expression in what is seen and heard. In other words, it is not the representation of relations that is of key importance but rather what the relations and processes make (im)possible. There is no image and no sound beyond these processes.

Furthermore, it is the interaction between the agents that brings about a collectivity with indefinable and fluid boundaries that goes beyond individual desires and intentions and that is key to the voice of the film. In other words, a film whose voice is based on this form of collectivity cannot only be traced back to the actions of individuals, since it is always more than a sum of individual contributions and what is represented in it. This is of utmost importance if we are to see film as a political act in its own right.

Although the space, which also includes the actual film shoot and the apparatus around that, can rarely be accessed by just anyone, it can be seen as a part of a future publicness because of the presence of the camera. Thus the film project could be seen as a form of meeting place for political acts in an Arendtian sense. In other words, we who are present at a film shoot, for example, act and speak with each other but also through the camera to future audiences. Thus the camera transforms the closed-off film location into a town square of sorts that to a degree is based on plurality and publicness, where one can be seen and heard by everyone. This space has certain limitations, however, that are linked to the conditions of the film and are only potentially political, because it is dependent on the filmed material being incorporated into a film that is subsequently shown at a place that can be accessed by anyone.

In order for the film projects to become a space of appearance there has to be room for the unexpected, unpredictable and unplanned. A film project where the choreography, gestures and verbal communication are predetermined in detail, can thus not become a space of appearance. While I have stressed the importance of the uncontrollable, I have also argued for the significance of the political and ideological focus of the film projects; that the encounters between the actors occur on the basis of political aims. The notion of film projects as a space for political action must therefore be founded on a dialectical relationship between the political and the personal, between the structured and the spontaneous, between the planned and the unplanned, between the ideological and the indefinable, between the expected and the unexpected. Arendt argues that it is precisely between what is and what can be that there is a possibility for new action and a chance to change direction.[218] I thus believe that the political potential of film lies in its dual movements, which also comprise the one between the historical and the imaginary. This applies to structure, aesthetics, content and to a certain degree even screening.

Besides words, deeds and intersubjective interactions the notion of political action also comprises listening. However, if listening can be understood as a political instead of a private phenomenon, then listening has to enter the world. In film as a political act the camera plays a major role since it gives rise to publicness, makes relations possible and takes part in forming the film's *who*. But can the camera even enable listening to emerge and enter the political sphere through film? That is to say, can the ambiguity and unpredictability of actions, words, gestures and movements and thus their political potential be made evident and heard through a 'listening' camera? Can the film in this way make listening 'visible' or 'audible' through its images and sound? A listening camera would thus be a part of the political act.

The politically acting film can have an ideological and political direction, but not a realpolitikal aim. The aim of film as political action is the ethical and political relations that emerge in the film project and in relation to an audience.

Notes and References

This dissertation includes four films that are distributed via sistersmakingfilms@gmail.com.

Conversations: Stina Lundberg Dabrowski meets Petra Bauer
(2010)

Sisters!
(Petra Bauer and Southall Black Sisters, 2011)

Mutual Matters
(Petra Bauer, Marius Dybwad Brandrud and Kim Einarsson, 2012)

Choreography for the Giants
(Petra Bauer and Marius Dybwad Brandrud, 2013)

Notes

1. *Nightcleaners* is archived at the British Film Institute National Archive. The film can also be rented from the distributor LUX – Artists' Moving Image in London.

2. The Showroom is a non-commercial art institution in London run by the curator Emily Pethick.

3. *Not a Penny on the Rent* (Cinema Action, 1969), *Squatters* (Cinema Action, 1970), *People of Ireland* (Cinema Action, 1973), *Arise Ye Workers* (Cinema Action, 1973), *The Miners' Film* (Cinema Action, 1975), *Rocinante* (Cinema Action, 1986), *Bearskin* (Cinema Action, 1989), *Miss/Mrs* (London Women's Film Group, 1972), *Fakenham Film* (London Women's Film Group, 1972), *Whose Choice?* (London Women's Film Group, 1976), *About Time* (London Women's Film Group, 1976), *Women of the Rhondda* (Esther Ronay, Mary Kelly, Mary Capps, Humphrey Trevelyan, 1972).

4. In the 1920s, European and North American filmmakers started questioning conventions within filmic narration. They experimented with the contents and the narrative construction, as well as sound and imagery. The films were labelled as 'experimental film'. It is in this sense that I use the word 'experimental' in this dissertation. See for example Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, *Film History: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 173ff.

5. See for example *Light Reading* (Lis Rhodes, 1978) and *Riddles of the Sphinx* (Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen, 1977).

6. Hannah Arendt's notions of political communities and the 'space of appearance' can be compared to Jacques Rancière's thoughts on the political. Like Arendt, he believes that the political does not exist per se, but emerges in the encounter between people. But, as opposed to Arendt, Rancière stresses that the political comes about in the conflict between order on the one hand, which he with an allusion to the Greek *polis* (city, state) and an extension of the conventional word for society's law enforcement calls 'police', and on the other hand those who are not yet subject to the community in the *polis*. To be more precise, politics emerge when those who are not yet included in the community of the polis demand an active redress of a wrong. Rancière explains that 'parties do not exist prior to the declaration of wrong. Before the wrong that its name exposes, the proletariat has no existence as a real part of society. What is more, the wrong it exposes cannot be regulated by way of some accord between parties. It cannot be regulated since the subjects a political wrong sets in motion are not entities to whom such and such has happened by accident, but subjects whose very existence is the mode of manifestation of the wrong.' (Jacques Rancière, 'Wrong: Politics and Police', in *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy,* tr. Julie Rose [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998], 39.) Rancière continues, stating that 'the political is the encounter between two heterogeneous processes. The first process is that of governing, and it entails creating community consent, which relies on the distribution of shares and the hierarchy of places and functions. I shall call this process *policy*. The second process is that of equality. It consists of a set of practices guided by the supposition that everyone is equal and by the attempt to verify this supposition. The proper name for this set of practices remains *emancipation*.' (Rancière, 'Politics, Identification, and Subjectivization', in *October*, 61, *The Identity in Question* [Summer 1992], 58.) Arendt does not deny the importance of conflict for the political space, but does not necessary assume that it is in the redress of a wrong that the political comes into being. This is an important difference between the two thinkers. In this thesis I use Arendt's view of political action. When it comes to discussions of the relation between politics and aesthetics, Rancière's thinking has been a common reference point in contemporary art for many years now.

7. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 199ff.

8. Ibid., 199ff.

9. Since, in this dissertation, I am referring to the ability of *film* to act, as opposed to the human subject, I have chosen the word 'agency' or 'agent' instead of 'actor' to highlight this difference.

10. Jean-Luc Godard, 'What is to be done?', *Afterimage,* 1 (April 1970). See also Colin MacCabe, *Godard: Images, Sounds, Politics* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1980), 50.

11. Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Reflections: Essays, Autobiographical Writings,* ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1978), 220–238.

12. Sergei Eisenstein, 'The Montage of Film Attractions', in *Eisenstein: Writings 1922–1934*, ed. Richard Taylor (London: BFI Publishing, 1988).

13. For a more in-depth discussion of the films that were produced by the Black Audio Film Collective and their political aspects I recommend Kodwo Eshun and Anjalika Sagar (eds.), *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982–1998* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).

14. Since this dissertation is not a text *about* Hannah Arendt's theories, but rather about film-making as a potential political act, I will only explain those terms and ideas in Arendt's theories that are key to the focus of the dissertation on film as a political act.

15. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 220–221.

16. This is an argument that can be found in many of Hannah Arendt's texts. For an introduction to the terms 'public' and 'private' according to Arendt, I recommend: *The Human Condition*, 50–73.

17. Ibid., 38–49.

18. Ibid., 175–181.

19. For a summary of a feminist political discussion of the relation between the private and the political see for example: Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 95–139.

20. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 188ff.

21. See for example Nancy Fraser, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', *Social Text*, 25:26 (1990), 56–80. Cecilia Sjöholm addresses some of the criticism that has been aimed at Hannah Arendt's ideas regarding the public sphere in *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt: How to See Things* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 7–22.

22. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 181.

23. Ibid., 176.

24. Ibid., 182.

25. Hannah Arendt argues that thinking, like action and reflection, is an activity. However, it is not action; in other words, to think is not to act.

26. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), 255–272.

27. See Cecilia Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt* and Annika Ruth Persson, *Hannah Arendts 1940-tal: en ickebiografi i tre delar* (Gothenburg: Kabusa böcker, 2014).

28. In the autumn of 2015, when I was busy finishing my dissertation, Cecilia Sjöholm published the book *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt*, which explicitly deals with how an aesthetic theory could be formulated based on Hannah Arendt's political theory. Sjöholm's book deepens the discussion of the role of aesthetics in Arendt's work. I share many of Sjöholm's opinions regarding Arendt's theories and how they can be used to understand the importance of aesthetics in the political space. Since we come from different disciplines and take on Arendt's notions about the space of appearance with different kinds of background knowledge, our findings, however, also differ on several important points. While Sjöholm has focused on deepening the understanding of the role that aesthetics play in Arendt's theories, I have chiefly used Arendt's theories to deepen the discussion of what constitutes a political act in film. Furthermore, Sjöholm's focus is primarily on the actual appearance, that is to say, when the subject and the object appear in public, while I am most interested in the *production* of an appearance, that is to say in the conditions of the process that preceded an action.

29. Cecilia Sjöholm argues that Arendt in her later work was busy developing an aesthetics based on her political theory. Although Arendt did not manage to finish this work before her death, Sjöholm points out that there are traces of it in several of her lectures and in the book *The Life of the Mind* (Sjöholm, *Doing Aesthetics with Arendt*, 72).

30. Ibid., 71–77. Sjöholm argues that even though Arendt is inspired by Kant she deviates from his thinking on aesthetic judgement since she uses his ideas to create a political theory that can be used to understand the world in its most mundane form.

31. Ibid., 76.

32. Ibid., 121.

33. Ibid., 54.

34. In the spring of 2010 I was accepted as a doctoral student in artistic processes at Konstfack – the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. Thus it became possible to further develop and deepen the project that I had started in collaboration with The Showroom dealing with film as political action. For the first two years, my doctoral studies were conducted in collaboration with the Division of History of Science, Technology and Environment at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH). In 2013 I obtained my licentiate degree. The title of my licentiate thesis was *Sisters! – Förhållandet mellan politisk handling och estetiska strategier i samtida film* (Stockholm: KTH, Royal Institute of Technology, 2013).

35. For a further discussion of artistic research see for example: Magnus Bärtås, *You Told Me: Work Stories and Video Essays*, Ph.D. diss. (University of Gothenburg, ArtMonitor, 2010); Henrik Karlsson, *Handslag, famntag, klapp eller kyss? Konstnärlig forskarutbildning i Sverige*, diss. (Stockholm: Swedish Institute for Studies in Education and Research, 2002); Mara Lee, *När Andra skriver: skrivande som motstånd, ansvar och tid* (Gothenburg: Glänta produktion, 2014), as well as Ingrid Ryberg's dissertation *Imagining Safe Space: The Politics of Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography*, diss. (Stockholm University, Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2012).

36. Although I do not write about *Conversations: Stina Lundberg Dabrowski Meets Petra Bauer*, I see the film as part of the dissertation since it reflects on and poses initial questions about collectivity, politics through film and feminist issues based on the historical material dealing with the British film collectives.

37. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 65ff and 78ff.

38. Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 247.

39. Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, 14: 3 (Fall 1988), 575–599; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the*

Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Houndmills: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271–313.

40. The following short historical background is based on Margaret Dickinson's book *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain,* 1945–90 (London: British Film Institute, 1999), 1–12 and 35–44. Other historical documents and articles that I have read and several of the people whom Dan Kidner and I interviewed, however, testify to the same development; some of those can be found in Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner (eds.), *Working Together: Notes on British Film Collectives in the 1970s* (Southend-on-Sea: Focal Point Gallery, 2013). The historical summary is here to remind the reader of a situation that of course was far more complex than what is expressed in this text.

41. Ibid Dickinson, Rogue Reels.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. The French journal *Cahier du Cinéma* was an important platform for this critique.

45. Phil Hardy, Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, "Introduction", *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*, 1 (1976), 3–5.

46. Ben Brewster, 'Introduction', *Screen*, 16: 2 (1975), 3–4.

47. Elizabeth Cowie, 'The Spectacle of Actuality', in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 30.

48. Trinh T. Minh-ha, 'The Totalizing Quest of Meaning', in *Theorizing Documentary*, ed. Michael Renov (New York: Routledge, 1993), 100ff.

49. Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 92–106.

50. Charlotte Krolokke and Anne Scott Sorensen, *Gender Communication: Theories and Analysis* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006), 1–20.

51. In 1970 Carol Hanisch's article 'The Personal is Political' was published for the first time in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*. The article and the expression 'the personal is political' spread and became an important slogan for the second wave of feminism in the USA and Europe. *http://carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html*, accessed 2016-04-24.

52. Bauer and Kidner, information pamphlet about the London Women's Film Group written by the members of the collective in 1976, 118–121.

53. All three films can be found at the British Film Institute National Archive, *http://www.bfi.org.uk/archive-collections/about-bfi-national-archive*, accessed 2016-01-16.

54. Very few overviews and in-depth analyses of the work of the film collectives exist, nor is there any exhaustive documentation on them. One of the few overviews that exists about the British film collectives that worked with documentary film narratives in the 1970s is Margaret Dickinson's study *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain, 1945–90*. In the study Dickinson discusses the collectives and their historical context based on a film-political perspective. Dickinson, however, does not present or reflect on the film collectives' choice of methods and aesthetic strategies. In 2011 the film theorists Julia Knight and Peter Thomas wrote *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2011). It is an historical investigation of different forms of distribution channels that filmmakers outside the commercial film industry used in the 1970s. In the investigation the authors include individual filmmakers, film collectives as well as organisations that only worked with distribution, such as the Other Cinema. Although Knight and Thomas focus on different forms of alternative distribution they don't write about the production process and political ideas of the film collectives. They also focus mainly on the London Film-Makers' Co-op, an organisation consisting of artists who worked with structuralist film. Several historical studies of the same organisation and genre exist, such as David Curtis's *A History of Artists' Film and Video in Britain* (London: BFI, 2007). I found most of the documents, texts and films that I have used in my dissertation in the library of the British Film Institute (BFI) as well as in film archives such as the Central Saint Martins Study Collection. Other films were borrowed from former members of the film collectives. Some films were, however, not accessible at all while others were so damaged that they could not be viewed. Apart from documents, texts and films, my work is also based on a number of interviews with the former members of the collectives. Dan Kidner and I held all the interviews between January and July 2010 in London. We interviewed the following people: Margaret Dickinson (historian), Ann Guedes (Cinema Action), Fran Mclean (the London Women's Film Group), Felicity Sparrow (Circles), Steve Sprung (Cinema Action) and Humphry Trevelyan (Berwick Street Film Collective). I also talked to David Curtis (researcher and initiator of Central Saint Martins Study Collection), Mary Kelly (artist), Chris Reeves (Cinema Action) and Lis Rhodes (filmmaker). In the spring of 2010 Dan Kidner and I also arranged seminar programmes and film screenings about the British film collectives and film culture in the UK of the 1970s at the art institution Raven Row in London. Apart from those named above we also invited Colin MacCabe, Paul Willemen, Noreen MacDowell, Esther Lesley, Nina Power and Marina Vishmidt to public discussions. To broaden my approach and give me more tools in my study of the films and the texts, I also returned

to the theories that the film collectives themselves were influenced by and to some of the theoretical discussions that were relevant when the collectives were active. I have been particularly interested in the documentary film tradition that the three British film collectives were influenced by. In the 1970s the theoretical discussion on film was mainly held in three journals: *Screen Magazine, Frameworks* and *Afterimage.* I have gone through all the issues between 1970 and 1980 and looked for articles that in any way dealt with the British film collectives. All the documents and interviews that I refer to in the dissertation are collected in the book *Working Together*, compiled by Dan Kidner and me.

55. Interview with Ann Guedes, recorded by Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner, 18 July 2010 in London. An excerpt from the interview is found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*, 65–69.

56. Some of the information available about Cinema Action was written by the members themselves. There are also texts that were written by supporters of the film collectives, for example workers and trade union representatives. Some of these documents are collected in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*.

57. *Not a Penny on the Rent* (Cinema Action, 1969), *Squatters* (Cinema Action, 1970), *People of Ireland* (Cinema Action, 1973), *Arise Ye Workers* (Cinema Action, 1973), *The Miners' Film* (Cinema Action, 1975), *Rocinante* (Cinema Action, 1986), *Bearskin* (Cinema Action, 1989).

58. The interview with Steve Sprung was recorded by Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner in London, 10 March 2010. An excerpt from the interview can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together,* 57–63.

59. Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 44.

60. Ibid., 56.

61. Ibid., 39.

62. Julia Hallam with Margaret Marshment, *Realism and Popular Cinema* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 31.

63. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 44.

64. Interview with Ann Guedes, London, 18 July 2010 and Steve Sprung, London, 10 March 2010. An excerpt from the interviews can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*, 57–69.

65. In the first half of the 1970s there were many film theorists and filmmakers who engaged in critical discussions about film as a commercial product, which were clearly inspired by the Frankfurt School. *Screen Magazine* became one of the most important platforms for these discussions.

66. Interview with Ann Guedes, London, 18 July 2010.

67. Vlada Petric, *Constructivism in Film: The Man with the Movie Camera: A Cinematic Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 3.

68. Interview with Ann Guedes, London, 18 July 2010 and Steve Sprung, London, 10 July 2010. An excerpt from the interviews can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*, 65–69.

69. Eisenstein, 'The Montage of Film Attractions', 45. What I am most interested in here is that the film was believed to be able change the human body's physical movements and reactions, that is how one reacts to images, actions and narratives.

70. Ibid., 53.

71. Ibid.

72. Jane Gaines, 'Political Mimesis', in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, ed. Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 90.

73. Ibid., 92.

74. Ibid., 91.

75. Ibid., 92.

76. Here Gaines uses the term 'consciousness' in a conventional Marxist sense.

77. Gaines, 'Political Mimesis', 92.

78. Ibid., 89.

79. Ibid., 94 f.

80. Ibid., 92–93.

81. Ibid., 92.

82. Ibid., 98–99.

83. Ibid., 92–93.

84. The information pamphlet about the London Women's Film Group written by the members of the collective can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*, 118–121. See also the talk show *Open Doors* that was broadcast by the BBC in 1975 (exact date unknown). A copy of *Open Doors* can be found in the BFI National Archive.

85. *Open Doors* (1975, exact date unkown).

86. Ibid.

87. Information pamphlet written by the London Women's Film Group.

88. 'The male gaze' was a term that Laura Mulvey later theorised in the well-known text 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16: 3 (1975).

89. Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema', *Screen Pamphlet*, 2 (1973), 24–31.

90. Ibid.

91. Eisenstein, 'The Montage of Film Attractions', 41.

92. Sergei Eisenstein, 'Give Us a State Plan', in *Eisenstein: Writings 1922–1934*, 91.

93. Rosalind Coward, 'Class, "Culture" and the Social Formation', *Screen*, 18: 1 (1977), 75–106.

94. Interview with Humphry Trevelyan, former member of the Berwick Street Film Collective. Interview recorded by Petra Bauer and Dan Kidner, 12 January 2010 in Cardiff. An excerpt from the interview can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together,* 47–55.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. Ibid.

99. Bertolt Brecht, 'The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and tr. John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1964), 39.

100. Bertolt Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect', in *Brecht on Theatre*, 144.

101. Ibid., 143.

102. Bertolt Brecht, 'The Street Scene – A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre', in *Brecht on Theatre*, 121.

103. Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen, 'Brecht in Britain', *Screen*, 16:2 (1975), 107.

104. Ibid., 103.

105. Diegesis refers to the space and time that is covered by the narrative in a film. Hence everything that is part of the world of the narrative is diegetic. That which exists outside of the narrative is called non-diegetic.

106. Johnston and Willemen, 'Brecht in Britain', 106.

107. Brecht, 'Short Description of a New Technique', 143.

108. Johnston and Willemen, 'Brecht in Britain', 104.

109. Ibid., 101ff.

110. Ibid.

111. David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 82.

112. Esther Lesley, 'Adorno, Benjamin, Brecht and Film', in *Understanding Film: Marxist Perspectives*, ed. Mike Wayne (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 39–40.

113. Interview with Steve Sprung, London, 10 March 2010. An excerpt from the interview can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*, 57–63.

114. This, of course, depends on who saw the film. Women who shared the experiences described in the film probably approached it in a different way from those who had not lived in a mining family.

115. Michael Renov, 'Towards a Poetics of Documentary', in *Theorizing Documentary*, 29.

116. Interviews with Ann Guedes, London, 18 July 2010; Steve Sprung, London, 10 March 2010; Humphry Trevelyan, Cardiff, 12 January 2010. Excerpts from the interviews can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*, 47–69.

117. Dickinson, *Rogue Reels,* 74. At the beginning of the 1980s, Cinema Action started including detailed information of who had done what in the film productions. See for example *So That You Can Live* (Cinema Action, 1981). I can only speculate whether this was a result of the ongoing ideological shift from the notion of the collective to the individual, or whether it was due to the fact that Cinema Action had started receiving money from larger organisations and businesses, such as the BFI and Channel 4, which required a strict job division when it came to film and TV productions.

118. Dickinson, *Rogue Reels*, 76ff.

119. Colin MacCabe, 'The Politics of Separation (on: *Deux ou trios choses que je sais d'elle* and *Tout va bien)'*, *Screen*, 16:2 (1975), 46.

120. Ibid., 48.

121. Ibid., 49.

122. Ibid.

123. Ibid.

124. Robert Stam gives an excellent basic overview of the different theoretical shifts and the criticism that was aimed at them in his book *Film Theory – An Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000). In it he writes that there are many theoreticians who have both taken on and criticised the analytical tools provided by psychoanalysis and poststructuralist theories. Within feminist theory as it was developed in the 1980s it was claimed that if Marxism was blind to gender and ethnicity, psychoanalysis was blind to class. The theorists who saw themselves as part of 'cultural studies' were on the other hand interested in film as text and tried instead to see film within a greater social context.

125. With the expression 'filmic strategies' I refer to the whole process and production apparatus – including aesthetic strategies – that the creation of film entails, ranging from production conditions, to choice of motif, camera work, editing and distribution. When I want to discuss formal processes of expression specifically, and not necessarily production conditions and distribution, I use the term 'aesthetic strategies'.

126. Brecht, 'Short Description', in *Brecht on Theatre*, 140.

127. The number of employees varies depending on the organisation's economic situation.

128. See for example bell hooks, 'Black Women: Shaping Feminist Theory', in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), 1–15; Angela Davis, *Women, Race & Class* (London: The Women's Press, 2001) and Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989). In an interview with the director of Southall Black Sisters, Pragna Patel, she emphasised that blackness to her was a consequence of a political and historical situation and that the organisation consciously avoided defining the significance of that more closely. Instead it is up to every individual woman to determine whether she identifies herself as black or not. The interview was conducted by me on 25 February 2011 in Southall.

129. Interview with Pragna Patel, 25 February 2011.

130. The first court case that the organisation was involved in was the Kiranjit Ahluwalia case. In 1989 Ahluwalia had caused her husband's death by setting him on fire. Ahluwalia was sentenced to

twelve years in prison. Southall Black Sisters succeeded in having the sentence overturned since it was seen that the court had not taken into account the fact that Ahluwalia had been abused by her husband for many years, and that her actions could be seen as self-defence. In the end, Southall Black Sisters together with Ahluwalia and their solicitors succeeded in getting the court to change the sentence from murder to manslaughter. This case is very well known in the UK and has set a precedent in court cases against women who have murdered their husbands after years of abuse. For more information see: http://www.southallblack-sisters.org.uk/campaigns/kiranjit-ahluwalia/, accessed 2016-01-09.

131. http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/, accessed 2016-01-09.

132. Renov, 'Towards a Poetics of Documentary', in *Theorizing Documentary*, 27–28.

133. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', 271–313.

134. See for example Michel Foucault, 'Panopticism' in *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1991), 206–213.

135. The film *Sisters!* is also a part of this public context. Through the film, people outside the organisation can learn about certain aspects of the work that the organisation does.

136. Sue O'Sullivan was very active in the women's movement, and for a while she was also the editor of the feminist magazine *Spare Rib*.

137. See for example Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Righting Wrongs', in *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 103: 2/3 (Spring/Summer 2004), 523–581, and 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'.

138. Interview with Shakila Maan (Southall, 22 September 2010), Meena Patel (Southall, 23 September 2010), Pragna Patel (Southall, 25 February 2011), Hannana Siddiqui (Southall, 25 February 2011).

139. The concept of the 'redistribution of desires' has been taken directly from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's text 'Righting Wrongs'.

140. See page 47ff.

141. Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema', 24–31.

142. In the process of making the film the production company Skogen produktion got involved as co-producer.

143. Interview with Ann Guedes, London, 18 July 2010. An excerpt from the interview can be found in Bauer and Kidner, *Working Together*, 65–69.

144. Ibid. This principle changed when Cinema Action started collaborating with Channel 4.

145. Bauer and Kidner, information brochure about Cinema Action, 108–112.

146. Julia Knight and Peter Thomas, *Reaching Audiences: Distribution and Promotion of Alternative Moving Image* (Bristol and Chicago: Intellect, 2011), 71–93.

147. *http://lux.org.uk/*, accessed 2016-01-09.

148. Noel Burch, 'Avant-Garde or Vanguard?', *Afterimage*, 6 (1976), 52–63; Mike Dunford, 'Experimental/Avant-Garde/Revolutionary/Film Practice', *Afterimage*, 6 (1976), 96–112.

149. Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1970), 28ff.

150. The argument for and in terms of comes from Wendy Brown when she refers to Michel Foucault who answered the interview question by Francois Ewald 'whether he wrote *The Use of Pleasure and Techniques of the Self* "for the liberation movement." "Not for," replied Foucault steadily, "but in terms of, a contemporary situation." The difference between "for" and "in terms of" is crucial: it indicates whether intellectual life will be submitted to existing political discourses and the formulation of immediate political needs those discourses articulate, or will be allowed the air of independence that it must have in order to be of value as intellectual work for political life.' From Wendy Brown, Politics out of History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 42–43.

151. Basing her argument on the feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis, the film theorist Ingrid Ryberg claims that this double and partially opposing movement between affirmation and criticism is something that has been typical of feminist film culture during the second wave of feminism as well as the feminist film culture that developed during the 1980s and 1990s (diss., *Imagining Safe Space: The Politics of Queer, Feminist and Lesbian Pornography*).

152. *Reassemblage* (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1982).

153. Renov, 'Towards a Poetics of Documentary', in *Theorizing Documentary*, 25.

154. Ibid., 22.

155. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 192.

156. Ibid., 183f.

157. Bertolt Brecht, 'Collective Presentation', *Screen*, 15:2 (1974), 41–48.

158. This can be compared to Sjöholm's reading of Arendt's notion of appearance.

159. Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', 595.

160. In her dissertation *Soul of the Documentary: Expression and Capture of the Real* (Turku University, 2011) the film theorist Ilona Hongisto points out the importance of asking ourselves what the film *does* instead of what it represents. The artist and filmmaker Hito Steyerl has in recent years gone so far as to speak of images that resist. She has criticised the representational image and tries to emphasize the digital image's agency beyond its representational function (*http://www. hkw.de/de/programm/2012/berlin_documen-tary_forum_2/veranstaltungen_65716/veranstal-tungsdetail_76800.php*, accessed 2013-02-21). In

comparison to Steyerl, I am conventional in my approach. I am certainly interested in the politics of the image just like Steyerl, but I try to use and develop ideas about the representational image in regard to its genesis, function and not least its meaning in society.

161. The way in which the film was edited also played an important part in the narrative that was created. Here I have, however, chosen to focus on the relationship between the different parties involved in the actual shooting of the film. The person who edited the film, however, is just as much a part of the 'we'.

162. The invitation was a collaboration between the Centre and the Swedish Arts Grants Committee/IASPIS. IASPIS planned to expand its international studio programme and the trip to Israel was a two-month pilot programme. The only requirement was that I should write a report when I came home that would form the basis of a discussion regarding a more long-term collaboration between the two organisations. At first I was reluctant to accept the invitation since I was against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory. I thought about what the political implications would be if I as an individual took part in a state-run exchange programme between Sweden and Israel. Would I be directly supporting policies that I was critical towards? But at the same time I was also interested in gaining knowledge of how the state occupation manifested itself in daily life and how the local resistance against it found its expression. The invitation provided the opportunity to do this. However, the final contributing factor towards my decision to accept was the fact that, at the time, the Israeli Centre for Digital Art was run by the curator Galit Eilat, who is critical of state policies and therefore a lot of the art that the institution presented was critical of the prevailing political, social and economic situation in Israel and the Palestinian territories.

163. After 2007, I travelled back to Israel several times. In 2008 I started collaborating with Kim Einarsson, and together we travelled to Israel and Palestine to continue our research.

164. In this text I will consciously avoid using the word conflict. The reason for this is that for some Israeli and Palestinian activists the word 'conflict' is based on an assumption that there are two equal parties, which is not the case in Israel and Palestine. Rather, they believe that it is the case of a strong state occupying the land of a weaker non-state.

165. For example, films by Oreet Ashery, Avi Mograbi, Cecilia Parsberg and Sameh Zoabi, as well as films made within the framework of the B'tsalem Camera Project.

166. This applies especially to films by Yosi Atia and Itamar Rose, Maayan Amir and Ruti Sela, and Avi Mograbi.

167. Georges Didi–Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 19ff.

168. Didi–Huberman *Images in Spite of All*.

169. See B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, B'Tselem's Camera Project'. Available at: http://www.btselem.org/video/cdp_background, accessed 2016-01-09.

170. See Rory, McCarthy, 'Inquiry Launched Aftre Film Shows Israeli Soldier Firing Rubber Bullet'. Common Dreams, 21 July 2008. Available at: https://www.commondreams.org/archive/ 2008/07/21/10506, accessed 2016-01-09.

171. The film resulted in an investigation that led to two soldiers receiving a suspended prison sentence. See B'Tselem – The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 'Soldiers fires "rubber" bullet at handcuffed, blindfolded Palestinian, July 2008. Available at: http://www.btselem.org/video/20080721_nilin_shooting, accessed 2016-01-09.

172. HEB2.tv – Guide. Available at: http://www.heb2.tv/guide/about/, accessed 2016-01-09. 'HEB2.tv is an audio-visual production/research project on the divided city of Hebron, West Bank. A unique political geographical, and demographical entity in the region, Hebron is home to an enclave of Jewish settlers entrenched in the midst of a predominantly Arab-Muslim population. Arguably the most violent and volatile friction point in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, H2 Hebron is a locus of competing national, religious, and territorial agendas. Taking Hebron as a test-case and laboratory of sorts, the project examines the Arab-Jewish relationship at multiple levels: at the level of personal interactions and lived experience among door-to-door neighbours; and at the symbolic levels of historical narrative, of religion, and of myth. Employing a mixed-bag of videographic techniques and formats, HEB2. TV attempts to map out this cultural, visual, and human environment that is at once both historically specific and emblematic of a broader, national and global condition.'

173. Many windows in Hebron have bars since the settlers throw objects into Palestinian families' houses.

174. http://www.btselem.org/video/2011/08/soldiers-wake-children-nabi-saleh, accessed 2016-01-09.

175. The three of us are equally responsible for the film and its different parts, from the manuscript to the filming to post-production. I completed the first phase of the research alone, however, and circa one year after starting, I initiated the collaboration with Kim Einarsson. This text is a description of my view alone of our joint work and therefore I use the word 'I'. Marius Dybwad

Brandrud and Kim Einarsson did, however, read the text before it was completed, but I alone am responsible for the contents of this text, in contrast to how we worked on the film.

176. In the text I differentiate between 'conversations' and 'interviews'. I use the word 'interview' when I refer to an encounter that is based on prepared questions that the interviewee is asked to respond to. A 'conversation' is a meeting between people that is not formulated in advance or framed by specific questions. The conversation has rather developed in the relation that has emerged between those present. It does, however, not mean that no questions were asked in the course of the conversation.

177. This can be compared to what Esther Lesley calls the 'blind film.' See page 62.

178. See page 58ff.

179. Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 142ff.

180. See page 24ff.

181. See the chapter 'Sisters!' above, 71–105.

182. A critical reflection would include both reflection and judgement.

183. See the chapter 'The British Film Collectives' above for a presentation of the interactive documentary representation strategy.

184. Action, which always unfolds in the here and now, can of course in a wider perspective be seen as one specific node at a specific time in a specific process, which in itself gives rise to new actions.

185. http://cavalcade.stadmechelen.be/nl, accessed 2016-01-09.

186. This according to the parade's project manager Eva van Hoye and the artistic director Michel de Cock, as they told me when we met in September and November 2012. Eva van Hoye and Michael de Cock bore the main responsibility for the organisation and execution of the parade.

187. For more extensive information on the history of the parade and its current form see my book, *Choreography for the Giants* (Copehagen: Pork Salad Press, 2013), which is a part of the eponymous art project.

188. Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 101ff.

189. I was solely responsible for the book *Choreography for the Giants* while the film by the same title was a collaboration between the filmmaker Marius Dybwad-Brandrud and me.

190. For an introduction to the case that the film *Der Fall Joseph* (Petra Bauer, 2003) is based on, I recommend: Per Landin, 'Sebnitz förlorade heder', *Dagens Nyheter*, 7 March 2001, as well as Dahlkamp, Röbel, Smoltczyk, Wassermann and Winter, 'Die traurigen Tage von Sebnitz', *Der Spiegel,* no. 49 (4 December 2000), 30–38.

191. See the chapter 'The British Film Collectives'.

192. Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 239ff.

193. This is the argument that Butler develops throughout the entire text of *Giving an Account of Oneself*. See for example 65ff and 78ff.

194. But even if, for example, the London Women's Film Group believed that a film production cannot be disconnected from how the production conditions and power structures are arranged in society in general, these can at the same time be questioned, made visible and ideally shifted with and through the film. In that sense the filmmakers have a form of agency and can act within the framework of the prevailing conditions. This was a central aspect for all three film collectives with regard to film as a political instrument.

195. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 132.

196. See for example *The Man with the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929); *Chronique d'un été* (Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, 1961); *Le Gai Savoir* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1969); *Reassemblage* (Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1983); *Schnittstelle* (Harun Farocki, 1995); *November* (Hito Steyerl, 2004).

197. See page 112ff.

198. Bauer, *Choreography for the Giants*, 120 ff.

199. Michail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1984), 7–8.

200. The auteur theory in film theory could be seen as belonging to this approach.

201. The artistic director of the team, Michael De Cock, initially refused to have any contact with us or to discuss what he thought was problematic about the book. In the end he sent word that he would consider granting us permission to film if we adjusted the contents of the book. In other words, the film project became contingent. I had no idea how to react to this since it contained a form of threat but also because it was unclear what it was that needed adjusting. In some other cases I had taken away short passages or comments that other people thought to be false, problematic or quite simply unfair. Without specific examples it would, however, become an abstract guessing game that would be based on what I thought someone else could possibly be offended by. It would be a matter of projection without any dialogue to back it up; an impossible position to work from. For a few weeks the power lay in the hands of the team regarding if and how we would be able to continue working on the book and the film. The scenes we were planning to film in connection with the parade would demand a lot of work and coordination with the team. As time passed without any clear answer it also meant that the planned film shoot was made impossible. After the silence came a resounding no. We thus found ourselves in a situation where the artistic director was not interested in discussing and negotiating the content of the book in a concrete and constructive way and I was not interested in blindly changing the book to accommodate the artistic director. From others who were involved I understood that the organisers were upset in part because they thought that the conversations had taken place in confidence. This surprised me since from my perspective the

two tape recorders indicated that the conversations were not unofficial and intimate, especially since I had clearly stated both verbally and in writing that I intended to transcribe and print the conversations in a book. My questions were never personal either, but always linked to the work on the parade. To me, what was interesting was precisely how the different individuals chose to explain and give examples of what they meant by representation, citizens, inclusion and ethnicity with the knowledge that their words would be made public. Despite this, it was quite apparent that several of the chosen parts and comments that had been inserted were not very popular among certain members of the team. In their opinion the selection was not representative of their work and the discussions that they had had. At the same time, the artistic director realised that it was impossible to stop the book since he had given the project his approval and because of the fact that the words that were reproduced in the book were traces of conversations we had had. However, here I must reiterate that of course the line of reasoning found in the manuscript differs from the situations that the conversations were a part of. The arguments are based on the conversations but not identical to them. I made a selection, changed the conversations into a text and also allowed the conversations to become chapters that are related to other chapters containing other conversations. In other words, the text is a montage that is based on a thought, a line of reasoning, a discussion of the consequences of representation.

202. In this dissertation I have primarily employed Hannah Arendt's thoughts on the capacity for action to initiate something new. The term 'becoming' is, however, mainly linked to the theories of Gilles Deleuze. In the dissertation *The Untimely-Image: On Contours of the New in Political Film-Thinking* the film theorist Jakob Nilsson develops an interesting and more in-depth argument based on Deleuze regarding the relationship between 'new', 'becoming' and 'the moving image'.

203. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 45–46.

204. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 108.

205. See pages 115–116.

206. Although I see the content that was created as specific to the framework that was set up, the content does not only belong to the world of film but is dependent on political and social processes in society as a whole. In other words, there is a complex movement between the film's contents, aesthetics and more overarching social and political structures.

207. Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 83–136.

208. Several of the artists and filmmakers whom I came across in my historical research stressed – inspired by feminist and Marxist practice and theory – the importance of thinking through what we make films about and how we make them. For these filmmakers it was a political act to both create narratives that had not been told before and to use aesthetic strategies that challenged the existing conventions of the time within the domains of art and film. They were thus interested in having a critical discussion, as well as challenging who was telling the story, what was told, how something was told and even in part to whom it was being told. There are many examples and each expression and interpretation gives complex answers to the questions who, what and how. Some of these filmmakers chose to work individually while others joined forces and formed different film collectives. Since I was most interested in what engaging in politics together through and with the use of film entailed and whether there was critical and political potential in collective action, I have, in the historical review, focused on three of the film collectives that were formed in the course of these years.

209. Renov, 'Towards a Poetics of Documentary', 27–28.

210. 'Peter Osborne in Conversation with Paul Willemen', in *Working Together*, 39–46. For a more in-depth philosophical discussion of contemporary subjectivity see also Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (Brooklyn, New York: Verso Books, 2013), 15–35.

211. On the other hand, based on Michael Renov's line of reasoning it is not relevant whether or not certain participants saw themselves as a collective, since it does not make a difference to the notion of the voice of the film.

212. See page 75.

213. Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy*, 141ff.

214. Ibid., 149.

215. Ibid., 153.

216. Nichols, *Representing Reality*, 34ff.

217. Johnston and Willemen, 'Brecht in Britain'.

218. This wording was inspired by Annika Rut Persson as expressed in *Hannah Arendts 1940-tal*.

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Southall Black Sisters together with Kiranjit Ahluwalia 1989, courtesy of Southall Black Sisters.

How can we think of film as political action? Bridging the gulf between aesthetics and politics, artist and filmmaker Petra Bauer reflects on her own experience of making political films and launches a theoretical argument that – via Hannah Arendt's ideas about the constitution of the political arena – uncovers the aesthetic mechanisms that underlie contemporary strategies for collective and feminist filmmaking.

An exploration in artistic research, *Sisters! Making Films, Doing Politics* draws on an extensive historical archive of radical filmmaking and film theory, with particular focus on the British film collectives of the 1970s and films made by Palestinian and Israeli film-makers. At the centre of the investigation stands *Sisters!*, Petra Bauer's collaborative film project with the London-based feminist organisation Southall Black Sisters.