Tom Holert, Doreen Mende, and Editors

Editorial: "Navigation Beyond Vision, Issue Two"

Our editorial for the first issue of "Navigation Beyond Vision" in June 2019 began: "Today one may complain that life has been reduced to points in a matrix of relations – cities, territories, and historical narratives prematurely refined into categories of known and unknown, real and virtual, concrete and abstract space." At the time, we could not have imagined the mass migration into abstract space that would soon follow. Today, living through the planetary pandemic, the imperative to navigate the world and our own lives through computational tools has been radicalized to the extreme. The last months of Skyping, Zoom conferencing, and collaborative Google Docs writing make us feel we have no choice but to exhaust the planetary promise of navigational tools, refining remoteness into proximities, scaling the world of friends, colleagues, and family into the rectangular screens in front of our eyes. More than ever, a paradigm of navigation folds all social and economic activities into the domestic, the facial, the optical, demanding further reflection on the enmeshment of labor, exhaustion, and love into a techno-political website.

"Social distancing" in this context seems a double euphemism: First, for the constant interruption of face-to-face conversations by glitches, echoes, ventilation hum, or simply by headaches and sore eyes. And second, in echoing filmmaker and writer Harun Farocki's "computer animation rules," by using model worlds to rehearse actions in the world, social distancing becomes less of a social exercise than a technological mandate. Galleries and art institutions who still continue the high-modernist tradition may secretly rejoice when uploading exhibitions and programming to not only more cost-effective virtual platforms, but also into online spaces sanitized beyond the wildest dreams of any white cube. If before they struggled to sterilize spaces into bright white voids of absolute hypothesis and contemplation, an entire planet has now emerged from hiding, even more virtual and ripe for habitation, and with lighting already built into the screen.

Our impulse to engage with navigation departs, in the first place, from Harun Farocki: in the 1990s, he would develop the concept of "distance montage" (introduced by the filmmaker Artavazd Peleshyan) into the "soft montage," where continuities between images are folded into one another. To Farocki, this conceptual-practical shift could acknowledge a "farewell to cinema" (Chris Marker) and the arrival of video games, video art, and video installation. Drawing on media theorist Alexander Galloway's term

"actionable objects," Farocki embarked on understanding the actionability of a "ruling class of images" that produce the world through a performative relation (rather than simply reproducing a virtual world that is "highly artificial with millions of details").

In early April 2019, the Harun Farocki Institut (HaFI) and e-flux embarked on this research path with "Navigation Beyond Vision," a conference at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW) in Berlin. Following this conference, we conclude that the principle of montage is not obsolete as a methodology and epistemology of the political image. While computational navigation continuously refreshes the image to sustain its infinite and exploitative tyranny of immersion, the principle of cinematic montage should stand as part of a continuous debate on how navigation alters the way images – and art – constitute models of political action and modes of political intervention. The seven contributions for this second issue of "Navigation Beyond Vision" aim to complicate and expand upon navigation's planetary technological promise.

In 1967–68, Farocki and his fellow students at the German Film and Television Academy Berlin (dffb) occupied their film school, renaming it "Dsiga Wertow Akademie." What would be an equivalent educational-political action for filmmaking students today? Perhaps they should follow the pedagogy of Neytiri te Tskaha Mo'at'ite of the Na'vi tribe of *Avatar* (2009), who teaches "the ways of the people" to travelers lost between distant bodies and distant worlds. The "Na'vi Academy" could become this student occupation of our screens. We still have 116 years to develop this further: the daughter of the Na'vi people was only born in 2136.

– Tom Holert, Doreen Mende, and the Editors

✕

Tom Holert is a researcher, writer, and curator. He is the co-founder of the Harun Farocki Institut in Berlin. He's currently organising the research and exhibition project *Education Shock. Learning, Politics, and Architecture in the 1960s and 1970s*, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin (forthcoming September 2020).

Doreen Mende, curator and theorist, is currently professor for Curatorial Politics and head of the CCC Research-based Master and PhD-Forum at HEAD Genève/Switzerland. Recent curatorial projects include "Hamhung's Two Orphans" for Bauhaus Imaginista at Garage Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow, 2018; "The Navigation Principle" at the Dutch Art Institute, 2017; "The Prisoner Letter" at Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, Sharjah Biennial 13 Offsite in Ramallah, 2017. Since 2015 she has been a founding member of the Harun Farocki Institut in Berlin.