



Artistic Research as Critical Praxis in Film

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CRITICAL

- acute,
- burning,
- clamant,
- compelling,
- crying,
- dire,
- emergent,
- exigent,
- imperative,
- imperious,
- importunate,
- instant,
- necessitous,
- pressing,
- urgent

Engagement

PRAXIS

Aristotle

Theoria (thinking aiming at truth), poesis (making, goal is production) praxis (doing, goal action)

Karl Marx: "praxis" is free, universal, creative and self-creative activity through which human kind creates and changes the historical world.

Praxis takes primacy over theory. "All social life is essentially practical".

Jean-Paul Sartre: praxis is an attempt to negate human need. Collective "group praxis" over individual one. Revolution.

Hannah Arendt: praxis as the highest and most important level of the active life.

Praxis over contemplation (vita contemplative vs. vita active). Participation to political praxis.

Critical praxis in filmmaking

**NOT TO TAKE ANY
PRACTICE/CONVENTION FOR
GRANTED.**

**RATHER THAN UNDERSTANDING
THEORY AS SOMETHING APART
FROM “PRACTICE”
THINKING CRITICALLY
WITHIN FILMMAKING.**

CRITICAL REFLECTION

ARTISTIC RESEARCH

- Artistic research is theorizing art practice in organic relation to the practice of art.
- Instead of research *on* art (e.g. art studies in humanities) artistic research aims at theorising **WITHIN** art.
- Making art as a **context, method** as well as **outcome** of research (Henk Borgdorff).
- ARTISTIC RESEARCH as **CRITICAL PRACTICE** challenging the dominant forms & practices.
- **CATALYSE NEW FORMS** AND NEW PRACTICES RATHER THAN TO CATALOGUE WHAT ALREADY EXISTS.
- **WHY?** WITHOUT A CRITICAL RELATION TO CONVENTIONS, ART FORMS & PRACTICES CANNOT BE DEVELOPED TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME.

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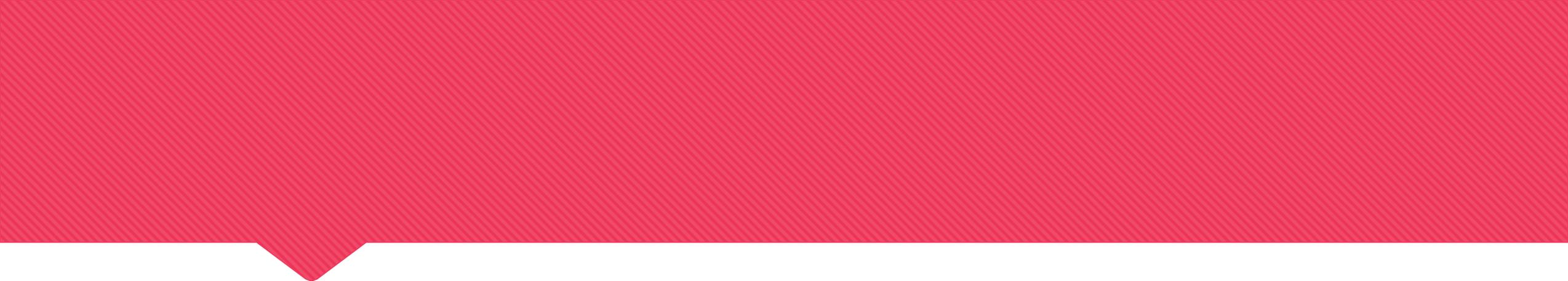
Filmmakers' theory in the history of cinema.

Artistic research?

Early cinema: montage theory. Sergei Eisenstein expressed and formulated his “montage theory” through his films & theoretical writing. Concepts, ideas, proposals which are not just conceptual findings (theoretical concepts) but ideas which would not exist without his films.

MONTAGE IDEA AS AN INNOVATION?





conventions
politics of representation
professional practices

Film/film industry consists of sets of different conventions

What kind of conventions do we recognize?

FORMS, RULES IN FILM PRACTICE, “THEORIES” THAT FORMULATE THE AESTHETICS, HOW WE MAKE FILMS.

POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

HOW WE TELL STORIES? WHAT KIND OF STORIES? WHOSE STORIES ARE BEING TOLD?

TO THINK WHAT WE CANNOT SEE IN FILMS AND WHY?

GENDER, ETHNICITY, CLASS, SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

**THE SUPREMACY OF “WHITE”, “WESTERN”, “MALE”;
“HETEROSEXUAL” HAS BEEN ADDRESSED CRITICALLY.**

**Professional practices:
the ways we “do” things
in the field is being
addressed critically.**

Workplace well-being

Processes

Accessibility

**Sustainability: economical, social,
ecological.**

Artistic research project case study

- **Images of Harmony and Rupture – Documentary Film Reflecting Fractures in the Scandinavian Welfare State Ethos**
- **Sovun ja repeämän kuvat – dokumentaarinen elokuva hyvinvointivaltion eetoksen ja murtumien heijastajana**

Observation behind the project

- It is difficult to recognize political crisis in a welfare state setting. It is even more difficult to try to capture these crises through documentary films. Why?
- Post-welfare state rhetorics!
- Neoliberal political and economic discourse since the 1990's

"In order to keep their medium elastic and relevant in depicting present day societal realities documentary filmmakers have to be able to recognize the expectations of the nature of societal reality embedded in the conventions of social documentary. "

BOUNDARY

**CONVENTION OF SOCIAL
DOCUMENTARY**

VICTIM MOTIF

AGENDA OF CHANGE

VISUAL EVIDENCE

CRISIS STRUCTURE

**OBSERVATIONAL MODE
AS A CORNERSTONE OF
“AUTHENTIC”**

**DOCUMENTARY = STYLE
OF AUTHENTICITY**



CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTARY FILM CULTURE

IDENTIFICATION

EMPATHY

**NARRATIVE TOOLS STEMMING FROM
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM OF
MAINSTREAM FICTION FILM**

DRAMATURGY

**+ VICTIM MOTIF & SENTIMENTAL
EMPATHY**

EMOTIVE TURN IN DOCUMENTARY FILM

**THERAPY CULTURE SIMILAR TO SELF-HELP
LITERATURE**

INDIVIDUALISM, "SELF"

= Therapy narrative in documentary film

**Individual healing processes defining the
dramaturgy.**

**What kind of relation to the societal
experience or "political" is created?**

**Political as imagining community
vs. individualism**

**Idea of “the self” as the cornerstone of dramaturgy,
emotional identification with the individual) vs.
calling for the experience of a community.**

○ Pitfalls of empathy. Can we really know and “feel” the suffering of others?

Sarah Ahmed “attentive hearing”= the pain of others cannot be felt. The pain that cannot be shared through empathy.

○ Call for different kind of inhabitation. Accepting the distance btw. the experiences.

Therapy narrative= individual happiness (rather than justice) as an aim in the society.

The question:

how the unravelling of the welfare state ethos can be made visible through documentary film?

Abstract notion. Neoliberalism, all the spheres of society and life are more and more subjugated to the economic paradigm, immaterial values to material ones.

Where does this happen?

What kind of form can capture such abstract notions in film?

RUTHLESS TIMES –SONGS OF CARE (ARMOTONTA MENOA-HOIVATYÖN LAULUJA) 92mins.

Dir: Susanna Helke, Script: Susanna Helke & Markku Heikkinen, Cinematography: Sari Aaltonen, Editing: Markus Leppälä, Sound design: Juuso Oksala, Music: Anna-Mari Kähärä, Production: Timo Korhonen Road Movies LTD.

The topic: The crisis of the elderly care sector in Finland

The invisible realities of political rhetorics:

Econo-political "newspeak", lingo.

Singing tableaux, testimonies as a key element



Why singing tableaux?

CHOIR

**An embodiment of a shared
experience.**

**Not one voice. Not an individual
victim narrative.**

Ruptures

the econo-bureaucratic language is sung by the retirees: “sustainability gap is us”

This is a way to make the irrationality of the economic paradigm visible

carnivalizing the language