

*On & For Production*

Trying out a practical context for  
the production of artists' films.

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PROJECTS



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## *Fierté Nationale* [National Pride] By Sven Augustijnen



### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

*Fierté Nationale* is a vast documentary film preceded by a research process that is as ambitious as it is delicate. The title – which translates into 'National Pride' – ironically refers to the Fabrique Nationale de Herstal, the Belgian weapons manufacturer from Liège that keeps Belgium's national pride high through the design, the production, the export and the licensing of weapons to Western countries. An example is its crown jewel, the FAL (Fusil Automatique Léger), a rifle which was nicknamed "the right arm of the Free World" during the Cold War, and which boasts in its trophy cabinets such charismatic leaders as Che Guevara and Patrice Lumumba. The manufacture, trade, use and even the resale and reuse of those arms generate a non-negligible density of points in the geopolitical map of the last century.

*Fierté Nationale* is neither a documentary film on the Fabrique Nationale d'Herstal, nor on the fabrication, the traffic or the problematic of light weapons. Instead, Sven Augustijnen sets out to trace a route through the maze of conflicts in which the FN arms where, and are still, used that should allow for a chosen glimpse onto that dense geopolitical cartography, and for a purposely non-conclusive reconsideration of the imbrication between arm trade and power balance.

Through re-enactments, prepared situations and testimonies in 'cinema direct' style, *Fierté Nationale* will unfold as a travelogue in our contemporary history from the sixties and seventies to nowadays that is marked by its many revolutions and counter-revolutions, whose consequences and backdrops last until today.

Jean-Pierre Rehm, director of FID Marseille, wrote about his previous film *Spectres*, that it proposed "a documentary dramaturgy that is totally new" in the sense that the leading voice and character is a dubious guide who is "knowledgeable and involved, both reliable and unreliable, haunted, constantly in motion: restless" and that the camera becomes "a consenting victim, if we may say, in this unusual vibration in the documentary genre".

Building up on this method, *Fierté Nationale* will make use of a singular grammar that emerges at the intersection between a detective's visual notebook and a guided journey across episodes, characters and scenarios. The camera will follow an arm connoisseur in a journey that brings together encounters and conversations in which the historical and personal dimensions are in balance.

On that battlefield, the camera will try to keep up, clinging to a shoulder as another kind of weapon: a weapon that moves and changes position and gives flickering images, that affect –without trying to sway–, that are troubling –because the bias is never too clear–, that are fragmented –in order to see clearly, or maybe to not see at all–, and which make tangible the unbearable fragility of human life.

A film that is aware of the materiality that is inherent in the very act of filming and which turns it into an asset to concretise a reality that would otherwise remain diffuse. Historic materiality has to be restored. Especially since arms are needed for revolutions and counter-revolutions and since peace has paradoxically become a precarious balance of arms.

## ARTIST BIO

Sven Augustijnen (1970, Mechelen, Belgium). His work concentrates on political, historical and social themes while constantly challenging a genre definition that reflects a wider interest in historiography and a predilection for the nature of storytelling: ‘Historiography is by no means a natural phenomenon. The way we use stories, images and fiction to construct reality fascinates me.’

His films have been included in international exhibitions and festivals such as in Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, Artist Space, Wiels, Kunsthalle Bern etc. In 2007 he participated in documenta 12 and in 2011 he received the Evens Prize for Visual Arts. In 2013 his latest film *Spectres* was distributed throughout the network of French cinemas of ‘Art et Essai, Recherche et Découverte’.

Sven Augustijnen is represented by Jan Mot ([www.janmot.com](http://www.janmot.com)) and is a founding member of Auguste Orts, a Brussels-based platform for the production and distribution of artist films.

## PRODUCERS

**Auguste Orts** is a Brussels-based production and distribution platform founded by four artists/filmmakers - Herman Asselberghs, Sven Augustijnen, Manon de Boer and Anouk De Clercq - with the experience to develop, produce and distribute creative projects that are at the intersection of genres and formats : films that are at the crossroads of film, video, visual arts, documentary, experimental cinema...

Multimedia? Interdisciplinary? Hybrid? Terms at once vague and in vogue, which are used to describe what has now become an evidence. More than ever, artist films stand at the intersection between genres, medias and disciplines. Consequently, Auguste Orts prefers ideas and sensitivities over genres and formats. We also have a strong preference for self-organisation as a means to reinvent operating protocols. Generating support and production strategies that are specific to each film is what gears our non-profit organisation.

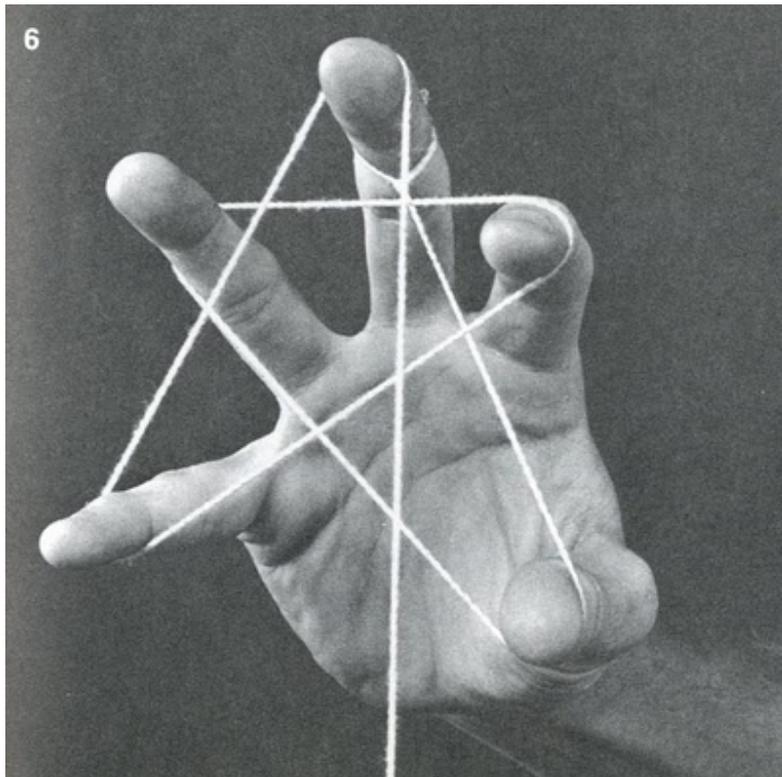
**Jan Mot** Gallery in Brussels and Mexico D.F. representing Sven Augustijnen as well as Pierre Bismuth , Manon de Boer, Rineke Dijkstra, Mario Garcia Torres, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Douglas Gordon , Joachim Koester, David Lamelas, Sharon Lockhart, Tino Sehgal, Philippe Thomas, Tris Vonna-Michell and Ian Wilson.

**Cobra Films** is a Brussels-based film production house, founded in 1987 by Anne Deligne and Daniel De Valck producing author films, mainly in the domain of documentary filmmaking.

<http://www.cobra-films.be>

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## *Crippled Symmetries* By Beatrice Gibson



### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

*Crippled Symmetries* is a film about a precocious 11 year-old capitalist who inadvertently creates the single greatest financial empire the decade has ever seen, spun largely from the invisible confines of the school pay phone. The film details the rise of his adolescent virtual web of profit and deceit and the corrosive effect it has on the lives of those who come into contact with, in particular a well meaning but naïve modernist composer. In a world increasingly governed by abstraction, music and finance become strangely entwined.

*Crippled Symmetries* takes American modernist William Gaddis' epic experimental novel, *JR*, as its starting point. Written in the mid 70's, Gaddis' novel is an eerily prescient, biting social satire, a 750 page parody of the American dream turned upside down and inside out. The novel follows the financial escapades of a young schoolboy, the eponymously named JR. Whilst the schools lessons are being broadcast over an open circuit TV system, (eliminating the need for staff) the headmaster (who is also head of the local bank) and several other nameless official have one seemingly pointless budget meeting after the other, debating everything from possible cuts, (text-books and bullet proof glass) mortgage applications, loan refusals, canteen focused product placement to teenage pregnancies, deceased art teachers and accidental porn broadcasts. After a field trip into the city to the company that his class have purchased a share in, and with the unwitting help of the school's resident composer, JR sets about amassing his own vast financial network. A psychedelic social mirror, JR isn't evil so much as transparent; like a glass prism he gleefully reflects back what is projected onto him.

*Crippled Symmetries* overlays the narrative of *JR* onto contemporary London. Not an adaptation of *JR*, as much as a homage to it, *Crippled Symmetries* use Gaddis' novel as the production structure for an experimental children's workshop. Using the fictions of *JR* as an open-ended score for a series of improvised situations, the workshop will stage a series of encounters between children and the novels multiple characters and communities, such as music teachers and hedge fund managers.

*JR* is a novel about abstraction and value; money in the novel is indeterminate, it has no intrinsic value. Rather, value is conferred or projected onto it by the humans that own and encircle it. The novel's characters are consequently all beset by the question of what is valuable, of what is worth doing. The question of value is also

posed by the book's form. Told entirely through unattributed dialogue, JR is made up of almost 750 pages of voices. Speakers are never identified by name, with the transition from one speaking character to another indicated only by a dash. Notoriously difficult, Gaddis claimed that the novel's incessant noise was intended to mirror the clatter of contemporary capitalism. But he also suggested that the opposite was true; that its cacophony was intended as device to elevate the reader into a collaborator, a co-author in the construction of the novel's meaning. Indeed, the reader is presented with much the same dilemma as the novel's principal characters: the question of what is worth doing?

Departing from this logic, positing and complicating a similar notion of agency, *Crippled Symmetries* invites the public into the process of its own making, outsourcing its characters to school children, music teachers and city workers. Placing the fictions of JR on top of real landscapes as means to investigate their character, *Crippled Symmetries* hopes to offer an alternative exploration and representation of the present moment, one that includes the public in the construction of its fictions, while at the same time questioning what exactly it might mean to do that.

Using Gaddis's dizzyingly relevant narrative as its alibi, *Crippled Symmetries* explores what it means to grow up in society beset by abstraction, by the intangible and the immaterial. A comic story of music and numbers that explores the notion of value, by playing on its varying meanings: social, aesthetic and financial.

## ARTIST BIO

Beatrice Gibson's films are composite works, collaging together sound, literature and multiple authors to explore the slippery operations of language and difficulties in representation. Born out of interests in improvisation and experimental music, her films blend social modes of working with a diverse range of references, from the compositions of Cornelius Cardew or the musicality of speech found in the operas of Robert Ashley, to the writings of Gertrude Stein and the typographical experiments of BS Johnson. As a result, Gibson's films function as elegiac exquisite corpses, their socially engaged foundations challenging conventional notions of authorship and filmmaking.

Recent exhibitions include CAC Bretigny (2013), Index, The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation, Stockholm; The Showroom, London (2012); Kunstlerhaus Stuttgart (2010), The Serpentine Gallery (Sackler Center) (2010). Gibson's films have screened at numerous experimental film venues and film festivals nationally and internationally including Light Industry, Anthology Film Archives NY; LA Film Forum; Rotterdam International Film Festival; London Film Festival; CPH: Dox, and Oberhausen Short Film Festival.

Gibson has twice won the Rotterdam International Film Festival Tiger Award for short film. She was one of five artists shortlisted for the 2013-15 Whitechapel Max Mara Art Prize for Women and was nominated for the 2013 Jarman Award. She is represented by the Laura Bartlett Gallery. Her films are distributed by LUX.

## PRODUCERS

**Mike Sperlinger** is a producer, curator and writer based in London and Oslo. For more than a decade he was the assistant director of LUX, a London-based agency which holds the largest collection of artists' film and video in Europe. In that role he was involved in every aspect of film-making by visual artists, as well as working with many other partner organisations internationally such as Artissima, Frieze Projects, Rotterdam Film Festival and CPH:Dox. He has curated many screenings and exhibitions, both for LUX and independently, and edited a number of publications including *Kinomuseum: Towards An Artist Cinema* (2008). He currently teaches part-time at the Oslo Academy of Fine Art.

**LUX** is the UK agency for the support and promotion of artists' working with the moving image. Founded in 2002 as a not-for-profit company and charity it builds on the legacy of its predecessor organisations The Lux Centre, The London Filmmakers Co-operative and London Video Arts with a history stretching back to the 1966. In addition to organising exhibitions, touring, publishing and education LUX represents Europe's largest collection of moving image works produced by visual artists. LUX has commissioned and produced many

award-winning artists' moving image works by amongst others; Matt Collishaw, Tracey Emin, Aurélien Froment, Yang Fudong, Jacki Irvine, Amar Kanwar, Miranda July, Mark Leckey, Deimantas Narkevičius, Rosalind Nashashibi, Laure Prouvost Catherine Sullivan, Mika Taanila, Mark Wallinger, Gillian Wearing, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Akram Zaatari.

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## *Labour Power Plant*

By Robert Schlicht and Romana Schmalisch



### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

*Labour Power Plant* documents the experiences of five people enrolled in a programme at an education and training centre in France. The objective of the training they will be following over the course of several months is to physically and psychologically prepare them for the demands of the labour market. Their social competences, their emotional and cognitive qualities and deficiencies are established in an initial series of exercises and interviews that define their profiles and propose individual training plans. The programme alternates between tests of physical endurance, coordination and logic, but also creative activities that induce the participants to reveal their frustrations, desires and a large part of their privacy, as well as enhance their self-confidence and instil a sense of meaningfulness. Placed in concrete working environments, the candidates will also alternately assume different roles of, e.g., supervisor, waiter, guest, sub-worker, etc., to learn and have their aptitudes tested. While in some scenes the work efforts of the groups turn into what appears like a collective, choreographed movement, in other scenes, the participants have to cope with irritations occurring during the procedures. Some physical training units involve the most basic, abstract activities that have no other aim than advancing certain abilities and may therefore appear grotesque for anyone not aware of this aim, including the participants themselves.

As the months pass, it becomes increasingly clear that the goal of the programme is not to educate the participants for a specific vocation, but rather to prepare, discipline, and appease them so that they are able, willing, and even eager to serve as a workforce, that is, to turn them into abstract human capital. It turns out that we are in fact visiting a "labour power plant", housed in a large building located outside of urban contexts, which provides society with the human capital on which it depends – a facility consuming human beings with their own will, interests and desires, and transforming them into the final product of labourers. The building is comprised of different departments with diverse architectural features: some spaces are modelled on real working environments, others appear like a laboratory/stage; narrow and dark rooms – which convey both a sense of claustrophobia as well as of security – alternate with open-plan, glass-surrounded spaces – which suggest both the lack of restrictions as well as a feeling of being under constant surveillance. Moreover, the architecture combines styles from several epochs, from the industrial to the information economy, reflecting the different methods used to the same end. The executive board of the "labour power plant" even commissions a

management consultant to propose new ways of how to rationalize and streamline the processes to produce ever more efficient and willing workers.

The processes employed are extracted and abstracted from real existing social life – training and employment centres, schools, psychological advice centres etc. The scenes will in part be filmed in real environments in education centres in the Seine-Saint-Denis department, with participants playing their own roles, interacting with the professional actors. The camera will move independently and in a floating manner through the scenes, seeming to leave or approach the actors at its own will.

In the combination of fictional and documentary modes of representation and with its use of grotesque and hyperbolic elements in the manner of Jacques Tati's *Play Time*, the film will try to condense and make visible socio-economical structures that define today's labour relations. Creating a tension between the documentation of concrete conditions and the construction of abstract social structures, on the level of both the individual scenes as well as the overarching narrative, the film will at times even resemble a dystopic science-fiction film.

## ARTISTS BIO

Romana Schmalisch (1974, Berlin, Germany) studied Fine Arts at the University of the Arts in Berlin. She was a resident artist in several stipend programmes, among others at the Fine Art Department of Jan-Van-Eyck Academy, Maastricht, the Berlin Senate's stipend program in London and currently at Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers (2013-2014), where she works on a long-term research project "The Choreography of Labour". Robert Schlicht (1975, Berlin, Germany) studied philosophy at Humboldt University Berlin. His recent text "Film as Show Trial" was published in *Der Standpunkt der Aufnahme – Point of View: Perspectives of political film and video work* (edited by Tobias Hering in collaboration with Arsenal Berlin – Institute for Film and Video Art).

Since 2004 Romana Schmalisch and Robert Schlicht have collaborated on several projects at the intersection of theory and film, investigating cinematic representations of history and society. Their films have been shown in exhibitions and film festivals in Berlin, Houston, Paris, Moscow, Yerevan, Madrid, Brest, Essen, Duisburg, Vienna among others.

## PRODUCERS

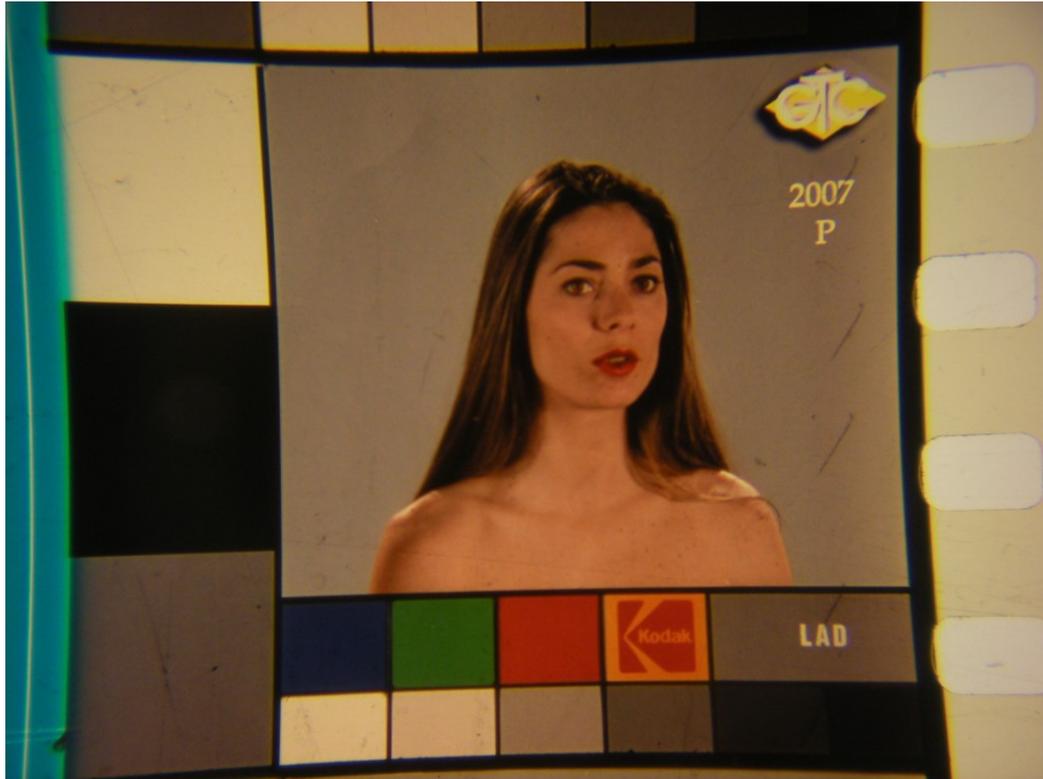
**SPECTRE Productions** is a production company dedicated to emerging film practices and innovative audiovisual projects. SPECTRE Productions collaborates with organisations accompanying a artists in their work, active in the intersection between the fields of contemporary art and cinema (festivals, art schools, art centres and art cinemas)

**Les Laboratoires d'Aubervilliers** is a place for research and creation, for resources and experimentation, developed in intimate cooperation with its setting (from the most local to the international sense) and with its audiences, and in relationship with the artists. It invents the tools to conceive artistic practices from all fields – visual art, dance, performance, theatre, literature, etc. – viewing them as a process of learning, sharing and experiencing; an intermediary object that is capable of investigating and taking the measure of the most urgent contemporary issues, reinventing ways of being together, while taking a risk and upsetting our approach and our conception of art.

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## *Skin / Blush*

By An van. Dienderen



### DESCRIPTION

*SKIN / BLUSH* interweaves the materialistic narrative of the history of color film, with the urban legend of the shapeshifter 'Oude Rooie Ogen' in Mechelen, and the cross-cultural practice of dismembering body parts of people with albinism. The film installation mixes these narratives into a sensorial, haptic film, which suggests and evokes the relation between media and skin (color), triggering physical memories of touch.

To unravel the connection between technology and film in a literal fashion the film explores the development of the history of color film. Brian Winston, cinema historian, reminds us that African-Americans look green on American NTSC television (Winston 1996). And this is, according to him, no coincidence. Essentially, the research agenda for color film (and color television) was dominated by the need to reproduce Caucasian skin tones. Yet this is implicitly denied by the rhetoric surrounding color film "in favor of a stress on naturalness, realism and verisimilitude".

Such a narrative thus digs into what Laura U. Marks has termed "the skin of the film", as it explores the materialistic process of developing film in which the skin is contested as an ideologically laden vehicle (Marks 2000). This layer is connected to two racially charged narratives. On the one hand there is the local legend of Mechelen with a black monster as its main character. Set in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the monster was said to abduct children, after which he ate them alive. A homeless black man was thereafter lynched and skinned alive. The skin is supposedly buried in the basement of [St. Rumbold's Cathedral](#) in [Mechelen](#). During the early 18<sup>th</sup> century till present a ghostly dark figure with fiery red eyes has been seen in Mechelen and surrounding areas. It is said that he seeks his skin to become whole again as the demonic figure he once was.

On the other hand the film evokes practices in several communities in which people with albinism are at risk due to erroneous beliefs and superstition. Body parts of persons with albinism are believed to possess magical powers capable of bringing riches and power if used in potions produced by local witchdoctors. To date, the Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights of June 2013 received information about more than 200 cases of ritual attacks against persons with albinism in 15 countries between 2000 and 2013. In southwest Cameroon, for instance, there is an old belief that when the local volcano erupts, only albino blood can placate the god of the mountain.

For this film installation archival research is conducted at the studios of Eastman/Kodak into the period of 1930 - 1950 to look more specifically at color chart images, in which the skin of a white lady or a white baby is used as a reference key for color grading. The archival footage is treated in a sensorial manner so as to navigate on the tactile dimension of the skin. The part on the people with albinism has a sense of urgency and will therefore be shot in a documentary way by registering facts and figures of these practices worldwide. The part on the local legend has a fictional feel to it, as it serves as an urban legend. As a result *SKIN / BLUSH* will mix three different approaches or registers in which the skin (of the film) in its literal and figurative meaning will be explored in an evocative not informational manner.

## ARTIST BIO

An van. Dienderen (1971, Brasschaat, Belgium) is a filmmaker and obtained a PhD in Comparative Cultural Sciences. She made several (inter)nationally awarded films, published in (inter)national journals and directs a small non profit art production company (Elektrischer Schnellseher). She also initiated the international art workspace SoundImageCulture, which helps artists to develop projects in the bordering zone between documentary, anthropology and visual arts.

Her work is rooted in cross cultural and interdisciplinary work, relating fields such as film practice and anthropological research, with a focus on cultural identity, multicultural society, visual anthropology and migration. Her films have been awarded in several countries, have been screened in major film festivals worldwide and are distributed through argos, center for arts and media Brussels and Women make movies (NY).

## PRODUCERS

**Contour Mechelen** is an organisation dedicated to art being made in the moving image. Every two years, Contour Mechelen organises the Biennial of Moving Image, also known as 'Contour', the project for which it has become most known. The biennial offers a platform to curators and artists working with different forms of moving image, from film and video to installation. The biennial also stimulates a dialogue between contemporary art and architecture in the city of Mechelen. In between the Biennial, Contour also instigates and produces public projections and installations. *SKIN / BLUSH* is commissioned by Contour 7.

**Elektrischer Schnellseher** is an organization that represents the work by An van. Dienderen and Didier Volckaert. It focuses on the production of experimental & documentary films, and video installations. Its members work in cooperation with film schools, art houses, cultural centers and universities. The organization aims at providing a critical arena at the interval of art practices and media and cinema theory, between the institutional, the academic and the controversial, to both practice and reflect on image production.

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