

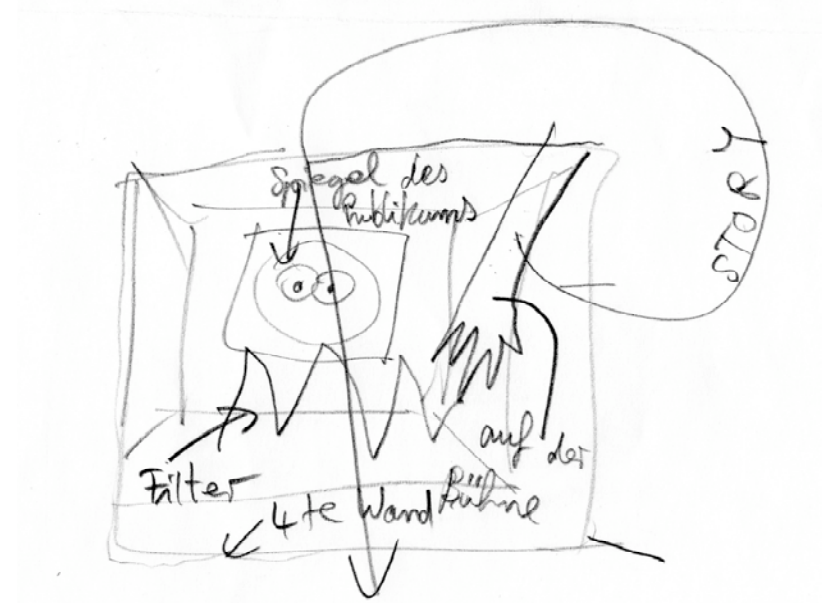
Antonia Baehr & Isabell Spengler

Two Friends and More Than Four Walls

A lecture on relationships between performance and film

(Berlinale 2010)

The lifelong friends Antonia Baehr (choreographer / performer) and Isabell Spengler (filmmaker / performer) analyse the spatial and temporal interlacing of cinema and stage situations in their works. Using an overhead projector, they chart diagrams of the events and effects in the space between the audience and the stage or the audience and the film respectively.



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The following text is a transcribed and slightly revised version of a lecture held by Antonia Baehr and Isabell Spengler at the 60th Berlin International Film Festival on February 12, 2010, in Arsenal Cinema 1.

The lecture includes a discussion of the following works:

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transcription / proofreading: William Wheeler

Introduction by Nanna Heidenreich

Welcome to the fifth edition of Forum Expanded. We welcome you to our first event that will be happening only once. My name is Nanna Heidenreich, and I'm part of the team of Forum Expanded.

I have the great pleasure to introduce the upcoming lecture: **2 Friends and More Than Four Walls**. Many of you may have noticed by going through our extensive program that this year we have a new focus, which is performance. It relates to something that started earlier, connecting nicely to a project that took place here in the fall of 2009 around the work of Jack Smith. However, this focus also connects—in particular in this case—to another event we did last summer, The Arsenal Summer School, where we invited Antonia Baehr and Isabell Spengler to participate in a series of lectures that addressed the question of space and, specifically in their case, the relation of performance and film and video to space—or more precisely, the production of space in the workings of performance, and the connection between performance and film and video. The lecture they gave was an incredible pleasure for us, and it resulted, among other things, in something tangible: drawings that they presented on the overhead projector, which you will be seeing in this lecture as well.

For those of you who are not familiar with the two of them and haven't had the chance to go through the catalogue, or the longer biographies in the Forum Expanded brochure, **Antonia Baehr** is a performer and choreographer. A vital part of her work lies in collaboration, which often has to do with scores where either she writes a score and someone else performs it, or someone else writes a score for her that she performs. So it's also about the changing of positions: the performer and the choreographer, the writer and the one who executes. She has also made a lot of films and videos, and is often to be seen in other people's films and videos, some of which are made by Isabell Spengler.

Isabell Spengler is a photographer, filmmaker, video artist, and also often works with performance. And I would say, to highlight something that is, for me, very special about her work, she relates very structural thoughts about

cinema, very conceptual thoughts, to a very baroque imagination, a very baroque image production with elaborate costumes and often elaborate stories—which are all, however, always connected to very conceptual thoughts.

Among their collaborative work was an installation piece that we showed in the second year of Forum Expanded called *Telepathie Experiment I*, a work that is based on a long, long friendship. They sort of grew up together and have been friends and collaborators in work ever since, with their *Holiday Movies Initiative* and with several kinds of works. Having them together here on the stage, not on the screen but on stage (though you will also see them today on screen) is a great pleasure for us, as is re-introducing them back into Arsenal and back into Forum Expanded. And now, I would like to welcome Antonia Baehr and Isabell Spengler on stage.



Antonia Baehr & Isabell Spengler, Berlinale 2010, photo: Sander Houtkruijer

Antonia Baehr: Maybe I have to be closer to the microphone? ... Good? ... Great.

Hello, the title of this lecture is *Two Friends and More than Four Walls*.

Today we will analyze the relationships between film and performance, paying particular attention to the aspects of space and time. We will take our works and collaborations as examples to address the following questions:

One side of our investigation will be concerned with this: Why do you make a performance and why a film? How can film or video be used in performance and vice versa? And more so, how can the moving image be intertwined with live performance? And even further, how can we talk about film from the perspective of live performance and vice versa?

The other side of our investigation will be concerned with the audience of live performance, and the one of film and video works: What exactly happens in the space between audience and stage, and audience and screen?

To look at this, we will scrutinize and revive the concept of the fourth wall (the imaginary wall separating the stage from the auditorium in the theatre)—using a slightly self-made and expanded definition of it, we must admit.

Isabell Spengler: When choosing the title for our lecture, we also considered “Two Friends IN / ON and ABOUT More than Four Walls.” This is to say the title refers not only our personal re-interpretation of the classical theater term “the fourth wall” as applied to our works, but also to the many visible and invisible walls that went into, and that play a role in, the construction of time and space in our films and performances: stage-walls, cinema-walls, screens, monitor-walls, walls of shooting-locations, sound-proof and semi-permeable walls, walls in time-tunnels and imaginary walls.

So, to make it simple, you can think of this lecture as a conversation between a choreographer and a filmmaker, friends since childhood, both working with performance *and* film and discussing their work from these two perspectives: the choreographer mainly thinking about how things work live on stage, and the filmmaker thinking about what you can do with film (prepared in advance) in the cinema.

A.B.: In this lecture we will show how the intertwining of situations in time and space, and of performance and film in both our works, leads to a specific activation of the spectator. Through the set-ups and layers of the works, each time they are shown, it is an experiment between the artwork and the audience on even grounds. The spectator creates her own film or performance in her head. As Jacques Rancière observes in his book *The Emancipated Spectator*, there is no consensus in the auditorium but a dissensus of a plurality of interpretations and perceptions.

I.S.: So now we’re going to stop reading from our scripts, and we’re going to show and discuss examples, film-excerpts from about five different works, all of which use some combination of film and performance. Then there will be a Q & A, so if you have questions please keep them until the end. We’d be very curious about your feedback.

ERIKA IN AMERKA

A.B.: The first example is a film I made in 1998, a 16mm black-and-white film. It’s an example of how film and performance can be boxed into one another,

like a box in a box in a box. In this case, there's the film, and then there's the performance, and then there's the film. At that time I was studying performance at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The film is 17 minutes in duration, but we will show only 2 excerpts with a total length of 6 minutes.

(Film excerpts from ERIKA IN AMERIKA are projected.)



film still, ERIKA IN AMERIKA, Antonia Baehr, 1998, 16mm film, 17 min.

A.B.: We wanted to show this example because of our concern with the question of what exactly happens in the space between screen and auditorium. Here the auditorium becomes a classroom, Antonia Baehr becomes the teacher, and the audience members become the pupils. So there is a shift in context from the cinema situation to the school situation. Perhaps the contract between screen and auditorium becomes visible.

I.S.: I don't know if you noticed—there was a moment in ERIKA IN AMERIKA when Antonia Baehr says “Bye-bye” to everybody, including the performance audience at the time of the filming, and also to the three cameras that are present at the shoot. And when she looks into the camera, the image of which we just saw in the film, it could be called a typical example of “breaking the fourth wall” in film. Because it's as if she's breaching this gap of the time-space of then, when the film was recorded, and now, here in Arsenal, or in any other future moment when this film gets shown. But, of course, the term—“breaking the fourth wall”—really comes from theater, and maybe Antonia can give us the classical definition of the term as used in theater.

A.B.: Yes. In the classical sense – in the theater the fourth wall is first established when the actors do their thing on stage as if not seen by the audience, and the audience is sitting in the dark, as if watching what's happening on stage through a peephole. And perhaps all of a sudden the actors say “AH!!”, as if startled by the audience, and the fourth wall—meaning the illusion—is broken. Or the actors can address the audience directly by holding a speech about the story that is being represented on stage. That's another possibility of breaking the fourth wall and violating the boundaries of fiction.

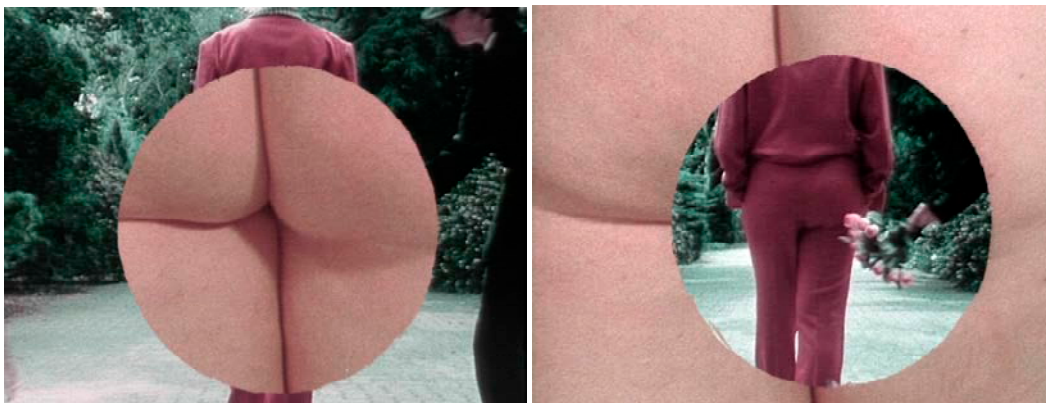
SYNCPPOINT

I.S.: In the following examples we will talk about other ways of breaching the gap between the depicted time-space on screen and the time-space of the audience.

The next example is an attempt to use film's specific means to do just that. Like *ERIKA IN AMERIKA*, it's a film depicting a live performance, but rather than recording the on-stage events straight up, it's an attempt to translate the conceptual content of the live performance into film language and by doing so take advantage of things you can only do in film projection.

Actually, the performance it's based on is produced by Antonia Baehr, and some other friends, namely, the band Larry Peacock. They invited me to make an experimental music video for one of their pieces. I chose out of their repertoire one song of 4 minutes duration. The music video I made is shot on 16mm film transferred to video. So, we'll show this four minutes long video now and discuss it after the projection.

(SYNCPPOINT video is projected.)



2 frames from SYNCPPOINT, 16mm on digital video, color & bw, 4 min.
Isabell Spengler & Larry Peacock, 2007

A.B.: Since the film looks quite different from the performance it's based on, maybe I should tell you briefly about the Larry Peacock show:

Larry Peacock is a performance of a concert which addresses the performativity of electronic pop music as well as binary gender roles, and it plays with preproduced and live sounds. The band is Ulf Sievers a.k.a. Sabine

Erklenz, Land a.k.a. Andrea Neumann, and Henri Fleur a.k.a. Antonia Baehr. The performance of all the songs together is 60 minutes long. So Isi, how did you translate this live performance into film?

I.S.: The song I choose is originally called "*The Sound-Sender and his Dancing Sound Receivers*" - so in German: "*Der Tonangeber und seine tanzenden Tonabnehmer*".

And I choose this piece, because in it Henri Fleur, produced by Antonia Baehr, gets rolled onto the stage on a little cart and is a "sound-machine" of sorts. So Henri Fleur gets played, in addition to some preproduced sounds that are playing. Music is created directly on the body of Henri Fleur. The two other performers use contact microphones to make noises on Henri Fleur's jacket and skin. And I was intrigued by the challenge of how to translate these two categories of sound—live and preproduced. Because obviously film is always out of the can. This led me to the question: how can you give an impression of liveness in film, or how can you make a film that has live aspects, aspects of a "live" event? So I used flicker film, because of its "live" effects in the moment of projection. Flicker film works with after images. The spectators see colors that are not actually on the film itself. This renders the audience's participation—which in any perception of film is always creative—more physical.

A.B.: Maybe you could explain a little about what flicker film is. Many of you probably already know, but—

I.S.: The reference here is Tony Conrad's *The Flicker* from 1965, which contained only black and white frames cut very rapidly in various rhythms. The cuts are so quick that with a projection of 24 frames per second the human eye melts the two images—black and white frames—together. So we see colors due to the persistence of vision of the human eye—which has other effects when you record and project a live scene with 24 frames per second: then you have the illusion of movement.

Conrad's film was made without photography. But flicker film doesn't always have to be made entirely of monochromatic or abstract images. In my video I combined black and blank film leader with photographic film images. The strobing light of flicker films can induce hallucinations, which I believe was one Tony Conrad's goals. My video SYNCPOINT, however, is actually way too short to get the viewers into a hallucinogenic state. So what I did here is more of a quote.

A.B.: There are certain causalities in the performance, for example when the contact microphone that is on the larynx of the sound sculpture, Henri Fleur, gets hit with a drumstick, the sound sculpture laughs. So it's like pushing a button, after which the sound sculpture outputs the laughter. How did you translate that into film?

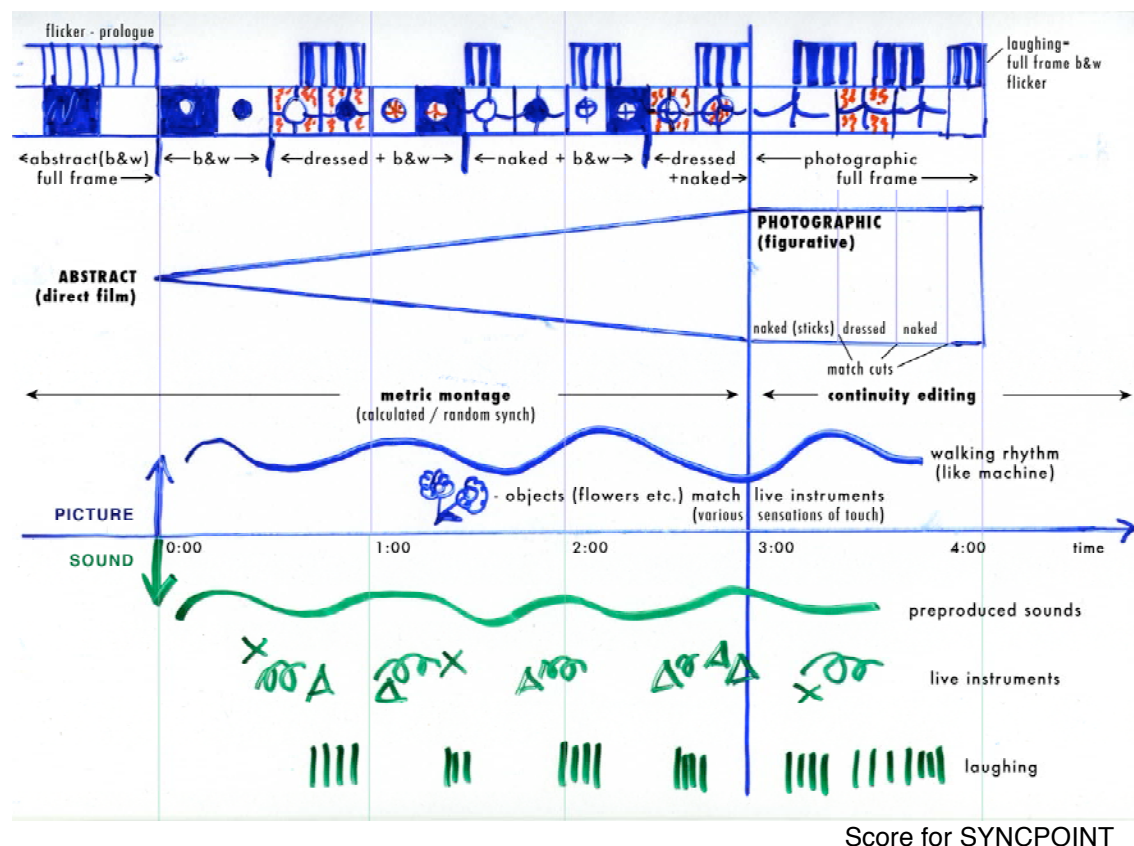
I.S.: Well, of course, synchronicity is the archetypal subject of the music video. In many music videos we see singers filmed and they're moving their mouths,

lip-syncing, and then we have the impression that this causes the sound. It's a very straight-up relationship. I did it a little bit differently...

A.B.: Can you show us on the overhead projector?

I.S.: With pleasure.

(I.S. goes to overhead projector and switches it on.)



I.S.: What you see here is the graphic score for the SYNCPOINT video. Blue lines refer to the image and green lines to the sound. So as you see both have several layers. In the second row from the top you see thumbnail pictures of all the frame compositions I used. What I basically did was to calculate all the possible combinations of what could appear inside and outside of this hole with four different images as my material: Black frame, white frame, naked and dressed bottom. So I came up with 16 possible combinations, which I just distributed evenly over time. So many of the connections between sound events and image events are actually random because of that mathematical or metric editing method.

But in some layers the sound events are accurately synchronized with specific images—like the laughter of Henri Fleur, which you see at the very top and at

the very bottom of the score, is always illustrated by a full frame black and white flicker.

In the middle we have the live sounds created by the contact microphones, which are synchronized and correspond to the little objects that come into the picture, for example the flowers and the magic wand. You don't have to understand all the details of this score. What was important to me was to create a stack of visual layers with some designed and some random synchronicities. Through these multiple layers I think an openness is created where anybody can make his or her own connections between picture and sound, depending on which layer they chose to pay attention to. The creation of mental connections by the audience while viewing the film—this audience participation—is one “live” aspect of the film; another is the physical interaction, the individual perception of the flicker.

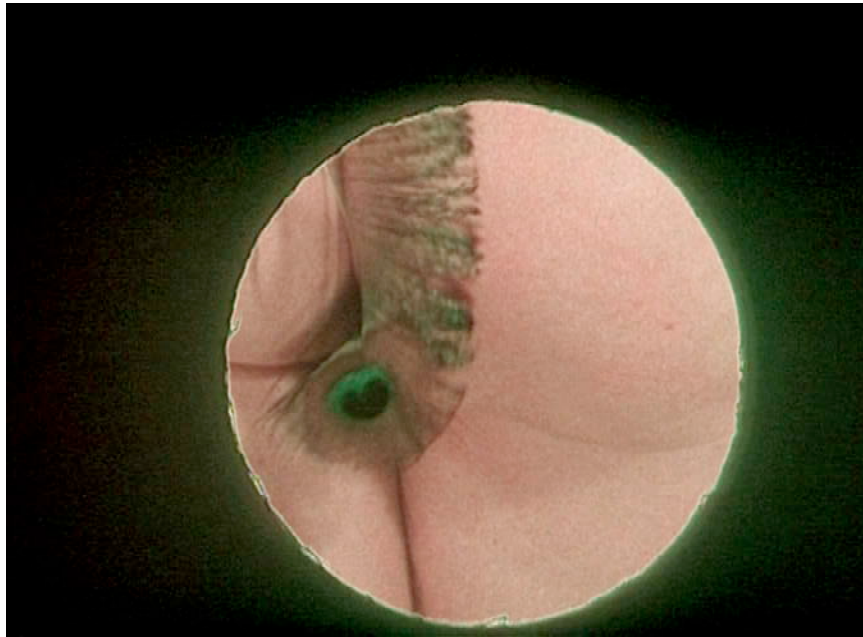
Also important, and visualized in the score by the crescendo sign, is the overall development of the picture from “abstract” or “direct film” to “photographic” and “figurative.” Like I said, I combined the two. The film starts with “direct film”—since I didn't shoot the hole with the camera; I just took black and white film and punched a hole in it. And for me “direct film” points to a different temporality. The photographic image will always point to the moment when it was recorded, and the abstract one doesn't really point to any specific moment in time—so it's somehow more in the here and now—maybe it points to the moment when the film was produced or to the time when I punched that hole into it, but it's not very specific. I see them as different modes in film time, functioning differently—and also calling for a different type of film editing. Hence (in the figurative, photographic part) the video ends with a series of “match cuts,” using the convention of continuity editing, when for example the magic wand points at the naked bottom, and the image cuts to the dressed bottom while the position and motion of the wand is continued over the cut. This type of editing, which is like a magic trick you can find in many of Méliès' films, points to an illusionistic realm of filmmaking. And I see a connection here to the illusionistic tricks in the Larry Peacock performance: the illusion of “liveness” created by synchronicity, was a central part in the play with causalities—with preproduced and live sounds—in the Larry Peacock concert.

A.B.: Maybe you can read us this beautiful text you wrote about all these synchronicities.

I.S. presents a text on the overhead projector and reads it:

“A hole is a whole hole. And a dot is a point in time and space. The point here is too hear and see the dot as a whole hole and the space of the stage through that hole in the film which points to different points made before. But the film is now, and it has a hole through which behind and before come together in time, each doing their own thing like behinds liked to do before. But you can sync butt and but, as ass, as you please—that's the point.”

- Isabell Spengler



film still, SYNCPOINT

I.S.: To finish the discussion of SYNCPOINT, I should tell you how I came up with the central image of the hole.

I had this idea because of the technical process used for synchronizing film and video—something you don't usually see in the cinema, because these frames are cut out of the finished films: when the lab transfers your film to video for offline editing, they punch a hole into the very first key-coded, or numbered, frame of each roll of film to get the synchronicity between the video and the film. And I was always intrigued by these punched images, because a big part of the image is missing, as if it was censored. I was intrigued by creating a relationship between a censorship in image and a point in time—a caesura, so to speak.

And since in SYNCPOINT almost every frame of the film has a hole punched through it, it's like something is constantly in synch with something else. So if you would use a hand clap as synchronization point or clapper as Antonia did in ERIKA IN AMERIKA, you would have to go like this:

I.S. gives microphone to A.B. and makes a quick series of hand claps as if applauding.

Finally, of course, the association of the hole with the naked ass calls up numerous further interpretations and references*. By referring to the asshole as a non-gendered human sexual body part, it was my intention to respond to the gender performance aspects of the Larry Peacock performance.

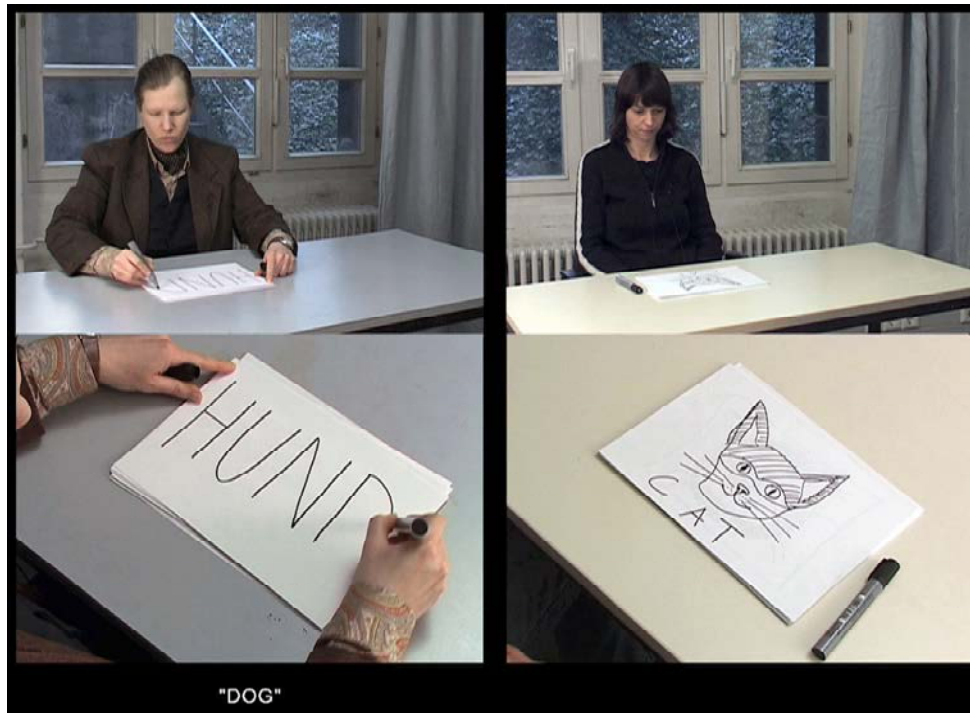
*further references: Yoko Ono's film No.4 "Bottoms", 1966

TELEPATHY EXPERIMENT I

I.S.: Next we'll show an example which is actually an installation. It was shown in 2007 here at the Berlinale in Forum Expanded. It is a work that came about

when I asked Antonia to collaborate. We're going to show an 8-minute excerpt from the 30-minute loop. In the installation you could just walk in and out of the room as you please, and the image was looped. So you would enter at a random moment and decide for yourself how long you want to stay in the room. Now we're showing the beginning, the first 8 minutes of that loop.

(Excerpt from TELEPATHY EXPERIMENT I is projected.)



still, TELEPATHY EXPERIMENT I, Isabell Spengler, 2007
HD video installation, 31 min. loop, with Isabell Spengler and Antonia Baehr

I.S.: What are you thinking? (laughs)

A.B.: What do you think it means?

I.S.: Ask me something.

A.B.: (Laughs) Well, um, it's uncut. Totally uncut, contrary to SYNCPOINT. And, so, is it a classical performance for the camera? Why are there no cuts?

I.S.: I think there is one cut, because it's on a split screen. So the four channels of video are synchronized and arranged in one frame, like on those surveillance monitors in the supermarket. Otherwise the four videos are uncut. And yes, one could say that it's a performance for the camera. Although, I think—more importantly, we were performing for each other and the camera is a witness.

A.B.: —Could it be performed live?

I.S.: Maybe if you cut a house open like Gordon Matta-Clark and put some soundproof glass in there, but then you still wouldn't have close-ups. Again, the work uses something you can best do with film and video and which would be hard to achieve in other media or arts: to connect different spaces and look into them simultaneously.

Actually, thinking of the live situation when we recorded the video, the two rooms we sat in for the experiment were in the same building, but they were so far away from each other that we certainly couldn't hear each other. And before we did the take, we made a lottery about who would send thoughts first and who would receive. So the score, so to speak, for this performance was very simple. The ... *Anweisung* ... (to Antonia) How do you say that?

A.B.: Instruction

I.S.: ... the instruction was to try and send thoughts for 15 minutes—and then I happened to be sending first and Antonia was sending for the second fifteen minutes while I was trying to receive.

So, yes, I decided to make this as a film and not a performance—well, first of all, it would be complicated live—but secondly, I was going for a specific relationship between the work and the viewer: In the installation there were headphones, and you had one voice on the left ear and one voice on the right ear so that your head kind of became the center where connections are made between these two, or four, channels of video. So I think or I hope that the viewer sort of realizes or *makes real* what the title of the piece claims by creating mental connections between these signals that match or don't match.

A.B.: So, you say in SYNCPOINT and TELEPATHY that actually the film happens “in the head of the viewer.” But isn't it like this with any film I see? Or what's different here?

I.S.: Yes, I think it is like this with any film, but I think that I'm trying to work with it conceptually and address it with the spatial layout of the work, the setup. I think that this piece sort of shows something that's fragmentary and breaks open the narrative code. So I think that it asks more general questions, semiotic questions: when do we say that the cat on the left is similar enough to the line on the right, similar enough that we can call it a match? And that's a process you become aware of when you watch the piece. I don't know if this happens with narrative or fictional film, where you're more guided by the carrot, more engaged in following the story than in observing the way your brain processes information...

A.B.: When I watch this piece as a viewer, I observe myself making connections. For example, when I see the horse tail and the whiskers, I think “Great! They look alike!” But at the same time there's another level in my head or perception that tells me “Oh, you're just doing that now.” So I have a double activity, and that's something that I maybe don't have if I go see a Hollywood movie.

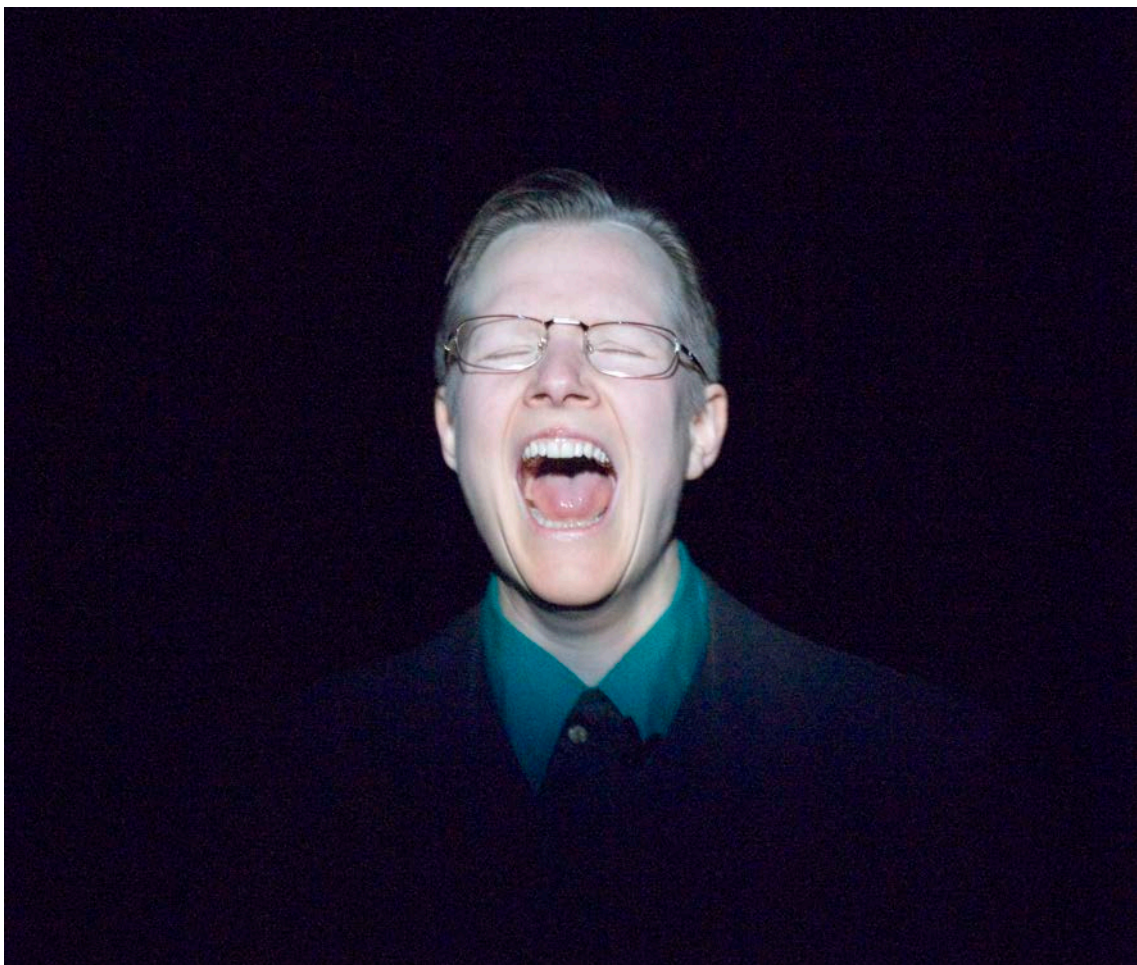
I.S.: Yeah, I guess you can also watch those analytically...

(Both laugh.)

I.S.: Let's move on. Let's stay on the subject here.

RIRE / LAUGH / LACHEN

A.B.: Yes. So the next example we would like to show talks about how video is used in live performance. It's the piece **COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR SEVEN MINUTES** by Antonia Baehr for Antonia Baehr. It's part of a larger project called **RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN** that encompasses a performance that I perform in theaters where the audience sits in the dark, and a book. It's a solo, so when I created the piece, I asked myself "Who am I in the eyes of others?", and I found out that people see me as someone who laughs.



RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN, Antonia Baehr, 2008, photo: Marc Damage

A.B.: Then I asked my friends and family members to give me, for my most recent birthday, scores for my laughter. I got a lot of these scores, and they're in this book too. *(A.B. holds up the book RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN)* That's what I perform on stage, and the one we will talk about is only one of those scores: "COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR SEVEN MINUTES." I'll show you some examples of these scores on the overhead projector. *(A.B. goes to overhead projector and switches it on.)*

I thought it would be interesting to talk about scores in this context because scores are a way to organize material in time and space. (To audience) And as you saw a moment ago, some filmmakers like Isi here also use scores rather than scripts or storyboards to organize their films.

II. 1. (andante, for laughing solo voice / pour voix seule)

PPP m hm hm hm hm hām hm hm hm hm [hm mm] PP

1/2 tone up 1/2 ton plus haut P hm hm hm hm hām hm hm hm [hm mm] PP

mf öh hä hä hä hä hu hu huuuuuu ✓ fff

ha ha, haha! hoho, hoho!

PPP f [oh] ha ha ha ha ha ha haaaa! haa! haa, PPP fff [oh] uh haa haa haa haaa! haa!

[oh] ha ha ha haa! ha ha haa! ha, haha (deux soupirs/two sighs) [h] hää, hää,

uh ha ha ha ha ha haaa! fff

uh hu hu hu huuu!!!

uh ha ha ha ha ha haaa, ha

uhha ha ha ha ha ha haaa!

uhha ha ha ha ha ha haaa!

uhha ha ha ha ha ha haaa! ha, ha ✓

ha ha, haha! hoho, hoho! hoho, hoho!

öh ha ha ha haaa

crescendo

excerpt from page 42 in the book RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN, score by Nicole Dememle

A.B.: So these scores look very different from each another. Here is one by Andrea Neumann, who is a musician. And this one is by Nicole Dememle and can be easily sight-read.

(Antonia demonstrates a few lines of the score; audience laughs.)

A.B.: And this (see score on the next page) is the one we will talk about now, because it uses video and is interpreted by Antonia Baehr, who also made it. You see, it can be for 15 minutes, or for a whole life long, and we will talk about the seven-minute long one. Here is a slide image of how it looks on stage.

ANTONIA BAEHR

ANTONIA BAEHR
COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR 15 MINUTES?

Solo TO BE PERFORMED IN ANY WAY BY ANYONE.

FOR ANTONIA BAEHR
NEW YORK, April 20th 1998 and BERLIN, April 20th 2007

DECIDE UPON A LENGTH OF TIME. IT CAN BE
ANYTHING FROM A MILLISECOND TO 15 MINUTES, FROM
A DAY TO A YEAR TO A LIFE-TIME.

TELL YOURSELF TO LAUGH FOR THAT LENGTH
OF TIME.

OBSERVE, JUDGE AND CORRECT YOURSELF
WHILE DOING IT.

WHEN THE TIME IS UP, STOP AND THANK YOURSELF.

page 61 of book RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN, score by Antonia Baehr, © 2008

A.B.: So on the right you see the live Antonia Baehr. She is standing on a little pedestal, a black pedestal here (*A.B. demonstrates blocking on stage*). And at the beginning of the performance, she doesn't go stand there immediately.



"COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR SEVEN MINUTES",
Antonia Baehr in RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN, photo: Marc Damage

A.B.: First she goes to the left where there's a big black pedestal, and on top of it there's a TV. She switches it on, and an Antonia Baehr appears. And then she goes and stands on her little pedestal. Then the Antonia Baehr in the video tells the physically present one "Could you please laugh for seven minutes!" And she does it. After a while, the head in the video says "Stop, stop. It wasn't very convincing. Please start again." Or later on it's "Very good," or "You're laughing like a woman." At the end, she says "Thank you. Thank you." So Antonia Baehr stops laughing—if she can—and goes and switches off the monitor.
(Slide image is turned off.)

I.S.: So finally I get to ask you some questions. I want to ask you why this is a live performance. Why not a film?

A.B.: Well, the activity of the audience is part of this performance—that's why. And this activity also has an influence on what actually happens in it. Also, I wanted to make a piece about what actually happens in the audience, or in a normal theater audience. The audience boos, claps, sleeps and also laughs. And so in a way it's a piece that works like a mirror of the audience's activity. Or like feedback. You know, like when you film a TV monitor with your video camera, maybe like this kind of relationship between stage and audience...

I.S.: So the signal gets changed and sort of enhanced—more and more laughter accumulated—well, we'll come to that. My next question. Why did you choose to go back to a classical audience situation? Because a lot of performance art—well, I don't know if you would even call this performance art? Probably not. Would you call it choreography?

A.B.: Yes.

I.S.: Anyhow, in trying to do something about the space of the audience, artists have left the classical theater situation or rearranged the chairs in the theater space. And you're choosing this very frontal stage situation. Why?

A.B.: Well, I think I'm more interested in researching the conventions which our Western culture is based upon rather than rejecting them. I was interested in actually working with or about the fourth wall. The fourth wall actually has a really interesting history, which is still relevant for us today. During the reign of Louis XIV in the seventeenth century, ballet was flourishing. And you know how in ballet classes there's always a mirror, and you dance for the mirror? Actually you are dancing for the gaze of the king, for Louis XIV, who would be sitting in the loge in the front. And that's why ballet is so frontal.

Then when the bourgeoisie came to power, Diderot was the first to establish this term "fourth wall"; and he imagined the stage not as a representation of the city, but as the bourgeois living room. He also imagined a wall separating the audience—the auditorium—from the stage, and the auditorium as a space of voyeurs looking through a peephole in this imaginary wall at what's

happening on stage, where all the while the people on stage are acting as if they aren't seen by the audience. He talks about this in "Le fils naturel". Also, up to that time there were benches for the audience on stage, so it's also with Diderot that the benches got banished from the stage.

In RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN I'm not laughing for any imaginary king or physical king, or pretending that the audience is not there. However, there is such a thing as this invisible wall that separates the audience from me. And it's also quite strange to be alone on stage, laughing.

I.S.: But at least you bring your monitor, so you're not completely alone. What is the role of that monitor, and your act of cloning yourself in this particular piece that we saw? Does the person in the monitor come from another time?

A.B.: That's a good question, because it has two functions: One side of it is that it's the score for the laughter, so it builds a frame around my laughter. And we tried that piece without the monitor—me just going on stage and laughing for no reason, because the whole piece is actually not about jokes or comedy, but rather about laughter itself; so no reason for the laughter—and this laughing without any frame or reason was really strange for the audience, really disconcerting and uncomfortable. The contrary of contagion happened. So that's one function, and the other function is a play with preproduced and live events, because Antonia Baehr, the monitor, is pretending to say "Very good, very good" even though she doesn't know what I'm doing there.

I.S.: Yeah. So you're using it as if this monitor-person were really a person, really there, live.

I find it interesting that you choose to make the film image so small even though the person in the video has such authority over you. Were you afraid that you couldn't compete with the glamour of multimedia? (*Antonia laughs*)

A.B.: Actually, I must confess, it's the only time that I've used video in my live work, and ERIKA IN AMERIKA was the only time that I've used film in my live work (laughs). So yes, I think that human presence and video oscillate on different wavelengths. These two oscillations, these two wavelengths compete, and I'm also not such a big friend of the addition of different media, or of live presence plus film, plus, plus, plus...

I.S.: Okay, wavelengths...

A.B.: Well it's a little bit like when you're in a room and there's a tv running and there's people, and I never know where to focus my attention. There's really a competition there. I'd rather not put them together in one place.

I.S.: Yes. Usually people watch the media image. Don't they?

(*Both laugh*)

I.S.: Let's show the next piece. The next film is actually a film and not an installation, and it's an example of another relationship between performance and film. I made this video not with Antonia Baehr but with another friend, Evelyn Rüsseler, in 2008. It's called THE PITCH, and it's one uncut take, 17 minutes long. But we're going to show 2 excerpts, four minutes each. And just for those amongst you who aren't familiar with the term: in the film industry, a "pitch" is when you present a film idea to a producer.

(Excerpts from THE PITCH are projected.)



video still, THE PITCH, HD video, 17 min., Isabell Spengler, 2008
with Isabell Spengler and Evelyn Rüsseler

A.B.: So Isi, this was really a performance for the camera. It's totally uncut, and even the sound is not manipulated...

I.S.: Yes, but I think it spatially differs from a classical performance for the camera, in which the performer is usually located in front of the camera. So maybe it's a performance *with* camera. Because the stage is actually behind the camera, in the off-screen space. And the person we see on screen mirrors what's going on behind the camera by reacting to it ... or not. It's constructed quite differently from TELEPATHY, because here knowledge is withheld. In TELEPATHY EXPERIMENT I, the viewer has the overview and knows more than the performers on the stage—I mean on the screen (laughs)—here, the person on the screen knows and sees more than the viewers of the video.

A.B.: And what's the role of the audience?

I.S.: Well, the audience has the privilege of deciding if the pitch is a good idea or a bad idea, and they are sort of mirrored in this on-screen producer or listener, who does the same thing: judging the filmmaker. So it's as if the camera is turned around and instead of pointing at the actors it is pointed at the space "behind the scenes," at the producer of the film who usually never appears on screen. And this reversal happens before the film is even made, in the very first stages of the film's conceptualization. So, as part of this reversal process - or to turn things around once more - while pitching her idea, filmmaker is casting the producer as a possible actress for the film and is making a screen test of her.

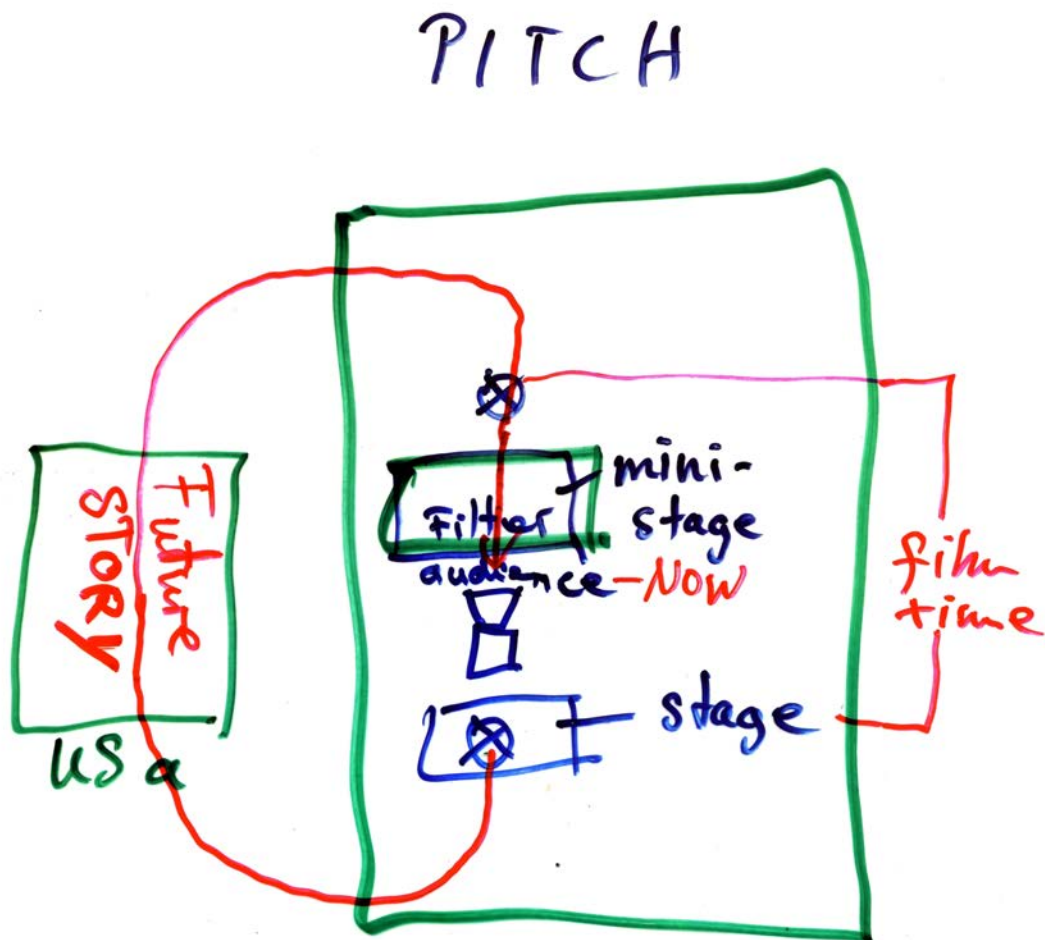


video still, THE PITCH, HD video, 17 min., Isabell Spengler, 2008
with Isabell Spengler and Evelyn Rüsseler

I.S.: So what's there to be judged—if the film happens mostly off screen and in the future and we see a screen test instead? We hear a verbal narration of the plot, and the filmmaker stages all kinds of special effects and inserts little models in the space between the camera and the producer. Now the audience can judge a number of things: if the models and special effects correspond and match or successfully illustrate the story they hear, if the producer is a good actress, if the filmmaker is a good filmmaker. And ultimately they are deciding if the filmmaker is talking about a film to be made in the future and trying to raise money for it, or if in fact the video documentation of the pitching session they are seeing right now is identical to the film described—which would mean that the film is already made or gets made in the process of its description.

A.B.: Maybe you can draw it on the overhead projector, how time and space and the audience relate, because it's quite complex.

(At the overhead projector I.S. draws a diagram of the set of THE PITCH.)



space-time diagram of THE PITCH, drawing by Isabell Spengler

I.S.: I will use a blue pen for the space and a red one for the time. (Using blue pen) Okay, we have a camera, and then there's somebody behind the camera—so that's the stage. And then we have someone in front of the camera. And we have in between many layers of stuff. I call this a mini stage, because it's illustrating what's happening on the bigger stage. Or maybe it's also a filter. And where's the audience? The audience has no space. The audience has to squeeze in here, in the middle.

A.B.: And what about the time?

I.S.: (Using red pen) And now the story goes all the way around, through the future here, when the film was actually made, and through the reaction of this producer who maybe has to produce it or maybe is already acting in it, and then back to here, which is now. And these two people here are in the film time or past, back in 2008, when the video was recorded.

So one could say it's a science fiction film of sorts ... but it's actually more complicated, since the science fiction and its making-of documentation are happening simultaneously ...

A.B.: So like *SYNCPPOINT* and *TELEPATHY*, it also raises the question of synchronicity.

I.S.: Yeah, it's a question of matching. There are three different times and three different spaces in which the film is happening, all superimposed on top of each other. I will use a green pen to draw the imaginary spaces in which the film is happening. And the imaginary spaces partially coincide with the actual blue spaces of the film set and mini stage, which is an aquarium. The special effects and miniature models were staged inside an aquarium. So we have the mini stage, which is a model of two other stages, the bigger stage where the pitching session happens, so the actual film set of *THE PITCH* and the future film set in the "US a country," where the filmmaker and the producer are acting in the *Easy Rider* film story, as we learn from the plot narration. And the question is: do they match, and how can they be translated into one another?

... and this is where the language of the narration comes in: the filmmaker speaks from behind the camera and uses all kinds of word games, puns, metaphors, homonyms and synonyms to jump between and match the three different spaces and times as well as the roles she and the producer play in them. So ultimately she's committing a performative speech act with the goal to liquify the roles and identities of filmmaker and producer by constantly switching the way the two are named and addressed. And since the audience is mirrored in the person of the producer, it can participate in this process as well. They really are the true producers and makers of the film in the end.

A.B.: Maybe I should compare that to *ERIKA IN AMERIKA*, no?



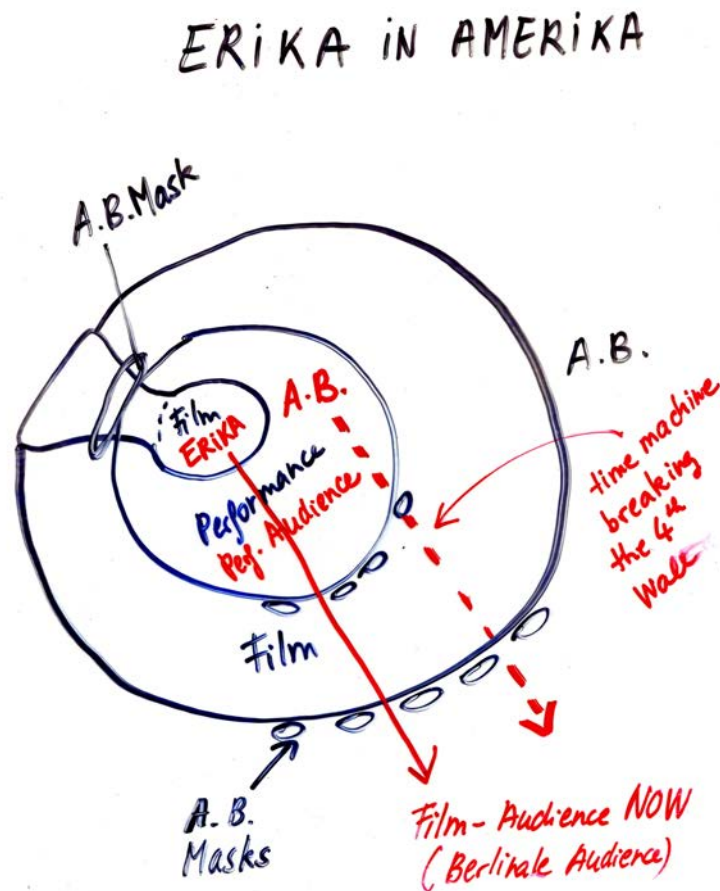
film still of Erika puppet wearing mask representing Antonia Baehr,
ERIKA IN AMERIKA, 16mm film by Antonia Baehr, 1998

I.S.: YES.

A.B.: So in ERIKA IN AMERIKA, as you remember, there was a puppet film projected on the blackboard, and everybody had to wear masks representing Antonia Baehr. There was actually an audience present during the film shooting.

I.S.: So this (*places overhead transparency onto projector*) was that.

A.B.: Yes, thank you. This is a bit of a “boxing principle.” We put the animation film here (*in the center*); and around it was the performance audience; and here is the 16mm film recording the live performance and film projection; and here you are at the Berlinale 2010. How does the time work? The time goes from the puppet film to you. And these little dots here are what we talked about when we discussed “breaking the fourth wall.” It’s when the Antonia Baehr from the past, from 1998, talks to you today, yes? And these oval things are the masks representing Antonia Baehr that everybody has to wear. Erika, the puppet, is wearing one; and that audience is wearing one; and that audience too.



space-time diagram of ERIKA IN AMERIKA, drawing by Antonia Baehr

I.S.: No, they're not wearing masks!

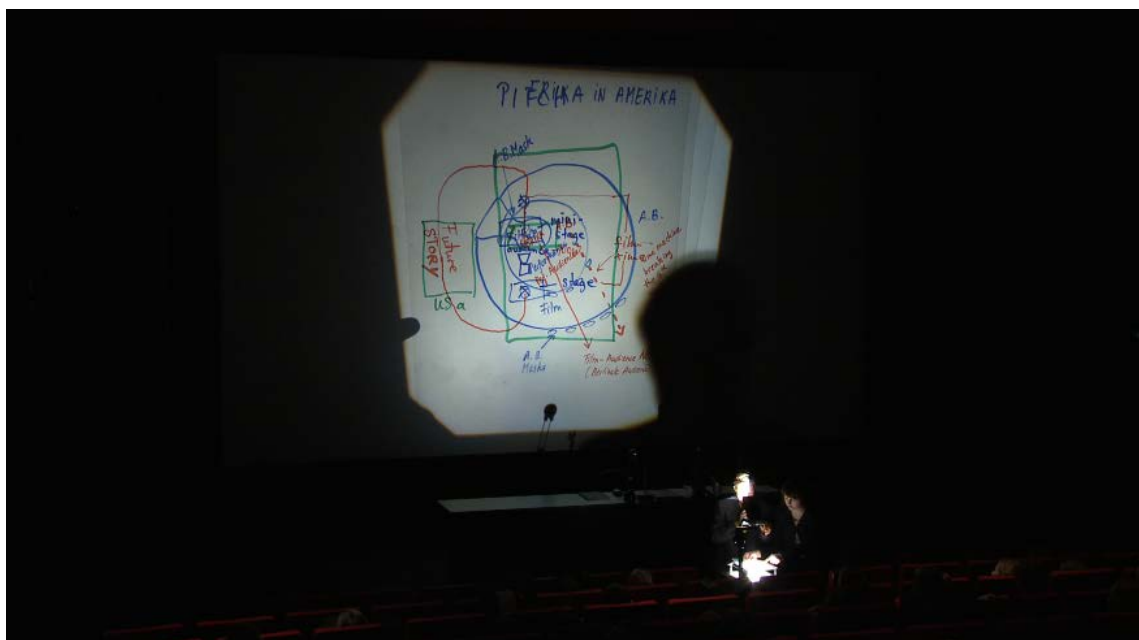
A.B.: No, no, not the Berlinale audience here, this one, the performance audience in 1998.

I.S.: Why not? Why not?

A.B.: Okay, you want me to say why?

I.S.: Yes!

A.B.: Okay, well maybe they are wearing masks as well, but more in an imaginary way. Because they might identify with the heroine, and in this sense they might also be wearing masks representing Antonia Baehr. And maybe also because they want to stay anonymous. So, yes? Do you like the answer?.



(I.S. puts the diagram from THE PITCH on top of the diagram from ERIKA IN AMERIKA, superimposing the two. She continues to superimpose other diagrams.)

I.S.: Very good answer.

A.B.: Good. And now we would like to compare THE PITCH with ERIKA IN AMERIKA because there are some similarities there. Also because *The Pitch* is a small model world—“*Modellwelt*”. In ERIKA IN AMERIKA the puppet animation is in the same place as the aquarium, which is where all these little special effects happen...

I.S.: Yes, we pretty much already explained how that happens.

A.B.: Yes.

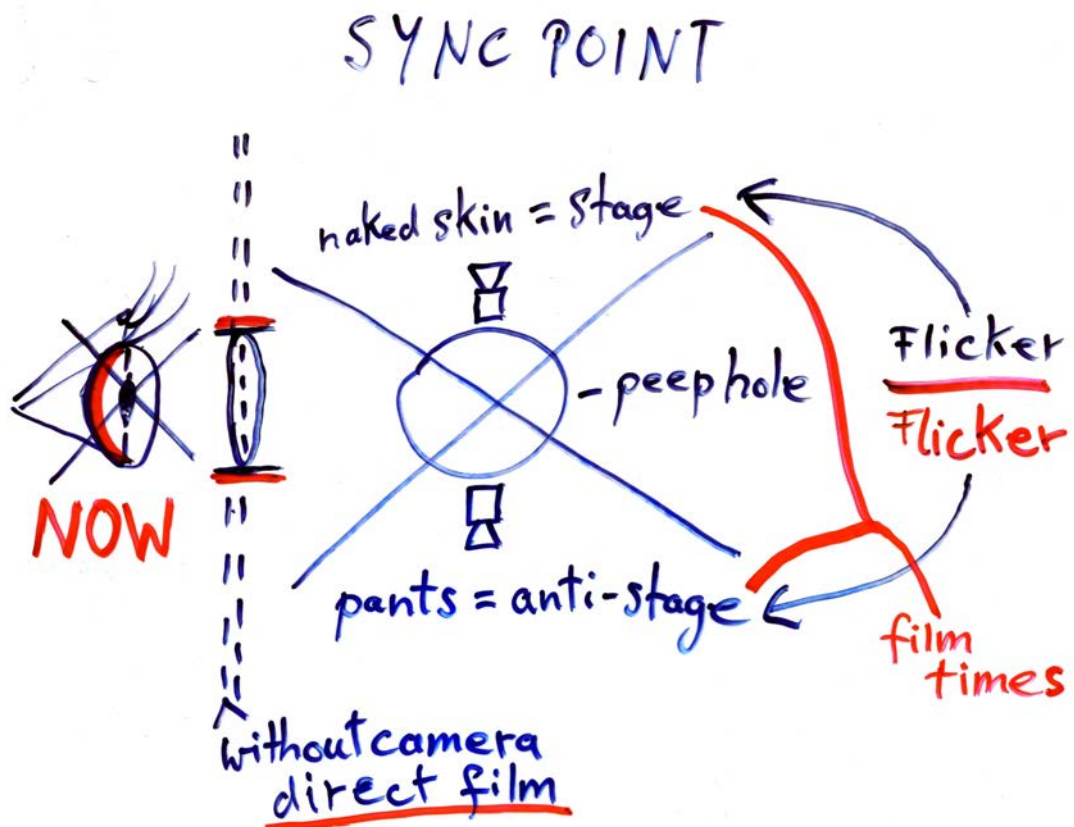
I.S.: But you see, there is something outside... (*points to empty space next to the word "Future" on the edge of the diagrams*)

(Audience laughs)

A.B.: Here is the little mini stage in both films, and also what is similar is that something remains in that time—time being red—something remains unfinished, or for the future, or never done, because the money ran out or because maybe the producer doesn't give the money. But the big difference between ERIKA IN AMERIKA and THE PITCH is that in ERIKA IN AMERIKA it's all in different times and spaces—the animation film has been done in a previous time, before it was projected on a blackboard, and before it happened as "film on film." And in THE PITCH, everything happens at the same time ... and space. And film production itself becomes the subject matter of the film itself. So there's a collapse of time and space, identity, production (making), and showing.

I.S.: (*Exchanges diagrams on the overhead projector*) Great. So we have to move on...

A.B.: We have to move on, because we're short on time.



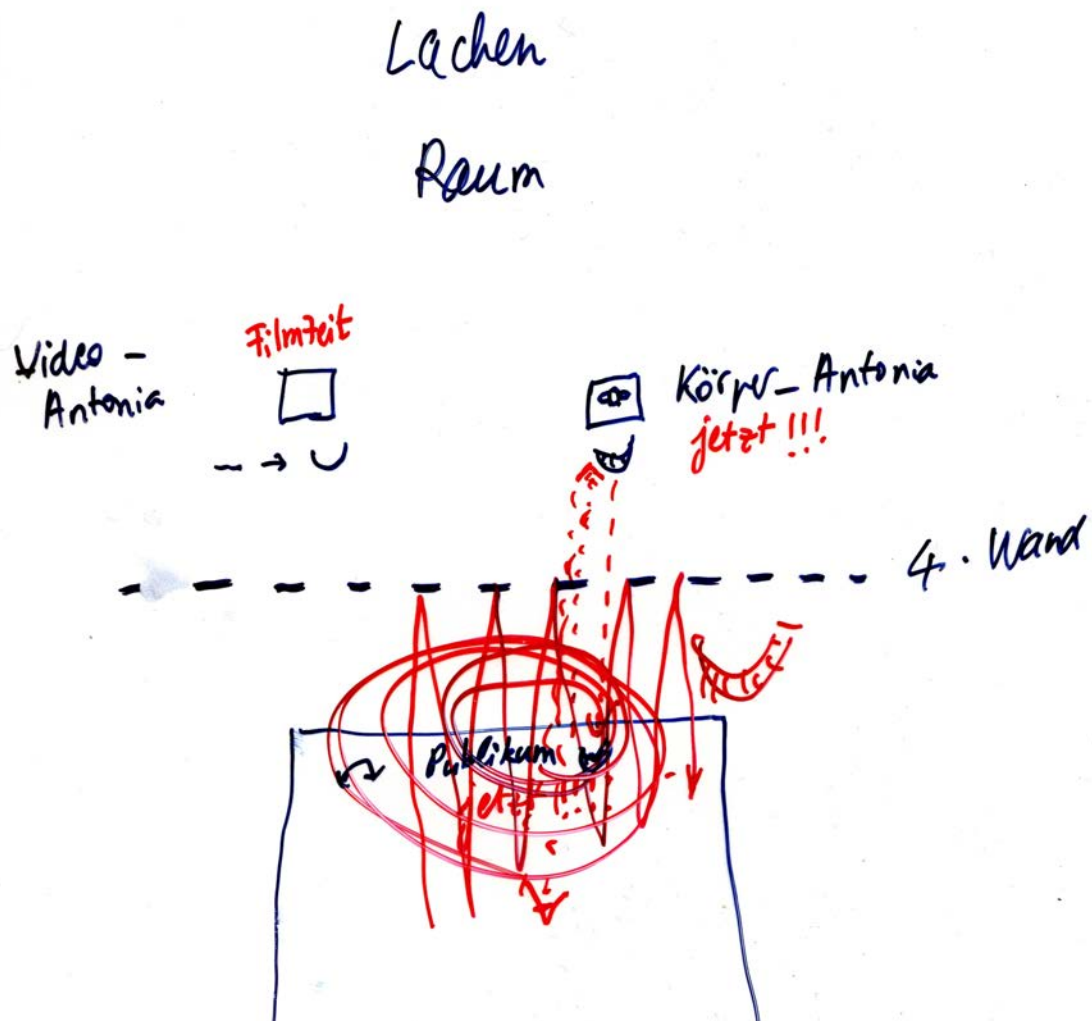
space-time diagram for SYNCPOINT, drawing by Isabell Spengler

I.S.: We can just say that the diagram of SYNCPOINT was a comparison between the anatomy and workings of the human eye with the construction of the film in time and space.

A.B.: Do you have the one from last week?

I.S.: Yes, I have it here...

A.B.: Maybe we can just put them all on top of each other (*superimposes all the diagrams in one big pile*) joining them at the fourth wall. ... Oh, and here's *Laugh*.



space-time diagram for RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN, drawing by Antonia Baehr

I.S.: Maybe you should show *Laugh* briefly ... or, well, we'll do it in 3D!

(Audience laughs)

A.B.: Yes! But actually *what is the fourth wall in our understanding?* And with the piece **COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR SEVEN MINUTES** I really ask myself "is it an electrical spark, is it a brick wall with a peephole, a glass wall,

a mirror. What is it actually? So we would like to figure this out through a test arrangement.

(I.S. begins setting things up on stage)

I.S.: *(To A.B.)* I can be your assistant.

A.B.: *(To I.S.)* So we need a monitor. So we'll set up COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR SEVEN MINUTES, and through actually trying it out, we'll find out what the fourth wall actually is in this piece. Great. So that's the TV. *(To audience)* We won't do it frontally toward you so you can have a better understanding of this question, and we will put the fourth wall here and the audience here.



Three-dimensional model of COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR SEVEN MINUTES, Antonia Baehr gazes through peephole in the "fourth wall" (as a brick wall).

A.B.: Yes. And now we need a fourth wall. Yes, here. In between the stage and the audience, who is in the dark. So is the fourth wall just a brick wall? That would be if I'm laughing all by myself, and they can't see me, and they can't hear me. So the answer is no. But is it perhaps a peephole? Yes, like in the story of "Le fils naturel" by Diderot, where they would watch me through the peephole as if voyeurs, as if they wouldn't be there, and as if we were in two separate worlds. Maybe we can see if this is the case if we have something for the laughter.

I.S.: Yes. *(I.S. gives A.B. a green ball to represent the laughter)*

A.B.: ...to see what happens with that laughter. So let's say this ball is the laughter. Great. So this one says to this one, "Could you please laugh for seven minutes." So she starts laughing. "Hahaha." Okay. Let's say they just watch me through that peephole laughing like this. They might. And actually it

happens in some performances, because sometimes those people don't laugh at all. And they just watch me laughing. They're totally quiet and enjoying it like a concert. I don't exactly know what happens in their heads, but it does happen. But it's more probable that there will be some laughter in the audience as well. So then I would say that it's not the peephole in the brick wall. But maybe, for example, I laugh, and this person catches the contagion from the laughter, and that person starts to laugh too.

I.S.: Like a net.



Three-dimensional model of COULD YOU PLEASE LAUGH FOR SEVEN MINUTES, Spengler and Baehr throw a ball representing the laughter over the "fourth wall".

A.B.: Yes, like a ping-pong net, thank you. Let's try it out in our test arrangement.

(Spengler and Baehr throw a ball representing the laughter over the "fourth wall" represented as a ping-pong net.)

A.B.: So, my laughter produces their laughter. Let's say just one person in the audience laughs. I can hear it because when I'm doing this piece, the audience is in the dark, but I can hear the audience. So this one person's laughter makes me laugh some more and makes the person laugh some more.

And sometimes that person has very funny laughter, so this one has to laugh and boing, boing, boing, person after person in the audience gets infected by the laughter ... yes, this kind of thing happens. And in that case, when I hear that happen, I'm just opening my mouth (*opens mouth and makes no sound*), and I become, in a way, a placeholder for the activity of the audience. And I'm just enjoying the concert. So Isi, in that case, what do you think the fourth wall is?

I.S.: Maybe a sheet of glass, sound proof glass.

A.B.: Sound proof glass? Okay...

I.S.: Or a mirror.

A.B.: Or a mirror. Yeah, because they see themselves in the mirror, and I'm just there to reflect their image. Because also through my laughter on stage and through the fact that it's not in life but on a stage, those people become very conscious of their laughter. They laugh naturally, and then they think "Ooh, my laughter is really funny."

(Everyone laughs)

A.B.: But sometimes it happens like this: it's just me...

I.S.: ...and you become conscious of—

A.B.: —of my laughter. Yes. Because it is very artificial to be alone on stage and laugh. Perhaps it's just a mirror that is turning all the time like this, and I would also suggest that it's a spark. An electrical spark.

I.S.: We don't really have a 3-D model of a spark.

A.B.: No.

I.S.: But we have to move on.

A.B.: What I would say is that in every performance, in every live actualization of that score in a performance, the fourth wall becomes something else. And it can even transform throughout the performance itself. And now I would be really curious about what the fourth wall is in THE PITCH.

I.S.: Okay. So... let's rearrange.

A.B.: ...and maybe I'm your assistant?

I.S.: Yeah. In THE PITCH nobody's laughing. Take all the laughs off and ... um ...

(A.B. rearranges the three-dimensional models on the stage)

I.S.: Maybe we can use the television as the aquarium. And ... we have a camera! I say now that the camera is behind the audience, because they don't see it. However, it's kind of in the same place.

A.B.: Okay.

I.S.: We have a person behind the camera who is a voice and hands, for the most part. (*I.S. positions a tripod with a newspaper megaphone, and gloves in the place where the camera operator would stand*) So, I mean, these gloves should be longer, and they should be able to reach around throughout all the different layers of the picture space. Then we have a story. I think that's it, no?

A.B.: Yes. Maybe you can take the red yarn for the story, because in German you say "*Der rote Faden der Geschichte*" (the red thread of the story). So it starts there?



Three-dimensional model of THE PITCH, Berlinale 2010.
Spengler and Baehr demonstrate the path of the story with red yarn.

I.S.: Yeah, it starts in the position of the camera operator. And then it goes all the way around to the future, but also to this producer, because obviously the voice person and the producer are in the same time-space. From the producer we get some reactions, and then the story goes through the illustration on the mini-stage. So can you give me some objects representing the characters? (*A.B. hands I.S. objects*) Then the story stays mainly here—in the heads of the viewers.

(*Antonia adjusts objects in aquarium carefully...*)

I.S.: (To Antonia) ... you don't have to be that precise Then we have the magic time machine, right?

A.B.: Yes. So with this time machine, I would like you to show us how time works in this piece.

I.S.: Yes, it goes alongside the story, I'd say. You're going from a moment when this was recorded to ... basically jumping ... to here, the producer—she's

in the same space. Then it comes back to this magical moment where the future gets turned into the now, the present, which would be here: on the mini-stage of the aquarium. So the future is sort of surrounded or framed by the past.

A.B.: So is the aquarium really the fourth wall?

I.S.: Well, it depends on *for whom*. I think it depends on the perspective. Because for an audience, generally the screen is the fourth wall—

A.B.: —in film anyway, you mean?

I.S.: Yes, so in this film it would be here. (*I.S. holds a sheet of glass in front of the lens of the camera model in the test arrangement*) But I think that the aquarium is a representation of that same fourth wall, over here—between the producer and the audience—from the perspective of the producer looking back at the audience. Because the two are mirroring one another, I mean the audience and the producer.... So the fourth wall is enclosed by the two sheets of glass of the aquarium and becomes a three-dimensional room rather than a two-dimensional sheet of glass. A room looked at and judged, or disputed from two opposite perspectives.

The on-screen producer has the opposite perspective than the audience. But she's not just a mirror of the audience as in RIRE/LAUGH/LACHEN, because she's also showing us what's going on behind that audience. There is a third party present in the off-screen space: the filmmaker. So maybe the producer is like a rear-view mirror, or a side rear-view mirror on a car—which you can use to look at yourself, but which is meant to enable you to look behind you and around the corner into your blind spot. I mean, THE PITCH is a road movie after all. So ... (*to audience*) I think that's the appropriate metaphor for the function of the on-screen producer in this piece. And that's the end of our presentation.

(*Audience applause*)

I.S.: (*To A.B.*) Do you want to read a conclusion?

A.B.: (*To audience*) Would you like to hear the conclusion?

(*Audience agrees*)

I.S.: They do! (*To audience*) You have a lot of patience, unlike Antonia Baehr, who never finishes her films. (*To A.B.*) Do you have a microphone?

A.B.: No. But these things have to be read with microphones?

I.S.: Yes.

A.B.: So you saw that we are interested in creating specific imaginary spaces, and for this purpose we intertwine spaces in different ways: namely stage-, filmed-, cinematic-, audience-, and imaginary-space.

We are using film depicting performances in one way or another, and live-performance utilizing film or video on stage in order to address the role, the space and the identity of the audience.

I.S.: Rather than establishing an unbroken illusory space on screen or on stage, which is the basis for "breaking the fourth wall" in the classical sense of the term, the construction of our films and performances in time and space is a conceptual part of our work, which we lay open and share with the audience.

We investigate the subject of the fourth wall from within. We present specific contents in order to change, transform and play with the quality of the fourth wall.

In art history there have been attempts to get rid of the fourth wall altogether and to radically change the spacial relationship between audience and artwork and by performing between the seats of the auditorium or by leaving the theater space completely.

In Expanded Cinema, Valie Export's works *Tap and Touch Cinema* and *Ping Pong. Ein Film zum Spielen – ein Spielfilm*, both from 1968, are very good examples.

And while we love some of these works and consider them still important, we don't think the fourth wall is an evil institution that condemns the viewer to passive consumption of the presented content, and that needs to be destroyed in order to allow dialogue. We believe the audience is actively involved when perceiving all kinds of art work.

A.B.: We work with and about the fourth wall—inside classical theater and classical cinema situations, and to use these situations as a frame for our investigations.

We create a third thing outside of ourselves, the authors, and outside of the audience as the recipient, a thing that we can all look at and talk about on even grounds.

So, the opposition between the author as active and the recipient as passive is questioned.

(To audience) Dismissed.

(Q & A follows)