

ELKE MARHÖFER



PRENDAS – NGANGAS – ENQUISOS – MACHINES  
{EACH PART WELCOMES THE OTHER WITHOUT SAYING}

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Valand Academy

University of Gothenburg

Vasagatan 50, 40530 Göteborg



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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## Media Ecologies

In one of his signature moments on screen, Werner Herzog narrates the cruelty of nature. In a clip that can be easily found online, Herzog releases while filming *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) his dark ecological meditations about the environment; the plants, animals, and life all just expressing an echo of (sort of) Darwinian natural selection styled meditations about survival through fornication and death and also what Herzog calls the “misery of existence.”<sup>1</sup> It is an odd meditation, which at first sight seems powerful due to the style and voice of Herzog. Yet, it turns out to be extremely problematic as soon as one considers more carefully what is actually being said. Herzog claims that nature is “prehistoric,” still in its formation, like looking for a historical period; however, nature is in fact already set within a historical narrative that defines it as prehistoric. Any attempt to speak of nature is already inside a specific discourse that sets it in relation to humans and culture. This seems to be partly ignored, at least for a fleeting moment of exaggeration. Such a scene also prescribes the Americas as “prehistoric”: displacement of indigenous people, plants, natural resources by way of massive operations of military, scientific and technological nature since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. European treaties such as the one of Tordesillas narrativized not only maps but also the way that time and history was perceived. They outlined the contours of what they defined as “prehistoric times,” the “arrival of modernization,” and colonized areas as European “discoveries.” Even the Herzog film *Fitzcarraldo* dealt with access to rubber growing areas (this also being a historically significant reference, considering the massive abuse of indigenous populations in the Amazon during the “rubber boom” in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century).

Despite Herzog’s trademark provocative style, one wonders whether his rather nonhuman stance still implies a sense of anthropocentrism by suggesting a sense of melancholy about nature as a “state of nature” – pre-social, ignorant of any social conventions or aesthetics, and mostly about biospheric cruelty of plants and animals. While avoiding the romantic idea of nature, it somehow gets entangled in the latter.

Contrary to that scene presented by Herzog, Elke Marhöfer’s film *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* follows a different path by illuminating an alternative ontology of film. In short, Marhöfer does not prescribe a prehistoric nature, but one that is post-historical in



1 On Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xQyQnXrLb0>





a couple of ways.<sup>2</sup> While not forgetting or leaving history behind, it realizes that all sorts of natural formations are already historically conditioned, whether through scientific use of materials or the cruel histories of colonialism. Rather than the narrative history invented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it has a cinematic and media aesthetic quality that offers an audiovisual impression of time where natural and social history conjoin. It is a film of the nonhuman that is embedded in human history.

In other words, if Elke Marhöfer's film is about the Anthropocene, it curiously and fittingly hardly ever shows any humans on screen, except for a few shots. It is a film that moves in and out of human reach; it touches human hands, animals, ecologies of multiple scales, all entangled in a filmic rhythm that forms the audiovisual ontology. It attempts to be a noninvasive investigation, which instead moves in and across the rhythmicity of the events, mapping their duration.

In this short essay, I want to unfold themes that are present in Marhöfer's work, especially in *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines*, and tease out how it speaks to the Anthropocene debate by way of specific filmic techniques that show how the planetary concept is also working on micro levels.<sup>3</sup> These dimensions aren't necessarily always "smaller" but cut across the big-small-binary and thereby reveal aesthetic dimensions of reality as ways to address historical contexts such as colonialism.<sup>4</sup> One could almost say that it refers to the famous Jacques Rancière thought about politics of aesthetics – or how aesthetics is at the center of the political as it divides the reality in perceptual blocks.<sup>5</sup> It gives orientation and guides, and in this sense, informs an aesthetic sensibility that is formative of ethical and political divisions too. It is of course clear that Marhöfer's main reference point is Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophy, however the philosophical concepts are discussed in relation to issues of aesthetics as embedded in the material reality. One could even say they are embedded in the natural history of the planet.<sup>6</sup>

I want to address this theme in the two following sections.

<sup>2</sup> See also Vilem Flusser's use of the term to refer to the programmed nature of history as post-history. Vilem Flusser, *Post-History*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> On Anthropocene and cinematic culture, see McKenzie Wark, "Anthropo{mise-en-s}cène", Public Seminar-blog, December 10, 2014, <http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/12/anthropomise-en-scene/>.

<sup>4</sup> This "micro" refers to the micropolitics of Deleuze and Guattari. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Recently there has been an increasing amount of research on the relations of "natural history" and media (art) history. See especially Douglas Kahn, *Earth Sound, Earth Signal. Energies and Earth Magnitude in the Arts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013). Jussi Parikka, *A Geology of Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

## I

*prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* deals with the two-fold theme of “ecology of practice” and “practice of ecology.” The film is situated in an ecological relation including both, the filmic aspect as part of the epistemological mapping and the environmental aspect as one of multiple layers of human and nonhuman traits that forms an assemblage. In the most subtle moments of the film that has no voice-over and is of course in many ways not a narrative film, one can almost detect an implied trace, sometimes through longer shots, sometimes quick, almost abrupt cuts.

Across the cuts and articulated by them, there are hints of various trails, that in most instances could indicate the existence of colonial networks of labor, material and the mapping of the global South. In this case it is the Americas and other places around the world marked by their role as providers of resources necessary for building modern societies, such as tin, rubber, etc. Another vital resource is human and animal labor. The film makes this visible in some of the shots showing the animal labor as much as the hands that prepare the horse, which of course is also a sign of the transported labor force from the European continent. The domesticated animals belong to the post-historical as much as the infrastructures of modernity that at times appear in the film; the most obvious example being the railroad as a sign of colonial infrastructure for transporting goods and more. Such systems organize, synchronize space and time, indicating the sort of programmability Flusser analyses too. If time is increasingly programmed – and we take this as one key element of colonial policies – then subjectivity is programmed too by way of its relation to infrastructure: “The apparatuses that program us are synchronized. For example: the transport apparatus is synchronized with the industrial apparatus, and the administrative apparatus with the entertainment one. The synchronicity is the rhythm that marks our lives.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, the question of rhythm becomes a way to unfold political questions regarding how subjects, objects, environments, animals and people are being governed. “[I]nvasion is a structure not an event”<sup>8</sup> and we can add: invasion is an aesthetics and structured by way of media (technologies) and time.

The film’s variety of shots ranging from close-ups of an animal, the ground, a plant to the landscape becomes a way of entangling scales. The film stock material – originally shot on 16 mm and later transferred to digital – becomes more visible as the surface effect. The light illuminates the scene but at times is displayed itself too.<sup>9</sup> While

7 Flusser, *Post-History*, 59.

8 Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Continuum, 1999), 2.

9 On the cultural practices of light, see Sean Cubitt, *The Practice of Light. A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Print to Pixels* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014).



the film is recording the scene, it becomes a condition in its existence as audiovisual. It is this epistemology through the media of film that is part of the colonial mapping of the global South – South America, Central America, Africa, etc., which shaped an anthropological insight to various cultures and natural environments, and forms a post-colonial approach regarding its presence in this narration without words. Those geographical places are also sites where knowledge of natural worlds of light and color slowly transform into the massive industrial production of audiovisuality and color. The organic color extracted from natural sources is an important reference point in the history of visuality, but is increasingly superseded by the chemical industry.<sup>10</sup>

Marhöfer is aware of this dual role, this co-conditioning of the technological media and the anthropological knowledge, the media and the natural, the light, colors and their artificial afterlife in the Industrial Age. However, she is also interested in how to detour and detach from the normalized power relations of the film medium and to stimulate another set of forces of art and filming, lived experience, conceptual abstractions and alternative knowledge, to paraphrase her ideas. This means resurrecting an awareness of different rhythms and their relations to colors.

It is as if the film moves along with the rhythms of nature. The wind, the plants, the animals are themselves rhythmic elements that are paired up with the film and shot as rhythms that relate to breathing. Again, Marhöfer is aware of this co-conditioning of the technological and nature. In her words:

It breathes and never keeps one movement or one affect throughout, but each affect and each movement, each bending of my mind is turning into an actual movement recorded by the camera. It connects and switches assemblages. Producing symbiotic sensibilities in motion. It turns into a machinic companion.<sup>11</sup>

This companion is a body formed by the entanglement of the different rhythmic worlds. It responds to Deleuze's note that "[a]ny two forces, being unequal, constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship," introducing it into this specific artistic context.<sup>12</sup> Broadly speaking, the issue of rhythm has been recognized in media studies and cultural theory, and it is also relevant here, as an underpinning factor of how such heterogeneous bodies (film-nature, nature-film) are formed.<sup>13</sup>

This film perception is what forms a specific way of approaching the theme we have opted to call the Anthropocene. In short, the term

<sup>10</sup> See Cubitt, *The Practice of Light*, 131. See also Michael Taussig, "What Color is Sacred?" *Critical Inquiry* 39 (2006), 28–51

<sup>11</sup> Elke Marhöfer, *Ecologies of Practices and Thinking*, doctoral thesis draft, June 15, 2015, 40–41.

<sup>12</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 37.

<sup>13</sup> See the special issue on rhythm: Julian Henriques, Milla Tiainen and Pasi Valiaho, "Rhythm, Movement, Embodiment – special issue," *Body & Culture* September & December 20 no. 3–4 (2014).



functions as a sort of placeholder in the midst of the scientific debates about whether or not we have entered a new geological era that is characterized by the massive human involvement on a planetary scale. This refers to agriculture, chemistry, geoengineering and many other ways in which the soil and the atmosphere are record(ing)s of humans living on the planet. In recent debates different periodizations regarding the beginning of the Anthropocene were suggested. Did it start thousands of years ago with the introduction of agriculture or rather in the 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific acceleration that had a new chemical impact on the earth (both in agriculture, industries and warfare)? Or perhaps, as most recently suggested by the Anthropocene Working Group, it only started properly with the “Great Acceleration” in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century?<sup>14</sup> However, in order to put things into a political and historical perspective and more apt to the focus of our film, it could also be dated back to the early modern era and the colonization of the Americas with its brutal history that brought about the colonial trade routes and the unequal power relations not merely between humans and the earth, but between Europeans and the indigenous tribes that were deemed inferior.<sup>15</sup> As Sean Cubitt and many others demonstrate this is still happening; the neo-colonial displacement or misuse of indigenous land continues to be part of the current resource mapping and extraction across the planet.<sup>16</sup>

## II

*prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* teases out an ecology of practices. It refers to the specific Afro-Cuban practices of healing, a sort of a cultural technique that relates to both histories of colonialism and slavery.<sup>17</sup> And it also practices ecology, bringing ecological and environmental relations, humans and nonhumans, closer together in specific situations, perceptions and affects. It is in the context of such percepts and affects that humans and nonhumans are gathered into one body in interaction.<sup>18</sup>

14 Jan Zalasiewicz et al., “When Did the Anthropocene Begin? A Mid-Twentieth Century Boundary Level is Stratigraphically Optimal,” *Quaternary International* (2014), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.quaint.2014.11.045>.

15 Dana Luciano, “The Inhuman Anthropocene,” *Avidly – A Los Angeles Review of Books Channel*, March 22, 2015, <http://avidly.lareviewofbooks.org/2015/03/22/the-inhuman-anthropocene/>

16 Sean Cubitt, “Decolonizing Ecomedia,” *Cultural Politics* 10 no. 3 (2014): 275–286.

17 On cultural techniques, see the special issue: Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Jussi Parikka and Ilinca Iurascu (eds.), “Cultural Techniques-special issue,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 30 no. 6 (2013).

18 The terms are used as suggested in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994). “Percepts are no longer perceptions; they are independent of a state of those who experience them. Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself.” (164). I see this characterization pertinent both to a media technological understanding of percept and affect and also to an understanding of the structuring role of power that constitutes subjectivity by flowing through us, independent and yet entangled with us.



Regarding the debates about the Anthropocene, Bronislaw Szerszynski outlined how we might be able to consider not merely histories and memories of the Anthropocene but the way the world itself incorporates and expresses a memory through its various processes.<sup>19</sup> He relates this to theories of self-organization where the systematic qualities of natural “things” (i.e. systemic processes) are based on a memory through which they change their state and life unfolds. This applies also to inorganic systems, including geological ones. This viewpoint allows us to think of the planet’s inorganic life as wholly entangled with the biosphere, and to elaborate a position of nonhuman memory that is constantly expressed, both on a local and planetary scale.

The various systems and subsystems form a living entity that is in resonance across different scales. This applies to geochemical formations, the atmosphere and many other magnitudes that thereby reveal their dynamic qualities. They unfold towards the future but are prescribed by their memory, which can be said to be their virtual potentiality. Szerszynski reminds us that this is also a long-term memory: a memory of planet Earth and memory’s outer-planetary conditions and yet of a constant relevance to us as entangled in such systemic qualities.<sup>20</sup> Every thing across the scale of being is embedded in a dynamic, rhythmic existence.

It is also an archive of sorts – or at least it stimulates the discussion concerning memory and the archive that we have been witnessing over the past few decades. It relates to the wider sense of archivability, which opens up anew when we think of nature, the world as media that already does the work of active inscription and active memory:

The archive works against itself – this is the *mal d’archive* [Derrida...] Whether it is the very strata of the rock, or an archive created by humans in order to record Earth’s memories and what it knows, the archive’s very form of resistance to forgetting makes a more final forgetting possible – the hiding or destruction of the archive. The closed archive of the solid body of the Earth is now being opened but at the same time ransacked.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, this subtle imbalance that we call the Anthropocene signals a sort of temporality surfacing at certain moments. In *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* it is teased out by scenes of animal and plant life; a memory on screen, in things, in relations. The world becomes an issue that can only be dealt with by way of understanding it as media, time and as memory. Unlike the nostalgia for a “prehistoric” nature this very different approach is interested in summoning a

<sup>19</sup> Bronislaw Szerszynski, “The Anthropocene and the Memory of the Earth”, paper at the conference *The Thousand Names of Gaia: From the Anthropocene to the Age of the Earth*, Casa de Rui Barbosa, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 15–19 September 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.



complex set of human and nonhuman times as an “archive” in which the Anthropocene takes place.

Another philosophical approach that relates to the same question is put forward by Andrew Murphie. He addresses the situation by way of Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy, perceiving the world as a medium.<sup>22</sup> This view acknowledges that our usual fields of film, media and communications should not be set against a backdrop of a world of nonmediation. Instead, Murphie describes media as something that runs through the world as an ontogenetic process. As such, it resonates with recent readings of process philosophy and relationality, such as that of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, outlining a way to understand the dynamics of nature as parallel to the work of media.<sup>23</sup> This refers to the ontogenetic force of both media and nature as constant processes of differentials that mark a difference, rather than just passively registering it. It also corresponds closely to Marhöfer’s thinking that filmic material and natural processes should not be conflated but treated as contrasting counterpoints in a co-determining interaction. They merge into dynamic bodies of knowing and feeling, of affects in media environments where the media is not reduced to merely being the film.

In other contexts I talked about “insect media” and the silent, minor history of animals and technology especially as it pertains to the past 150 years of technological modernity.<sup>24</sup> This approach outlines the ways in which natural formations and animals such as insects have been included in the technological imagination and sometimes even design plans. We can, however, adapt an approach as broad as Murphie suggests; to unfold the situation of the world as media in order to be able to appreciate the audiovisual rhythm of its dynamic life. This brings both a sense of vital life to film and media to nature. Marhöfer’s work is a development of this vitality by way of situated practices of ecology. Such a practice is based on staging encounters and creating events. Rather than being a laboratory practice in the sense of being removed from the world, it takes the world as its stage to be framed, reframed, and embodied by the movement that becomes a catalyst for the filmic work. This is where the references to anthropological research on nonwestern epistemologies – such as Viveiros de Castro’s work – become extended by way of this cinematic media form. The moving image comes to life through rhythm and observes the organization of the postcolonial spaces: these are not prehistoric, but post-historical in how they are constantly lived through various historical and temporal realities both human and nonhuman.



22 Andrew Murphie, “The World as Medium”, unpublished article manuscript, March 30, 2015, forthcoming.

23 Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act: Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

24 Jussi Parikka, *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines  
 {each part welcomes the other  
 without saying}

1.

A membrane trembles where the everyday and the immanent touch, separating and at once connecting them. It permits the senseless routine of everyday life and the imperceptible stillness of immanent life to give way to one another, to communicate. The porous membrane is an active conduit between acknowledged (everyday) and unacknowledged (immanent) forces in human lives. Passing through it is indeterminate and like so many anomalous sensations little attention is devoted to it. We avoid lingering in or near this membrane because it cannot be readily processed to conclusion through language and reasoning, growing and receding as it does at the limits of sensation. It is this membrane Elke Marhöfer allows us to inhabit for 25 minutes in her film *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines {each part welcomes the other without saying}*.

The everyday, the day-to-day, the ho-hum routine of everyday life. This is what lies on one side of the membrane Marhöfer explores. It is the bound-to tedium of going about the day, the live-long day, which interests her in this film. Thus the domestic shots – of domestic plants, domestic animals, a domestic man, and a domestic state. The latter is visible only in her shots aboard a train that runs from Havana to the neighboring province of Matanzas, and in the yellow plastic collar of a horse's wagon harness. The everyday Marhöfer presents us with is one of domestic stillness, where life is so mundane it literally goes without saying. No one speaks in this film, and given that Cuban households can be intense places, this is notable. The cart driver quietly harnesses his horse, then softly bathes its steaming back at the end of a shift. The horse is noiseless. The shots of home are as quiet as the eggs that somehow hold a central place in this film. Marhöfer's is a quiet, everyday, domestic stillness.

The everyday routine is not without its costs. The most pernicious of these is the alienation that is attendant to it. So many connections and possibilities have been foreclosed. This is the price of having rationalized and structured the day according to schedule, according to plan. All of it worked-out and made sense of in the realm of language, in thought, and logic. How many possible gestures, possible effects, go un-realized when the "repetition of the same" becomes what we call "the day?" The everyday: a making-sense, through reason and language, of forces gathered-to, so that no further sense need be made. If the everyday is exceptional it is only because despite being ho-hum it is the result of a barbarity of objectification, which places countless possibilities at a distance and welcomes in the disaffection we call "boredom." Alienation, as we well know from our human relationships, brings with it silence, too.

The other side of the membrane Marhöfer presents us with is “the immanent.” This is the nature that makes life possible, which undergirds the life we notice as such. The immanent is what life, including human life, is saturated by, it is that matter without which we could not live. Counterintuitively, it is also that matter which we experience the least, and rarely affirm. Because it is ubiquitous and our entanglements with it are so intricate and intimate, immanent matter is rarely acknowledged. The immanent stands out even less than the everyday, though not for being domestic. It is rather untamed and intensive, but infinitesimally, and in most of human life it is experienced at the limits of sensation and usually escapes notice. The silent hum in our ears, the feel of our pulse, the warmth of the sun on our skin, the temperature of our bodies.

Marhöfer’s film plants us in this intimate matter as relentlessly as it does in the domesticity of everydayness. Her presentation of immanent life begins with the shots of vegetation, mostly trees. The repetitive shots of trees. The initial images are an homage to Mikhail Kalatozov’s *Soy Cuba*, where palm trees also stand-in for the island. Trees that at first glance captivate us with their delightful shapes – the shaggy top of a Royal Palm, the ropey, knotted, arms of a *Jaquey*, clumps of giant bamboo, and the slick sheets of a banana plant. But minutes into *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* {each part welcomes the other without saying} the vegetation slips away, despite being in many of her shots. The green recedes, in its expectedness, to the background of existence we notice not at all – immanence. Marhöfer intends for us to linger alert near the immanent though. So, hand-in-hand with letting the trees recede, she brings them forward. Thus, the wind shakes them and the rain soaks them, to mark a difference in the canvas, to recall to our attention the immanent field she has only just introduced.

In and out of focus comes this immanent world, and this is her intention. This is the first hint that she is placing us in the membrane that separates the everyday and the immanent. It is appropriate that she would give us wind and water, two extensions of nature so close to us that rarely do we acknowledge them. The water contained in our cells, which comprises the greatest part of our blood and tissues. The wind, a dramatization of the air we breathe, the oxygen and carbon we share with the vast part of life on earth.

Marhöfer introduces another play of immanence in her film, and this is the ubiquity of light. From the first shot she rarely yields in this. She insists on the light of the sun, specifically, and on reminding the viewer that everything she shows us exists by virtue of sunlight, in one form or another. In the early takes sunlight streaks across her smudged lens. Twice she adjusts her aperture mid-take, so that you can’t help but see the light. She doesn’t just want us to acknowledge the sunlight. She has us look right at it. Like any look at the sun it can only be a peek, as when she glances directly at it behind corn stalks (sunlight avatar second only to the sunflower). Sunlight, the energy of this planet, suffuses *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* {each part welcomes the other without saying}, and when we are not looking directly at the sun, it directs us to other shapes of sunlight, transformed and made concrete in the forms of plants and animals. Plants and animals as accumulations of vast amounts of sunlight, plants and animals sunken in sunlight, made by sunlight, and fed by it. This is immanence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For an economy of sunlight paired to a philosophy of immanence see Georges Bataille, *The Accrued Share, Volume I: Consumption* (New York: Zone Books, 1988).





A good film will perform an active encounter with light – grappling and pondering with it. Marhöfer does this most obviously in her POV shots of sunlight, making us realize that we are included among the creatures bathed and fueled by its energy. Her play with light does not end with these shots and continues in her post-production. Her film processing self-consciously plays with light in that she has introduced a significant amount of “noise” to the film: streaks, smudges, sprites and lights of all sorts playing on the film and at its margins. As a viewer you are never allowed to forget that you are watching a spool of film stream past. You are interfacing with a technology. In her post-production Marhöfer turns away from the bad habit of imagining film as a transparent medium. The light-glitches on the film are image stutters (explicitly so in the shot of the two calves), to ensure you never forget that you are, in fact, viewing. There is an homage to Rouch- (and Brecht-) inspired cinema in this. But Marhöfer’s intentions are beyond these sources in that she appears to reject the very idea of mediation (or representation) that drives most of cinema studies, dialectically inflected as these are. Her effort is rather to produce an extension of the very boundary that her film is made to explore: the one between the everyday and the immanent.

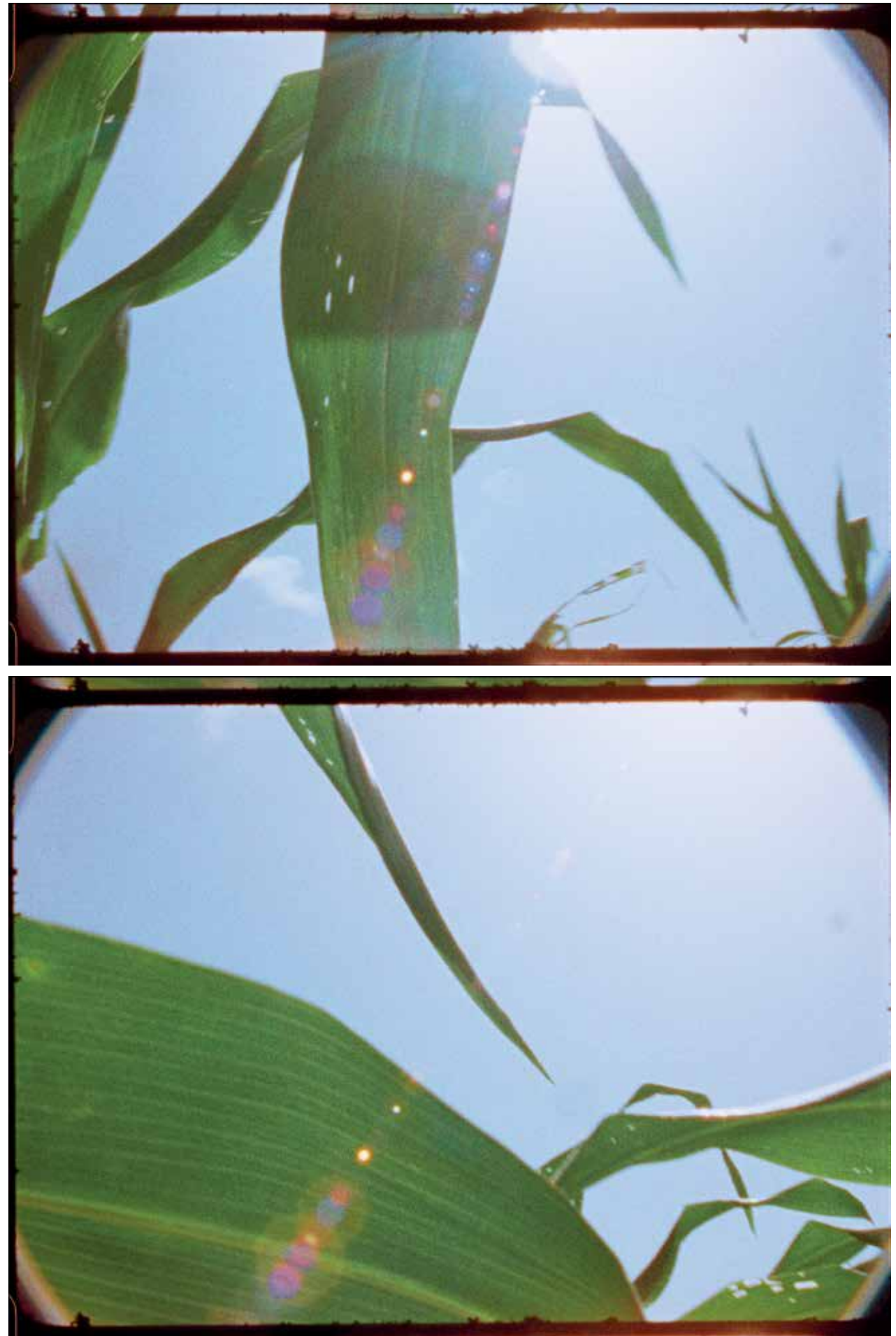
The everyday and the immanent share a quiet that passes for the obvious or the insignificant, these two twisted in a Mobius strip. They share a quiet that eludes detection. This is what Marhöfer means by “*each part welcomes the other without saying*.”

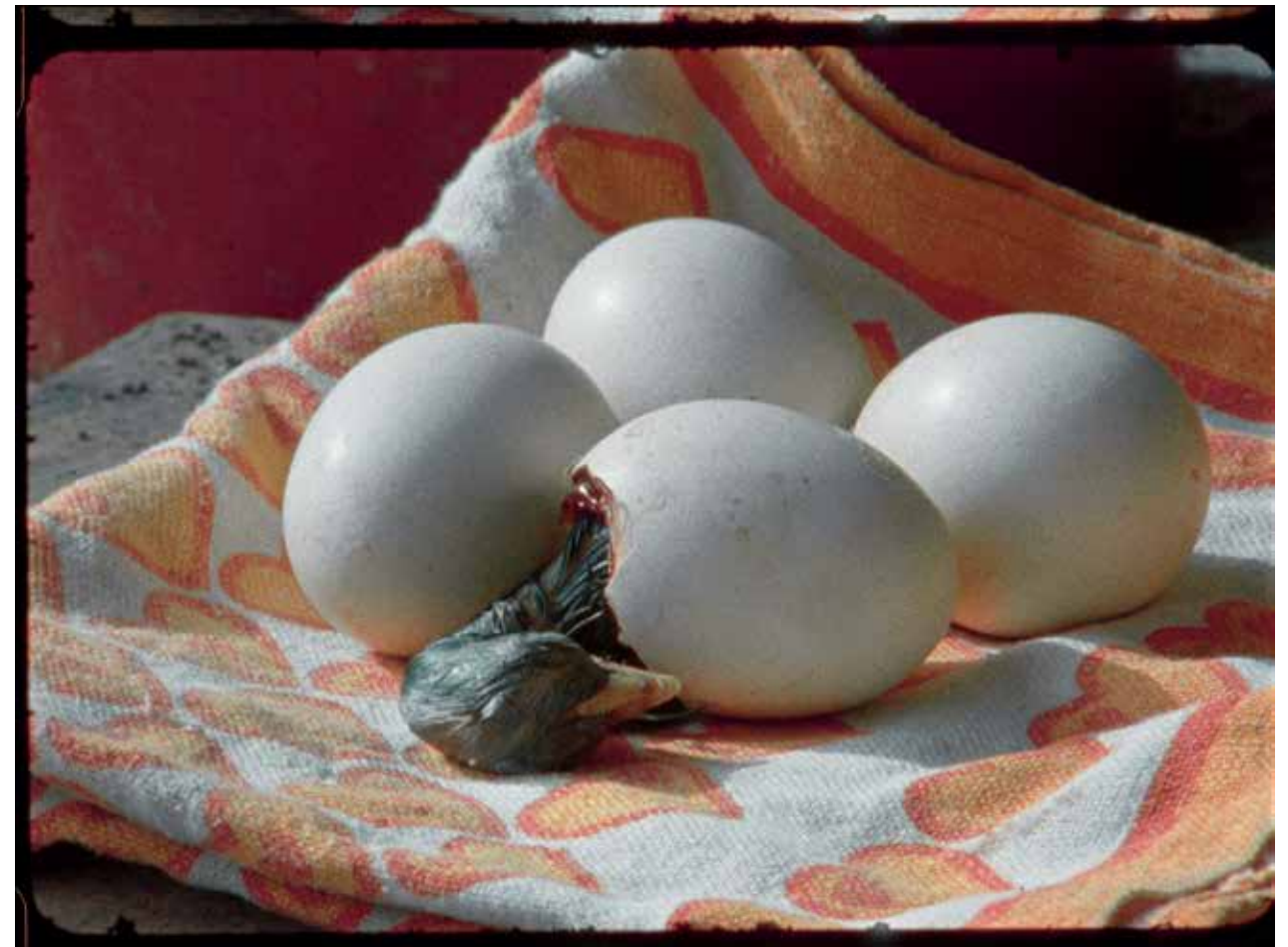
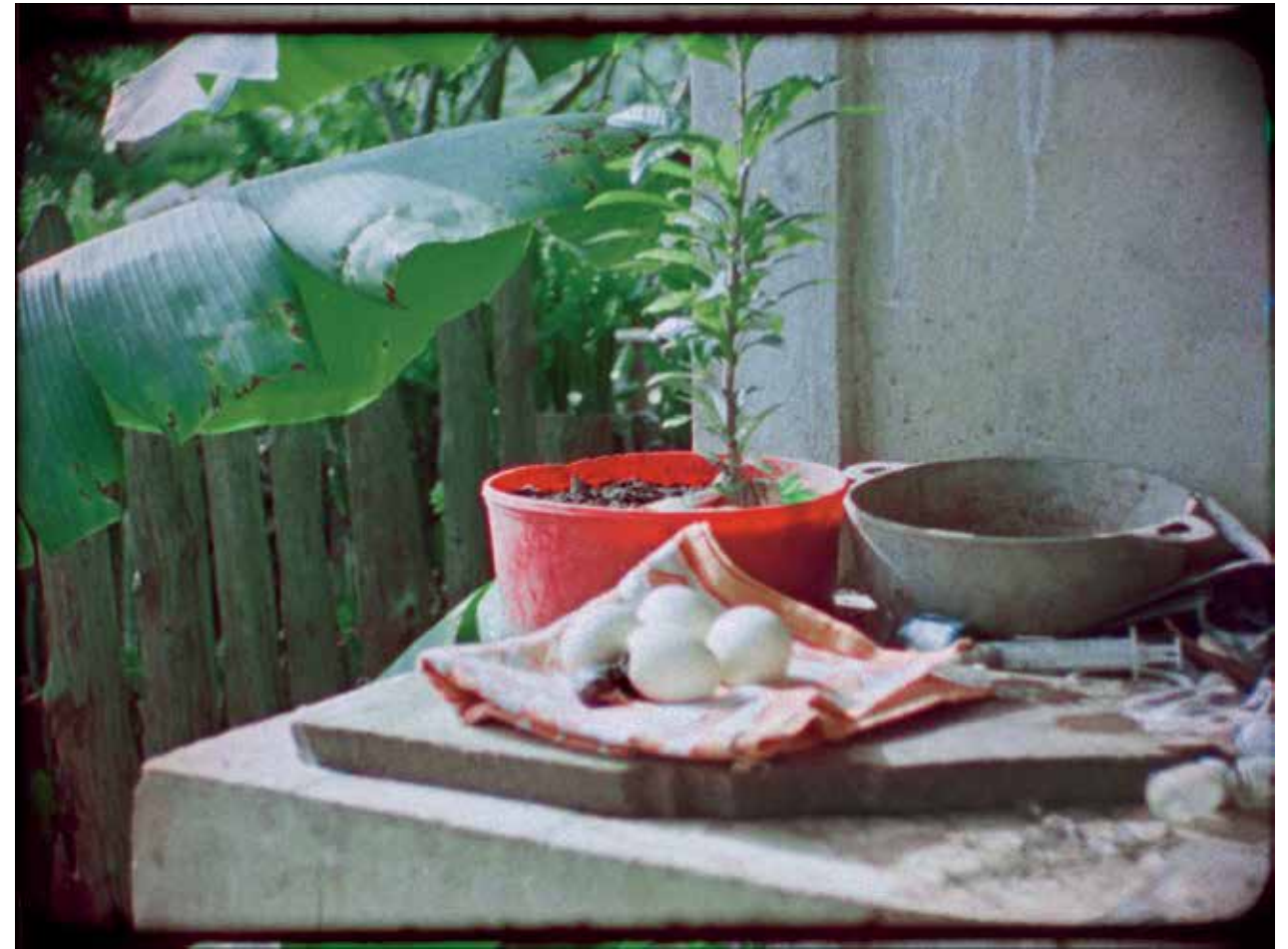
Marhöfer’s achievement is to have us experience the play of everyday life and immanent life – the way rote life vanishes before our eyes only to slip against the radically proximate and vanishing reality of immanent sunlight and sunlight-avatars (plants, horses, chickens, cows). She involves us in this play by sinking us in the strange and silent boundary between them. A gelatinous boundary, unknowable in language in that it is radically experiential, resistant to translation and explanation in its dense silence. Her accomplishment is to have sought and found this membrane, and in her craftswoman’s hands she thickens it so that the viewer can’t but be caught in it.

In this Marhöfer is a devotee of her art and its history. She pushes the very materiality of her equipment, of her lenses and film, and explores their limits. This is the task of the artist within her guild, and she shows herself to be a keen and curious filmmaker. In the case of this film, the limits she probes are emotional (affective), and only through this are they conceptual. She pushes the affective dimension of her equipment and her handiwork in editing and processing, so that the film becomes an extension of the very membrane she seeks to explore.

## 2.

*prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* *each part welcomes the other without saying* could be run backward, beginning with the credit sequence and ending with the Kalatozov shot, with its rowing sounds and sight of palm trees. Starting from the end, the film would begin with the shot of the *prenda-nganga-enquiso* for which this film appears to be named. We assume it is *Zarabanda 7 Rayo* there in the background of the now-opening credit sequence, where the *prenda* is acknowledged by its proper





name. This prenda, (I assume it is kept by the cart driver?) is the strange attractor through which the life in this film takes its shape. Prendas lend shape to the lives of those who keep them as part of *Palo*, a Kongo-inspired practice of healing and harming unique to Cuba. Palo connects the living to the dead through intensively material craftwork. Every shot from the one of Zarabanda 7 Rayo onward could be experienced as having passed through this prenda-nganga-enquiso, having been bent and shaped by its gravity.

Marhöfer has us linger with Zarabanda 7 Rayo, and only by virtue of the flickering candle can we discern it is not a still shot. In this, Marhöfer is doing precisely what the prenda wants her to do, which is to honor it with her presence. A Cuban-Kongo prenda also wants to grow, and it does so through lavish gifts. We do not know what Marhöfer gave to this prenda-nganga-enquiso while in its presence: was it an animal offering, or perhaps it was something more prosaic but no less generous, like a bottle of cane liquor? Given her benign interest in living things, as seen in the attention given to the little chick, I assume she did not offer Zarabanda 7 Rayo one of the animals we see in her film. This is how a prenda is “fed,” but from the look of the Zarabanda 7 Rayo it has not been soaked in animal blood recently. It is in repose, a candle to light its way into the pressing sea of the dead into which it is sunk and by which it is suffused. What we do know is that she offered Zarabanda 7 Rayo the gift of her time and creativity, and all of the resources necessary to make this film. The film is praise for this prenda-nganga-enquiso, and in this it is apt.

Prendas-ngangas-enquisos, like Zarabanda 7 Rayo, thicken reality. They lend to it gravity and density by pooling and connecting forces that would otherwise be dissociated or incommensurate. To these forces prendas-ngangas-enquisos lend new direction and shape, so that they may return to it increased. This is why Marhöfer has made the film, to present some of those forces, the everyday and the immanent ones, and the world of energy in which they are sunk and which make them possible. In this way, Zarabanda 7 Rayo, the prenda-nganga-enquiso for which this film was made, grows through the film and finds its extension in the remote and powerful worlds in which the film acts.

## Raw Whole Plant Materials

Since ancient times, people have practiced herbal medicine (naturopathic medicine) as a healing art. The use of nature's green pharmacy has been passed down from generation to generation and the efficacies of these approaches to healing have been shown through experience.

At the beginning of the 20th century, chemists had become increasingly adept at isolating the active components of plants, while the use of raw, whole plant materials started to be conceived as crude and unscientific. However, in the late 20th century, herbal medicine made a comeback as physicians and scientists became aware of its huge value. Nowadays large amounts of herbal remedies are marketed and have proven to be effective. In addition to that, there are many places around the world that simply do not have alternatives to naturopathic medicine.

Even though the use of herbal medicine has become widespread in Cuba, it is still necessary to promote its significance. The Cuban Government will continue to support other countries concerning medical care.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to prepare this paper and assume that it will be a useful contribution. I also want to thank Danay Gil Martínez whose help made this contribution possible and for taking the photographs of the plants.

1. **PARTHENIUM HYSTEROPHORUS**

(Feverfew or mugwort)

My grandmother, who was born in 1898, used this herb to prepare various remedies. This plant helps to prevent infections and fever. It aids the formation of scar tissue. Put ten mugwort roots in one liter of water and let it boil for about 5 minutes. The product can be used in the treatment of staphylococci, especially those that many people catch after surgery.

The branches of the plant are used both in religious rituals and as an insect repellent for protection against red poultry mite.

Today it is used in organic farming involving microorganisms. Fermenting two kilograms of the plant over a period of 8 days will result in an excellent organic fertilizer.

2. **CNIDOSCOLUS CHAYAMANSA, CNIDOSCOLUS ACONITIFOLIUS**

(Chaya or tree spinach)

Chaya is native to Mexico and Central America. It has a protein content of 8% and contains micronutrients and is used as food. While it can be eaten in soups, stews, tamales and tortillas, it helps to prevent brain damages, improves the blood circulation and supports the treatment of diabetes. It can also be used as a remedy for kidney stones. For this just add 6 leaves of the plant to 2 liters of boiling water.

3. **CITRUS AURANTIUM**

(Sour orange or forbidden fruit)

The leaves of this plant are used to prepare a nal tea to fight the flu. My mother used these leaves to treat erysipelas, a skin disease with severe rashes accompanied by fever and vomiting, caused by streptococcal bacteria. She used to take 9 leaves, a pair of scissors and quietly started to pray. While praying she made crosses with the leaves and then cut them into small pieces. After three or four days the patient got better.



4. **CISSUS SICYOIDES**

(Lambrall, pinakoop or pudding vine)

Just as sour orange and lemon grass, this plant helps to prevent the flu.

It is also applied to prevent or treat asthma. For that prepare a ritual in which San Luis Beltran's prayer (a prayer used to heal and bless a person to remove bad energy) is

read and a branch of the plant is suspended behind the door. You should fix the little twig securely to the door. It is said that when the branch has dried up completely the person is recovered and the asthma disappears.



5. **CYMBOPOGON CITRATUS**

(Lemongrass)

This plant is used to prepare herbal teas that eliminate phlegm. It helps to breathe freely when suffering from the flu. Besides that, it is used to lower blood pressure.

It is recommended to strain the herbal tea before drinking in order to eliminate crystals that can be carcinogenic.

6. **ALLIUM CEPA**

(Red onion)

People who suffer from a severe cough, should drink boiled water with onionskins. Onions should be eaten regularly because they contain vitamins and minerals that are essential to the human body.

7. **PROTIUM CUBENSE**

(Copal)

Copal is a miraculous plant. Rural people are accustomed to spread its resin on their ankles and cervical vertebra and then cover it with band-aid. This is an effective remedy to prevent a cold while working in damp places. It is also used to fight a sore throat and arthritis.

To make wine from this plant use the following ingredients:

- Copal resin or branches
- Copal sap (obtained from the leaves or main ribs)
- Noni pulp
- Coconut (grated or chopped into small pieces)
- Honey

Put all the ingredients into a glass bottle and keep the bottle refrigerated, (not in the freezer compartment). Let it settle for 12 days. Then drink it three times a day (in the morning, afternoon, and at night). This solution prevents the flu, brain damages, indigestion and asthma. It improves the blood circulation, regenerates eyesight and bones, increases appetite, and has a positive effect on cholesterol levels. It is used to relieve rheumatic pains and helps to keep a healthy weight.

All these benefits are based on personal experiences and the statements of other people who were treated with copal.

## 8. MORINDA CITRIFOLIA

(Noni or Indian mulberry)

Noni is native to Polynesia. It can be eaten or used as a medicine. I consider this plant very important. My mother had bladder cancer when she was 75 years old. She started to drink noni juice instead of water. Thanks to that remedy she lived longer and was healthy during those years in spite of the cancer. She died in 2006 at the age of 86 years.

## 9. COCOS NUCIFERA

(Coconut tree)

Coconut milk prevents kidney diseases and is very refreshing. Coconut oil is used in religious rituals and also in animal fodder. Delicious candies are made from this fruit.

## 10. HELIOTROPIUM INDICUM

(Indian eliotrope)

Indian eliotrope helps to eliminate internal and skin inflammations. Prepare an herbal tea from the leaves and drink it like water. The other parts of the plant are used to cure hemorrhoids.

## 11. GOSSYPIUM BARBADENSE

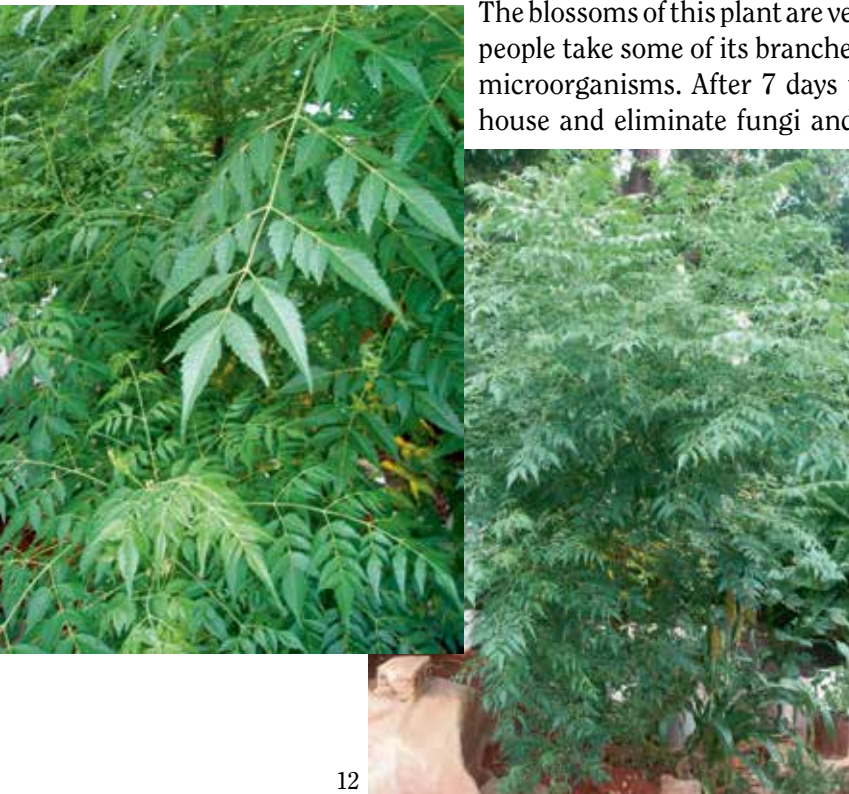
(Cotton)

Cotton is used to treat bronchial conditions. People also clean the house with cotton when they are practicing religious rituals related to Santeria (a religion that combines the West African Yoruba religion with Roman Catholicism. It recognizes a supreme God as well as other spirits. Originally developed in Cuba by West African slaves, it is now practiced in the Caribbean and the United States).

## 12. MELIA AZEDARACH

(Chinaberry, hog bush or pride of India)

The blossoms of this plant are very beautiful. Usually on Fridays people take some of its branches to ferment them with benign microorganisms. After 7 days the liquid is used to clean the house and eliminate fungi and bacteria. There is a common believe that it brings peace, health and prosperity to your house. When the seeds of the plant are mixed together with a certain kind of microorganisms, after 12 days a liquid is obtained that can be used to kill lice.



## 13. CHAMAEMELUM NOBILE

(Camomile)

Camomile is used to stabilize the digestive system in the case of stomach disorders. It helps to eliminate children's rashes and nurtures the scalp.

## 14. ANACARDIUM OCCIDENTALE

(Cashew)

While the plant is nearly extinct in Cuba, there is a successful project to grow the plant. Its fruit has a strong flavor and people prepare juices and candies from it. Its seeds contain excellent oil, which is used in religious rituals. In some places the seeds are used to cure hemorrhoids.

## 15. ARTEMISIA ABROTANUM

(Souhernwood)

Souhernwood is used in religious rituals. It eases pain from headaches and stomachaches and prevents a blocked nose. It is also used as a biopesticides, supporting an ecological balance.

## 16. XANTHIUM CHINESE

(Burdock or burweed)

Since the 20<sup>th</sup> century burdock is widespread in the countryside. All kinds of kidney diseases can be treated by using either this plant or mugwort with amazing results.

## 17. PIPER AURITUM

(Hoja santa, Mexican pepper leaf, root beer plant or sacred pepper)

For a treatment of inflammations caused by infections or any other injury hoja santa is recommended to put the leaves in warm water and add coconut oil or cocoa butter. This is also used to treat erysipelas, a severe skin rash accompanied by fever and vomiting and caused by a streptococcal bacterium. It is very useful in religious rituals.

## 18. ANNONA MURICATA

(Soursop)

The plant as a whole is used to treat a sore throat and colds. Since it is considered anti-carcinogenic, the cultivation of soursop is widespread. It is healthy to eat the fruit, for example, in juices, milk shakes or ice.

## 19. GUAZUMA TOMENTOSA

(Bastard cedar or West Indian elm)

It is a well-known plant among peasants who use it for various purposes.

The sap is used to treat sunburn and foot ulcer.

It is a lightweight wood and the branches are very good to make handles for mattocks. The inner bark is used to make ropes.

The leaves are mixed with other plants, serving as animal fodder. They also help to treat tenesmus.

It is a leafy plant, so agricultural workers enjoy taking a rest in the shade of a bastard cedar.

**20. CRESCENTIA CUJETE**

(Calabash tree)

My grandmother used this plant to prepare a cough syrup as well as to treat bronchitis and colds. The syrup contained honey, copal, coconut, aloe vera and the fruit of the calabash tree. She used to leave the syrup in the open for 10 days and then strain it. This syrup became the best remedy for any ailment.

**21. RICINUS COMMUNIS**

(Castor-oil plant)

The oil from the seeds is a very successful cold remedy and also recommended as a laxative. In order to prepare biopesticides the seeds are fermented with certain microorganisms over a period of 8 days. The product helps to control pests such as mite, whitefly and bedbug.

**22. ELAPHRIUM SIMARUBA**

(Gum tree, turpentine or West Indian birch)

This plant is used to treat colds. While small children are treated by having branches placed on their stomach, adults are supposed to drink a hot herbal tea.

The resin is recommended to eliminate infections caused by cuts or pricks.

People who believe in the powerful properties of the plant use it in combination with seven other plants.

From my personal experience: when my daughter was two years old she had a umbilical hernia. I made her stand below a gum tree, made a mark on the trunk and then took a small piece of the bark. A short time later the hernia disappeared. We went to see the tree and the mark on the trunk was gone.

Recently we proved that we can prepare an excellent biopesticide from the bark of the gum tree.

**23. PETIVERIA ALLIACEA**

(Guinea henweed)

It is easy to grow guinea henweed, however it should only be used if really required. When cows graze on it the milk will taste of the plant. Nowadays it is used in cancer drugs as well as biopesticides.

I myself have used guinea hen weed once to treat sinusitis. For that I soaked a few branches in a bottle of alcohol for ten days until they had turned white and the solution smelled like the plant. I spent one day in bed smelling the solution when, due to a sudden movement, I got a small dose into my nose. After that all my problems related to sinusitis disappeared for good, even though this treatment happened 30 years ago.

**24. ORYZA SATIVA**

(Rice)

Rice is one of the staple foods in Cuba. Before cooking people rinse the rice and keep the water to develop certain kinds of microorganisms. After 3 days the water can be used to water the garden, clean the house, do the dishes and wash clothes without having to add any detergents. Some people also believe in its ability to eliminate negative energy.

**25. EUPATORIUM ODORATUM**

(Bitter-bush)

This plant helps to banish bad luck. It has a lovely scent and is regularly applied by people who practice Santeria, a religion that combines the West African Yoruba religion with Roman Catholicism. Among other plants bitter-bush is effectively used to purify houses.

**26. PLUCHEA ODORATA**

(Sour bush or sweet scent)

Sour bush is a treatment for sore throats and hoarseness. Two leaves of the plant are made to form a cross and dropped into a cup of hot, unsweetened coffee, which then should be drunk.



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**27. BURSERA GRAVEOLENS**

(Sassafras)

Sassafras is an aromatic plant used to cure sore throats and the flu. It also stimulates the production of red corpuscles. In combination with foalfoot people prepare it as an herbal infusion.

**28. TAMARINDUS INDICA**

(Tamarind)

Tamarind is widespread in Cuba. It serves as a barrier against whirlwinds and protects the crops. The delicious tamarind juice, made from its fruits, is recommended to treat constipation and liver problems.

**29. TITHONIA DIVERSIFOLIA**

(Tree marigold, Mexican tounesol, Mexican sunflower or Japanese sunflower)

It is easy to grow tree marigold. The protein-rich plant can be used as animal fodder. While its dried leaves are especially suitable to feed chickens, its flowers are part of



Santeria practice. It serves as a barrier against whirlwinds and is planted near rivers and ponds to prevent landslides.

**30. EUPHORBIA LACTEAL**

(Prickly pear or cochineal cactus)

This plant is used to treat pityriasis, a skin disease affecting humans and animals in which the skin becomes dry and scaly. First a prickly pear is cut open and applied on the skin. Then both halves are suspended on a string. When they are dried up the person should be totally recovered. I can confirm from my own experience that over 50 people who followed these instructions never have suffered from pityriasis again.

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**31. VERBENA OFFICINALIS**  
(Verbena)

This plant is used to treat rashes, especially in the case of children.

**32. CECROPIA PELTATA**  
(Trumpet-tree)

This plant is used in medicine to treat the flu. Prepare an herbal tea from the leaves, ideally in combination with copal, lemongrass and Moses-in-the-Cradle. Sweetened with honey the tea helps to clear the respiratory tract and prevent asthma attacks.



**33. ROSMARINUS OFFICINALIS**  
(Rosemary)

Rosemary is an aromatic herb and its branches are commonly used in religious rituals. To ease muscular and rheumatic pains a skin lotion can be made from a few branches that are kept in a bottle of alcohol. The water from boiled rosemary branches can be used as a natural hair treatment for shiny hair.

**34. DATURA ARBOREA**  
(Moon plant)

This is a shrub growing to about 2 meters in height. It is characterized by numerous branches and bell-shaped flowers. The purple flowers open at dawn and close again at dusk. This plant is very important for the pollination process. It is used as a repellent to keep away ants, especially leaf-cutter ants. Herbal tea made from its flowers is a treatment for sore throats and colds. Besides this, it is grown for decorative purposes.

**35. RUTA CHALEPENSIS**  
(Rue)

Just a small dose of an herbal tea containing rue is sufficient to kill the strongest parasite. However, this plant is also used as a remedy for rheumatism.

**36. ANNONA SQUAMOSA**  
(Sugar apple sweet sop)

This fruit is used to prepare juices and milk shakes. It is an effective treatment for stomach problems. Eating the ripe fruit in the morning is very healthy. However, be careful with small children who tend to swallow the seeds and may have an upset stomach as a result. Both the leaves and seeds help to cure cystitis and kill lice.



**37. ALLIUM SATIVUM**  
(Garlic)

Garlic is one of the most popular condiments in Cuba and prepared in various ways, be it chopped, ground, crushed, fresh or dried. Some people believe it to cure every ailment. To treat sinusitis grind a clove of garlic, squeeze it and extract the juice. Then put a drop on your nose. Repeat this procedure for 2 or 3 times and the sinusitis will disappear. Garlic is also used as a remedy for arthritis. Take a bottle of sugar cane brandy, add 10 cloves of garlic and let it settle for a few days. This remedy should be taken daily before eating any food. Eating garlic is recommended in order to strengthen the musculoskeletal system and to cure colds. In Cuba many recipes include garlic and it is common practice that garlic's peel is burned to ward off bad energies.

**38. OCIMUM SANCTUM**  
(Holy basil or tulasi)

Tulasi has small leaves and is used in religious rituals. Its medical purpose is to lower blood pressure, treat diabetes and stomach disorders. People use it while reading San Luis Beltran's prayer to heal and bless children and to ward off bad energy.

From my personal experience: When I lived in the countryside many children recovered from illnesses without having seen a doctor. Adults just read San Luis Beltran's prayer and the children got better. I remember that the women used to hide their children when a certain man visited the village. When that man praised a child he or she immediately came down with a fever. People said that man had bad energy. My mother was among the women who were in charge of reading San Luis Beltran's prayer to cure the sick children.

**39. ARGEMONE MEXICANA**  
(Mexican poppy or Mexican thistle)

Mexican poppy is a thorny plant with yellow flowers that grows in the countryside. Pigeons who like to eat the seeds have to avoid its thorns. The seeds are supposed to have an antibacterial effect similar to mugwort and are used to reduce a fever. It contains latex, which is used to treat herpes just as the latex from slipper plant. When the plant is boiled it can help to treat skin diseases.





## 40. EUPHORBIA LACTEA

(Mottled spurge)

Mottled spurge has many thorns and therefore is commonly grown as a perimeter fence. The latex from this plant is very strong and used to eliminate herpes and warts. Cutting this plant can be dangerous because its latex may cause eye problems. It is recommended to wear gloves and a long-sleeved shirt as a precautionary measure. Latex is also used to control some pests such as whitefly and bed bugs. For this purpose a kilogram of the plant is cut it into small pieces (about 1 to 3 millimeters long), mixed with 10 liters of water and a gallon of efficient microorganisms in a plastic container. The process of fermentation takes 8 days. Before use, combine one liter of the finished product with 20 liters of water.



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## 41. RESEDA ODORATA

(Egyptian privet, henna plant or mignonette tree)

Egyptian privet is used to treat stomach problems and can be combined with other aromatic plants. Add a few branches to one liter of sugar cane brandy and drink a cup of this remedy whenever you suffer from a stomach upset.

## 42. KALANCHOE PINNATA

(Leaf of life, wonder of the world, air plant, life plant, miracle leaf or Goethe plant)

The roots of this plant are used to treat parasites in both humans and animals. It is also a good animal fodder.

## 43. CORDIA GLOBOSA

(Curacao bush)

Curacao bush is a plant that turns red when it is boiled. People use it to cleanse their blood.

From my personal experience: One of my friends makes wine

from curacao bush and always keeps some of it at home. I tasted it some time ago and liked it very much.

## 44. PHYLLOSCOPUS BUNYI

(Aztec sweet herb, bushy lippie or honeyherb)

This plant is as common as mint. An herbal tea made from its sweet leaves is used to treat stomachache and to control asthma attacks, especially in the winter. It is very good for the digestion. No sugar needs to be added because the leaves are so sweet already.



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## 45. PLANTAGO MAJOR

(Common plantain or greater plantain)

The juice obtained from this plant is used to ease a toothache and eliminate mouth ulcers. As an herbal tea it helps to treat a sore throat.

## 46. ALOE BARBADENSIS

(Aloe vera)

Aloe vera is commonly used to treat indigestion, gastritis and ulcers. It helps to cleanse the liver and is known as a remedy for hepatic failure. It eliminates infections in the urinary system. The remedy consists of the main ribs of the plant that are peeled, frozen and usually taken in the mornings.

## 47. SECHIAM EDULE

(Chayote or mirliton)

It is recommended to eat this plant in soups and salads. Chayote tea made from its leaves is an excellent help to treat kidney, lung and bladder problems. It can also assist to dissolve kidney stones.

## 48. PERSEA AMERICANA

(Avocado, avocado pear or alligator pear)

Avocados are very healthy fruits. They contain a substance called carnitine that helps to treat heart problems. Avocado oil is used to prepare hair and skin products. People with rheumatic pains should drink an herbal tea made from the bud 3 times a day.

## 49. CASSIA ALATA

(Ringworm shrub)

This shrub is a seed plant that grows to about 4 meters high. Prepare an herbal tea in a pot that should not be used to cook any other food. This herbal tea is used to cure athlete's foot.



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## 50. PEDILANTHUS TITHYMALOIDES

(Slipper plant)

The plant grows to about 1 to 1.5 meters in height. It has green branches and stems and its red flowers produce a sweet nectar. It reproduces from fallen branches. When broken the stems secrete latex which is used to treat mouth ulcers, stomatitis and skin diseases such as herpes.

## 51. MUSA PARADISIACA

(Plantain)

Plantains grow everywhere in Cuba. There are many different kinds such as banana plants, plantains and oriental planes. The fruit is considered highly nutritious food for both humans and animals. It is also used in religious rituals by people who believe in Orishas (an African-based religion based on the worship of numerous deities, who also have Catholic counterparts).

## 52. LOCHNERA ROSEA

(Church-flower, old maid, periwinkle or vinca)

Church-flower is a treatment for conjunctivitis. Pick 3 to 5 flowers, wash them and put them into a cup of water. After 30 minutes the water can be applied to the infected eye with a piece of cotton. Repeat that 3 times a day. The roots from this plant are used to prepare an herbal tea to reduce a fever.

## 53. BROMELIA PINGUIN

(Penguin)

Penguin juice is a parasite treatment. Drink one cup before eating anything else. The fruit has digestive properties and therefore should be eaten after every meal.

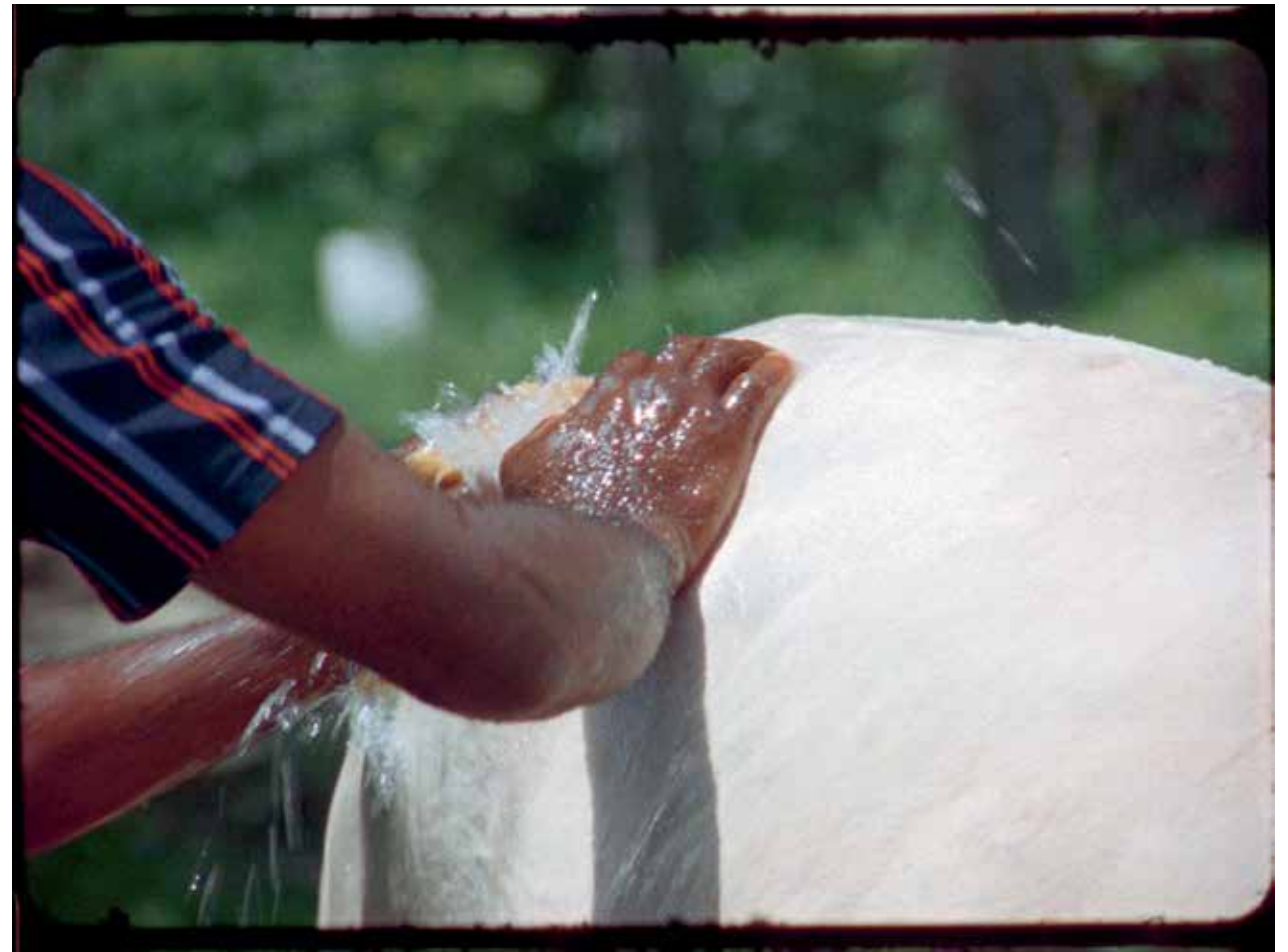


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## Performing Things

Over the past few years, arguably starting with *permeable super real* in 2010, Elke Marhöfer's films have taken the course of a continuing research journey. What in the beginning seemed to be more of an intuitive refusal to comply with ideological constraints of the cinema apparatus, by now has grown into a deliberate experiment with and within Elke Marhöfer's artistic practice and her academic investigations. At the core of this project lies the desire to abandon or transcend the anthropocentric predilections that are not only institutionalized by anthropology but also dominate the theoretical and practical terminology of film.

It is still generally assumed that the fundamental constituents of a cinematic act depend on the human perspective and perception: the viewpoint, the center of attention, the protagonists and the addressees are usually all human, and in case their humanness is uncertain, the nonhuman element typically serves to set the stage for the creepy, bleak, estranged, absurd or haunting, depending on the genre and narrative at hand. The attempt to challenge and overcome this anthropocentric framing has aesthetic and technical, as well as political and ethical aspects. While it is a shared concern of a number of contemporary filmmakers and artists, the nonhuman and even antihuman traits of the cinema apparatus have informed filmmaking from its beginnings: automation of the reception, manipulation of the body, the alliance "man-machine", comical, frightening and awe-inspiring, were very much the focus of early cinema. And again in experimental and expanded cinema where the disposing of narrative structures and the deconstruction of exclusively human authorship by the creative involvement of hazard, coincidence and unintended effects of the material and technical processes created a critical aesthetics, a critical perception, or a perception in crisis. It can be argued that while these forms of dissident aesthetics were essentially meant to shatter the spectator's/recipient's belief that film was an object (commodity) *made for him/her, with him/her in mind*, the aesthetics of more recent forms of "*disloyalty towards anthropocentrism*"<sup>1</sup> in film (as Elke Marhöfer puts it) are less concerned with destroying (the ideology around the commodified object). Instead, they aim to provide new pleasures – or seek to please something new, hitherto unrecognized, a not necessarily human desire from which unrecognized affiliations, confluences, and creations might grow. Recently, some of the work of Thai filmmaker Apitchatpong Weerasethakul and the cinematic output of Harvard University's Sensory Ethnography Lab co-directed by filmmaker Lucien Castaing-Taylor have often been cited as examples for this kind of latent development. While probably informed by it, Elke Marhöfer's work bears ample evidence of entirely idiosyncratic choices made by an artist researcher/researching artist who has provided herself with a double chance to be disloyal towards anthropocentrism by opting to work in both fields simultaneously: anthropology and visual arts.

<sup>1</sup> All quotes in italics are taken from an unpublished paper by Elke Marhöfer in which she reflects on the conceptual background of her artistic practice. This text was originally written as a response to the paper.

There is no need to actively favor the human species over other forms of existence, in order to nevertheless be deeply entangled in anthropocentrism – through modes of production and perception, aesthetics, narratives, the shape of objects and landscapes, and even through the very tools used to express critique, be it language, a camera, or a keyboard. Renouncing anthropocentrism is not equivalent to giving up the human perspective or even ridding oneself of one's humanness (if that was possible). It first and foremost means to reorganize the field of perception, discourse and practice in such a way that the human perspective is not favored over that of other beings or bodies; that all “actants” involved in a given setting are given equal consideration. Bruno Latour introduced the term “actants” that allows us to speak of an active, interested and creative involvement in the world independently of the typically anthropomorphic terminology around “intentionality” (“subject,” resp. “subject – object,” “consciousness,” “will,” etc.).

The fact that the very language we use to describe the dilemma is a heavily loaded vehicle of anthropocentric predilections has been one of the major tasks for posthuman theory, and it is relevant for Elke Marhöfer's practice, too: “*The question is no longer, if animals generate images, have language or gesture to communicate, use their hands to make tools, but what terminology, which words are appropriate to describe their expression and perceptions?*” She goes on to explicitly describe her own approach as aiming in the direction of an artistic practice with an entirely different self-assertion. She suggests that in the light of “*the bold correspondence of human and nonhuman expressions and perceptions*” the dominant concepts of “*meaning, culture, representation, which includes thinking and knowing*” must inevitably appear “*outmoded and anachronistic*”. “*Why not do without them?*”, Elke Marhöfer asks, as it seems with the joy of relief rather than the fear of uncertainty.

It is fascinating and rewarding to see how in Elke Marhöfer's artistic work getting rid of the old vocabulary becomes audiovisual practice. I would argue that a particular characteristic of her recent work is due to the performative awareness (or aware performances) in using her tools, making films that can be seen as a composition of traces of a complex, both intellectual and technical engagement with the world. While, in a general way this could be said of all audiovisual productions, the essential questions now evolve around the role and importance given to the human in these interactions and how one interprets one's own humanness as an actant. “*Enfranchised from the human,*” Elke Marhöfer suggests, “*the production of meaning or knowledge is not only a cognitive process, but also a dynamic, practical interaction with the world, that takes place in relationship to a territory or the earth.*”

Such “performative awareness” in filmmaking must not fear the charge of “performative self-contradiction” presumably implied by the objection that, after all, it is a human subject that expresses this enfranchised critique. “Yes and no,” replies Jane Bennett, who in the introduction to her book *VIBRANT MATTER* asks these rhetorical questions herself. For her, attempting “to present human and nonhuman actants on a less vertical plane than is common is to bracket the question of the human [...]”<sup>2</sup> On the one hand, the fact that such bracketing is an intentional, willful operation appears less like a contradiction once “revisions in operative notions of matter, life, self, self-interest, will, and agency” have had their effects on how self-reflection is

perceived and performed. On the other hand, however, self-contradiction made visible and expressive in an audiovisual act can even be part of the dynamic (or serve as an epiphany) that helps to decenter the typically anthropocentric perception of moving images and the accompanying sounds.

Elke Marhöfer, recognizing that, “*when working under the premise of a non-anthropocentric point of view, filming becomes not only a matter of content, but also entails a technology like a camera*”, goes on to suggest that “*a camera is not purely a human cultural and technical device, but must be seen as an extension of already existing forces within the surrounding environment. With this in mind the camera becomes a ‘tool’ that is in principle not different from nonhuman animal tools.*” In her case, the camera is a 16 mm Bolex. Actively “bracketing the question of the human” regarding this camera and its interrelations with “existing forces” does not deny the importance of the filmmaker's physical and more or less skilled way of operating it. On the contrary: the actual handling of the camera, the physical efforts to hold, control, move and balance the technical device become parts of an uninterrupted and non-hierarchical network of relations including the effects of light and heat, the shadows of clouds, the movement of animals' bodies, the flexibility of a tree moved by a gust of wind, the noise of petrol combustion in a car engine, and innumerable other processes and events.

Contextualizing the human aspect on a “less vertical plane,” as Jane Bennett aspires, allows for a more dynamic and permeable understanding of the involvement of the human in these complex arrangements.

The “animate in plants” and the “vegetable in animals,” as Gilles Deleuze puts it, comes to the fore on such a reorganized plane and the anthropomorphic aspects of objects and creatures denote something more autopoietic than merely a metaphor ascribed from the human point of view.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010). All subsequent quotes from Bennett are from page IX of this volume unless otherwise noted.







## In the Rhythm of Another Relation

*The sound of water, a slow slow moving shot. Light filtering through the trees, dappled, the sky grey. Closer, now, the sound of walking. Now another quality of light, a shifting of the dapple. A banyan tree, bones on the ground, rusty metal, the camera now moving in circles, dizzying.*

Isidra has left her front door cracked. Down the hall the closet where she keeps her *prendas-ngangas-enquisos* is open. Beyond this, Isidra lies prone on the cold tile of her dining room. Her forehead is pinned to the ground in front of an urn. This urn is *Madre de Agua* (“Water Mother” or “Mother Water”). A candle burns inches from Isidra’s head covering. The candle is indispensable as a signal light and a fuse in the swirling, combustible flows of *Kalunga* and one would be foolish to visit with an agglomeration of the dead like “*Ma’re Agua*” without one. Without looking up Isidra has pulled me to her side and we are inches from *Ma’re Agua*. She is singing in a low tone, a song that by its melody and cadence might be from the countryside where she grew up. But she is muffling her voice, catching her words in her mouth, and I can’t make them out.<sup>1</sup>

*Dead carcasses. The hind legs of an animal, an ox. The camera turning, clockwise. Vertigo. Leaves in the wind.*

Two works here side by side. One a slow, visual iteration of a rhythm in the making. Elke Marhöfer’s *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines {each part welcomes the other without saying}* (2014), a 25 minute, 58 second digitalized 16 mm film. The other an essay, written in the turbulence of an encounter with Isidra, Todd Ramon Ochoa’s *Prendas-Ngangas-Enquisos: Turbulence and the Influence of the Dead in Cuban-Kongo Material Culture* (2010). These two together not because of direct influence but because of a confluence of exposure, the two in alliance in my own encounter with the *prendas-ngangas-enquisos*, the force of form that mobilizes the dead, activating more-than human tendencies in the midst of a world reencountered.

In the praising of the dead, in the ritual field of activation that moves spirits to compose with their surrounds, the *prendas-ngangas-enquisos* act as intercessors. Intercessors are not simply mediators.<sup>2</sup> Their practice is not simply to enter into the middle, but to be the middle, the middling force that alters everything with which it comes into contact. The *prendas-ngangas-enquisos* activate the associated milieu, in Gilbert Simondon’s words, the field of relation through which experience composes.

<sup>1</sup> Todd Ramon Ochoa, “Prendas-Ngangas-Enquisos: Turbulence and the Influence of the Dead in Cuban-Kongo Material Culture,” in *Cultural Anthropology* 25:3 (2010): 391.

<sup>2</sup> In the 1990 translation of Deleuze’s texts, *intercesseur* was translated as “mediator.” Had Deleuze meant mediator, he would have written “*médiateur*.”

Of African origin, these are not objects, as Ochoa emphasizes. Though they may take the form of cauldrons or urns, though they may seem object-like, their force is precisely their capacity to activate associated milieus through which new modes of life are made palpable. This is what makes them intercessors.

An intercessor, as Deleuze suggests in his text by the same name, cuts the field of relation, reorienting its terms. Radically empirical, the intercessor sees relation as the active force it is, understands it not as the between of experience already-formed, but as the field through which all aspects of experience move. Unlike the mediator, who accepts the spatial configuration, entering into it as given, the intercessor activates a cut that reorients the terms of the encounter. “Intercessors are fundamental. Creation’s all about intercessors. Without them nothing happens. [...] I need my intercessors to express myself, and they’d never express themselves without me: you’re always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own.”<sup>3</sup> The intercessor is the force through which an encounter is capable of expressing the more-than of what actually comes to be.

When Ochoa suggests that “prendas-ngangas-enquisos propose a second ‘condition’ for themselves beyond the ‘object,’” what he is pointing toward is how the event of the ritual intercesses into the site of the everyday to alter its conditions of existence.<sup>4</sup> These are not objects in any contained sense: what they do is mobilize the conditions for a turbulent reorientation of what existence can be.

*5 minutes have elapsed. The trees have given way to the countryside. A horse quietly feeds, the expanse broad, the sky opening to light. The feel of a languishing camera, a rhythm calm with the awakening of the day.*

Marhöfer’s film does not tell us about the intercessor, does not explain the quality of what the ritual site can do, does not educate us about African history, about sorcery, about “Palo,” the “Cuban-Kongo praise of the dead,” as it is known in Havana.<sup>5</sup> Nor does the film tell us about its site, Yateras, a site of the violent conflicts of colonization. But it does ask the question, in its slow rhythmic exploration of the lively interstices in the landscape, a landscape alive with the intercessions of historical and contemporary practices intermixing, with the animal and the human in co-composition. It does make felt that there is something important at stake that must be heard in the quiet interstices of the more-than human world.

In his trek toward Isidra, after her call in the middle of the night, this is what preoccupies Todd Ramon Ochoa. He is worried about how best to problematize what the ritual site can do. He is concerned with the ethnographer’s tendency to situate experience in terms of subject-object. “Isidra and I will each grapple with this problem of turbulence and self-determination in our own way tonight, but our struggle will be a common one: to accomplish turns of the dead such that each of us arrives, by practical means, to new understandings and new problems.”<sup>6</sup> Because Ochoa’s work

3 Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995), 125, translation modified.

4 Todd Ramon Ochoa, “Prendas-Ngangas-Enquisos,” 406.

5 Ibid., 387.

6 Ibid., 391.

is not one of translation, as much anthropological work ends up being. It is one of transduction, of making felt the stakes, in the event, of a turbulent transformation, and of making those stakes come alive not as an explanation of an object, but as problematization activated by an ever-changing field of relation.

*At the 9:08 marker everything changes. The film, which until then seemed quietly consumed with the making-felt of the environment beyond its lens, suddenly itself becomes the focus. The image: a grey sky, wind, trees blowing. And: a red stripe, covering the right edge of the screen. A reminder of time passing, red film stock, the sign of celluloid’s aging. With time, human perception becomes palpable, but with it also comes a certain encounter with history, and with what cannot be properly archived. What is this intercessor of red? It feels important, vital even. And it keeps coming back – at 17 minutes, at 19:30, at 21:44.*

Ochoa enters Isidra’s abode. It’s very early in the morning. The outside air is cold. We’re not sure what he sees, but what seems certain: there are urns and iron cauldrons with healing and harming substances, and a candle.<sup>7</sup> And there is blood,

the blood of a duck Isidra had killed for [Ma’re Agua, the prenda-nganga-enquiso]. [...] In the force of herbaseness, in the blood and lush mass of feathers that covered her, in the soaking aspirations of cane rum I delivered as her supplicant, in the cloud of cigar smoke that enveloped her, and in the prone body of her keeper at her feet, she crossed into modes of feeling, and of matter, that are called ‘Palo’.<sup>8</sup>

*The red stuns the image, undoing it of its distancing quality. A dissonance has entered, a dissonance that composes with the landscape. By now we have also seen sites of human intervention, we have heard the train and perceived the landscape from its window. We have moved at the speed of a different technology, and have seen the effects of this technology on the city, which has appeared as a reminder that the land is also a shape-shifter that composes between rhythms and times. The human hand is felt but rarely seen.*

Marhöfer asks: how can we connect the more-than-human within the historical, specifically the postcolonial space without deepening violations already inflicted on both humans and nonhumans? If one attempts to evoke a perceptiveness that exceeds the human, stepping into the more-than-human world without privileging human life, one might have to approach the surrounding in a different way: not as a static nonspeaking reality, but as moving and being moved by invisible forces; so that mountains, valleys, stones and trees become active players for spiritual matters and organizing perception connatural to human knowledge.<sup>9</sup>

Isidra brings Ochoa along. Soon, they are not two, but many, the rhythms of the ritual event moving them: “and she brought us along. Together, the three of us sank into

7 Ibid., 387.

8 Ibid., 410.

9 Elke Marhöfer, *Ecologies of Practices and Thinking*, doctoral thesis draft, June 15, 2015, 117.

the matter of force and receptive bodies, to tremble in what certainty there was, which was but the contingent uncertainty of open revaluation.”<sup>10</sup>

The red is not a symbolic cut. This must be emphasized. “The prenda cannot be reduced to a sign, however close to the world a sign might be conceived.”<sup>11</sup> And yet it does signal. Marhöfer’s desire is similar to that of Ochoa, it seems to me, “to implicate prendas in the world around them by seeking their material rather than semiotic connections to the world and to people’s lives.”<sup>12</sup> Perhaps what we have here are not semiotic conditions of the normative kind, a sign-system that would seek to normalize their account through what Ochoa calls the “will-to-explanation and its attendant philosophical demand for systemic coherence and closure,” but a different kind of non-local linkage that precisely signifies in ways that can only be felt through the affective force of the kinds of rhythms Marhöfer’s work activates and Ochoa’s story narrates. In this context, the prenda-nganga-enquiso are what James calls local signs,<sup>13</sup> active in their capacity to make felt what Brian Massumi calls nonlocal linkages.<sup>14</sup> “The function of the local sign is catalytic,” the local signs host “the semblant event.”<sup>15</sup>

The semblant event has its stakes in the conditions of its emergence, in the singularity of *this* ritual event, and yet it is also more-than this event, more than this iteration. The semblant event is more-than, beyond any account of signification or representation understood in the sense usually given these terms. The field of relation is here made up of a “qualitative-relational order,” a lived abstraction that is “more than objectively real.”<sup>16</sup>

It can never be contained within a frame. It is never reducible to the sensuous content of any framing of experience. It is not reflective of the objective order. It is self-detaching from it. It is the immediately lived reality of the objective order’s spontaneity, in encounter and eventual transformation: its changeability. Its creativity. Its semblance as immediately lived abstraction, directly perceptually felt, unauthorized and without guarantee. Pure occurrent.<sup>17</sup>

*It’s not just the red that returns, haunting the edge of the screen. By the halfway mark, the film is continuously on the verge of interruption, static cutting in, a whiteness, sometimes even a yellow glare, troubling the landscape.*

Without looking up Isidra has pulled me to her side and we are inches from Ma’re Agua. She is singing in a low tone, a song that by its melody and cadence might be from the countryside where she grew up. But she is muffling her voice, catching her words in her mouth, and I can’t make them out. My voice picks up the tune as I fall predictably into these flows of Isidra’s making. To make of a flow, to introduce a flow,

10 Todd Ramon Ochoa, “Prendas-Ngangas-Enquisos,” 410.

11 Ibid., 398.

12 Ibid.

13 Williams James, vol. 2 of *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Dover, 1950), 172–173.

14 Brian Massumi, *Semblance and Event: Activist Philosophy and the Occurrent Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 128.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 129–130.

17 Ibid., 130.

to determine an inflowing of forces against other forces, this is what I am calling “influence.”<sup>18</sup>

*It’s not that there is always red. Or just red. It’s that the red has become intercessor to the image, its semblance now always there, even when we don’t actually see it. 19:30 – the red and the faint yellow now faded out, a horse in close-up. A long slow shot, its face toward the camera, almost looking at it, but not quite. The presence of a man. Unlike the horse, still not quite looking at us, we don’t quite see him, just those gestures of his that suggest that the horse will soon be ready to be taken out, ready to ride.*

Nonlocal linkages and the way they activate local signs are the reason theories of representation suffer the poverty they do. Representation does its work only on the surface, its siting an interpretation of time passed. Prendas-ngangas-enquisos inhabit another kind of time, a time that activates the schism of futurity alive in the present. They generate a cut in metric time, opening it to the influence of forces in excess of its time-signature. In so doing, Ochoa suggests, they deeply influence experience, not only in their capacity to generate, in the event of their activation, fields of emergence where the dead compose with the living, but also in their capacity “to stage new problems,” problems that are untimely and out of sync with representational matrices and normative systems of signification.<sup>19</sup> A problem, for Henri Bergson, is operational: it creates the conditions for new modes of existence. Ochoa makes this clear: what is at stake is the creation of a new field of valuation. “[P]rendas-ngangas-enquisos spoke to those enslaved BaKongo who brought the minkisi spark to Cuba, their children, their clients, and very likely to slave owners, just as they do to people who keep them in Cuba today, as a people yet to come, on the precipice of new values and new valuation.”<sup>20</sup>

*Marhöfer’s film ends with the prendas-ngangas-enquisos, a scene of ritual, the candle burning. We see a skull, perhaps, a plastic cup, a pumpkin, sticks (the palo). It’s hard to tell – the scene is dark and the film’s intertitles move over the image. There seems to be a desire to keep our gaze away of this site of influence. Or maybe it’s just that the slowness of the film’s rhythmic quality has troubled vision, causing us to day-dream, to perceive at those interstices of the local sign and the non-local linkages, a lulling that is rendered no less urgent by its engagement with times nonhuman, more-than human.*

The intercessor activates the difference at the heart of a process. “Whether they’re real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It’s a series. If you’re not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you’re lost.”<sup>21</sup>

At the confluence of different modes of intercession, non-local linkages proliferate. This happens not in the mode of interpretation, but in the felt experience of participating at the edgings of two distinct encounters with the force of form. In one

18 Todd Ramon Ochoa, “Prendas-Ngangas-Enquisos,” 391–392.

19 Ibid., 395.

20 Ibid., 404.

21 Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations*, 125.

of these encounters, words carry the narrative. In the other, the movement of images and sounds takes us on a similar journey. But these remain two distinct modes of existence, a coupling also alive with non-local linkages. I bring them together here not to suggest that what they do is the same, but to emphasize the way the prendas-ngangas-enquisos themselves do their work across divergent fields of relation. That they cannot be captured is deeply felt in both dramatizations of their force, and it is this that most emphatically produces the sense that it is a renewed sense of valuation that is at stake.

This is not without risk.

This is the grace of prendas-ngangas-enquisos: to destabilize, to dissipate, and make anew what is fixed and given, as each version of the dead that enters their field, or passes through it, is at the same moment transformed. The living are drawn to this potential when the collection of forces that organize their lives becomes oppressive, and impossible to turn toward good fortune. But the transfers of force over which prendas preside are ambivalent and hold no easy formula for healing. Rather, they promise only disruptions of what has become inevitable. Such disruptions are neither painless, nor devoid of risk, but the people who come within the atmosphere of change a prenda-nganga-enquiso like Ma're Agua generates find themselves willing to try their fates with her coupling of visceral surrender and social destabilization, which is to say, with the sovereign coupling of healing-harming and outcomes unknown.<sup>22</sup>

*21:44, the screen almost entirely translucently yellow. It has been raining, the landscape alive with the sound of birds. Roosters crow. A new day calls, the ground wet, thick with mud and debris. A man washes a horse. Again, we don't quite see him. And a hand holds a chick, perhaps the same one we saw earlier fighting its way out of the egg.*

Ochoa writes of “values yet to come.”<sup>23</sup> These emergent valuations compose, always, with the force of violence the prendas-ngangas-enquisos call forth. How could they not, they who raise the dead, the dead slaves, the dead colonized? New forms of valuation cut the field. They are harder to compose with than the ubiquitous evaluations that normalize existence. This is a risk worth taking, Marhöfer's gentle film suggests. It is worth the risk to reorient experience toward what it can do when the human is not its pivot. It is a risk worth taking to reorient toward the emergent collectivity activated in the associated milieu of experience. For it is here, where forces do their work in the interstices of non-local linkages, that new modes of existence are invented and lived.

<sup>22</sup> Todd Ramon Ochoa, “Prendas-Ngangas-Enquisos,” 410.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

RENÉ RAMOS LA ROSA was born on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1940, in Morón, the former Camaguey province. His parents were Francisco and Hortensia.

He studied in a rural school located in Liborio, a small village in Violeta. After the triumph of the Cuban revolution, the name Violeta was changed to January 1<sup>st</sup>. This municipality is now part of Ciego de Ávila province.

He worked in the sugar cane fields since he was 13 years old. He also grew beans, yucca and maize on a small lot. He gave up his studies and became a self-taught person, hoping to work as a storekeeper in a small village.

After the triumph of the Cuban Revolution everything changed: all sugar cane fields and mills were requisitioned by the revolutionary government. On December 10<sup>th</sup> in 1959 he joined the National Revolutionary Militias and became the Militia commander in the territory. In 1960 he was appointed coordinator of the José Padrón farming cooperative. In the following year he and other agricultural workers had the opportunity to study in the former USSR. He went to Ukraine where he received a degree in Agricultural Mechanization. Subsequently he started to work in a repair shop in Artemisa. In 1970 he was appointed sales representative in Havana and Havana City where he was in charge of supervising the sales of agricultural spare parts. In 1976 he was appointed assistant manager of the CEATM Company. This company sold equipment for agriculture, transportation and construction. He became the second representative of this company in 1981.

In 1987 he was appointed general manager of the Recycling Company in Havana City. In 1990 he became consultant of the Union of Recycling Companies.

After 38 years of work and three spinal surgeries he retired at the age of 51 because of health problems. Afterwards he began to work in agroecology, plague control and fertilization.

In 2008 he was awarded a prize for his lifetime achievement. Besides that, he has received important prizes from ACTAF (the Cuban Association of Agricultural and Forest Technicians) and was given an award by ANAP (the National Association of Small Farmers) for working ten years in agroecology.

In recent years, he dedicated his work to the production of fertilizers, microorganisms, worm humus and compost in order to substitute chemical fertilizers and improve soil qualities.

He lives in La Lisa, Havana, is married with four children, five grandchildren and has eight brothers.

ERIN MANNING is professor in the Faculty of Fine Arts at Concordia University where she holds a research chair in philosophy and relational art. She also directs the SenseLab ([www.senselab.ca](http://www.senselab.ca)), a laboratory for thought in movement that explores the active interstices between art, movement, philosophy and politics. Her artistic practice is concerned with creating conditions for emergent collectivity. Recent works include *Stitching Time* (2012, 2013), *Weather Patterns*, *The Smell of Red* (2014) and, in a different iteration, with Nathaniel Stern (2014, 2015). Her writing focuses on movement from a philosophical perspective, exploring the interstices between autistic perception, minor gestures and relationships. Recent publications include *Relationships* (2009), *Always More Than One* (2012) and *The Minor Gesture* (2016).

JUSSI PARIKKA is Professor of Technological Culture & Aesthetics at the Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton. He is the author of the media ecology-trilogy of *Digital Contagions* (2007), *Insect Media* (2010) and most recently, *A Geology of Media* (2015). He has also written widely on media archaeology, including *What is Media Archaeology?* (2012) and *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications and Implications* (2011, ed. together with Erkki Huhtamo). He co-edited with Joasia Krysa a book on the Finnish media art pioneer Erkki Kurenniemi that will be published by MIT Press in the fall of 2015.

TOBIAS HERING is a freelance curator and writer whose work focuses on experimental documentary forms and the politics of the image. He lives in Berlin. He recently collaborated with various art and film institutions, including the Forum of the Berlinale, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Médiatheque des Fonds d'art contemporain de la Ville de Genève (Geneva), Espace Khiasma (Paris), The Showroom (London), Savvy Contemporary (Berlin), Zeughauskino (Berlin), International Center for the Arts José de Guimarães (Guimarães, Portugal) and on a regular basis with Arsenal – Institute for Film and Video Art (Berlin), where he has co-directed (with Marie-Hélène Gutberlet) the collaborative research project *Visionary Archive*. Tobias Hering is a member of the selection committee for the annual documentary and video festival Dokfest Kassel. He gives lectures and publishes papers on his research topics and has edited the essay collection *Der Standpunkt der Aufnahme – Point of View: Perspectives of political film and video work* (Archive Books, 2014).

TODD RAMÓN OCHOA is an ethnographer who writes about African-inspired life in Cuba. He is associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

DANAY GIL MARTÍNEZ was born on June 1st 1978 in Marianao, Havana, Cuba. She has been interested in natural sciences ever since she was a child. She attended Vladimir Illich Lenin senior high school and after finishing college she studied Biology at Havana University. In 2001 she graduated with excellent grades. After that, she started working at the Carlos J. Finlay Institute of Vaccines and Serums. She stayed there until 2008 and made some outstanding contributions in the field of vaccines. Besides this, she took various postgraduate courses, published articles in some scientific magazines and took out a patent. While working as a researcher she organized national and international conferences related to a variety of topics. In 2008 she started learning French at the French Alliance in Cuba and obtained the mastery level. During this time she became a member of the LASA project (artistic laboratory of San Agustín). From 2009 she started working permanently with this project. She is in charge of organizing artistic events with national and foreign artists. In 2012 she took a teacher training course for French teachers sponsored by the French Alliance in Cuba. Today, she works as a teacher in this Cuban-French institution.

ELKE MARHÖFER is an artist living in Berlin. Via moving images and suppositious writing, Marhöfer works with notions of self-admitted foreignness and radical othering. She collaborates with dear friends and things, and revises notions of animal, vegetable and object relations. Marhöfer studied at the University of the Arts Berlin, the School of the Art Institute Chicago, the Whitney Independent Study Program New York, and is enrolled in a practice-based PhD at the University of Gothenburg. She received fellowships from IASPIS Residency Sweden, Akademie Schloss Solitude Stuttgart and Cité des Arts Paris. Her films have been screened at the BFI – British Film Institute London, Berlinale – Internationale Filmfestspiele Berlin, International Film Festival Rotterdam, Courtisane Festival Ghent, Cinematek Brussels, Images Festival Toronto, and The Showroom London. Her art exhibitions include Palais de Tokyo Paris, FCAC Shanghai, Manufactura's Studio Wuhan, Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Houston Museum of Fine Arts and NGBK Berlin.



Numbers vary and are difficult to determine. According to some accounts, all over Cuba nearly sixty percent of the African slaves, the Taínos, as well as the Chinese forced laborers, at least temporarily freed themselves from colonial violence to settle in remote clandestine communities. In Cuba these communities were called *palenque*. Today they all have disappeared. Cuba's revolutionary government commemorates these lines of flight as resistance movements, and named a city in the mountains of Yateras, where many such settlements were built, Palenque. The city has a hospital and a museum on local *marronage*. This is where we took the pictures and this is where we began the film.

ELKE MARHÖFER  
PRENDAS – NGANGAS – ENQUISOS – MACHINES  
{EACH PART WELCOMES THE OTHER WITHOUT SAYING}

16 mm film, 25 minutes 58 seconds, color, stereo sound, Cuba, 2014.

Transducing a single film into printed matter, this book addresses the question of how to connect the nonhumans, animals and plants to the postcolonial space without deepening inflicted violations on both people and nature? The film *prendas – ngangas – enquisos – machines* {each part welcomes the other without saying} gathers affects of plants and animals whose ancestors were moved to the New World, and “had to colonize the new land with the humans as a team.” In present-day Cuba animals such as cows, horses, goats, pigs and chickens provide food and labor, and often move around freely. Much like extended family members some animals share close relations with humans. Some entered the intermediate state between domesticated and wild, others return to the forest to fully reverse their domestication and to become something else entirely. The film sets out to relink adamantly separated concepts of human and animal bodies, vegetables and history. It suggests that nature is both, historically situated, evoking testimonies of past events, while recognizing their specificities, and at the same time continuously growing and surpassing historical formatting with its unique and machinic mode of constantly evolving and creating something new.

With essays by JUSSI PARIKKA, ERIN MANNING, TODD RAMÓN OCHOA, TOBIAS HERING and RENÉ LA ROSA.