

# STUDIEN ZUR KUNSTVERMITTLUNG 1

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## Kunstvermittlung zeigen

Über die Repräsentation pädagogischer Arbeit  
im Kunstfeld

## Representing Art Education

On the Representation of Pedagogical Work  
in the Art Field

**zaglossus**

Geschlecht, Sexualität und Begehren. Queere Politiken in Kunst und Wissenschaft Berlin: Revolver Publishing, S. 188–202.

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Abb. 1/Image 1: Guy Ben-Ner (2007): Stealing Beauty, Video, 17:40 min, © Guy Ben-Ner.



Abb. 2/Image 2: Guy Ben-Ner (2008): Second Nature, Video, 10:12 min, © Guy Ben-Ner.

# Learning to Document

## On the Development of Representational Critique in Work with Portfolios and Beyond

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Nanna Lüth

This text focuses on the observation that the documentation of educational situations is not neutral, but changes the events that are to be shown and in doing so often falls back to existing power imbalances between genders and social groups. For this reason, I argue for the creation of opportunities in which representation can be developed in the area of conflict between professional-institutional and personal interests. My own experiences in the area of media art education form the starting point for the observations below. Media art, which comments on technological and social developments from unforeseen perspectives, is understood here as a means to make people aware of different forms of representation and their messages.

## Big Sister is watching you!

The vocational training that I will use to explain the necessity of queer-feminist perspectives in education activities took place at the beginning of 2010, in collaboration with a church association for kindergarten work at the *Edith-Russ-Haus für Medienkunst – ERHfM (Edith Russ Site for Media Art)* in Oldenburg/Lower Saxony. The association, which cooperates with museums and galleries among others, had asked me, as the director of education of the ERHfM, to offer a vocational training session in video and photo documentation. It was to look into a relatively new professional requirement in the area of early childhood education in which the learning and development of children were being increasingly recorded in pictures or videos. If educators in kindergartens and similar institutions are to document their own environment and work, they needed additional qualifications.

Since the educational programme of the ERHfM supported an artistic art education approach (among others Maset 2007), I started by consulting the exhibition programme to find connections for the vocational training. The exhibition *Guy Ben-Ner: Flying Lessons* promised decisive incentives in terms of both its content and media aesthetics, because the artist deals with the issues of family, education and childhood. His family takes part in some of these videos (image 1). With alienating methods such as rhymed dialogues or cinematic tricks, his way of staging the films negotiates the border between documentary and fiction. By his daughter and son taking over, with great relish, roles as a seafarer or a wild child, Ben-Ner offers a multitude of impressive portrayals of children.

My workshop offering thus literally started “from art” (Sturm 2011), i.e. getting to know the work of Ben-Ner was to encourage the participants to take an exploratory approach and engage in unusual perspectives. In the sense of a critical attitude towards representation, at the same time I wanted to encourage people – this was my personal agenda – to question the power structures in the visual field.

The two-day workshop was given the title *Big Sister is watching you*. This title sent out an ambivalent message, by, on the one hand, addressing the invited educators as a community of sisters in solidarity (“sisterhood”)<sup>1</sup> and simultaneously making one think of surveillance.

### Learning to document from art

The first meeting with the eighteen participating female educators<sup>2</sup> started with them presenting their media practice. It became clear that there were noticeable limitations for the production of images in most kindergartens: digital cameras were not available, when memory cards were at hand, they had to remain at the workplace, interns were not allowed to take pictures.

We then visited the exhibition and discussed the video *Second Nature* (2008) by Guy Ben-Ner (image 2). In this work, he tells the following fable, attributed to the Greek poet Aesop: the fox flatters the raven by telling him that he has a

beautiful singing voice. The raven finally opens its beak and lets fall out a piece of cheese that he just was about to eat. Ben-Ner’s video shows how this story is being staged with two animals and their trainers.

This film formed the introduction to the subsequent exercise. With allocated tasks and media (acting, camera, video and photo documentation, stage set, direction), another fable was recorded in two improvised studios. At the end of the day, we compared how the pictures from the main camera described the story, while the second, documentary camera told us more about the creation and collaboration.

The next meeting took place a month later. In the meantime, the child care workers were to collect visual material for further processing in their facilities. When I prepared the seminar, I realised that I had made a big mistake. At the first meeting, I had taken pictures of the participants without their permission. This was serious because the seminar meant to transmit a professional approach to documentation. I decided to reveal the problem and to take it as a starting point for the planned unit on image and personal rights.

When I had addressed the situation, one participant reacted angrily to my explanation. She expressly precluded me from using pictures of her. She requested that I delete all documentation material that had been produced. The larger part of the group agreed with her and demanded that I was to stop photographing from that very moment. When the mood had calmed down a bit, I suggested that we would come back to the subject at the end of the seminar. The group agreed. We were able to continue as planned. The legal regulations of personal rights, which I then dealt with, are important to clarify the different interests that can arise

1 About the limitations of this allegedly global feminist concept that “seem[s] predicated on the erasure of the history and effects of contemporary imperialism” see Mohanty 2000:110–111.

2 I use the term “female child care workers” (*Erzieherinnen*), which refers to women only, in this text because this corresponds to the performance of the participants as perceived by me.

when pictures of people are taken. All people have a “right to their own picture”. This stands for a high degree of self-determination in the field of depiction. In the case of children, their parents or legal guardians can manage this right for the child, e.g. when they grant the kindergarten image rights, or if they do not grant them (Unabhängiges Landeszentrum für Datenschutz 2015). Struggling for the approval of parents for documentation was well-known to the educators and the legal information therefore was very welcome. My priority was to now provide them with more detailed information on their possible courses of action in their relatively new position of documentary filmmakers and photographers of the events in kindergartens.

We then worked with the visual material from their kindergartens. Again, groups formed to use these to design a fanfold, a poster or a video clip. In this activity, the idea was to look at the productions from different perspectives<sup>3</sup> and to debate them as depictions with a social and cultural imprint. During the presentation, some participants allowed me to take pictures from a distance, on the condition that the children depicted on the visual material, they had worked with, would not be discernible.

At the end of the training session, I once again took up the conflict on image rights and circulated a list where the participants could sign up to different options, which also included the exclusion of use. The majority of the participants opted for a compromise, i.e. to be contacted if a publication was pending.

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<sup>3</sup> Such as the observation of a single child, the chronological depiction of a learning scenario as a whole, or a focus on personal interactions, and many more.

## Beyond data protection

The impressions I got from this training session suggest the following conclusions, from the point of view of art education with a critical approach to representation: one end of the spectrum is formed by the thoughtless approach to documentation, the other end by an extreme fear in dealing with images of children. The latter is caused by a broad social discourse on the subject of “child pornography”. In this respect I would like to note that mainly right-wing parties try to transfer the issue of “sexual violence against girls”, which was originally raised by feminists, to children in general and to recode it by chains of associations such as “child protection – drug trade” or “paedophilia – homosexuality” and to thus encourage racism and homophobia (Schaffer 2001:56–68; Schaffer 2014:188–202).

Against this background and because as an artist and art educator I want to commit to both a responsible handling of images and the freedom of representation, I think that it is necessary to promote training and further education which combine the information of people on sexualisation and sexism in pictures with emancipatory interventions (Settele 2011; Thuswald/Sattler 2016).

### Start with representational critique

Art education that is geared towards feminist and queer<sup>4</sup> issues can encourage a more differentiated approach in the debate about open and hidden power structures: this could help educators and other pedagogues to examine the meanings and effects of illustrations in films and pictures, for example. A more or less reflective use of media in education and documentation activities will have an influence on how children and young people see themselves presented and how they can themselves try out autonomous, non-normative methods of (self-)representation (Lüth 2015:144f.). Since in publications by education departments of cultural institutions and school websites predominantly children and young people are given to be seen, this also challenges the producers of these materials to think about an expansion of the image repertoire and about gaps of resistance. To achieve this, it is essential to be able to critically deal with media and to be ready to negotiate questions of representation between the people who document and the respective institution.

The training described proved to be too short for these demands. Due to the various expectations and needs of a technological, design-related or legal nature that were articulated by the child care workers on the first day, I postponed my own wish to also debate the social inclusions and exclusions of image productions and to train a correspondingly

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4 “Queer understands itself [...] as a flexible reading of social conditions and epistemic practices that are viewed and examined to find out in what ways they produce exclusion by recourse to identity/difference.” (Mecheril 2005, our translation)

changed, scrutinising approach to photography and videos. The concept originally aimed to include emancipatory content, such as the question of social coding of depictions in a practical, vocational media training session. I introduced criteria relating to the viewing and production of images as “political”,<sup>5</sup> but did not have enough time to examine them in-depth. Still, the group had an extensive look at different perspectives regarding media representation. Moreover, the two-day course was a source of inspiration for the thoughtful and diverse documentation of learning and development processes.

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5 In the minutes from the second day, which the participants received after the training session, I listed legal, technological/media-related/economic, aesthetic, content-related, pedagogical, situational, personal and – as mentioned – political questions that are faced on a professional level regarding the production and selection of images.

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