

## Maya Schweizer in Conversation with Ines Goldbach

Ines Goldbach: Dear Maya, I'm delighted to have this opportunity to talk to you and discuss your recent work. I'd like to start with the video works that we are currently showing at Kunsthaus Baselland—a trilogy that started in 2019 with *L'Étoile de mer*. In 2020, this piece was followed by *Voices and Shells*. You have now expanded the series with *Sans histoire*, a video work that recently had its premiere at your solo exhibition at the Jewish Museum Berlin. What does it mean for you to bring these three works together into one large narrative, despite the fact that they were created a few years apart from each other?

Maya Schweizer: Dear Ines, thank you very much for inviting me to this interview. I'm not at all sure anymore whether the works form a trilogy or if they are actually individual variations—experimental film variations that revolve around the fragility of memory. While *L'Étoile de mer* is a collage that attempts to keep memory alive, *Voices and Shells* navigates the architecture between Munich's underground, canals, and surface, encountering fragments from the city's past (history). This is a history that becomes manifest primarily through the 1930s Nazi regime. Similarly, the third film, *Sans histoire*, is set for the most part in what I call a fluid environment, to borrow one of Elena Vogman's concepts. It oscillates between dream, future memory, and the hope for utopia.

IG: Water—specifically being underwater or in underwater channels—plays a central role in all three video works. This not only includes a fluid quality, but also darkness, lack of clear visibility, the night. Does the night harbor its monsters, to quote Goya, or is it the night and the silence beneath the surface that let otherwise suppressed voices be heard?

MSCH: I think it really varies each time. I first started using water as a cinematic object to make transitions between different sequences. I often have the dictionary of cinematographic objects at hand to find other motifs for transitions. And Florian Sprenger's paragraph about water says something like: "Since it does not have a center or a fixed form, water is an environment for senseless movement, as Gilles Deleuze writes: 'Water is the most perfect environment in which movement can be extracted from the thing moved, or mobility from movement itself. This is the origin of the visual and auditory importance of water in research on rhythm.'" (Gilles Deleuze, 1986, *Cinema 1. The Movement-Image*, tr. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam).

And Florian Sprenger elaborates further: "Films and water are environments for the mobility of movement. Both can only exist in motion. The incorporation of water in film allows the representation of representation as a reflection on both the medium of film and water."

I am also very much awed by the animistic character of water as an element. So I see it not only as a cinematic tool, but also as a place of reflection, a multifunctional medium that allows for emotions and meanings.

IG: Could you expand on that a little bit with reference to your work?

MSCH: For instance, *Voices and Shells* is concerned with portraying a place through its underground dimension. It's about exploring a fluid psychogeography of Munich—looking at the city as a human body, so as to enable a radically discerning look at ourselves, our cities, and our histories.

IG: I find it incredibly fascinating how all your video works use historical texts, in German and also in French, to combine image and film sources. In this way, you merge past and present to create a new visual language. Could you say something about how you choose your text and image sources?

MSCH: It is usually a combination of recollections of texts I read, sentences recorded from radio broadcasts, and online research... I often use these very freely. The sentence fragments that are used in their original language also play an important role as subtext and steer us in navigating towards a reflection on the film itself. They are often recontextualized sentences that harbor the potential to open up a dialogue about the film's form as well.

But I would like to go back to your first question for a second. These texts, these voices that you hear in different languages, or that seem to come from elsewhere, perhaps also correspond to the unconscious element which is sublimated by the undercurrents of the city.

IG: I think that's a great introduction to my next question. In your work, we always find sound, text and voices playing a central role. This is true not only in your video works, but also when you employ sound as the only medium. I could mention here the work *Vulnérable Witness*, a 4-channel sound installation that you're now showing for the first time in Switzerland during Art Basel. What can sound transmit that the video format cannot in some circumstances—and vice versa?

MSCH: That's a good question ... When I work with film, I conceive of the two layers of sound and image as being equally important. They coexist; they complement each other. If one is abstract, the other is less abstract. For example, there are sounds that you can't perceive and sounds that you recognize or think you recognize. The sound work you've referred to, *Vulnérable Witness*, was made without prior visuals (montage). In other words, I plunged almost blindly into an acoustic adventure that, based on my own experience and that of the people I played the work to, is highly visual.

IG: Is it precisely this shifting relationship between hearing, actually seeing, and one's imagination that appeals to you?

MSCH: Yes, exactly. Especially since you can convey all these nuances of hearing with sound alone. For instance, there are distant sounds that resound from afar, whose source is far away or invisible, precisely because they cannot be seen or are not near their source. These coexist with what I like to call small-scale sounds, partly referring back to Michel Chion and his book *Le son: Traité d'acoulogie*, in which he created concepts to think of and describe sounds as objects. This invites us to explore sound in our daily lives, regardless of the volume at which it is recorded; and this applies again to sentences from radio broadcasts and memories, conversations, and so on.

IG: I just have one more question to ask you. You have finished *Sans histoire*, which premiered at your solo exhibition at the Jewish Museum Berlin and will soon be launched at Kunsthhaus Baselland. Alongside the two films *L'Étoile de mer* and *Voices and Shells*, you are also installing the sound work *Vulnérable Witness* in Basel at the Basel Social Club. What are you planning to do next? Or have you perhaps already started working on "the next thing"?

MSCH: I've actually recently finished another video work. It's a short, eight-minute piece that was recently shown in the project space Kurt-Kurt. It is called *Errant Gestures* and draws on Vilém Flusser's essay *Gestures* as its starting point.

This film essay is a reflection on intentional and unintentional gestures in our daily lives. To give an example, it explores... the thinking step, the waiting step, the hurrying step, the playing hand, the paying hand, the working hand, the stealing hand... It is a relatively spontaneous film with collage. It is a film about ephemeral movements that echo not only the moment caught between what comes before and after, but also the short paths between conscious actions and unconscious gestures that connect us to our environment in a barely perceptible way.

IG: And needless to say, that's one of the most urgent and important tasks of art today! Thank you very much for this conversation.

MSCH: And my sincere thanks to you too!