

brickwork follow strict symmetry creating chalky depth. Foregrounded wrought iron fence guards with black arrow tips. The composition twists then collapses. The front carrier lowers his side to the ground. Roughly in place, a boot tight on the panels floored edge, the other end is slowly dropped to the floor. Without sound the image flattens, meeting the black painted wood of the stage floor.

I use writing as a means of cropping out and decelerating. This text explores the ways in which dramaturgical materials can be unlearned and relearned when studied at close proximity. Giving heightened attention to an object's surfaces can bring histories of popular use, adaptation, promise and repair into question. The close reading of stage props through writing can render them unfamiliar, allowing for new material readings to be brought to the fore in haptic and analytic detail. Seen from another perspective or another point in time, the stability of the worlds and the cycles of production in which they are embedded can be rethought. This is a process of recontextualization which takes place as an embodied practice. Attempting to locate the legibility of text and the visibility of images within the socio-political present of the usually unseen.

REFERENCES

- Hodgdon, Barbara. 2016. *Shakespeare, Performance and The Archive*. UK: Routledge.
- Stewart, Kathleen. 2010. *Atmospheric Attunements*. The University of Texas Press.
- Lorenz, Renate 2014. *Now! Not Now! Chronopolitics, Art and Research*. Sternberg Press.
- Vannini, Phillip., 2015. *Non-Representational Methodologies: Re-Envisioning Research*. Routledge, London.

<https://doi.org/10.37522/8b38w782>

Dwelling Notes

Eva la Cour and Miki Ambrózy

A conversation between artist-researchers Eva la Cour and Miki Ambrózy on moving images as artistic research, long-term engagement with place, and the method of live editing.

Miki Ambrózy: I'd like to begin simply. Your work as an artistic researcher is embedded within the long-term relationship you have with Svalbard. A central concern of your inquiry has been to find out how to witness things simply yet critically, in the moment of their becoming. These moments will naturally accumulate, leading to an archive of hard drives. Your research, as articulated in your book, uses an analogy: the production of a film. Could you briefly explain the biographical origins of this triangle: Svalbard, sustained dwelling in a place, and moving images?

Eva la Cour: Yes, though it prompts no simple answer. I arrived in Svalbard shortly after graduating from the Art Academy. In 2007, The Academy of Contemporary Art in Tromsø opened with a distinct focus on histories pertaining to the North of Norway; specific political and cultural struggles, local knowledge, Sami culture, and land relations. This approach distinguished it from other art academies in Norway and allowed it to establish connections outside of Norway rather than simply mirroring the

long-established and powerful art academy in Oslo. As part of this decisive profile and attempt to offer something different, the new academy in Tromsø sought to establish student relations abroad and thus invited third-year students from Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, respectively, for one- or two-month visits.

During my time in Tromsø, I worked with video for the first time and created the piece *The Imaginary Nature of*

Locality. I remember having been introduced to and inspired by the writings of Arjun Appadurai, the Indian anthropologist of globalization. The video installation consisted of a free-standing wall with a projection screen in the middle, like a window, visible from both sides. Depending on which side you viewed the video from, you heard a different voiceover. One revolved around my encounter with Khaled Ruhani, a doctor at the hospital who had first arrived in Norway in 1992 as a Kurdish refugee registered with the UN. Another revolved around my encounter with Faris Shemari, also a foreigner. He had come to Norway in 2004 as an Iraqi refugee and then sent to a small village in Finnmark. But by the time I met him, he was working in Burger King in Tromsø. Khaled, on the other hand, I had met in the mountains as he was taking off his skis, and he eventually taught me to telemark ski. That is, in different ways Khaled and Faris introduced me to the place I had arrived to, and as a visitor and young art student I was intrigued by their experiences and explanations of local tension between native Norwegians and Sami. I was intrigued, I guess, by the idea of gaining insight into local Sámi struggles through the perspectives of two non-natives—perspectives that rarely seemed considered relevant in such matters.

Looking back, there is much I would approach differently today in terms of ethics. But fundamentally, Khaled and Faris helped me better understand Northern Norway as a complex colonial terrain.

In 2008, I thus returned to Northern Norway to exhibit my video installation with Khaled and Faris at Riddu Riddu—a Sámi festival in Mandalen. I encountered curiosity about the project from some, but also discomfort from others. I even heard remarks that I perceived as racist, directed at Khaled and Faris, questioning their legitimacy as foreigners to speak on local matters. Effectively, the experience motivated me to seek insights from the field of visual anthropology. Although sceptical of its colonial legacy as a discipline, I had an urge to critically orient myself with its methods.

Shortly after my graduation from the art academy, I travelled to Svalbard for the first time (an archipelago I had gotten to know of because of my time spent in Tromsø). I applied for my first artist residency, the second edition of the Arctic Circle residency in 2010, on board a 20-passenger Dutch steel ship with sails, navigating along the west coast of Svalbard's main island. The experience was both fascinating and perplexing—visually representative of all that I had ever learnt to be Arctic—wide, empty, wild, and open for projection; a place for

science, explorers, geopolitics, and thus image-making.

At the time, I didn't own a proper camera and only had a small pocket camera with a scratch on its lens. I remember feeling foolish and intimidated by the amount of equipment brought by the other artists, mainly Americans. I tried to frame it as a choice of being present, going without a proper camera, but I regretted it afterwards. I felt irresponsible for not fully utilising the privilege I had been given.

This feeling of privilege and the question of access intrigued me, however. Especially in relation to metropolitan imaginaries and heroic depictions of Arctic landscapes historically. Therefore, I decided to return to Svalbard in connection with my studies in Media and Visual anthropology and ended up making a film (*The Tour*) about taxi drivers in Longyearbyen - the main town on Svalbard. *The Tour* is produced with the funds I earned as a taxi driver, making my anthropological fieldwork an integral part of financing the film's production.

The biographical origin of my interest in the relationship between long dwelling and moving images is becoming cluttered. Yet, it seems relevant to turn to anecdotes from lived experiences in explaining stuff like this. I generally take anecdotes very seriously, as intimate arguments almost. Anecdotes express how intuition and association generate or re-code concepts and discourse. In fact, at stake in the triangle of



The Tour, 2012, HD-video, 36min

Svalbard, sustained dwelling in a place, and moving images, is my understanding of art as aesthetic sensibility, critical capacity, and analytic agility. That is at the foundation of artistic practice as research, and its ability to draw unforeseen connections and bring together seemingly incompatible social contexts and phenomena.

MA: I'm quite taken by your brief mention of mixed reactions to your migrant friends—or should I call them informants—in the Sámi festival's context. I do believe that in moving image practice, such public moments are significant and can show the narrowness of audiovisual media, revealing all the problems and shortcomings of representing or telling via image and sound. If you recall our shared experience with the SIC residency,¹ my film *The One to be Taken / Home* received a fair bit of moralising critique from the side of “real” documentarists, on account of the author's lack of an unambiguous “situating.” That confusion lingered within me long after the screening had finished.

What I'm curious about here is an overlapping desire to stay true to complex and ambiguous relationships, especially when they are in conflict. This is relevant for our Baltic context, where an affinity seems to exist between anti-colonial thought (mediated by the west) and the post-Soviet nationalist desire for self-actualisation. I'm often reminded of sociologist Eva Illouz's words when she says that one can love their country and care about migrants and systemic poverty at the same time; it's only right-wing populism that suggests that one position excludes the other (Illouz 2023). I imagine this is partly what you mean by “seemingly incompatible social contexts.” A kind of refusal to a single story or truth-telling. How do moving images in your research practice contain this impulse, and could you elaborate on the analytical agility you mentioned above?

ElaC: To stay true to complex and ambiguous relationships is at the core of my artistic research. I'm interested in time rather than space as

¹ Sound Image Culture is a year-long transdisciplinary artistic coaching project in Brussels, Belgium. Its foundations are in film art and documentary cinema.

a crucial axis of isolation or separation. Thus, the acclaimed anthropologist Marilyn Strathern has written about the ‘ethnographic moment’ (Strathern 1999, 1) as the moment when the field of observation (fieldwork proper) is recreated in a reflective and analytical field (writing-up, in the case of the anthropologist). This involves understanding ethnography as a practice with a double location: being open not only to what happens ‘in the field,’ but also to how those encounters continue to reverberate ‘back home.’ In my work with moving images, I have tried to take seriously the task of resisting images that seek to totalize what they depict. For me, this becomes a practice of staying focused while remaining open to what may emerge later, to whatever unfolds in the ongoing process of image production.

The starting point is often a moment of looking with delay at footage I have recorded myself, which is to say an embodied moment of experience of the footage's discontent. At stake is how to work not with predefined categories—such as say ‘the Arctic’, icebergs or even ‘nature’—but to embrace and work in the editing room (from within the delay, so to speak) to develop a relational and temporal form of the image and of my own image practice. In a very literal sense, this is an



The Arctic Dwelling Project, Bio Valand, Gothenburg, 2017, documentation montage of live edited event, video still



The Arctic Dwelling Project, Bio Valand, Gothenburg, 2017. Documentation montage of live edited event, video still

exploration of film practice as archival research. In my artistic PhD work, I more explicitly used live video-editing as a method through which representation is negotiated through remediation, to exhibit the site of production as one simultaneously of observation and presentation. That is, live editing expresses my interest in delay—the axis of time—as a gap of potentiality, through an occupation with means of production and distribution in the presentation of an image. Live video-editing was the method I developed to disrupt Arctic image-making that works to totalize the Arctic.

I have always had a strong urge to refrain from self-righteous rhetoric in favour of more incongruent, situated and sensitive ones where different registers work with and expose each other. I think that's what I mean by claiming that there is an analytical agility in artistic practice, not least as archival practice. I could unpack how all this is informed by my research into the figure of the guide and different female Arctic explorers, largely embodying the complexity that you are after in your question. The female Arctic explorers I've focused on show clearly that colonial relationships are not only about power and control but also about emotions—and that emotional bonds can themselves reproduce or entangle with colonial dynamics.

MA: Perhaps this is what is so attractive about dwelling in a place—a long-term engagement, where images previously seen as banal suddenly gain force. Please make the connection between colonial relations and female Arctic explorers!

ElaC: Well, there is an overlap between early-twentieth-century expedition films and early documentary filmmaking that has informed the auteur figure as we know it. That is, the independent director-as-auteur persona as it has been developed and applied within film studies. In an article on female Arctic Explorers, the film scholars Mariah Larsson and Anna W. Stensport thus trace a strong connection between the

figure of the intrepid Arctic explorer (Western, white, and male) and the independent and forceful film photographer braving adverse conditions in the pursuit of documentary realism (Larsson and Stensport 2019). In short, the great director who is able to impose their personal visions on films produced in collaborative systems is inscribed with qualities such as strength, virility, perseverance, leadership, and force of personality, which recalls a dominant masculinist paradigm. As an expression of an overlap between colonial histories, geopolitics and colonial image practices in general, this paradigm makes the female filmmaker an interesting figure in the Arctic as a terrain with colonial histories. For example, I have explicitly looked at Jette Bang (1914–1964), a Danish photographer and filmmaker, acclaimed for her intimate portrayals of Inuit communities during Denmark's early colonisation and modernisation of Kallaalit Nunaat,² and at how she historically navigated a paradoxical double bind in which there, perhaps, was a sense of freedom. On the one hand, a dominant masculine discourse shapes the explorer, the filmmaker or artist, and the researcher in masculine terms. On the other hand, a colonial paradigm enabled her to occupy a privileged position. While she may have been poor, Jette Bang was white and possessed an intellectual and cultural capital affording her some comfort with her own—albeit relative—authority.

To return to my own moving image practice: I began thinking with and through the female filmmaker as a historical figure in relation to my own role as artist in the production of the Arctic in the present. That is, as a producer of an artistic practice in the context of my research, where I essentially explored the artist figure as a sort of guide figure.

² By using the name Kalaallit Nunaat I want to signal a position in relation to language and the country's wish for independence from its colonial and historical ties to Denmark.



The Artist as Editor?—Proposal for a story about Emilie Demant Hatt, 2023, HD-video, 23 min., video still

MA: In your book, you write that the guide's role is in "setting the conditions for things to happen" (la Cour 2022, 29). I understand the guide as someone offering knowledge of territories for others, and that offering may or may not be taken up. An interface or medium in its own right. I'd like to focus on the leap between the figure of the Arctic (anti-colonial, female or non-binary) guide and the mode or method of live editing that you experimented with. Was the image of the guide more of a metaphor than an operational concept? And, how does moving image practice operate in the guiding mode?

ElaC: I think it might be both: a metaphor and an operational concept. That is, the guide is a metaphor for the "absence-presence" of the artist as editor (Busch 2024). Metaphorically speaking (and drawing on the historical role of the female filmmaker, as addressed above), the artist as editor is a guide who, rather than knowing the way to a better world, challenges and (re)negotiates the relationship between archives and social processes, images and thinking, authorship and authenticity.

This makes guiding an operational concept that resides in how collecting, circulating, presenting

and producing narratives and images merge. I am thinking of my experiments with collaborative live video-editing in my research, but also about how I, since then, have continued to explore film practice as the production of lived time.

In the context of my PhD research, I explicitly involved artist colleagues in my image production to explore the method as a compositional effect of guided collaboration. In its various iterations, my experimentations always happened a little differently, according to different parameters. But often it would involve me asking a trusted colleague or friend to live-edit an image montage, based on live signals from cameras in the space and a digital archive that I had pre-arranged. This image montage would both function as a backdrop for a voiceover performed in the live situation and as a documentation montage of the event (with the sound of the performance recorded). Hence, in one case, I had an actor perform the voiceover while I participated in the situation as a camera operator. In another situation, I performed the voiceover in the form of an anecdote-driven lecture. Thus, as an operational concept in collaborative live editing, guiding is a performative approach. It is a strategy that allows for several divergent temporalities and references to be evoked simultaneously: visual annotations, sounds, anecdotes, reflections, scholarly debates and personal memories alike.

What I show in my book is generally how the production of lived time always is a practice of manoeuvring through, with, and around stuff (including people) in situated environments. There is a degree of reality in film footage (the material) that resides in the film editing process as an investigative procedure. But I don't simply put my agency to the service of mere representation—I myself am influenced by the multiplicity of agencies at play in conveying something to other people.

A crucial part of my research revolved around time spent with guides on Svalbard. For example, I took part in an exam excursion of a nature guide training program, which I describe in the book as a revelation of how:

"The guide is part of constellations with others, and with other, than herself. The guide has a special responsibility; the guide has to answer to several stakeholders. The guide must be trustworthy; the guide must possess both power and humbleness. The guide, if she is good, is both knowledgeable and passionate. Perhaps, also, discontented. The guide is, then, as authentic as non-authentic; perhaps

above all a storyteller capable of shifting focus as required from the prescribed to the performative—not in the sense of performing but of living.”(la Cour 2022, 66)

Over the years, however, having returned to Svalbard again and again, I have come to understand this as the realisation that there is no place outside the imaginaries carried by our relations to our surroundings. And in essence, this is what the Arctic nature guides revealed: both social and natural stories emerge from being in—or part of—nature (Tsing 2011). Hence, an increasing lack of sea ice may obviously complicate safe crossings of fjords and require nature guides to seek new paths in the terrain. But embedded in that manoeuvring is also the constitution of human behaviour and community as an improvised negotiation of environmental and social stories. To be more concrete: the remains of blubber ovens, oil boilers and now ruined huts, left behind by whalers of the eighteenth century, allow the nature guide to track human presences and histories in a landscape often narrated as barren and empty. Embedded in this is a contemporary effort to mobilise perceptions of nature to critically frame stories of post-industrial mining sites and educate “Arctic Ambassadeurs” (a term that was often used by the nature guides).

Coming back to editing as a research method, guiding is fundamentally an operational concept for the articulation and negotiation of temporal communality and indeterminacy. The artist as editor brings film footage (the archive) to life by being both an organiser of, a participant in, and a witness to filmmaking as an event, whereby editing as a research method exposes illusions and ideas of authenticity, pure authorship and undisturbed knowledge production. At stake, for me, is fundamentally to respond and potentially contribute to calls for “more affective modes of critique”(Skiveren 2023).

MA: This would be a good place to delve into the format or structure of a live-editing experiment. Could you give an example of how you constructed these, perhaps in the form of instructions that go into the event? You told me once before that it seems quite “obvious” when disclosed. But simplicity works in artistic research precisely because it allows for flexibility to open up.

ElaC: My experiments with live editing have been quite diverse, but the essence is the exposure of how the presentation of an image is also its production. To make it concrete, I can describe my PhD defence, where I wanted to avoid talking about my collaborative live video-editing experiments as artworks or cinematic performances. I intended to

demonstrate artistic experimentality as a mode of reflecting upon the production of the Arctic. I wanted to situate and enact live editing as a method in the context of the defence, and thereby make the event part of the iterative series of live experiments that constituted the design of my artistic research. How, I wondered, does a PhD defence give the production and reception of art shape and possibility? And what is the relationship between the traditional split between art and science and the imaginaries of the Arctic sold to us throughout the 20th century?

Fundamentally, the defence was at once a live editing experiment and a statement of a need, as I see it, to train being comfortable with uncertainty, indeterminacy, and self-implicatedness.

The event took place in a theatre rehearsal space, a high-ceilinged black box at HDK-Valand at Gothenburg University. The audience was seated along the walls of the space and on an interior balcony, as well as in a cinema space elsewhere in the building. The set-up was like this: two screens; one played prepared video sequences, and one streamed the live edited documentation being assembled at/the event. This outcome was also streamed in the cinema space and online. In the theatre space, I had invited an artist colleague and friend to live edit from a digital archive—audio-visual material from my Svalbard hard drive—and live feed from two cameras operated by other artist colleagues, as well as still cameras.

Meanwhile, I was sitting by a table with a microphone and a table stand with a webcam directed downwards. Underneath, I had my thesis (the book), which functioned like a flipbook with a dozen still images from an imaginary timeline. The pictures included in my thesis appear as extracted video stills, and thus signal a narrative but open grid of sorts. Finally, I invited a friend who is a musician. Apart from being in charge of the sound levels in the space (my voice and the video’s sound), he had designed a digital instrument that was activated by my speaking voice. I had not worked with live sound design in this way before, but I attempted to incorporate sound as a cinematic effect responding to my (slightly anxious) nervous system. Occasionally, I gave the microphone to the camera operators, the editor and the musician who read short passages from my thesis out loud.

The readings formed part of a 20-minute live narration about a proclaimed fictitious female filmmaker. It opened with the filmmaker receiving an email from a friend asking about the possibility of traveling to Svalbard by boat. The filmmaker’s friend wished to help out a fourteen-year-old LGBTQ+ individual from Kabul, Afghanistan,



Svalbard, a live narrated montage. The Visual Arena, Lindholmens Science Park, Gothenburg, 2018, dual-screen documentation montage of live edited event, video still



Svalbard, a live narrated montage. The Visual Arena, Lindholmens Science Park, Gothenburg, 2018, dual-screen documentation montage of live edited event, video still

wondering about Svalbard as a viable destination due to its visa regulations—no visa is needed (as long as the Schengen area is circumnavigated when arriving by boat). The storyline was only mentioned in passing and not elaborated upon, which can be questioned. But its purpose was to critically engage with and challenge aestheticized imaginaries of Svalbard as an Arctic place. Overall, the attempt was to expose Svalbard as less a fixed place in the North than a geopolitical and infrastructural circumstance that reaches out and elsewhere.

This is not an example of a method with which I have produced a great film. One examiner indeed raised the question: “Where exactly is the film?”



Presentation at public PhD defense. HDK-Valand, Gothenburg, 2022. Documentation.

I don't remember how I responded. But I consider the question to be an invitation to reflect upon what it means to contribute to filmmaking. Now, the status of the documentation of my live editing experiments remains a bit unclear, and since my PhD, I have had an urge to explore the method differently and in a broader sense. Let me end by arguing for the value of live editing as a methodology and epistemological strategy of essayism—the French word for trying something out.³

Given the intellectual history of the essay film, which largely shaped the training of my generation of artists, this form was always

closely related to an idea of emancipation and progressive auteur visions. But my live editing experimentation does not only draw on the intellectual history of essay filmmaking. It also seeks to contribute to or rethink it. At a time when audio-visual production has come to fill new cultural roles in the critical contexts of contemporary crisis, collaborative live editing explores the possibility of a shift in focus from, say, “the film to come,” towards filmmaking as a precarious form and vulnerable practice of articulation; a practice through which knowledge is being produced rather than transmitted. Ideally, this implies the training of care, sensible attention, and structural critique needed to tackle the fact that our contemporary (poly)crisis can only be improved through enormous collective efforts (Zielinski 2023).

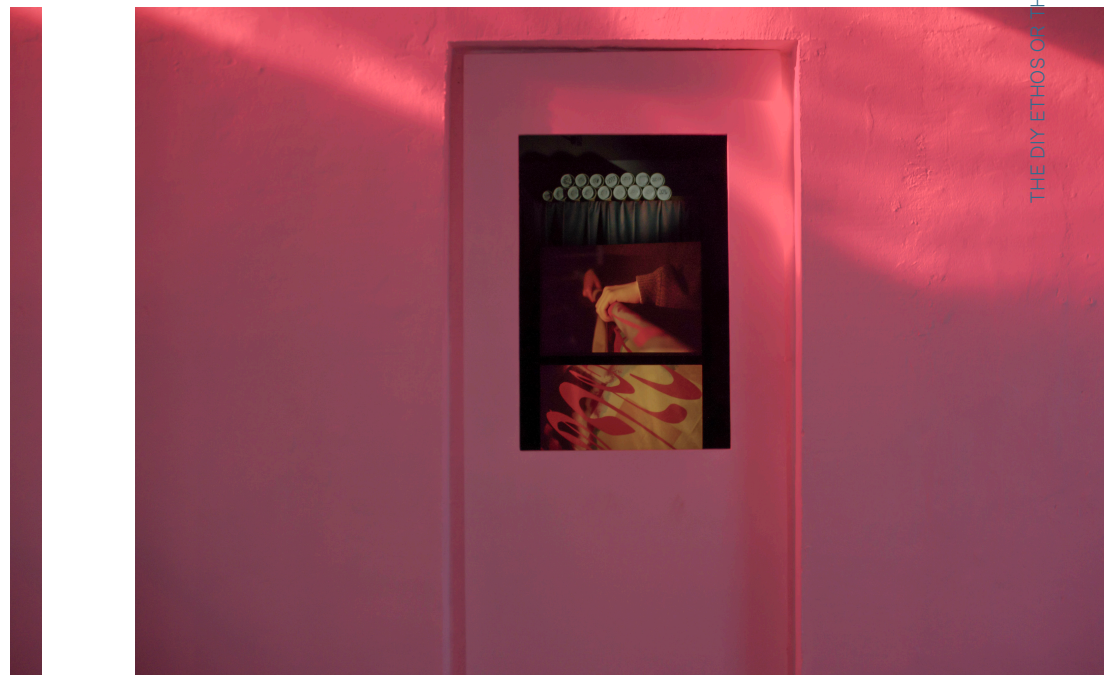
3 This is explicitly reflected in the subtitle of my PhD thesis, which include the term post-future essayism. Post-future essayism basically covers my urge for a futurity beyond that which is sold to us as the future in the present (when a wave of far-rightist crypto-enthusiastic threat is spreading), prompting that a homogeneous technological future is the only option. That is, in contrast to a form of determinism that imposes the current system as the only possible one, I suggest that post-future essayism covers a strive towards indeterminacy. That the situation is open. This should not be understood as a disregard for future consequences for our actions, but more as a shift in focus from temporal linearity, authenticity and origin, towards historical effect and struggle; historical becoming.

REFERENCES

- Busch, Annett. 2024. *Material, Montage – Et Brev Til Redaktøren*. Billedkunstskolernes Forlag.
- Cour, Eva Ia. 2022. *Geo-Aesthetical Discontent: Svalbard, the Guide and Post-Future Essayism*. ArtMonitor.
- Larsson, Mariah, and Anna Westerstahl Stenport. 2019. "WOMEN ARCTIC EXPLORERS." In *Arctic Cinemas and the Documentary Ethos*, edited by Anna Westerstahl Stenport, Lilya Kaganovsky, and Scott MacKenzie. Indiana University Press. JSTOR. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvcj2wqq.8>.
- Skiveren, Tobias. 2023. "New Materialism and the Eco-Marxist Challenge." *Environmental Humanities* 15 (2): 181–94. <https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-10422355>.
- Strathern, Marilyn. 1999. *Property, Substance, and Effect: Anthropological Essays on Persons and Things*. Athlone Press.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt. 2011. *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton University Press. <http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=815525>.
- Zielinski, Siegfried. 2023. *Varianter Af Fælles Handling i Kunsten*. Kunsten Som Forum På Tryk & Billedkunstskolernes Forlag.

the DIY ethos or thesis is: stay permanent

Ben Caro & Kat Cutler-MacKenzie in trialogue with
Laura De Jaeger



Installation view of *the DIY ethos or thesis is: stay permanent*, (dual-channel 35mm slide projection, 162 colour and black and white slides), 2025. Installed in the exhibition *Rooms in Rhymes* at the Contemporary Art Museum of Estonia (EKKM), Tallinn, 2025. Photo courtesy: EKKM.