



Clemens  
von Wedemeyer  
2016–23

KOW

*“The crowd not only acts upon the human being who is inside it and exposed to it, its agency within him persists when he is alone and isolated, and its effect on him is sometimes strongest in his greatest isolation.”*

Clemens von Wedemeyer’s new films from the cycle „The Illusion of a Crowd“ undertake a probing exploration of the phenomenon of human crowds. What happens when they grow exponentially? How can their behavior be predicted, and how can it be controlled? What distinguishes digital hordes from physical ones? And how is the individual human being part of a crowd, or many crowds, even in isolation?

The centerpiece of Wedemeyer’s new film cycle, 70.001, is a reconstruction in the digital realm of the Monday demonstrations that filled the streets of Leipzig in October 1989. But two key differences set the computer simulation of the mass movement apart from the historic events: The crowd is flowing through the digital Leipzig of today. And it doesn’t disperse in the evening as people go home. The algorithms don’t need a break and, day after day, add new protesters to yesterday’s crowd. Soon enough the streets are

packed as far as the eye can see with animated clones, turning the demonstration into a viral sea of stereotyped bodies. Is there actually a will that propels them? And if so, what do they want? Is their behavior preprogrammed?

Wedemeyer presents his animation in the form of a video wall set up in the gallery space. For viewers who now stream it on their computers at home, it raises another question: Will we one day send our digital avatars out to demonstrate in virtual streets while staying at home ourselves? Will the digital political public of the future organize Monday demonstrations in the data space? And has that future perhaps already arrived?

In Transformation Scenario, a trust-inspiring voice speaking in a soothing tone summarizes the latest science on the behavior of crowds and individuals—from riots to Woodstock. As

powerful cinematic footage fills the screen—simulations involving large numbers of extras evoking a menacing power of the multitude that might infect any society—the voice touts a new understanding of the human being: someone who, when caught up in a complex situation, no longer needs to decide for himself or herself what to do. The insights of mass psychology, the voice argues, now make automated control of the individual possible, relieving him or her of all anxiety, doubt, and uncertainty. Guided by artificial intelligence, every one of us can at long last be free and completely himself or herself, the promotional clip promises.

Crowd Control is a simulation software designed for police and military forces and security services that enables the user to control the dynamic of mass protests and rehearse countermeasures. Wedemeyer's film of the same title shows the construction of different model scenarios in which protesters clash with police and the crowd wrests itself free of the state apparatus's iron embrace. Or it doesn't. Depending on who dominates the game.



For *Faux Terrain*, Wedemeyer staged a scene that interweaves the isolation of a lone protagonist with a seemingly absurd concatenation of mass events, ranging from the Yellow Vests protests to Cold War-era security measures and back to the year 1871, when Switzerland granted asylum to 87,000 French soldiers, the birth of its modern identity as a neutral humanitarian nation. In the present, however, such neutrality gives way to chaos: ambling through the deserted white halls of a museum, the lonely young woman is abruptly swept along by a frenzied crowd aimlessly rushing through the disorienting White Cube.

An accident strikes. But things could be much worse. A few people have sustained light injuries for exercise purposes—a hundred servicemembers are on the scene to assist them. In Wedemeyer's *Katastrophenübung* (Disaster Response Drill), the health care system lovingly tends to minor scratches, but also, and more importantly, to itself. The drill without a disaster shines a spotlight on the public authorities' need for organization at a time of crisis, when communicative

and bureaucratic routines cocoon the individuals in a closed society even as each one of them may actually have only himself or herself to depend on.

Wedemeyer's films prompt us to rethink our own positions in the real, media, and digital spaces of assembly and isolation. The crowd, in the sense of an impulsive collective of affected bodies and stirred emotions, is a constant presence today, both a menace and potential source of solidarity. The regulation and control of those bodies and emotions and their agency will be a pivotal issue in the political debates, and likely also the art, of the near future. Wedemeyer's work is an eye-opening introduction to its complexities.



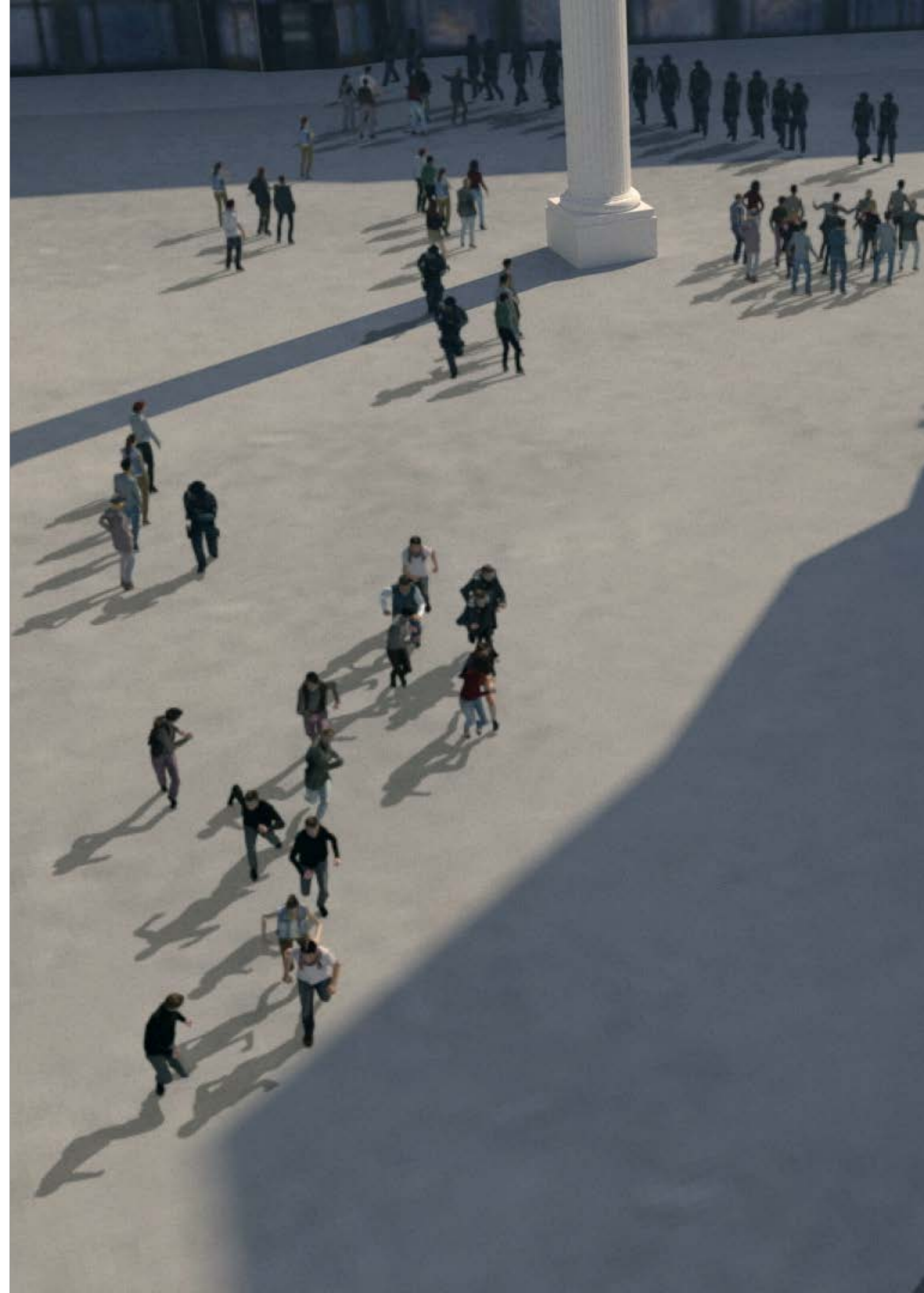
## 70.001, 2019

Video, color, sound, 16:9

16 min

The Monday demonstrations in East Germany in 1989 to 1991 were a series of peaceful political protests against the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) that took place every Monday evening.

70.001 is a speculative view of the events of 1989 from today's perspective. A computer animation is used to simulate Leipzig as hundreds of thousands of so-called digital agents move along the inner city ring. The crowd swells continually until the procession of demonstrators faces itself. The animation is accompanied by interviews with contemporary witnesses and discussions on digital culture.





# Transformation Scenario, 2018

Video installation , color, sound, 16:9  
20 min

Simulated life began in the movies and computer games, but is influencing many fields today. In architecture, city planning, traffic navigation, and market and trade predictions, virtual scenarios of human behavior change the way we live. Transformation Scenario creates a speculative narration on the impact of emulated group behaviour in society.









## Crowd Control, 2018

Video, color, sound, 16:9

23 min

Security forces used to rehearse safety procedures for demonstrations with actual crowds of people. Meanwhile, crowd movements are simulated virtually to optimise the coordination of police operations. Crowd Control demonstrates three typical scenarios.





MASS



CROWD CONTROL

Resources

- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline
- Frontline

Groups

- Group3 (750)
- Group4 (500)
- Group5 (500)
- Group6 (100)
- Group7 (100)
- Group8 (50)

Scripts

Other

- Pedestrian

Group: Group5

- Move to...
- Move to area...
- Move along route...
- Move in direction...
- Stop
- Resume
- Speed
- Attributes
- Behavior
- Situation
- Group
- Composition
- Orient...
- Properties...
- Delete



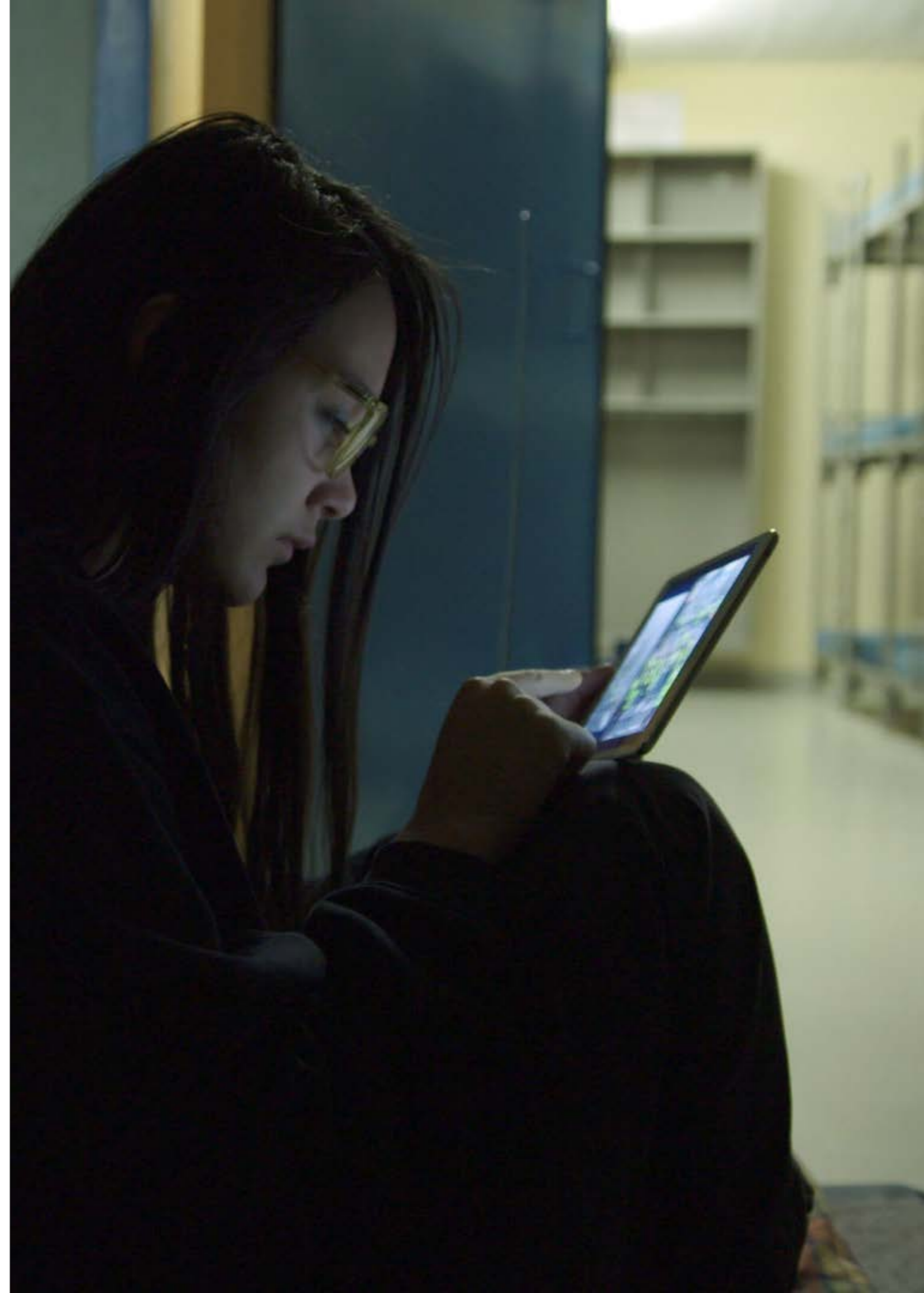
## Faux Terrain, 2019

Video, color, sound, 16:9

20 min

The space that separates a panoramic image from the standing position of its viewers is known as false ground – “faux terrain”.

The plot of the film follows a young adult, whose identity remains unclear, in special social spaces in Lucerne: the historical Bourbaki Panorama, civil defence shelters and the Kunstmuseum.





## Emergency Drill Revisited, 2020

Video, color, sound, 16:9

20 min

All the responses to the pandemic were somehow predictable, familiar scenarios sketched out in disaster movies. AI, 3D software, and algorithms are in fact constantly deployed to formulate response plans. These are then rehearsed through role-play and live exercises until the difference between rehearsal and reality fades away. The point of such exercises is not simply to rehearse rescue operations. Instead, their ultimate goal is to establish complete control over crowds or to prevent them from ever forming by placing restrictions on movement and social contact. Such are the techniques explored in Clemens von Wedemeyer's new film. In 2018, he observed an emergency drill in the vicinity of Leipzig. Its fictitious scenario was the capsizing of a ferry. Countless victims are treated by rescue workers. Everything goes according to plan and without any of the sentiments that we

know from blockbusters. The voiceover is a dialogue on the rituals of the state of exception, describing a society obsessed with self-protection.







## Open Objects, 2021

Work in progress, colour, sound, VR

The project Open Objects is a digital copy of the studio of the Belarusian sculptor Zair Azgur in Minsk, where hundreds of his artistic creations are still preserved today. Born in Mogilev province, sculptor Zair Azgur (1908–1995) studied at the Leningrad Higher Institute of Industrial Art but later moved to Minsk where he lived and worked as a professional sculptor. This city later became home to several of his public monuments. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Azgur's studio became a time capsule of sorts, filled with numerous twentieth-century statues that follow the canon of socialist realism. Sculptures depicting iconic figures of a communist canon — Stalin, Lenin, Marx and others — reflect the complex history of Belarus, which for many years was part of the Soviet Union.

As part of the Open Objects art project, the workshop is transformed into

a digital 3D space, with sculptures becoming the material for new constellations, semantic arrangements and interpretations. The viewers will be able to enter the virtual interiors of the artist's studio where they will see its original size and real scale; in another location they hear discussions about the themes of cultural memory and the development of historical narratives that permeate the statues in the studio. How can we turn the studio with all its impressive range of artistic, historical and discursive narratives, with all the memories it holds within it, into an open space, where everything is ambiguous, not entirely defined, where everything can be revised and reinterpreted? How can we get out of the time capsule, and can we get out at all? This project began in late 2019 and was conceived as a living exhibition with physical objects, but soon a pandemic happened that radically and fundamentally changed

our present, our individual and collective lives. Then, against the backdrop of the political crisis in Belarus, protest and political turmoil made it impossible to hold the exhibition in Minsk. The decision to create a virtual space is not a full substitute for a physical exhibition, but this format allows us to accept and affirm the new possibilities offered by the virtual space, in which we can cross borders more easily.

As a work in progress it will bring together artists, philosophers, historians and cultural theorists, while discussions will explore past and present situations.





# Ausbeutung, oder wie man die Oberfläche durchbricht, 2020 (Exploitation, or How To Break The Surface)

with Paula Ábalos, Emerson Culurgioni, Charlotte Eifler,

Deborah Jeromin, Mikhail Tolmachev

Video installation, color, sound

5 screens

12 min

The 1521 painting by Hans Hesse of the Annaberg mountain altar shows in a realistic style scenes of the everyday mining routine in the Erzgebirge. The pictorial and intellectual world of this medieval work of art is the starting point for a large video installation by Paula Ábalos, Emerson Culurgioni, Charlotte Eifler, Deborah Jeromin, Mikhail Tolmachev together with Clemens von Wedemeyer.

„Our reaction to the image is a new work and is titled: ‚Exploitation, or how to break the surface‘. It is an artistic research, which starts close to the material part of the picture and tries to understand connections of the picture in today’s world through the pro-

tagonist - a restorer. A media history also becomes visible: from painting to photography and the moving image to dematerialization or transformation in digital media. In this way we want to make visible workers’ motions in the picture and follow indications of global connections of the exploitation of raw materials and its costs. With this approach we try to question the past identity of mining in Saxony for its validity“. Produced in frame of the Saxon State Exhibition for Industrial Culture BOOM, 2020.





## Vermin of The Sky, 2017

Single channel HD video installation

b/w, sound, 3:1

10 min

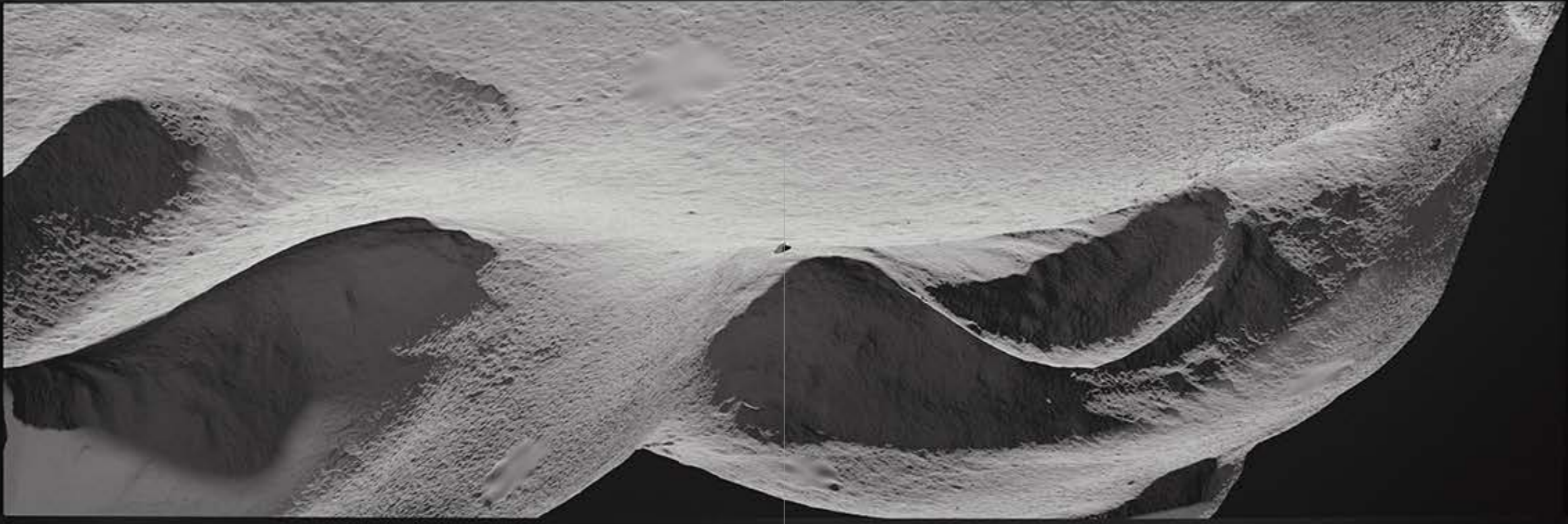
In a surreal meeting in the outer space, digitalized sculptures engage in dominance and submission exercises, which turn a bust of a locally meritorious general, a mask of the prime Czech patron saint and Prometheus' head into mere physical matter, played out in a newly told Space Odyssey.

The work is a continuation of the artist's research on the discursive, social and symbolic value of sculpture in relation to film, the actor, and also the spectator, which Wedemeyer already explored in the exhibitions *The Cast*, presented at MAXII Rome in 2013, and the subsequent project *Cast Behind You The Bones Of Your Mother*, shown in KOW Berlin in 2015.











Vermin of The Sky, 2017  
Sculpture display, mixed media



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