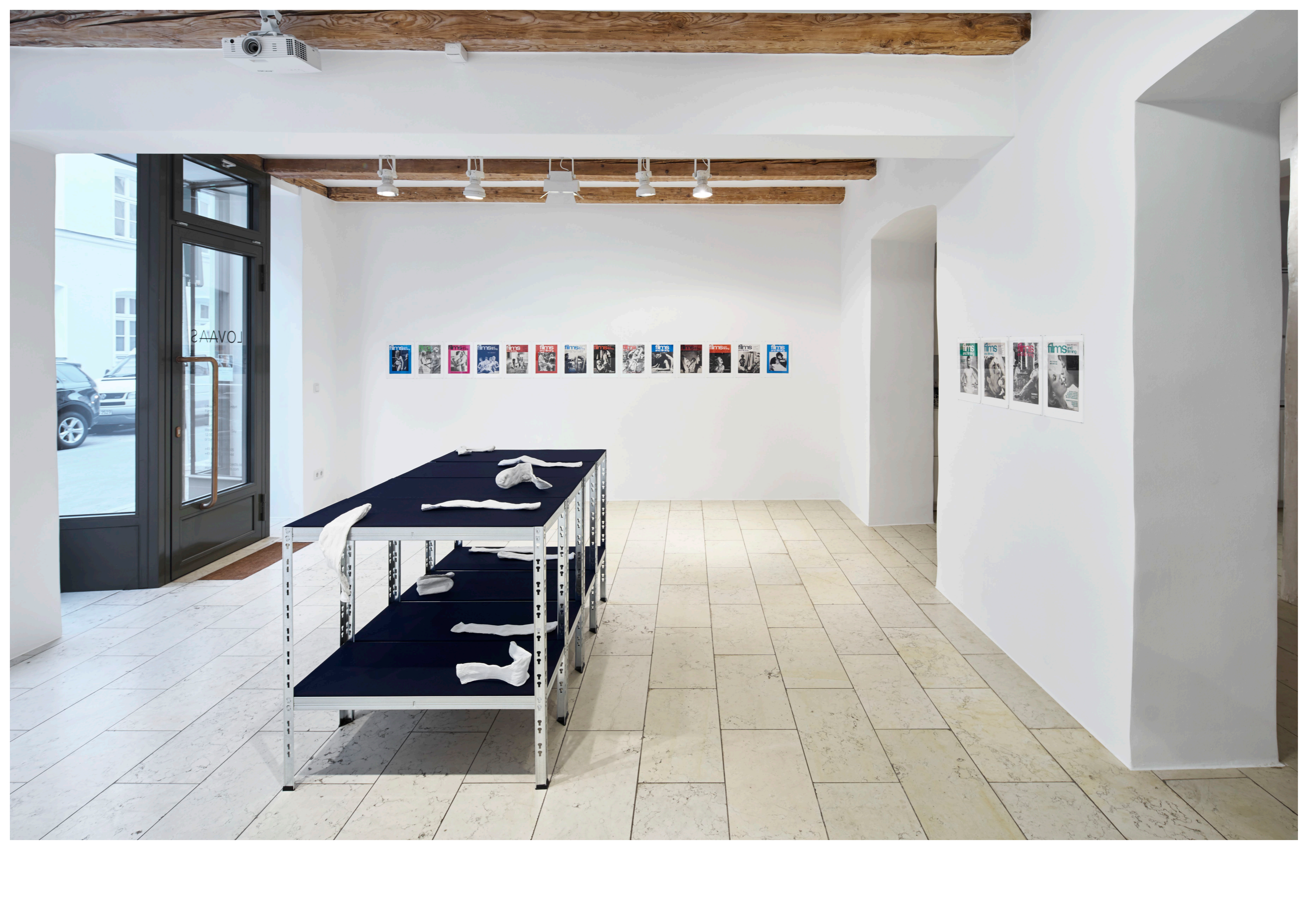


DAVID LIESKE
DIRECTION ARTISTE



Direction Artiste (Fig. I Le Drapeau de la Capitulation), 2017
White flag
Dimensions Variable
Unlimited Edition





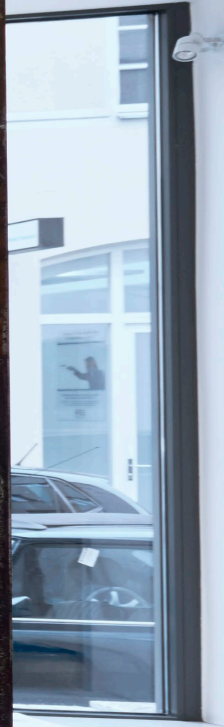
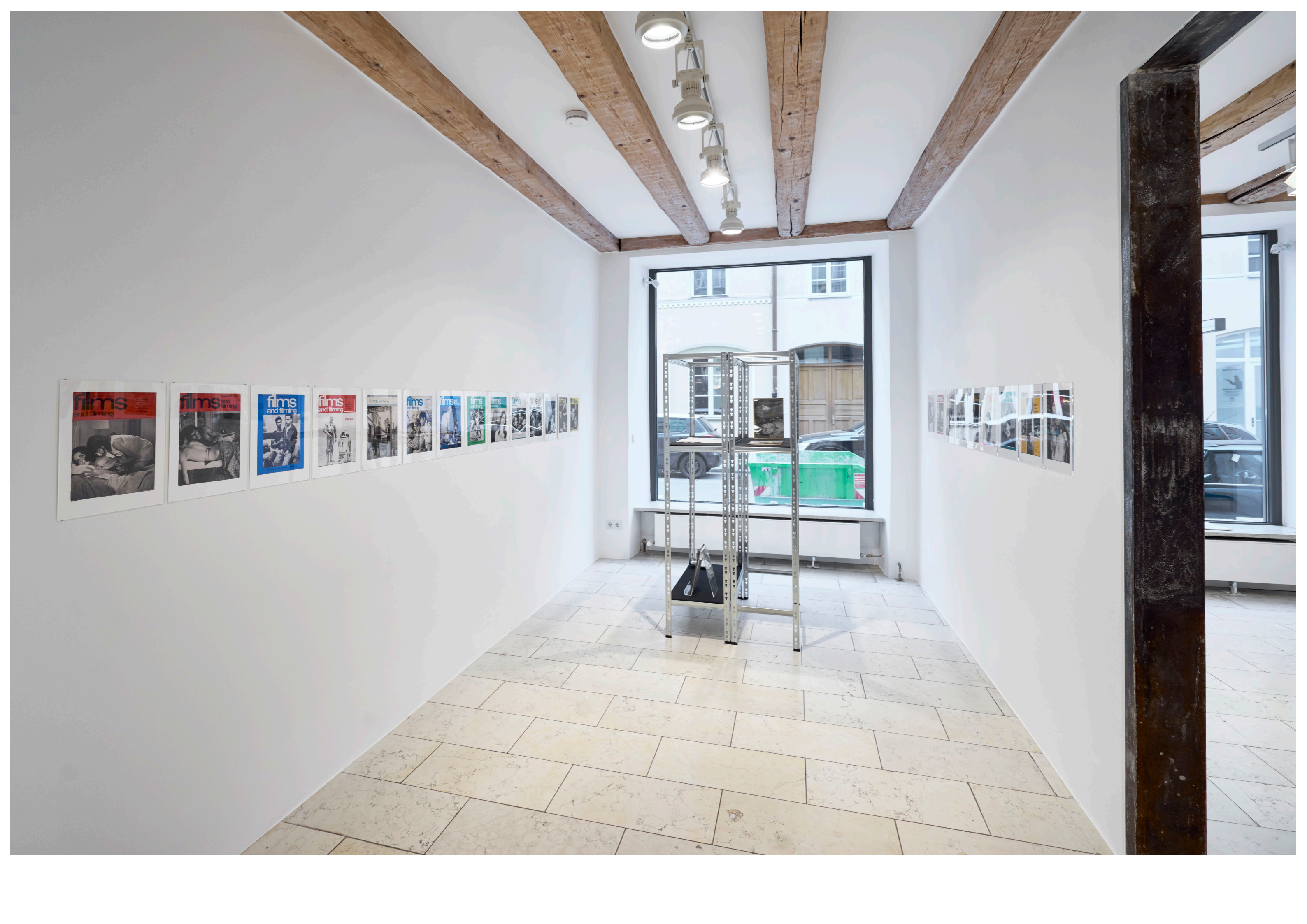




Direction Artiste (Fig. III Fossilisation Historique), 2017
Aluminum storage-shelf, cashmere, athletic-socks, paint
97 x 160 x 90 cm
Unique



Direction Artiste (Fig. III Fossilisation Historique) (Detail), 2017
Aluminum storage-shelf, cashmere, athletic-socks, paint
97 x 160 x 90 cm
Unique





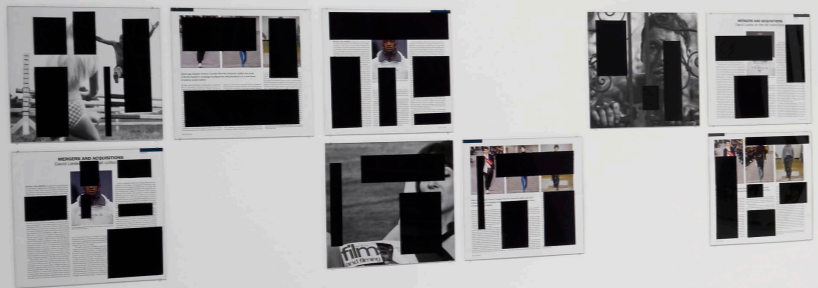
Direction Artiste (Fig. IV Anti-Quare), 2017
Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136,
Aluminum storage-shelf, cashmere, athletic-socks, paint
177 x 80 x 90 cm
Unique

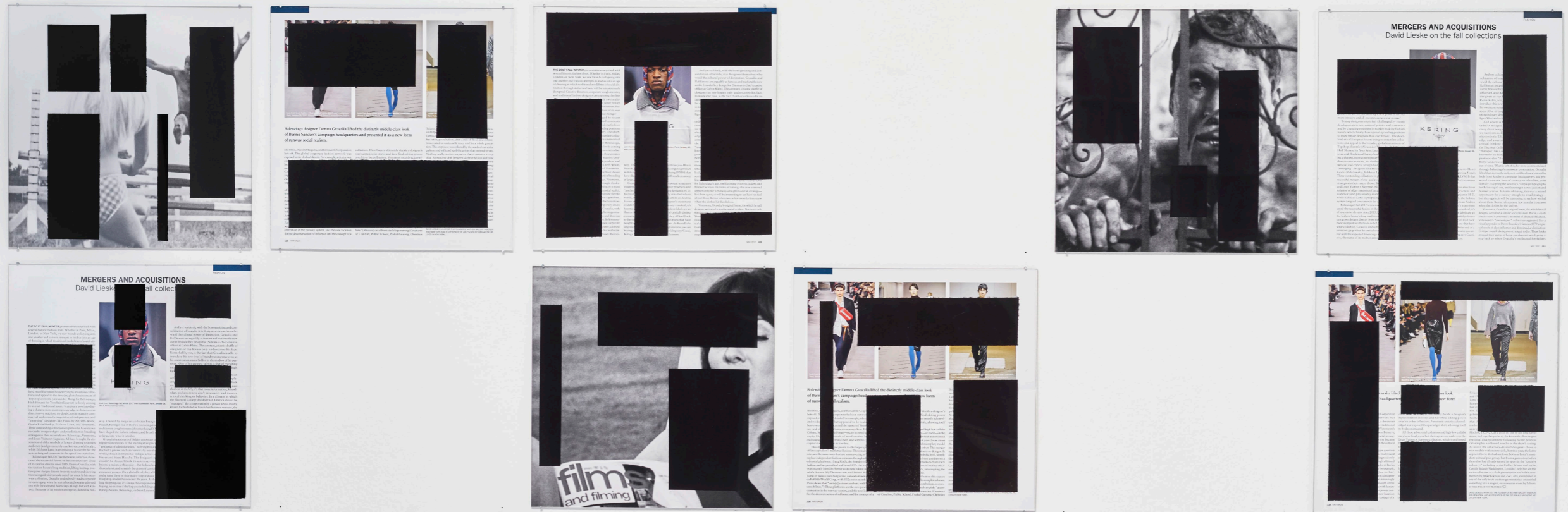


Direction Artiste (Fig. IV Anti-Quare) (Detail), 2017
Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136,
Aluminum storage-shelf, cashmere, athletic-socks, paint
177 x 80 x 90 cm
Unique



Direction Artiste (Fig. IV Anti-Quare) (Detail), 2017
 Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136, Radikal No.136,
 Aluminum storage-shelf, cashmere, athletic-socks, paint
 177 x 80 x 90 cm
 Unique





Direction Artiste (Fig. V Disposition d'Automne), 2017
Inkjet-print, digital-print, plexiglas, acrylic paint
55 x 171 cm
Unique

DAVID LIESKE DIRECTION ARTISTE

— Appendix —

A conversation with Thomas Meinecke

THOMAS MEINECKE: It is of course very interesting for me, because I wasn't aware, or at least not knowingly aware of this magazine until you pointed it out to me. Nor was I aware of the various implications, which are super interesting. First of all I wanted to ask you: how did you come across this publication. Do you collect the copies or do you happen across them here and there?

DAVID LIESKE: It was actually through a film called *The Swimmer* that I came across the magazine *Films and Filming*. This movie by Frank Perry and Sydney Pollack from 1968 is set amongst the upper middle class milieu of the 1960s suburban Connecticut, with Burt Lancaster as main character. Lancaster – *the swimmer* – is seen throughout the whole film wearing nothing but his swimming trunks, which most likely helped the movie commercially.

The Lancaster character seems to have been somewhat excluded from this poignantly portrayed society, but he doesn't seem to have realised this himself. In a proto-performative grand gesture he spontaneously declares to "swim home" to his house via the various pools in the neighbourhood. He wanders from one garden to the next and swims across each of the neighbouring swimming pools. The closer he gets to his own house, or what he imagines to be his, the more sinister become the encounters he has with people who gather around these pools when he appears.

In one of his final encounters before the big showdown, he meets a former lover of his, who is also a bit out of sorts with him. In the opening sequence of that scene we see her lie in a deckchair by the pool reading an issue of *Films and Filming*. The strange symbolism of the film – Lancaster and a brief female companion, for example, are challenging a bunch of horse jumps, which are quite similar to the ones I have been using for a number of exhibitions in the past – and its altogether peculiar conceptual art-like gestures and language – the swimming across imaginarily inter-linked swimming pools –, both reminded me more of Lucy R. Lippard's book *Six Years*, rather than of other Hollywood movies that I have seen before from that era. When shortly afterwards, I realised that Edward Ruscha's artist's book *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* was made in the same year (he replaced the East-coast setting of *The Swimmer* for a world of Californian motels), everything seemed to me even more connected to my general interests. Anyway, I had to research the magazine *Films and Filming*, the title of which was so compelling that I used it as a title for a group show without even knowing more about it. But then, upon realising what kind of magazine this really had been and what was all at stake here, I was really excited and started to collect issues whenever it was possible.

THOMAS MEINECKE: And where do you find these magazines? In vintage shops for movie collectables, and are they expensive?

DAVID LIESKE: No, not at all. Or maybe? I have never been to any such shop. To be honest, I bought most copies on Ebay for an average of two or three Dollars per issue. One of the last deliveries contained a little note saying: 'Thank you for collecting the magazines of my youth. That was somewhat touching. These magazines must have meant quite a bit to someone. But, as far as I know, *Films and Filming* is not very sought-after or rare. I believe it is quite forgotten.

THOMAS MEINECKE: That's interesting. Because I quickly found a few cultural studies essays on the internet, that suggested the magazine did work on two levels, that on the one hand it appealed to cineastes and on the other hand to those with a sexually different orientation. Although the word "gay" wouldn't have been used, there was no doubt that it was dealing with *special interest*. For me it is riveting to think that this *special interest* was also a general interest, and that even those who were not affected by this *special interest* – in the sense of an 'unfortunate disposition' as it was called in Germany back then (*unglückliche Veranlagung*) – that even those were offered, by way of the *special interest*, a possibility to deal with sexuality, including other sexuality. It was obviously put on the front cover and that I find incredibly exciting. I instantly caught fire, and I would love to flick through them at once.

DAVID LIESKE: I was immediately taken by their very free use of third-party visual material for the covers of *Films and Filming*. The manner in which film stills from well-known (often straight) movies were isolated on the front cover is both a precise and a highly skillful reinterpretation of their original context, without changing the source material at all. It heavily reminded me of the practice of the so-called Pictures Generation but I had never really seen this kind of best possible and most beautiful example of highly politicized appropriation outside the field of contemporary art, and this particular one taking place years ahead of Douglas Crimp's *Pictures*. It seemed that I had at hand a very effective and also subversive variation of what is nowadays called art direction.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Precisely. The magazine was launched back in 1954 and existed until 1990. The incredibly long time span in between might have fostered this role as a narrational supporting act, which the magazine seems to have taken on and which may have become a bit superfluous when codes were superseded once people were able to be more explicit.

In your pieces, the examples range up until the year 1980, if I'm right.

In this respect, it is interesting that back in the 60s and 70s magazines such as *Konkret* and other German periodicals, especially during the course of the so-called sexual revolution, would adorn their cover pages with bare breasted women. Whilst on the inside there would be a column by Ulrike Meinhof, on the outside there was a naked or semi-naked lady. This seems very odd from our contemporary perspective and thank god it doesn't happen that often anymore. But in general, it would be worthwhile considering whether sexuality – both hetero and queer – was simply used for advertising purposes.

DAVID LIESKE: Funny enough it seems that especially the politically progressive or leftist magazines took up the cause for very liberal nudity and body politics. Another interesting example is a fashion magazine from former East Germany called *Sybille* that I am fascinated by and after which I modelled a fashion magazine with Rob Kulisek last year. *Sybille* used plenty of nudity simply because of their extremely limited access to western designer clothes to be photographed. But I also believe that they wanted to create a clear opposition to West German press, where the displayed attitudes in general were rather prudish and marked by restraint. That also made leftist papers in West-Germany that were pro-East such as *Konkret* take on a similar stance.

THOMAS MEINECKE: For the first time in my life, I was in Belgrade recently where I talked to many intellectuals. Some older ones had grown up during Socialism and they claim that homophobia didn't exist back then. It simply wouldn't have occurred in the context of or in parallel to socialist nudism. I thought that was interesting, that the Eastern Bloc might have granted itself a luxurious attitude towards sexuality that I, from the West, was utterly unaware of.

With *Films and Filming* I find interesting, how you experience their progressive work with image material. As you said before, it was the way the magazine was interpreting or re-interpreting movie stills with very different original meaning, which provided the additional twist, by placing them on the cover with added keywords, captions or names of actors. I wonder how it felt like in 1967 or 1971, looking at such cover pages. Homosexuality was still illegal – in West Germany in any case. Because of Section 175 in the German Criminal Code, you met many gay men who used a hidden system of codes to identify themselves or to make themselves identifiable. I was born in the 1950s and remember exactly when the fog lifted. Such magazines were of course a much earlier way to place subtle signs and they helped define that whole area. Amidst

subtlety and suppression, a set of very difficult codes could be invented, and they would help develop a signifying that left any ordinary citizen miles behind – something that is also triggering my excitement for gay or African-american sub-cultures.

DAVID LIESKE: Many *Films and Filming* issues have been in my possession for a few years now, and I thought about what I could do with them. In the end, I went for the one appropriation procedure that has been historically most prominent, the process of re-photographing, also as a way to differentiate the cover from the general content of the magazines by simply repeating the appropriation. This more or less also reflects the two layers of meaning that I think you were talking about.

When I looked at all the final images I suddenly had to think about the city of Munich. Certain motifs appear, such as the cover of the half nude Helmut Berger wearing nothing but two swastika wristbands. It is a movie still from *Salon Kitty* by Tinto Brass. Or of course the one from Visconti's *Ludwig*, again with Berger. The combination of avantgarde-film, high camp, haute bourgeoisie and national socialism was simply too poignant and seemed to sum up what in my imagination is in a way the essence of Munich.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Yes that seems to be quite fitting, I'd say as someone who's from Hamburg and who voluntarily moved to Munich in 1970. At the time, there was a very interesting film-maker based here, Hans-Jürgen Syberberg, who made pretty queer movies, amongst others about the Bavarian king Ludwig II and the German author Karl May, and there was of course Fassbinder. It was a city ruled by Disco, the music was produced here and sent around the world. Munich has many interesting things to offer, it is a place where queer masculinity was already quite strong back then. Until today the city is quite likable. I usually take visitors first of all to the AIDS Memorial by Wolfgang Tillmans right by the Sendlinger Tor, followed by the Gärtnerplatzviertel and the Deutsche Eiche by Fassbinder and so on. There really is something. I only didn't assume that you see a relationship – although your exhibition takes place here.

DAVID LIESKE: A few years ago I did an exhibition about an architect from Munich, Herman Sörgel, who had made a plan to evaporate the mediterranean as a fascist peace-project. The show took place in a small institution in Minneapolis that Kati Lovaas was heavily involved with at the time. I first met Kati in Minneapolis before she and her daughter went on to set up this gallery, which is hosting the current show in Munich. I had heard about Herman Sörgel through your fellow author Christian Kracht. He showed me a

book about Sörgel's *Atlantropa* project on one of the few days that I ever visited Munich. We went swimming that day in the small river called the *Eisbach* in the Englischer Garten. At one point we had the impression of hearing unicorns whinny in the distance and at the end of the day we had a so-called *Fernsehteller* at Schumann's restaurant and he drove me home on his Swiss army bike. The day seemed to have come out from the novel *In Youth Is Pleasure* by Denton Welch in some way and has stayed in my memory quite vividly as one of the best days in my life.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Your thematic and aesthetic proposal is well placed in Munich, but what happened in this British magazine is also as *international as it can get* within the realm of the northwestern world. It was a British magazine, am I correct?

DAVID LIESKE: Yes, that's true.

THOMAS MEINECKE: In some way, I also do wonder whether this is a particularly British story. Generally speaking at that time, also here in West Germany, many of these issues were not freely available. Someone like me – a heteronormative teenager – had to visit gay bookshops in order to purchase a book by Quentin Crisp, for example, something I most urgently wanted to get. *The Naked Civil Servant* was a must read, and I had to find out how the *Stonewall Riots* had happened. And then one started talking about Judy Garland's funeral, about the likes of Jack Smith and Charles Ludlam and the *Theater of the Ridiculous*, not to mention Warhol's *Factory*. Everything I was curious to know, I could only find out about in gay bookshops.

DAVID LIESKE: I didn't know that!

THOMAS MEINECKE: And in this respect there is a universal pledge in this *special interest* that even wasn't one. It was also just a heteronormative *interest*, and in my opinion it was made subject matter and washed right up to the surface. And if you only look at the cover pages with its captions – without knowing the contents inside, you realise, that ground was prepared in the proper places.

DAVID LIESKE: It is very different for me. I was born a lot later.

THOMAS MEINECKE: When exactly?

DAVID LIESKE: 1979. For me, this is something I was slightly barred from, and the only access I have to the things that you were just talking about, is through the mediation of cultural historians and artists. Unlike you, I haven't really experienced any of this first

hand. I do know everything about it, of course, but only from this processed sort of retrospective point of view – which makes me a bit sad. But when I discovered this magazine, I let myself be carried away by these simple interventions within its pages. I thought: "Wow! I thoroughly understand how it could work like that." I do especially like the inherent ambivalence, because you cannot be sure whether this actually was a political project at all. Is it really about launching a *gay submarine*? Or is it simply a clever marketing stunt to sell a strange *special interest* movie magazine and what sort of relationship does exist between the two interests?

THOMAS MEINECKE: Yes, and did you come to any results?

DAVID LIESKE: Not really. In the end, this magazine embodies complete ambivalence altogether and, as it is, that's enough for me. Even more so that's what I find particularly interesting and admirable about it as the same is true for the art that I want to exhibit and that I am promoting – its greatest aim should be to generate the highest level of ambivalence. In the same sense I am unsure whether what I am proposing here as my exhibition could still be called art.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Absolutely, I'd think the same. Because in this case ambivalence is not characterised by a set of contradicting vectors but by a form of directional concurrence. Whether further baggage was carried along we don't know or whether there was a commercial interest – it doesn't really matter. It is simply interesting how they were dealing with these signs and it is quite a cool thing that subtlety doesn't come across as inhibition. From the histories of *Gay Liberation* we know anecdotes such as the one about four men who somehow went to the Stonewall Inn or another bar next door. They were gay, they ordered a beer, thanked in a polite manner, after they had been served, and went away thinking that they changed the world, because they had been served in the first place. It can be quite a staid story like this. I mean, there were members of the gay movement that were raving against queens, because they felt that they were bad for business, bad for serious one-by-one emancipation. Someone like me, a fan of camp and popism, has always been happy about the likes of RuPaul or the Cockettes or even the RuPaul precursor, Sylvester. RuPaul entered the stage much later when everything had already been laid out in history. But all of this is a re-construction, also in my case, I had no part in it neither. Christopher Street, I only know about from these incredibly interesting historical accounts. You get the feeling that the times that the *Films and Filming* magazines represent didn't even know anything about

themselves. It was a mixture of political manifesto and hanky code, and that was how the cover pages worked.

DAVID LIESKE: Yes, you can imagine how someone with such a magazine on their lap was sitting on the underground and would actually be accosted by another person or how they would swap them.

But I wanted to get back to that idea of appropriation, because that is an interesting issue also regarding your books and the way you are working with it. You told me that your books were causing an inter-continental problem. As appropriating practices are treated differently in America than in Europe, there were issues with the translation of your recent books. It seems to me, as someone living in the United States, that appropriation in general is somewhat in crisis. Appropriation has a rather negative connotation, and it is at least highly suspicious, admissible only after great considerations.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Do you mean, especially in the US or everywhere in the world?

DAVID LIESKE: I mean in the USA in particular. Especially in the light of the recent debates about cultural appropriation driven by a new wave of identity politics that is experiencing a renaissance at the moment.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Yes, there's plenty going on at the moment. I think that's exciting and, generally speaking, I think it's great that things are moving on, because I've always been in favour of being fairly rigorous when it comes to deciding, which kind of appropriation is ok and which is not.

I particularly remember that in earlier historical accounts concerning camp cultures and queer aspects of pop music such as Glam Rock, David Bowie, Little Richard or Mick Jagger, there was no distinction made, as to what is actually happening there. For example, I recall one text by Mike Kelley, who lumped the drag aesthetics or art of Alice Cooper, Frank Zappa, David Bowie and Boy George amongst others all into one. This meant effectively, that by putting on your grandma's dress, you would be transgressive or would have changed the world. I remember – and I am old enough to remember first hand – that I regarded Mick Jagger's make-up in the early 70s or very late 60s as a rather hostile takeover of femininity. But other iterations, such as voguing culture, I perceived as worshipping gestures of something that could exist if you weren't male. I always thought that hostile takeovers were taking place within such processes of appropriation. All of them used to strengthen the foundations of existing power structures, male power – and colonial power

(which effectively means white power) in the current examples that you might have had in mind. In this respect I understand all the sensitivity where appropriation of dread locks or hoop earrings is concerned.

But still I find it incredibly difficult, because there are cases, like the recent one in Canada, where a college radio played *A Walk On The Wild Side* by Lou Reed and the people responsible for the show had to apologise, as it was claimed to be a transphobic song. At the same time, however, it is one of the first songs in pop history that offers an opening to the whole complex of sexual transgressiveness. It goes: "Holly came from Miami, F.L.A. / hitch-hiked her way across the U.S.A." How does it go on? 'Shaved her eyebrows on the way,' no, 'shaved her...' something was shaved, probably the legs. And then: "He was a She." And it is this line that is nowadays deemed to be transphobic, because a 'he' doesn't become a 'she' that easily. There is an almost tragic dimension to it, because people forget that the space from which we can talk about such issues today was opened up by something that is now being criticised, such as the lyrics of Lou Reed.

DAVID LIESKE: And of course the fact that a pop song was devoted to a trans-woman was already something that did not exist before.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Quite right.

DAVID LIESKE: We've digressed a little bit. I wanted to ask you directly, how do you deal with this in your own writing: do you apply a particular set of rules? You appropriate writings in such a way that you are not citing your sources and by integrating longer fragments of other writers into your own texts, you are proposing a form of 'total appropriation'.

THOMAS MEINECKE: Let's put it this way: I have little interest in the position of autonomous authorship that I obviously inhabit, and I have absolutely no interest in making it the subject matter of my writings or even present it as something special. So when I've written something that, in the process of writing, I believe I've never read anywhere else before, I tend to try and find a section elsewhere that says the same thing, before I did. Then I replace my so-called "own" with the so-called "other". To me it is more important to place myself within a network of thinking and thought-paths rather than trail after the old-fashioned chimera called 'artist' that propounds one produces something unique and new. Which means that I prefer the quoted text to "my own" but I make a bow towards the sources by stating more than once where they do come from. The quoted idea may come up again about 40 pages later, this time without any hint towards the source, but that's because I rely on the readers to notice

"Ah, here we've got someone like Hubert Fichte or Jack Smith again. But they were introduced some time before." I do not really use quotation marks. Simply because I do not believe in the enclosed autonomy of the Other. I regard that as open as anything else. That's why I follow a form of writing that was propagated by feminists such as Hélène Cixous, who describes feminine text as openly accessible from the top and the bottom, from both sides, from the front and the back.

DAVID LIESKE: That is of course very beautiful.

THOMAS MEINECKE: That's why I want there to be a flow. I'm the one who pulls the trigger but I am not necessarily the originator. I'm not interested in that. For that reason, I find quotations so difficult. I mean, indicating the quote as such, because I might have put my spin on it right in the middle. Maybe there is a passage taken from Anaïs Nin in a German translation that I don't like very much, for instance, of which I quoted maybe 90% but beautified the other 10%. That's when editors become nervous, in particular the American ones. I had this case with a book that was published in the States by Amazon Crossing. An editor at New Directions believed that he had to place up to two or three hundred quotation marks, in order to be correct. I had to put a stop there, as I didn't know myself anymore where the quotes began and where they ended – and neither am I really interested in it.

DAVID LIESKE: Great. I think, this ought to be the end of our conversation.

Layout: Till Sperle

Transcription: Lisa Sofie Weber

Translation: Jorn Ebner



January 1971
film
and filming