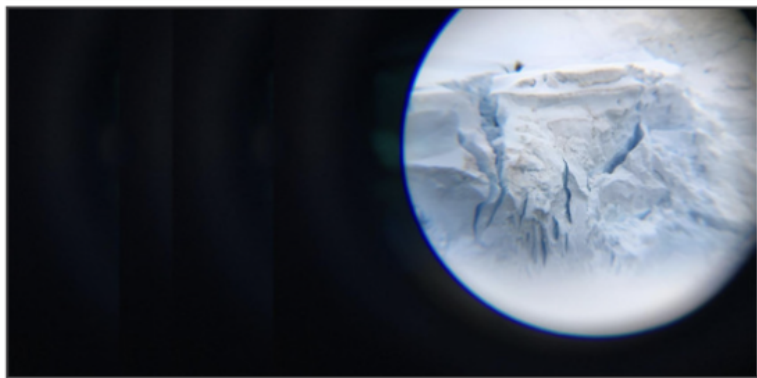




living in the future of others

Blanca Pujals, Henry Bradley, Solveig Qu Suess

Prompted by interwoven structural and personal stresses, artist-filmmakers Henry Bradley, Solveig Qu Suess, and Blanca Pujals started having monthly meetings in January 2022 to share and collectively reflect on their practices. These regular exchanges provided a support structure, nurturing their individual practices and enabling change and mutual influence. In a recent screening and artist talk at the Critical Media Lab in Basel, they decided to intertwine their projects, tracing thematic threads across techno-scientific optics, intergenerational trauma, memory, and modeled futures, rather than displaying individual works. For [Rehearsing Retreat](#) [b-n-l/focus/rehearsing-retreat], the artist-filmmakers reflect on the method they developed together and how it informs the design and conceptualization of film screenings and presentations.



Speaker 1 [00:32:57] I think it would be nice if we leave these as more experimental blocks of work, as something that is mutating into conversation.

Speaker 3 [00:33:18] I really like also the idea of sourcing out certain fragments of our projects, and having them sit alongside each other. Because then it's also about thinking with each other through the fragments rather than each of us individually trying to show everything from our projects.

Our conversations began in January of 2022, when the three of us got in touch to start monthly meetings. This desire grew out of friendship, following a number of conversations about how we were struggling, each in our own way, through difficult moments within our lives. Whether it was complicated by, or a product of, toxic cultures of pressure, we were all facing different forms of intertwined structural and personal stresses, both as practitioners and as independent artist-filmmakers. Since we started sharing our projects while working on them, our exchanges have become crucial parts of our individual practices. We prioritized these meetings as a way of gathering in support of each other, while at the same time providing room for our respective research. Here, filmmaking was a process of generative healing, as our interactions and conceptual concerns were not intended for any public-facing event.





Top: Still from *Aqua-Drama*, (2023), Henry Bradley
 Middle: Still from *Little Grass* (2023), Solveig Qu Suess
 Bottom: Still from *Haluci.nation*, (2018). Antarctica, Blanca Pujals.

Film had been the main operative tool across our works as we met each month. Our ongoing projects have been the following; Blanca is currently developing her practice-led PhD on the geopolitics and spatial articulations of particle physics' «Sensing Infrastructures», looking at fundamental physics laboratories such as CERN and how they amplify material and political interactions. Henry is working on a multi-channel film installation titled «Aqua-Drama». The installation navigates a semi-fictional educational complex, made up of domestic, cultural and scientific institutions designed to rehearse future worst-case scenarios of global shipping. Solveig has been shooting a film which recounts her mother's career as an optical engineer. The story is complicated by a non-disclosure agreement signed with the Chinese state in 1987, where her work traces around the absence of information, weaving alternative genealogies of optics through a mother-daughter relationship.

Over months of exchange, our projects became intertwined through questions surrounding particular hegemonic scales of time. Ocean modeling centers rehearsing one-in-a-thousand year storm events; the Chinese state using optical technology as a means of «catching up»

with Western progress; subatomic particles that inaugurated the anthropogenic deep-time nuclear era. Each of our respective research projects and films interrogated what it meant to be living the futures proposed and enforced by corporate, state, or scientific powers. Quantum particles, family histories, and future scenarios problematized and reinforced linear Western preconceptions of time, causality, and progress. Drawn from feminist new materialist theories, thinking in terms of «thick» time became a way for us to grapple with questions on how we could use filmmaking to embody alternative registers of time together.



Still from *Haluci.nation*, (2019). Antarctica, Blanca Pujals.



Still from *Haluci.nation*, (2019). Antarctica, Blanca Pujals.



Still from *extremo.files*, (2021). CanFranc Deep Underground Laboratory, Blanca Pujals.

Speaker 1 [01:13:48] Symptoms that we are living the future of others had already been tested in the past.

Speaker 2 [01:14:23] Yeah, exactly, when I was looking at the Digital Belt and Road, they were supporting all of these «green» projects as a way to continue oil extraction in the Arctic, anticipating that the rise of global temperatures would allow for new shipping routes. And so they're already planning different oil rigs, using Big Earth Data to reinforce the credibility of their designs, which are being framed as sustainable development and, you know, something positive.

Speaker 3 [01:15:44] It links to how companies have been preparing for these futures and the effects on their own activities for a long time. You know, it's not just that they were aware; they were actually building into their simulations and models such things as sea level rise and worst case scenario storms. The extreme weather events we see, we now realize that capital already rehearsed them decades ago. Companies didn't just think about it and turn a blind eye to the research; some actually, materially built these features in a warehouse so they could simultaneously rehearse the negative effects of it on themselves while delegitimizing attempts to halt its acceleration in the real world.

Speaker 1 [01:19:04] By preparing, they legitimize everything.

Speaker 3 [01:17:41] Also, one of the things that resonated was the idea that technology will bring everyone faster to a better future. And again, we're always confronted with this dominant future rhetoric.

Speaker 3 [01:02:11] Because you mentioned the thickness of time, I now feel like there are so many resonances, especially when thinking about space, time and paradoxes.

Speaker 1 [01:02:47] As you were speaking, I was also going to say that there are so many crossovers in terms of questions about cinema and how to make a film, which is kind of how we started that, didn't we?



Still from *Little Grass*, (2023). Solveig Qu Sues.



Still from *Little Grass*, (2023). Zeiss Archives. Solveig Qu Sues.



Still from *Little Grass*, (2023). Family Archives. Solveig Qu Sues.

Making films across archives, family homes and within techno-scientific institutions – each space we were investigating raised different questions about the act of filmmaking itself, disturbing notions of ethics, extraction, privacy, reputational capitalism, embodiment, and empathy. As research-based practitioners we are tasked with continually thinking through our methods of filming as a means of generating, rather than just illustrating knowledge. Discussing the tools, processes and knowledges we were using – lens filters, editing techniques, modes of staging – our monthly meetings helped us create the space needed to collectively reflect on alternative ways of producing our images.

Speaker 2 [01:36:05] But this was very interesting for me, That both projects know each other starting from the opposite points.

Speaker 1 [00:42:07] In your project the area of concealment that laboratories have is similar to the sort of concealment that is active in the factory your mother worked in. A sort of controlled set of conditions.

Speaker 2 [00:42:30] Yes, controlled conditions and also that could lead into archive as well and keeping and controlling conditions of knowledge.

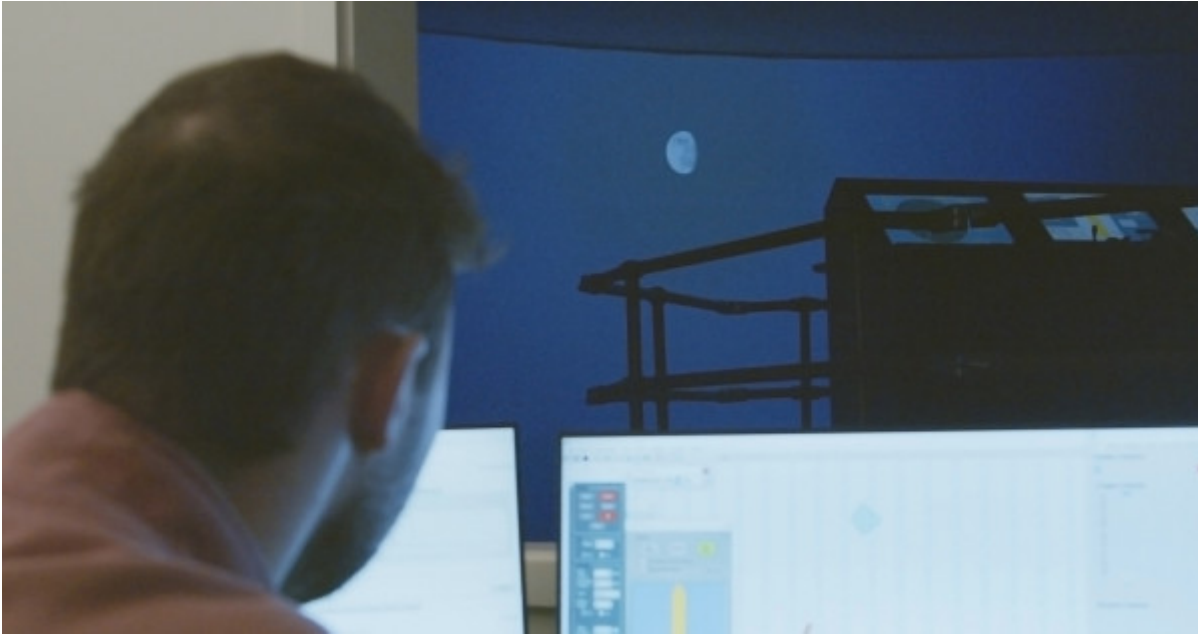
Speaker 1 [01:14:43] Also the link between all of our projects is obviously the space of the laboratory or observatory. It's weird to think that the image to which we understand as the globe, and how we are constantly observing ourselves, we get into this feedback loop, where it becomes this endless form of observation. While chatting with the laboratory scientist, I basically said that you're in a sense endlessly chasing your own tail. Because the more you observe, the more you see.

Speaker 1 [00:42:19] It's a really fruitful time to be together. It's not like we just share or watch our past works and talk about them. We're becoming involved in the process.

Speaker 3 [00:42:52] I think this is why it's now worth meeting because we tried at other times and it was impossible.

Speaker 2 [00:43:10] Would be amazing to keep meeting to see the films come together. I now imagine going through those stages and then also when we get into the editing stage.

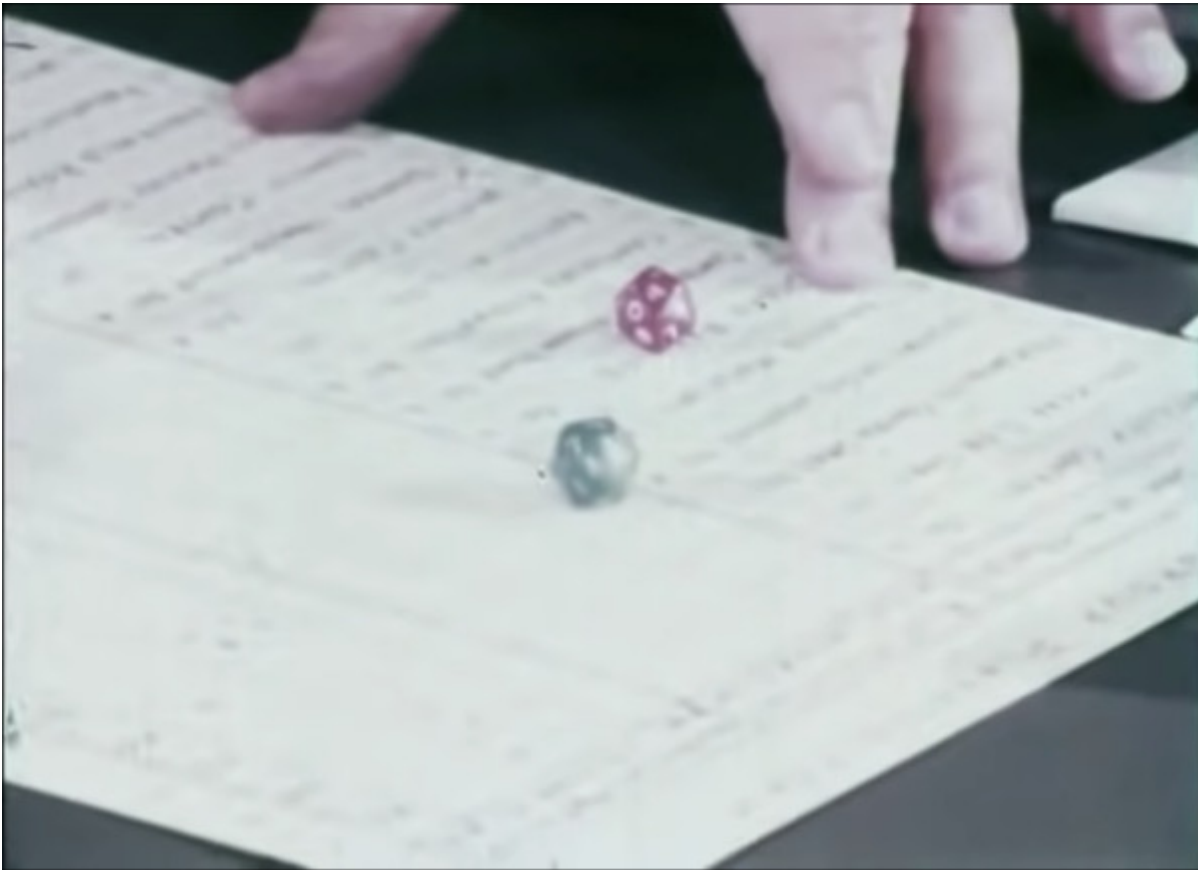
As a researcher at the Critical Media Lab in Basel, Switzerland, Solveig invited Henry and Blanca to join her at their [colloquium](https://criticalmedialab.ch/living-in-the-future-of-others/) [https://criticalmedialab.ch/living-in-the-future-of-others/] on September 28th, 2022. Following our monthly meetings, we decided to use it as a performative space to publicly weave together relationships across our work. We shared various fragments taken from our projects in progress, using the act of being together in public as a moment to further entangle our respective projects, rather than displaying individual, finished works. Collectively rooting it in the politics of making films, we traced thematic threads between our projects across techno-scientific optics, intergenerational trauma, memory and modeled futures.



Still from *Aqua-Drama*, three-channel video, 2023, Henry Bradley



Still from *Aqua-Drama*, (production shot. Rehearsing future floods in the UK), Henry Bradley



Still from *Aqua-Drama*, (archival image. A member of the University of Pittsburgh «Future Scenario's» think tank playing a game with 12-sided dice in an attempt to predict future crisis', 1960), Henry Bradley

By presenting our materials as open fragments, we wanted to question the format of the group film screening. Foregrounding process rather than displaying finished edits, we allowed our projects to bleed into each other in a prismatic way – a cat's cradle of images and thoughts nurtured and held together by collective questions, doubts, similarities and differences. Fragmented and broken apart, our 'rushes' could now play alongside each other, destabilizing the default idea that our images needed to operate solely for our own films;, they could in fact speak to and support the work of the others. The projects now diffracted through one another, acting towards and for a collective knowledge.

Speaker 3 [00:02:18] It was like a kind of prism that you put on top of the lens.

Speaker 1 [01:36:19] Also, to see how you're developing this close relationship through the act of filmmaking and filmmaking being like a generative thing to develop relationships,...

Speaker 2 [01:17:03] Knowledge building is collective and happens over years and generations. We usually only see the final and stellar moment of the new discovery or the finished product or work, but this is built from generations of contributions and invisibilized moments of errors and failures.



Critical Media Lab, Research Colloquium, 28.9.22

There was a desire and need felt through the symposium at the Critical Media Lab in Basel, as well across conversations with friends and other practitioners, for more spaces offering both critical and emotional support. We are reminded through these conversations of the simple fact that the socio-cultural landscape we often investigate in our films is also the landscape within which our bodies-as-filmmakers are working. Given a rise in auto-immune diseases that disproportionately affect women and other marginalized groups, the physician Gabor Maté illustrates how these landscapes are making our physical bodies sick on a collective level. Throughout the 20th century, strands of cinema sought to reveal the apparatuses of capture behind their own productions, such as the camera, lighting, and on-set roles. In our neoliberal climate we need to extend this behind-the-scenes gaze to include the pressures, precarity, and anxieties of modern living. In such a socio-cultural climate, supporting each other's filmmaking practices should therefore include making the time and space to share and watch each other's work as well as listen to the personal and social issues that may be going on around them. Creating such a space helps us to understand an embodied filmmaking where the images we produce are not detached and hidden from circumstances of mental health, financial pressure, housing precarity, personal relationships, extended communities, and other issues that may have accompanied their production.

If we think about what support structure we could not eliminate from our monthly encounters without transforming them, it is Time. Time for care, as Silvia Federici explained, is the historically invisible form of unpaid labor, displaced from the neoliberal notion of productive and valuable time. It is not a coincidence to us that Time is both a support structure and the prime matter of film. This isn't just because of the physical time required to watch each other's work in a time-based medium, but because of the time needed to care for the extended communities involved in all of our projects; from the laborers working with Henry at the ocean modeling centers to Solveig's conversations with her mother to Blanca's time spent with logistic workers in Antarctica. Recognizing this need for more time to care is not a revolutionary proposal, but unfortunately, as time continues to become increasingly commodified, it remains a primary support structure we must continually join efforts to reclaim for each other. Entangling our individual films, like we did at the colloquium at the Critical Media Lab in Basel, is one way for us to embody our growing time spent together. Without either being fully collaborative or presenting individual projects, unfinished

fragments of our films can be/are the materials for us to become a cat's cradle together,
finding new connections, frictions, and supports capable of building collective knowledge.

HENRY BRADLEY

Henry Bradley is an artist and filmmaker. Working across socially-engaged performance and cinema, he creates staged documentaries. He is currently investigating educational and performative practices designed to rehearse future ecological scenarios. These traverse modelling spaces, animal tracking, citizen rehearsals, and state drills. Often set in a single room or building, his films use the constructs of theatre and architecture to physically bring different people, events and ecologies together — both as an act of community-building on a local level and to question forms of management at the scale of capital.

He graduated from the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths University of London, in 2017. Since then he has undertaken residencies and exhibitions internationally with Gasworks, London; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; BBC, UK; The Room Projects, Paris; LUX, London; HALLE14, Centre for Contemporary Art, Leipzig; Fondazione Prada, Venice; Jerwood Arts, London; Kasseler DokFest, Kassel; PS2, Belfast, among many others. He is a selected studio holder at Studio Voltaire, London, and will be a 2023 residence at Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, USA.

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BLANCA PUJALS

Blanca Pujals is an architect, spatial researcher and critical writer. Her cross-disciplinary practice uses spatial research and critical analysis to engage with questions around geographies of power on bodies and territories, and geopolitical configurations of contemporary techno-scientific infrastructures. Her work encompasses film, architecture, lecturing, curatorial projects, teaching and critical writing.

Graduated in Architecture at the Barcelona School of Architecture, she completed her studies with a MA in Critical Theory and Museum Studies at the Independent Studies Program of MACBA Museum, tutored by the philosopher Paul B. Preciado, and a postgraduate degree from the Centre for Research Architecture (Visual Cultures Department) at Goldsmiths University of London, directed by Susan Schuppli and Eyal Weizman. She is currently developing her practice-led PhD in Art&Science, about the geopolitics and spatial articulations of Particle Physics' Sensing Infrastructures, looking at fundamental physics laboratories such as CERN (The European Organization for Nuclear Research) and how they amplify material and political interactions.

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SOLVEIG QU SUESS

Solveig Qu Suess works within the fields of documentary film and artistic research. Her films and writings look into the optics of an increasingly unpredictable world, exploring questions of power and perception, the negotiation of bodies and environments, and image practices which escape the boundaries of their frame. Using filmmaking as a means to research and connect registers of the intimate and geopolitical, she has most recently been investigating the politics and poetics of infrastructure.

She completed her MA at the Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths University, and is

currently a researcher at the Critical Media Lab, Basel and PhD candidate in Urban Studies at the University of Basel. She has taken residence and shown her work internationally such as at the Li Xianting Film Fund Beijing, Fondazione Prada, Venice, International Film Festival Rotterdam, ArtScience Museum Singapore, Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe, Guangzhou Image Triennial, Kunsthall Trondheim amongst others. She is most recently a recipient of the Gwaertler Foundation Grant in 2022.

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