In early 2016 I prepared a work for the Wola Museum in Warsaw, which resulted in the three-channel installation *restraint* (2016). During my research, I came across a photograph from Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel's *Evidence* project (fig. 1). The first time I saw the picture, I stopped in my tracks. I knew that I was looking at a journalistic photograph, probably from the early 1970s, a factual record of a historical situation. Yet I could not rid myself of the impression that it was also somehow intimate. In the tight frame of the medium-format photograph, the anonymous reporter captured a moment when a young man was being incapacitated by two American police officers. The young man is in the centre of the frame, on either side of him the functionaries are fragmentarily visible, holding him by the hands and neck. Neither of their faces is visible. The only uncovered parts of their bodies are the hands of the man and the officers, playing out a silent drama of power and submission. Although this is a scene of evident aggression, it does not rouse my sense of opposition. On the contrary, it inspires a kind of visual desire. I observe the officers' immaculate uniforms with aesthetic satisfaction – the matching shirts, straight tie, the shiny accessories: the sheriff's star, the pen clip, a ring, a watch. Completing the whole picture is the offhand elegance of the young man's clothing: a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves, tucked into tight-fitting dark jeans, no belt. The button of his trousers lines up with the buttons on his shirt and the button on the policeman's cuff, pressing into his neck. Then there is the arrangement of the bodies, the fine quality of the photograph, the appealing light of the flash, and the tension between the anonymity of the protagonists and their skilled exhibition; I realise that I am looking at the photograph as if it were a stylish fashion campaign from 2017 AD. I want to own the shirt the apprehended boy is wearing. Yet what draws me in to this archival photograph is its visual language. The depth of detail in the medium-format negative, the proportions of the image, the elegance of the black and white, the aesthetic allure of the flash, the thoughtful stylisation – the iconography reminds me of contemporary images.

This photograph is one of many in a conceptual project by Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel, titled *Evidence,* and hailing from 1975-77, wherein documentary photographs from institutional archives were collected, removed from their original contexts, and presented as works of art.[1] Since that time, the language of this archive has penetrated so deeply into the aesthetic consciousness of the visual arts that, despite my knowledge of the original context of the photograph, I cannot believe in this image. I have all the data to do so, but I cannot. I read this image not as a visualisation of a historical event, but as a reconstruction, much as I see the photographs of *Hockey Fight, 1951* (2010)2 by Stan Douglas, or *Passerby* (1996)3 by Jeff Wall. Juxtaposing these pictures, I wonder which are more reliable – the one without the context, or the one without the historical derivation? Stan Douglas says that he treats historical events as if could have turned out differently.4 This gives him the opportunity to substitute certain parts of those events in their reconstructions and to write alternative histories. In the six-hour film, *Luanda-Kinshasa* (2013), Douglas reconstructs the minutest details of the legendary New York Columbia 30th Street Studio, where Miles Davis made his most important records. He records an Afrobeat jam session there, visualising an alternative history of the place and of culture as such. The visual language of the documentary is also subverted by Aernout Mik in the *Raw Footage* film installation (2006). He complicated it with Reuters and ITN footage documenting the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, making a peculiar selection: instead of the typical images of war, I see shots of the everyday lives of soldiers and civilians, in which nothing much is going on. Mik shifts the balance away from visualising the anticipated events, negating what I expect to perceive and levelling these images with ones that could well be staged. He boldly steps into a space that has always been critical in discussions on visualising and remembering history. Throughout the history of visualizing conflicts, photographers have been arriving on the scene of action after the event (e.g. Joel Meyerowitz's 2011 *Ground Zero* project) or – more fascinatingly – even before it occurs. A stand-out example is the war in the Persian Gulf, which photojournalists were not allowed to cover. Removed from its source, the documentary is increasingly free to use metaphor, allusion and subtle aesthetics. Moreover, it appears to hardly miss this source, as demonstrated by the success of Richard Mosse's projects. The gallery sales of his photographs of the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo from the *Enclave* project (2013), which premiered during the Venice Biennale, helped finance his most recent film, *Incoming* (2017).[5] The pictures for this film installation were taken with a military infrared camera, and the soundtrack was composed by Ben Frost. The result is a spectacular audiovisual experience that abandons the figurative and takes its place in the gallery and art-market circuit. Apart from the change in production and presentation venue, this project makes the maximum distance from the source highly (and literally) visible: Mosse used a camera able to film people from thirty kilometres away. Viewing this film, I wondered if I had direct access to these events, and how my memory was mediating them.

In *Zidane: a 21st Century Portrait* (2006), a fil by Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, the main protagonist, Zinédine Zidane, mentions that he experiences the games he plays like recollections visited after the event: 'The game, the event is not necessarily experienced or remembered in "real time". My memories of games and events are fragmented'.6 This film is an in-depth portrait of the French midfielder, filmed in March 2003, during the Spanish top-league match between Real Madrid and Villarreal CF at Santiago Bernabéu Stadium. Seventeen television cameras were focused on Zidane alone for the entirety of the match, resulting in an intimate portrait of a lone athlete. This material was carefully edited, and soundtracked by Mogwai. The work is undoubtedly both epic and intimate, collapsing the boundary between cinematic plot and television retransmission. I wonder if it takes me closer to the event, given that I see it from such close proximity? In comparison, Harun Farocki's multi-channel installation *Deep Play* (2006), which shows the final match of the world football championships of 2006 from many perspectives (expert, television, industrial), gives me more data.7 Farocki breaks the media message into its prime factors, while Gordon and Parreno narrativise, discarding the 'objective' transmission of the football match. The objective visualisation Farocki proposes removes me from the event, whereas the film by Gordon and Parreno draws me in with its cinematographic perspective. I myself am fond of radio sports commentaries, which supply a dramaturgy and exercise the imagination. The spoken word, the imagination, and the memory are the basic media in *Paul* (2015), which I organised during a residency in Strasbourg. The point of departure was analytical: I wanted to conduct an experiment, to see how memory and imagination warp history. I organised an action involving a pass-the-baton story with a number of participants. Their task was to remember the story and to tell it to the next participant in the first person. When their memory failed them, they had to fill in the gaps with personal experiences. When the story had gone round the circle, now altered by the memories and imaginations of the tellers in turn, it returned to Roberto, who initiated the story. He had shared his memories of his ambivalent relationship with his stepfather – Paul – who had perished in unexplained circumstances. Later it turned out that Roberto had taken part in this act having felt an inner need to 'explore' his past. In terms of my action this was quite a stretch; how was he going to discover something about his past from random people who had nothing to do with him or his family? This relay-storytelling only created space for fiction and the imagination. To my tremendous surprise, Roberto's aim was paradoxically achieved in this space. It was as if he was not interested in the objective facts, but only in confirming his anxieties and longings for his stepfather in the collective myth of the father figure. The collapsing of the difference between the private and the common, and the accompanying happiness, came as quite a positive surprise for me. The distance from external history was suspended to participate in a joint story, reconstructed live in each teller's narrative 'here and now'. Here was access to past events, not in objective facts; first-person involvement brought all the participants a great deal of satisfaction. My *Is the Day a Double of the Night* (2016) action also collapsed the difference between 'inner' and 'outer'; it was carried out at the *Visual SPA* exhibition in 2016. I suggested cutting the power throughout the exhibition floor space for fifteen minutes. This was done for the finissage. For fifteen minutes the exhibition went dead, darkness reigned and conversations grew hushed. The intervention took place after dark, so the darkness of the space mirrored the nighttime cityscape; attention in this glassed-in space was focused outwards. The architectural division into inside and outside was momentarily erased. Personally, I felt this quite *physically*, the borders of my body and experiences shifted much further in the dark, beyond the glass tower to somewhere on the city's horizon. As if vision, and viewing of pictures (in this case, the exhibition) caused a separation, a difference that was too great to allow participation.

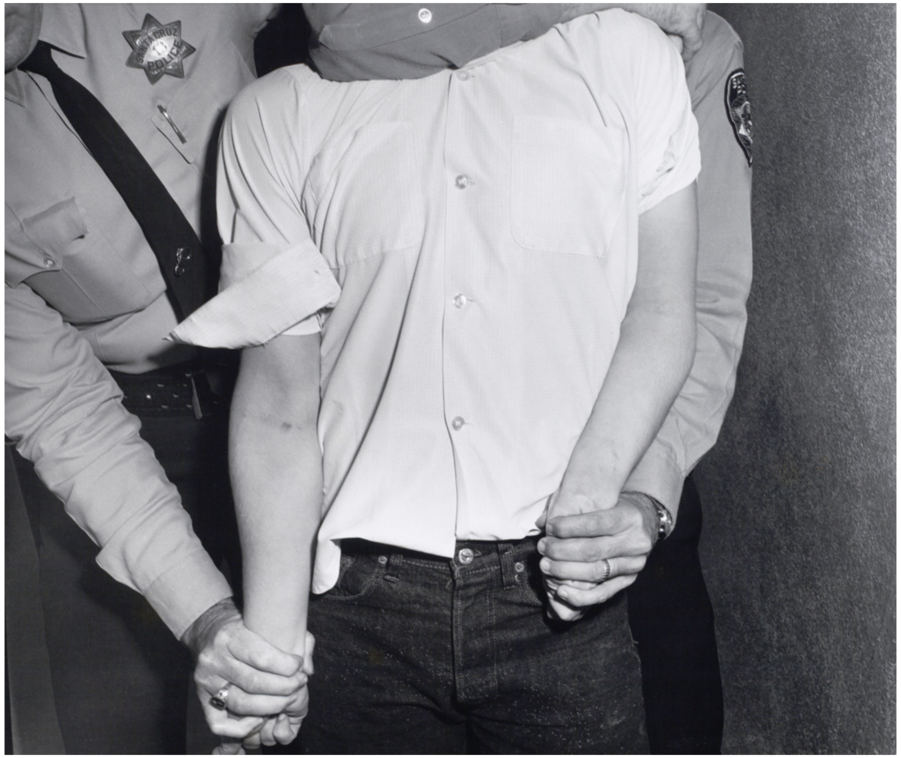
In *Possessive, Pensive and Possessed,* Victor Burgin recalls a ten-year study project begun by sociologists in 1977 at the University of Provence. They asked over four hundred inhabitants of southern France for their personal recollections from 1903-1945. They noticed a widespread tendency to blend these memories with scenes from films and other media depictions of the era.[8] This phenomenon is linked to the ‘memory content’ described by French philosopher Bernard Stiegler, as distinguished from memory of the species (transferred through genes) and individual memory (learning and gathering experience).[9] The third kind of memory is accrued and passed on through technology, including cinema. I began thinking of cinema as a kind of collective memory when I came across Pierre Hyughe’s work titled (of course) *The Third Memory* (2000).[10] In a film studio, the artist recreated the space of a bank that John Wojtowicz held up in 1972. This hold-up was a media event in its day, was even broadcast on television, and was ultimately dramatised in Sidney Lumet’s 1975 film *Dog Day Afternoon,* starring Al Pacino. In 2000, Pierre Hyughe invited Wojtowicz to the film studio, where he built a replica of the bank and asked him to recreate the original event for the camera. The result was a filmic installation juxtaposing fragments of Lumet’s film with the reconstruction of the historical event. The similarity of the narratives makes us wonder which came first: Could Wojtowicz have been remembering the bank robbery as it was shown in the film? Or perhaps he was performing a projection of the hold-up already etched in his ‘third memory’ by other films? A ‘filmic’ recollection that captured my imagination for a very long time was the atmosphere of the park in Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow-Up*. This is the director’s only film that was both praised by the critics and carved a place for itself in the pop-culture repertoire. I often recalled the exciting uncertainty that marked the atmosphere of the film’s Myriad Park in my personal experience of nature. Some part of my experience was hijacked by my memory of the film. When I now think about my *blow out* video installation (2016), I am certain that returning to scenes from *Blow-Up* was an attempt to take back the memory from the film and make it my own. I divided the final sequence in the park into six projections, each of which showed a separate, looped scene, and I scattered them about a space according to the original logic of the montage. All trace of the film’s protagonist was removed from these scenes, and from the film’s original soundtrack, which accompanied the installation. The elimination of the protagonist and the shattering of the film’s linear plot line reconstructed the atmosphere so vivid in my memory. Yet now the viewer was central, and could spend time in this installation as he or she pleased. With the lack of a firm footing came choices.

I will not be going out on a limb if I state that the a ‘cinematic’ reality is widely desired (paradoxically, because practically no one wants to live a fiction). In one of our conversations, Graham Gussin told me that during the exhibition of his *Illumination Rig* installation (2004) in Reculver,[11] where he illuminated the island coast with film light, he was passed by a woman hurrying towards the light, explaining: ‘If that’s a film, I want to be part of it’. Why doesn’t anyone hurry this way towards reality? Everyday reality has dramaturgy just as breathtaking as some action films, as Jolanta Brah-Czaina noted with great sensitivity in *Cracks in Existence*.[12] Everyday life has all the attributes of a film in which each of us is the main protagonist. Pasolini poetically and harshly compared the length of life to that of a long film shot, with a cut that rounds off the whole at the moment of our death: ‘the substance of the cinema is therefore an endless long take, as is reality to our senses for as long as we are able to see and feel (a long take that ends with the end of our lives)’.[13] Observing and remembering reality as a film is the subject of *Epiphanies in Three Acts* (2016), which I prepared in Dublin in collaboration with Martine Caroline Hauser, Olga Kowalska, Kamil Kotarba and Iwo Rachwał. The public was invited on a walk along a riverside promenade, with staged performances that were difficult to distinguish from everyday activities (e.g. jogging, two friends arguing, a musician playing a guitar). Without any hints as to what was staged, the public mistook the performative actions for ‘natural’ ones. The viewers were forced to handle the situation for themselves: they had to distinguish art from non-art, editing their own non-camera ‘master shot’. It turned out that the difference between reality and art was a conscious choice, demanding careful attention and sensitivity.

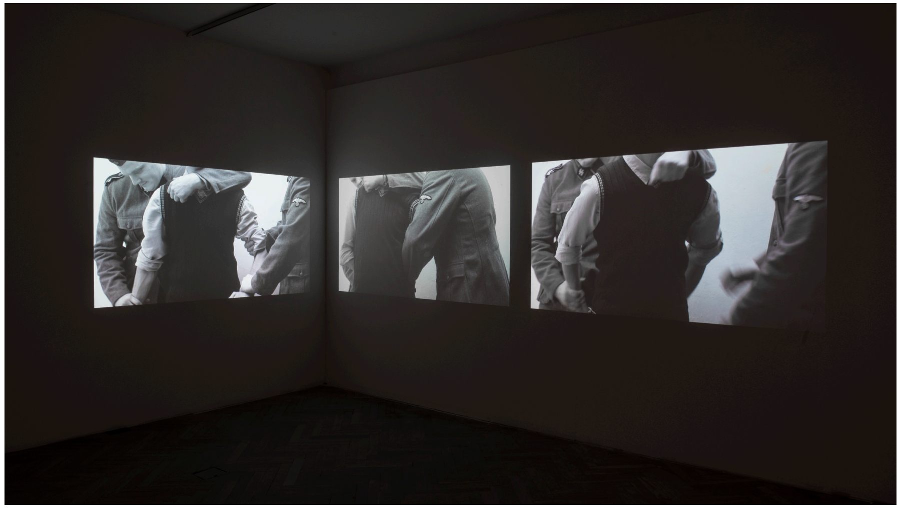
I wonder about the difference between reality and fiction – can they be separated, or does truth have a fictional structure? This takes me back to the photographs from the *Evidence* project and my urge to reconstruct it while working on *restraint* (2016). Now I know that the tension I feel when I look at it comes from a simultaneous sense of nearness and distance. This image affects me too strongly to remain distant, but I am unable to come close to it. My decision to reconstruct this situation aimed to diminish this distance and remake it as my own, as closer to myself; to test it.

I made contact with groups that do reconstructions from the Warsaw Uprising period, because this is a historical episode that is both remote, and close to us through media, a part of popular culture. In my ‘third memory’ I hold images and ways of apprehending these events. I wanted to revise this memory, to get closer to it, and this photograph by the American reporter provided the opportunity. While speaking with the reconstructors I was struck by the ambivalence with which they outlined their task: they spoke from the perspective of the characters they were playing, they recounted the cathectic emotions that sometimes accompany them; yet on the other hand, they denied them, as it was only a game. They involuntarily typecast their roles: the ‘bad’ Nazis were generally reconstructed by stocky men, managing the business of the reconstruction rationally and precisely, while the ‘heroic’ insurgents and civilians were played by model high-school students, playing the victims in the name of history. The upshot of this collaboration was a three-channel video installation documenting the Nazi soldiers’ choreographic attempts to overpower the civilian (fig. 2). This is another mediation of history, inspired by a different image and evoking many others, without the Real stepping in. Yet the reigning narrative for me (the clear division between executioners and victims), justifying the tendency to violent thought. This was because of the dynamic of proximity from the historical image that was both closer and farther away. We might quote Inke Arns here, who wrote of the nature of the artistic reconstruction: ‘Here reference to the past is not history for history's sake; it is about relevance of what happened in the past for the here and now. Thus one can say that artistic re-enactments are not an affirmative confirmation of the past; rather, they are questionings of the presents through reaching back to historical events that have etched themselves indelibly into the collective memory’.[14] Historical truth had no significance for me in preparing *restraint* (2016). I was looking to break the cycle of the mutual influence of historical narrative and collective memory, to wedge my way between these heavy hitters to call attention to the danger of real violence re-enacted in theatrical reconstructions. It strikes me that a similar premise – writing a footnote to history, and not a meticulous reconstruction – was at the heart of Jeremy Deller’s *Battle of Orgreave* (2001),[15] a spectacular reconstruction of a clash between English police and striking miners in Orgreave in 1984. The scale of the event (several hundred reconstructors took part) and the fact that Deller involved miners and police officers who had been part of the real events gave the action an unpredictable feel. It allowed viewers to question the prevailing narratives, both official and personal. In the reconstruction filmed by Mike Figgs,[16] we find a ‘complex and in-depth reflection of the mediation of memory – which can be even described as the core subject of re-enactment as an art form. This tendency asks how memory is an entity which is continuously being reconstructed – not only by filmmakers and re-enactors but also by us personally, as mediating and mediated subjects’.[17]

The need to reconstruct as an artistic strategy is undoubtedly rooted in a lack of faith in images, which mediate not only history, but also every event at present. The near/far dynamic, being somewhere in between a viewer and a witness, is an attribute of my everyday participation in any kind of event. This lack of faith could evoke a longing for an objective and neutral way of apprehending reality (past or present). Yet it could also be that being stripped of this guarantee forces us into first-person participation in and constant revision of the narratives passed down us, in whose construction we take active part. We are living in turbulent times, and we must be on our guard.



(fig. 1: a photograph from Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel's *Evidence* project, 1975-1977)



(fig. 2: *restraint,* 2016, installation view at Wola Museum, Warsaw)

[1] Larry Sultan and Mike Mandel *Evidence* (1975-77), http://larrysultan.com/gallery/evidence/, accessed 16.09.2017

[2] Stan Douglas, *Hockey Fight, 1951* (2010), https://www.victoria-miro.com/artists/39-stan-douglas/works/artworks14560/, accessed 16.09.2017

[3] Jeff Wall, *Passerby* (1996), http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/jeff-wall/room-guide/jeff-wall-room-8/jeff-wall-room-9, accessed 16.09.2017

[4] *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, episode 8, *Vancouver*, https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s8/vancouver/, accessed 16.09.2017

[5] Richard Mosse, *Incoming* (2017), https://www.barbican.org.uk/richard-mosse-incoming, accessed 16.09.2017

[6] Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait,* [DVD] [2006], Curzon Artificial Eye, 31'25'

[7] Harun Farocki, *Deep Play* (2007), http://www.harunfarocki.de/installations/2000s/2007/deep-play.html, accessed 16.09.2017

[8] *The Cinamatic*, edited by David Campany, London, White Chapel Gallery and IMT Press, 2007, p. 200

[9] op. cit. p. 203

[10] Pierre Huyghe, *Third Memory* (2000), https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/10460, accessed 16.09.2016

[11] Graham Gussin, *Illumination Rig – Reculver, Kent,* 2004, http://www.grahamgussin.co.uk/work/illumination-rig-reculver/, accessed 16.09.2016

[12] *Cracks in Existence*, Jolanta Brach-Czaina, Cracow, Efka, 1992, pp. 66-68

[13] *The Cinamatic*, ed. David Campany, London, White Chapel Gallery and IMT Press, 2007, p. 86

[14] Inke Arns, *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance*, accessed 16.09.2017: http://en.inkearns.de/files/2011/05/HWRI-Arns-Kat-2007-engl.pdf, p. 2

[15] Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave*, (2001), http://www.jeremydeller.org/TheBattleOfOrgreave/TheBattleOfOrgreave_Video.php, accessed 16.09.2017

[16] Mike Figgis, *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ncrWxnxLjg, accessed 16.09.2016

[17] Inke Arns, *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance*, accessed 16.09.2017: http://en.inkearns.de/files/2011/05/HWRI-Arns-Kat-2007-engl.pdf, p. 8