



SUSTAINABLE REPRESENTATION

Art can provide an in-depth view of the complex circumstances of the human condition, and thus has the potential to offer what we could call "sustainable representation." This is opposed to the quick shot in response to crisis as perpetuated by the media – or rather the steady but noticeable transformations, presented to us as crises, which call for emergency action. The increasing failure of sustainability of livelihood in the region is, of course, the reason for migrating in the first place. Sustainability and migration are less closely linked concepts in the Sahel, where inhabitants have not a hint of the stable land to desertification over the last few decades. By sustainable representation I do not mean undertaking background research on the economic path before for migration. The term should reflect both the object of inquiry and its methodological process.

SUSTAINABILITY DOES NOT EQUAL SLOWNESS AND DURABILITY; IT TELLS THE STORY OF HOW EVERYTHING WE DO AROUND THE WORLD IS INTERCONNECTED HERE AND NOW, I.E., HOW THE WESTERN LIFESTYLE, KNOWN TO HAVE AN EFFECT ON CLIMATE CHANGE, ALSO HAS AN IMPACT ON HERDSMEN IN THE SAHEL

What could sustainability mean when applied to the visual field? What is the aesthetic ecology of Saharan mobility? What immediately comes to mind are representations with a Singer Masquin, more durable images that would rather vanish into the romanticized mythology of desert life nor get hooked on the dematerialized figure of the immobilized refugee. These reductive narratives

refuse to acknowledge that the deteriorations being manifested in the region today have, in fact, evolved over a long period.

Watching the preparations for the great desert crossing at the Assader truck terminal, it became evident that, only through the patient and unedited recording of this quiet daily routine that has sprung up around life-changing journeys, will the deliberate practices of migratory self-determination fully emerge. Sustainability does not equal slowness and durability. It tells the story of how everything we do around the world is interconnected here and now. It, how the western lifestyle, known to have an effect on climate change, also has an impact on herdsmen in the Sahel. In this sense, it is less of a critical tool than an attitude reflecting contemporary awareness of how we live our lives.

Images are not excluded from this process. As social relations, representations that constitute meaning in one place are locked into the signification of another. A way of thinking about sustainability, then, is to generate images that do not exhaust the possibilities of others by fixing them in a place when their potential for a fuller life is likely to be realized in a distant country. This is why I regard it as imperative to show them as the mobile, inventive and highly organized actors they are.

Ursula Biemann
An artist and filmmaker who has, in recent years, focused on mobility, migration, and global interconnectedness. Her work has been exhibited internationally and is included in the book 'Transient Spaces – The Tourist Syndrome'.



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Transient Space The Tourist Syndrome

Over the past two years, the interdisciplinary project Transient Spaces – The Tourist Syndrome has been addressing current issues of mobility through workshops, seminars, lectures, and exhibitions in Italy, Lithuania, Romania, and Germany. This volume, published on the occasion of the project's final exhibition in Berlin (NGBK and Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien), offers a multifaceted approach to themes such as tourism, migration and new forms of flexible living and being permanently on the move, through essays, texts, interviews, case-studies and artists' interventions. The publication is an important document of the recent debate on questions of representation related to contemporary mobility issues.

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