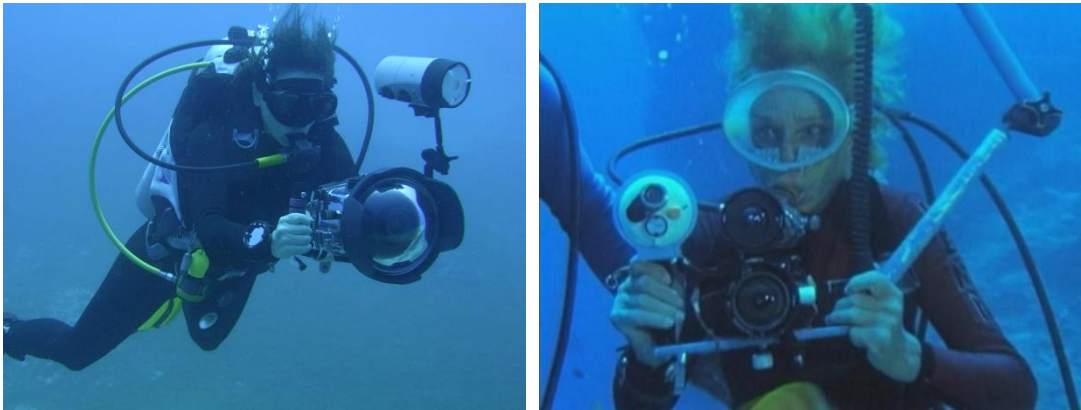


Leni and I



Abstract

The film 'Liebe Leni' is an imaginary correspondence between Leni Riefenstahl and me, in which we converse across time, director to director, woman to woman, Israeli to German. We exchange thoughts about scuba diving, film and beauty, racism and propaganda. Slowly and gradually the professional conversation continues to personal lines. But what kind of a conversation is one that is conducted with the dead? 'Speaking through others' is a term that describes audiovisual works in which protagonists appear and talk in first person although they are absent from the artistic process of creation. Through a manipulation of existing footage into a fictional conversation, this new form of dialogue becomes a tool for speaking to oneself. Between appropriation and self-reflection, the illusionary mode of 'speaking through others' is studied through the metaphors of ventriloquism and the Séance ceremony. How can these terms and concepts assist in ethical and artistic dilemmas throughout the process of creating such a dialogue? I will tackle this question through examples of current deliberations from a work-in-progress.

Film Synopsis

In the place where the legendary German UFA studios once stood, there is a film park for the whole family. I have come to this area to search for Leni Riefenstahl, for inspiration and advice for a personal challenge. Twelve years ago, I encountered a near-death experience underwater, and now I wish to reconstruct it cinematically. Riefenstahl's final film was shot completely underwater. With appreciation for her dramatic and aesthetic abilities, I wish to put aside, just for a brief moment, my complex feelings towards the Nazi propagandist and learn from her as a filmmaker.

Leni emerges from hidden corners of the park, and we start conversing. But what begins as a lesson in directing soon turns into a deeper discussion, centred on questions such as: How far should I go for my art? When does fascination become dangerous? I target these questions both towards Leni and myself. Gradually my true reason for approaching Riefenstahl is revealed. As a Jewish granddaughter of a holocaust survivor, I demand explanations regarding her dark past. While she justifies her actions, the tension between us grows. However, in between the unpleasant moments, I notice a brilliant filmmaker whose meteoric success was entirely cut off, and she was left to grow old in solitude. Will I be able to feel empathy towards

her? Can I learn from her? In the tension between following an authoritative figure and setting out on an independent path, I am drawn to her and repulsed by her, inspired and yet opposed to her. As a young filmmaker, I search throughout the film for my way of expression and try to figure out if I can reinvent myself through her.

The film unfolds a dialogue of words and images through a playful manipulation of footage. Riefenstahl's side is formed with archive materials that include films, interviews, and photographs. There are many hours of interviews that I seek to put into a new context. I aim to illuminate her character differently and also learn about myself as a woman, director, and immigrant. My side will be represented in my voice and through footage from Israel and Germany. I take the liberty of creating a cinematic portrait that shakes the standard format of the "biopic." The film recounts the biography of a great and infamous director. Her bothersome yet thrilling life story is gradually revealed through a joint dialogue, while I resurrect her character in the present as a ghost that haunts me and the entire cinematic realm. Will I be able to learn from her as a filmmaker? Are knowledge and ethics separable?

Director's Biography

Maya Klar is a director, film editor and researcher. She completed her BFA and MFA studies in The Steve Tisch School of Film and Television, Tel Aviv University, and is currently writing a Ph.D. in the artistic/scientific program at Babelsberg Film University (Potsdam). She directed the short films "Phantomstühle" (2019) and "The Girl Who Didn't Know What to Do" (2021), and edited several documentaries, TV series and shorts that were screened worldwide in festivals such as Locarno, Toronto, Clermont Ferrand, and the American Academy Awards . Nowadays she is working on her first feature length documentary.

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