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Artists' Film: Gerard Ortín Castellví, Agrilogistics

Live transcript

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SPEAKERS

Dimitris Papadopoulos, Canan Batur, Gerard Ortín Castellví

Canan Batur 00:10

Welcome, everyone. I am the curator of live programmes here at Nottingham Contemporary. And today we're gathered for the UK premiere of *Agrilogistics* by Gerard Ortín Castellví. I'll be telling you brief housekeeping notes and some information about the programme. But before I do so I want to talk a bit about the film itself. This film is Gerard's most recent film, and it looks at recent technological transformations in contemporary industrial agriculture. In his film, tulip bulbs, you will see chrysanthemum stems and vine tomatoes are processed through cameras, feeding datasets that regulate their own growth. During the day, we see that the greenhouse becomes a cinematic device, an automated film set optimised for the mass production of fruits and flowers. Whilst at night the factory stops, without an inside or an outside, the greenhouse becomes an oneiric chamber where plants, animals and machines form new entanglements and formations. So in terms of running order, we will be watching *Agrilogistics* for 21 minutes long, and the screening will be followed by an in conversation between Gerard himself and also his long lasting collaborator Dimitris. Papadopoulos. And following that we'll be accepting questions from you. Please wait for the microphone to be given to you by one of our assistants, who is supporting us tonight.

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Some very brief introduction to our live programmes and housekeeping notes before I introduce our guests. Our live programmes open up different interventions and propositions within our curatorial research across the organisation. And this event expands on our current research trend, Emergency and Emergence, a multi-platform programme that looks into transdisciplinary, sensorial and speculative practices of radical sense making and wayfinding via questions of repair, pedagogy, remediation and mutation, to investigate how to move from crisis to renewal, from emergency to emergence. Although we will keep an informal atmosphere throughout the evening, our talks, performances and screening seek to create challenging environments where open-mindedness and respect for each other's approaches and perspectives can foster growth. So please be mindful and respectful of each other's opinions and views. In the unlikely case of emergency, a member of staff will guide you to the nearest fire exit. And also I would like to say I would like to use this opportunity to extend my gratitude to our funders, University of Nottingham and Nottingham Trent University for generously and graciously supporting tonight's event, as well as my colleagues of course, Shannon Charlesworth, Catherine Masters, Tom Chamberlin, Craig Parr and Millie for making this event possible. Lastly, as with all events here at Nottingham contemporary, tonight's talk is free. So if you feel generous, please do consider a donation. So without further delay, I'm very pleased to introduce our collaborators Gerard and Dimitris. Gerard Ortín Castellví is an artist, filmmaker and researcher. After completing an MFA at Sandberg Institute in Amsterdam, he finished an MA in artists film and moving image at Goldsmiths, University of London, where he is currently doing a PhD and teaching at the MA Art and Ecology. He is a member of the Ecological Reparation project and collaborates with Border Ecologies Research Network. He has exhibited exhibited at Fundació Joan Miró, Tabakalera, Stedelijk Museum Buro of Amsterdam, and Office for Contemporary Art in Oslo. His works have been screened in places like the Anthology Film Archives in New York, Centre Pompidou in Paris, LUX in London and festivals like visits delirio and in neon, Open City Film Festival in London, and Berlinale in Berlin. I'm also very delighted to welcome Dimitris Papadopoulos, who is a professor of science, technology and society, and the director of the Institute for Science and Society at the University of Nottingham. He is also the founding director of

EcoSocieties, one of the University of Nottingham's interdisciplinary research clusters and a member of the Ecological Reparation Collective with Gerard. Papadopoulos is currently a Leverhulme fellow and has been an Alexander von Humboldt fellow in the office for History of Science and Technology, the University of California, Berkeley, and the Center for Cultural Studies in University of California, Santa Cruz. He is currently completing a photography book on divergent ecologies and a research monograph on chemicals, eco politics and reparative justice. His most recent books are Ecological Reparation: Repair, Remediation and Resurgence in Social and Environmental Conflict, published by Bristol University Press in 2022; Reactivating Elements: Chemistry, Ecology, Practice, published by Duke University Press, in 2021; Experimental Practice, Technoscience, Alterontologies and More-Than Social Movements published by Duke University Press in 2018. So without further delay, let's start with the screening. Many thanks again for joining in our event tonight, and also our community. Thank you.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 05:52

Well, thank you. Thanks, everyone, for staying. And yeah. Thanks, also, Canan, for making this happen. I'm really happy. I feel very welcome. It's the first time that I come to Nottingham, I feel very welcomed. And I'm here with Dimitris. And the plan is that we give you some time to think questions. But yeah, I'm very curious about what you think. And yeah, to have a conversation also with you. But yeah, Dimitris also?

Dimitris Papadopoulos 06:26

Well, thank you very much for inviting me to be in this discussion. And also to watch the film in the big screen, which makes such a difference from watching the film in the small computer. It's a fabulous film, and I've been thinking how to approach it and how what to ask you first. So, the way I saw the film is in a certain way, as a diptych, as two sides, and it reminds me almost of, you know, Renaissance paintings where you have two sides that in a certain way, they are very separate, but they are also linked together, and you can not see the one without the other. And here almost in the middle, we move to a different set, to a different reality of the one we seen the first. And I was trying to think, what is the characteristic of the first one and then of the second? And I thought the first one is very, very sterile? Very, very, you know, it's automated

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food production, it's automated agribusiness and it's something where you don't see much of human intervention, beyond perhaps fixing the machines or maintaining the robot. And I was thinking, what is the characteristic of this? And the word that came into my mind, and I want to ask you, to what extent do you think this is the case, is delocalisation, something that is not located somewhere, or something that could be everywhere. And we are, of course, also in the middle of a food crisis right now. And this has another meaning. Because you start thinking, why are we in the middle of a food crisis? And how is our food produced and why is it interrupted so easily? And perhaps this process of delocalisation, which you saw in the first part of this diptych is a process where you think that you can replicate food and produce it everywhere, so standardise it, create a sterile environment, create more food and produce it in this way. But perhaps that's the reason why it can be also interrupted so easily. So how do you, would you see the characteristic of the food production in this first part of your of your film?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 09:10

Right, yeah. I mean that's really interesting, it's very interesting to hear your reading. And I don't know if I speak louder, or if it's gonna feedback or not, but yeah, I thought, okay, I guess like the first important thing is to mention that these two parts have been recorded with a distance of two years almost and with a pandemic in between that, yeah, also like this zoonotic pandemic, but so, first I was thinking of making this film. I mean, departing from this idea of understanding the greenhouse as a cinematic device, as a device where image production is also agricultural production. Some people also have discussed this idea that the greenhouse is with the camera lucida that imprints light onto botanical surfaces. So in a way where you would place the film, through vegetal surfaces. So I came with these ideas initially, let's see if this is actually, if this can be explored through film. And I mean, as you know, I also write my PhD and so on. But somehow I felt this required, like a practical approach. And in a way, filming these cameras with my camera, film the backstage of these operational images that yeah, are not representational necessary, but they, necessarily, but they are part of a process, of an operation. So that was my kind of like, first approach to this. Then, when we went to film with, I started seeing what the greenhouse was or what not necessarily the greenhouse, the agro-factory,

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you know, this. And, for instance, in this factory, where you see in this greenhouse, you see the tomato production, we have to get sterilised with like, suits, the equipment also had to go through a process. So let's say a greenhouse is a chamber here, also the parallel with a camera, no camera chamber, like a room where energy inputs and outputs are strictly regulated, where life is controlled. And so us coming as an external assembly of living entities have an impact no, in this way of understanding production. So I think that yeah, you're very right in pointing this out, the kind of like, sealed space, that is the greenhouse in the first part, the ways in which production is articulated. But also, I was wondering, at some point, looking at this camp, at these you know, a lot of times I present the film and people tell me like, wow, this I could watch machines sorting vegetables for hours, no, it's kind of so hypnotic. And then, yeah, okay, but then, you know, I start questioning, what is this hypnotic, you know, is it because there's a pleasure there, when seeing these repetitions, that, you know, you anticipate, you know, that it's going to repeat the same movement? And then there's like a kind of, or is it because there's like a zoomorphisation? Or like an anthropomorphisation of the movements of the machine somehow of the yeah, what's at stake there? No. And also, what is this doing? Am I, by filming this, contributing to kind of adding value or like kind of like, how to say, yeah, creating fascination for this technology. And here's where the second part started for me being necessary, something that can counter this first part, something that can Yeah.

Dimitris Papadopoulos 13:55

So for the second part. So, where does this, what is the counter image that emerges from the second part, because we say the first one is repetitive, cinematic, is like a closed camera system, a closed loop of surveillance and then implementation should be as an implementation with all these cameras, and then the machines or the robot hands that put the plants in pots and move the plants around. So in the second one is like, for me, the word that came to mind was reclaiming in a certain way. So it's, but I was not sure and I of course, that's what I think, but probably most of you had different thoughts. So is reclaiming by whom and of what? So who is reclaiming what? But I felt again of something that it is embodied in a very different way - in the first one is machinic embodiments of plants and agricultural production and food is made

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through this automated process; in the second one, it's much more organic. Yeah. But both are legitimate, but both have implications. And I think what you see are these implications. So what do you see also reclaiming as the second part of the film as the main leading theme? Or what is the theme that emerges there for you?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 15:49

I mean, it's interesting, this word that you brought reclaiming? I haven't thought of it. But maybe, yeah, I mean, maybe. I guess what's important to say is one of the reasons why I thought of the second part was that in a lot of these factories, when I shot back in 2019, I would see that outside, there were small fenced areas, like little zoos almost, where they would have animals. But very, almost like an apres-zoo, you know, like where in these areas before entering the bust, the big greenhouses, you would have these animals, and sometimes they would have like alpacas or like a local varieties of that. Sorry, I forgot to say this is all shot in the Netherlands, in an area called Westland, which is one of the agricultural clusters of the Netherlands. So, yeah, I would see these animals, that it seemed to me that they were maybe, you know, perhaps to receive the clients or to kind of create this facade in front of the greenhouse. But then what was happening inside was a different thing. And these animals would never be allowed to be inside. So I started thinking about this. In a way, the question was, like, what has happened in contemporary agriculture, so that animals have been excluded from the cycles of production and reproduction, right? So in a way, some of the ways that we've learned maybe, I mean, I don't want to sound nostalgic, no, but if that we know from the past are that, you know, plants fix the nutrients of the soil through photosynthesis, then animals would eat these plants, metabolise these nutrients, through manure fertilise again the soil, which will serve again for the plants, you know, I mean, of course, this is an oversimplification no, but you, there has been moments where there's like, animals have been embedded in agricultural production. And here you have like a greenhouse that allows you to produce tomatoes, in the four seasons at zero degrees no. With CO2 with like heating with. So, just the answer, to me, initially, it wasn't much more intuitive than thinking, okay, who is reclaiming or what is reclaiming? My initial thought was, like, I need to do something that goes against the logic of the first part. So also, in

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terms of cinematic language, I don't, it doesn't, it doesn't have to be any more observational. There has to be certain agency for the animals so the camera will follow up with the animals. And there has to be a bit of challenging of this rationality of the editing in the first part. So there has to be things that are maybe following my intuition in a way, but yeah, that's of course, I mean, here I'm sharing my reading of, or my intention, but I'm sure you know that you all have like different readings of what this does and what it is for you. But yeah, a little bit I was thinking on these terms. So yeah. But I guess another question is like the second greenhouse is a greenhouse that is in a different area in Drenthe that is not this kind of hyper technified cluster of greenhouses. And in this area, we found this greenhouse that used to be a horticultural school that had been abandoned for many years. And now some neighbours are actually reclaiming, through like, some kind of like, there's like an artist residency there, kind of, and there is, it's in an open moment where they're thinking what to do with this space. And in this open moment, I asked them to film and they allowed me, and these greenhouses, you know, the glass is broken. So plants that are from the surroundings have gotten in, animals like the birds that you see get in and out, get trapped and then flees. And also species that have been cultivated as part of the school have been overgrown. And so for me, it was interesting, this disruption of the sterilised chamber into a chamber that allowed infiltration of species, of.

Dimitris Papadopoulos 21:28

One is sterile and the other is perused, so there is a lot of corrosion in traffic happening there. I think, for me the, really one of the most powerful images or clips in the film was the scene with a robotic hand moving and the insect, I don't know whether it's a dragonfly I don't know.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 21:53

It's a stick insect.

Dimitris Papadopoulos 21:54

Yeah. So moving, you don't know which moves what I mean, it is as one moves the other or the insect controls the hand, or it's, it has something about movement. And actually, this is my next question that I wanted to ask you is, is about the movement in the film, because, for me, it was a lot about movement and different types of movement. You know,

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the, I know that it's quite easy to criticise, of course, the first type of agricultural production. But still, I would try to avoid, you know, black and white and easy. And I was fascinated with the precision of the movement of the machines and the wheels, how they turn and how. So it's in a certain way there is something there about movement that is fascinating, in the first. And I think it what you mentioned the beginning about having this mesmerising effect is because I think that there is a machinic unconscious, or a machinic subconscious, probably not unconscious, that is dominate our lives, simply because we are, to a large extent, machinic. So I wouldn't want to make to break that and say this is, you know, artificial in the second half. And also because I'll close my longer question, also, because in the second half, where we have a different type of movement, much more organic and much more complex and self organised. It happens to domesticated animals. So the reclaiming of the automate, of the greenhouse, happens through domesticated animals who have a long history in agriculture and llamas have been domesticated 6000 years ago, so it's there is no innocence because it's in a certain way, you could see the first part of the film as the continuation of this part. This agriculture that becomes more and more, you know, delocalised, but it's the same, it's agriculture. So there is a complexity then I thought this is a fascinating study about movement your film.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 24:47

Thank you. I mean, yeah, I think I mean, it's interesting that you bring these like key concepts like movement, reclaiming, because yeah, I think somehow, you know, like, you end up thinking about your film in particular ways that I, as you were thinking, I, three ideas came to mind. Three ideas that maybe, yeah, inform, you know, like, I'm constantly reading stuff and people telling me. And the first one is in relation to the animals, there's this idea of the transition from the hunting regimes to the capture regimes. And also this idea that, parallel to the proliferation of cinema, or let's say, put another way, the proliferation of images and reproduction of animals, through the invention of photography and cinema, comes hand in hand with the disappearance of animals from ecosystems, no, that would be the first idea. So what are the the images of the animals, this motion that in the origins of photography is trying to capture the horse as it moves through cameras? What is, what happens

in this transition from the hunting, the actual hunting when you hunt an animal no, I mean, of course, like I'm referencing people here no, Mizzou Talibit and other authors that have talked about this. But what happens when this animal is no longer dead but it's capturing an image, and its motion is kind of capturing an image. This was one of the ways that I thought of movement, or of what recording animals imply. The other one is by Canadian filmmaker Phil Hoffman, which I really admire. And I've heard him once say that framing animals with the viewfinder with a camera is not so different than surrounding them with a fence. And he said they are both forms of domestication. Now I don't fully agree with this, I think that perhaps yes domestication, but perhaps a domestication has this one direction, that the camera domesticates the animal, and I think I wonder to what extent, this is a much more fluid thing by which also, the camera can be tamed by the movement of the animal. But there's something there that we were trying during the shooting, kind of like limiting a big space for the animals to move, and kind of framing and staying with a frame and then whatever. I said three things. And then the other one, what was it in relation to the first part? Yes. And movement. Jonathan Beller in his work on the cinematic mode of production talks about how cinema acquires properties of the production line and interjects them as a form of consciousness. And here in a way, when we see this tomato robot that moves through the heating pipes, you know, in a way, I think of it as a reversal of this, in a way the production line is taking back certain qualities that have been worked through cinema such as the dolly track, no, this robot is basically like a dolly camera that six pairs of cameras that move through dolly tracks. The panning also, it pans, it records and yeah, and kind of like basics of the yeah, of cinema no, and it works through another a different kind of machinic consciousness, that is datasets, deep learning that inform the growth of the vegetables. And I think in all these three ideas movement is kind of somehow what creates friction, or yeah, what imprints fiction in the animals, in the machines, in relation to the camera. So yeah, yeah. And cinema in a way, the raw matter of cinema is movement and time, no? So.

Dimitris Papadopoulos 29:53

When finding ways to capture it, and yeah, yeah. So I'm looking at the time and I would like to open it to discussion, I have a final question. So

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the last bit of that came to my mind is that Agrilogistics is, poses in a certain way, I don't know, I mean, you might never have thought of this. But for me it pose the question of energy. So because I was thinking, what powers the movements in the first part of the film, and it was, you know, it's oil, basically, it's fossil fuels that powers the movement in the first part of the film because all these machines, the cold air conditioning, or the heating or the data capture, the images, and then the processing of data, all these are very energy hungry processes. And then we move to the second and we move through this transition where the screen blacks out. And then we start seeing, you know, that the llama, which appears a bit as a ghostly figure, there is definitely a ghostly. And then you start thinking, so what powers the movement now in the second part, and of course, these are not fossil fuels. And these are this is a different type of energetic concept or energy that flows through the second part. So for me with, it's a very timely film, because it poses, of course, all these other questions that we have discussed, also in the middle of a food crisis, which is also a crisis of energies and energy crisis. And it is something that comes up as in these two parts of the film. So when you were making it so did you ever think about, you know, this question of, you know, what powers may be, what powers may move it, what powers the subject of this film?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 32:13

Yeah, I mean, to me. Back then I wasn't necessarily thinking about energy, but I was thinking about another word that is kind of closely related, which is metabolic processes, right? So how this energy is transformed in a way or how this? And yeah, definitely, you know, and there is also an energy in the timeline of the film, you accelerate, the timeline accelerates this energy, or has the capacity to move the energy from one shot to another? So I think what's important is precisely what you were highlighting, to remind ourselves that the fact that there is this kind of emergence of the digital food regime or you know, like in the terminology of the food regimes, some people are talking that there's this data, digital food regime. And sometimes when you talk about this, it seems that there is no material infrastructure that enables this to happen. So part of the film was kind of to show that it's very material, even if there's data, there's like, objects, there's a greenhouse - to build this greenhouse, you have to ship metal, you have to use trucks. You

know, in the latest documentary, I think it's the latest documentary of David Attenborough, I don't know if you've seen it, the one that talks about his life, it ends with a with kind of like open ending, looking at some greenhouses in the Netherlands. And actually, some shots are similar to the ones that I use. But there is a voiceover which is something that I would never do. But there is a voiceover and he says, The Netherlands, despite being one of the, something like this, one of the countries with a small farmable land, no like with a small territory has managed to become one of the largest agricultural exporters. Now it turns out that some people later on analyse this data. And it turns out that the Netherlands counts as agricultural exports one flowers. So flowers have a different production, you know, and they require like fertiliser, they're required, like a lot of things, and also re-exports. So things that come to Rotterdam and are exported count also as agricultural exports, so in this framework these images, even if these robots are not powered by oil, in a way, these images are energetically connected to the whole fossil fuel. You know, either because they are becoming this facade of this sustainable production that, in fact, still relies heavily on these other forms that are not sustainable. Or Yeah, yeah, I, this was, let's say in relation to the first part. And I think I'm gonna leave it here because otherwise we can continue this yeah, this discussion. I don't know if someone has questions already.

Audience member 36:00

I'm a bit selfconscious with the microphone. Congratulations on a fantastic film. That was really amazing. Curious to see if you would make a feature out of it really, like get more, more things you'd like to investigate really like, I think it would be quite interesting to see the crew being sanitised going in there, for example. It reminded me of sort of sci fi movies really like Silent Running came to mind.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 36:38

Which one?

Audience member 36:38

Silent Running about. Yeah. That's quite interesting. But I really would like to ask is, you must have introduced the robot into the derelict greenhouse no with the stick insect on? Because that really throws into

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the film, I also wondered if anyone ever asked if you were working with a horror film, it looks quite terrifying, but fantastic at the same time.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 37:09

Yeah, thank you. Yeah. So I did introduce this robot. I worked in collaboration with someone that works at the agri-food department of Wageningen University, which is one of the universities that is kind of like, you know, you have like, both the people that work for developing this robots that will serve for the industry, but you also have, you know, people that are discussing critically what is the role of this too? Yeah. I, yeah, this person was very generous, and they were like, interested in participating. And then I think, when they saw what I was doing they were like what is this. But yeah, thanks for your comment.

Dimitris Papadopoulos 38:09

It's interesting that you saw something, you know, horror dimension to that, because it's, I saw, you know, a gracious movement and coordination between the robot hand and the insect, but you are right, actually, there is something there because out of nowhere, there is a robotic hand moving, which might be a relic, you know, and machine being, you know, empowered again and then starting to control things again. So it's like, something else associated, or something.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 38:45

Yeah, I mean, sometimes people react, like, oh, these robots are creepy. And then other people actually tell me that they find them quite human or like that there's like a humour in even sometimes or like. So I think that they're in this threshold between being uncanny, their movements being uncanny, and sometimes that produces like a weird humour or, I mean, I don't know, I don't know how you felt about this. Yeah, horror, could be somehow related to the horror humour, you know, I don't know. Exactly.

Audience member 39:29

At one point I thought about the robot stumbling around in Silent Running for example, like they're quite humourous and clunky.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 39:34

Right. Yeah.

Audience member 39:37

But you always anthropomorphise things that move, that's just natural.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 39:42

Yeah, I mean, I mean, in a way also, the history of robots in agriculture is relatively recent, no, like in the Green Revolution, you have robots replacing the function of animals. So there is also something of the animals that gets fossilised in this movement, but also the working of, the work of the humans is also kind of replicated by the robots. So it's I think that these anthropomorphisation, zoomorphisation is kind of inevitable.

Audience member 40:29

Just talking about the human element, it's interesting that you filmed animals. But when it came to humans, it was primarily hands and there was no, there wasn't any human faces. Was that a conscious decision to sort of dehumanise the film in that sort of sense?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 40:49

Yeah. Yeah. Yes. You know, I, yeah, there's been. I've been thinking a lot about this, how, you know, how much presence of humans, in which ways and in which moments the presence of humans has to happen? What does it say? And also reading some stuff and kind of like trying to see why am I doing this? Like, because there is already like a tradition of industrial filmmaking that has kind of like addressed these questions and so on. In this process, I came up with this book that is called *The Process Genre*, by Salome Aguilera. And in one section, she actually refers to different critiques of films. And someone said that this idea that not showing the face and showing the hands is the humanising, is actually, quite anthropomorphic, quite an now that we were talking about anthropomorphic, is a quite anthropomorphising way of understanding the image by which if you don't see a face, there's no human in a way, something like this, you know? But I see what you mean. There's, yeah, there's a number of reasons why I decided to not put the faces.

Audience member 42:25

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Perhaps it's sort of makes one feel that the humans are sort of more servants to the machines, rather than controlling or running machines?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 42:35

Yeah. Yeah. So yeah. I mean, so I guess like here, we will enter, like, perhaps a much more, much more into the material conditions of how I film there, I enter in some of these greenhouses, through the companies that produce the robots. And once I was inside, I was able to film other things. So among the things that I film, I filmed the faces of the workers, etc. But my role there, I, it was a difficult role, in the sense that I wasn't entirely sure what I was doing by filming these faces of temporary workers that come there. A lot of the times with zero hours contract, like here, you know, in places like Kenya would have like a lot of Polish workers, Romanian workers, but there in the Netherlands, there's also these seasonal workers. And so I wasn't entirely sure that I wanted to make a social documentary or like a documentary, that would look, I thought that suddenly I had to focus on and stay with my initial purpose. And the politics of representation require a different approach for, let's say, a film that would include these workers or the ways in which these workers are entangled in the machinery of the greenhouse. But at the same time, when making the film, I was like, I can't fully present like I can't present a fully automated greenhouse because that's not exactly what it is. These machines, for instance, are not designed to clean themselves, which tells a lot about how reproductive and care practices are not included in the productive capitalist modes of production. And these machines also are not as precise as they should be. So sometimes the bolts are lost and there has to be still someone but this someone is following the rhythm of the machine. And here there's different theories. There's also people that say there isn't a real interest from companies to fully replace the labour of humans by machines because they still want to rely on cheap labour. So introducing one machine, yes. But not fully replacing the whole. So yeah, I mean, all these things were, you know, in the editing process, discussed with the editors, with friends, you know. And at the end we made some decisions and in a way that's yeah, that's what happens in the film that you, you end up like going for one option.

Audience member 45:54

Thank you. Congrats on the film. Yeah, building on, really building on the

last few questions about the kind of transition from humour to horror. And also the presence and absence of human, the first section of the film really made me think of Wallace and Gromit. And I'm not sure if you know that reference, but it's really like, it's like these machines that are kind of comical in the way that something really like their function. Like something goes in and something comes out. There's a really famous thing from chickens, which is in one of the films, chickens go in, pies come out. And it's like this kind of process of building a humorous thing. I think the transition with the second part is interesting, because that reminded me of like, footage of Chernobyl, like, previous to the war, of course, but like when you see that there's a disaster. There's nothing really left. Except for nature, sort of reclaiming the land, as you said. And I'm familiar with Birdman. And I kind of recognise the element of the robot and it kind of made me feel that that's like quite a common trope in horror movies. I think about Planet of the Apes and that when you see the kind of responsible institution behind it like I think the Statue of Liberty sticking out of the soil you kind of see that there's this kind of history of what's gone before it and well basically what this made me think of is kind of human responsibility and what that means for the climate and things specifically.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 47:37

Yeah, yeah, I mean, yeah, I think yeah, I mean, thanks for your comment I think is very yeah, it's very interesting. I was thinking about this thing of the logo that you mentioned, I mean, partially it was part of the negotiation also like how how do they want to be represented so I guess the they always have these logos and then but yeah, I mean, I also never tried to hide the institute like or the corporations or the like if that's there, like it's there yeah. Yeah. I don't know I don't know if there was like a question or no, it was more like a comment No. I mean, I like it. I think it's.

Audience member 48:30

Yeah the kind of institutional role and where humans, the role humans play in creating and then neglecting these things is very interesting. Hi there, like the others I felt was quite a strong sci-fi element to it, particularly in the second part. It's really enjoyable to watch the whole thing. What I kind of found curious was the first part felt like

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an observation and the second part, and not to use this in a kind of derogatory sense, but a contrivance maybe. And I wondered if you were kind of going from deromanticising agriculture to romanticising a kind of post agricultural possible. Does that make sense?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 49:32

Yeah, I see what you mean. Yeah, I mean, I don't know. I don't know. I really wouldn't know what to say. You know, like I think my the second part for me was more like a response to how I felt the images of the first part were operating and with the fact that I didn't feel fully comfortable with making an observational film, another observational film about industrial processes. And so in a way I follow a lot of intuition. I mean, I have like a lot of ideas let's say, that I, that helped me explain this. But, yeah, I mean, initially, maybe, maybe going into the process can be helpful in this case. Initially, I made the cut in 2019, where this part of the animals was one single shot of a cow at dawn. And I was narrating this idea of animals breaking into a greenhouse through subtitles. Kind of like, with the sound, but without any voice just like texts, a bit like the storytelling that you see in the second part. That is not obvious. But it's let's say, there's a fabulation there. I was narrating it through subtitles. And then I wasn't happy, I wasn't comfortable with this idea of voicing the nonhumans through text and and so then that's when I started deciding on creating a bit more of a performative shooting situation where I would have some shots decided, but other things were more like, yeah, seeing how the animals interact with a place. But I think there's the second part has more to do with. I mean, I don't know if it's meant to bring Donna Haraway. But SF no, science fiction, but also the speculative fabulation, like all this playfulness that she does with this SF, no. And I'm, yeah, I don't know. I wonder if there's something of that in the second part.

Audience member 52:16

Hello thanks again, possibly slightly biographical question, I was just wondering what led you as an artist and filmmaker and researcher into this area. And whether it forms part of a sort of wider, a wider theoretical project that you might have, over a longer term.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 52:40

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It does form part of a larger practice based theoretical project. So I'm currently doing a PhD, practice based PhD around the technologies and ecologies of food regimes, around food production, distribution and consumption, each of these phases is addressed through a moving image work. In this case, this one would be the one about production. I'm currently starting to develop one of distribution. And, so yes, it belongs to this current research. What led me here is a long story like, but I'm gonna try to make like, make it short. So I'm from Barcelona, I'm from an area of Barcelona that I mean, I don't know if you've been there or you're familiar, but basically where someone is limited by the mountain and the sea and then two rivers so that's why it's extremely compressed. And that's why I tell everyone don't go there. Don't go there is a jungle of concrete. It's too hot. There's too many tourists so but I grew up in an area that is called Collserola, which is the verge of the city, the moment where the city ends and natural park starts, it is a strange area, area where there's overlaps, and you know, my parents had like a house it's kind of like in for like, at the beginning of a forest. There is a lot of wild boars and wild boars, for instance, are kind of like a hybrid species between a European species that adapts to the human so they eat from the trash but then they live in this natural park. They proliferate a lot. They create, like disruptions but these disruptions are maybe not disruption. Sometimes it's like actually humans that are expanding. And so I grew up with this. And this is not a rural context, not a human context is a really strange context. I have a friend that the guy that did the sound here, just moved there. And he was telling me Gerard is it normal that you know, my dog got attacked by a wild boar? And I was like, yeah, like this happens, you know, I had a dog that died from this. So there isn't this kind of aggressiveness of the rural maybe but there is another form of aggressiveness by which you find wild boars, run over by cars. And then okay, I'm going for the long one. But I need to show them sorry. But I have so many stories about the wild boars that one day we could share with a pint in the pub. And but then, let's say I was studying fine arts and in fine arts, basically, you have like all the subjects photography, and they ask you like, do something. And so basically what I did was like going to the place that I knew which was that place, and filming and making photographic projects and making drawings and making sound pieces, and suddenly my work became work about this place. And then I started reading about ecology, I started being part

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of collectives, meeting people that were more connected to activism, making films, meeting people in the film and then in the last 10 years, I've been developing a practice around contemporary ecologies, let's say, and one thing led to the other. And with this, I'm going to end I promise, in a film that I did before, which was called *Wolfdog*, and was looking at the logics of coexistence between wolves and cattle industry in the Basque Country. I ended up filming an automated milking machine in a rural area of the Basque country that work 24/7 and it was giving surplus food to the cows and they were there was no one in this warehouse. So the cows would come in and the farmer would control it through the phone. This machine is called *Astronaut* if you want to look it up and it basically yeah, detects the nipples, with the sensor, it milks, the cows pass through, you know. So two things happened after - I stopped drinking milk, or industrially produced milk. And then I started doing a PhD on automation and farming or like I started looking at those things, which eventually would lead me to this. So yeah, that's a bit my journey. It's a bit of a long answer. I hope it explains.

Audience member 57:52

Yeah, just to follow what's next.

Gerard Ortín Castellví 57:56

So the next one is this film around food distribution. And here I'm trying to think about, so in each of these films, I'm not trying to represent the whole thing like, this is food production. This is food distribution, but rather I look at a specific case study that I think is representative of changes in technology and ecology and food regimes. And so I'm looking at food delivery in cities. So quite a different topic from this one but in a way it relates how algorithms also shaped the human fabric, how there's ghost supermarkets or supermarkets that are arranged in a different ways from the ways that we used to engage with the retailing sector. Yeah, and a little bit thinking about how food moves and what in the city and why does it move? And yeah, but I think it's gonna be very different from this one hopefully, I'll come here and show it to you in a few months or years.

Dimitris Papadopoulos 59:21

Perhaps we are close to the end. But before we finish I wanted to ask

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you if you can say something about the sound and the work the fabulous work Oriol Campi Solé who is the sound artist that made the sound because I think this half of the, perhaps not half, but the sound is so important for this film. So if you want to see something about this?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 59:47

First thing I want to say is not half of the film, more than half of the film is Oriol, who is like a good friend. When I had these ideas, I didn't have money. I was a student - money in terms of money to produce the film. So I had to do the camera myself, which I borrow from University. And I didn't have money to do the sound. And he said, like I'm coming with you, you'll pay me whenever you get funding. And eventually I managed to pay him so. But this is just to say sometimes it takes friendships and all kinds of relationships to produce something. So he was quite crucial in that, but then he was also quite crucial in conceptualising, and thinking through sound the film, and a lot of the times, we would spend quite a lot of time, setting up the microphones around the machines. And so Oriol mainly use this microphone, which is called Figure Eight microphone, that then you can create a matrix. This sounds like sci fi, but just basically you can separate the the kind of input that goes into the microphone into channels. And that gives this very specialised sound that you perceive here of the machines. But he also use like microphones that capture the lower frequencies, I'm happy that here we had like a good sampling system. And then we could also perceive all these things. And then also microphones that are contact microphones for recording some of the machines so there was like, quite a lot of attention paid to sound. And we were aware that sound was kind of the glue of this film, the images in the first part, but also the glue between the two parts. And in this moment, between the two parts, there's two sounds that are kind of key - one is a sound of a conveyor belt that was broken. And it created this kind of cheering, I don't know if cheering is a word, but like this kind of like whirring high pitch sound rotating sound that had cycles. And then the other one is the sound of the crickets. Of the outside of this greenhouse. No, it's a greenhouse, but you hear the outside. So we will hear the crickets. And then I came to see the sound mix to my friend Oriol's studio. And he said, like, look at this Gerard, like, I'm just looking at these two waveforms, and they're almost exactly the same. Like one of I mean, it was pure coincidence, but we basically

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didn't have to do much, you know, like, we just crossfade them. And then we work with like a friend of ours with like a sound artist who has worked a lot - Tom Fisher, Action Pyramid, who has worked a lot recording plants. And so he also was kind enough to share part of his library for the film for free. And he worked, recording different kinds of plants in ponds, underwater, in different ways. But there is a moment in this transition from this platform that moves endlessly kind of, to the second greenhouse in which there is this polyphony of sounds of machines and other nonhumans yeah, but yeah, yeah, totally super good to work with Oriol in the sound.

Dimitris Papadopoulos 1:04:01
Great, then we can close?

Audience member 1:04:13
Are we able to see your other work anywhere or even this again in some capacity?

Gerard Ortín Castellví 1:04:19
Ah, so this one, you're literally attending the UK premiere. So hopefully, you know, now it's circulating in film festivals, which means that I have to be, I can't make it public yet online or anything like this because film festivals are quite picky with the status of the premiere. But hopefully, it might be available. Maybe there is a way in which we can share a link or something through the organisation. I don't know. I'm happy to do that. The previous works yeah, you have to send me an email and I'll send you the links. Because there yeah, there's different kinds of like situations in each of the works in terms of the production and but there's like three other films that I made. And I'm happy to share it or to arrange another screening of the other works here or in another cinema. Yeah.

Canan Batur 1:05:23
Round of applause for our speakers tonight. It's such a deep layered film that introduces so many brilliant connections like industrial complex, contemporary agriculture, non chronological timelines, science fiction for some and horror and humour. So it's so much, it so allows interpretation and it brings every time I watch it, it brings something new for me as well actually. So thank you so much Gerard. Thank you

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so much, Dimitris, for being here and moderating this conversation today. If you would like to trace back some of the gems that we shared and this conversation tonight, do keep your eyes peeled on our website and our socials. Hopefully it will be available in the next few weeks. But it's almost 9.30. So I think it's for us to kind of close today. Thank you for being with us today. And thank you again for joining our community. And one last round I will say for both Dimitris and Gerard and thank you. Thank

Colophon

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