



FEATURED TEXTS OR PROJECTS

Blind man's bluff with open eyes

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Abstract

The text reflects on the experience of participating in Lukas Sander's video walk, comparing it to the childhood game "Blind Man's Bluff." In the game, being blindfolded transforms familiar surroundings into an unstable and disorienting landscape where the central question shifts from "Where are the others?" to "Where am I?" The author argues that Sander's work induces a similar disorientation, paradoxically enacted "with open eyes." Guided solely by a disembodied voice through headphones, the participant navigates urban and semi-hidden spaces, experiencing uncertainty, vulnerability, and a regression to a childlike state of dependence and unsteady movement. The loss of auditory self-awareness intensifies the destabilisation, prompting even attempts to record one's own footsteps as a form of reassurance or self-preservation. Throughout the walk, reality becomes ambiguous: sounds blur between environment and recording; spaces feel at once familiar and estranged. By the time the participant returns to the starting point, the landscape is unchanged, yet the experience has altered the self. The text thus explores how Sander's work transforms perception, orientation and identity through deliberate sensory displacement.

Keywords: ·Site-specific , Urban transformation, Perception, Orientation, Sensory displacement

Biography

Johannes Binotto is a professor of cultural and media studies at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and a senior lecturer at the University of Zurich. He is also an experimental filmmaker, video essayist, and senior researcher who leads the Swiss National Science Foundation-funded project "VideoEssay". His work focuses on the intersection of film theory, philosophy of technology, and psychoanalysis.

You all know the children's game called "Blind Man's Bluff": You get blindfolded and then you have to try to catch the other players. But if you can remember playing it, you will also remember, how this game made not just the other children invisible but how it turned your whole surroundings into a puzzle. The room through which you stumble and grope on your search for the others becomes an endless labyrinth. The sofa and the chair must have been moved as they no longer seem to stand where they always stood. The lamp is in my way and the rug is a trap laid out for me. All distances between the things have shrunk to mere cracks or they have suddenly expanded to an unsurmountable abyss. Everything is different and I've become an alien in my own world. The question where the others are hiding is getting replaced by a much more unsettling question "Where am I?"

To enter Lukas Sander's video walk means to enter a game of blind man's bluff – but one that is all the more confusing as you play it with open eyes. I can see the street before me clearly but I don't know my path as it will only be mapped out for me by the voice I hear through my headphones. Am I really supposed to enter that door? Have I gone too far or not yet far enough? I become a child again, a toddler even, who only recently learned to walk. I move through buildings and parking lots, I cross fences and gates. I pass apartments with lit windows and people looking out, eyeing me suspiciously and I follow a beaten track up the hill, next to the motorway. I do this all because a voice in my head tells me so – a gentle psychosis. There are times I am so tempted to take off my headphones because an anxiety rises in me that I will lose myself slowly and completely. I've once read that people will eventually go crazy when trapped in a completely soundproof room. I begin to wonder if the same is true when you can no longer hear yourself. Is this grumbling noise I can make out in the background just part of the pre-recorded soundtrack or is coming in right now from the motorway behind those thick concrete walls? I breathe hard but I don't hear it. As if to secure myself I start to make my own audio recording with my phone, while I walk. What a weird idea to record my steps on gravel, grass and concrete. Like an audio backup for recovering myself afterwards so that I could listen to where I had been while I was lost. The voice in my headphone tells me about that huge building on the left. A flickering light is signalling to me but I cannot decipher the code. Yet, as I slowly return to where I began I do not want my trip to end. As the voice in my head fades away I keep standing under those trees to where it had led me last. I have returned to the place where once I was.

But I am no longer the same.



videowalk perspective in residential area of "Greencity" | filmstill of animation with cityview and virtual forest overlay



videowalk perspective on final construction site of "Greencity"