

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Tobias Kaspar, "Filming and Being Filmed," *Provence Magazine*, April, 2019

# PRVNC



## FILMING AND BEING FILMED

Tobias Kaspar and Inka  
Meißner in conversation with  
Karl Holmqvist and Rirkrit  
Tiravanija

Earlier this year in spring, Karl Holmqvist, Tobias Kaspar, Inka Meißner, and Rirkrit Tiravanija met up in Rirkrit's Berlin apartment to discuss his new film, Karl's Perfect Day (2017), being friends in the art world, and working together in general.



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Rirkrit: You want to make coffee?  
You guys want coffee?

Tobias: With pleasure.

Karl: What kind of coffee?

R: Keto. I'm on this fat diet. I only eat fat. So ...

Inka: There's this coffee made with butter.

R: Yes, that's Keto Coffee. It's made with ghee and basically coconut oil.

I: Yeah. It actually works. Lars did it with the blender ...

R: Well, maybe we should do the Keto Coffee. You can have a taste. It will keep you warm. Maybe you need to be used to it. But anyway, you basically change from sugar power to fat power. And then there's all these health concerns that comes along with it. It's good for diabetics and actually also good for the metabolism.

T: Rirkrit, you recently finished the film *Karl's Perfect Day*. Where and when did the film premiere?

R: July 2017. I didn't really make it for the art-system, in the sense that I wasn't making it to put it in a museum or a gallery. I tried to put it in the film industry, which is not so easy if you don't have a real connection.

T: Do you have a professional film distributor on your side?

R: No, the person I work with in Mexico, my kind of partner / producer, he's the one who has been selling it to different people. Partly already when we were fundraising, you know. We sent it to different possible funders in the film system, so some of them knew about it already. But no. And I'm not pushing it. It's more like somebody saw it and they say something to somebody and then they ask for it.

T: When did you, Rirkrit and Karl,

start thinking about this film?

R: My approach for this film was based on my first film, which was also kind of a documentary portrait of a particular person.

T: The film about the Chiang Mai rice farmer?

R: Yes. That film was a very small production, kind of like a fairytale. The filming was done in eight days, in two different seasons: four days and four days. We just followed the rice farmer around and everything that happened in the film was just happening in front of us. The film made itself in that way. The initial first four days of shooting were supposed to be a test run, but when we went back and looked at it there was great stuff in it. Afterwards we went back and shot in the rainy season again and got more great stuff, but when we put it together, I decided to switch the seasons. So it starts off with the rainy season, partly because I had some structure in mind that follows a certain logic, and that logic only really started on the second shoot, because the first one was a test. I really didn't plan anything. The idea was to make a film about Karl's perfect day—from when he wakes up to when he goes to sleep. I didn't know what he would think, but I've known Karl for a long time. On the other hand I had no idea what Karl's perfect day would be. We shot some scenes in New York. He went for a jog through Central Park. He did some things I never knew he did like jogging and exercises. It was kind of a shock to me. Then Karl wrote a whole kind of script. Like a scenario. He wrote down what he would want his day to be like. When I said to Karl, "perfect day," I really thought he would wake up in Berlin and have coffee in Paris and he would jog in central park, because in a way the perfect day could be the perfect place. It could be anywhere. Also it's supposed to be kind of fictional anyway, but Karl is too modest a guy so everything happened in Berlin.

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K: There were these possibilities of doing extravagant things, but I was thinking that this is also going to somehow define my person to others and it's quite personal. And I know that if I do this kind of crazy thing, then the rest of my life is going to seem so boring. Everyday is a perfect day in a way. So I'm going to my favorite restaurant, I'm going to my favorite bar, I'm jogging in my favorite jogging pants and whatever. So that was perfect.

R: There were moments like going to Hannah Höch's house, which was something you wanted to do but never did until in the film. Or meeting Arto Lindsay—the musician having a cameo in the film. So in a way there were things Karl wanted to do but hadn't done. Every perfect day is staged eventually, even if it's all the usual things simply compressed into one day.

T: How much time passed between the initial idea and the final result?

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R: My things take a long time just because I have no money and I don't go to get money really. Then at some point, you've got some money and that's how we start. But yeah, it's a long process. But when we shot it, it was really like a week.

I studied film in school; people don't know that. I actually have shots in my head, so I pretty much know what I want. I don't try to shoot more than one take. I let people rehearse but I wouldn't shoot more takes. In that sense, it doesn't take much time, it's more just organizing people and things together.

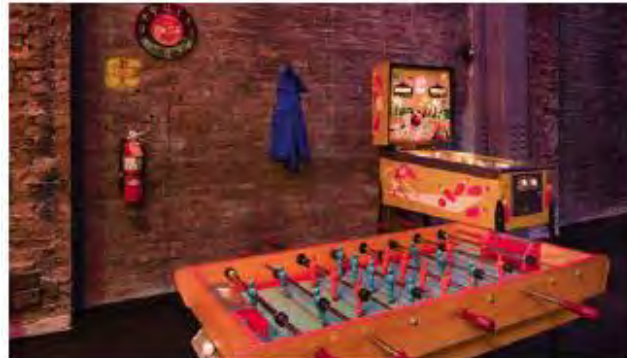
T: You mentioned this behind the camera moment as being a very social moment and that it is important for you how you choreograph the team that works with you on the film. It's almost like your cooking sessions which are social gatherings although filming is more controlled. Do you have a personal relationship with everyone on set?

R: Yes and no. For the first portrait film there were three people shooting. But my vision of Karl's perfect day was a bit more cinematic, so we needed more people. My producer actually didn't pull it together. It was quite difficult. The film didn't have enough money and he was arranging it as if it would play out like my first film. Then, of course, I knew certain things wouldn't work and they didn't. So we had to reshoot some scenes at the end.

I: What was the difference between shooting with someone you didn't know and shooting with someone who's very familiar?

R: Well, it's not like I give Karl a lot of direction. He's already directing himself because it's his story in a way. So he chooses the places and the way he wants to do it. In that sense, he was kind of self directing and we were just on the other side. From my experience everything was quite easy except dealing with the producer, who was this friend of mine who I felt

wasn't really understanding my vision. But we also got through it. I also see this movie as part of a trilogy. There's one more film that I'm planning to make and the approach is about focusing on a particular person at a particular moment. In Karl's Perfect Day we have a lot of other characters involved.



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T: Friends?

R: Yeah. Most of them were friends so that was fine. The only odd person out was the boyfriend who he meets in the bar.

T: That wasn't planned?

R: No, that was planned but it wasn't somebody that we knew. Originally Karl wanted Radcliffe ... What's his name?

K: Daniel.

R: ... Daniel Radcliffe as the boy he meets in the bar. That's the actor I would try to reach but we couldn't get him. Then Karl came up with another person he didn't really know, but thought would be good. And now they're like Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn because they appear in other films together.

K: The pick-up scene was very good. There was a traveling camera. It was shot in Berlin's bar Möbel Olfe, so they had to change the whole floor so that the camera could travel on a rail and they worked on the lighting for hours. The pickup scene itself was like two minutes [Laughing]. It was just like, "Hey, wanna come?" But I think it works in the film.

R: Do you want some tea?

I: Thanks, yes. Where did you meet the first time?



K: 1990, I think.

R: Yes, in New York. I always thought back then that Karl was more of a writer and poet kind of

thing, you know.

T: Before this film, have there been other ways of working together or using each other's work, besides having an on-going conversation?

R: No, not from my point of view. We have this on-going project or something that doesn't end but it's a kind of constant conversation. And things take their own path. Like after meeting Arto Lindsay in the film, you went to Brazil, right, Karl?

K: Yes.

R: And you made a recording together, so it starts to expand a bit.

T: And Arto was someone that you worked with before?

R: Yeah, he's somehow a friend and we've collaborated on other things, and I also like doing that because Arto doesn't really consider himself as an artist though he is, even if he's not perceived that way. I don't think Karl was perceived that way for a long time either, but they're there and they're doing things in a way that is interesting to me. Right?

K: Yes. I was just thinking about Arto, what he does, which is great. I was always very impressed by Arto's parade so we could have squeezed that in. But enough was enough. As an artist you spend a lot of time alone and that's actually quite satisfying, but maybe not so interesting for people to watch. So there are moments between loneliness and social life — too much social life stresses me. I need to have my own time.

T: You also mentioned this notion of Kreuzberg and maybe that's also why you decided not to have breakfast in Rio and dinner in New York, but stay in the very small daily places that you visit every day when you're in Berlin?

K: Kotti is the most dangerous place in Berlin, there's a lot of drugs and petite crimes and stuff going on. I was a big fan of Lung Neaw Visits His Neighbors (2011),

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Rirkrit's first film, and after the kind of time travel or time expansion that happens with the farmer and his friends in the jungle I kind of felt it should be possible to have something like that. This time not in the rice fields in Chiang Mai but in the middle of Kreuzberg, so that was somehow part of it and just kind of walking around discovering something that leads to something else. There is this idea of stretching and expanding time etc.



T: Rirkrit, you worked with the film *Angst essen Seele auf* (1974) before, right?

R: Yeah, the first time I worked with that film was probably in the bar in Cologne in '95 with Esther Shipper. I made this bar — where was that?

K: At Friesenwall?

R: At the time Esther had a storefront and she wanted artists to do the window, but it was like a shop. I didn't really understand so I made a bar which was based on this Fassbinder film. It was a time with a lot racial tension and violence going on, just like now.

I: In re-enacting the Fassbinder film, did you also consider the behind the scenes hierarchies between the artists?

R: What do you mean with hierarchy?

I: I think looking back to the days Fassbinder made his films this became a topic; the implicit and explicit tensions and relations between the director and the actors; even more so because they were this group of artists and friends.

R: I'm more concerned about the actors than directing them. To me it's kind of like curating, I take care of the artist because I feel like that's more important. The artist feels good, the show will look good. So I was more interested in making sure that everyone was happy with what they were doing. I usually work with people locally but it was quite tough since we only had a limited time because we literally finished shooting two days before the show opened.

K: The day after we finished shooting in NY I left to fly to Münster to look at the *Skulptur Projekte*. I was super tired and the next morning when I woke up in the hotel bed I was like, "Where is the camera?!" I'd been doing it for so many days.

R: It's like when you've been on a ship and you still feel like you're on the ship, even though you put a foot on land. You're still moving with the thing.

T: Unemployed actor; "I'm in between roles."

I: But would it be a preferred state of being? I mean the possibility to slip in and out of this situation of being in front of the camera again and again.

K: I don't know. It's always very embarrassing. It's exciting and it's embarrassing and it's exciting. I think we're privileged as artists to get to do a lot of different things and hopefully get some interest in it.

R: We've answered all questions?

T: Yes. Only this one: What happened at Paris Bar?

