

## Wednesday, 13th October - Charles Heller

19.00

### **Crossroads at the Edge of the Worlds**

Charles Heller, Switzerland 2007, DV, English, 40'  
and excerpts from other videos

**Perception Management** – Video lecture about a research project on the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)

Charles Heller, about 45 min

21.30

*Carte Blanche*

### **Le tombeau d'Alexandre (The Last Bolshevik)**

Chris Marker, France 1993, Beta, German version, 116'

## **Charles Heller**

Charles Heller is an artist, documentary film maker, and writer. He was raised in the USA and Switzerland and has earned university degrees from Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Geneva and from Goldsmiths College London, where he is currently involved in a PhD programme. Charles Heller lives in Geneva.

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Core topics of his work are the effects of European migration policies, everyday and institutional racism, and the political role of the arts and the media. His first film, *NEM-NEE* (2005), grew directly from his activist engagement. Under commission of an NGO he documented the living conditions of illegalized migrants in Switzerland and analyzed their systematic discrimination under Suisse immigration laws.

Shortly after Heller was invited by artist Ursula Biemann to contribute to the „Maghreb Connection“ project. The outcome was a documentary travelogue, *Crossroads at the Edge of the Worlds* (2006), in which Heller follows the clandestine routes of sub-Saharan migrants towards Europe. His third film, *Home Sweet Home* (2009), brought the migration topic home to Switzerland. Heller presents here an extensive image and text research on the history of his home country and its ideological and practical conduct with “strangers”.

## **Emancipation, media literacy – propaganda?**

*Crossroads*... already raises critical questions about the role of images in migration policies; it tries to avoid the dilemma that representations of migrants, even when empathetic, often feed into the European phantasm of a “refugee invasion”. Then the encounter with the media campaigns of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) really made Heller think twice whether this dilemma can be solved by „simply making the right film“.

IOM performs as an advisor and service partner in “all issues concerning migration”. Its 126 member states provide the organization with an annual budget of 1 Billion dollars. The professionally produced “information campaigns” which the IOM has launched in several African countries apply similar if not identical images like those which are meant to scandalize the situation of migrants in the EU. With the difference of course that this time they are meant to discourage would-be migrants. This state of affairs has caused Charles Heller to take a break in his own image production and rather investigate further the IOM’s “Perception Management”. The functional use of images within a regulative, even bio-political agenda recalls the didactic mission of “mobile cinemas” under colonial rule. IOM’s practice, however, also raises critical questions for the video activist and his or her emancipative cause: Is it blue-eyed to produce images without having a say in their dissemination? Isn’t all

rhetoric use of images “propaganda for the just cause”? And aren’t emancipation and propaganda natural enemies?

### **Carte Blanche**

*Le tombeau d’Alexandre* (The Last Bolshevik) by Chris Marker is an apt film for the context; it raises these vial questions in the form of a critical homage to Russian vanguard and propaganda film-maker Aleksandr Medvedkin. Regarding propaganda as a means to empower rather than indoctrinate his audience, Medvedkin became a popular reference for generations of film-makers to follow. In the late 1960’s and early 70’s in France, the “Medvedkin groups” (co-initiated by Chris Marker) set out to make film a tool in class struggle. In his current research, Heller considers Medvedkin and the “Medvedkin groups” not as models or ready-made answers, but rather as triggers for the right questions.