

# Fonja

*the first film made by juvenile detainees*



Burg Giebichenstein  
Kunsthochschule Halle  
University of Art and Design

FUJIFILM



MIO  
NEW IDEAS FOR CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Zaza Faly e.V.



# Synopsis

« Fonja » is a film made by the youngest and possibly most exceptional filmcrew of Madagascar. Over the course of a film production workshop, ten detainees from the male youth prison of Madagascar's largest detention center in the capital Antananarivo discover the camera for the first time.

While the young inmates gain practical knowledge about filmmaking they also develop their very own approach to look through the lens and to freely express themselves. It becomes a tool to play around, to visualize their own ideas, to rediscover their familiar surrounding upside down, through a filter of purple or fully zoomed into detail.

The developed film workshop program resulted out of the initiative of Lina Zacher with support of the German association « MIO » and the student art-association « Freundeskreis » and was finished as her Diploma-film within her art studies at Burg Giebichenstein University of Art and Design in Halle (Saale), Germany.

The 4-months workshop program gradually introduced the underage detainees to the medium of film, giving them the opportunity to capture their everyday life, everything that surrounds and moves them in a free and experimental kind of way.

The boys in the juvenile detention center in Antananarivo are living with very limited contact to the „outside world“, to friends and family. The lack of all kinds of supply concerning their accommodation and the unfairness of case treatment at the court, creates extraordinary and tragic living conditions. The idea to set up a film-workshop was also about the intention to create an offer that would support the creativity and diversity of ideas of the minors and lead them into an independent process of finding their own way of expressing themselves.

The possibility to use cameras and recording devices freely and at any time of the day led to the outcome of both intimate and interesting footage. Since there is no such thing as a TV or radio in the prison, the boys take care of good entertainment on their own! It is the creativity to think different and the strong engagement to start something new, which seem to be the prevalent energies during daily life in the prison. With a minimum of activities coming from the outside, the boys are left alone with creating their own program. Not only theatre performances, card game competitions, presentations of poems or funny anecdotes, but also a self-initiated preaching service is part of their self-made day-schedule!

Over the course of the project the detainees developed the capacity to follow events with high attention and curiosity. The minors developed a strong interest for little things, which at first glance, might not even be noticeable. Silent observation and the ability to wait in order to capture a particular moment, trained the young people's gaze through the lens immensively. But also the pleasure of experimenting with the camera came along with the various tries of unusual camera angles, the play with different speed and movement, the composition of form and colour as well as the selection of the image frame.

The final 80min feature-length documentary "Fonja" takes us on a journey into their daily life in the prison through the unique perspective of the young prisoners and allows us a glimpse into a world which is shaped by a strong hierarchy and the obedience of internal rules on the one side and social cohesion and solidarity on the other side. - A story about struggles and dreams, told by a strong bonded group and their great spirit to invest all of their creativity, energy and inspiration to make their own film.



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### 1180 characters / 200 words

« Fonja » is a film made by the youngest and possibly most exceptional filmcrew of Madagascar. Over the course of a four months film production workshop, ten detainees from the male youth prison of Madagascar's largest detention center in the capital Antananarivo discover the camera for the first time.

While they learn about the specifications and rules they also develop their very own approach to use the camera it becomes a tool to play around, to visualize their own ideas, to rediscover their familiar surrounding upside down, through a filter of purple or fully zoomed into detail.

"Fonja" takes us on a journey into their daily life in the prison through images independently shot by the young prisoners themselves. We get a glimpse into a world which is shaped by a strong hierarchy and the obedience of internal rules on the one side and social cohesion and solidarity on the other side. - A story about struggles and dreams, told by a strong bonded group and their great spirit to invest all of their creativity, energy and inspiration to make their own film.

### 910 characters / 250 words

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Over the course of the four months workshop the minors learn to use the camera as a tool to observe, to document, to play around, to visualize their own ideas, thoughts and to rediscover their supposedly familiar surrounding through the lens of a camera. They take us on a journey into their daily life in the prison, which is characterized by a strong hierarchy and the self-organisation of theatre, dance or choir-activities - A journey into the daily life of the minors, shaped by their struggles and dreams and their great spirit to invest all of their creativity, energy and inspiration to make their own film.

### 500 characters / 80 words

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### 250 characters / 40 words

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# the location



The youth prison Antanimora is part of the „Maison centrale Antananarivo“, the largest prison in Tana and surroundings. The approximately 2600 inmates exceed the capacity of 800 over three times. The prison consists of a building complex with three different sections, each organized as a collection cell; the women's and children's prison, the adult wing and the unit for underage male adolescents. 80% of young people are in so-called protective custody and wait usually for several years or in vain for a lawsuit. Approximately 70% of the youth are orphans and grew up on the streets of Antananarivo.



# crew biography

## Raharisoa Sitrakaniaina



Sitraka entered the prison when he was 14. Since then he has taken over many duties and has started to organise activities on his own. He is the room-leader of one of the two cells (dorms) and is responsible for instructing the room members, to solve internal conflicts and to report major problems to the prison-guards. He organises small commissions like food-orders from the prisoners for outside and also leads the 'playtable' where he rents out cards to others for a small fee.

Since 2016 Sitraka has started a theatre-group with around 15 members. Every half a year they perform their self-written theaterplay to the rest of the prisoners. The other activities Sitraka conducts include a self-managed preaching-service inside the cell at night, story-telling gatherings and slam-events. Over the course of the film-shootings he played a major role both as camera-man, for organising the day-schedule, leading interviews and as main character behind the camera.

When he will be released in 2021 he wants to continue working in the field of film both as cameraman/cinematographer and director.

### Rakotondrabe Jean Chrisostome



Jean Chrisostome also belonged to some of the eldest and long-term detainees until he was released in 2018. Together with Sitraka he conducted a lot of the activities like the theatre-group and slam-events. Instead of documenting right in the center of attention he preferred to take the camera and step back to capture more quiet movements like the proceeding of a small ant or the slow passing-on of clouds in the sky. Besides the camera, music is one of his biggest talents. He writes songs and raps which he performs behind the camera and with the audio-recorder always on his side, sometimes solo and sometimes with a whole dance-crew next to him.

### Raharison Nantenaina Adriano



Adriano entered the prison at the age of 16 and was released in April this year. He belonged to one of the eldest and used to spend his time by drawing pictures, cartoons and designs or logos for all kinds of announcements of prison activities. During the workshop Adriano specialised himself in the technical handling of the cameras. To choose and change lenses, menu settings and decide what angle and frame is appropriate for the action to be documented were the tasks he was responsible of during the project.

### Adriamamy Feotoky Alpha



Alpha was detained for 3 years and is already enjoying freedom during these days. He also belonged to Sitraka's group, helping him with everything that was on the plan for daily film-shootings. Next to his duties at film-activities, he was also responsible for the opening and closing of the main gate, to check everybody who passes through and to communicate with the guards about the upcoming program. He has earned himself this job after a long way of lower tasks and he belonged just like Sitraka to some of the ones who enjoy high social status and respect among the fellow prisoners. Oftentimes he did camera-man work and handed-on his obtained abilities in terms of camera-handling to others.



## Lina Zacher



Lina Zacher, born in 1991, studied Industrial Design and Game and Learning Design from 2013-2016 and then moved to the class of Stella Geppert in the field of Art Education. Together with Delphine Bishop she developed the video exchange project „Mio“, a concept for improving intercultural learning in schools and then founded the same-named association „Mio e.V“. In the Philippines, Lina Zacher spent more than half a year working with refugee children of the indigenous tribe ‚Lumad‘ and realized together with the Philippine artist Aba Dalena the exhibition ‚Batang Lumad‘ (Lumad Child), which addresses the current problem of ‚landgrabbing‘. For her latest project and debut „Fonja,“ a documentary film shot by juvenile detainees, she spent more than four months in a youth prison in Madagascar, teaching camera handling, image composition, and editing techniques.



### Author's statement

My vision for this project is to carry out this personal and unique film with and from the minors of the youth prison Antanimora in Madagascar. This film is not only an important portrait which is highly relevant for human rights discussions but also a symbol for the great talent and individual creativity lurking in all of us even at a place being despised of society like prisons. My goal is to push those unusual young filmmakers and to make their effort a success. I want to reach out and spread the great spirit and positivity of this strong group to inspire and create wonder among others.

# Q & A

## **How did you start working with the minors in the youth prison? What was your objective?**

The idea for a film project in the juvenile detention was mainly due to the experiences of a supervised theater project in the same prison in 2013. I observed the great curiosity of the young people to express themselves creatively, each in a personal way, some impulsively and radically others very conscious and quiet, yet all with the same sincerity and determination.

My objective was to create a portrait of the place which had inspired me so much out of an unusual perspective - with the eyes of the young detainees themselves.

## **Where did the idea come from to let the minors film themselves instead of using a camera-man to do the job?**

This project attempts a documentary approach from the point of view of the boys. No outsider can capture, describe or portray what moves them, what they see and how they perceive their environment, except themselves!

With this approach I wanted to find a sensible and close way to capture everyday-life in the prison and practice an alternative concept aside from the usual procedure of filmmaking where the filmmaker with his camera, entering a new surrounding will in many means stay always a foreigner. Why not let somebody being part of that environment tell the story?

## **What exactly did the workshop include? How did your everyday schedule look like?**

First of all there were two parts of the workshop. The first half was held in 2017. It was a kick-off workshop with a basic introduction to camera-handling, composition and framing as well as a short journey into film history.

The second half took place one year after and was a post-production workshop only. The minors learned how to use an editing program and about the different steps in p-p-process.

Both workshops had a duration of each two months and were designed in the same way. The first two weeks of theoretical learning in class, after that the young detainees took over the organisation and were free to work on their own or in groups. This way they had the opportunity to practice managing themselves and to develop their film in the direction they wanted to. At the same time this method gave the freedom for each individual to find his/her own way of expression with the camera and later on in the assembling-process inside the editing program.

## **What was the most important development of the minors over the time of the project?**

What was visible over the course of the project was the obtained ability to wait, to listen closely and to observe thoroughly the action behind the camera. This way the boys learned to see familiar things and their fix surrounding con-



sisting of the never changing yard and the two cells through different eyes.

Another qualification I thought was stunning, was the experimental kind of way the young prisoners dealt with the camera. Far from the usual rules of filmmaking they developed their own techniques to capture whatever was meaningful to them and whatever they wanted to express for very individual reasons.

### **What have you seen and experienced during the time in the prison?**

What I have seen and experienced in the youth prison Antanimora are bad living conditions, malnutrition and lack of hygienic facilities and educational programs on the one hand but a an inspiring atmosphere, strong-bonded community full of spirit and a big amount of solidarity on the other hand. I was amazed by the motivation and positivity the boys were spreading everyday. And still I could see that they were part of a strong and hierarchical system in which some have to obey and some are in the position to rule. A system - a small microcosm or society in miniature format in which everybody has a clear role and function to serve or lead the group. An experience that I was not prepared to and that almost made me stop the project was the encounter with the different stories and backgrounds of the boys. Although I never directly asked them what has brought them into the prison, I eventually found out over time. I got confronted with crimes

that exceeded the kind of minor offences like pickpocketing in all matters. I felt a strong aversion to continue working and supporting people who have harmed others with brutal manner. Finally I could overcome my misgivings and decided to treat everybody equally regardless of their history. With the film-project I wanted to provide them a platform on which they can unfold and develop themselves freely and for once - not get judged.

### **How was your feeling being the only women in-between 120 male detainees?**

During the first weeks the boys tried to propose to me about a hundred times. It is very special for them to not only see but be around a girl for a long time after they haven't seen any since they got arrested. Even more unusual it is for them to see a white person, in malagasy language called « vazaha », which usually get admired and looked up to in society because they reflect all the dreams from the « outside world » that is oftentimes so unreachable for them. Over time the boys and I got used to each other and I became an accepted member of their group. I remember a circumstance where my pocket got stolen on the streets and I told them about what had happened. In total solidarity they assured me that they would tell their friends, the gang on the streets who were most possibly responsible for the disappearance of my bag, to immediately give it back since I now belonged to their group where all members enjoy



protection among each other.

Although they couldn't manage to get my bag back in the end, I was very touched that they considered me a full part of malagasy society.

### **What are the reasons for the imprisonment of the minors in Antanimora?**

Minor offences driven by poverty are the most common reasons for arrest among young people. According to the detainees, some arrests were preceded by no criminal offences and relied only on allegations. 80% of young people are in so-called protective custody and usually wait several years or in vain for a legal action. Approximately 70% of the youth are orphans and grew up on the streets of the capital Antananarivo.

### **How do everyday living conditions look like?**

The boys in Antanimora are in a special condition. The limited contact with the „outside world“, with friends and family, the catastrophic living conditions of accommodation and the unfairness of their seemingly inevitable destinies, create extraordinary and tragic living conditions. It is about coping with everyday life, dealing with other prisoners, observing and setting up internal rules, developing habits and solving problems. It is about adaptation and quiet stamina, but also about cohesion and solidarity.

The daily program in prison is limited to two meals (consisting of rice or cassava) and a church-initiated, irregular

morning education program. A small gathering room can be used for courses. The yard is the main and inevitable place to stay for the boys. At 6 o'clock in the evening, the 120 inmates are distributed in two sleeping bays and locked up at 6 o'clock until the morning call.

### **What is your vision for this project?**

My vision for this project is to carry out this personal and unique film with and from the minors of the youth prison Antanimora. It is not only an important portrait which is highly relevant for human rights discussion but also a symbol for the great talent and individual creativity among all of us even at a place being despised of the society such as a prison. My goal is to push those unusual young filmmakers and to make their effort a success.

My long-term vision is to set up a proper film school in Madagascar which can provide people from financially and socially problematic backgrounds a space of reflection and creation, as well as the opportunity to develop themselves artistically through a professional educational program.



# credits

## **Direction on-site, Camera, Cinematography**

the minors of the youth prison  
Antanimora in Madagascar

Raharisoa Sitrakaniaina  
Adrimamy Fenotoky Alpha  
Raharison Nantenaina Adriano  
Rakotondrabe Jean Chrisostome  
Adrianamelana Erick Edwin  
Andrianatoandro Ravo Henintsoa  
Rakotondrasoa Elani Eric  
Radrialalaina Todisoa Niaina Sylvano  
Rakotoarimanana Harinjiva  
Santatra Lovatiana Desire  
Ramanamokatra Sitraka Hermann  
Rafeno Fitahiana Safidy Henintsoa  
Njiva Frankenstein  
Cacahuete, Eddy, Voalavo

## **Idea, Production, Editing**

Lina Zacher

## **ass. Producer**

Jairus Nouvel

## **translation**

Raholivololona Mampionona

Lina Zacher

assistant  
Henintsoa Riana Ramangalahy  
Tahiana Hery Mampionona  
Safidiharizo Andriambeloniaina

## **filmworkshop planning and organisation**

workshop facilitators  
1.workshop (camera)

Lina Zacher

Lina Zacher

with Luck Razanajaona

and Tovoniaina Rasoanaivo

2.workshop (editing)

Lina Zacher

## **sound recordists**

Raharisoa Sitrakaniaina  
Raharison Nantenaina Adriano  
Rakotondrabe Jean Chrisostome  
Rakotondrasoa Elani Eric  
Radrialalaina Todisoa Niaina Sylvano

## **moderation interviews**

Raharisoa Sitrakaniaina  
Rakotondrabe Jean Chrisostome

## **documentation of workshop process**

Lina Zacher  
ass. Tovoniaina Rasoanaivo  
Luck Razanajaona

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mann

## **equipment sponsored by**

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Leandra Balliel  
Daniela Bohlmann



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**supervision of Diploma  
and consultation**

Stella Geppert  
Nina Werth  
Oliver Müller

**add. consultation**

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Benjamin Schief  
Julia Ernst  
Carolin Breme  
Martina Musek  
Cha Escala  
Kiri Dalena  
Emma Sattrup  
Amelie Sattrup

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Jairus Nouvel

**sound design**

Yaschar Scheyda

**project-cooperation with**

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Benedicte Soton  
Helene Mueller  
Celine Maret  
Louis Tandean  
Mathilde Roux

**coordination/  
organisation help by**

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Eric Maroson  
Tsitroharana Ranaivoson  
Laingo Randrianarisoa  
Toky Soloniaina Natolojanahary

**workshop-project treasurer**

Razanakiniaina Miarintsoa  
ONG Manda  
Zazafaly e.V.

**legal Advice**

Raholivololona Mampionona  
Fano, Hianitra, Lady Harris, Hen-  
intsoa Riana  
Nils Könekamp, Cha Escala, Lily  
P. Kugler

**transport/ transfer**

Raholivololona Mampionona

**accommodation**

Fanja Andriamahadisoa

**dedicated to and  
in remembrance of**

Raholivololona Mampionona

**print media**

Jairus Nouvel  
Lina Zacher

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Rivo, Mia, Heiko, Mme Jaqueline,  
Mme Odette, Mme Olivia, Ra-  
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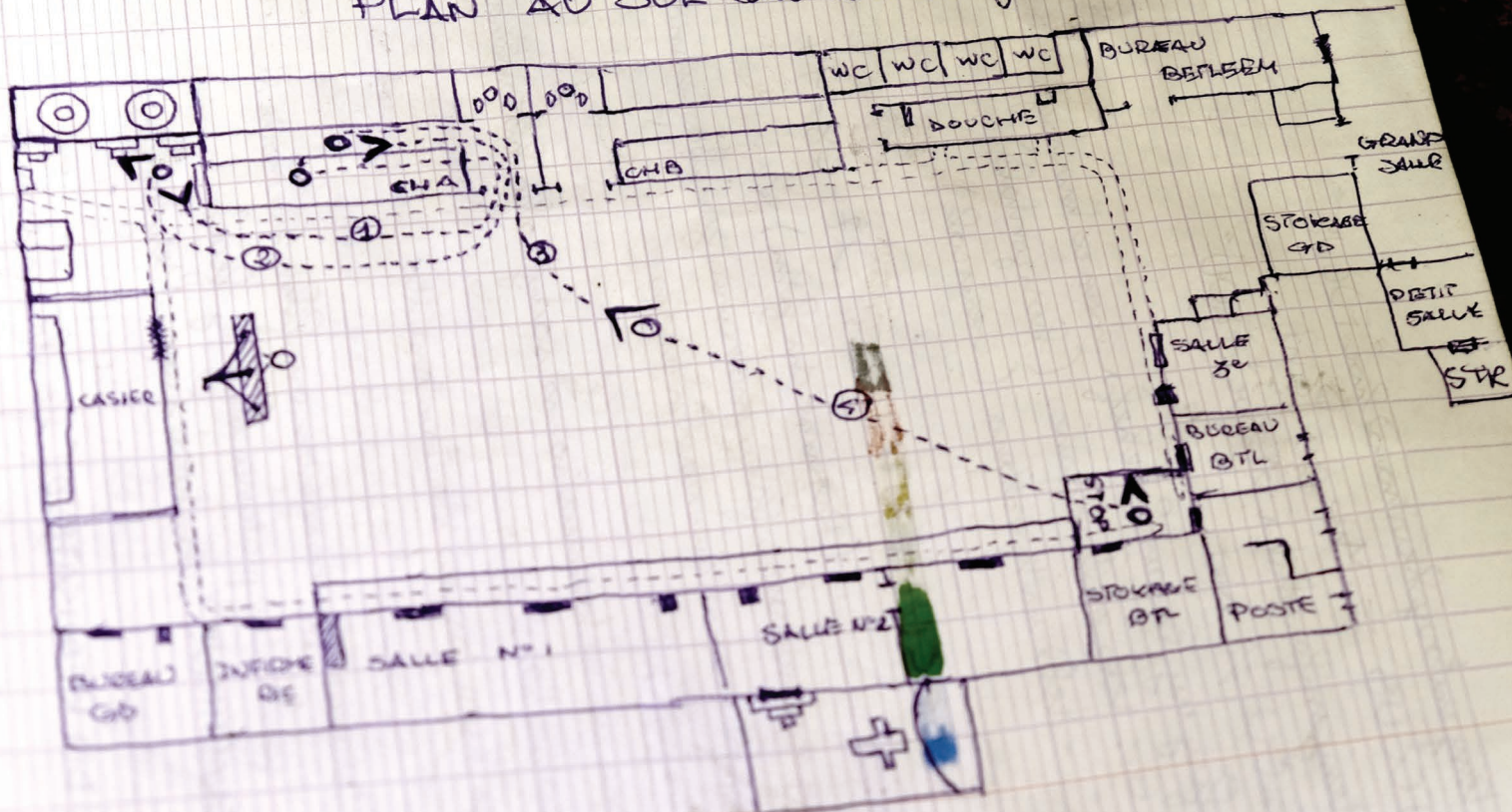
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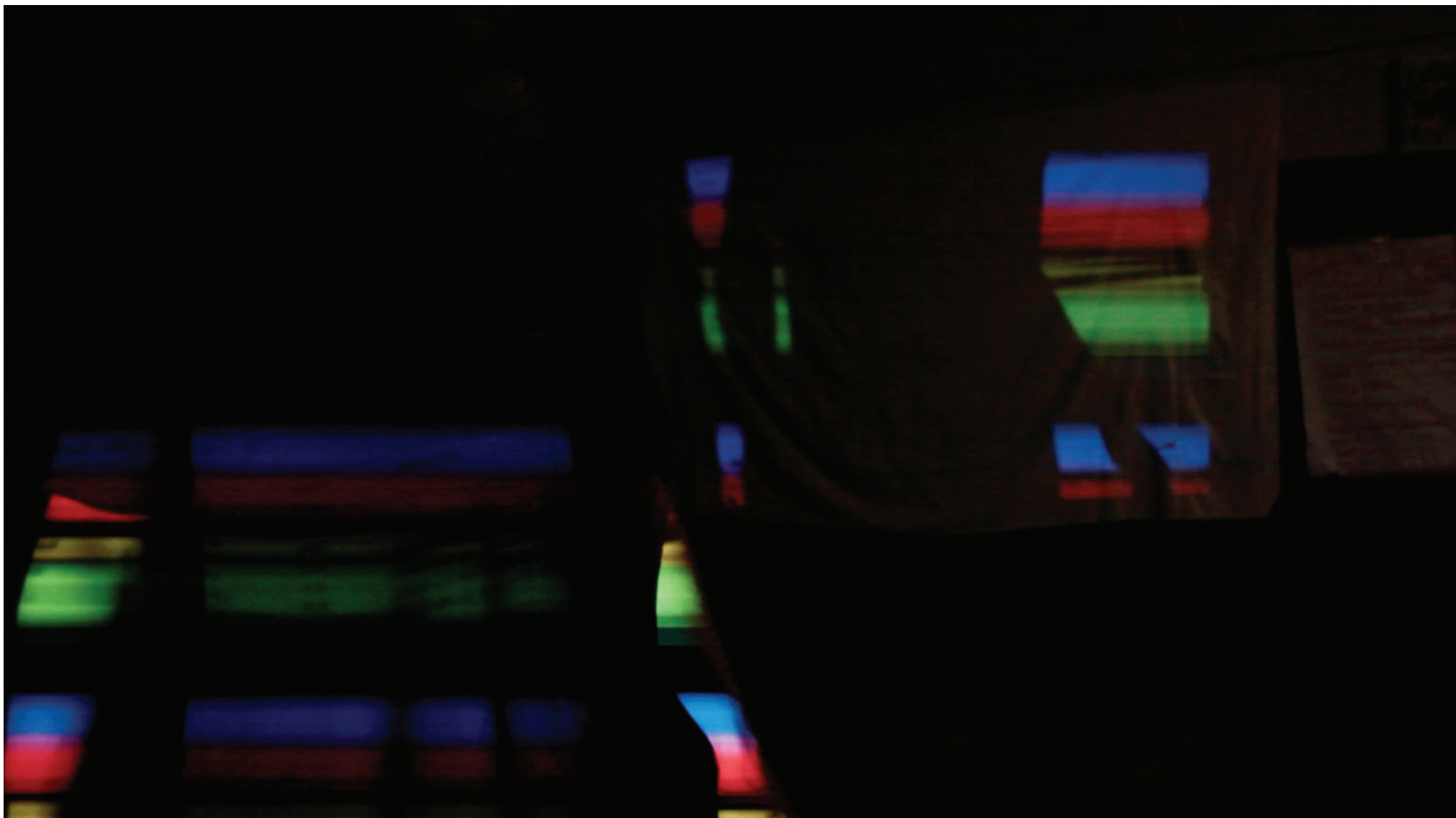
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