

Film Process as a Site of Critique

Ethnographic Research into the Mediated Interactions
during (Documentary) Film Productions

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"Tu ne verras pas Verapaz" by Didier Volckaert

This book is accompanied by a documentary directed and produced by An van Dienderen and Didier Volckaert: *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*. Due to the specific production procedures of VDM Verlag the DVD is not included in the book. The reader is therefore recommend ordering the DVD separately via mentat@telenet.be or at <http://stores.benl.ebay.be/elektrischershop>

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Preface

Before delving into the corpus of this book, I want to share a personal experience that provided me with the urge that fuelled this research. Some years ago I worked for the VRT (the Flemish Broadcasting Cooperation) as a documentary maker. I had finished my studies in Film Production at the Art School in Brussels and my anthropology studies at the universities of Ghent and Berkeley, and was given the opportunity to make some independent films, before ‘getting into the system’, the world of television production.

As I wanted to explore this system, I worked for an independent production company that offers programs to different channels. Because of my anthropological studies, my employers wanted me to work for a documentary series that was sold to Canvas, the second channel of the VRT, profiled as ‘high quality, high standard television for critical viewers’. The series dealt with different themes such as love, friendship, living, youngsters etc. and was designed as a cross-cut, a format that edits different stories in one program so as to build in a more dramatic structure. The story line I was asked to create needed to deal with a family of Turkish descent who were looking for a house. Before I started my research, my series editor, to my utmost surprise, handed me a detailed script in which not only the specific scenes were described but the quotes of the main ‘characters’ were written as well.

In the script, stereotypically, this family lives in a scrappy house with lots of relatives, the women are veiled and they all encounter many racist situations. For instance, they fall victim to villainous persons while they are looking for a buyer for their old house and are asked an exorbitant price for their new one. “*Make it happen*”, my series editor said, clearly affirming that I needed to model my interaction with this yet unknown family in such a way that I made them fit the script. “*Of course, otherwise we couldn’t have sold the format*” he answered when I asked him whether he was serious. The story quickly ended: I encountered a very interesting family with whom I made a documentary, without connecting to the script, so obviously this experience resulted in my dismissal.

When I tell this experience to friends, or to audiences when I lecture, I have noticed several specific reactions. They were of course surprised to hear how a documentary ‘fact’ is being manufactured. A script, quotes, characters, cross-cut, all these narrative techniques seem out of place in a documentary context. They were even more astonished to hear that such a “renowned” television channel operates in this way. It is the context of this channel that provokes the strongest reaction.

From the perspective of the ‘viewer’, it seems that crucial information about the production process is obscured. Images are not critically contextualized the way written texts, the audience therefore seems to depend on the status of the channel to evaluate the truthfulness of the images they see. In this case that is precisely what shocked them: they never expected such a prestigious channel to resort to such methods.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the Turkish family, - the ‘other’, this script seems absurd as they were unwelcome guests in their own script. There was no room for any participation or collaboration on their part in the creating of their image. The script is as a mirror image of the producer’s reflections, but there is no relation with the family it purports to show.

What if I were to fit the script, what would it entail for the Turkish family? How would this affect their lives and their social context? I noticed that my listeners were relieved to hear that I was fired eventually, so that I wouldn’t be strangled by this system. From the point of view of the ‘author’, me in this case, the story questions the process of production as a site where authors, producers and editors are tangled up in a web of values, responsibilities and audience rating.

In general, this anecdote prompts several questions. First of all, why is the translation from reality understood as a representation? Secondly, how is this transformation manufactured? What does this process entail with regard to the ‘other’ that is filmed? Next, which information is obscured from the ‘viewer’ and what are the consequences? Finally, how can the ‘author’ prefigure the ‘viewer’ within the process of production in a way that (s)he has a critical position in the film? In sum, how can we understand the interactions between the ‘author’, the ‘other’ and the ‘viewer’ in (documentary) filmmaking during the production process?

I evaluated this questioning of crucial importance in researching (documentary) film production: it is precisely this process of production that presents an enormous potential as a site of critique. Being a filmmaker myself, and having ‘been there’, I consider myself somewhat of an insider who on the one hand, can provide and assess information that would otherwise be more difficult to obtain. On the other hand, throughout my research I question the importance of the production process and thus the value of an ethnography of production: these formal aspects are examined in view of a hyphenated framework that builds on notions provided by anthropology and media & cultural studies.

As such, the present book focuses on the ethnography of production not only in terms of what type of information it offers for media researchers, anthropologists and 'viewers' in general, and thus on how to use the production process as a site of critique: it also examines how 'authors' create new strategies and methods to suggest the (context of) interaction, hence presenting concrete possibilities for filmmakers, visual anthropologists and practitioners in general.

Introduction

Truth on Formaldehyde (What and How - Phase I)

For a long time anthropologists appeared to have much in common with taxidermists in recording and classifying phenomena such as dances, feasts, or meals - in short: the rituals of vanishing cultures. Their main concern was not to establish what was disappearing or how this could be understood, but how it could be classified in their museum. Similar to a taxidermist, the anthropologist engaged in dissecting vanishing rituals, remove their vital parts and preserve them in formaldehyde in order to present them to noted colleagues. As Rony affirms: *“The metaphor of taxidermy – a form of representation which is infused with an acknowledgement of death, but also a desire “to be whole” – describes a plethora of technologies popular at the turn of the century used to represent the human body, including photography, film, and wax figures”* (Rony 1996: 244)..

Filmmakers were - and what is more: they still are - even more notorious for their dissecting methods. As early as 1887, the brothers Lumière completed the Ashanti series. The film series features twelve short dances performed by colored women. Yet the fact that the series was recorded at the Lyon World Exhibition suggests an entirely different story, which is wrapped up in colonialism, imperialism and exploitation. *“The irony – and this irony is at the heart of taxidermy – is that ‘reality’ filmed does not appear real. The filmmaker must use artifice to convey truth”* (Ibid. 116).

Documentaries do not demonstrate reality: they are the result of a delicately obscured ‘taxidermy operation’. Selection, manipulation and other distorting processes, all part of the act of reconstruction, are carefully edited out. Although these manipulations may seem obvious, they have a painful and strikingly unjust result; the ‘object’ of interest, *this human being* is carved up and presented as a stereotyped distortion in a freak show.

Moreover, the 'viewer' is unaware of the taxidermist at work and judges this 'other' as such. Narrative devices such as a detailed script, prefabricated quotes and characters, crosscutting - all seem misplaced in a documentary context. Yet, as I explained in the preface, when I was asked to make a documentary about an immigrant's family, working as a documentary maker for Belgian National Television, I not only received a detailed (and stereotypical) script, but also the timing of scenes and even quotes were specified. According to my editor, it was my job to fit a family into this predetermined matrix.

From the perspective of the 'viewer', it seems that crucial information about the production process is obscured. As images are not critically contextualized the way written texts are - there are no footnotes, or bibliographical references, - the audience seems to depend on the status of the channel in order to evaluate the truthfulness of the images they see. The 'viewer', in consequence, has no point of reference in order to establish the program's relation to reality. This, one might argue, is a fairly weak position of critique. More importantly, from the perspective of the people filmed, scripting seems absurd and most often even painfully stereotyped as they seem uninvited guests in their own script. There is no room for any participation or collaboration on the way they are represented. The script is as a mirror image of the producer's reflections but does not have any relationship with the subject.

The problem is that documentary images are conceived in a conventional way, and therefore help to maintain a certain balance of power. Constructed and manipulated images, which represent clichés, stereotypes and established values that are part of a cultural hegemony emerge and are moreover presented by the TV channel as truth or reality. Gilles Deleuze points out that clichés rather than images typify our society (Deleuze 1983, 1985). Billions of people are surrounded and guided by clichés of identities and they model their lives upon them. Arjun Appadurai asserts "*ordinary lives today are more often powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities that the media (either directly or indirectly) suggest are available*" (Appadurai 1996: 54). The rich potentiality and importance of visuals in the construction of the self, on the one hand, and the formation of sodalities through those media, on the other, are consequently important challenges to anthropology (Ibid. 7). In fact, we have not moved on from the 19th century anthropology and taxidermy: images are cut and parts removed in order to show a reconstruction in formaldehyde, which supposedly refers to the truth. At what stage does the taxidermist appear and when does 'the other' leave the room?

In general, (documentary) filmmaking prompts fundamental questions. First of all, why is the translation from reality understood as a representation? Secondly, how is this transformation manufactured? What does this process entail with regard to the 'other' that is filmed? Next, which information is obscured from the 'viewer' and what are the consequences? Finally, how can the 'author' prefigure the 'viewer' within the process of production in a way that (s)he has a critical position in the film? In sum, how can we understand the interactions between the 'author', the 'other' and the 'viewer' in (documentary) filmmaking during the production process?

The framework that I employ to explore these questions can be described as interdisciplinary, holistic and reflexive¹. Reflexivity as a tool in contextualizing this research has been adopted in several ways. It is important to accentuate that this reflexive gaze is not a mere and poor equivalent of the modern analytical one, which would claim “objectivity” and “truth”. Reflexive strategies and methods are not elaborated to legitimate and validate certain absolute pretensions of this research. As Pinxten points out: “*The mere reference to postmodernism or reflexivity does not render a view more dependable or even more interesting than its precursor*” (Pinxten 1997: 6). Quite on the contrary, the aim is to present a research that is qualified by a transparency in explaining and producing certain inferences.

As Alvesson and Sköldbberg argue, reflexivity should ultimately reveal the complex relationships of production of knowledge, the different contexts in which these processes occur and the position the researcher has in these processes (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2001). Moreover, I comprehend this description as a general formulation of the subject that I examine. These authors point the way to a more open-minded, creative interaction between theoretical frameworks and empirical research. They claim that relevant qualitative research is not a technical project, following the set procedures as elaborated in recent literature, where questions of access were handled about how to conduct interviews, how to make notes during observations and so on (Ibid. 288). Rather, instead of reasoning the managements of the different components of the investigation, they stress the importance of a meta-understanding of the character of research work. What primarily determines the value of qualitative research is “*the awareness of the various interpretative dimensions at several different levels, and the ability to handle these reflexively*” (Ibid. 288). According to the authors, it is “*the handling (constructing and further interpreting) of empirical material in a reflexive way, setting into motion reflections on several issues, at the same time consistently admitting ambiguity, is what gives social science its hallmark*” (Ibid. 288). Alvesson and Sköldbberg accordingly facilitate the creativity of established ideas, while maintaining flexibility on the level of research procedure and interaction with empirical material. It is from this perspective on reflexivity that this thesis has been produced.

Following Dornfeld, I attempt here the holistic integration between an anthropology based on an interpretive or symbolic perspective and a practice-oriented approach (Dornfeld 1998: 12), suggested by Marcus and Fischer, to focus on “*both form and content, on meaning in action ... the use of the specific Marxist keyword of production (and such derivative notions as Pierre Bourdieu’s “symbolic capital”) signals an effort to meet materialist and political-economy perspectives on their own terms. Not only is the cultural construction of meaning and symbols inherently a matter of political and economical interests, but the reverse also holds – the concerns of political economy are inherently about conflicts over meanings and symbols. Thus, what the use of the cultural-production idiom indicates,*

¹ These methodological notions are further on specified in relation to the fieldwork in chapter 2 which is referred to as “*What and How – Phase II.*”

again, is that any materialist-idealist distinction between political-economy and interpretive approaches is simply not supportable” (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 85).

This holistic approach prompts a flexible stance. I have therefore peeked over disciplinary boundaries, abundantly reading authors from such different domains as (visual) anthropology, cultural studies, cognitive linguistics and film theory. This interdisciplinary stance has been established because of the necessity of basic notions fundamental for the ethnographic fieldwork, such as representation, visual culture, interactions, mediations and so forth. The interdisciplinary links of this research verge on what W.J.T Mitchell calls an “*interdiscipline*’, a site of convergence and conversation across disciplinary lines” (Mitchell 1995: 440-441). MacDougall adds: “*In creating resistance to conventional textual discourses, images weaken the boundaries between adjacent disciplines. They describe a world in which the physical, social and aesthetic are intimately intertwined, and in which the performative aspects of social interaction are present, as well as its underlying structure*” (MacDougall 1998: 263)

This flexible, interdisciplinary and holistic approach triggered me to write this thesis simultaneously in a theoretical and an ethnographical vein. To throw in a metaphor, it is as the work of a juggler, who tries to swing several plates on sticks at the same time: according to the strength of the push, the resistance of the plate and the atmospheric pressure, some plates turn more swiftly than others. In order to swing all of them, the juggler has to respond intuitively, sometimes with rather clownish twists, sometimes by mere chance, sometimes by inventively anticipating on which plate will slow down and need an extra push. If one imagines some plates in the theoretical camp and some in the ethnographical, one can catch a glimpse of the process I have followed. Moreover, although these plates seem to have their own frequency and timing, they seem to be related to one another by the intermediary function of the juggler. If one plate would be swung, it seemed that a plate of the other camp needed an extra swing, thus making me write simultaneously in both parts.

Although I have tried to organize my material classically in three different categories: methodology, theory and fieldwork, by doing so I noticed that several aspects or concepts were repeated and are likely to position in all of the categories. By approaching a topic in this holistic way, it becomes clear that one concept cannot be pigeon-holed in one category. A concept like production process for instance is bound to be important in the three categories. This categorical approach therefore is justifiable to build up an argument but cannot be understood as exclusive and as a segmenting device, quite on the contrary. Given the linear structure, it seems that the theoretical part precedes the ethnographical one; instead I would invite the reader to delve into this research as a juggler who swings plates on a stick, in the sense of entering via different avenues, re-entering and reading back and forth. Hobart turns to the metaphor of dialogue: knowledge is not an essential, mental, static entity but a practice, a dynamic process.

“To view knowledge as a landscape requires objectifying it first: turning people into specimens to be pinned to boards. Organisms die: and their growth requires others to. Commoditizing critical thinking as anodyne information leaves it murred and moribund. Revolutions are rarely bloodless. Dialogue, by contrast, is en clé de vie: it points to a future, however uncertain. It presupposes someone else with a mind of his or her own who is likely not to agree with you. Dialogue as an image also has the virtue of specifying some of the different kinds of practice in which we actually engage, like teaching classes, discussing in seminars, talking with colleagues and people during fieldwork. It treats knowing as a diverse set of situated practices” (Hobart 1995: 58).

The first chapter explores the relevance of a study on the processes of production of (documentary) filmmaking in a questioning of the similarities and differences between textual discourses and audiovisual configurations, between the linguistic and the pictorial system. Starting from Geertz’s work on the critical analysis of textual representation (Geertz 1988) I investigate the links between the positivist assumptions of the presumed representational nature of both systems in such a way as to understand the taxidermy operations at work. Yet to comprehend the specificities of (documentary) filmmaking, I furthermore elaborate on the relation between the image and the word not only from a relativistic perspective as offered by Goodman and Elgin (Goodman and Elgin 1988) but also from a cognitive linguistic standpoint as formulated by Fauconnier, Lakoff, Sweetser and Turner (Fauconnier, Lakoff and Sweetser 1994; Fauconnier 1997; Fauconnier and Turner 1999).

In view of certain differences and similarities between textual and visual systems, I then propose a hypothesis to investigate the production process of (documentary) filmmaking: whereas Geertz focuses on end results, my research suggests to shift the attention to the examination of processes of film production as the mediated interactions between ‘author’, ‘other’ and ‘viewer’ varying along several phases of the process, such as the research, the recording, the editing and the distributing. In short, I combine aspects pertaining to production and reception.

Before exploring this hypothesis ‘in the field’, I assess consequences of the differences between words and images in the discipline of Ethnography/Anthropology given the focus on (mediated) interactions in this research. Visuals and electronic mass media provide possible links between the different states of locality. These links have grown so powerful that, according to Stuart Hall, identity should be understood as constituted “*not outside but within representation, and hence of cinema, not as a second order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are*” (Hall 1989: 80). Arjun Appadurai examines furthermore the impact of electronic media in relation to migration, deterritorialization and ‘self-making’.

He states: “*The importance of media is not so much as direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities but as semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan world facilitated by other channels*” (Appadurai 1996: 53).

The differences between images and words, have important implications for ethnographic representation, for it gives films and writings contrasting, and in some cases contradictory qualities (MacDougall 1998: 246). Pictures and words address us at both a general and a particular level, but they do so in different ways. In this chapter I will identify some indicative qualitative divergences in the application of these systems in anthropology referring to *Transcultural Cinema* written by David MacDougall (1998). Furthermore, I will evaluate the (in)adequateness of textual discourses to cope with evolution in society by assessing an interpretive anthropological attitude.

Given the astonishing, staggering, disrupted and haywire experiences of the real, how can one try to give some sort of comprehensive view that is communicable to others without reducing it to a textual attitude? This question will be researched through the work of Fabian (1990) where he refers to “performance” not only as an adequate description of the ways people realize their culture, but also, and this is particularly interesting, as the term to specify the method by which an ethnographer produces knowledge about that culture. He designates this reorientation as a movement “from informative to performative ethnography”: “*This has epistemological significance inasmuch as I recommend an approach that is appropriate to both the nature of cultural knowledge and the nature of knowledge of cultural knowledge*” (Ibid.18).

In chapter 2, I explore the hypothesis formulated in chapter 1 from a performative stance on anthropology. I have chosen four cases that can be placed on a sociopolitical continuum in order to scrutinize a broad comparative spectrum: one is my exploration as the assistant director of the rehearsals, preparations, scripting and filming of a community film project in Brussels directed by visual artist Els Dietvorst in collaboration with a hybrid tribe of migrants, asylum-seekers, prostitutes, a computer designer and a police woman, which she named ‘The Swallows’; the other case is situated in California, where I participated in the shoot of *Night Passage* by award winning filmmaker and theorist Trinh Minh-ha in collaboration with her partner Jean-Paul Bourdier; the last case is a personalized recollection of the entire production process of the film *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* directed by Didier Volckaert (my partner) and myself.

These three cases share some very general characteristics in the sense that they are (partly) state funded, and thus not engendered by commercial interests. Instead the ‘author’ is the driving force behind the project and is most often the producer. The crew consists of a small number of people, and is often a mix of “professionals” and volunteers. Because of their specific audiovisual choices, be it on the elaboration of the medium, the process, the authorship or the narrative, these cases can be situated as what one would refer to as ‘alternative’, ‘experimental’ or ‘independent’ cinema.

“While the media we study may be “off the map” of dominant media cartographies, they are no less crucial to the transformations of the twenty-first century and must be studied. Anthropologists seek to grasp the ways media are integrated into communities that are parts of nations and states, as well as transnational networks and circuits produced in the worlds of late capitalism and postcolonial cultural politics. ... Such formulations seem particularly well suited for anthropological inquiry: small in scale and sustaining an alternative to the mass media industries that dominate late capitalist societies, they occupy a comfortable position of difference from dominant cultural assumptions about media aesthetics and practices” (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002: 8).

The reason why I focus on such ‘off the map’ places is precisely to point out to the differences in the ‘cartography’ of media as a way of trying to “*safeguard the variety, because I am convinced that this riches can teach us more and different ways to survive. Comparison then never can come down to reduction, but will show the use of the same apparatus of human build to reach different perspectives on the same reality*” (Pinxten 1997: 15).

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FRAMES

“Infinite Relation Between Words and Images”

In this chapter we trace the relevance of a study on processes of (documentary) production in a questioning of the similarities and differences between textual discourses and audiovisual configurations, between the linguistic and the pictorial system.

“But perhaps the most intense objection, coming from all quarters, and indeed rather general to intellectual life these days, is that concentrating our gaze on the ways in which knowledge claims are advanced undermines our capacity to take any of those claims seriously. Somehow, attention to such matters as imagery, metaphor, phraseology, or voice is supposed to lead to a corrosive relativism in which everything is but a more or less clever expression of opinion. Ethnography becomes, it is said, a mere game of words, as poems and novels are supposed to be. Exposing how the thing is done is to suggest that, like the lady sawed in half, it isn’t done at all” (Geertz 1988: 2).

Self-bewitchment of Representational Systems

“The relation of word to image is an infinite relation.” (Trinh 1999: xi)

This book explores questions concerning the construction of documentaries and their implication on representation, which ultimately find their origins in the relation between word and image. What exactly is an image? How is it construed? And how does it relate to words and their constructions? Are there relevant similarities and differences? What do these entail with regard to anthropological, cultural and film studies? More precisely, what is the impact of the differentiation and resemblance between words and images on the study of identity dynamics in visual productions? In search of a relevant and efficient way to unfold this questioning, I read the legendary book by the noted and controversial anthropologist Clifford Geertz, *Works and Lives. The Anthropologist as Author* written in 1988. This might seem a digression, considering the spate of criticism the book has drawn, yet I appreciate it for certain similarities with the approach I would like to follow in this thesis. As is quite well known and disputed, Geertz advocates regarding anthropology as a representational² discourse: *“The ‘intermediary’ nature of at least most ethnographical writing... remains as much the crux, now that anthropologists are caught up in the vast reorganization of political relationships going on in the world and the hardly less vast rethinking of just what it might be that ‘description’ is, as it was when the first had scarcely begun and the second not begun at all” (Ibid. 141).*

² The adjective ‘representational’ in this context is not to be confused with ‘representational or pictorial systems’ developed by Goodman and Elgin (1988), discussed in chapter 1.1.2. For the sake of the argument I will not question the standpoint of Geertz in this chapter, as it is instrumental in demonstrating what he developed as hermeneutic notions based on his interpretive discourse. Therefore let us assume that anthropology is representational by nature.

In Geertz's view this intermediary nature is text-based. Geertz proposes to shift the attention partly from fieldwork - the result of the anthropological enterprise - to the *production* of those ethnographic statements, the textual discourses. The reason why he advocates this shift is eloquently formulated as followed: *"The advantage of shifting at least part of our attention from the fascinations of field work, which have held us so long in thrall, to those of writing is not only that this difficulty will become more clearly understood, but also that we shall learn to read with a more percipient eye. A hundred and fifteen years (if we date our profession, as conventionally, from Tylor) of asseverational prose and literary innocence is long enough"* (Ibid. 24).

This coincides with voices heard in media and visual anthropology that express their annoyance with the systematic lack of competencies and codes in examining, dealing with and expressing through audiovisual media and their parameters. In contrast with linguistic education, there is scarcely any consistently and efficiently organized audiovisual education. Yet everybody uses audiovisual tools, is surrounded by images and imagined by them. At the core of such an environment lies a positivist belief in the representational qualities of the medium. This belief is anchored in a long tradition in Western visual culture, in which the search for representation of reality was one of its main objectives.

Moreover, 'our' culture can be typified by a belief that symbolic systems have the ability to actually represent reality. Ginsburg asserts: *"The lack of analysis of indigenous media as both cultural product and social process may also be due to our own culture's enduring positivist belief that the camera provides a "window" on reality, a simple expansion of our powers of observation, as opposed to a creative tool in the service of a new signifying practice"* (Ginsburg 1991: 93).

It is this positivist belief in the representational nature of texts and images, which allows me to use Geertz's book to start this chapter on the differences and similarities between images and texts, so as to present the theoretical frame of this book. *"To argue (point out, actually, for, like aerial perspective or the Pythagorean theorem, the thing once seen cannot then be unseen) that the writing of ethnography involves telling stories, making pictures, concocting symbolisms, and deploying tropes is commonly resisted, often fiercely, because of a confusion, endemic in the West since Plato at least, of the imagined with the imaginary, the fictional with the false, making things out with making them up. The strange idea that reality has an idiom in which it prefers to be described, that its very nature demands we talk about it without fuss – a spade is a spade, a rose is a rose – on pain of illusion, trumpery, and self-bewitchment, leads on to the even stranger idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact"* (Geertz 1988: 140). Trinh also points out that *"One of the conceits of anthropology lies in its positivist dream of a neutralized language that strips off all its singularity to become nature's exact, unmisted reflection"* (Trinh 1989a: 53).

René Magritte made his influential painting *La trahison des images* in 1929³ in which he opposes the textual representation of a pipe with a painted one. As such, he clearly demonstrated the obvious (dis)similarities between two representational systems, but more importantly he brilliantly invited the viewer to understand the limitations of any representational system thus questioning its naturalistic or positivist presumptions. Yet as prominent as this painting may be in books on art history, apparently the understanding and the appreciation of its significance are far from being comprehended. Geertz continues: *“If the relation between observer and observed (rapport) can be managed, the relation between author and text (signature) will follow – it is thought – of itself. It is not merely that this is untrue, that no matter how delicate a matter facing the other might be it is not the same sort of thing as facing the page. The difficulty is that the oddity of constructing texts ostensibly scientific out of experiences broadly biographical, which is after all what ethnographers do, is thoroughly obscured”* (Geertz 1988: 10).

At this point, it is interesting to refer to the work of Anne Salmond, who analyzed scientific texts using concepts on metaphorical thinking as developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), discussing several prominent metaphors, including *“understanding is seeing”*, *“knowledge is a landscape”*, *“the mind is a container”* and *“intellectual activity is work”* (Salmond 1982). MacDougall argues that anthropological thinking relies on all of these, but *“understanding is seeing”* is perhaps the most widespread (MacDougall 1998: 268). Hobart agrees that understanding is essentially a way of *looking at things*, such that facts appear as objects, given, data (Hobart 1995: 53, quoting Salmond 1982: 73). The prominence in Western culture of a positivist belief in the representational qualities of symbol systems might be explained by this metaphor as well. Conceptual blending offers an explanation for perceiving represented or filmed reality as real: the content of those images is frame-blended with the form whereby the form only induces the cognition of the ‘real’, whether or not the form is actually factual. The typical documentary techniques are then blended with their ‘original’ content, which is claiming to reveal reality ‘as it really happened’⁴.

“The very authenticity of the image testifies to the use of source material from the present moment, not the past. This presents the threat of disembodiment: the camera records those we see on screen with indexical fidelity, but these figures are also ghosts or simulacra of others who have already acted out their past” (Nichols 1994: 4).

³ MAGRITTE, R., *La trahison des images*, 1929 oil on canvas, 60 x 81 cm, Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

⁴ Thanks to Eve Sweetser for this insight.

“End of Pretensions”

“There are a number of these pretensions, but they all tend to come down in one way or another to an attempt to get round the un-get-roundable fact that all ethnographical descriptions are homemade, that they are the describer’s descriptions, not those of the described” (Geertz 1988: 145).

The aim of Geertz’s enterprise is to make transparent foundational mechanisms in the elaboration of textual discourses so as to peel off some displaced authoritarian or naturalistic connotations. His main goal is to strip off some ‘pretensions’ of textual discourses, which obscure their construction so as to prevent the critical assessment of their authorship and rhetoric. As such, he is not giving in to a relativistic plea for the abolishment of authorship or for the questioning of the possibilities of meaning an sich, on the contrary: *“..the burden of authorship cannot be evaded, however heavy it may have grown; there is no possibility of displacing it onto “method,” “language,” or (an especially popular maneuver at the moment) “the people themselves” redescribed (“appropriated” is probably the better term) as co-authors. (Ibid. 104)* These pretensions, I want to argue, are also quite identifiable with assumptions associated with documentaries. I therefore take up Geertz’s formulations of several pretensions of textual discourses to confront these with documentary practices.

Blurred definitions

“Documentary filmmaking has become increasingly “subjective,” and the great divide between subject and object, mind and matter, is potentially breaking down. In this context, ethnography is liberated from its bond with the real, and from its assumptions about truth and meaning” (Russell 1999: 12).

Bill Nichols can be regarded as a distinguished contemporary voice in documentary theory. He designed a framework to apprehend different types of documentary representation. I incorporate this frame of reference as a starting point for this chapter so as to point out more precisely what is meant by documentary images, which shall be confronted with the Geertzian pretensions: *“Traditionally, the word ‘documentary’ has suggested fullness and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world and its motivating mechanisms. More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction. A shift of epistemological proportions has occurred. What counts as knowledge is not what it used to be. The coherent, controlling self that could make the world and others its objects of scrutiny is now fully one itself. Multiple (constituted of diverse subjectivities), split (conscious/unconscious), sedimented (bearing the trace of past selves and previous experience), what such a self knows and what we know of such a self evades ready determination. History and memory intertwine; meaning and action, past and present, hinge on one another distinctively. Documentary and fiction, social actor and social other, knowledge and doubt, concept and experience share boundaries that inescapably blur” (Nichols 1994: 1).*

Nichols suggests the following schematic summary of the five modes of documentary representation, suggesting how each attempts to provide redress for a deficiency in the previous mode while eventually presenting limitations of its own (Ibid. 94-95):

Mode -- Deficiency

Expository documentary (1930s): *directly address the real*

-- *overly didactic*

Observational doc. (1960s): *eschew commentary, observe things as they happen*

-- *lack of history, context*

Interactive doc. (1960 – '70s): *interview, retrieve history*

-- *excessive faith in witnesses, naive history*

Reflexive doc. (1980 – '90s): *question documentary form, defamiliarize the other modes*

-- *too abstract, lose sight of actual issues*

Performative doc. (1980 – '90s): *stress subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse*

-- *possible limitations: loss of referential emphasis may relegate such films to the avant-garde; "excessive" use of style*

Throughout the following analysis I focus on dominant (television) documentaries, which are best characterized by the observational documentaries specified by Nichols⁵. Yet the specific characteristics that will be pointed out are also identifiable in the other modes of documentary. My claim is, hence, that these characteristics are part of a generalizing tendency in representing the 'other' rooted in a strong belief in the positivist nature of filmmaking.

Pretension number One

"There is text positivism: the notion that, if only Emawayish can be got to dictate or write down her poems as carefully as possible and they are translated as faithfully as possible, then the ethnographer's role dissolves into that of an honest broker passing on the substance of things with only the most trivial of transaction costs" (Geertz 1989: 104).

The pseudo-positivistic claim of representational systems seems the source for the various assumptions on documentary images that need to be challenged. The positivist or naturalistic belief – the inference that what is being represented unquestionably refers to what has been experienced – seems even more dominant in audiovisual media than in textual discourses. Indeed, as visual media actually are able to represent an image of what can be perceived in reality, as the 'real' leaves recognizable and even mimetic traces in the audiovisual counterpart, positivist assumptions might appear much harder to battle. The idea persists that images represent without any censorship or manipulation whatsoever; images are supposed to have the ability to record

⁵ This reduction of documentary production is necessary for the sake of the argument of this chapter.

the interviewees in their own words, with their own gestures and physical body language. Television formats such as “*Life as it is*” unmistakably tap into this assumed conviction so as to persuade the audience that the program reflects life ‘as it really happened’. Moreover, the recorded images are interpreted as the unmistakable evidence of the point of view of the interviewees, given the chain of anthropological documentaries such as the Smithsonian series and media libraries, such as the Albert Kahn museum in Paris in which pictures and recorded images are catalogued depicting vanishing communities and tribes.

“What is presented as evidence remains evidence, whether the observing eye qualifies itself as being subjective or objective. At the core of such a rationale dwells, untouched, the Cartesian division between subject and object that perpetuates a dualistic inside-versus-outside, mind-against-matter view of the world. Again, the emphasis is laid on the power of film to capture reality ‘out there’ for us ‘in here’. The moment of appropriation and of consumption is either simply ignored or carefully rendered invisible according to rules of good and bad documentary. The art of talking-to-say- nothing goes hand-in-hand with the will to say, and to say only to confine something in a meaning. Truth has to be made vivid, interesting; it has to be ‘dramatized’ if it is to convince the audience of the evidence, whose ‘confidence’ in it allows truth to take shape” (Trinh 1990: 83).

Although Geertz’s book was written more than a decade ago, this positivist belief in the representational nature of texts (and of images) still remains quite unquestioned. I comprehend this by referring to the omnipotence of the audiovisual and its indexical qualities. Bill Nichols uses “*indexical to refer to signs that bear a physical trace of what they refer to, such as fingerprint, X ray, or photograph*” (Nichols 1994: ix). It is important to stress that the fact that something has been filmed, does not imply that it is real. This contrasts sharply with our understanding that something ‘real’ has actually been filmed. Because of the indexical quality, images might be wrongly interpreted as reality.

“Inevitably, the distinction between fact and fiction blurs when claims about reality get cast as narratives. We enter a zone where the world put before us lies between one not our own and one that very well might be, between a world we may recognize as a fragment of our own and one that may seem fabricated from such fragments, between indexical (authentic) signs of reality and cinematic (invented) interpretations of this reality” (Nichols 1994: ix).

Pretension number Two

“There is ethnographic ventriloquism: the claim to speak not just about another form of life but to speak from within it; to represent a depiction of how things look from “an Ethiopian (woman poet’s) point of view” as itself an Ethiopian (woman’s poet) depiction of how they look from such a view” (Geertz 1989: 104).

As the audiovisual positivistic claim is so dominant, it follows quite easily that a perspective from within a community can be effortlessly depicted. Quite in fashion lately are the numerous documentaries and television formats, in which the interviewees are invited to film themselves: to point the camera on themselves so as to guarantee the presupposed authenticity of the recorded images. In 2000 the BBC broadcasted a program called *Video nation* which was promoted for its truthfulness as all the interviewees had recorded themselves: they were given cameras to record their own lives ‘in their own way’. Yet what was strikingly obvious for a critical viewer, was that most of the audiovisual codes and parameters were in the hands of the series editors: the editing, and the choice of topics, obviously, but also the type of framing, the use of the tripod, sound and music, and the types of inserts. For instance, a sequence shows a parallel editing of three families. For one thing, the members of these families all talked about their housekeeping, definitely a choice by the editors. The framing of the image was conceived so as to contrast several families: one framing was extremely stable and neat, reflecting an old man’s tedious home, whereas another framing recorded a youngster of 16 who stereotypically lived in a sloppy room that needed to be cleaned. The framing was shaky, hand-held, the editing speeded up the frequency of the images and accentuated them by an up-tempo dance song, much in contrast with the silence background in the old man’s house. These codes were obviously chosen by the series editors so as to dramatize the program and accentuate the contrasts between the several characters. The result of these devices was a simplistic and very stereotypical depiction of these people, while letting the viewers mistakenly assume that the people on screen had had the total liberty over their representation.

“The relationship between mediator and medium, or the mediating activity, is either ignored –that is, assumed to be transparent, as value-free and as insentient as an instrument of reproduction ought to be –or else, it is treated most conveniently: by humanizing the gathering of evidence so as to further the status quo” (Trinh 1990: 84).

Pretension number Three

“There is dispersed authorship: the hope that ethnographic discourse can somehow be made “heteroglossial,” so that Emawayish can speak within it alongside the anthropologist in some direct, equal, and independent way; a There presence in a Here text” (Geertz 1989: 104).

Documentary film is, more than anything else, a matter of selection and intrusion. A crew consisting sometimes of five people, stampedes into a location and starts to rig up tripods, lights, cameras and microphones. Reality ‘as it is’ is disrupted, to say the least. As a consequence of the selective nature of documentary making, and thus of the time-space linearity of film, narrative devices are developed to guarantee to the viewer the representational qualities of the film. Moreover, the use of textual discourses in the audiovisual system adds to this narrating and most often simplifying regime: voice-overs, interviews and other textual devices transform the image to a dramatized version of the reality experienced. *“The producers (of the PBS series ‘Childhood’ AvD.) constantly search for dramatic material to illustrate intellectual points or to stand on its own. In the end, tensions get played out,*

more or less successfully, between the “magic” of documentary realism and the edification of expository explanation, between the programs as engaging television experience and the programs as scholarly knowledge, both tendencies mediated by the producers’ practical logic and the aesthetic ideologies of program production” (Dornfeld 2002: 257).

Raoul Ruiz uses the concept of a ‘central conflict theory’ to illuminate this idea. He defines it as an all-encompassing narrative and dramatic guideline that is ruled by conflict (Ruiz 1995: 14). He points out that “.. *the criteria according to which most of the characters in today’s movies behave are drawn from one particular culture (that of the USA). In this culture, it is not only indispensable to make decisions but also to act on them, immediately (not so in China or Iraq). The immediate consequence of most decisions in this culture is some kind of conflict (untrue in other cultures). Different ways of thinking deny the direct causal connection between a decision and the conflict, which may result from it; they also deny that physical or verbal collision is the only possible form of conflict. Unfortunately, these other societies, which secretly maintain their traditional beliefs in these matters, have outwardly adopted Hollywood’s rhetorical behavior. So another consequence of the globalization of central conflict theory – a political one – is that, paradoxically, “the American way of life” has become a lure, a mask: unreal and exotic, it is the perfect illustration of the fallacy that Whitehead dubbed “misplaced concreteness”. Such synchronicity between the artistic theory and the political system of a dominant nation is rare in history; rarer still is its acceptance by most of the countries in the world” (Ibid. 21).*

According to Ruiz, this theory has turned into a *predatory* theory, a system of ideas that devours and enslaves any other idea that might restrain its activity (Ibid. 15). Yet there is no strict equivalence between stories of conflict and everyday life. People fight and compete, but competition alone cannot contain the totality of the event that involves this. Furthermore, he states that this theory yields a normative system. The products that comply with this norm have not only invaded the world but have also imposed their rules on most of the centers of audiovisual production across the planet, attempting to master the same logic of representation and practicing the same narrative logic (Ibid. 21). He claims: “*The rules governing cinema (let’s say, Hollywood cinema) are identical to the simulation that is life today. This utopia reformulates the idea of salvation whose most perfect application is to be found in the theory of central conflict: the greater homage you render to narrative clarity or Energeia, the better your chances to be saved... In this permanent Olympiad, the citizens of the Ideal City are constantly pitched against each other in single combat” (Ibid. 29).*

As a consequence of the ‘intrusive’ part of filmmaking, an exaggeration of performative behavior can be ascertained. When a camera enters a room, certain types of acting or staging are being stimulated: a sort of amplified form of common behavior can be noticed. Moreover, it is as though the camera itself leads to a situation where not only the person in front of the camera but also the people behind it acts in an almost programmed way. One of the

students on our seminars on visual anthropology at the University of Ghent⁶ wrote a thesis on the 'trap' a camera could be. Even though he set out bursting with 'good intentions', lectures in visual anthropology and a good deal of common sense about what urban life might be, he found his own film on the black community in Brussels 'trapped' into a stereotype presenting blacks singing, dancing and sitting at the hairdresser. The audiovisual apparatus, the camera, the microphone and so on, often induces such a stereotypical behavior, and most of all when in the hands of amateurs or television professionals.

Yet as Geertz pointed out in regard to the construction of textual authorship and discourse, these essential elements of film are being dispersed or obscured. When, why, and how selection and intrusion has taken place is being camouflaged by means of an Ancient Greek view on drama directing the parameters to convey this drama as representation of an 'authentic' piece of reality. With a hand-held camera, an often-blurred focus, and thus a deliberately 'un-aesthetical' style, the interviewees are followed in their whereabouts as well as possible, showing sometimes shaky images and less understandable conversations. *"The documentary can easily thus become a 'style': it no longer constitutes a mode of production or an attitude toward life, but proves to be only an element of aesthetics (or anti-aesthetics), which at best, and without acknowledging it, it tends to be in any case when, within, its own factual limits, it reduces itself to a mere category, or a set of persuasive techniques. Many of these techniques have become so 'natural' to the language of broadcast television that they go 'unnoticed'"* (Trinh 1990: 88).

By submitting the flow of experiences to the structure of a classical drama, one confides in a certain appropriation and an ideology-laden use of images. The viewer cannot locate censorship or accountability. Form (the type of narrative, the scenario, the length of images, the frames, the angles,..) in and of itself thus carries a highly sophisticated ideological meaning. To ignore the mode of production of this form is to confine it in an ideological drama. Documentary filmmaking can therefore better be described as a site that constructs identities as opposed to representing them. In this sense, narratives dominate the reconstruction of the real. Furthermore, a documentary is deeply rooted in an economical framework, where decisions need to be taken for reasons of audience ratings, entertainment qualities, funding, etc.

As demonstrated by the anecdote recounted in the preface, documentary images are moreover generally interpreted in a conventional way. These conventions are mainly based upon systems of belief of dominant cultural groups. Political relations are reflected in those interpretations. Although the representational system is essentially a system of open meanings, contextual interferences narrow the scope of interpretations into stereotypes. The codes of representation are generally obscure constructions by which cultural hegemony is maintained. *"Electronic digital media at the end of the twentieth century have begun to alter many of our most precious assumptions about*

⁶ More information on the concepts and methodologies of this seminar, see the addenda.

visual representation, as the image is no longer linked ontologically or indexically to something “out there” in the real world. Unlike the cinematic image, preserved on celluloid, the video image is made anew at every transmission, and digital image processing has opened up the possibility of infinite manipulation” (Russell 1999: 7).

Pretension number Four

“And there is, most popularly of all, the simple assumption that although Emawayish and her poems are, of course, inevitably seen through an author-darkened glass, the darkening can be minimized by authorial self-inspection for “bias” or “subjectivity,” and she and they can then be seen face to face” (Geertz 1988: 145).

Textual systems of representation contain within themselves the methodology and tools for criticism. Self-reflective methods, a bibliographical list, footnotes etc. are developed to present to the reader a frame of reference in order to be able to judge the work. The accountability of the writer can be located through these different strategies. In visual systems of representation, those tools for criticism are lacking. A subject filmed does not have a forum to question the standpoint of the director. The viewer is not initiated in the mode of production. There is no space within a visual system of representation to question those production aspects. The importance of the matter becomes obvious when one imagines the consequences of the mode of production, the selection criteria, the framing, and the impact of the film crew on the ‘raw’ material. These aspects are essentially inherent to the production of film. Moreover, self-reflection in documentaries usually boils down to the simplistic and noncommittal bringing in view of the director and his/her cinematographic objects. *“Subjectivity cannot be denoted as simply in film as with the written “I” but finds itself split in time. The image of the filmmaker, when it appears in a diary film, refers to another cameraperson, or to a tripod that denotes an empty, technologized gaze” (Russell 1999: 280).*

In conclusion, one might state that Geertz’s analysis provided some hermeneutic notions in trying to understand the types of assumptions that are being made on the audiovisual medium. It seems that the positivist pretensions of the audiovisual system are much harder to challenge than those of textual discourses because of its indexical qualities reinforcing the positivist assumptions on its presupposed representational nature. Yet given ‘years of innocence’ and the ubiquitousness of audiovisuals it is of crucial importance that those pretensions are questioned. *“The risks are worth running because running them leads to a thoroughgoing revision of our understanding of what it is to open (a bit) the consciousness of one group of people to (something of) the life-form of another, and in that way to (something of) their own. What it is (a task at which no one ever does more than utterly fail) is to inscribe a present – to convey in words “what it is like” to be somewhere specific in the lifeline of the world; Here as Pascal famously said, rather than There; Now rather than Then. Whatever else ethnography may be – a Malinowskian experience seeking, Lévi-Straussian rage for order, Benedictine cultural irony, or Evans-Pritchardish cultural reassurance – it is above all a rendering of the actual, a vitality phrased” (Geertz 1989: 143).*

Differences between images and words

To escape the burden of this naturalistic belief, it is of crucial importance to analyze the fabrication of statements, the construction of a discourse or as Trinh summarizes: “...because language itself is fictional by nature. An image of a reality or a word used to point to a reality, has to address its “fictive” reality as image or word” (Trinh 1999: 56). To question and challenge the positivist belief of the representational nature of texts, Geertz analyzed four renowned ethnographical texts, specifically focusing on their construction by investigating on the one hand the authorship and its signature and on the other hand the discourse this author creates. “If, then, we admit that ethnographies tend to look at least as much like romances as they do like lab reports (though, as with our mule, not really like either), two questions, or perhaps the same one doubly asked, immediately pose themselves: (1) How is the “author-function” (or shall we, so long as we are going to be literary about the matter, just say “the author”?) made manifest in the text? (2) Just what is it –beyond the obvious tautology, “a work” – that the author authors? The first question, call it that of signature, is a matter of the construction of a writerly identity. The second, call it that of discourse, is a matter of developing a way of putting things – a vocabulary, a rhetoric, a pattern of argument – that is connected to that identity in such a way that it seems to come from it as a remark from a mind” (Geertz 1988: 9).

Yet in contrast with Geertz’s *Works and Lives*, in my research I am not focusing on the end result (a film, a documentary, a book), as is classic in cultural and film studies, but I shift the attention deliberately towards critical research on interaction and on the context of interaction. As such, it is my aim to add an investigative tool to the anthropological examination of the rich potentiality of visuals in the construction of the self, and in the formation of sodalities. The reason why I turn the attention to a process, to practices, to mediation itself, is inspired by the differences between images and words, between these similar yet differentiated symbolic systems. Before delving into the exposition on the production process as site of critique, I therefore continue this chapter by analyzing the differences via two perspectives: one is the medium, a characterization through two paradigms of the two symbolic systems stripped from any uses or interactions. The other perspective is the specific interaction between the ‘author’, the ‘other’ and the ‘viewer’ induced by the different systems.

The underspecification of the visual or pictorial system

1. The relativistic approach

“Visual images have a way of undermining writing. They threaten verbal descriptions with redundancy, and often make scholarly conclusions look threadbare. They suggest parallels and resonances that defy easy categorization. To the fieldworker they carry a wealth of associations – personal, historical, political – that their written counterparts strip away. This “excess” may indeed be superfluous for analytical purposes, but its presence is also missed. The visual in fact stands in relation of “semiotic otherness” to writing (Mitchell 1995: 543), offering up the anthropological in

an unassimilable form. For the writer struggling with words, images may seem all too easy, yet they also achieve an enviable closure. To borrow Mitchell's mixed metaphor, the visual is a 'black hole' at the heart of verbal culture" (1995:543). It is a gravitational force that sucks in, but never exhausts, all that is irreducible to discourse" (MacDougall 1998: 264).

Nelson Goodman and Catherine Elgin support a relativistic approach to epistemology (1988: 4). According to these authors, epistemology comprises understanding or cognition in all of its modes - including perception, depiction, and emotion as well as description: *"The mind then is actively engaged in perception just as it is in other modes of cognition. It imposes order on, as much as it discerns order in a domain. Moreover, things do not present themselves to us in any privileged vocabulary or system of categories. We have and use a variety of vocabularies and systems of categories that yield different ways in which things can be faithfully represented or described. Nothing about a domain favors one faithful characterization of its objects over others. To choose among them requires knowing how the several systems function"* (Goodman and Elgin 1988: 6-7).

Important then is to compare the symbolic systems⁷ and to evaluate their differences. The authors argue that an object can be presented in different symbolic systems: representational or pictorial, linguistic and notational (Ibid. 9). Comparison between those systems is based on their semantic and syntactic qualities. An important difference between pictorial systems and linguistic systems is the alphabet: languages have an alphabet, pictorial systems do not. Linguistic signs spelt in the same way are syntactic equivalents. Pictorial elements, on the other hand, can be similar but cannot be considered as syntactic equivalents. Therefore, languages are syntactically differentiated; representational systems are syntactically dense (Ibid. 9). As far as semantics go, both of the systems are dense, which means there are many ways offered by both systems to describe a certain object. Goodman and Elgin claim that these semantic and syntactic differences are noteworthy because they affect the order that different sorts of systems can produce (Ibid. 10). Languages, like notational systems, are syntactically differentiated and disjoint, thus the syntactic character of any linguistic token can be identified. This allows for repetition of utterances and replications of inscriptions. Like representational systems, languages are semantically dense and disjoint. Selecting a correct description may be difficult; for each object complies with indefinitely many terms (Ibid. 10).

Representational systems are syntactically and semantically dense. A pictorial representation of an object can refine infinitely but loses a strict and precise description. There is no such thing as a visual alphabet to allow for the exact comparison of units. *"Just what symbols make up a picture, and just what items constitute its reference is never completely settled"* (Ibid. 10). An image

⁷ The authors define a system as follows: *'In describing an object, we apply a label to it. Typically that label belongs to a family of alternatives that collectively sort the object in a domain. Such a family of alternatives may be called a 'scheme', and the object it sorts its 'realm'. Thus "B-flat" belongs to a scheme that orders the realm of musical tones; and "elephant" to one that orders the realm of animals. A 'system' is a scheme applied to a realm' (Ibid. 7).*

can therefore be described as an open token, a text cannot. The image is an open signifier, subject to various interpretations. Consequently, this *underspecification* is one of the most important features of the image. An image of the sea, for example, does not always mean *infinity*, *serenity* or *expectation*. It can signify all sorts of things, such as *mother* or *memories* or a *dull holiday*. *“It is worth emphasizing that there is no single or ‘correct’ answer to the question, ‘What does this image mean?’ or ‘What is this ad saying?’ Since there is no law which can guarantee that things will have ‘one, true meaning’, or that meanings won’t change over time, work in this area is bound to be interpretative - a debate between, not who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong’, but between equally plausible, though sometimes competing and contesting, meanings and interpretations. The best way to ‘settle’ such contested readings is to look again at the concrete example and try to justify one’s ‘reading’ in detail in relation to the actual practices and forms of signification used, and what meanings they seem to you to be producing.”* (Stuart Hall in Rose 2001: 2)

2. Blending fields

“Blends allow very generally for what Talmy (1995) calls ‘fictive’ constructions, which are cognitively efficient because they remain linked to the relevant input spaces, so that inferences, emotions, and such can be transferred back and forth. ‘Fictivity’ is a crucial component of cognition and shapes everyday thought - scientific and artistic alike” (Fauconnier 1997: 164).

Gilles Fauconnier, George Lakoff, Eve Sweetser and Mark Turner have developed a theory of language from a cognitive point of view. This view is embedded in empirical experiments and investigates the evidence for basic mental operations that underlie language and which are indispensable to human understanding. It therefore goes *“beyond both a philological interest in the history of words and a formal interest in the patterns of grammar”* (Fauconnier and Turner 1999: 416). In comparison with linguistic research, where the focus is on the structure of the signal itself (the language), they perceive language data as a way to access the non-linguistic constructions to which the signal is connected (Fauconnier 1997: 4). The aim is to research the rich meaning constructions upon which language operates. The science of language they present breaks away from a type of research centered exclusively on syntax and phonology, and instead concentrates on analyzing the construction of meaning. The latter *“refers to the high-level, complex mental operations that apply within and across domains when we think, act or communicate. The domains are also mental and they include background cognitive and conceptual models, as well as locally introduced mental spaces, which have only partial structure”* (Ibid. 1). Instead of assuming a priori and everyday-life conceptions of how human beings reason, talk and interact, this approach takes into account cultural and situational data as well as computational and biological evidence, in view of discovering some of the models, principles of organization, and biological mechanisms that may be at work.

“Language, as we know it, is a superficial manifestation of hidden, highly abstract, cognitive constructions. Essential to such construction is the operation of structure projections between domains” (Ibid. 34). One of these structure projections is mapping. In the most general mathematical sense of the term, mapping refers to defining a correspondence between two sets by assigning to each element in the first, a counterpart in the second (Ibid. 1). *“There has been mounting evidence for the central role played by various kinds of mapping at the very heart of natural language semantics and everyday reasoning”* (Ibid. 8-9). Other cognitive operations are analogy, metaphor, mental modeling, categorization, framing and conceptual blending.

“Essential to the understanding of cognitive construction is the characterization of the domains over which projection takes place. Mental spaces are the domains that discourse builds up to provide a cognitive substrate for reasoning and for interfacing with the world” (Ibid. 34). Mental spaces (Fauconnier, Lakoff and Sweetser 1994) are partial structures that proliferate when we think and talk, allowing for a fine-grained partitioning of our discourse and knowledge structure (Fauconnier 1997: 11). Mappings link mental spaces in several ways to construct meaning⁸. However, a description may originate in many mental spaces. Therefore a given sentence does not have a fixed set of readings; rather, it has a generative potential for producing a set of interpretations with respect to any discourse mental-space configuration (ibid. 58). Moreover, *“The multiple possibilities do not stem from structural or logical ambiguities of the language form; they stem from its space-building potential: the language form contains underspecified instructions for space building”* (Ibid. 65). Thus, mental-space constructions generally deal with a considerable amount of underspecification in the process of meaning construction. There are no precise indications of properties; they are negotiable in further elaborations of the conversation (Ibid. 159).

Meaning can also be constructed through conceptual blending. *“Blending is in principle a simple operation, but in practice gives rise to myriad possibilities. It operates in two input mental spaces to yield a third space, the blend. The blend inherits partial structure from the input spaces and has emergent structure of its own”* (Ibid. 149). *“It plays a role in grammar, semantics, discourse, meaning, visual representation, mathematics, jokes, cartoons, and poetry. It is indispensable to the poetics of literature because it is fundamental to the poetics of mind”* (Fauconnier and Turner 1999: 417). Blending is not restricted to language. It is common in visual representation, where it evokes conceptual blends (Ibid. 406).

⁸ *“Projection mappings will project part of the structure of one domain onto another. ...the general (and deep) idea is that, in order to talk and think about some domains (target domains) we use the structure of other domains (source domains) and the corresponding vocabulary. ...Another important class of domain connections are the pragmatic function mappings. ...The two relevant domains, which may be set up locally, typically correspond to two categories of objects, which are mapped onto each other by a pragmatic function. ...A third class of mappings, schema mappings, operate when a general schema, frame, or model is used to structure a situation in context.”* (Fauconnier 1997: 9-11)

Visuals in this approach are thus considered data, such as language evidence, in order to analyze the non-linguistic constructions to which the signal is connected. As Shweta Narayan (2000: 47) notes in her study on conceptual mappings in *The Sandman* of Neil Gaiman: “*Again, this Case Study shows that visual manipulation of conceptual mappings in Comics is extremely sophisticated. It involves methods of evoking frames and creating mappings that cannot be exploited to the same extent in spoken language, and can therefore tell us something about conceptual mappings that language cannot reveal.*” Challenging about this is that the authors provide us with a theory on how to ground blended spaces. As Narayan remarks, in a genre like comics, different spaces within the representation can be blended to form a space which exceeds the meaning construction of the separate spaces: “*The three types of linguistic input (narrative boxes, speech bubbles and sound effects) are, therefore, blended with the visual space...*” (Narayan 2000: 23). In this sense, the question is not whether there exists a hierarchy between words and images, but how the mind forms conceptual blends to construct meaning through several mental spaces induced by different data, and what this meaning construction might signify in the ‘real’ world. This view on the underspecification and the space-building potential of both words and images offers a refreshing challenge to the discussion.

“Whereas written accounts had always strained to carve out precise descriptions from a general repertoire of words, photography introduced a mode of description in which the particular appeared to ride effortlessly on the back of the general.” (MacDougall 1998: 245)

. Production Process as a site of critique⁹

1. Plural and mediated interactions

In view of this ‘underspecification’ of the image it is of crucial importance to investigate how this characteristic is employed, challenged or manifested by the principal agents who are implied by this symbolic system. The focus of my research is (documentary) film production; I will therefore specify the pictorial system by narrowing it to the audiovisual configuration. In this chapter, I investigate how the particular sets of interactions can be understood in (documentary) film production. I propose to define the interaction during (documentary) film production and hence the process of production as the mediated and variable relationship between ‘author’ and ‘other’ (subject) in which the ‘viewer’ is prefigured. It creates a complex context of interactions between different agents, during the production, reception and consumption of the documentary. It involves many stages of and negotiations on the creation and appreciation of visual representation. The ‘author’, the ‘other’ and the ‘viewer’ are plural positions, related to one another through several aspects of the medium, such as recording, editing and screening.

⁹ This chapter has been elaborated by working intensively with different researchers and filmmakers in the seminar on Visual Anthropology, initiated by Rik Pinxten and myself and taught at the Ghent University collaborating with the art school Hogeschool Sint-Lukas in Brussels, see Addenda.

As such, I propose to view these positions as inherently mediated: they cannot be understood without referring to the medium, the audiovisual configuration. This hypothesis allows me to avoid creating a gap between the process of production and the end result, or creating an opposition, as the result refers to interactions between these agents in a new way, with new viewers modifying these interactions, with other venues differentiating the relation with the film and hence reworking, re-interpreting the meaning of the work. This formulation might echo the term “technique” as formulated by Walter Benjamin: “*For Benjamin, the term “technique” referred to the position of an artwork within the relations of production, technique refers to neither form nor content, but the means by which a work engages with social relations. In this sense, film is technology, producing a relation between a fantastic (filmed) body and a physical (viewing) body.*” (Russell 1999: 23)

These agents can be plural or singular, yet what I propose is that their most salient characteristic is the fact that no position can be understood without referring to the other positions in such a way that the medium is implied. Throughout this book these interactions will be presented by using a basic scheme depicting the three positions in a more precise way, showing lines and crosses in full and dash lines. Several aspects of the audiovisual configuration mediate the relation between the ‘other’, the ‘author’ and the ‘viewer’. These aspects are different for each production, but can be illustrated by the following phases: research, financing, pre-production, shoot, editing, post-production, premiere and distribution. Throughout these phases the three main agents continue to interact with one another, yet these interactions differ as the specific aspect or phase of the audiovisual configuration influences them in a particular way. It is crucial to stress that the relation between ‘author’ and ‘viewer’ crisscrosses throughout every aspect of the audiovisual configuration; the ‘viewer’ is present differently during the research, production and consumption or distribution aspect of the audiovisual configuration and hence projected onto the interaction between ‘author’ and ‘other’.

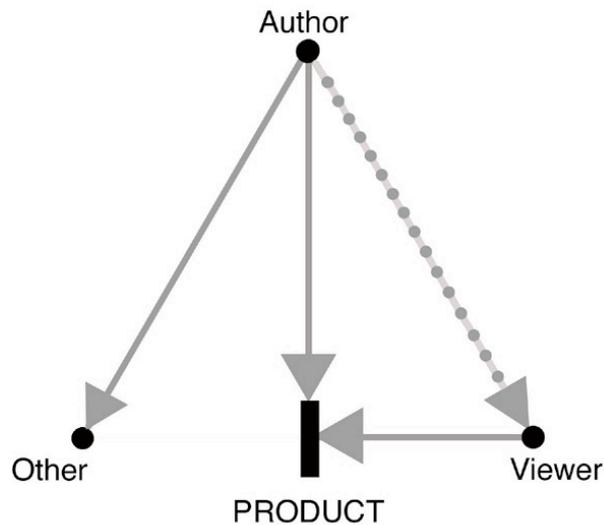
Some examples to illustrate these positions more concretely: From a pragmatic point of view, one can characterize the position of the ‘author’ by some sort of dispersed authorship, since (documentary) filmmaking can be but hardly ever is done by one person. It usually involves a crew of several persons, such as a cameraman, a soundman and the director; sometimes a few assistants are added to this core unit. Moreover, this authorship is often embedded in a production unit with a series producer, a line producer and an executive producer. The ‘other’, the interviewee, or the participant can be one person but a community of people as well. The relationship between ‘author’ and ‘other’ is characterized by the promise of a ‘take’, of a filmed encounter. People can be flattered by this promise or intimidated. They might want to deliver a perfect television performance, or they might want to adapt to the wishes of the series editor and his/her script. They might also want to get their specific (political, ecological, cultural, emotional, and/or relational) message across.

The relation between 'author' and 'other' is furthermore connected to a 'viewer' via the promise of a relationship with a wider audience, with spectators that can be situated locally and globally. The 'viewer' is most often unknown; s/he interacts not only with the 'author' through the documentary, but also with a mediated reconstruction of the 'other'. *"In her book 'Desperately Seeking the Audience', Ien Ang argued that "the television audience is not the innocent reflection of a given reality (Ang 1991: 35) but is rather a "discursive construct" providing specific advantages to the institutions that define it. Ang took as her concern the industrial machineries of broadcast audience research, looking at how large institutions in several national culture industries produce analyses of their viewership to rationalize marketing decisions. This theoretical move converged with the flourishing interest in theorizing and researching processes of consumption, but with a provocative reversal, locating the notion of audience within the production process"* (Dornfeld 1998: 13). As such, the 'viewer' is prefigured within the interaction between 'other' and 'author'. This relation is therefore intertwined with specific intentions, wishes, and desires, goals and purposes, which can be transformed in a specific body language and bodily interaction. Moreover, this physical enactment might be influenced by what people see on television, what stars do, what professors do, what terrorists do. Or quite the opposite, interviewees might need to perform as 'authentic', or as 'real' as possible, thereby obliged to 'forget' the crew and the technical apparatus. MacDougall asserts: *"The filmmaker's acts of looking are encoded in the film in much the same way as the subject's physical presence. This is fundamentally different from a written work, which is a textual reflection upon prior experience"* (MacDougall 1998: 261).

The cameraman, the soundman and their devices select specific angles and sounds, carve out the real according to his/her own intentions and those of the filmmaker and producer. In television documentary production these angles are chosen from an almost codified system of producing. For one thing, a cameraman needs to consider the design of the television frame and its flexible measurements. S/he therefore has to film more symmetrically, if s/he doesn't want to take the risk of cutting frames. Moreover, the specific angles are more often than not chosen with a specific editing system in mind. During an interview, the cameraman knows or is reminded, that cutaways should be filmed; these are images of pans sliding down from the face to a specific chosen focus where the camera holds still, such as a hand, a glass, a chair, to make sure the editor can cut this sequence down and shorten the answer consistently. When I worked for the VRT (the Flemish broadcasting cooperation), I made a portrait of a woman whose husband had had affairs with several women before she found out and divorced him. When I met her it was some years after their divorce and she still suffered mentally, had to visit a psychiatrist regularly and coped with pills and cigarettes. Yet she was determined to use this television opportunity to blame her husband so in a way to set her free. I was rather hesitant to film this and asked the opinion of the producer. He affirmed I had to accentuate the spitefulness of this woman by zooming in on her medications and her loneliness, and naturally evaded my question on ethics. The cameraman interpreted this literally and made a series of cutaways, focusing on the ashtray, the cigarettes, the array of pills.

Although this woman was a smoker and took medications, this system of cutaways extrapolated these aspects.

Furthermore, the editor cuts down the ‘raw’ recordings to a shorter version, and as such the ‘author’ relates to the ‘other’ in an indirect yet drastic way as s/he models ‘the other’ into an audiovisual counterpart, sometimes by stressing certain superficial characteristics, turning his/her subject into a stereotypical parallel. Often this ‘other’ is designed to fit a certain script, a narrative induced by the television format or by the venue, which will broadcast or screen the finished editing. As the previous example demonstrates, certain frames are implied in a television editing system. Cutaway’s and inserts seem to be *sine qua non* for a television editor. In the edited version of the portrait of this woman, images of the use of cigarettes and medications became of prior interest to characterize her. The editor was not preoccupied by this woman being an inveterate smoker and addict, he was only interested in making her consumable and hence stressing her use of cigarettes and medications. By doing so, he wanted to make sure to represent her as a pitiful and abused as possible, confirm the narratives set out in the script of the series editor. Through the editing, the ‘author’ and editor are relating to a ‘viewer’, prefiguring an agent to whom they address their editing. In this example, the ‘viewer’ should be emotionally moved and even repulsed by this husband and the way his behavior had affected his wife, whether or not she was actually the stereotyped person the series editor made her to be. See figure.



Throughout this book I hope to demonstrate that these mediated interactions between the main agents are variable, the relations as defined here will become more refined and hence more complex. The hypothesis I want to propose is that these interactions should be understood in reference to the several aspects of the audiovisual configuration. In the following chapters, I will first go into what these interactions entail for ethnographic research of (documentary) film production in contrast with written productions and exemplify this by pointing at ethnographies as examined by the few other researchers who focused on the production process. Next, since I concentrate on the medium as determining the specificity of the interaction, I will hence present some perspectives that will illuminate these ‘technologies of seeing’.

2. Ethnography of Production Processes

In *Works and Lives* Geertz questioned so far unchallenged pretensions towards textual discourses induced by a certain positivist attitude. He therefore analyzed the construction of the author and his/her signature, and of his/her discourse in a selected choice of noted written ethnographies. Yet this approach is not applicable in the examination of similar assumptions on documentary films. These assumptions are not only much more difficult to challenge due to the indexical qualities of the images, the 'author', his/her discourse and the mediated interactions between 'other' and 'viewer' cannot be located or analyzed solely through the end result. The process of production should be scrutinized as a site of critique in order to reveal these mechanisms. In my research and in the elaboration of the definition of the process of production Dornfeld, one of the few researchers who actually presented a full-scale ethnography of a PBS documentary production, influenced me. In his research he calls for a radical rethinking of the divide between production and reception. His examination on the production unit that created a seven-hour educational documentary series on childhood for American public television reveals the complex negotiations through which a documentary is constructed. He demonstrates Ang's argument (1991, 1996) that in mass media, audiences not only are empirically "out there" but also are prefigured in nearly every dimension of the production process, as public television workers bring certain assumptions about the particular class fraction of "the American public" that they imagine (and hope) will watch their work (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002: 17-18). Dornfeld states: "*What gets broadcast on television are texts produced in multiple places, in the pro-filmic locations represented on camera and in the occupational settings where the pre- and postproduction work takes place. And it is stating the obvious to note that these are not the places, for the most part, where television is consumed. Media researchers might, by design or necessity, limit their focus to one or two of these three arenas, each of which, of course, can and often does involve multiple sites. However, to engage with media with any theoretical depth is to see the implications of at least more than one, if not many, of these spaces that a given work or a genre traverses*" (Dornfeld 1998: 247).

The 'viewer' is active during the interaction between the 'author' and the 'other' in the recording and editing aspects of the audiovisual configurations; yet not in a 'real' way; s/he is prefigured in the minds not only of the 'author' but also of the 'other' and hence projected onto the interaction between 'author' and 'viewer'. The 'viewer' is also present during the negotiations on the consumption aspect of the film. The rethinking of the separation between production and reception studies by Dornfeld is inspired by Bourdieu's notion of the field of cultural production as "*the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated,*" and as "*the locus of the accumulated social energy which the agents and institutions help to reproduce through the struggles in which they try to appropriate it and into which they put what they have acquired from it in previous struggles*" (Bourdieu 1986: 138).

Bourdieu's work on cultural production has built on this metaphor of "the field of production". According to Dornfeld, seeing production as a "cultural field" challenges theoretical limitations present in other approaches to production – from either the ideal-viewer driven perspectives in some film and television theory, the organization-dominated work in the sociology of production or the production-of-culture approach, and from the ideology-driven theories of materialistic/critical approaches. By comprehending production as a cultural field Dornfeld attempts to locate simultaneously and in relation to each other the perspectives and interests of producers, production staff, PBS administrators, viewers, and the myriad institutions with which they interact (Dornfeld 1998: Footnote 11 chapter one p. 198). "*The challenge is to trace both how and why media messages go awry and yet also how they shape lives, treating audiences neither as resistant heroes to be celebrated nor as duped victims to be pitied*" (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002: 13).

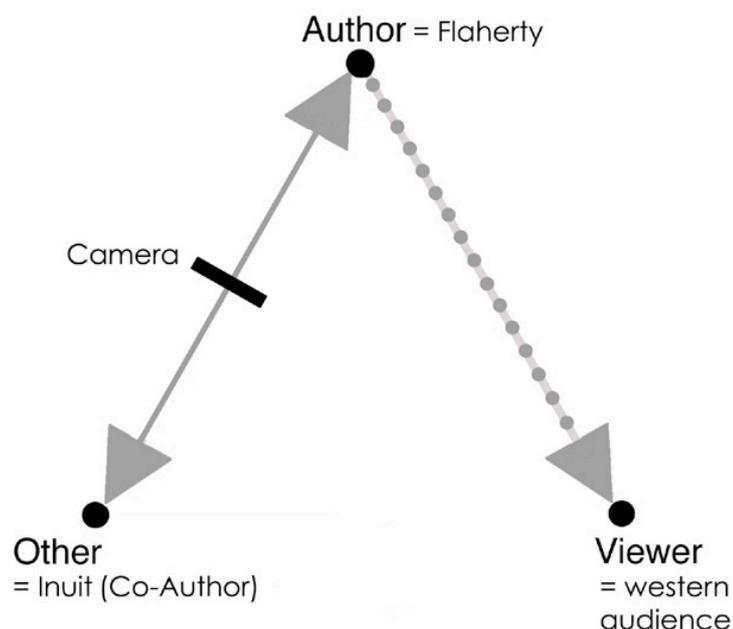
Another author with considerable influence in this approach is Eric Michaels. In a study of the use of television in Aboriginal communities, he proposes "*a model of the intrinsic structures of the TV medium as a negotiation of texts between producers, technology and audiences, a model which intends to identify some significant features of the social organization of meanings involved in this signifying activity*" (Michaels 1991: 305). In Michaels's sense, television production is a form of cultural mediation based on negotiations between powerful social agents that shape texts, presented in the contexts of a hybrid public culture (Dornfeld 1998: 19). Dornfeld asserts: "*The 'viewers like you' that the institution of public television is seeking, the audiences it needs to construct, become an imagined community on which it depends (Anderson 1991)*" (Dornfeld 2002: 260).

Fatimah Tobing Rony found interesting evidence in relation to the documentary by Robert Flaherty *Nanook of the North* (1922, 35mm film, black and white and color tinted, silent, approx. 56 minutes) on how the lack of collaboration and negotiation on the editing of the film created pertinent dissimilar perceptions by the Inuit, which differed dramatically from the Western view. "*Recent research has shown that the Inuit found Flaherty and the filmmaking a source of great amusement, and this amusement may well account for Nanook's smile. The enigma of Nanook's smile allows the audience to project its own cultural presuppositions: from the point of view of an outsider he is childlike, from the Inuit point of view he may be seen as laughing at the camera*" (Rony 1996: 111). Apparently, Nanook was having a good laugh when Flaherty tried to turn him into an actor performing 'a primitive man'. He was asked by Flaherty to wear clothes dated ten years ago, was asked to lick a gramophone, showing his (faked) ignorance of western technology. "*Like a museum display in which sculpted models of family groups perform "traditional activities", Nanook's family adopts a variety of poses for the camera*" (Ibid. 112).

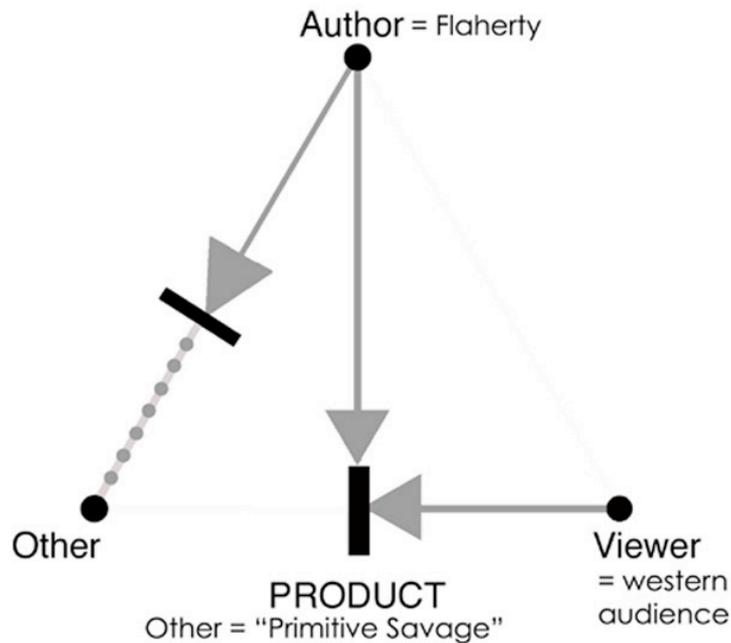
These acts all reinforced the image of a *primitive savage* the Western audience knew very well from exhibitions, zoos and museums. At that time, the Inuit were popular performers in those places, as they were treated as specimens and objects of curiosity (Ibid. 105). As such, Flaherty envisioned

the ‘viewer’ of *Nanook of the North* as predominantly western; the film was certainly not made for an Inuit audience. Furthermore, the position of the ‘other’ was such that it could tap into the cultural presumptions of a western ‘viewer’, carving *Nanook* into a fictional character inspired by a western imagination so as to appeal a large audience. Rony points out that although Flaherty has invited the Inuit to cooperate during the phase of shooting, the editing phase was strictly the private domain of Flaherty and his editing crew. “*Nanook is perhaps the first example in film of a mode of representation, which incorporates the participant observation ideal... Because Flaherty showed rushes to his Inuit crew, and because Inuit contributed to all aspects of filmmaking (from acting, to the repair of his cameras, to the printing and developing of the film, to the suggestion of scenes to the film), critics from the art world as well as anthropology have claimed that Nanook represents true collaboration, the native acting out his or her own self-conception. .. Although Inuit undoubtedly assisted in the filmmaking, there are no existing Inuit accounts of the process, suggesting the film was not as “collaborative” as Flaherty would have one believe. (Ibid. 118) The desire of Euro-American audiences and critics to perceive Nanook as authentic Primitive man, as an unmediated referent, is evident in the fact that until the 1970s, no one bothered to ask members of the Inuit community, in which the film was made, for their opinions of the film“ (Ibid. 104).*

During the recording phase, the interaction between Flaherty and the Inuit might be described in terms of participation in such a way that the Inuit could be termed co–author, given the tight collaboration as described by Rony. Yet the ‘viewer’ as prefigured by Flaherty is a strictly western one with whom the Inuit are more or less unfamiliar with. See figure.



During the editing and the distributing phases, the interaction between Flaherty and the Inuit is defined as a one-way line, where no collaboration of the Inuit is involved. Moreover, this phase is entirely directed with a western 'viewer' in mind, who was bound to appreciate the product because of the references to Inuit culture s/he knew from exhibitions, zoos and museums: it carves out the 'other' as a westernized fantasy of the Inuit community; the *primitive savage*. See figure.



Ruth Mandel examined the production process of *Crossroads*, a Kazakhstani soap opera. This was, however, no ordinary soap opera but an initiative of the British government's overseas development plan designed to promote transition to a free-market economy (Mandel 2002: 211). In order to focus on this process she conducted participant-observation between 1995 and 1998 at KazakhFilm Studios – the production site – as well as interviewed approximately 100 viewers, the consumers (Ibid. 224). She concentrated on the socio-cultural and political-economic field into which the British soap opera consultants entered in Kazakhstan; the often discordant conjunction of the Kazakhstani and British visions; and finally, the consequences of this British development project, after the British consultants' departure. She argues that this particular set of interactions and cultural productions is indicative of the cultural politics of post-Soviet transition (Ibid. 211). Furthermore, she affirms with her research the much more heterogeneous and polysemic models of audience reception that concurs with the criticism of others (e.g. Hall 1994; Abu-Lughod 1995; Mankekar 1993; Rofel 1995). Similarly on the production side, the evidence from Kazakhstan echoes Dornfeld's (1998) findings, in demonstrating the extremely complex sets of factors and contests competing for inclusion in the production (Ibid. 223). “.. *ethnographies of cultural production open up the “massness” of media to interrogation. They reveal how structures of power and notions of audience shape the actions of professionals as they traffic in the representations of culture*” (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002: 18).

3. Focus on the apparatus

The research by Dornfeld and Mandel is unique in its focus on the process of production as an ethnographic field. Yet in my view it seems to lack information on more specific particularities on the impact of the medium on the interactions between the main agents. The specificities of the audiovisual configuration and how it distinctively determines the interaction has not been incorporated in their research. At the risk of simplifying, I would venture to say that, whereas Mandel and Dornfeld seem to investigate the interactions between the agents in a socially structured field of the film production, my aim is to add a focus and explore the mediated interactions in relation to the specificities of the audiovisual configuration. This hypothesis implies that the particular sets of interactions during film productions are such that they cannot be understood without referring to the operation, the effect and the influence of the audiovisual configuration. This configuration shifts during the process: it has recording, mixing, editing, and screening aspects. Each of these aspects has its own set of parameters as developed through technological change embedded in a certain social and ideological network, determining the interactions between the agents involved. These implications are summarized by the claim that formal aspects and the content of any endeavor are extremely intertwined. I therefore propose to investigate the influence of the audiovisual configuration on the interactions, so as to incorporate in an ethnography of production. In the following paragraphs, I present two perspectives investigating the technological, social and ideological forces determining the development of the audiovisual configuration.

. Technologies of Seeing

“Let me stress how hidden is the very idea that the cinematographic apparatus carries within it any overt ideology.” (Winston 1996: 40)

In order to comprehend the influence of the audiovisual configuration on these interactions, I refer to *Technologies of Seeing* written by Brian Winston (1996). The book is concerned with one basic question: how does technological change occur in mass communications? The author examines the complex forces pushing and constraining technological developments in photography, cinematography and television, what he calls the ‘technologies of seeing’. Winston’s examination departs from a strong objection to claims of naturalness, realism and verisimilitude when referring to these technologies. According to the author, Western culture should be comprehended by “*a general cultural addiction to realistic modes of representation*” (Ibid. 44), much in contrast with the amounts of efforts to construct, develop and design devices to perceive reality: “*The technologies of seeing bring us ever closer to a sort of Borgesian map of reality – one that corresponds at all points with the external world – but as they do so, they do little to help understand their own historical and social realities. On the contrary, their basic illusionism disguises their artifice, their cultural formation and their ideological import*” (Ibid. 118).

He contests the view that technological advance is simply the result of scientific progress. Rather, the author argues that social forces control the media technology agenda at every stage. He denies the obvious answer that

“technological change occurs as a result of the working of the collective creative mind of technologists; that technologies in communications (and, indeed, everywhere else) are primarily the products of unfettered human creativity” (Ibid. 1). Hence, Winston refutes a technological determinism, which is defined by Williams as follows: “The basic assumption of technological determinism is that a new technology – a printing press or a communications satellite – “emerges” from technical study and experiment. It then changes the society or the sector into which it has “emerged”. “We” adapt to it, because it is the new modern way” (Williams 1989: 120).

Instead the book adopts a model for technological change, which *“suggests that social needs of various sorts govern the technological agenda in this area, conditioning the creativity of technologists so that on the one hand developments are pushed, while on the other their potential for social disruption is constrained” (Ibid. 1). To clarify to what extent social forces determine the ‘emergence’ of inventions, he deals with the question what transforms the prototype into the invention. According to the author, these prototypes languish in the prototype phase, conceived and produced “because the technologist, as a social being, sees a possibility of a use but the rest of society does not” (Ibid. 5). In his model, acceleration can be thought of as “an external social force, or combination of such forces, acting on the production of prototypes. In effect, these accelerating social forces can be described as supervening social necessity, transforming prototype into an invention and enabling its diffusion” (Ibid. 5-6). He continues: “New technologies are constrained and diffused only insofar as their potential for radical disruption is contained or suppressed. The technologies are made to ‘fit’ into society by this last transformation. This can therefore be termed ‘the suppression of radical potential’ (Ibid. 7).*

Winston demonstrates the ways in which social forces control media technology, and shape the agenda at every stage. Questions posed by this book include why the cinema is 100 years old rather than 120 or 150 years old, why Kodak film stocks have such trouble capturing non-Caucasian skin tones, and why professionals waited thirty years before widely adopting 16mm film. By raising these questions his focus is not only to demonstrate how technological changes are embedded in a network of social forces. He also explains how these social forces are dictated by ideological agendas, by pointing at the gap between the predilections of the person handling the photographic apparatus to the ideologically charged nature of the apparatus itself. According to Winston, *“photographs, cinema and television do not merely express in texts the ideology of the culture that produces them, with the possibility that other ideologies could equally easily be signified in different texts; rather, the technologies are embedded in the social sphere and are themselves an ideological expression of the culture” (Ibid. 39).*

Moreover, he asserts that the apparatus of film and television is ideologically limited as it is *“a product of ‘the lens culture’ inaugurated by Cardano, Maurolycus and Digges in the early 1550 (A.D. Coleman 1985. ‘Lentil soup’. Etc Spring, p. 19), and the replication of northern European ‘distant point construction’ perspective is its primary design objective. The photographic image accommodates the previously established codes of representation just*

as the social circumstances in which these new images were and are consumed conform to pre-existing and culturally specific patterns. The apparatus is not neutral, and turning its purpose requires considerable deformation of its inherent (i.e. designed-in) capacities and capabilities.” (Ibid. 41). By examining the history of the development of color film for instance his aim is to illustrate this intertwining of technological, social and hence ideological interests. “Essentially, the research agenda for colour film (and more latterly colour television) was dominated by the need to reproduce Caucasian skin tones. This need conditions the way in which the technologists thought about the competencies made available to them by science, and how they transformed those competencies into actual film stocks” (Ibid. 39). Wollen affirms: “We so often forget, for example, that when a colour film is seen projected, the colour is not in the Bazanian sense a direct ... registration of colour in the natural world... there is, in fact, no direct ... link between the colour of the natural world and the colour of the projected colour film – a whole technology of dyeing has intervened” (Wollen 1980: 24). The need to reproduce Caucasian skin tones is implicitly denied by the rhetoric surrounding color film, as much in the technical and scholarly literature as in advertising and other popular accounts, “in favour of a stress on naturalness, realism and verisimilitude – mathematics, as it were, rather than painting” (Winston 1996: 42). According to the author, the supposed analogy between human vision and the way Eastman kodak’s color films ‘view’ nature (i.e. just like we humans do) is obviously anthropomorphic and tendentious. Yet he claims that such language is the norm (Ibid. 42).

In sum, Winston contends the idea that the technologies of seeing merely emerged to reproduce reality. On the contrary, he argues that technological change in mass communication occur through a complex evolution from prototype into invention due to the acceleration of certain social forces which are embedded in a specific cultural context. The Kodak account draws moreover attention to this normally hidden dimension of technological development during the ideation phase. “It points up to the existence of choices in the development of these processes and suggests that in situations of choice, consciously or unconsciously, cultural determinants will operate. The Kodak experiment cited above speaks eloquently to how research is always redolent of a specific culture. In this case, the results produce film stocks, which are not readily manipulated to give good black skin tones. ... that this should warrant attention is only the result of the operations of media technology and, especially, media technology in the culture” (Ibid. 57). Winston concludes that these operations, in a sense hidden because transparent, conform perfectly to Barthes “ineffable ideology” (Barthes 1973: 142 cited in Winston 1996: 57). Technological change in mass communications as examined in this way offers an insight in obscure operations, which seem naturalized and are proffered as ideologically innocent (Eagleton 1978: 20). It is precisely this intertwining of technology, social networks and ideology as concentrated into the audiovisual configurations, which mediate the interactions between the main agents in (documentary) film productions. This configuration is, therefore, not a neutral device but a sophisticated product, the result from particular technological, social and ideological forces.

. An Authorial Exploration of the Medium

Challenging the *Cinématographe* as the origin of Cinema

In the same vein of Winston's analysis is the research done by filmmaker Didier Volckaert, my partner with whom I directed several documentaries. He wrote in 1995 an unpublished Master Thesis titled "What is Cinema?"¹⁰. He raised this question on the moment when cinema celebrated its centennial. Among the many perspectives on defining Cinema, the hypothesis formulated by Volckaert seems relevant to me as it allows me to focus more clearly on how pictorial and linguistic system differ. Moreover, this exploration is conducted by an filmmaker whose aim is to start a personal investigation of his medium as an 'author', and as such he is exemplary for the mediated interaction between 'author', 'other' and 'viewer' as pointed out earlier in this chapter. The first projection of the *Cinématographe* took place on December 28 1895 at *Le salon Indien* of the Grand Café, Boulevard des Capucines, Paris. This moment is regarded as the official date of birth of Cinema. The *Cinématographe* had been invented by the Lumière brothers and was a camera, projector and film printer in one. The program of this first program consisted of about ten films including such titles as *La sortie des ouvriers de l'usine Lumière*, *L'arrivée d'un train en gare*, *Le repas de bébé* and *L'arroseur arrosé*. "The success of the screening was considerable, when the existence of our place became known, although no publicity was sought. Thus on that date, December 28, 1895, the expression: "I have been to a movie" was really born" (Lumière 1936: 27).

Volckaert starts his exploration by challenging December 28, 1895 as the 'Day of Birth' of Cinema: "In reality the first projection with the *Cinématographe* had already taken place nine months earlier, more exactly on March 22, at the *Société d'encouragement à l'industrie Nationale*. Three others would follow: April 17 at the Sorbonne, June 10 during the *Congrès des Sociétés Photographique de France* and on November 10 in Brussels. The difference between these projections and the 'historical first projection' is that on December 28 people had to pay an admission fee, thus accentuating the undeniable influence of economy on the development of the Art of Cinema" (Ibid. 113). He also points out that our contemporary view on this historical date differs from how people regarded these projections in 1895: "This historical day didn't turn out to be a day of profit however. In spite of the invitations only thirty-three people attended the projection, none of them was a journalist. This lack of interest by the public should not amaze us. The development of Cinema had been a long process spanning centuries. Already in the seventeenth century people got acquainted with the projections of the *Lanterna Magica*. In the eighteenth century motion was introduced by using several glass plates and metal forms. Photography was invented in 1827 and was an immediate success. Five years later Joseph Plateau invents an apparatus which can produce the illusion of motion, he combines it with the already existing projection systems and it was only a little step further to replace the drawings in the projectors with photographic images. So at the

¹⁰ Volckaert, Didier 1995. *Opkomst en ondergang van Cinema, een Pre-Cinematografische zoektocht naar een kerndefinitie. (The Rise and Fall of Cinema, a Pre-cinematographic Search for a Definition)*. Master thesis Audiovisual Arts. St-Lukas Brussel 1995.

end of the nineteenth century the viewer was already used to a visual sensation that will later be referred to as Cinema. Despite all these developments the few who came to the Cinématographe projections of 1895 must have experienced something new, something exciting. The following days the audience would grow to two thousand, there were riots and police had to maintain order” (Ibid. 113).

What was so new and exciting about the *Cinématographe* that it became such a success and soon was regarded as the origin of cinema? By looking at the newspaper review that came out soon after the first projection, Volckaert points out what thrilled the audience in 1895. It differs not much from what thrills use today. “On December 30 *La Poste* wrote about the film ‘*Le repas de bébé*’, a one minute long fixed shot showing Lumière, his wife and their baby at the dining table which has been placed outside in the garden: “In the background trees move; one can see the wind lifting up the clothes of the child.” The impression of the journalist after he had seen ‘*La sortie des ouvriers de l’usine Lumière*’ was the following: “It’s the factory gates opening and the workers flowing out, with their bicycles, dogs running around, vehicles, all of this moves, swarms. It’s life itself; it’s motion as it is.” In my opinion, therefore, the success of the *Cinématographe* had nothing to do with its being the first machine to create Cinema. It’s the complex amount of detail it represented for the viewer that was the key to its success. Not that this quality was completely new but in contrast to other existing devices this camera was able to shoot outdoors. While preceding cameras were powered by electricity and needed of heavy generators, this one worked by hand cranking and was made of wood. It was the first portable camera! While filming his *mise-en-scènes* he also captured the complexity of motion in nature in the background. While other films had shown short theatre acts and simple gestures in front of a dark or painted background, the spectator was now confronted with ‘unacted’ life. Not only did the *Cinématographe* activate another, two-dimensional way of looking at reality, like photography had done before, but it added motion to this image. It gave the viewer a stronger sense of truthfulness and the sensation of experiencing, and analyzing the complexity of reality” (Ibid. 8-9).

The hypothesis on the novelty of the *Cinématographe* as suggested by Volckaert demonstrates again the peculiar obsession with and bewitchment by the positivistic claims of representational systems, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. In Winston’s words testifies of the “*general cultural addiction to realistic modes of representation*” (Winston 1996: 44). The choice of the *Cinématographe* over other configurations as the device at the origin of cinema exhibits once more our culture’s enduring positivist belief that the camera provides a “window” on reality, a simple expansion of our powers of observation (Ginsburg 1991: 93). It is precisely the reference to what is perceived as the real, or as more real than for instance photography, due to the potential of filming motion and details, which causes the *Cinématographe* to be referred to as *the* first cinematic experience. Volckaert thus challenges the novelty of the invention of the *Cinématographe* firstly by doubting its date of birth as a starting point for cinema, secondly by playing down its success and finally by adding that the hand operated apparatus of the

brothers Lumière was technically inferior in representing motion to several pre-existing inventions that were powered by electricity. Given these reasons, and as a filmmaker, Volckaert finds it unsatisfying that the *Cinématographe* is considered the origin of Cinema as the first apparatus in combining all the necessary parameters for the first time in history. In contrast to many other film historians he decides not to look for answers in the decennia immediately preceding 1895, when about a thousand patents were issued for similar 'Cinema' configurations, but to start from the beginning. What follows is a chronological search via all the inventions regarding optics, projection and related visual apparatus and theories. Among the references he uses are "The Encyclopaedia and Annotated Bibliography of The Moving Image Before 1896" (1993) by Hermann Hecht and "Dates and Sources, Moving and Projected Images: A chronology of Pre-Cinema" (1926) by Franz Paul Liesegang. In doing so Volckaert assembles a set of parameters of the medium so as to present a technical definition of Cinema in such a way that it allows for new possibilities, and new ways of communicating and exploring Cinema: "So what if, 100 years after one system became the world standard and 68 years after sound took control over the image (*The Jazz Singer* – 1927), we look back on the pre-history of Cinema? Wouldn't it open up a treasure box of possibilities and abandoned trajectories? What if we were able to find a definition, a technical purity of basic parameters, which the artist and filmmaker can use to explore and question the boundaries of this art, much in the same way artists did in other art forms from the 19th century until today? A definition, not to freeze this art form once again, but to break it opens, to free it from the domination of the narrative, to finally enter the era of visual culture" (Ibid. 9).

. Apparatus and parameters: in search for a definition

Volckaert starts his exploration by clarifying what he considers as the starting point of Cinema, which is the existence of the image in nature. As such he formulates what he defines as the first parameter of Cinema:

*"The first parameter is **light (and color)**. From the moment there was light, there existed an image in Nature; it's most basic form a shadow, it's more complex form a camera obscura. Light travels in a straight line and when some of the rays reflected from a bright subject pass through a small hole in thin material, they do not scatter but cross and reform as an upside down image on a flat surface held parallel to the hole. The camera obscura was not an invention, it was a discovery, probably first made by the Chinese in the 5th century BC. This discovery is the first major progression towards the invention of Cinema"* (Ibid. 10-11).

According to his research, the first introduction of the *camera obscura* in Europe took place in 1572 when the writings of the Arabian Physician Alhazen (965?-1038) were translated into Latin. In later decennia the image quality of the *camera obscura* was improved with the addition of a convex lens into the aperture and a mirror to reflect the image down onto a viewing surface. It was also used to stage plays and evoke the illusion of ghosts and supernatural beings. He arguments that other forms of an earlier date, like the shadow play

in Java, did not have any influence on the history of Cinema as they were introduced to us many centuries later. The 'natural image' as he calls it -a result of the laws of light and optics- contains some more parameters that are part of what later will become Cinema: "*This image, created by **light** and thus containing **color**, contains some of the basic parameters that are inherent to Cinema: a **frame, composition** and **sharpness**. But most important, it has **motion** and the progression of **time**. In other words, Nature provides us with six parameters to start with*" (Ibid. 10-11).

The second key progression he points out is the invention of the *lanterna magica*, probably by the Dutch physician Christian Huygens (1629-1695). This device works as a slide projector, a sort of reversed *camera obscura*. It projects a manmade image on the wall of a darkened room, with the use of candlelight and later on gaslight. These images were painted on glass. Volckaert considers this invention as the beginning of Pre-Cinema: "... *it lays out the key questions that inventors will try to resolve during the following centuries. This new, projected and manmade image does not contain all the qualities inherent to the natural image. There is no natural color and most importantly no natural motion! Pre-Cinema History is the search for a device that can produce these qualities, the ultimate perfection of the lanterna magica*" (Ibid. 18).

The third key progression is the introduction of motion in the manmade image. Already in the 17th century the *lanterna magica* is provided with glass plates that are able to create simple motion. All of them were manipulated by hand. In the 18th century they are perfected and a wide selection of motions and effects become available. Still, these motions are 'real'; they reflect the way the projectionist rotates the glass plates by hand or used metal figures and manipulated movable parts connected on the plates. The list of optical devices and inventions before 1831 he mentions is impressive and indeed a treasure box that every filmmaker or video-artist should have access to. He describes the invention and perfection of the *Microscope*, the *Fantasmagoria*, the *Eidophusikon*, the *Kaleidoscope*, the *Polyscope*, the *Zograscope*, the *Panorama*, the *Diorama*, the *Thaumatrope*, and so on.

This fourth key progression Volckaert points out will not be made until 1831 and is not a device but a theory. By then the Flemish physician Joseph Plateau (1801-1883) publishes his *Theory on The Persistence of Vision*. This principle had been recognized by Ptolemaeus (100-170) and later in experiments by Isaac Newton (1643-1727), but it was Plateau who firmly established. In the following year Plateau constructs the *Phenakistoscope*, a device based on his theory, which is able to create the illusion of motion. It consisted of two discs mounted on the same axis. The first disc had slots around the edge, and the second contained drawings of successive action, drawn around the disc in concentric circles. When viewed in a mirror through the first disc's slots, the pictures on the second disc will appear to move. This invention will become widespread and is known in many variations, the best known being the *Zootrope*. Volckaert claims that the Theory of Plateau and his Phenakistoscope have an important influence on the most specific parameter: "*From here on one should not regard motion as a parameter of Cinema but instead **the illusion of motion**. It will later distinguish Cinema from most*

*of the other art forms. Cinema is based on illusion and thus it needs a viewer to exist. A painting or sculpture in an empty room is still a painting or sculpture, but without a brain to deceive there is no Cinema in an empty theatre. It may sound bizarre at first but it's one of the principle parameters of Cinema, **the viewer**" (Ibid. 55).*

During the same period, photography was invented. Joseph Nicéphore Niépce (1765-1833), Louis-Jaques M. N. P. Daguerre (1787-1851) and William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), together with several others, were involved with this invention as well as several others. The invention of photography provides us with an indexical representation of reality more than the painted images up till then, but this photographic image is not projected by the use of light. Therefore it is not until the invention of a method to photograph on glass that there exists a significant influence on the history of Cinema. The credit for this invention goes to a nephew of Nicéphore Niépce: Abel Niépce de Saint-Victor (1805-1870) who made it public on October 1847 during a meeting of the *Académie des Sciences*. Towards 1865 it becomes clear what the next technical problems are which need to be resolved. First of all, even if photographic devices are able to produce photographs taken at high speed (less than 1/16sec was needed according to Plateau), there is no possibility to take at least 16 successive photographs within 1 sec. In other words there is still no film camera. And secondly, the *Phenakistoscope* and derived devices all lack sharpness because the image is constantly in motion. *"The second problem was resolved with the invention of the Choreutoscope in 1866 (maybe 1860) by Beale. The system makes it possible to fix an image before the projection lens, keep it there during projection, and then cover the lens while the next image is brought into place. All this, off course, at a sufficient speed to create an illusion of motion"* (Ibid. 70).

This key progression has influences on the time and illusion of motion parameters. The illusion is not just a construction within our brain, the projector itself is part of it. According to Volckaert, it is a clear indication that a definition of Cinema has nothing to do with style or content, but with technique and the laws of physics and optics. According to him the film camera is not even part of Pre-Cinema. It is instead the Sequence-Photography that is the last key progression towards Cinema. In June 1878 Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904) is able to take 12 successive pictures of a horse in motion, and he does it within a second. He used a battery of 12 cameras, lined up with a distance of 50cm between each. Every single camera was connected by a wire stretched across the track and triggered by electric shutters at a speed of 1/1000sec. Soon after these first attempts Muybridge was to use 24 cameras.

According to Volckaert, from that moment on all elements are there to create Cinema. All one has to do is combine them. In this period dozens of patents are issued: variations on existing devices, perfections, new combinations between projection apparatus and interval devices based on Plateau's theory, ... but none of them creates Cinema, none of them combines all elements that turned out to be necessary by our search through Pre-Cinema History. At the end of his Master Thesis Volckaert will convert all of these 'necessary elements' that he discovered in his chronological research into a definition:

“Cinema is a Configuration (of devices) that is able to create and Project a Photographic Illusion of a Reality in Motion” (Ibid. 127). According to him the first ‘Configuration’ of Cinema is the *Elektrischer Schnellseher* or *Electrotachyscope* invented by Ottomar Anschütz (1846-1907). It is interesting to see how different this apparatus is from the *Cinématographe* and, moreover his technique is still used today to project images. By late 1884 Anschütz was shooting *Chronophotographs* of the finest quality with a battery of twelve cameras; taking twelve photos in half a second. By 1886 his equipment consisted of a battery of 24 cameras with electrically linked shutters operated by an electrical metronome. In contrast to many others he doesn’t ‘fake’ successive images by asking actors to pose for him. His battery of cameras captures the fragments needed to create the illusion of natural motion. Instead of inserting his pictures in one of the existing projectors he decides to build his own machine in a whole new fashion. In his *Elektrischer Schnellseher* flashes of light from an electric fluorescence lamp (Geissler tube) provides a short-time illumination through photographic pictures on glass of motion phases. These are placed along the circumference of an electricity-powered rotating disk. This configuration combines all the needed elements in an extremely pure form: there is no screen as the images are projected directly into the eye and it also precedes the invention of a film camera (By Auguste Le Prince (1842-1890?) in 1891).

By way of conclusion, a starting point

I propose to understand the mediated relationships between ‘author’, ‘other’ and ‘viewer’ during (documentary) film production as complex and changing along with the various roles of the main agents involved in reference to the specific aspects or phases and its parameters of the audiovisual configuration. This mediating context relating to a present of an author, his crew and its mediating devices but also to a future, associated with a ‘viewer’ and a specific transmitted venue, seems impossible to be erased during the process of interaction between ‘author’ and ‘other’. On the contrary, the hypothesis I suggest is that the interactions specific for (documentary) film production are only to be understood as related to the medium, the audiovisual configuration. The positions of the main agents are hence inherently mediated. As Winston and Volckaert argue, not only is the audiovisual configuration a socially elaborated construal, which is ideologically embedded, but it has also certain specific parameters which cannot be ignored as they constitute the very operational forces of this configuration (Volckaert 1995; Winston 1996). Light, color, frame, composition, sharpness, and illusion of motion/time are these indispensable parameters that create the image in relation to a viewer.

I therefore believe that the audiovisual configuration with its social, ideological, operational and technological features determines the interactions between the main agents during (documentary) film production. An ethnography of production should therefore take these forces into account when analyzing the particularities of these interactions. Yet although these forces work simultaneously they should not be analyzed exhaustively. During some interactions certain forces might seem more influential than others. It is therefore necessary to comprehend the relative importance of these forces upon the interactions. In chapter 2 of this book on the ethnographic research, the above-mentioned theoretical hypothesis will be explored in three different cases.

Redefinition of the Relation Between the Word and the World: Performative Ethnography/Anthropology

In this chapter the consequences of the differences between words and images in the discipline of Ethnography/Anthropology are assessed.

By starting my discourse from Geertz's book, my aim is not only to focus on the shift in analysis from the end result to a process when examining (documentary) film production, but also to zoom in on the concepts and ideas that induce this difference in analysis. This focus points not only to the differences between images and words as elaborated in the previous chapter: in this chapter I also want to draw attention on the inadequateness of textual discourses to cope with evolution in society and even more importantly, on the dehumanizing reduction of an interpretive anthropological attitude. As MacDougall points out: *"Clearly anthropology's master concept, for all its distancing of itself from images, and in common with many other disciplines, has been the metaphor of vision – understanding is seeing – and it is partly because of this that film has come to occupy a position in anthropology of catalytic potential. (..) However, when the metaphor of understanding-as-seeing collides with seeing as an embodiment of knowledge, one can expect the discipline to experience a more fundamental intellectual disturbance – what could perhaps be compared to a fugue or synaptic short-circuit"* (MacDougall 1998: 267).

Identity construction within the never-never land of the screen

As Pinxten and Verstraete argue, identity construction is based on the interplay of narratives and labels within a certain socio-cultural context (Pinxten and Verstraete 1998; Longman, Pinxten and Verstraete 2004). Narratives are constantly mobile through the dynamics caused by the intertwining of fact and fiction, creating fluid identities: *"...identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its result"* (Butler 1990: 25). In other words, identity is a performance; it is what you *do* at particular times, rather than a universal *who you are*. The concept of identity proposed is free-floating, and not connected to an "essence", it is instead thought of as a performance. Moreover, the construction of the self (of an individual, a group, a community and the like) is also highly interlaced with the construction of selves in visual narratives. It is stating the obvious when one wants to refer to the growth and reverberations of the visual in our society, locally and globally. What has been pointed out with some accuracy, though, is that a crucial shift in the perception, construction and analysis of identity dynamics has taken place. *"What is new is the interaction of the stories and opinions of the audiovisual world with the everyday world – which is becoming more fragile every day. The boundary lines are vanishing. I don't just mean that we are guilty of complicity with any other aspect of the audiovisual world, but that all of our "I's" are fraternizing with the multiple "they's" fashioned in the never-never land of the screen"* (Ruiz 1995: 30).

Visuals and electronic mass media provide possible links between the different states of locality. These links have grown so powerful that, according to Stuart Hall, identity should be understood as constituted “*not outside but within representation, and hence of cinema, not as a second order mirror held up to reflect what already exists, but as that form of representation which is able to constitute us as new kinds of subjects, and thereby enable us to discover who we are*” (Hall 1989: 80). This vantage point has been inspired by the influential book by Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities* in which he argues that communities “*are to be distinguished, not by their falsity / genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined*” (Anderson [1983] 1991: 15). Hall suggests therefore conceiving of identity “*as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation*” (Hall 1989: 68). Arjun Appadurai examines furthermore the impact of electronic media in relation to migration, deterritorialization¹¹ and ‘self-making’. He states: “*The importance of media is not so much as direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities but as semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan world facilitated by other channels*” (Appadurai 1996: 53). Urged by these tendencies, Appadurai invites anthropology to open up to cultural studies¹², and proposes a redefinition of the discipline in function of the relationship between the world and word: “*...‘word’ can encompass all forms of textualized expression and ‘world’ can mean anything from the means of production and the organization of life-worlds to the globalized relations of cultural reproduction discussed here. Cultural studies conceived this way could be the basis for a cosmopolitan (global? macro? translocal?) ethnography. ... What the new style of ethnography can do is to capture the impact of deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of lived, local experiences. Put another way, the task of ethnography now becomes the unravelling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality as a lived experience in a globalized, deterritorialized world?*” (Appadurai 1996: 51-52).

These transformations confront anthropology with the limitations of its methodologies in relation to the ‘world’. It is not only the ‘word’ that is fruitful in exploring human transactions. Other types of symbol systems should be methodologically explored.

¹¹ Arjun Appadurai (1996: 49): “*There is an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called deterritorialization. This term applies not only to obvious examples such as transnational corporations and money markets but also to ethnic groups, sectarian movements, and political formations, which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities.*”

¹² “*British cultural studies situated culture within a theory of social production and reproduction, specifying the ways that cultural forms served either to further social control, or to enable people to resist. It analyzed society as a hierarchical and antagonistic set of social relations characterized by the oppression of subordinate class, gender, race, ethnic, and national strata. Employing Gramsci’s model of hegemony and counterhegemony, British cultural studies sought to analyze “hegemonic”, or ruling, social and cultural forces of domination and to seek “counterhegemonic” forces of resistance and contestation.*” (Durham and Kellner 2000: 16)

According to Sarah Pink: “...social sciences should, as Mac Dougall has suggested, ‘develop alternative objectives and methodologies’ (1997: 293) rather than attaching the visual to existing methodological principles and analytical frames. This means abandoning the possibility of a purely objective social science and rejecting the idea that the written word is essentially a superior medium of ethnographic representation. While images should not necessarily replace words as the dominant mode of research or representation, they should be regarded as an equally meaningful element of ethnographic work” (Pink 2001: 4-5).

Textual discourses challenged

. Differently told – different things

“This differential emphasis has important consequences for ethnographic representation more generally. Images and written texts not only tell us things differently, they tell us different things” (MacDougall 1998: 257).

The differences between images and words pointed out in the previous chapters, have important implications for ethnographic representation, for it gives films and writings contrasting, and in some cases contradictory qualities (MacDougall 1998: 246). Pictures and words address us at both a general and a particular level, but they do so in different ways. In this chapter I will identify some indicative qualitative divergences in the application of these systems in anthropology referring to *Transcultural Cinema* written by David MacDougall¹³. This author is not only a celebrated ethnographical filmmaker with prize-winning films (many co-directed with his wife Judith) but he is also one of the few documentary filmmakers who writes extensively on central issues about the relation between film and anthropology. The essays collected in this book tackle, among other topics, the difference between films and written texts and between the position of the filmmaker and that of the anthropological writer: *“Written descriptions express what can be grasped in their own languages, and are thus effectively blind (or inhospitable) to things outside them. As Stephen Tyler observes, this implies “a process of double occultation, for the ethnographic text can represent the other as difference only inasmuch as it makes itself occult, and can only reveal itself inasmuch as it makes the other occult”* (1987: 102). *In presenting the particular, ethnographic writing elides or limits sensory details that might shock or repel us if we were to confront them directly. In contrast to this, pictures are staggeringly particular and indiscriminate in detail, but they constantly reiterate the general forms in which the particular is contained”* (Mac Dougall 1998: 246).

Given the syntactic specification of languages, words can reveal the structure and rules of social and cultural institutions, specify categorizations, and compare units. This quality favors the categorization rather than the detailed description of observations. In this way, the visible and physical often slip

¹³ MacDougall, David 1998. *Transcultural Cinema*. Edited and Introduction by Lucien Taylor. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

through the net of anthropological writing and become attenuated, if not invisible (Ibid. 247). *“At perhaps the simplest level, the written caption presents us with a category of person (to which is affixed the category “Nuer”), whereas the photograph presents us first and foremost with the phenomenon of man”* (Ibid. 252).

Furthermore, although language is culturally specific because of its syntactic specification, and hence in the arbitrariness of its signs, most images of objects in the visible world are iconically or indexically expressive of a wide range of potential meanings and functions (Ibid. 269). These differences have far-reaching implications. Anthropology has been dominated by textual discourses and its *orientalist* attitude for decades without scrutinizing the implications of these discourses: *“When anthropologists review ethnographic films, they treat them as visual variants of anthropological writing, which although constructed in a different medium are subject to the same sorts of “readings”. (...) Yet in almost none of these discussions is the single, truly radical difference between writing and film ever mentioned – how vastly different the two are as objects, and in what they contain”* (Ibid. 248).

Treating images as just another form of discourse leads to a related disregard for their historical contingency (Ibid. 249) In sum, due to the textualist vantage point, anthropology was concerned with cultural differentiation, whereas images revealed a world of more modulated and overlapping identities (Ibid. 248): *“For most people such questions pale beside the presence in the photograph of the person: this one person, now facing us from some remote time and place. We might say, in fact, that the content of a photograph is overwhelmingly physical and psychological before it is cultural. It therefore transcends “culture” in a way that most written ethnographic descriptions do not – both by subordinating cultural differences to other, more visible contents (including other kinds of differences, such as physical ones) and by underscoring commonalities that cut across cultural boundaries. In contrast to ethnographic writing, this transculturality is a dominant feature of ethnographic films and photographs”* (Ibid. 252).

. Culture = text ?

“...I will explain how a focus on visuality as such is really the first step toward dismantling of the classic epistemological foundations of anthropology and ethnography” (Rey Chow 1995: 179).

Of crucial importance in the infinite relation between words and images is the relatively recent emergence of the equation of a culture with a text. This movement is inspired precisely by Clifford Geertz when he laid the cornerstone of the so-called interpretive anthropological view; in this view the text substitutes the real culture: a culture is a text (Geertz 1979; 1988): *“The textual connection of the Being Here and Being There sides of anthropology, the imaginative construction of a common ground between the Written At and the Written About (who are nowadays, as mentioned, not infrequently the same people in a different frame of mind) is the fons et origo of whatever power anthropology has to convince anyone of anything – not theory, not method, not even the aura of the professional chair, consequential as these last may be”* (Geertz 1988: 144).

By interrogating Gellner's paper *Concepts and societies* (1970) Asad questions its doctrinal position, which "represents a sociologism according to which religious ideologies are said to get their real meaning from the political or economic structure, and the self-confirming methodology according to which this reductive semantic principle is evident to the (authoritative) anthropologist and not to the people being written about. This position therefore assumes that is not only possible but necessary for the anthropologist to act as translator and critic at one and the same time" (Asad 1986: 164). In doing so, he problematizes the textual approach exemplified by Gellner's paper and wonders why it remains attractive to so many academics in spite of its being demonstrably faulty. According to Asad it is a certain style that has become dominant in anthropological writing. This style is "easy to teach, to learn, and to reproduce (in examination answers, assessment essays, and dissertations). It is a style that facilitates the textualization of other cultures, that encourages the diagrammatic answers to complex cultural questions, and that is well suited to arranging foreign cultural concepts in clearly marked heaps of "sense" or "nonsense". Apart from being easy to teach and to imitate, this style promises visible results that can readily be graded. Such a style must surely be at a premium in an established university discipline that aspires to standards of scientific objectivity. Is the popularity of this style, then, not a reflection of the kind of pedagogic institution we inhabit?" (Ibid. 164)

Yet this style mirrors an attitude of *textualization* by which cultures are in considerable danger of mistranslation and appropriation by more dominant "languages" (Ibid. 158). Furthermore, according to Fabian: "What has not been given sufficient consideration is that about large areas and important aspects of culture no one, not even the native, has information that can simply be called up and expressed in discursive statements" (Fabian 1990: 6-7). But more importantly, this textual attitude reduces cultures to discursive practices, to textual representations or linguistic statements. The systematic use of the word 'text' not only for culture but also for other types of symbols, of practices and representations, such as film practices, performances and even body language, as is used in culture studies advocated by Roland Barthes among others (Barthes 1979; 1982), creates an atmosphere of stable and safe knowledge: the amorphous and unclear, chaotic and dazzling experiences of the real are confined in a certain appropriated yet unchallenged culture ladenness which is equated with textual discourses. The labeling of all these practices and rituals a text, seems to turn into an unreflective habit, dominating and setting the norm for anthropological and cultural studies. Pinxten concludes: "Notwithstanding the fact that hermeneutics can be useful for the analysis and critical assessment of those aspects of culture that could be characterized as primarily 'textual' (e.g. aspects of oral literature and of myths), it is utterly uncritical to equate culture with texts. The sophisticated and critical linguistic anthropological reanalysis of myths at least demonstrates that even for this text-using sub-domain of culture, the equation of culture to text does not hold (see especially Hymes 1981). It is unlikely to hold for other domains of culture where text and text structure are far from obvious" (Pinxten 1997: 7).

Performative Ethnography/Anthropology

“Performative ethnography – the kind where the ethnographer does not call the tune but plays along” (Fabian 1990: 19).

Given the astonishing, staggering, disrupted and haywire experiences of the real, how can one try to give some sort of comprehensive view that is communicable to others? To try to translate the reality of an alien form of life to another culture is, according to Asad, not always best done through the representational discourse of ethnography; under certain conditions a dramatic performance, the execution of a dance, or the playing of a piece of music might be more apt: *“These would all be productions of the original and not mere interpretations: transformed instances of the original, not authoritative textual representations of it” (Asad 1986: 159).* Also MacDougall states *“the interdisciplinary potential of visual anthropology is further extended through its performative aspects – for films, at least are a form of performance” (MacDougall 1998: 262).*

Johannes Fabian is at this moment the most outspoken voice expressing what performative anthropology might signify. He uses the word ‘discovery’ to refer to his insight of this new perspective on ethnography/anthropology. While working in Lubumbashi, the capital of the mining region of Shaba in what was then Zaïre, now the Republic of Congo, on the evening of June 17, 1986, he wrote down his day’s events when he made this discovery: in the year before, he had come upon a statement that was clearly not formulated ad hoc and was pronounced with the authority of an axiom: *‘le pouvoir se mange entier’*: *“In the afternoon of that day in 1986 I had brought it up when I met with a group popular actors whom I had known since the seventies. I did this with no particular purpose in mind and I was overwhelmed by their eagerness to explain ‘le pouvoir se mange entier’ to me and to themselves. Spontaneously they decided that it would be just the right topic for their next play. On the spot they began planning – first suggestions for a plot were made, problems of translating the French term ‘pouvoir’ were debated, several actors cited sayings and customs from their home country – in short, I had triggered an ethnographic brainstorm” (Fabian 1990: 3).* When he assembled his notes later on that day, it became clear how important this encounter was for his thinking on anthropology. It prompted fundamental yet unasked questions, as he was into other projects and did not have time to deal with the implications of this happening. He wrote in his journal that day: *“.. but I simply cannot take in anymore information. Whatever else happened on that afternoon, here is a “new ethnography” – the ethnographer’s interpretive idea (to use the dictum as a key to cultural conceptions of power) is taken up, collectively discussed, cast into a play, tested on a public, etc. all this starting from a chicken gizzard in Kolwezi, the occasion on which the saying about power was quoted to me the first time” (Ibid. 4).*

Fabian examines traditional proverbs about power as it illustrates how the performance of *‘Le pouvoir se mange entier’* was created, rehearsed, and performed by the *Troupe Théâtrale Mufwankolo*. This experience inspired him to refer to “performance” not only as an adequate description of the ways

people realize their culture, but also, and this is particularly interesting, as the term to specify the method by which an ethnographer produces knowledge about that culture. He designates this reorientation as a movement 'from informative to performative ethnography': *"This has epistemological significance inasmuch as I recommend an approach that is appropriate to both the nature of cultural knowledge and the nature of knowledge of cultural knowledge"* (Ibid. 18). In trying to grasp the specificities and complexities of texts and performances he refers to them as several moments or phases during a process, or as layers that can be discerned, when communicative events are analyzed, accentuating the dialectical, processual relationships between them. Yet, he firmly states that they do not relate as tokens or representations to events: a text is not a representation, much less a symbol or icon, of a communicative event, it is that event in its textual realization. A performance does not "express" something in need of being brought to the surface, or to the outside; nor does it simply enact a preexisting text. Performance is the text in the moment of its actualization (in a story told, in a conversation carried on, but also in a book read) (Ibid. 9). This contrasts sharply with Geertz's interpretive anthropology: *"It reveals as misguided any sort of textual fundamentalism, which is a temptation especially for those anthropologists whom the idea to study culture as text(s) has liberated from positivism and naive realism"* (Ibid. 9). Fabian clarifies quite distinctly what performative anthropology might entail in a specific project:

(1) *"First, performing is here understood in contrast to informing. This is a matter of epistemological preference, not of ontology. Performances may inform; information may require performances to be realized. But usually theories of ethnographic knowledge are built on models of information transfer, of transmission of (somehow preexisting) messages via signs, symbols, or codes. Perhaps they are descriptively useful; epistemologically they are deficient because they fail to account for historically contingent creation of information in and through the events in which messages are said to be transmitted.... The notion of performance I am exploring here proposes to abandon hierarchical (or, in Tedlock's word, "analogical" (Tedlock 1983, chap. 3) definitions of relationship between observer and observed, questioner and questioned. Performing is in essence "giving form to." Giving form to only occurs whenever communicative exchanges are initiated that involve all participants, including, of course, the ethnographer"* (Ibid. 11-12).

(2) *"An image that keeps coming up as I think about the texts and performances around the theme "le pouvoir se mange entier" to which this study is devoted is that of an iceberg. Performance is the visible tip; rehearsal/repetition the submerged body. ... That tip is (certainly not only) a token of the submerged body. It is a part, a moment of a process. At least, this should be our epistemological point of departure; that all cultures we know of also construct tokens, symbols, and representation is a second-order theoretical proposition. In this way, thought about performance may lead to a materialist rather than symbolic position"* (Ibid. 12-13).

(3) *"Performance, as I like to think of it here, certainly is action, but not merely enactment of a preexisting script; it is making, fashioning, creating.*

What I called sociality (better, perhaps: social praxis) is, in this view, the result of a multitude of actors working together to give form to experiences, ideas, feelings, and projects. Performance can therefore have a guiding function in investigations where we encounter neither social order nor equilibrium, nor a homogenous-shared culture embodying undisputed values and norms” (Ibid. 13).

(4) “Performance, in other words, should not be projected onto societies whose images of theatricality we study in order to contrast them with our own, which we see as engaged in serious business. The ethnographer participates in, and gives accounts of, performances because he or she wants to report what is given form to. That cultural content, always the result of contingent historical processes, could be generated from sets of abstracts, transhistorical principles (be they structures of the mind, basic needs, or what not) is in my view extraneous to the tasks of cultural anthropology” (Ibid. 14).

In sum: a performative ethnography of production

“..filmmaking is a complex form of veiling. So rather than simply condemning the veil, we also have to deal with the power of its attraction as with desire in love relationships” (Trinh 1999: 197).

As demonstrated in the previous chapters, it seems that the particular underspecification and a specific mediated set of interactions differentiate words and images significantly. As the previous analysis of documentary images demonstrated, through narratives, manipulated contexts, and the occultation of selection and intrusion, the viewer is being persuaded to interpret the images they perceive as ‘real’. In contrast with Geertz’s analysis I cannot solely research the end results to investigate the construction of the authorship. To be able to question the way narratives produce the experience of the real, in order to investigate the manipulation of the contexts, to trace selection and intrusion and to analyze the technological, social and ideological forces at work, it therefore is of crucial importance to focus on the production process as a site of critique. My claim, therefore, is to develop an ethnography of production processes to examine how the interactions during these processes take effect in the field, as this will offer insight in the construction of statements, thus allowing a critical position towards audiovisual representations. *As Ginsburg claims: “Such strategies (ethnography of media AvD.) help us see not only how media are embedded in people’s quotidian lives but also how consumers and producers are themselves imbricated in discursive universes, political situations, economic circumstances, national settings, historical moments, and transnational flows, to name only a few relevant contexts” (Ginsburg 2002: 2).*

In general, this research aims at exploring the fabrication of a statement, *“trying to understand .. how and why, and in what context, a particular articulator structured his particular statement about the world”* as Sol Worth has put it (Worth 1981: 197). It strives to answer such questions as: How is power negotiated between author and subject in visual representation through parameters? How is the context of interaction made visible for the viewer? To put it generally, my research aims at showing the relevance and necessity of ethnography of production process for theoretical use and at the same time offers methodological suggestions for filmmakers. Dornfeld asserts that: *“Ethnographies of media production practices present both significant challenges and substantial possibilities for engaging with the circulation of media forms in contemporary societies, inviting us to rethink both the ways in which we situate ethnographic research and how we theorize media”* (Dornfeld 1998: 247).

The approach Fabian elaborated blends in quite efficiently with what I have been trying to elucidate in the previous chapters: firstly when I introduced the production process as site of critique for documentary production and reception studies. Not only have I designated the moment of filming as some sort of a performance: one in which not only the people in front of but also those behind the camera ‘played along’. Furthermore, the word also appeared when referring to the concept of identity, as it indicates practices that contrast with the static concept known from colonial history and anthropology.

Lastly, not quite surprisingly, Nichols initiated the term when he specified the fifth mode of documentary representation as performative, referring to an associative, dialectical and social mode of evocation rather than representing qualities, evoking an epistemology of the moment, more than of history or epoch and restoring a sense of the local, specific, and embodied (Nichols 1994: 105-6). As Fabian points out: *“One of the connotations from which performance should not be purified is that of being just performance, of putting up an act, of tricking and dissimulating. Colonial history, and social history in general, have taught us that the “shuffle and dance” to which the oppressed had to resort in everything, from how they speak their languages to the way they move, and the manner in which they relate to those in power, have been so many ways of surviving. An ethnography/anthropology that does not contemplate performance from a safe distance but realizes that it must itself become performative will – correctly be qualified as “shuffle and dance” by those who never experienced difficulties with the methods and approaches we inherited from times when our discipline fought for, and achieved, academic respectability as a positive science”* (Fabian 1990: 20).

Rather than coining documentary with concepts such as Reality, Authenticity, and Faithful Representation, I suggest that the organizational, structural, interrelational and personality-linked interactions of the production process determine the ‘flow between fact and fiction’. By investigating the production process, these aspects can be revealed and criticized. I will therefore explore this hypothesis in the following chapter by examining the mediated interactions between the three plural positions of the ‘author’, ‘viewer’ and ‘other’ during the production process of three cases, which I scrutinized through intensive fieldwork, thus clarifying what an ethnography of the production process signifies as defined in this way.



Film stills from *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*,
by Didier Volckaert and An van. Dienderen

CHAPTER 2: IN THE FIELD – ON THE GROUND

Methodological Notes: Approaching Fieldwork In Processes (What and how – Phase II)

In this chapter I examine the hypothesis, as formulated in the previous chapter, 'on the ground'. During several phases of three processes of (documentary) filmmaking, I will look into the interval - between the realities as it is experienced and the screening of the 'produced reality' - from the perspective of the main agents involved.

"The whole point of 'evoking' rather than 'representing' is that it frees ethnography of mimesis and the inappropriate mode of scientific rhetoric that entails 'objects,' 'facts,' 'descriptions,' 'inductions,' 'generalizations,' 'verification,' 'experiment,' 'truth,' and like concepts that, except as empty invocations, have no parallels either in the experience of ethnographic fieldwork or in the writing of ethnographies. The urge to conform to the canons of scientific rhetoric has made the easy realism of natural history the dominant mode of ethnographic prose, but it has been an illusory realism, promoting, on the one hand, the absurdity of 'describing' nonentities such as 'culture' or 'society' as if they were fully observable, though somewhat ungainly, bugs, and on the other, the equally ridiculous behaviorist pretense of 'describing' repetitive patterns of action in isolation from the discourse that actors use in constituting and situating their action, and all in simpleminded surety that the observers' grounding discourse is itself an objective form sufficient to the task of describing acts. The problem with the realism of natural history is not, as is often claimed, the complexity of the so-called object of observation, nor failure to apply sufficiently rigorous and replicable methods, nor even less the seeming intractability of the language of description. It is instead a failure of the whole visualist ideology of referential discourse, with its rhetoric of 'describing,' 'comparing,' 'classifying,' and 'generalizing,' and its presumption of representational signification. In ethnography there are no 'things' there to be the objects of a description, the original appearance that the language of description 'represents' as indexical objects for comparison, classification, and generalization; there is rather a discourse, and that too, no thing, despite the misguided claims of such translational methods of ethnography as structuralism, ethno-science, and dialogue, which attempt either to represent native discourse or its unconscious patterns, and thus commit the crime of natural history in the mind" (Tyler 1986: 130-131).

The research that I conduct is firmly rooted in a reflexive perspective. As pointed out in the introduction, this exploration values the notion of reflexivity as a way of drawing attention to the complex relationships between processes of knowledge production, and the various contexts of such processes as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2001: 5). Macbeth proposes two types of reflexivity: one is positional reflexivity and is described as *“those formulations of the reflexive exercise that treat it as a self-referential analytical exercise”* (Macbeth 2001: 38). He might agree if I would refer to the performative, comparative and holistic framework as a way to position this fieldwork. I will first elaborate on these aspects. Macbeth, then, explains textual reflexivity, as *“discourses that directly address the work of writing representations”* (Macbeth 2001: 41). This type of reflexivity will be illustrated next. Throughout the elaboration of the reflexive gaze, I introduce the cases of my fieldwork, intertwining methodological aspects with the presentation of the subject, as these notions are particularly enmeshed with one another.

. Holistic, performative and comparative: positioning the field

The elaboration of the fieldwork adopts an approach in which practice and reflections are integrated, thus focusing on both form and meaning. I consider this research a holistic endeavor because I not only examine the production process of (documentary) filmmaking, but also the consumption and the reception (Dornfeld 1998). Production and consumption or reception studies are generally separated areas, which suggests a binary view on representation. However, not only is the ‘viewer’ prefigured throughout the entire production process as Dornfeld, Mandel and others have demonstrated, it is also necessary to question how the ‘viewer’ is perceived as having a critical position within this process (Dornfeld 1998 and 2002; Mandel 2002). As Dornfeld states: *“An ethnographic approach to cultural production offers the possibility of rethinking and bridging the theoretical dichotomy between production and consumption, between producers’ intentional meanings and audience members’ interpreted meanings, and between production studies and reception studies. In doing so, it transcends disabling debates in media studies, moving beyond the binaries of media power versus resistance, ideology versus agency, and production versus reception”* (Ibid. 12).

Through this fieldwork I monitor the interactions between the main agents involved in (documentary) filmmaking: the ‘author’, the ‘other’ and the ‘viewer’. Moreover, as Winston and Volckaert argue, not only is the audiovisual configuration a socially elaborated construal, which is ideologically embedded, but it has also certain specific parameters which cannot be ignored as they constitute the very operational forces of this configuration (Volckaert 1995; Winston 1996). I therefore explore the hypothesis as elaborated in the previous chapter that the audiovisual configuration with its social, ideological, operational and technological features influences the interactions between the main agents during (documentary) film production.

In doing so, I take up Geertz's invitation, and strive to question and challenge the positivist belief of the representational assumptions of (documentary) filmmaking (Geertz 1988). By focusing on the production process my aim is to make transparent foundational mechanisms of meaning production so as to peel off some displaced authoritarian or naturalistic connotations. Moreover, I investigate the 'author' function and its mediated relations with the 'other' and the 'viewer' so as to encourage the critical assessment of authorship in (documentary) filmmaking. As Dornfeld argues, the reorientation to a holistic framework in studying media allows us to consider authorship as a grounded, empirically assessable dimension of cultural production, to attribute some definable forms of agency to authors, and to investigate how authorship operates in a particular setting or domain (Dornfeld 1998: 17). MacDougall adds: "*However, the concept of the author of a work as a stable center is illusory and seems more like the reification of one side of a structural or moral abstraction. In fact, our voices as authors are plural. At any moment we represent shards and fragments of a continuing social and cultural experience, in which those we film or write about form a crucial part. The author is never isolated but always a contingent being, and the author's "voice" is always constituted in relation to its object. Finally, no author is fully aware of what constitutes its voice – it speaks differently in different contexts, it undergoes shifting subjectivities with others, it is a ventriloquist for its teachers, parents, friends, and heroes*" (MacDougall 1998: 274).

To this end, I examine several phases during the production process of three cases to explore what Hobart has referred to as "*situated practices: what people did and what people said about it*" (Hobart 1995: 67). Ginsburg points out that "*'participatory cinema' - as MacDougall has elaborated (MacDougall 1975) and the development of indigenous media have been particularly innovative in the filmmaking processes as much as product, it seems appropriate that analysis should shift as well: I am concerned less with the usual focus on the formal qualities of film as text and more with the cultural mediations that occur through film and video works*" (Ginsburg 1991: 94). Instead of examining production processes from a solely theoretical perspective, I explore it from 'the ground' so to speak. Dornfeld acknowledges: "*Despite the theoretical insights of this recent work (Nichols and others) on documentary, the grounded, practical life of these forms has not been sufficiently addressed*" (Dornfeld 1998: 17). Finally, in order to examine the interdiscursive context in which 'viewers', 'authors' and 'others' engage with documentary images, it is essential to situate this research "*within interlocking contexts of national and transnational cultural flows and political economies... to delineate a conjunctural ethnography*" (Mankekar 1999: 49).

I have chosen four cases that can be placed on a sociopolitical continuum in order to scrutinize a broad comparative spectrum: one is my exploration as the assistant director of the rehearsals, preparations, scripting and filming of a community film project in Brussels *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger* directed by visual artist Els Dietvorst in collaboration with a hybrid tribe of migrants, asylum-seekers, prostitutes, a computer designer and a police woman, which she named 'The Swallows'; the other case is situated in California, where I participated in the shoot of *Night Passage* by

award winning filmmaker and theorist Trinh Minh-ha in collaboration with her partner Jean-Paul Bourdier; the last case is a personalized recollection of the entire production process of the film *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* directed by Didier Volckaert (my partner) and myself. These three cases share some very general characteristics in the sense that they are mostly state funded, and thus not engendered by commercial interests. Instead the 'author' is the driving force behind the project and is most often the producer. The crew consists of a small number of people, with a mixture of "professionals" and volunteers. Because of their specific audiovisual choices, be it on the elaboration of the medium, the process, the authorship or the narrative, these cases can be considered as 'alternative', 'experimental' or 'independent' cinema.

Without locking these cases into a genre, I refer to them as 'off the map' places, a term formulated by Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin in reference to the research on indigenous media: "*While the media we study may be "off the map" of dominant media cartographies, they are no less crucial to the transformations of the twenty-first century and must be studied. Anthropologists seek to grasp the ways media are integrated into communities that are parts of nations and states, as well as transnational networks and circuits produced in the worlds of late capitalism and postcolonial cultural politics. ... Such formulations seem particularly well suited for anthropological inquiry: small in scale and sustaining an alternative to the mass media industries that dominate late capitalist societies, they occupy a comfortable position of difference from dominant cultural assumptions about media aesthetics and practices*" (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002: 8).

Of particular significance in this fieldwork and rather unusual in anthropology and cultural studies is that this research involves studying people whose projects have such reflexive correspondence with the practice of ethnography (Dornfeld 1998: 20-21). This reflexive correspondence has several aspects, pointing at the performative framework in which this research is embedded: Trinh's work has been a challenging critique on such disciplines as anthropology, cultural studies and film studies. Furthermore, Els Dietvorst adopts a practice, which has several similarities with an anthropological survey involving concepts such as collaboration, feedback, and interaction. Given my experience as a filmmaker, and my 'double' identity in these projects, I faced complex interpersonal roles, urging me to sustain a reflexive attitude throughout the fieldwork. Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin point out that this type of correspondence should be understood by the position of media in society: "*Anthropologists now recognize that we are implicated in the representational practices of those we study; and we are engaged or complicit, as the case may be, in complex ways, with all those communities for whom media are important*" (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2003: 23).

This reflexive correspondence might be compared with a gift: I take up Dornfeld's comparison in reference to Lidz (1977) and Bosk (Bosk 1979) between the right and privilege of being a researcher as a gift presented to him/her by his host and subjects. "*So the researcher has, in addition to*

whatever the other problems that becloud his structured role-relations with his subjects, the very special problems that attend the giving and receiving of gifts" (Dornfeld 1998: 25). Bosk deals furthermore with the feelings of solidarity and obligation that often result from the fieldwork situation, and warns against three associated dangers that the gift of access wields tyrannically over the ethnographer: *"(1) The danger of overrapport: so thoroughly merging with the subject's point of view that one cannot achieve the critical distance necessary for analysis; (2) the danger of overindebtedness: so thoroughly feeling a sense of diffuse obligation that one can no longer assess what one does and does not properly owe his subjects; and (3) the danger of overgeneralization: so thoroughly idealizing one's subjects that one sees their behavior as representative of all persons in a class"* (Bosk 1979: 204 in Dornfeld 1998: 25).

The fieldwork I elaborate is furthermore based on a comparative scheme proposed by Pinxten (Pinxten 1997: 87). This scheme is built on the concept of a 'root intuition or principle': *"What appears at first sight to be varied, chaotic, unconnected or utterly disparate in a culture can, upon closer examination, be recognized to be unified or closely linked because of a common root principle. A somewhat similar argument holds for the synonymous term of cultural intuitions; they express the non-discursive or immediate notions, which are underlying the level of rational discourse"* (Pinxten 1997: 87) According to Pinxten, a comparative stance will depend on deep ethnographic work in each culture concerned, and is explored in terms of its 'root principles' (Ibid. 96). Such research therefore involves a comparison of only two or three cultures: *"his/her own and the culture(s) s/he worked with, systematically allowing critique and control on the ethnography by the interviewees or participants"* (Ibid. 96). The stress on ethnography as an interactive encounter is of crucial importance as *"the informant and the ethnographer are producing some sort of common construct together, as a result of painstaking conversation with continuous mutual control"* (Ibid. 31). Pinxten proposes a scheme of at least three different steps throughout the fieldwork. The first step is trying to grasp the 'root intuition' on a topic or domain in the culture under study from a rather provisional basis. In a second step more thorough ethnographic description of particular, explicit and concrete language and behavior concerning the selected topic is engaged in. Pinxten points out that there is a continuous interactive encounter occurring between insights from the empirical research - hence of the participants involved - and the provisional formulation of the 'root principle' focused on; in this way the latter's identification is continuously being amended and modified. Up till this level the research remains within the domain of one particular culture. In a third step the researcher engages in the comparison of two or more cultures on the basis of the identification of their 'root intuitions'. Pinxten accentuates that any aspect of a particular culture must be understood in the frame of that culture, meaning first and foremost in the frame of its 'root principle(s)' before comparing a particular element (Ibid. 97). This stance stresses thus the interactive nature of ethnographic research, the necessity of deep ethnographic exploration of a given field, and the importance of the notion of 'cultural intuition' in comparing certain cultures; these aspects will guide me through the field.

. Textual reflections

This written fieldwork is deprived from its oral and physical qualities as it transferred to a text. As emphasized previously in reference to Asad, translating another culture is not always best done through the representational discourse of ethnography (Asad 1986: 159). MacDougall also highlights that many aspects of social experience are not finally translatable (MacDougall 1998: 266). On the contrary, an interaction, an encounter can simply not be represented by textual discourses without transforming it. These would all be productions of the original and not mere interpretations: transformed instances of the original, not authoritative textual representations of it, as Asad underscores (Asad 1986: 159). Fabian contends: *“Translation is a process; the texts we call “translations” are but documents of that process. They, too, are produced through contingent events – in fact, they may in turn be regarded as rehearsals and performances – and are therefore never definitive”* (Fabian 1990: 99).

The textual production I present of the ethnographic fieldwork underlines that it tempts to produce rather than interpret, that it can be understood as a performance, rather than an analysis. To this end, each case is elaborated differently depending on the specificities of my interaction with the main agents, yet they all *“underscore multiperspectivalness as a substitute for the monomaniac system builder’s perspective on human beings and knowledge, and an emphasis on plural, local or particular perspectives as suggested by Lyotard and other French postmodernists”* (Campbell 1977, partly published in 1989 cited in Pinxten 1997: 5). In the wake of Dornfeld I have been induced by arguments in favor of a dialogical anthropology (Tedlock 1983) to include much of the transcribed speech of the interviewees in this research (Dornfeld 1998: 28). Yet the final responsibility of the text is obviously solely mine and as such I will take full responsibility over the ‘burden of authorship’, the ‘author’ being understood by Fabian as the one who presents this story to a public and therefore has to take responsibility for its anthropological findings and political implications (Fabian 1990: Xv).

Next, another performative element of the production of the text next to the multi-vocal reconstruction is that I have taken the liberty of throwing in some metaphors, not with the intention of classifying but rather in order to create an atmosphere that might invite the reader to project or map an image of this process on the performance that has taken place. Finally, although the text is often presented as a dialogue, in terms of the lay out I develop a graphic style that allows to stress the differences between the voices by means of the ordering of the quotes or by their lettering.

Urban Collectivity on Screen: Fieldwork in a Swallows' Nest

In this chapter ethnographic data on the production process of the community-based film project led by artist Els Dietvorst, are analyzed. Dietvorst's project is an interesting illustration of participatory filmmaking. For about four years she has collaborated, discussed and worked with a collective she named 'The Swallows', which is located in a marginalized area of Brussels. I examine their interactive approach, by focusing on the preparations, rehearsals, performance and shoot of their last and final film *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger*.

Weaving multi-vocality

As a filmmaker and anthropologist, I was involved for several years in the making of *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger*, sometimes as an observer, sometimes as an assistant, sometimes just by having a great time or by being in people's way. This enabled me to fully submerge myself in the project and to collaborate with the Swallows. In order to examine their process, I conducted in-depth interviews in French, or Flemish with ten people selected from the cast and the crew. The interviews were translated into English for the purpose of this book. They took place immediately after the main shoot in Brussels in June 2003 and before the film had been completed. A part was filmed in Morocco in January 2004 but at the time of this research it was still uncertain (for budgetary reasons) when and even if this would be possible. The interviews consist of open, semi-structured conversations and depart from basic notions such as key words or images, followed by topics which were introduced by the interviewees or which seemed relevant to me, such as the interviewees' expectations and input at the various stages of the process and the differences between preparations and shooting.

On the one hand, I am interested in investigating how the author handles the parameters of the medium and how they are employed and negotiated with participants: what is introduced by whom? When and where? What is the barrier between author and participant? Consequently, I monitor the participants' input in their own representation. On the other hand, it is of equal importance to examine the position of the viewer in this process. Has this negotiation been explained sufficiently to the viewer? Does the viewer gain insight in the context of interaction? Are the filmmaker's suggestions of parameters employed when dealing with the 'other' satisfactory? In this research I have limited myself to the first set of questions, the reason being that *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger* has not yet been edited. I compiled 20 hours of material in total, part of which directly related to these topics, part of which was surprising or seemingly incoherent. I repeatedly read the interviews until a certain structure as well as several concepts imposed themselves. I then organized the input by grouping statements of various participants round important issues.

The structure of the conversation is thus divided in three parts:

- First, I reconstructed the trajectory of the Swallows through important manifestations and happenings as this sheds light on the concepts and values behind this formation. I paid particular attention to the meaning of the word Swallow, as it gained importance over the years as an identity marker.
- Next, the preparations of *The March*, *The Burden*, *The Desert*, *The Boredom*, *The Anger* were revised focusing on the elaboration of the script, as an example of the negotiation-method based elaborated (cf. Addendum 1). It gives insight in the way the collective managed to set up the development of the shoot.
- Finally, the shoot of *The March*, *The Burden*, *The Desert*, *The Boredom*, *The Anger* involved a type of professionalism unlike the previous performances thus creating a rupture that for some was inspiring and for others brought frustration. This is evoked in the last chapter that deals with reflections on the shoot.

Seeing that during the interview matters such as balance of power, hierarchy and financing were discussed, and because of some of the participants' frail position within society, all interviewees remain anonymous. I therefore chose to divide the participants into three groups: the Swallows/actors, the crewmembers and the director. This allowed me to contextualize the quotes and, at the same time, remain sufficiently vague in order not to reveal the person behind the answer, except for the director who obviously is publicly known as Els Dietvorst. All questions asked during the interview have been underlined. After a first draft I have invited the participants to correct where necessary, thus using their feedback to enhance the understanding of this collective experience.

The reconstruction of these interviews reads like a weave, a virtual conversation, a kind of nest speaking in different voices: those of the Swallows, and mine, but also those of anthropologists and filmmakers whose citations are abundantly used to debate and negotiate what this collectivity on screen might entail. The citations are weaved and intertwined as in a conversation to enhance a multi-vocal discourse and recreate a performance instead of an authorial representation. This discourse suggests a discussion, a happening where my voice is clearly contextualized as the one who has selected the citations and is situated between others.

The Nest: The breeding of the Swallows



“The Swallows”, by Els Dietvorst

Els Dietvorst, an artist working as a sculptor, was introduced to the Anneessens area, a marginalized neighborhood in the southern area of Brussels in 1999, when she was invited by a contemporary art gallery – Etablissement d'en face - to exhibit her work. Although warned by the gallery curators about the area's high crime rate, instead of remaining inside the gallery, she started to explore the area on foot. The area is located near the Southern railway station, in the heart of Brussels. Yet whereas other areas in the center recently were revived through several urban activities such as the 'contract with the area' (*wijkcontract*) by which local government officials invited the inhabitants to designate the most acute problems and helped to solve them (1994 – 1998), the Anneessens area remained isolated (Demeyer and Van Pee 2003: 164). Main arteries such as the ring-road, and two new housing projects, physically lock in the area and so prevent integration with other parts of Brussels. The failure of the contract with the area left many habitants disappointed. Dumps of rubbish, vandalism, neglected public spaces, all these elements create an atmosphere of carelessness, negligence and sloppiness. Mostly populated by immigrants from different countries, the area can be characterized as a transit area: these different communities are very separate entities, without any common goal or interest whatsoever.

While Els Dietvorst crossed this area, she experienced various interesting encounters, which encouraged her to work with the people of this neighborhood instead of imposing her works of art on them. Although she had never worked with a video camera before, she felt drawn to this medium because of its social aspects, and proposed to make a film with the people of the area because of the social aspects of the medium. It turned out to be the appropriate medium, as it was precisely this type of collective experience that the area lacked. (**Els Dietvorst**) *My dream was to create something collective, not something individual. I believe the great dream of the individual renaissance artist is out. Nowadays we need to find whether we are capable of creating something in a collective way. Call me an old-fashioned Marxist, but I do not believe in a society solely steered by individuals. When it comes to that, I'm a utopian. I believe in collective values, even if we all remain individuals. Why? I think it's a way of linking our own culture with that of other people. I'm interested in other people because I think that perhaps I can improve myself by learning what others do. I'm not interested in my own culture, or purely in myself. I'd get terribly bored if I had to draw from my own life (cry somewhere between 'no!' and 'yuck!'). Looking for and finding other things opens up new perspectives. But to use the words of Levi-Strauss, there's always a chief. I think a collective needs a chief. There's no need to deny that. At first I gave the people involved in the project a lot of freedom, which was hard to do. But I did so deliberately. I wanted to know what the limit was and how far I could go.*

The fascination of Els Dietvorst with the area is born out of a deep concern for others, in her words: *"I always want to defend people who are oppressed or deprived of their basic rights."* In her note of intent, she stipulates that abstract notions such as utopia and collectivity, and more pragmatic concerns, such as encouraging communication in the area by inviting the inhabitants to express themselves in a joint experience are of primary interest. The Anneessens area seemed to her the perfect source for a new art practice of this sort. This practice reminds George Marcus who has coined the term "the activist imaginary" to describe how subaltern groups turn to film, video and other media not only to *"pursue traditional goals of broad-based social change through a politics of identity and representation"* but also out of a utopian desire for *"emancipatory projects... raising fresh issues about citizenship and the shape of public spheres within the frame and terms of traditional discourse on polity and civil society"* (Ginsberg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin, 2002: 8 citing Marcus 1996: 6). Els organized a casting in a container that she planted on the Anneessens Square located in the center of the area. Although, again, many people warned her for criminal acts, 200 people presented themselves. Els invited them to improvise, inspired by texts of Arthur Rimbaud, as he has lived in the Anneessens area and has written on exile and migration, themes that seemed apt to her in relation to the history of many people of the area. In the container, alone with a video camera, Els recorded these amazing performances. Rimbaud seemed a perfect source for them: people sang his texts, recounted emotional stories about their migration, some even performed somersaults and other acts of physical prowess. Slices of these recordings are still being screened in art houses and community centers in Belgium.

(Swallow/actor) Let's go back to the moment where you were doing an audition in front of Els. You walked through the door of the container. What happened? Well, I'd been given a sheet of paper with several extracts written by Arthur Rimbaud. I read them several times and selected one I particularly liked, a text about slavery. The history of slavery is a subject that has always touched me, I'd seen documentaries and films about it and I said to myself: "this is what suits me best". So I selected the text and read it several times and when I was standing in front of Els, she said to me "OK, we're listening. You can do whatever you like with the text, you can sing... do whatever you please". So I started reading out loud, in my own way, and, all of a sudden, I don't know whether I actually sang, but I do remember I became one with the text. As soon as I read out a phrase, I saw the image described in the text in my head. That's how I did the audition and that's why Els selected me. For the second interview, we had to do the same text, but with more detail and longer. I did the rest of the text with even more conviction, added a personal touch to it and imagined I really was a slave. I felt really part of it and it went really well.

This successful casting was the start of a four years project funded by several organizations, mainly governmental and helped by different community groups based in the Anneessens area. In the first period of the project, between January 1999 and January 2000, which Els has labelled the documentary phase, she explored and connected with the inhabitants, drank tea or beer, and tried to build up lasting relationships, by providing a context of respect and confidence. She also contacted several local organizations and invited them to participate, such as the 'area shop' (*buurtwinkel*) a social organization aimed at local development and communal cohesion. Other organizations with which Els worked intensively are Albatros, a place for homeless people, and Adzon, a center for male prostitutes. The café 'Rouge et Noir' is a typical Brussels venue; with its 34 years it is the oldest bar in the area, and can be regarded as the living room of the project. Els cooperated with the *Beurschouwborg*, a vivacious urban art center with an international program. With this support, Els managed to engender a hybrid group consisting of people without passports, prostitutes, migrants from Moroccan, Iranian and Italian descent, a computer designer and even a Belgian policewoman, a dynamic and vigorous group of people she named the Swallows.

(Swallow/actor) *The swallow is a bird free to fly wherever it wants. I believe that by choosing the name 'the Swallows', Els wanted to show the freedom we all need in this life in order to do what we want to do. I think perhaps that's why she set up this project. How do you personally feel about the image of the swallow? Personally, I do feel like a swallow, as a matter of fact. Proof of that is the fact that I'm here, that I can say what I want to say, I can make a film and talk about Togo, about everything that, in terms of politics, goes wrong there. It would be impossible for me to do that in Togo. Over there, I would feel like a sheep or a dog on a leash or a chicken in a coop, whereas here, I feel like a swallow, I can fly to wherever I want and say what I think without having to worry about it. Does this add something to your identity? Have you perhaps taken on a new identity? I believe I have, for thanks to the Swallows I've been able to meet other people and share my*

experiences and this has helped me to talk about my problems and the other way round. We've all poured everything out and mixed it all together in order to reduce it to one single issue. What do you mean? The issue of the immigrant plunging in an environment that's not his. We've all come from countries with different problems. We created 'the Swallows', sat round the table and shared our experiences in order to create one single problem, namely that of the immigrant living in an environment that is not his. We do realize that over here immigrants are perceived in a particular way. We're not at home and therefore can't act as if we were. Hence the problem of racism. I've really suffered. And everyone who's here, all the Swallows who're not Belgian, have had the same difficulties in one way or another.

(Swallow/actor) Did your personal background as an immigrant have anything to do with your decision to stay in the group? It didn't. During the casting I had no idea what the film was going to be about. I didn't know what they were going to shoot, what it was all about. I don't think Els was one hundred percent sure either. I was attracted by the word FILM, like a moth to a flame.

People came and went, Els insisted on creating an open atmosphere where people felt at ease without having any obligations other than collaborating with the others on an art project. The accessibility for anyone interested and a context of positivism and respect are of primary concern for Els.

(Els Dietvorst) How did you select the actors? After the container audition, we organized a second selection. These are "the Church tapes", which were recorded in a church that we were allowed to use. We selected people who had not been trained or hadn't finished their training, but who came across as very pure and natural. There are a few people who've been on acting courses, though? Only partly. Diplomas are of no importance. In principle K. could say: "I am the king of Belgium". As long as he's a good actor, he can be the king of Belgium. I'm not going to say to anyone: "This is not realistic" or "You're telling a lie". I don't care. If he invests in the group and wants to be Pinocchio, he can be Pinocchio. Being inspired about the part was important for you during the auditions? There were different levels. Some people stayed in the group, like M. and N., because of their tremendously positive impact on the group. Perhaps, because of their personalities, they took a step back when acting. In the group they had a healing, positive influence. They stayed, although they didn't get the biggest parts. Another person was selfish to such an extent that it became almost unbearable. But then other people liked him, and because he was a good actor, he stayed. The audition was an open, organic process. Every character that has stayed within the group has his own story.

Els Dietvorst rejects strict boundaries between art, community projects and anthropology, and deliberately opted for the experimental, even freewheeling character of the project. She didn't focus exclusively on the film during these four years, but remained open to suggestions from the Swallows, who were very creative and inspired by their new nest. There were street performances, jukebox stories based on the lives of the inhabitants and recounted in a local pub, glossy magazines covered the activities of the Swallows in full-colour

pictures and rave reviews. Likewise, the projected three differentiated phases of the process, imaged as a funnel, were but sketches, undefined guidelines that were used to communicate about the project, they were not its defining structures. However, the ultimate goal remained to produce a fiction feature film based on the lives of the Swallows. Hence, the second phase (January 2000 till January 2001) entailed selecting and specifying the members, and the third (January 2001 till January 2003) comprised the repetitions and production of the film.

***(Swallow/actor)** We started with the short film “After the Flood”. It was all a bit confusing. We talked about it amongst those willing to admit it. There were days when we were wondering what we were doing. Didn’t you find Els tried to explain? No. But it was our fault too, we never asked. We just nodded every time we got positive feedback. Wasn’t Els’s s enthusiasm contagious? It was. We were scared, in the first place, of hurting Els, in the second of being misunderstood. In the beginning we had absolutely no idea what we were getting ourselves into. And after the short film was completed, we still didn’t know.*



“After the flood, rehearsal”, by Orla Barry

These experiments were much appreciated by the Flemish, the Walloon and the Brussels governments, Belgium being led by various governments. The activities of the Swallows were a source of inspiration for the former Flemish minister of Culture, Bert Anciaux. Since 2001 he has created an experimental line of subvention to support community work, - now labelled as socio-artistic or socio-cultural practices -, for its potentiality of promoting cultural participation and cultural competence, enhancing emancipation by marginalized communities, or persons. Some regard this new focus as an evident complementary tool in organizing a welfare society, art as a lever to enhance cultural and socio-political participation (Laermans 2002: 28-29). The subvention of art might seem as politically inappropriate. However, to avoid any political interference, in Belgium relatively autonomous committees are administering the subventions, and their recommendations are seldom ignored or rejected by the minister in charge (Pinxten 2003: 60).

(Crewmember) *In my opinion, a film, which has been funded for just about 100% by several local governments, isn't an independent film. But in Belgium many films are made that way. I'd say they're films made through the funding of culture, in the sense of protected filmmaking. For me, independent filmmakers are like the American producers who work with small crews and, despite everything, put all their own money into it, perhaps with the help of a sponsor. But not this [the film we've made], for me this isn't independent filmmaking. Is this protected filmmaking? Yes, it's cultural exception in all its splendour. In Belgium we make genuinely protected cinema, just about all the time. Why not? I'm all for it, because I believe it's the only way you can ensure an original outlook on culture, and protected cinema seems to be the only vehicle for the occasionally interesting ideas left.*

These socio-artistic practices are certainly subsidized based on the law issued in 1994 in paragraph 5 of article 23 of the Constitutional Law of Belgium, which stipulates that everyone has the right to develop oneself culturally and socially. In Belgium culture is thus regarded as a basic human right (Demeyer and Van Pee 2003: 13). This line of subvention is inspired by activities of social organizations such as the Koning Boudewijnstichting (King Baudouin Foundation), Kunst en Democratie (Art and Democracy), and in the Flemish parliament by the Ad Hoc commission on Poverty and Social Exclusion (1997). On the level of local government, this ministerial line of subvention is preceded by the creation of a Sociaal Impulsfonds, SIF (Social Impulse Fund), aimed at subsidizing cultural projects in Ghent, Antwerp, Brussels or Louvain to stimulate social, and communal cohesion and participation. Although this work is still in an experimenting phase, and many interpretations and approaches are circulating, the definition for such work formulated by a recent study is articulated by the following four aspects (Demeyer and Van Pee 2003: 26):

- An artistic process which stimulates creativity, imagination and confrontation
- A social process which involves social and cultures fractures from society
- A professional, cross-over collective project between social and cultural agents
- A direct involvement of persons who experience social and/or cultural exclusion and underprivilege

The authors of this study suggest to regard these projects not so much as defined by a concept but rather approached by the following question: ‘*When can a project be regarded as a socio-cultural project?*’ This question evokes the image of a continuum ranging from projects focusing primarily on social concerns, to projects aiming at more artistic creations. Precisely in the interaction of the social and the cultural, is where the organizers of these projects can stimulate renewal (Demeyer and Van Pee 2003: 27). As the Swallows are regarded as an exemplary project of this socio-artistic practice, it is of interest to situate the context of these practices in Belgium. The study conducted by Demeyer and Van Pee focuses on different methodologies of several cases in Brussels and Flanders. The selection is based on the previously formulated four aspects and supplementary criteria such as the specific art form, the age of the target group, cultural diversity, social and cultural agents and regional dispersion (Demeyer and Van Pee, 2003).

According to the authors, the initiators of these projects impart a critical vision on society drawing attention to social and cultural dichotomy, cultural and social segregation, and the exclusion of basic rights such as culture, habitation, and privacy (Ibid. 225). They share a genuine belief in the merits of cooperation between separated sectors such as culture and welfare to engender projects that stimulate cultural competence, enhancing cultural and socio-political participation. Two aims are developed, based on this specific vision on society and culture: one is to make transparent and (possibly) to expand the cultural baggage of the participants and the second aim is to strengthen the participants by reinforcing their cultural qualities. Given these foci, principles such as accessibility, an overall encouraging, positive approach, a profound exchange of experience between participants, participation and providing spaces to encourage encounters are developed (Ibid. 229-256). This study presents a rather instrumental and pragmatic analysis of these projects, paying less attention to abstract concepts implied in socio-artistic practices and the specific types of interaction, and negotiations on socio-cultural codes; it formulates nonetheless some insightful notions for comprehending this practice, notions which are also suitable for profiling the Swallows.

(Swallow/actor) Did the project give you strength? Yes, it gave us the strength to comfort each other, to realize that we’re not the only ones having these problems and, above all, to be heard through our various roles and thereby to vent all our different frustrations. It helps us to deal with the scourge of xenophobia).

In this context, it is also useful to refer to the study conducted by François Matarasso in which he focuses on the social impact of participation in the arts (Matarasso 1997). This research is designed to add a dimension to existing and aesthetic rationales for the arts by looking at their role in social development and cohesion. The study was undertaken with two aims: one is to identify evidence of the social impact of participation in the arts at amateur or community level; the other aim is to identify ways of assessing social impact which are helpful and workable for policy-makers and those working in the arts or social fields. To this end, case study research was undertaken in Batley,

Bolton, Hounslow, London, Nottingham, Sandwell, Portsmouth, Northern Scotland, Derry, Helsinki and New York. The methodology included questionnaires, interviews, formal and informal discussion groups, participant observation, agreed indicators, observer groups and other survey techniques, as well as desk research (Ibid. vi). Matarasso concludes: *“The arts have a serious contribution to addressing contemporary social challenges. Rather than the cherry on the policy cake to which they are so often compared, they should be seen as the yeast without which it fails to rise to expectations. It sees the creativity, openness and elasticity of the arts as the roots of their social impacts”* (Ibid. ix).

Although this study is rather unique in its purpose, it departs from a questionable perspective on arts: *“..the real purpose of the arts, which is not to create wealth but to contribute to a stable, confident and creative society”* (Ibid. v). Many artworks aim at destabilizing and questioning concepts of society using metaphors such as displacement, serendipity and the like. Moreover, it seems that the researchers try to justify community projects, rather than to investigate them. The study is proposed as a positive manifestation of the impact of the arts by offering six activist themes to assess the social impact of participation in the arts. For these reasons I am certain this study is useful and important as a tool for policy makers (such as the Flemish minister of Culture), but I am rather doubtful about the relevance of this study for the understanding of the project of the Swallows.

Although I present these six themes as another ‘voice’, throughout this chapter other voices will counterbalance the uncritical positive image these themes seem to suggest:

- Personal development: participation in the arts can have a significant impact on people’s self-confidence, and as a result on their social lives. Many feel more confident about what they do, many have learnt new skills by being involved.
- Social cohesion: participatory arts projects can contribute to social cohesion in several ways. At a basic level, they bring people together, and provide neutral spaces in which friendship can develop. They also manage to promote intercultural understanding.
- Community empowerment and self-determination: taking part in local arts projects is a popular way of becoming involved in community activities. As a result it helps build organizational skills and capacities.
- Local image and identity: the arts can affirm the pride of marginalized groups, and help improve their local image. Participatory projects can encourage people to become involved in environmental improvements and make them feel better about where they live.
- Imagination and vision: participating in the arts makes a big difference in developing people’s creativity.
- Social policy and the arts: the study concludes that participatory arts projects are essential components of successful social policy, helping to turn houses into homes. They can open critical dialogue between users and providers, and avert costly mistakes. They involve people missed by other initiatives and introduce creativity, meaning and communication into the equation. (Matarasso 1997: Vi-ix)

(Swallow/actor) Do you live in the Anneessens district? No. The socio-artistic nature of projects such as ‘the Swallows’ sometimes implies it having a positive impact on the neighborhood. Can you tell us something about that? It is true that it concerns the Anneessens district. Now, what happens in this neighborhood? Most inhabitants are foreigners. I don’t live in this area but I consider myself part of it because I’m a foreigner and I feel as if I belong there. Did you bear in mind during the rehearsals that this is a problem area and that the project could give it a new impetus? Yes, this has always been on my mind because I know what they mean when they’re talking about Anneessens being a breeding ground for socio-cultural problems because it’s inhabited by people belonging to different layers in society, from different countries, who refuse to integrate completely because perhaps they feel a bit rejected or abandoned. That’s why I had the courage to talk about my history, about my society. To me, it’s a bit like a jigsaw puzzle. I have simply added my part in order to complete the puzzle, namely the problems the Anneessens area faces. And I’m sure that there are other exiles from my country in this district. So I really feel as a part representing the whole in this area.

Yet what is painful about this new line of subvention of the Flemish ministry of Culture is the so-called categorical approach (Pinxten 2003: 69). By creating an independent structure, by offering a specific funding for these socio-artistic projects, these projects are labelled as ‘separate’, pigeonholed in a specific category, independent from others. The positive condition of creating a low barrier for the members of these specific communities, thus enhancing participation in society, is cancelled by the enhanced effect of exclusion by affirming the ‘separate’ category (Pinxten 2003:70). The experimental line of subvention of socio-artistic or socio-cultural projects is therefore grounded in a rather ‘categorical’ discourse on poverty, marginality and exclusion in which cultural practices appear to have separate and emancipating qualities.

The Swallows managed to escape from this segmenting system by growing in many categories and directions at the same time. What is unique about the Swallows is that typical socio-artistic aspects are not the foci of the project. Obviously, whenever a Swallow needs social or legal assistance regarding passport issues, or housing problems (and these occur frequently), Els helps by assigning them to informed social workers. Although these social aims, as formulated by Matarasso in the above-mentioned six themes, may be attained, they are not the ‘root principles or cultural intuitions’ behind the project. On the contrary, in my opinion, abstract notions such as positive energy, collectivity and utopia inspired Els and her Swallows to create a challenging process. Els set the perfect example with her continuous enthusiasm and positive charisma, enabling many to overcome their fears and anxieties towards their future by believing in this collective project. It is this long, enduring, flexible and vigorous process which stands out from other similar projects: not focused on a pre-scripted product or result, this process enables the Swallows to search individually and collectively for shared moments, happenings, performances which lead intuitively to this yet unknown art work, preferably a feature film. By means of negotiating and experimenting the Swallows expand the notion of author to a more cooperative inspiration.

Unique about this process is the importance of an individual approach: before introducing the different Swallows to one another, Els worked intensively with each of them, trying to grasp his/her concerns, interests and life history, so as to put them at ease and provide a context of respect: **(Els Dietvorst):** *I met K. in the center for homeless people, Albator, and he agreed immediately to work with me on the project. I have been making drawings with him for half a year, as he only spoke Persian. It is only now that he is beginning to speak French.*

At a certain point in the process, Els decided to confront the different Swallows with one another, not in a community or an art center, but on the street during a performance, created by them. It was a very direct introduction and created immediately a resourceful energy between them, being faced for the first time with a real audience and with other Swallows, and trying to improvise based on what they had rehearsed with Els, again, on texts by Arthur Rimbaud.



“Boys during the Street performance” by Orla Barry

From that moment on, repetition and rehearsals were organized collectively. During these sessions Els worked individually and collectively as pointed out by Demeyer and Van Pee who included the following observation on Els's method noted during the rehearsal for a process film¹⁴ in their study: "*Els asks if everyone is prepared. She speaks in French to the Swallows: 'Everyone at their place, we are going to rehearse! Robots (looking at five girls dressed in red and two boys dressed in black), Don't smile, be as stiff as possible!' She gives instructions to the two boys acting as Rimbaud on how they should hang the robots onto the ladder. Meanwhile Els directs them by using her hands intensively. She explains she will sign when they have to stop. There is lots of laughter in the space. Els says: 'It is now our last rehearsal before we will film. We will do all the movements: all scenes will be recorded in one take. Do continue acting as your character, as you will be all in the picture all the time. I don't want to hear or see laughter, it will be difficult, I know, but we have to try!' She looks at every one separately and says: 'Be serious!!' to someone who starts laughing. Then she goes to some actors individually, and to the musician. Meanwhile, people start laughing, and singing. Els walks up to Satan and says (in Dutch) 'It's better to move under the ball instead of pushing it away.' 'Everyone ready?' Els repeats. 'Silence, moteur, action!!' After the scene has been filmed, Els goes up to the Rimbauds, and says them that it was okay, gives some constructive remarks and pats them on their shoulder and then on their hands, signs that they are up for it"* (Demeyer and Van Pee, 2003: 182). By working in this manner, the Swallows were able to create a multi-layered project in which on the one hand different categories and media, and on the other different identity dynamics were transcended, thus affirming the concept of diversity rather than a concept based on exclusion or marginality (Pinxten 2003: 72).

(Swallow/actor) *You told us that your political activities brought you to use the camera. In what kind of situation and why? I filmed many political events in my country. The last one I filmed, was the one that turned into a tragedy, a killing. We were going to a demonstration and agreed to wear white T-shirts. We were going to meet on a square. It was a peaceful demonstration. We wanted to denounce certain problems caused by the regime in its attempt to hinder democracy. But people still supporting the regime infiltrated us. They were wearing a red T-shirt underneath the white one. We didn't know anything about this at first. But then, all of a sudden, a military vehicle entered the crowd and started firing. This was only the starting shot. At first, we thought they were shooting blanks in order to*

¹⁴ Els thinks of process films as recorded during performances or happenings, aiming at exposing the preparations, repetitions and methods during the process of the project without any direct reference to the final film. The film referred to in this paragraph was recorded during a performance in an art center, where she was asked to expose pictures. Instead she organized a film scene with a magnificent set made with sculptures by Els, the costumes were impressive and the Swallows were reciting Rimbaud, Dalida and their own texts. This creative mixture contrasts sharply with a classic exhibition, in which little interaction takes place between the exposed 'object' and the viewer. By contrast, the performance of the Swallows refers to filming, to performing and to exposing; consequently, boundaries between these disciplines are blurred, and demonstrate a creative, humane interaction through live action. These recordings were used in a process film that was screened during a public screening some months later.

frighten us and scatter the crowd as they sometimes do. But no, they were really shooting at people, at the crowd. And then, suddenly, all those wearing a red T-shirt took off the white T-shirt. They were hiding guns. They shot whoever was next to them in a white T-shirt and the march was soon transformed into a killing, a massacre. And you were able to film all this? Yes, at least in the beginning. I continued until I couldn't film any longer, because it had become far too dangerous. What did you do with this footage? I gave them to the person in charge of the party. The media broadcast some of the footage. So in your opinion, can the camera be a political tool? Yes, a tool exploited by dictatorial regimes in particular, because through the camera they succeed in fooling us by manipulating images. This allows them to do whatever they want. When they organize marches, very few people attend these marches, but they make the crowds look bigger to convince us that everybody loves what they're doing. The camera is a tool used to put us to sleep. What happens when Els is behind the camera? When Els is behind the camera, the same tool allows me to discover reality and wake up those who've been put to sleep, just like me.

(Crewmember) Can this project, in your opinion, be defined as « socio-artistic »? Els isn't just running a socio-cultural or artistic project, she's setting an example. It's her dynamics, the dynamics of a pioneer. The first time I saw her, in the café, I said to myself "I know what kind of film I'm in". She radiates the most extraordinary energy and kindness. So it's more than that. I'm sure that, unfortunately, once the film's edited, she'll be frustrated. I can sense how she's already becoming more demanding, but she's got a limited budget and great ambitions.



"After the Flood" by Orla Barry

Much was left to try out, to experiment, to defy easy categorization or definition, which was not always effortless: **(Swallow/actor)** *We felt as if we weren't taken seriously, as if we were puppets and had to follow the group, unable to do our own thing, really. At a certain moment we felt like guinea-pigs. We completely lost the feeling of playing in a movie. Guinea-pigs for what kind of experiments? The social aspect, the contact with the others, with the area, while we had come to do a film).*

This method inspired not only the ministry of Culture but was also appreciated by the press to a point where the Swallows became a romanticized idea of community work or even an excuse for all other marginalized areas that were deprived from socio-cultural and political attention: **(Swallow/actor)** *I believe the media strongly romanticize our social performances in that everything is possible. The fact that, even in a destitute neighbourhood, these events are possible? That's romanticizing, it doesn't work that way. Els, who always gives 100%, has been disappointed too, had to get angry too. Although the neighborhood had promised they'd be quiet, they kept on intruding. I think that's romanticizing. But it is possible? The film is being made. I think the result will be good. The final product will be shown. However, what happens in between, is not going to be shown. What do you mean? The thefts, for example, how they broke into David's car, the fact that they shouted at us, that the takes were interrupted by blokes wanting to show off and other such things.*

Collaborative Preparations of the Film: Sharing Codes and Values

The writing of the script is one of the many interesting examples in the process of the method based on negotiation and participation¹⁵ as experienced by the Swallows. Els and Orla Barry, her partner and co-writer, invited the Swallows to write their own piece of the script. What is important to note is that they not only managed to convince the Swallows of their self-identity, that they had something important to share with an audience, but they also handled this in a professional way. According to Pinxten, it is a specific kind of professionalism that differentiates a socio-artistic project from a hobby or occupational therapy (Pinxten 2003: 73). It entails a commitment to learn the specific cultural and socio-political codes or competences of not only the artists involved but also of the other participants. It requires listening to others, learning to try to transform alienation where and when it occurs into an acknowledgment of the value of another type of expressing taste and emotion. It is also important for the artists to tune these different voices and find an appropriate form to present this tune. This sort of professionalism differs significantly from that of artists who claim professionalism by imposing art on other people in an attempt to represent them.

¹⁵ For more elaboration on this method, see Addenda.

(Els Dietvorst) We started the script by asking people what kind of part they wanted to play: a part they're familiar with or a part remote from them, and what they wanted to add to the part. For many actors, the part consisted of something they dreamt of being in real life. In fact it's some sort of escape from society, or something society refuses to consider. Like D. (actor/Swallow), for example. In the film, he chose to be a manager who decides to give everything up and go hitch-hiking. It's a romantic idea of freedom. He chose the end to his part himself. I would have given it another, more dramatic ending. L. (actor/Swallow) also chose how her character ends. It was a bit more extreme, but it was her choice. R. (actor/Swallow) was also completely in charge of his character, wasn't he? I remember Eva (script supervisor) suggesting a costume and R. (Swallow/ actor) saying: "No, no, no." R. (Swallow/ actor) knew very well what he wanted. He knew very well the road his character would follow. Maybe this played an important part throughout the process. Maybe we listened to people who really knew what they wanted. In the end, they got a bigger share than the people who stayed in the background all the time and who were never clear and always unsure of what they wanted. Did it not create problems? Perhaps two people in the group, including L., were disillusioned. But there are always people who are disillusioned about the final touch because we had to cut certain things in the definitive version. Otherwise the film would have been far too long. At the beginning, the script contained 21 characters with equal parts. We invited some people to read the script and no-one was able to follow. They didn't even understand what the end was or the beginning. Did you do that in order to give everyone a part? Yes, but having 21 characters didn't work. In the end, even we lost track of what everybody was doing. We had to drop some scenes in the end. For the sake of logic? Because no-one understood. When you develop 21 characters and give them two minutes each, you don't get any depth. You never get beyond superficially portraying characters without contents. By consequence, is a so-called "democratic way of writing" less productive? I think it's possible to do it, providing you have ten hours of film and a lot more means and a lot more money. Then you could have 21 characters. But this was not the case. We were limited by time: by the length of the film, and by the time spent filming. We had to scale down, for the sake of clarity. But we discussed this with everybody, and after that it was OK. You reconnected the script to the people? I did. We have been honest when dealing with the actors. Not all 21 of them were able to devote themselves to the project full-time. Some were only available on Saturdays. People with less time were given smaller parts.

(Crewmember) Once you feel like leaving reality behind, like going beyond reality, there's no way you can deliver amateur work, because you have to give, on all levels, the craziest portrayal possible of what we see of that reality. And as soon as we start talking about a mad portrayal of reality, everything trivial has to be left behind and we have to touch higher ground. Perhaps Els hasn't reached that higher ground yet, I don't know. But I think that, on that level, the project in itself is very interesting.

(Swallow/actor) Was it an interesting experience, the fact that you contributed so much? Yes, because the end result depends heavily on your own input. People who really wanted to achieve something, really stand out from the rest.

Although a selection had to be made, during long sessions of discussions and feedback, the Swallows debated on the different contributions. In this phase of the process, the collective managed to create a collaborative script, although it is clear that Els and her co-writer Orla Barry defined the overall type of the film, as they were convinced that it would be pointless to create an experimental film not viewable by some Swallows. They therefore used the idea of ‘a real film, based on real lives’, to communicate about the project, a concept based on a general idea of film but excluding commercial block busters. Yet this concept was still very open, again, so as to invite contributions made by the Swallows and to enhance reactions on unattended situations and improvisations as a way of opening up for the real.

(Els Dietvorst) You said “The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger” had to be a real film. What do you mean by that? When they say that a real film is a feature film, like in a cinema theatre, then it should be a feature film, with a story line, characters, something about life, love and death. That was their idea of a real film. So that was their idea, what’s yours? My idea was quite similar. As an artist, you can go many ways. I understand their idea of a real film. An experimental film can be really interesting, I can see the beauty of it. But I think that everybody has to admit that when you’re watching a film and you start crying, that’s a real film. The feelings might be cliché, but we recognize them as part of our own lives. And that’s what you were aiming for? It’s based on their lives and there are story lines in every life. If I were to make an experimental film based on their lives, I’d find myself a bit abusive. But that’s not what it’s about. It’s about trying to make a film together with this collective, which showed a part of their lives and emotions. I was trying to be the director and steer things in the right direction. But at the end of the day it’s not my film. I directed and coached, I introduced visual ideas. But if someone had told me four years ago: “This is the film you’re going to make, this is your film”, I would have told them: “Not entirely...although everything about it interests me, it’s based round a collective”. It’s not purely my film.

Els and Orla openly communicated about the direction they chose for the film inviting the Swallows to bring in their opinions. They nonetheless made it very clear that some decisions needed to be taken by them, in spite of the collectivity, for reasons of efficiency and management, but also for artistic reasons. The challenge of this type of project is to experiment what the fragile limit might be in the relation between a collective and a ‘chief’, in Els’s words, to invest in the collective not necessarily by finding a consensus. It is a search for the limits of negotiation, the sharing of codes and to invest these in a choice, a decision. **(Crewmember)** I really hope it is some sort of social project. But in the talks with the actors, it became clear they had objections. Or Els had failed to involve them in certain issues. They gave a part of the history of their life, something that happened to them personally, something rather fragile. They simply gave it for her film. I thought this was a delicate issue throughout the film. How far can you go in using other people’s story to tell your own? How far can you go in tearing yourself away from their story? Because, in fact, you are creating an alibi to use these people for your film. I think the result will tell.

The script presented a collage of different slices of lives touching upon local, national and transnational issues in which locality, nationality and transnationality were differently defined as subjected to the background of the Swallows in this diaspora community. As Ginsburg claims: “*Transnational subjectification*’ occurs, with the help of small media, in a different way for a diasporic group living within a nation but with links to distant homelands’ (Ginsberg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin, 2002:15). Moreover, the script combined familiar and local aspects with translocal and unknown subjects, thus defying easy categorizations. As such, the script does not pretend to reveal the ‘category’ of the immigrants of the Anneessens area, nor does it represent them, or put up a mirror trying to mimic this community. On the contrary, the script presents a flexible and playful collage of the (utopian) lives of the Swallows, in which fact and fiction are blurring and in which concepts such as authenticity, reality or realness are ignored, yielding a rich example of the concept of identity dynamics as proposed by Pinxten and Verstraete (Pinxten & Verstraete, 1998). This collage brings a vital community in images, and is able to elude stereotyping and even taxidermist representations. Without narrowing people to limited characteristics of their identity dynamics, - such as “Moroccan descent”, “marginalized Fourth World”, “without passports”, etc -, Els and Orla offer the Swallows an invitation to communicate on whatever topic they choose, in contrast with many other socio-artistic, or community projects in which members of a marginalized community seem to be invited to participate on condition to only represent themselves, in this case a member of a marginalized community. These types of projects only lead to stigmatizing a community (Pinxten 2003: 75-76).

At this point, it is interesting to compare the project of the Swallows with fieldwork of Faye Ginsburg so as to position the Swallows in an international context. Ginsburg examined Australian Aboriginal media since 1988: the Warlpiri Media Association in the Central Desert Aboriginal community of Yuendumu; CAAMA- the acronym for the Australian Aboriginal Media Association located just outside the town of Alice Springs; and Imparja Television based in Alice springs, but serving all of the Northern territory and large parts of South Australia as well (Ginsburg 1991). Her findings are of particular interest for the analysis of the work of the Swallows, as her definition of indigenous media might serve as an analytical tool to describe how the Swallows used their media: “*Indigenous media is a cultural process and product. It is exemplary of the construction of contemporary identity of Fourth World people in the late 20th century, in which historical and cultural ruptures are addressed, and reflections of “us” and “them” to each other are increasingly juxtaposed. In that sense, indigenous media is a hybrid, and (to extend the metaphor), perhaps more vigorous and able to flower and reproduce in the altered environment that Aborigines live today*” (Ginsburg 1991: 106).

Although the Swallows may come from other worlds but the Fourth, originating from very diverse backgrounds, all of them have, in different ways, faced domination to a degree that they were unable to construct their identity in a ‘vigorous’ way. By means of the Swallows’ performances, and especially in the elaboration of the script, through these hybrid media, they created complex and dynamic identities using elements from their past, from their

present situation and from factual lives. As Ginsburg claims: “*Work being produced by minorities about themselves, I suggest, is also concerned with mediating across boundaries, but rather than space and cultural difference they are directed more to the mediation of ruptures of time and history – to heal disruptions in cultural knowledge, historical memory, and identity between generations due to tragic but familiar litany of assaults...What these works share with current practices of ethnographic filmmakers such as David and Judith MacDougall, Gary Kildea, Dennis O’Rourke, and Jean Rouch is that they are not about recreating a preexistent and untroubled cultural identity “out there.” Rather they are about the processes of identity construction. They are not based on some retrieval of an idealized past, but create and assert a position for the present that attempts to accommodate the inconsistencies and contradictions of contemporary life*” (Ginsburg 1991: 104-5).

A Cinema Summer of Climaxes and Ruptures

Finally, in the Summer of 2003 enough money was found, and moreover, artistically the Swallows were ready for shooting *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger*, after months of collaborative writings, rehearsals and site specific run-throughs. The film was thus the result of a long period of preparations necessary to gain confidence, to establish a group, to be able to create a script, to act collectively and individually. The main shoot was filmed in June 2003. Its cast consisted of 23 amateur actors who were all part of the Swallows. The site was, naturally the Anneessens area. The crew consisted of a hybrid group of people such as professional technicians, social workers and volunteers¹⁶ with consequently a mixed set of interests in the project.

(Crewmember) *In January I decided I wanted work experience on a set. Looking back, I am really glad for all the experience I gained. I wanted to find my place on the set. What do I like? Do I like working on a set? I honestly have to say that in that sense it was a pleasant experience, but, on the other hand, I’d like to go in a different direction. The size of the group and project, for example, are too much for me at the moment.*

The transformation of a script into the actual film shoot is of crucial importance: a script is above all a potent invitation for a yet unknown formal elaboration. Driven by Els’s description of ‘a real film’, the production unit organized the shoot as a classical fiction film set, - but only provided with a very limited budget - within a limited period of time, four weeks in total, with a rather strict definition of functions: a professional cameraman and his assistants, a sound engineer and his assistant, a script supervisor, a make-up artist, several production assistants.

¹⁶ As Dornfeld points out: “*The role of freelance crews in independent and public television production has not been given much scholarly attention but represents an important dimension of how creative labor is utilized in these domains of production. These crews constitute a kind of mobile community in this project based enterprise*” (Dornfeld 2002: 261).

(Crewmember) *You're left with a group of people and you've got to get everybody organized. This way of working soon smells of fiction. Everyone has his or her job. When you make a documentary, it's more interchangeable than with other kinds of film (the sound technician could easily be the cameraman, for example). Here everything had been neatly laid down and people worked within a specific frame. I believe that to be typical of fiction. You can feel it's more rigid, all the activity, the hustle and bustle of a film.*

(Crewmember) *When you're working for commercial cinema, there's always the fear of being behind schedule, the director is stressed and imposes his own vision, hence the script. From there on, we're nothing but rank and file, we don't argue, we do our job. I'm sure that this particular kind of rhythm, of an infernal machine, which moves on without ever looking back, has a direct influence on what's being filmed, as well as the acting and all possible varieties on the subject matter, I mean the possibility of changing a sequence, of changing direction. There's no way you can alter things if they've been planned right from the start. It limits the artist who, perhaps, wants to add something, unexpectedly, after seeing the actors, the set or the costumes. And that's where, I believe, this production makes all the difference, in a positive sense. The outcome may still be the same, but the mood in which we work is different, a lot more pleasant. You feel you can contribute, participate.*

The hierarchy following such an organization contrasted sharply with the dynamic and negotiable production process of the Swallows. The crew brought thus another type of professionalism with them, which created a definitive rupture with the other performances. This rupture brought changes to the project not only because outsiders infiltrated this rather intimate nest of the Swallows, but more importantly because codes and values such as the parameters of cinema (focus, frame, color, light, composition, and depth among others: Volckaert 2004) were in the hands of professionals, rendering impossible the negotiation on codes, and ultimately distancing Els from her Swallows. Moreover, although Els invited the crew on rehearsals and tried to make them sensitive to the overall social background of the project, it remained very difficult for a first-time director to entirely direct them in the Swallows' way, characterized by a more participatory way of creating: **(Els Dietvorst)** *In fact, no-one dared to overstep the mark during the shooting. In the end everyone stuck to the part they'd learnt. They were perfect. But that was also because they were overawed by the crew? Yes, and because of all the repeats. I thought more people would improvise. But in the end they'd all been trained. Caroline's training allowed them to do perfectly what they had to do. But you have to ask questions. You didn't always ask questions. They gave me what was asked of them at that moment. The pressure was terrible. During the rehearsals I never had to ask them to improvise. Things happened because they were meant to be. So I thought I could say to them: "Now you do this, and you do that, etc.". But this was impossible with all these cameras. No matter what I asked them to do, they'd have been lost for words, unable to do anything because of the stress. You know what I mean? Whereas the rehearsals were so easy-going, everything happened intuitively, without any pressure. But that wouldn't have made a film. I've learnt the hard way. Next time I'd like to approach it in a completely different way. I've*

learnt a lot from Rémon (cameraman) and Eva (script supervisor), from every crewmember actually. But I'd like to be more in charge next time. And I'd like the actors to have free play.

This rupture had different sorts of impact on the Swallows, the neighborhood and on the project as such. Whereas Els often felt frustrated, some Swallows felt inspired by the crew and were even discovered as new casting talents. Some people of the neighborhood were proud of the crew while others saw them as intruders.

(Swallow/actor) *It's true that sometimes I would feel intimidated, impressed by the small audience that had gathered around me, especially when my emotions got the upper hand and I started crying. It's like...I compare it to...I'm sorry to make this comparison, but I compare it to having sex...that's to say, you get started, you get into it, you go for it and suddenly you're so excited because you've arrived at the top, at the point of no return, and then you ejaculate, you explode. During this explosion (as I am playing my part), I hardly recognize myself, I really feel like on the day these things happened, when I genuinely shed my tears. Afterwards I'm a little embarrassed, just like after ejaculating, when you feel a little relaxed, but also a little embarrassed towards your partner. So it's very moving? Yes, it's very moving. I'm sure it was therapy for me, precisely helping me to digest what had happened to me. Just by talking about it, I freed myself. To me it seems the message came across. At last I felt relieved from this feeling locked inside me for such a long time. Did this feeling of relief come about after the shooting or after the rehearsals? No, not at all. During the rehearsal I sometimes came close to the feeling, but it was nothing like during the shooting. During the shooting I got into a trance which took me back to the place where things happened, and that is what brought about this relief. It wasn't the same thing at all. So it was the shooting that reminded you of the moment, the fact that you were surrounded and observed by so many people you didn't know? Absolutely! People were listening to me! People who didn't know me! On the day of shooting, I didn't know the volunteers in front of me, the people in the bar. There were about ten, fifteen, perhaps even twenty extras. They were all there and it was the first time I had to perform this scene in front of them. The others, who already knew me, knew what I was going to say, because I had rehearsed it with them. But in front of these people I said to myself "At last, a new audience, I can say to these people what's in my heart and they'll listen to me". And that's what I did, and that's what caused this emotion, this excitement, which I never felt before. They transmitted something to me and in return I gave them what was inside of me. What was their reaction? I became aware of their reaction only after I had finished saying what was in my heart. In fact, there was a short improvisation: someone got up and said: "In my country we have the same problem. The same things are happening in the Congo". Someone else got up and said: "This is not only happening in the Congo, but the same thing is happening in Liberia, Rwanda and the whole of Africa, the same problem occurs everywhere in Africa". The whole thing was transformed into a short political debate. I believe that at a certain moment, we even forgot we were being filmed. I was there, listening.*

(Crewmember) Everybody was shouting “Shut up! Silence!” And these young people said: “Why do we have to be quiet? This is our home.” It’s absurd, they were right. Why did we ask them to shut up? They didn’t understand the purpose of filmmaking. If we were making a documentary, we wouldn’t have shouted “Shut up!” we would have recorded the sound as it was. But because we’d been given lines and because they had to say their lines in such way they’d be understood and could be edited, someone had to shut them up. I think that’s on the edge of documentary making because we weren’t sure of ourselves, because we were making a film, but at the same time, we were in these people’s neighborhood. It’s on the verge of representation, performance and life in a documentary. I think it’s a brilliant example of confronting documentary and fiction.

(Swallow/actor) During the rehearsals you were one of the crowd. Now (during the shooting) you can show a part of yourself.

(Els Dietvorst) Before, if someone promised to be at a rehearsal and they weren’t, it was bad, but it wasn’t a disaster. We work with volunteers, everybody contributes on a voluntary basis. Some people covered quite a distance to get here. Everything is purely based on other people’s passion. There is no financial or material reward. But when the people were absent at the time of shooting, it was a disaster. All of a sudden we had to sometimes use inhumane means to force human beings to be there. Why was it a catastrophe compared to the rehearsal? Because we were unable to continue shooting the film. We had limited time. We were on a deadline. What was the consequence of all this? People had to drop their parts, despite of the fact that certain parts were very important. But certain parts were linked to other people in the collective. They weren’t individual parts. If one person didn’t make it, another part fell through as well. That was the most painful aspect. Did this not have to do with the fact that you were working with a specific crew, which had been booked for a certain period of time? That was one aspect, but the most important one was the financial one. We had the camera for a limited period. We had the means for a short film but made a full-length film. I think that, on the other hand, the drive of working professionally was crucial in achieving what we did. I’m very pleased with that. But I’ve learned a lot about the human aspect involved in making a film, and I’d never do it the same way again. For four years I didn’t force anything. And now I had to force things. Did these issues come to the surface because you were exacting certain things? Because I was exacting certain things, the situation was no longer humane. You end up with a balance of power, which is not human. I found this very painful. By working with a...? A professional schedule. Perhaps also because it was my first film. If I were to shoot a second film, within a particular time limit, with a particular team, I’d go about things differently. I’d prepare everyone much better. I had no idea what was lying ahead of me. It was a jump in whatever for me. I’d prepare the humane aspect much better. Although I’m sure no-one thought of me as being inhumane. But whereas before we had given people their freedom and hadn’t forced anything, now all of a sudden we had to force things. And that bothered me at times. Also because it forced me to take on a role I didn’t want to play.



“During the Shoot”, by Norma Prendergast

. Predatory and Faustian aspects of filmmaking

The earlier elaborated comparison with the indigenous media Ginsburg researched is constructive in another way as well. She suggests that indigenous media present a kind of Faustian contract with the technologies of modernity, enabling some degree of agency to control representation under less-than-ideal conditions (1991):

“Thus, indigenous media and minority people have faced a kind of Faustian dilemma. On the one hand, they are finding new modes for expressing indigenous identity through media and gaining access to film and video to serve their own needs and ends. On the other hand, the spread of communications technology such as home video and satellite downlinks threatens to be a final assault on culture, language, imagery, relationships between generations, and respect for traditional knowledge” (Ginsburg 1991: 96).

The bargaining with Mephistopheles causes the erosion of languages and cultures by the content and hegemonic control of mass media, replacing them with alien social values and an attraction to Western consumer goods. Such concerns, for example, have been the basis for debates in Papua New Guinea over the introduction of commercial television (Ginsburg 1991: 97). In the Swallows’ case, the Faustian dilemma might be interpreted differently: the Swallows’ culture is not based on a common tradition, language or relationship between generations. They have created a community, a tribe, during four years, based on a sharing of codes and values and thus a living in

diversity. Yet the audiovisual media threatens this community in a different way: although the script has been created collectively, since they create a 'real film', they inscribe their process in this dominant and hence constraining mode of production. As Ginsburg points out: "*In some remote Aboriginal communities, television retains its original nickname, "the third invader"; first were Europeans, then alcohol*" (Ginsburg 1991: 106). In the project of the Swallows it is the very form of Western narratives that may undermine the mode of representation. As David MacDougall pointed out: "*The dominant conflict structure of Western fictional narratives, and the didacticism of much of Western documentary, may be at odds with traditional modes of discourse*" (MacDougall 1987: 54).

This form can be evaluated by the organization of the crew, which is more rigid than any the Swallows were used to. This is partly due to the number of people on the set and how to organize them efficiently but also due to a type of filmmaking that has become common in Western cinema. As pointed out in the previous chapter Raoul Ruiz uses the concept of a 'Central Conflict Theory' to relate to this Western cinema. According to Ruiz, this theory has turned into a predatory theory, a system of ideas that devours and enslaves any other idea that might restrain its activity: "*The voracious appetite displayed by this predatory concept reaches far beyond theory. It has become a normative system. The products which comply with this norm have not only invaded the world but have also imposed their rules on most of the centers of audiovisual production across the planet attempting to master the same logic of representation and practicing the same narrative logic. And yet there is no strict equivalence between stories of conflict and everyday life*" (Ruiz 1995: 15).

I do not, however, want to imply that *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger* fell 'victim' to this theory; on the contrary, this ethnography of their production process demonstrates a different mechanism and method, especially regarding the processing of the script and the collective aims of the project. Yet it is important to note that this theory does have an impact in a more undefined way. Whenever Els or the Swallows felt uncertain over a specific choice or decision, due to a lack of experience or under too much pressure, it seemed necessary to rely upon the experience of the professional crewmembers, instead of finding resources in their own flexible and dynamic methods that preceded the shoot. Instead of questioning how the relation between Els and her Swallows could be imagined, questions such as costume continuity and clarity prevailed because of this type of professional dependence on the script and on the type of organization of the set. Ruiz continues: "*What I call 'narrative clarity' is the territory in which today's rhetorical persuasion elaborates its fictional stories. Its ground rules have developed since the nineteenth century. They are all founded on a supremacy of the plausible over a dusty, incoherent reality that is almost impossible to believe*" (Ruiz 1995: 28-29).

(Crewmember) *It's probably a personal thing, but I would have taken a more "popular" approach. I would have spent more time amongst the people, using a more perceptible camera. Perhaps some more "action painting".*

(Els Dietvorst) *Can a utopian result be achieved through sheer anarchy? I don't think so. Can you turn a cocaine trip into a film? I don't think so. Perhaps it's the kind of experience that's impossible to translate visually. Some experiences are very physical. We went through a lot of emotions during the rehearsals, some sort of socio-artistic experiment, but I didn't want to leave it at that. I wanted to reach a point where the outcome's artistic, I wanted to turn it into a film. That was my challenge. The project is about sharing: so it had to be a final product, which should be viewable by the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and friends of the Swallows. It should be something they are proud of.*



“A moment of rest during the shoot”, by Norma Prendergast

Performative Wandering

As part of the performative productions of the interactions I had with Els and her Swallows, in which I invite the reader to take part rather than to observe or interpret it, I have chosen to draw a comparison between the production process of *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger* with the connotations of the potlach. Again, with this comparison it is not my intention to classify but rather to create an atmosphere that might call the reader to project or map an image of this process on the performance that has taken place.

“Potlach, n. = A ceremonial feast among certain Native American peoples of the Northwest Pacific Coast, as in celebration of a marriage or an accession, at which the host distributes gifts according to each guest’s rank or status. Between rival groups the potlatch could involve extravagant or competitive giving and destruction by the host of valued items as a display of superior wealth.” (www.potlach.org)

In the nineteenth century, the potlach was interpreted as a ritual exchange of gifts that in some cases led to the destruction of the possessions of rival communities’ leaders. Colonial officials considered it to be a primitive habit responsible for the poverty and moral degeneration of the Indians, and forbid it. From then on, the potlach was organized underground, so that it remained an aspect of the native culture. Juridically seen, it became a punishable offence in 1884 and remained so until 1918. Then it became a crime that no longer had to pass before a jury. Not because it was less condemned, but because prosecuting became easier. Even today, the ritual bathes in an atmosphere of controversy, mysticism and political (in)correctness.

Amongst anthropologists, the potlach has lent itself as an excellent fodder for Western myth-formation. Franz Boas, noted anthropologist and proponent of tolerance, contributed paradoxically to the systematic colonial misinterpretation of this ritual (Doughty 1998). Boas namely interpreted the potlach mainly in economic terms. According to him, it was a ritualized method that served as a redistribution of incomes, and concurrently as a system for investment, since whoever received gifts was expected to pay back with interest. *“The contracting of debts, on the one hand, and the paying of debts, on the other, is the potlach”*, Boas concluded (Boas, 1898; repr. Stocking, 1974: 105-6). Ruth Benedict reworked this interpretation and gave it a psychological twist. As she wrote in her 1934 classic, *“Patterns of Culture”* *“the object of all Kwakiutl enterprise was to show oneself superior to one’s rivals”* (Doughty 1998). The fixation on power, social status and property led her to point to group psychoses.

Christoph Bracken collected texts on the subject such as government documents, diaries, missionary reports and anthropological studies (Bracken 1997). He argues that the so-called pathological potlach ritual was mainly an invention of the nineteenth century Canadian law system that sought to destroy it. *“At the root of all conflict and, for that matter, all attempts at cooperation between native and non-native peoples have been a systematic*

“rhetorical structure of misinterpretation” (Doughty 1998). Strengthened by anthropological analyses, the ritual expanded into a Western myth of a certain magnitude. As Howard Doughty claims: *“(It was) European blindness to the mirror image of their own commodity fetishism that made pathology of the potlach.”*

In short, connotations such as reciprocity, western mythology, controversy, colonialist interpretations, and romanticism seem to surround the discourse on the potlach. Using the potlach as a literary metaphor implies these notions, and is thus a resourceful tool in assessing the production process of *The March, The Burden, The Desert, The Boredom, The Anger*. This production process evokes hence concepts drawn from western myth building central to the discourse on potlach, such as Romanticism, Freedom and Individuality, but also more descriptive notions as recurrence and participation on the methodological part. Like potlachers in an urban environment, Els Dietvorst and her Swallows recreated their encounters on video, through a long and dynamic process in which the Swallows contributed through a sharing of their experiences and talents, confidence and their thoughts on her images and Els participated with her camera, her enthusiasm and her interest in Freedom, Romanticism and Individuality which she has found in them. Postmodern irony is not suited to her and thus she believes in the potlach, and rediscovers humanity once again in its mythology.



“Brussels, during the Shoot”, by Norma Prendergast

Epilogue I

The aim of Els Dietvorst and the Swallows was to create a collective project based on the experience of a marginalized community in Brussels characterized by its diversity. It is relevant to contextualize this project in the recent Belgian wave of socio-artistic practices, promoted by the new line of subvention by the Flemish Minister of Culture, for its potentiality of promoting cultural participation and cultural competence, enhancing emancipation by marginalized communities, or persons. Principles such as accessibility, a context of encouragement and respect, a profound exchange of experience between participants, the concept of participation and providing spaces to motivate encounters are developed in these projects to enhance cultural emancipation.

In contrast with other socio-artistic projects, where social themes determine the process, abstract notions such as collectivity, utopia and positive energy qualified as 'root principles or cultural intuitions' guided the Swallows through their different performances. Moreover, the Swallows attach great value to the enduring, vital and flexible process, without obligations of working for a certain purpose, product or final result. This enables them to create performances based on negotiating between the Swallows, through a sharing of values and codes and through a specific method developed by Els by which she first worked individually and only afterwards collectively. This method is explored through the elaboration of the script, in which the Swallows have cooperatively extended the notion of author to a more diverse and wide-ranging definition. Thus a specific type of professionalism was developed: it entails a commitment to learn the specific cultural and socio-political codes or competences of not only the artists involved but also of the other participants. This method resulted in a script defined as a transnational collage of (utopian) narratives of the Swallows, in which the disruption of their time and history is mediated so as to present the processes of identity construction, rather than those of retrieving some idealized past. This script thus creates and asserts a position for the present that attempts to accommodate the inconsistencies and contradictions of contemporary life. The script is neither a representation of the immigrants of the Anneesens area, nor a categorical approach to reflect on pigeonholed communities: it is exemplary in its imagining of a vital community while avoiding the pitfalls of stereotyping and even of taxidermist representations.

Yet instead of executing the script in a participatory way of filmmaking, the parameters of film were in the hands of professionals distancing the relation between Els and her Swallows, breaking up the collective and therefore diverse ambitions. The organization of the film set, characterized by a typical fiction film hierarchy, elaborating on a fixed script and hence, the running of 'the machine', without negotiating codes or values, actually pushes the collective ambitions of this project to the edge.

This ethnography of production consequently reveals that the blurring of the boundaries between fact and fiction, induced by a vigorous production of identity dynamics in the script, found a more rigid counterpart in the actual film production. This brings in mind the Faustian and predatory aspects of filmmaking caused by a hierarchical structure in which codes, parameters and values remain non-negotiable, and by working under less-than-ideal conditions, such as a limited budget and little experience.



“Birdi”, the logo of the Swallows, by Els Dietvorst

Auto-reflective Reconstruction of *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*

In this chapter ethnographic data on the production process of the documentary *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* directed by myself and co-directed by Didier Volckaert, are presented.

The “Inappropriate Other/Same”

“The moment the insider steps out from the inside, she is no longer a mere insider (and vice versa). She necessarily looks in from the outside while also looking out from the inside. Like the outsider, she steps back and records what never occurred to her the insider as being worth or in need of recording. But unlike the outsider, she also resorts to non-explicative, non-totalizing strategies that suspend meaning and resist closure. .. She refuses to reduce herself to an Other, or her reflections to a mere outsider’s objective reasoning or an insider’s subjective feeling. .. She knows she is different while at the same time being Him. Not quite the same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undermined threshold place from which she constantly drifts in and out. Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider. She is the Inappropriate Other/Same who moves about with always at least two/four gestures: that of affirming “I am like you” while persisting in her difference; and that of reminding “I am different” while unsettling every definition of otherness arrived at” (Trinh 1991: 74).

The choice to include an analysis of the production process of a documentary made by my partner and myself might seem an easy solution born out of a narcissistic bent. Quite contrarily, reflecting on *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* was extremely difficult for me precisely because I am so enmeshed in the project, its ambitions, and perspectives. Yet by incorporating this analysis I hope to contribute to the research in (documentary) film production in different ways. Firstly and most obviously, this examination might provide information, reflections and perceptions that can be difficult to obtain when analyzing processes in film directed by third parties; consequently contrasts with the two cases examined in this chapter on fieldwork. In this manner, my aim is to provide the analysis with the required identifiable ground to be able to compare the three cases. As Pinxten argues: *“Comparison will depend on deep ethnographic work in each culture concerned, describing that culture in terms of its ‘root principles’. It follows that any individual researcher will be able to compare only two or three cultures: his / her own and the culture(s) s/he worked with in a very intense way, systematically allowing critique and control on the ethnography by the autochthones” (Pinxten 1997: 96).* Secondly, as the reader has observed, I consider the DVD of *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* as an integral part of this book. The written presentation of the analysis of the production process contrasts with the film in such a way as to present two different symbolic systems, which consequently represent two different narratives, - to paraphrase MacDougall: *“Images and written texts not only tell us things differently, they tell us different things” (MacDougall 1998: 257).* Yet ‘these different things’ depart from the same material, which seems to me are the experiences of the mediated interactions.

By adding the film to this book, I want to stress the distinctions between these symbolic systems, and hence the research on the process of production as a complementary tool in the investigations of audiovisual representation. Finally, by including my personal experiences of documentary production I seek to shed light on the development of the first chapter of this book. In general, as pointed out in the Introduction, the aspiration of this book is to present it as a (self-) reflective or (self-) reflexive endeavor. As Alvesson and Sköldbberg argue, reflexivity should draw attention to the complex relationships between processes of knowledge production, and the various contexts of such processes as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 2001: 5). These authors point out: *“Reflection means thinking about the conditions for what one is doing, investigating the way in which the theoretical, cultural and political context of individual and intellectual involvement affects interaction with whatever is being researched, often in ways difficult to become conscious of”* (Ibid. 245).



“Didier and An”, by Elke Borghs

In reconstructing *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* I hope to provide the reader with a context to situate ‘*the involvement of the knowledge producer*’. In my opinion, this book would read differently if I did not contextualize myself as a filmmaker with a particular perspective on (documentary) film production. In resonance with the metaphor of the Inappropriate Other/Same as drawn by Trinh, Alvesson and Sköldbberg point the way to a more open-minded, creative interaction between theoretical frameworks and empirical research. In this exercise I try to profile or reconstruct myself as an intertwined or blurred combination of an insider and an outsider, and hope thus to establish a position as Inappropriate Other/Same. The insider position is partly arrived at through my responsibilities and involvement in this film production. Given the fact that this film is co-directed, I have therefore also included perceptions and comments written by Didier Volckaert after I wrote a first draft of this chapter. The insider is therefore a dual position, combining intentions, experiences and desires of two people. This production process of is recounted through a personal reconstruction where my voice and Didier’s are further assembled with those of crewmembers, and the people with whom we worked, with the express aim of challenging the strict opposition between insider and outsider. This position can only be but much more personal than the multi-vocal discourse established in the previous chapter.

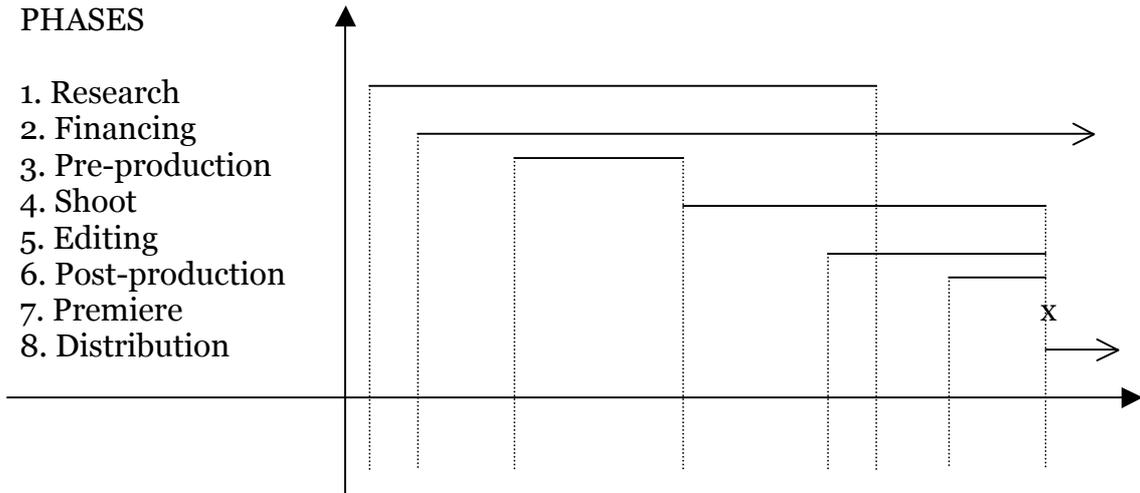
This reconstruction is written in a language, that is not our own. This linguistic distance might help to create the position of the outsider, as the figure of the insider constantly intertwines and mixes with the one of the researcher examining the data retrieved during the process. The most difficult part to establish this latter position is to create a critical distance towards material we created ourselves. To achieve this distance, I use the analytical frame on production processes as developed in the first chapter, where I propose to define the production process or the context of production as the mediated and variable relationship between author and other (subject) in which the viewer is prefigured¹. I structured these relationships in a chronological discourse recounted through eight more or less defined phases of the production process. These phases are: research, financing, pre-production, shoot, editing, post-production, premiere and distribution. Each phase determines a specific moment and function during the production of the film, yet during this phase other phases continue to evolve as well. It is important to stress the interconnection of these phases and the way they influence one another. Yet the division in phases helps to clarify particular actions and interactions based on a specific set of functional decisions during a precise moment in the process.

The eight phases are presented in the following time scheme in which the position in time of each phase is marked and the interrelation between the phases can be grasped:

¹ The distance between ourselves and our the film is furthermore obtained by using as a resource a thesis written by Elke Borghs who was our local contact in Guatemala. She conducted interviews with the crewmembers, and used her experience as an assistant for her observations on the production of the film.

PHASES

1. Research
2. Financing
3. Pre-production
4. Shoot
5. Editing
6. Post-production
7. Premiere
8. Distribution



TIME LINE

My aim is to clarify what each phase entails in reference to the theoretical frame of the production process. This frame helps to examine the information gathered during these phases by focusing on the following questions: Who is the 'author', the 'other' and the 'viewer'? And how can the interactions between these agents be described in each particular phase? This frame consequently strives to answer such questions as: How is power negotiated between author and subject in visual representation through parameters? How is the viewer prefigured? As outlined previously the specific type of interactions between the 'author', 'other' and 'viewer' varies in the course of the different moments or phases of the production process. These interactions are variable and fluid, even sometimes inexistent.

The analysis of the production process of *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* aims at exemplifying what this variability specifically entails in each of the phases. For each phase I have chosen some relevant situations, as an exhaustive recounting would not be efficient for the purpose of this research, and these choices, again, accentuate the personalized narrating of the process. In the analysis of the production process of *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* I hence investigate how these mediated interactions take effect in the field. This will not only offer insight in the construction of statements being made in the end result, thus allowing a critical position for the viewer: the presentation of this analysis will also clarify what an ethnography of the production process signifies as defined in this way. It hence strives to provide a suggestion of a certain methodology, or tool, of which the aspiration is that other researchers might use it as well.



“Didier and tripod”, by An van. Dienderen

Over The Hill

Somewhere in the Spring of 2000 Tobias De Pessemier, a friend of Didier and myself, visited us to talk about his latest experiences while he worked for a local theater group in Ghent, the city where we live. He was asked by this group to look for urban legends. Yet when he was able to present an interesting series of legends, the group cancelled the project. Our friend therefore turned to us, as he thought we might be interested in a specific story he heard when he was talking with some old people in the *Muide*², which is labeled as a rather marginalized and isolated area populated partly by immigrants, situated close to the harbor and known as the ‘appendix’ of Ghent, given the fact that it is only accessible by one bridge (sic). This story starts in a small street officially called ‘*het sasseblindeke*’ – which can be roughly translated as a blind alley near a sluice - but better known as ‘*het verapa*’. The houses in this alley were demolished in 1934 –’35 and replaced by garages. What does remain is a song, popular at the end of the 19th century set to the tune of Gaetano Donizetti's opera Lucia di Lammermoor: “*D'immenso giubilo s' innalzi un grido*” and still sung by some seniors of the *Muide*:

*Wie goat er mee noar Verapas?
Doar moete wij niet wirke
Eten en drenke op eu gemak,
Sloape gelijk een virke*

² A dialect word that can be translated as ‘estuary’.

*(Who's coming to Verapas with us?
No need to work there
Just drink and eat when you want to
And sleep like a pig.)*

According to the research³ by De Pessemier the word 'verapa' referred to several different meanings, yet none of these has been officially recognized. According to Philemon Eeckhoudt, a connoisseur of the *Muide*, this little alley was named after a Mexican province. He thought that Zouaves had spent some nights in the *Muide* before sailing to a far country (Mexico?), and they had drunken so much that a bar is named after them. Another person recalled 'verapa' as the name of a boat that was docked in the harbor of Ghent. According to the story, sailors set out to shanghai youngsters by talking about a promised land, somewhere in America, where one didn't have to work. Lastly, Richard Vankenhove and Adh mar Lepage (1932) explain 'verapa' by referring to the French sentence "*Tu ne verras pas*", so 'verapa' in this song actually recalls an imaginary country; one that no-one ever gets to see, always out of reach, located somewhere beneath the horizon. Along with the authors, this meaning is explained by the belief, held by many people, that Leopold I, the first king of Belgium, had bought an island in the Pacific, as a place of exile to deport the poor to. The people of the *Muide* thought the boats were designed in such a way that when they reached the middle of the ocean it would sink, killing the poor rejects of Belgian society.

Apparently, the song and its mystical content triggered the imagination of many, creating different urban legends and interpretations. Yet what seems to be at the heart of its significance is the reference to a completely unfamiliar piece of Belgium's history: the former Belgian colony in Guatemala, Santo-Tomas de Castilla. This history is not taught in school, it appears in no official history books and hardly any Belgian knows about it. De Pessemier found one book about this colony written by Stefan van den Bossche, who linked this historic event to the evolution in Dutch prose (van den Bossche 1995). The author argues that when Leopold I bought a piece of Guatemala in 1843, his aim was not to exploit valuable resources as was done in the Congo, but to reduce crime level in Belgium. To achieve this goal, he thought it was necessary to deport the unemployed, the losers and adventurers – rejects of nineteenth century society - one and all. Propaganda was vital: the *Compagnie Belge de Colonisation*, in charge of the organization of the colony, handed out exotic engravings, fake letters supposedly written by Belgian migrants, praising Santo-Tomas as a land of plenty and presenting Guatemala as a promised land. van den Bossche traces these narratives in prose, poetry, travel journeys, letters and stories written in the second half of the 19th century.

³ The research of Tobias De Pessemier is not published. It is written in personal documents that were handed to me. This chapter is written in reference to his research. He based his research on oral interviews in the *Muide* and on literature in the following books: Brysse, A. 1993; Lekens, L. & J. Lagrou, 1996; Neylants, E. 1953 ; Rieux, H. 1971; Stalpaert, H. 1954; Van Wesemael, M. 1972; van den Bossche, S. 1997. The last book is the only one that goes into the historical account of the colonial experience in Santo-Tomas.

So here we were, in the spring of 2000, charmed by this song on ‘verapa’, overwhelmed by its romantic desire for an imaginary El Dorado, surprised about this unknown colonial history of our country and its connection to our city, and dazzled by the mixture of urban legends in trying to understand the significance of these intriguing narratives. For us, this story immediately triggered concepts such as paradise lost, exile, diaspora narratives, cultural identity and other anthropological concepts relating to migration and colonialism, through a local story that has its repercussion in translocal history and has the potentiality of challenging the history and the conceptualization of Belgian colonies. The concepts of migration and El Dorado are also valuable to us personally as Didier and I often thought about migrating to another country. In addition to this, we were particularly interested by the propaganda used to attract people to sail to this unknown place. It showed once more the interesting parallel with contemporary uses of the image, when persuading consumers of the value of commodities, places and countries.

These elements appeared to us as very relevant and inspiring aspects for making a documentary. Not only because of the position and significance of the image in this colonial history, demanding for a documentary made in a visually challenging way, but also given the content of the narratives as they evoke a perspective on migration in a reversed way: not people from another country coming to Belgium, but Belgians themselves who were urged to migrate. This is a reversal of a generalized Belgian expression, which says that “Belgians are born with a brick in their stomach”, referring to the difficulty with which Belgians are believed to leave their house and homeland to move to other countries. This feeling is demonstrated quite strongly by the following expression on the colony in Santo-Tomas by Leopold II, who became the most despised Belgian king, precisely because of the bloodthirsty vigor with which he colonized and exploited Congo: “*St Thomas fondé sur l’émigration ne pouvait pas réussir. Le Belge n’émigre pas.*” Moreover, this reversed perspective on migration seemed very topical indeed, given the growing racism and nationalism in Flanders, stimulated by the slogans of the extreme right nationalist party ‘Vlaams Blok’ (Flemish Block). Considering the very personal and at the same time interpersonal aspirations these ‘verapa’ narratives offered, we decided to try to continue the research De Pessemier started, and so find the funding necessary to create this film we envisioned so far.



Film still, *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*

Delving into The Real, Searching for El Dorado

Before I elaborate on the specific lines we followed during the research of the 'verapa' narratives, it is important to contextualize this investigation as each context differentiates the socio-economic, personal, formal or geographic perspectives obtained and hence their relevance. In this case, the context is determined by the decision to create a documentary, not an academic book, a CD-Rom, an article for an urban legend journal or a diary, to name a few options. Participants, data or facts needed to be relevant for a documentary. This formal decision profoundly influences the specific narratives, objects and appearances one explores, and hence the particular content and methodology of the research. This research is therefore not a historical one, or one specialized in urban legends in Ghent; its main interest is to find people, narratives and objects, which fit a specific desire linked to particular formal aspirations. To understand the implications of this, it is relevant to try to explain this desire and to contextualize us as filmmakers, as 'author': what we aim at, how we conceive of documentary film production and more particularly, how we relate 'film wise' to this project. To specify (the context of) the research further, I will describe how we envisioned the interactions between 'author', 'other' and 'viewer'.

“A documentary aware of its own artifice is one that remains sensitive to the flow between fact and fiction” (Trinh 1990: 89).

Comment dire ‘je’ au cinema? This phrase brought to us by filmmaker Eric Pauwels, in admiration of his teacher Jean Rouch, is central to our appreciation of documentary film production and thus of the context of our research. A documentary conceived in this way can be understood as somewhat of a self-portrait in that it reflects the desires, interests and associations of the ‘author’. Not objective, encyclopedic or totalitarian, the aim is to reflect in a personal and intuitive way on how to use cinema to relate to the ‘other’. Hence, we want our films to tap into our personal understanding and aspirations of a documentary. In this sense, the first ‘viewer’ equals the ‘author’, as the film needs to tempt, to interest, to attract and to intrigue us as filmmakers. Or to put it differently, one of the main characteristics of the context of the research is -to put it in affectionate Flemish ‘*goesting*’. This word might refer to ‘gusto’, or ‘guts’, it signifies something like desire for, being passionate about, yet in a rather straightforward, unsophisticated manner. ‘*Goesting*’ is most often linked to food, drink, sex, and mood, to all basic cravings actually. When Didier and I discussed about the project this word often cropped up; it is important for us to have ‘*goesting*’ in the undertaking, to feel passionate about it, to crave for it to come true. This ‘feeling’ determines the entire project, its research and hence its approach.



Film still *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*

In this particular and personal research, an intertwining of artistic concepts and academic insights is central to my personal struggles, doubts and desires in making documentaries; film as an art practice versus/combined with film in an anthropological context. My background is therefore profoundly influenced by the inventive work of inspiring filmmakers such as Jean Rouch, Jonas Mekas, Eric Pauwels, Bill Viola, Haron Farocki, Trinh Minh-ha, and others who challenge anthropological methods and concepts. I share with these authors a context of respect and openness in filmmaking that can lead to methods such as participation, interaction, and feedback. Hence a documentary for me involves a process in which a trajectory is followed in a relatively personal and independent way; one in which the research, the interactions with the people we work with, and our personal interests and involvement determine the final result. This means a documentary film practice, which does not depart from a fixed, marketable, vendible and consumable script, based on a television or festival format or slot. As such, we envision documentary production as a process that is driven by intuitive and personal choices – ‘*goesting*’ - not as a product yet conscious of the importance of the competences of communicating towards the ‘viewer’.

The fact that it was precisely through etchings, through visual manipulation, that Belgians were persuaded to emigrate to Santo-Tomas triggered our interest to develop the film in a visually provocative way. This interest is profoundly influenced by our background in an experimental film culture, where film is envisioned not as a story-telling device, but as an art form that challenges visual and optical sensations by treating film in a materialistic, structuralistic or chemical way. This type of filmmaking is hands-on, meaning that it entails a creative and artisanal mode of production, and is stimulated by a resourceful interest in filmmaking exploring different types of media and genres. The propaganda campaign and its use of etchings invited us also to consider how to envision the *mise-en-scène* of the film, how to construct these stories through the audiovisual configuration and how to relate this construction to the viewer. This self-reflective, meta-narrative aspect in documentary production seems necessary to us to avoid precisely the creation of a propaganda film.



Film still *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*

1. RESEARCH

Four people conducted the research, as Tobias De Pessemier and his partner Veerle Devos engaged themselves by a contract confirming their participation in the project. This meant that they would be paid if the film would return money. It was agreed from the start that I would be the director and producer, and Didier the cameraman, editor and co-director when necessary. In order to elaborate a consistent project decisions concerning the research ultimately needed to be taken by me. One of these decisions was that I found it crucial to be able to continue researching until the film would be edited and screened. As elaborated in the previous paragraph, I consider a documentary production as processual, hence the importance of openings and invitations 'to the real', so to speak, until the editing finalizes the research period.

We started our research at Stefan van den Bossche's house, inquiring into some of the main topics of interest such as the still living descendants of Belgian colonists in Guatemala, the etchings, his research method etc. He generously gave all his copied documents to us, which shortened the period of preparation to reconstruct the historical account of the colony consistently. Very quickly, we found out that little serious research had been done concerning the historical reconstruction of the colonization of Guatemala. Apart from the work of van den Bossche (1997), Lafontaine (1997) and Everaert (1981), recently no-one appeared to be interested in these intriguing and mysterious events; no new research, no articles, no books, nothing is published in the period from 1938 till 1981, the date of Everaert's article⁴.

⁴ Un unpublished master thesis has been written by Rita Daveloose in 1978: *Belgisch kolonisatieproject van Santo-Tomas de Guatemala*. University Ghent. Promotor:

In this article, the author refers to the main documents at hand until 1981 when he wrote it:

“Notwithstanding the voluminous documentation on Santo-Tomas, no overall study has been made till this day. The best survey, even of some vulgarizing value, comes from Ch. Maroy, La colonie belge de Santo-Thomas de Guatemala, Bulletin ... de l’Ecole sup. De commerce Saint-Ignace (Anvers), III/1926, pp. 159-209. The publication by N. Leysbeth, Historiques de la Colonisation belge de Santo-Tomas, Guatemala, Bruxelles, 1938, in fact is a quite useful collection of documents, even though it is presented in a non-scientific way. The colonizing company herself has conducted a large publicity-campaign. Its leaflets and pamphlets, which have been reprinted several times, have been assembled in a “Collection de documents” (2 vol.) In order to write the exposition we also made use of the following sources:

Printed reports:

-M. Cloquet (Consul à Guatemala, Commissaire du Roi près de la Communauté de l’Union), Rapport sur la situation de la colonie de Santo-Thomas and 1843, Bruxelles 1844.

-Ed. Blondeel Van Ceulenbrouk (Chargé d’affaires, Commissaire extraordinaire du gouvernement belge), Enquête faite au Guatemala au sujet de la colonisation belge, Documents parlementaires, Séance de la Chambre des Représentants, n° 268/10 juin 1846.

-*Idem*, Rapport adressé au Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, *Ibidem*, n° 124/16 fev. 1848.

Written documents (AEB 2027 – 16 voluminous files)

-Rapport intéressant de la position présente et future de la colonie belge de Santo-Thomas (A. Tassier-Majeurs, colon de 1ere classe, Bruxelles 4 avril 1844).

-Notes & observations sur l’Amérique centrale, particulièrement sur la colonie de Santo-Thomas (rapport anonyme, Bruxelles 5 avril 1845).

-Aperçu sur l’entreprise de la Colonisation belge à Santo-Thomas (A. tKint de Roodenbeek, Bruxelles 16 sept. 1847)

-Rapport de M. Cloquet (Consul de Belgique) à d’Hoffschmidt (minister des Affaires Etrangères), Santo-Tomas, 30 juillet 1848 (reproduced by N. Leysbeth, *op.cit.*, pp. 228-35.

-Rapport de J.P. Aguet (délégué spécial de la “Compagnie”) au président de la Communauté de l’Union, Santo-Thomas, 1 août 1848 (copy)

-Journal d’un ex-colon de Santo-Thomas de Guatemala (A. Boignets, about 1850)

-Rapport sur les communications en 1850. Colonie de Santo-Thomas de Guatemala (annexe au rapport consulaire, 14 janv. 1851)” (Everaert 1981).

Oddly, although between 1938 and 1981 (1978) there seems to be a lull in the research or better, the accounts on the colonization in Santo-Tomas, the publications on the song ’verapa’ continued to appear, tough without referring

Professor John Everaert. This thesis disappeared out of the library of the Ghent University.

to the colonization. This observation raises questions not only concerning the colony and the reasons why it seems to be neglected by the academic body of scholars, but also concerning the relation between the 'verapa' song (and related urban legends), and the colony in Santo-Tomas. It appeared to us that, since so little was publicly known about the colony, the memory of the descendants and people familiar with the topic may have had to go 'underground' and had found its way into urban legends, in which the 'data' appeared mythicized. At this point, we understood that we had to go over all the documents to carry out basic historical research in order to try to assess to a certain extent what had happened in Santo-Tomas, and how this had affected the rise of urban legends on 'verapa'.

This observation implied on the one hand much more research than we anticipated and on the other more mistiness on the part of the historical account that we would present in the film. This mistiness may have encouraged us even more to undertake a research based on our personal fascination, our '*goesting*', and hence dealing with concepts such as cultural identity, El Dorado, migration, and paradise lost. These concepts created a filter located in our minds when dealing with the many persons, the loads of information, narratives, data, facts and objects we came across during our investigations in public archives, private collections, in local pubs, in embassies, on the internet and so on.

The research we worked out departed from something of a shared context: the colonial history connects Belgium and Guatemala in a historical and geographical way. We therefore simultaneously started to search in different directions in both countries: (1) Urban legends concerning 'verapa': songs, etchings, persons, narratives; (2) Genealogical research: investigations of different family trees to look for descendants of colonists in Guatemala and in Belgium, alive or dead; and (3) Attempt to reconstruct the historical account on the colony. To find people and material related to these three lines, we researched many institutions and used different search engines, yet to simplify I could distinguish three groups:

1. **Individuals With Stories:** we followed several paths of investigation such as the internet, visits on location, telephone directories, etc. to look for interesting Individuals With Stories, in a broadest sense of the term. I considered them as very important for the film as they might want to appear in it to share their stories with the viewer. Like Victor Zestig: the oldest inhabitant of the alley known as 'verapa': we could trace him in an home for the elderly where he convinced us that 'verapa', the alley, was a paradise to live, hence the song. Or Frans Deroy, who appeared to be a descendant of three brother colonists, one of who jumped off the boat to return swimming to Antwerp, and opened an inn which he named 'verapa'. Or Marc Punnewaert, who discovered that this bar was at the origin of the following saying in Geraardsbergen: "He's almost in verapa", meaning that this person is almost dead, because this inn was located next to a cemetery. Or Martha-Thelma Calderon-Vandenberg who lives in Guatemala-city and who feels Belgian given her green eyes from her partly Belgian mother and who emailed us saying that her research corresponds with ours, yet hers is not an audiovisual but a written one.

2. Private Collections: Through some Individuals with Stories we discovered very precious treasures. We were looking for objects which could be interesting from an (audio)visual point of view, such as photos of the street known as 'verapa', items belonging to the colonists, or issued by the *Compagnie belge de Colonisation*⁵. In the collection of professor John Everaert we were able to view some yet unpublished material. Through the reading of the book written by van den Bossche and personal contacts we were able to trace two Belgian lions in stone, which were shipped to Santo-Tomas in 1843 and are now kept by Luis Tobias Sanches in Puerto Barrios, a city next to Santo-Tomas. At the house of writer and filmmaker Marc Lafontaine we viewed many pictures of descendants of colonists in Guatemala, his personal friends, as he had written a book on them (Lafontaine 1997). We also met Roger Moureaux who conducted a research on the old alleys in Ghent and who had several pictures of 'verapa', when it was still a lively street. Also, the hairdresser Jacky Lagrou living in the *Muide*, helped us with his large photo collection. Jean-Claude Versluys owns a very inspiring collection of all sorts of documents and objects relating to the colony.

3. Public archives and Libraries: In order to trace some necessary documents which we didn't find in van den Bossche's file, we turned to public institutions such as the Albertina, the main library in Brussels, the archives of the Ghent university, the Royal Army Museum in Brussels, which owns many original etchings, the archives of the national broadcasting company (now VRT and RTBF), the archives of the Flemish Jesuits. In Guatemala I contacted the CIRMA, the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamerica in Antigua⁶ and the Archivo Generale de Centroamerica in Guatemala-city, which owned some books written by Guatemalan authors and some maps.

⁵ Also known as 'Belgische Maatschappij voor Volkplanting', the Flemish version translates as Belgian Company for Colonization. On October 7 1841 a Royal Degree (Koninklijk Besluit) was issued to establish this company with the aim of installing several overseas colonial settlements in Central America, especially in the then called Guatemalan department Vera-Paz (van den Bossche 1997: 25).

⁶ I contacted CIRMA through email and they provided me with a list of their publications concerning the colony. Most of these were printed in Belgium, and hence known to me. Yet some titles were printed in Guatemala and so I managed to obtain copied versions of the following titles: Pérez Valenzuela, Pedro, 1956; Griffith, William J., 1959; Guinea, Gerardo, 1977.



“Luis Tobias, Belgian lions and Didier” by An van. Dienderen

Historical mistiness on the Belgian colony in Santo-Tomas

Although strictly speaking not the focus of this chapter, yet given the relative unfamiliarity of most people with the Belgian colony in Santo-Tomas, a survey of the main aspects of its history will afford the reader an insight into why the colony was installed, how it was organized and why it failed. Belgium was founded in 1830. In many respects the first two decades of Belgian independence were quite worrisome. Everaert describes the socio-economical context of these decades: “*Economically speaking industrialization and especially the mechanization of the cotton-manufacturing industry – in Ghent, as in other urban centers – continued to progressively eclipse the traditional Flemish linen-manufacturing industry, an activity exercised by peasants as a means of supplementary income during the dead season. On the other hand the loss of the Javanese textile market (about 1834-35) could difficultly be compensated by other badly prospected new markets. .. With an interval of two years, two industrial crises occurred in 1839 and again in 1845 – 50, the second depression being of a much more serious, longer and far-reaching nature. Every time the scenery had an identical outlook: basically there was an agrarian crisis, caused by one or more bad harvests (catastrophic crop for potatoes in 1845 –46), which brought along with it sharply rising cost of living for the people, whilst their purchasing-power of manufactured goods was distinctly cut down. The simultaneity of the above phenomena caused rural and urban unemployment, which was aggravated by the demographical boom in the first half of the century*” (Everaert 1981: 1).

Studies were printed analyzing the social problems in Belgium, such as the poverty and the unemployment. These studies pointed out that there was only one solution: seeking commercial outlets as well as territories where the problem of overpopulation would find some relief. Colonization seemed to be the answer (Smets 1993 : 245) and was covertly encouraged by the royal court. From 1837 on, projects concerning the establishment of Belgian trading-posts or colonies abounded and embraced all continents. Everaert sums up: “*In Africa: The Cold-Coast (1837-1840) and Ethiopia (1839-40): in Asia: the Philippines archipelago (1840-41): in North-America: Texas (1842). Latin America was also present with aborted propositions for the acquisition of the isles of Pinos (1838) and Cozumel (1840) as well as a disputed territory on the boundaries of French Guyana and Brazil (1840)*” (Everaert 1981: 2)⁷. Newspapers supporting the king and the colonial discourse, such as *l'Indépendant*, defended this perspective (Smets 1993 : 245). Part of the clergy in Belgium approved the colonial projects, as they were convinced that a coordinated emigration could restore the moral of villages and cities in the long run. The problem of immoral behavior and petty crime could – so it was thought – in this way partly be deported to Latin-America, the overseas promised land of beggars, drunks, thieves and other losers (van

⁷ See also the elaborate photocopied report ascribed to Ch. Piot, called “*Emigration et Colonisation*” and to be found in the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affaires in Brussels (AEB 2030). Moreover, A. DUCHESNE has set up a large *Bibliographie des tentatives de colonisation et d'expansion belges sous le règne de Léopold Ier*, REEB, pp. 768-807 (Everaert 1981: Footnote 5: 20).

den Bossche 1997: 17). Liberal politicians opposed colonization: they blocked many colonial attempts. Yet the King, Leopold I, was determined: he also put his personal funding in specific future colonial projects and made sure his sycophants were designated as their directors (Ibid. 22).

It was in this climate that the idea of a colony in Guatemala ripened. Mariano Galvez, the contemporary national leader of Guatemala, developed a relatively liberal program aiming at the diversification and the modernization of the agrarian production, which was to be stimulated by settlement colonization. Galvez therefore divided three quarters of the national territory into five grants, which were assigned to three British impresarios who committed themselves to colonize these areas by means of European immigrants and to improve the infrastructure. In return the foreign concessionaires obtained the monopoly of forestry and also enjoyed certain fiscal and commercial advantages (Everaert 1981: 4). At the same time however Galvez hoped to be able to counteract the territorial aspirations of the woodcutters of the 'British settlement' (Belize) and he also was striving to gain a certain independence from the English merchants of Belize – the staple for Central America – by laying out the inland transport network (Ibid. 4). Early in 1841 a fraction of the English concession was sold to the Belgian business-men, who thus became subcontracting parties (Ibid. 6).

On October 7 1841 a Royal Decree was issued to administer the *Compagnie belge de Colonisation* (or *Belgische Maatschappij voor Volkplanting*, the Flemish version) translated as the Belgian Company for Colonization, aimed at installing several overseas colonial settlements in Central-America, especially in the then called Guatemalan department Vera-Paz (van den Bossche 1997: 25). The company was morally supported by the king and by the government. Their first assignment was to send out a commission in order to explore the future operating field. This resulted in 1842 in recovering the concession of Santo-Tomas instead of the district Vera-Paz and thus delivering themselves from English tutelage (Ibid. 6)⁸. Although this might have been important for the self-esteem of this young nation, and more particularly of Leopold I, the contract signed by de Puydt, head of the Belgian mission, warranted the country of Guatemala more benefits than the previous agreements of the same kind. Everaert synthesizes the agreements: "*Indeed, the company paid quite dear for the concession (160.000 piasters for 8.000 caballerias (Footnote 12: 400 000 ha for 300 000 Belgian francs – in the days of the colony) and committed herself to supply arms, to establish a*

⁸ It is interesting to note that the province of Vera-Paz is actually located next to the province in which Santo-Tomas is situated, although the history of the colony is remembered as one of 'verapa'. This might be explained historically by the concession: originally the government in Guatemala wanted to offer the region of Vera-Paz but the Belgians changed it for the region at the seaside (Santo-Tomas) because of the possibility to exploit the harbor. It is also probable that the term refers to the "real" Vera-Paz because that region became the 'land of milk and honey' for German immigrants. It is actually the area where the economic boom of Guatemala took place. The many explanations of the word became an important focus in our research.

militia and to fortify the planned port. Furthermore she would found a town according to the principles of modern planning; she would build a carriage road leading to the Motagua with a corresponding steam-navigation line. Finally she would house a thousand families (5.000 immigrants). This quota had to be realized gradually in about ten years, the immigrants losing their original nationality once they were definitely settled. As for the company and the colonists, for the time being they would be granted some fiscal and military exemptions as well as a few commercial privileges. On the whole, the obligations and benefits of the acquisition were mainly commercial ones. The Guatemalan Government obviously counted on them to make their old dream come true of penetrating as far as the Caribbean Sea without taking too many risks. The colonial directory on the other hand covered up the onerous obligations of the contract and highlighted the dazzling profits to be made out of the traffic in colonial products and forestry exploitation” (Everaert 1981: 6).

A formula of exploitation combining both purposes was worked out. To that end the company established in 1842 the *Communauté de l'Union*, a distinct joint-stock company, linking up property, capital and labor (Ibid. 7). The *Communauté de l'Union* was designed after the philosophy of Charles Fourier, a 19th century French philosopher and sociologist. His social theory was much appreciated in Belgium by 1840. According to his premise, laborers needed to be grouped within large production units, *phalanstères* as he labeled them. In this unit each worker would cooperate freely and would find satisfaction in his work, without having any responsibility. The workers had social security, cultural and recreative institutions, such as a school, a hospital, houses etc. This vision is also exemplified in the regulations of the *Communauté de l'Union* of Santo-Tomas (Smets 1993: 247). Everaert explains the concrete organization of the Community: “*The funds of the “Communauté” consisted of the territorial concession (about 400.000 ha) divided into 8.000 parcels of 25 ha each and to be subscribed to; the remainder of the grounds constituted the soil-reservoir. Each lot consisted of a parcel of 20 ha, to be taken at will from the wooded or uncultivated areas, and which had to be placed at the disposal of the subscriber (“titre de propriété”). On the other hand the remaining 5 ha of lands to be reclaimed entered into the collectivity (“titre de communauté”) entitling to a proportional share in the profits as well as the repartition of the goods at the moment of liquidation. The emigrants-colonists seldom possessed shares, for most often they were mere contract-labor wage-earners on the pay-roll. (Footnote 16: Communauté de l'Union, fondée par la Compagnie belge de Colonisation, Règlement organique (entered into several propagandistic pamphlets). Workers would be paid 4 francs a day (as compared with 3 francs to the “Caribbeens” and 2,5 francs in the case of Indians recruited in the colony); employees would receive between 3 and 4.000 francs a year. Emigrants who happened to be not very well-off would be paid an advance for their passage (150 or 250 fr), their overseas accommodation and their household. Moreover, loyal workers were promised social benefits (old age allowances and widow’s pensions), medical care (hospital, dispensary) and cultural aid (school). An incentive premium system in the form of land donation (25 to 30 ares) had also been thought of” (Everaert 1981: 7).*

One of the important assignments of the *Compagnie belge de Colonisation* was to recruit future colonists. To this end, in rather dubious propaganda campaigns, in different publications and pamphlets, on magnificent etchings, and especially by word of mouth, Guatemala was represented as the future paradise on earth where it would be wonderful to live. People marveled at characters on the market place dressed as the imaginary colonists, while etchings were distributed, printed in Paris, representing the colony in an idealizing way (van den Bossche 1997: 44-45). The clergy considered this exodus an efficient instrument to establish a 'healthy' morality while the administrators thought it would improve unemployment. Because of this campaign, the candidates for the colony were not the craftsmen colonel De Puydt had hoped for, but rather marginalized and simple people, beggars, widows, orphans, elderly and sick people. They were promised a piece of land of 50 are, which would become their property after working continuously for three years for the *Communaunté de l'Union* (Ibid. 43). Even in 1843 the *Compagnie belge de Colonisation* continued their promoting campaigns, for instance by using (fake) letters written by colonists, describing the life in Santo-Tomas as divine in abundance of food and other pleasures. This type of messages, describing heavily laden tables and magnificent scenery, were gratefully used by the Company for the sole purpose of making the potential colonists' mouths water (Ibid. 70-71).

On March 16 in 1843 two ships departed from Antwerp to Santo-Tomas: the *Théodore* and the *Ville de Bruxelles*, from Ostend the schooner *Louise Marie*. During the period between 1844 and 1845 a total number of 800 emigrants arrived in Guatemala, predominantly Belgians but some Germans as well⁹. This group consisted of administrative and military personnel, laborers, travelers, with a specific scientific goal, large families and many orphans (Smets 1993: 248). van den Bossche points out that the colonists were primarily people from the lower social classes, especially those who suffered the most from the crises in agriculture and the cotton-industry in Belgium (van den Bossche 1997: 49). Soon upon their arrival, the colonists understood that the colony and its leading men didn't possess sufficient financial resources to install the necessary and promised infrastructure. The colonists were very disappointed and desperate not only because of the financial situation, but also because the area didn't resemble the victorious atmosphere of the propaganda campaign and the popular songs. These had depicted Guatemala as a land of milk and honey (Ibid. 51).

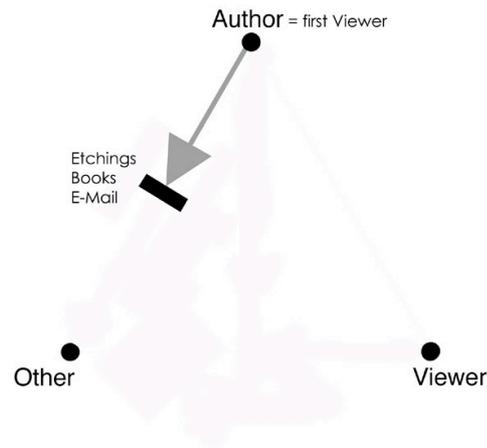
Apart from the poor housing conditions, provisions presented another weak spot in the organization of the colony. The pioneers had brought over from Europe large quantities of victuals (potatoes, flour, butter and salted meat). Yet due to the lack of storage accommodation, this stock tainted almost at once. As Everaert points out: "*As a matter of fact, the colony has always been*

⁹ Contrarily to what the 'verapa' narratives in Ghent seem to indicate, according to van Wesemael, very few inhabitants of Ghent left for Santo-Tomas: Armand Delantsheer with his two children arrived there in April 1844; he owned a piece of land, some cows and horses. The other people from Ghent, Emma Marie en Augusta Marie David en Gustave Joseph Goethals, used the colony to reach another destination in Central-America (Van Wesemael 1972: 36). van den Bossche adds Charles Dekryger and Adolf Papeleu (van den Bossche 1997:112.).

*too dependent upon the homeland for her victualling which was quite irregular in arriving indeed” (Everaert, 1981: 9). Given the miserable housing-conditions, the pitiful sanitary situation, malnutrition and epidemics, many disappointed immigrants tried to penetrate deeper into the inland, and consequently the population of the colony was considerably diminished (Ibid. 8). The lack of encouraging and decisive leaders, and the quarrels between these leaders and the Jesuits didn’t improve the settling of the colony. On the contrary, the agreements as stipulated in the contract with Guatemala could hardly be executed. By 1851 Guatemala considered the concession with the *Compagnie belge de Colonization* as null and void (Smets 1993: 253). Everaert argues that this failure is not only due to the financial and organizational chaos, but also because the targets or the foci of the colony and its concrete realization were not well developed in advance: “*Agricultural colonization should have had initial priority... To start with, there was the badly chosen location, considering the unhealthy and hostile environment. ... Moreover, the colonization company had proceeded in a not very selective way when recruiting colonists, for lack of attraction... The result was a mere agriculture of survival. ... instead of encouraging the colonists, the company, by means of her exploitation system, tried to subjugate them, to turn them into laborers forced to grow staple crops. The second aspect of the enterprise consisted of land-speculation which was meant to lure capitalist. .. The emission of land-shares – at the nominal price of 1.000 BEF, first introduced at 500 and six months later completely leveled – accompanied by a vast advertising-campaign, did not tempt the public” (Ibid. 15-17). During the period between 1843 and 1851 542 Belgians emigrated to Santo-Tomas: more than one third of them died in this period, marking the colonial endeavor as a human tragedy. One third of the Belgian colonists left to Guatemala-City and the others stayed in Santo-Tomas (van den Bossche 1997: 166).**

Imagined Interactions Between ‘Author’, ‘Other and ‘Viewer

The ‘other’ in this phase of the process remains mostly abstract, virtual, through the mediated interactions with written accounts in books, articles, diaries and email communication or with visual documents such as etchings and pictures. The ‘author’ and the ‘viewer’ still seem equated with one another, as in this phase we researched those lines we thought would be interesting to view. The ‘other’ in these narratives were hence yet unknown to us but so far seemed to me compiled of different people who come from different communities and backgrounds, such as the *Muide* in Ghent, and the descendants of Belgian colonizers in Belgium and in Guatemala (not only from the 19th century but also their present-day descendants), yet who share the experience of migration and a desire for an El Dorado if not personally than through the memory of their family members. The ‘other’ might also be the responsible authorities that can be traced in travel journeys and governmental reports, contextualized in a certain socio-economical climate with particular ideas on colonization, migration, and society, or historians when trying to analyze what happened.



It seemed to me that these narratives on ‘verapa’, the unfamiliar experience of the Belgian colony in Santo-Tomas, Guatemala and its connections with urban legends, could yield an interesting mixture of ‘other-ness’: an other-ness that correlates with my personal interests, context and desires, such as Ghent, migration, colonialism, propaganda and El Dorado, and so smoothes down an opposition between the ‘other’ and myself, as ‘author’. In researching this ‘other’ I wanted to depart from a shared position: not only from a historical point of view, in referring to a certain sameness with the Belgian descendants in Guatemala, but also geographically, as a Belgian living in Ghent sharing some aspects of my identity, interest and background with the people of the *Muide*, this inspiring area in Ghent. I started to collect citations on personal cards, which I thought were very stimulating, moving, exciting, anecdotic, or hilarious. My intention was to take these cards with me in order to be confronted on location in Guatemala with these voices of ‘others’ from the past.

Some illustrations of these citations¹⁰:

“As colonel De Puydt noted in his report: ‘The Belgian flag will not wave above the colony in Santo-Tomas’” (Coolsaet 1950: 197).

“Le Commerce Belge, March 20th 1843. The wooden chapel for the new colony was built in the garden of Count De Mérode, president of the Board of the Company for Colonization. On March 6th 1843 the Cardinal and Archbishop of Mechlin blessed it in the presence of a large number of notables. The chapel will be shipped to Santo-Tomas on the next boat and reconstructed on the spot” (Count de Hompesch cited in Smets 1993: 245).

“Magnificent etchings were distributed where life was depicted with ‘Paul et Virginie’ romanticism imagining the “El Dorado” of Guatemala” (Coolsaet 1950: 197).

¹⁰ I translated the Flemish citations to English. The French quotes are the original versions.

“The newspaper “L’Indépendant” in its editorial of Nov. 10, 1842, concerning the charter of the Belgian colonization company: “... En présence de ces faits (augmentation de la population, machinisme, paupérisme) les économistes commencent à proclamer très haut que l’Europe aura bientôt à choisir entre la colonisation et la guerre... dans un autre hémisphère il y a d’immenses quantités de terre d’une fertilité (incomparable) .. Le problème consiste à rapprocher.. du sol à exploiter, l’ouvrier qui peut en retirer (des produits). C’est là le but de la colonisation” (Everaert 1981: Footnote 6: 20).

“All you need here is willpower and a bit of effort. It's enough to work no harder than the Indians, you do a quarter of what you do in Europe and you'll see that your fields give a fantastic crop. Send us honest, hard-working men. They can be assured they will soon live in prosperity. I take care of an exchange of the area called Verapaz for the extended area around Santo-Tomas” (Colonel Remi de Puydt, head of the exploration commission to Santo-Tomas cited in Smets 1993: 244).

“Now that I have crossed rich continents, I can assure you that over there our populations will find their necessary income through easy work, which we cannot guarantee them here. The misery that is afflicting Flanders will soon disappear. Because many groups of people who have no work here, will be able to find over there a stable and lucrative employment” (report by Mr. J. van den Berghe de Binckum, provincial deputy and member of the “Commission d’exploration dans l’Amérique Central”, published 12/5/1842 cited in Leysbeth, N. 1938: 81).

“Under these arches of leaves, which are actually reservoirs for rotten exhalations, dangerous insects born out of the heat and the humidity live in a great number. A suffocated respiration and a feeling of fear, warn us that a visit in those places can only be for a short period of time and that it will be necessary to live next to the banks of the rivers and by the seashore to be able to breathe healthy air” (Dr. Dechange, member of the “Commission d’exploration dans l’Amérique Central”, published 12/5/1842 cited in Dumont s.d.: 23).

“On sait que la variété des fruits ne manque pas et si l’on peut en dire autant de l’abondance, c’est en partie la faute des colons qui montrent, en général, un dégoût pour ces produits, en ne demandent que des pommes de terres et de la choucroûte de l’Europe” (Blondeel van Ceulenbrouck 1846 : 153).

“Ironically it was said that the most important task of the carpenters in Santo-Tomas consisted out of the construction of coffins. Between March 6 1844 and September 1 1845, no less than 211 people died due to tropical diseases such as malaria, tbc, and others” (van den Bossche 1997: 90).

“... de ces jours de deuils, où les cadavres ne pouvaient plus être enterrés, faute de bras pour creuser les fosses, fautes de mains pour clouer les brières” (Major Guillaumot 1844 in Le Soir).

“How is it possible that to a new founded colony where problems concerning health and hygiene have not been solved, families are being sent who suffer from scrofula, rachitis, phthisis, blinds, idiots etc”. (Dr. Fleussu in a report written by Blondeel Van Ceulenbrouk cited in Smets 1993: 250).

“Los valientes colonizadores que llegaron a Santo Tomás, animados de los mejores propósitos y sanas intenciones por hacer de aqueller esta región un ElDorado, y de Guatemala su segunda patria.. “ (Translated as: “The brave colonists arrived in Santo-Tomas with the admirable intention of transforming this region into an “El Dorado” and making Guatemala their second home land” (Gerardo Guinea 1977: 18).

“... de los azotes naturales y provocados, que a muchos de los colonos, a obligaron a regresar a otros, y quizás quienes sintieron amor por la tierra que tan generosamente los acogió, a pesar de las hipertensiones que produjeron la miseria y el abandono total, se trasladaron a la capital...” (Translated as: “The natural and man-made scourges which killed many colonists and obliged others to return, forced those who loved Guatemala as the country that had so generously welcomed them to migrate to the capital” (Gerardo Guinea 1977: 98).

“El Nuevo Mundo tenía el deber de recibir en sus vastos y despoblados territorios a la gente que no tenía tierra en donde trabajar, ya que Europa estaba tan superpoblada.” (Translated as: “The New World had the task to receive in their unpopulated areas people who had no land of their own to toil, Europe being so crowded” (William J. Griffith 1959: 34).

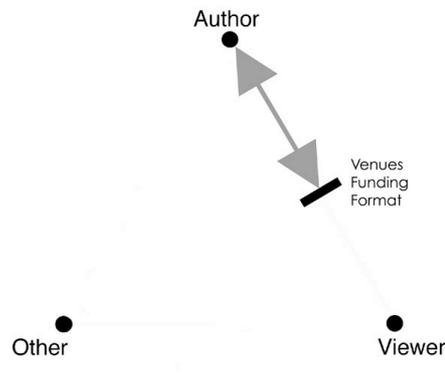
As for the 'viewer', given the limited and specialized audience that came to screenings of other films made by us, I was now interested in an audience that was broader in a socio-economical sense of the word because of the specific issues the 'verapa' story raised. The 'viewer' of this yet unmade film, seemed to me plural and consisting of people of different socio-economic contexts. My aspiration was to create a film for people who might be difficult to reach as they live in rather isolated places as the *Muide* or in Santo-Tomas, yet were central to the issue of migration. As they would become key characters in the narratives of the film, it seemed obvious that the habitants of the *Muide* and the descendants of Belgian migrants were an important part of the 'viewers' of the film; as such the position of the 'viewer' coincides with that of the 'other'. It seemed to me of crucial importance that the accessibility of the film would be such that the film would invite people not only from the *Muide*, and from Guatemala but also from art film circuits and from a broadly interested audience. I hoped the film would become more accessible by combining familiar aspects with unfamiliar issues, bringing this story in a way that local aspects were combined with translocal or transnational issues.

2. FINANCING

As the producer of the film, it was my responsibility to look for funding to make this documentary production possible. Typically for our way of working, the script, the concepts and hence the process, were very open and flexible; based on information we found so far. This was mainly characterized by its mysterious reconstruction, the mistiness of urban legends, and the memories of Individuals With Stories. With this personalized package, lacking any specific description of the film besides our interest, our 'goesting', and some premature contacts with 'others', we began our search for funding at KunstenFESTIVALdesArts, in Brussels, directed by Frie Leysen, with whom I had worked before. I roughly outlined her the previous chapter, with the imagined interactions, and future research lines. Although she liked us talking about these imagined 'other(s)', the discussion with her primarily dealt with the relation between 'author' and 'viewer'. Her intention with this festival is to throw bridges and open borders, which is already demonstrated in the choice of their name: although Belgium has been gradually transformed into a federalized country consisting of two well-nigh independent language communities, the Flemish and the Walloon, the festival used both languages in their title for a festival located in Brussels, the bilingual capital. This crossing of borders is the main theme throughout different editions since the start of the festival in 1994.

In the edition of 2002, when the film was programmed, Frie Leysen articulated her concept of an art festival as follows (<http://www.kfda.be/archief/en/2002/i2002.html>): *"The first step to developing the program of events is for the artist and the KunstenFESTIVALdesArts to meet. There must be a reciprocal desire to do so – it takes one part intuition, one part subjectivity and plenty of rigor. There's no point looking for an established or 'fashionable' theme. The program champions certain values and is firmly embedded in life, the city and the world. Artists set the tone. They come to us concerned with the issues of our time, as we go to them, where they are, in one of today's urban environments. They are invited as individuals and not as representatives of a state, religion or genre. The festival leaves it up to them to choose the means, the most appropriate language for transmitting the urgency of what they have to say. So this is how the festival establishes its equilibrium: both from new productions, which require taking risks, to welcoming previously performed works that have been seen abroad and with which we have fallen in love. There is no getting away from the fact that we have developed particular affinities as time has gone by. Without wanting to generalize, here is a rough idea of some of the characteristics we like in our artists: a critical generosity – first and foremost applied to themselves – disturbing, constantly evolving and enigmatic. They often shed new and unexpected light on the philosophical, artistic and political certainties we hold. How should you choose? Where should your journey begin? You will understand that we cannot and do not want to recommend you see one performance over another. So we suggest you look at our website or come and get more information at the festival center or, if you prefer to hear someone else's recommendation, let yourself be guided by the comments made by our 'foreign correspondent' Alejandro Tantanian. Lastly and quite simply, let*

your intuition guide you. The KunstenFESTIVALdesArts has been a hybrid – fragmented, mixed and heterogeneous – since its beginnings. We do things in the plural. As the first notes are played, the tone is grave and invites you to strive upwards, it is poetic and invites you to set off on your journey!”



The intentions, desires and interest of the ‘author’ and her/his relatedness to the themes of the team of this festival determines its relation with the ‘viewer’, and hence situates the festival more in an avant- garde position. It asks from him/her an intuitive choice of a program characterized by many international, unfamiliar and daring contributions. The festival has its main focus on theater and dance but tries to persuade its public to sample some developments in film, video and other visual art as well. I thought the ‘verapa’ project would fit into this concept, guaranteeing us the necessary flexibility to work out the project in a relatively independent way, and at the same time providing us with a structure of viewers who were used to interacting with exploring projects, as I hoped the film would become. I elaborated a very flexible budget, estimating the total cost at 4 million BEF (more or less 67.000 \$); half of this amount would be covered by participations, such as the payment of the researchers and Didier’s and my fee. By subsidizing the project with 500.000 BEF (8.350\$), Frie Leysen helped us to set in motion the agreements with other funding organizations, all of them state funded, like the cultural administration of the city of Ghent, the province of East-Flanders, the King Baudoin Foundation (Koning Boudewijnstichting or Foundation Roi Baudoin) and the Flemish Film Foundation. Although all of these organizations inquired on the audience perspectives we had in mind, most of them were satisfied to know that KunstenFESTIVALdesArts would screen the premiere, as they expected other similar venues would follow. The only organization that insisted on managing our ‘viewer’ more actively was the King Baudoin Foundation, urging us to try to screen the film as much as possible, and in socio-economically different places. From the beginning of the project, as I explained previously, I hoped to present the film primarily to the people with whom we made it; the people of the *Muide* and some descendants of the Belgian colonists in Guatemala. This was much appreciated by the funding institutions. These ‘viewers’ implied screenings in community centers in the *Muide* and in Santo-Tomas. The first venues were easy to convince as I offered free screenings, and thus the community center *de Muide*, the local people’s bar (*Volkshuis*), and some art theaters such as the Nieuwpoorttheater and the film theater of the Ghent University agreed without any hesitation.



Film still, "Philemon, Jacky and Albert singing"

Yet the attempts to screen the film in Guatemala were complicated; at this point in the process I started to ask for funding from the Ministry of Development, and the similar administration of the city of Ghent, as it was clear that it would be pointless to ask any governmental Guatemalan institutions for this type of cultural funding. The search for funding in order to retrieve the necessary money to produce the film continues up to this day, as I engaged myself to return the investments Tobias De Pessemier and Veerle Devos made. In general, the aid we received through these different types of state funding and artistic programs implied that they approved of the image of the 'viewer' we had in mind, thus leaving us the liberty and independence of the mediating interactions we had in mind, which were still very open and rather undefined, and depended on the direction in which the process would take us.

3. PRE-PRODUCTION

Given these different sorts of funding, we managed to get the budget more or less covered. We could therefore plan the film more concretely by determining the period of filming, the selection of the crewmembers, the types of cameras and editing material. These aspects depended on the financing of the film: if we were to raise more funding, our period of filming, the types of camera and film would obviously differ. It is rather typical of our way of filming, given our experimental background, that we are willing to moderate these aspects in many and diverse ways; we do not feel strait-jacketed by a fixed format.

Inspired by the research and based on the amount of money we managed to gather, I developed something of a scheme in which I proposed directions for the use of the audiovisual configuration of the film:

Audiovisual treatment

I set out some directions, not a detailed script, as I highly appreciate the intuitive possibilities on set. I want to have the result as open as possible to let the process of the production slip into the film. For the clarity of the film, I find it necessary to point out certain basics. I want to have many images referring to the frames of the etchings. So, it will be necessary to memorize them as well as possible.

Black/white super8 will be used to film objects and places to reveal the historical narrative: the cemetery, the lions, photographs, archives, as well as people like Victor Zestig, who sings the Verapa-song : clear cut/stabile with possible slow pans, seeming frozen in time: like an archive display.

Color super8 will be used to give an impression of "the promised land" the beautiful sites, and the 'exotic' bay. These images should be very compelling, mesmerizing and romantic. We will hopefully –if we find them in time- use the original etchings produced by the Belgian

Company of Colonization to use the framing as reference. Slow motion (High speed (45 images/sec), Starting/ending out of focus, soft movement but not to mathematically/cold.

Color super8 will be used to film the “desperateness” of the climate: therefore I will need images during and just after the rain of muddy roads, depressing sites, the bushes, etc. Close up, decadrage, moving, restless, low frequency frame/sec. (9) to achieve accelerated speed

The video camera will be used for all interviews. Hand held, vivid and spontaneous imaging: a contrast with the static archival footage, etchings, photographs, history. Because of this option, it will not be disturbing that crewmembers enter the frame. They shouldn't be in there always, but it will open up the film to the ‘production process’, or to personal motivation, interaction and research. It is also not unlikely that Didier and I will fire some questions to the crew, randomly, late at night. In general, the framing can be quite classic: not esthetical or too theatrical: ‘natural’ close ups of faces, filming settings,.. As a film device, I will also use the original etchings to start the conversation. I am interested in the reaction of the descendants to the propaganda by the “Compagnie belge de Colonization”.

The video zoom will be used as a device to refer to the telescope. Mostly when filming landscapes: from the boat, or from the hill. It is important to have a wider angle than usual because we will add the round black optical during the editing process. It is also necessary to have a back up of the image without the extra space for the telescope effect.

I will need a series of video images of name cards, labels, doorbells etc in which Belgian names appear: Köerner, Dewatinne, Esmenjaud, Schmitz, Vandenberg, Wirtz, and Haegendorens. Also with the video camera: footage of botanical value: the upper class colonizers were very interested in botany, as it was -after all- the 19th century. Hopefully we will have copies of original etchings with us, that we can use in the frame to compare. Classifying, very clear composition, only slight natural movement of subject to avoid freeze effect.

Sound: we will have the Belgian song on ‘verapa’ with us on mini disc. This will be plaid when we interview the descendants. It is important to have an extra mike pointing at the mini disc. Also: rain, muddy sounds, all which could add to the desperate situation of the colonizers. ‘botanical’ sounds, and sounds that envision the promised land (if possible). I am still looking for ‘authentic’ recordings of the ‘verapa’ song and for ‘exotic’, romantic songs on the El Dorado.

This audiovisual treatment implied a relatively small crew. Because of its flexibility, its swift way of responding to things ‘in the real’, but also because of the more intimate interactions between the crewmembers, Didier and I enjoy a small crew. Firstly, we were looking for somebody who was acquainted with the region, who had lived in Santo-Tomas and knew the inhabitants. S/he

would be able to mediate, to translate, to help to interact, and to participate, as we didn't master the Spanish language. Instead of researching somebody who lives there, we were looking for Belgian exchange students, as Puerto Barrios, the city located next to Santo-Tomas appeared to be a possibility for Belgian AFS students.

Elke Borghs was one of them; when she was 18 year she stayed for a year with the family of Luis Tobias, who housed the Belgian lions (!) shipped to Santo-Tomas in 1843, as mentioned earlier. She was immediately enthusiastic about our project and wanted to join us to return to her 'mom and dad', as she would call Luis Tobias Sanches and his wife. To me she was of tremendous importance for the group and the film; not only because of her familiarity with the region and with one of the characters in the film, but also because of her warmth, her optimism and her friendliness with us, and later on with the inhabitants of Santo-Tomas; she became a sort of 'classic anthropologist' on board given her empathy and acquaintance with the region and her enrollment in a master program for cultural anthropology at the University of Leuven.



"Portrait of Elke", by An van. Dienderen

Because of the relatively heavy focus on different types of images and sound, we thought it was necessary to engage an extra cameraman next to Didier, who would also be in charge of the sound. During the shoot of *Night Passage*, the film directed by Trinh T. Minh-ha and Jean-Paul Bourdier (see the following Chapter), I met an interesting crewmember, Maximilian Godino, who directed some experimental films and installations, but was also qualified as a professional grip on a film set. He mentioned to me his future trip to Guatemala and so I proposed to combine this with a job on our set as the soundman and the second camera man. Although he wasn't particularly interested in this bizarre Belgian story, he was motivated for a particular reason: "Well,...frankly this is not that exciting to me...you know...Belgian colonization in Guatemala in 1843? The interesting part is that we have to make that interesting" (Maximilian cited in Borghs 2002: 23). He found it challenging to look for sound, which could recall 'El Dorado', or 'tropical climate', he was inspired by the different uses of the super8 camera and above all he was enthusiastic about working with us. With his tongue-in-cheek humor, his knowledge of experimental ethnography and film, and his bay area easygoingness, we welcomed him in our crew.



"Portrait of Max", by An van. Dienderen

Didier and I needed somebody to manage our trip (booking the hotels, renting a car, telephoning whoever needed to be contacted, and continuing our research for descendants of Belgian colonists. It also seemed obvious that we would ask Tobias De Pessemier for the job, given his acquaintance with the several topics of the research, but also given his volunteering work that he had done with an inspiring amount of enthusiasm; moreover, we wanted to thank him by asking him on this trip to Guatemala. He agreed, and assumed his partner could assist him, although we weren't in need of any further assistance. We thus had formed a crew of six persons in total, which in our experience seemed rather large. This crew forms the interaction with the 'other' and the 'viewer'; via Elke we would approach the 'other' in Guatemala, Didier and Maximilian formed the connection of the 'other' to 'the future' viewer' and through the contacts and work of Tobias and Veerle our interaction received a material context.

The equipment and material needed for the production as envisioned so far comprehended the following material, with a rough estimation of the value per item:

- Camera XL-1S Canon (200.000BEF/3.350\$)
- MA-100 XLR (11.000BEF/184\$)
- Micro Sennheiser (80.000BEF/1350\$)
- Boom (8.000BEF/135\$)
- Filters set FU (7.000BEF/117\$)
- KATA case (14.000BEF/234\$)
- KATA rain cover (6.000BEF/100\$)
- 5 spare Batteries 930 (5 X 5.500 BEF/458\$)
- spare battery charger (yet undetermined)
- Manfrotto tripod (25.000 BEF/417\$)
- Cables (5.000 BEF/83\$)
- 40 DV tapes (40.000 BEF/667\$)
- 2 Super8 cameras Bolex (2.000 BEF/33,4\$)
- 30 Super8 films (25.000 BEF/417\$)
- A1 Canon photo camera (20.000 BEF/334\$)
- U-1 Olympus photo camera (5.000 BEF/83\$)
- 20 B/W photo films Canon (6.000 Bf/100\$)
- 10 slide films Fuji (1.500 Bf/25\$)
- Leatherman (3.500 Bf/58\$)
- Other (8.000Bf/135\$)

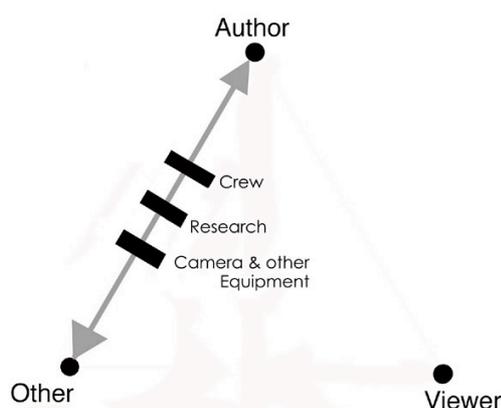
We estimated the value of the equipment at a total of 8300\$, so we wanted to rent rather safe places to sleep which rendered our accommodation more expensive than we had budgeted. Given these reasons, the budget didn't allow the crew of six people to stay longer than 4 weeks in total, and consequently our period available for the shoot in Guatemala was decided more due to a series of external factors. We considered the rain season in our fixing of the dates to shoot, hence we arranged flight tickets in October, beginning of November, so we could hopefully film the All Saints Day rituals we thought could be interesting when we would film the Guatemalan cemeteries where Belgian were buried.



“Portrait of Didier”, by An van. Dienderen

4. SHOOT TO GUATEMALA

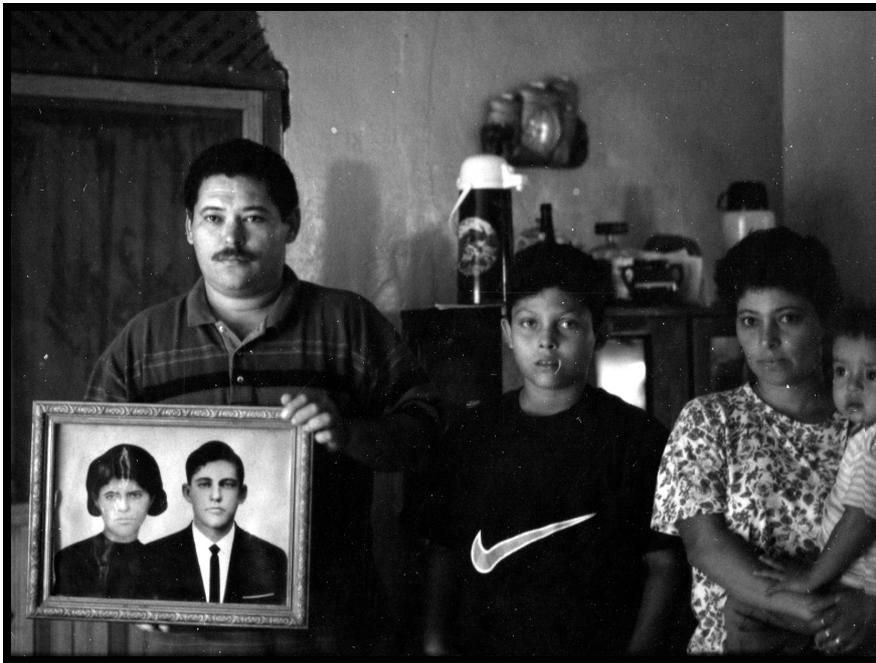
There are many aspects of the film period in Guatemala that might be relevant to discuss. I have chosen some particular examples and anecdotes, which seemed of importance to me to the focus on mediated interactions in this book. The interactions with the 'other' in this phase of the process are actual and interactive, (most often) mediated through the camera and sound system. The relation between 'author' and 'other' is not one of a directing and guiding 'author' who leads the subject into scenes and places that fit into a pre-scripted scenario. Nor is this relation one where the 'other' provides the 'author' with consumable and thus filmable portions of retrievable information. On the contrary, in my view it is primarily an interactive endeavor, where the medium can sometimes be a tool empowering the 'other', the 'author' or both, but always mediating, interfering or dominating the relation between them, based on the research we elaborated.



To point out that this relation is not directed in one way only, but that the 'other' intervenes and steers the sort of contact that is established, I recall welcoming Martha Thelma Calderon-Vandenberg's initiatives of leading us to several of her relatives. We visited more than 50 descendants of Belgian colonists; all of them were introduced to the project by her and were very emotional when inviting us to their houses. The number of descendants overwhelmed me, as we didn't expect that so many relatives still seem to recall the colony, but I was even more touched by their warmth, by their emotional involvement with their Belgian legacy. It struck us how their cordiality contrasted with the ignorance with which the Belgians relate to the colony. I am convinced that this contrast would not have been that obvious if I were to had persuaded Martha-Thelma Calderon-Vandenberg to play a part in a script that I would have drawn beforehand.

Martha-Thelma's cousin seemed to estimate the project as the perfect tool to introduce himself as an 'internationally important' tour operator in the Santo-Tomas area. He thus took us to several restaurants and hotels where he tried to let us book diners or rooms. Tobias and Veerle had a very difficult time trying to convince him of the aims of our projects, and were struggling not to be traded upon for his marketing plans. This active participation was also performed by Frans Deroy, one of the descendants of Belgian colonists who lives in Antwerp. He is a productive lawyer and has several international assignments. One of these missions led him to Mexico during more or less the same period of our film shoot in Guatemala. During our conversations beforehand, he appeared to me as a very rational and cerebral man, yet the passion for our project revealed a more zealous nature, which he demonstrated by his continuous urge to join us in Guatemala. For more than a decade, he was planning a trip to Santo-Tomas, to visit the area where his great-great-grand-parents used to live, to unravel their mysteries and be confronted with their habitat. He didn't seem particularly eager to be filmed, nevertheless his urge was motivated, so it seemed to me, by our project as the ultimate push he needed to finally make the journey. As he insisted, by booking a plane ticket and a hotel, I understood that he became one of the characters of the film, leading the film to directions that were unexpected, such as to the veranda of his hotel, of which the view reminded him of the etchings of the *Compagnie belge de Colonisation*. He therefore phoned us and inquired whether we could come to see for ourselves and be convinced of his hypothesis. During the interview on location, he drew our attention to the different points of resemblance between the etching and the scenery, and was therefore excited and touched to understand that his great-great-grand-parents should have been in the same area. I was less convinced of his hypothesis, but I was moved by his sudden outburst of emotional involvement.

Another anecdote that illustrates the interactive nature of these mediated contacts, refers to the first time when we were filming the Belgian cemetery in Santo-Tomas. Elke remembered this location vividly; during her stay as an AFS student she was asked by Luis Tobias Sanches to help cleaning, as the cemetery with its 12 Belgian graves seemed to be used by the community as a garbage dump with pigs and dogs living there and garbage all over the place. As the president of the *Comité Cultural de Rescate de Valores Históricos de Izabal* he felt responsible to protect the monument. By the time we visited it, there were still some animals, the vegetation had grown wild, yet it was less dirty than Elke remembered. Martha-Thelma was so touched by the state of the cemetery that she started to remove the dirt and the weeds. Frans Deroy, by contrast, was excited to decipher the names and dates on the tombs, and was, in deference to the colonists photographing the graves from all points of view. Didier, Maximilian and I were filming them from a distance, leaving them the space to undergo the confrontation with the location. At the same time, Tobias, Veerle and Elke were trying to fix a hotel with the cousin of Martha-Thelma. It is difficult with these types of activities to go unnoticed, especially given the heavy audiovisual material we were carrying with us, our white skin, our clothing, our language and so on. The result of this visit was that the following day when we wanted to film the cemetery some more, we found it 'cleaned'; no more animals, the plants were weeded, the grass cut.



“Portrait of relatives of Martha-Thelma Calderon-Vandenberg”,
by An van. Dienderen

During our conversations before the trip to Guatemala, Elke had foretold this type of intrusive performances we would (un)consciously carry out in Santo-Tomas, as the city remained isolated from the capital with rather few tourists visiting the area. After a few days, the entire community knew of our visit and project. Tobias and Veerle felt uneasy, they feared the robbery of our material and urged us to return to the capital as soon as possible to contact more wealthy descendants of Belgian colonists, such as Oscar Berger (the current president of Guatemala), the family Vassaux and Esmenjaud. They were convinced that the return to the capital would prove more rewarding than filming in Santo-Tomas. As a matter of fact, Tobias wanted us to leave Santo-Tomas upon arriving, because he considered it a dangerous place. He did not have much traveling experience, with a single trip outside Western Europe to Sicily. By contrast, Elke knew half of the inhabitants and was very popular, being often surrounded by a dozen of residents who remembered her very clearly and dearly from her AFS stay two years earlier. She told us about some passionate crimes that had occurred in Santo-Tomas and Puerto Barrios, of the petty crime and the poverty in the region, but was not under the impression that we had to leave to “save” our material and lives.

I am not particularly courageous, on the contrary: I fear dogs, I fear heights, aggression and speed, yet in Santo-Tomas with this small tribe of us, I felt at ease and was determined to stay as long as necessary, much against the will of Tobias and Veerle who quarreled daily over the dangers and crime-rate of Santo-Tomas. Moreover, they seemed to think about the project quite differently from the way we did. Although basically Tobias and Veerle were asked to be the line producers, organizing the shoot, our housing and food, they found it very unproductive to work without any detailed script and accused the project of amateurism. They thought it was necessary to decide which direction the film needed to take and hence wanted us to depart for Guatemala-City or film things we were not particularly interested in. For instance, we wanted to film the coast of Santo-Tomas from a boat, to create subjective shots in an attempt to identify with the colonists. The boat Veerle and Tobias came up with was a military boat, equipped with a rocket-launcher and with a crew of eight marines. Obviously we could hardly use any of the shots, as the boat didn't fit in the imagined scene we worked out. Although these disagreements seem beside the focus of the film, beside the focus of this research, I think they matter, because they reflect what went on in the crew and demonstrate how frail cooperation is, and yet how this cooperation determines decisions that cut into the filmic interactions.

Meanwhile, upon our arrival in Santo-Tomas, I felt physically awful, felt sick in the morning to a point that I was almost convinced of having caught a tropical disease. I could identify very personally with the sufferings of the colonists. I felt unable to make interesting decisions and felt miserable. Didier noticed and proposed to be more active as the co-director. One of his decisions was to modify the schedule we had elaborated so far. As I felt too sick to conduct interviews, Didier decided to skip them for a while. Instead Maximilian and Didier left the hotel each equipped with a super8 camera, and a mini disc recorder, in search for relevant images and sounds.

6. EDITING AND POST-PRODUCTION

The first thing that I wanted to do in Belgium was contacting my gynecologist, as I didn't feel any better. The doctor confirmed: I was three months pregnant, I would give birth end of June, one month after the premiere of the film. The baby thus continued to grow while we edited, continued the research and financing, and promoted the film.

Given the imagined prefiguration of the 'viewer' and hence a particular accessibility, we needed to develop somewhat of a narrative structure. The shoot in Guatemala and in the *Muide* resulted so far in a collage of several 'little' narratives but did not create an overall structure, necessary, so it seemed to us, for the 'viewer' we anticipated. I continued to research archives, libraries, and contacted several persons in the *Muide*. We felt fascinated by the 'coincidence' of the occurrence of this urban legend in an area, which might be a textbook-case of issues of migration. Yet the research for interested 'others' did not turn out well. I found nobody interested in cooperating. Apparently most of the immigrants had been interviewed previously by a television journalist and were 'used' in his program in a stereotypical, harmful way so that many had lost their confidence in documentary making all together. We therefore decided to try to contextualize the 'verapa' area in a visual way, but not in a very interactive or emotional way.

Meanwhile, I continued researching for more 'voices' of the past, as I hoped their collage might provide the necessary structure. One month before the premiere, I visited the archive of the Flemish Jesuits in Leuven, where I found the most extraordinary book: it was a diary written in 1844 by a colonist who had returned¹¹. It read like a novel; it was witty, well documented, very thrilling and emotive. Didier immediately decided that this would provide us a convincing and intense narrative that would not lose our focus of offering different perspectives on the 'verapa' stories, yet it sort of made the other narratives fall into their place. I started a research to try to identify this anonymous account. With Professor Evereart we thought we were able to point out who had written the report based on the list of people who were on board of the ships departing for Santo-Tomas before 1844 namely Charles Van Huyse.

For budgetary reasons Didier decided to edit at home, not in a studio, with the result that it became difficult to get away from his work and to create a distance *vis-à-vis* the editing. He often got up early in the morning and went to sleep in the middle of the night still wearing his pajamas. I viewed his work in the evening and we then discussed the different possibilities to develop the storylines and to initiate '*les règles du jeu*' to the viewer. These 'rules' are codes we elaborate throughout the film, based on a specific use of the parameters such as the frame, the focus, the angle and so on. With this particular application of parameters we want to equate it with a specific significance. For instance: by using super8 images in color often accompanied

¹¹ F.A.C.V.H., 1844. *Relation et impressions du voyage et séjour d'un colon revenu de St-Thomas. Pour servir d'éclaircissements en de rectification au jugement qu'on pourrait se faire de cette colonie*. Anvers: Imprimerie de J.Jouan, Place-verte 480.

by Hawaiian steel guitar music from the twenties we wanted to stress the exotic, romantic and idealistic longing for an El Dorado. To elaborate these 'rules', we continued filming during the editing: for instance we filmed a shot in which I hold a camera so as to introduce myself as the one filming the super8 images resulting in a specific 'authorial' perspective on the history.

By the end of this phase we invited two editing doctors, two very different types of editors, one known for his creative work, the other for his efficient style. They encountered the work in a new, fresh way whereas we were enmeshed in it. Their comments and suggestions were encouraging to us. During the editing, I remained in contact with the many 'others' we had met thus far. I negotiated with Martha-Thelma on the images we would use; I discussed the 'verapa' narratives with Jean-Claude Versluys and Roger Moreau and thought with Luis Tobias Sanches on how we would be able to screen the film in Santo-Tomas. The contacts with the crew of the KunstenFESTIVALdesArts were about the promotion and presentation of the film based on the direction the film was taking during the editing. They offered us to screen the film on a location that would refer to El Dorado, such as the center for asylum-seekers. Yet we opposed, given the more problematic accessibility and the difficulty of screening the film under good technical conditions, which is of crucial importance to us, and given the moral assumption underlying such a choice.

We were therefore given the opportunity to screen the film in the film museum located in the center of Brussels. Next to a Flemish subtitled version of the film, the festival urged us to organize a French subtitled version, in view of their border-crossing profile. Furthermore, I ordered a Spanish translation because I also had the people in Guatemala in mind when specifying the 'viewer'. Finally an English version was made possible for academic purposes and for screenings in North American and English venues.

7. PREMIERE

Although my aim was to organize a simultaneous premiere in Brussels and Santo-Tomas, because of budgetary reasons this became impossible; the people at the Ministry of Development had rejected our demand for aid as they did not consider Guatemala a so-called 'underdeveloped' country. Other attempts failed as well. The film was therefore solely screened in Brussels, not simultaneously in Guatemala, to a mixed audience of relatives of Belgian descendants, experienced viewers of the festival, some historians, some people from Ghent and our friends and relatives. Most of the people with whom we worked on the 'verapa' narratives in Ghent, came to the screening in the community center a week later. Where the screening in Brussels was presented to a rather mixed audience, in Ghent it were almost only inhabitants of the *Muide*, who participated in the screening in a more emotional way, for instance by joining in the 'verapa' song when it came up in the film.

The premiere forms the end of the phases of filming, editing, and post-production, but announces the beginning of the distribution, the reception and consumption of the film. The research period continues, in a less active way from my side. What became somewhat of a ritual after every screening was the overload of narratives on the colony that were told to me. The screening of the film seemed to set in motion or activate the memory of viewers who were familiar with some of the narratives, and so I could make a sequel based on the many new urban legends and narratives that were told.



Film still, *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*

8. DISTRIBUTION

In Belgium the film was screened on several locations in Ghent, in the community center *de Muide*, Volkshuis, Caermersklooster, Film-plateau, Timefestival; on film festivals in Belgium, such as Viewpoint, Documentary Film Festival in Ghent; Open Doek, Turnhout; Festival van het Vrije Beeld, Brussels; Argosfestival, Brussels; and in art film venues in Belgium such as Zuiderpershuis, Antwerpen; De Warande, Turnhout; Zedcinema, Leuven. Internationally it was picked up by the Margaret Mead Film and Video festival New York, the Pacific Film Archive Berkeley, School of Oriental and African Studies, London and Nederlands film festival, Benelux screening in Utrecht. Some embassies screened the film, e.g. the Belgian embassy in Honduras and the Guatemalan embassy in Stockholm. The film became furthermore the subject of an educational brochure issued by the Flemish Ministry of Education and distributed on 500 copies for interested teachers to use in their courses. The national broadcasting corporation (VRT) was not interested, because of the very particular and rather local focus - in their opinion - of the film, although we did receive the prize for best Belgian documentary of 2002 and 2003 of the Flemish and Walloon community.

In May 2003 the film was finally screened in Guatemala City on the *Festival de Cine Europeo*. The organizing committee invited me to return a list with the names of the people who had participated in the film so as to make sure they received free tickets. Although I had mailed a stack of VHS tapes to Luis Tobias Sanches, this public screening was an opportunity to share the film with an audience. Apparently, people came in such numbers that two extra screenings were necessary in a larger venue. Yet it roused public controversy by two articles published in *El Periodico*, the national newspaper. Many letters arrived at the editor's desk. What caused this controversy? By going into the particular way the film was received in Guatemala, I intend to further the understanding of the mediated relation between the 'author' and the 'viewer/other'.

Vamos a Verapaz

MARTA SANDOVAL
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El documental, *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*, se inicia con la historia de Elvis, quien cuenta por qué tiene los ojos azules, y asegura: "no son de contacto, son originales". Elvis, cuenta, es descendiente de belgas, aunque por los ojos claros todos crean que es gringo. Como él, algunos de los descendientes de los belgas que llegaron a Guatemala en 1844, atraídos por la riqueza que prometía "La compañía de la colonización" —luego de que Leopold I adquiriera tierras en el país—, cuentan su historia en este filme de An Van y Didier Volckaert que se presentó el pasado martes dentro del Festival de Cine Europeo, que actualmente se lleva a cabo en la ciudad.

Dos ancianas de apellido McDonald rememoran cómo sus abuelos llegaron de Bélgica: "El año que vinieron no me recuerdo, es decir no lo sé, porque no estaba yo nacida", dice una de ellas. "1843", la interrumpe su hermana. "Vinieron en 1843", exclama segura. Las dos se sienten orgullosas de sus antepasados y la primera acota: "Ojalá mi mamáta viviera, porque se sentiría muy feliz de que le preguntaran todo esto que nos están preguntando a nosotras", la entrevistada explica que ella nació en 1904.

Según narra el documental, cuando Leopoldo I adquirió tierras en Guatemala, en 1843, su objetivo no era explotar riquezas, como sucedió en el Congo, sino reducir el nivel de criminalidad en Bélgica. Para lograrlo, animó a los belgas más ricos a crear "La compañía de la colonización", y luego la promovieron con exóticos anuncios y cartas falsas de supuestos migrantes belgas en Guatemala, que describían como un lugar de abundancia, como "la tierra prometida". De esta manera, les

"Tu ne verras pas Verapaz", película belga filmada en su mayoría en nuestro país, se presentó el pasado martes en Guatemala.



EL DOCUMENTAL VERAPAZ fue filmado en su mayoría en Santo Tomás de Castilla.



LOS REALIZADORES BELGAS investigaron la descendencia belga en nuestro país.

fue posible deportar a los desempleados y relegados de la sociedad. Aquí se ubicaron en el territorio de Izabal, donde muchos formaron familias e intentaron trabajar una tierra en estado desastro-

so. Muchos murieron en la aventura, otros retornaron.

Quienes se quedaron se sienten orgullosos de haber contribuido al progreso económico de Guatemala.

Fueron ellos, por ejemplo, los que introdujeron al país las diligencias.

DONDE NO HAY QUE TRABAJAR

"Nos han abandonado", dice René, otro descendiente de belgas que, junto a Carlos, reclama que no han podido obtener el pasaporte de esa nación: "Yo quiero el pasaporte belga, no porque lo necesite sino porque me siento belga", comenta Carlos. "A mí no me hace falta", dice René, "mis hijos y yo ya tenemos pasaporte suizo".

Una pareja de ancianos recuerda a sus antepasados, son de apellido Berger, y dicen sentirse orgullosos porque los Berger han sido siempre líderes: "Hay un Berger que fue alcalde de la capital y otro que está para candidato a la Presidencia", afirma el anciano.

En una de las escenas, Elvis pasea a los documentalistas por el cementerio Belga de Santo Tomás de Castilla, un lugar en total abandono, tomado por los perros callejeros. Al parecer, los descendientes belgas también han abandonado a sus antepasados.

Luego, hay una visita al parque Belga, siempre en Santo Tomás. Allí había una placa con la fecha de inauguración y un agradecimiento a la colonia belga, "seguro se la rularon", dice Elvis, y comenta que están buscando dinero para volver a colocarla. "Eso sí, ahora le vamos a poner candado", asegura.

Una voz en off narra la perspectiva desde el punto de vista belga y cuenta lo que les tocó sufrir durante el trayecto para llegar a este país. Antes de dejar su tierra cantaban esta canción: "¿Quién quiere ir a la Verapaz?, donde no hay que trabajar, sólo comer y beber a placer, y dormir como un cerdo". Pero al llegar a Guatemala la realidad era otra. Cuentan que cuando, por fin, iban a comer carne, un dirigente jesuita les prohibió comerla porque era viernes; como resultado, al día siguiente la carne ya estaba podrida.

Aunque los emigrantes belgas que se asentaron en Guatemala no sumaron más de 600 y varios de ellos regresaron a su tierra natal, los descendientes que viven en Santo Tomás de Castilla son muchos. El impacto histórico que "La compañía de la colonización" tuvo en nuestro país, sin embargo, no fue de gran magnitud.

It seemed that the journalist had copied the following text published on our website (www.verapaz.be):

*Who's coming to Verapas with us?
There's no need to work there
Just drink and eat if you want to
And sleep like a pig.*

This old song from Ghent, popular at the beginning of the last century, refers to an unfamiliar piece of Belgium's history: the former Belgian colony in Guatemala, Santo-Tomas de Castilla. When Leopold I bought a piece of Guatemala in 1843, his goal was not to exploit valuable resources as was done in the Congo, but to reduce crime level in Belgium. To achieve this, he inspired rich stockholders to start up the 'Company of Colonisation'. Propaganda was vital: the Company handed out exotic engravings, fake letters supposedly written by Belgian migrants praising Santo-Tomas as a land of plenty and representing Guatemala as a promised land. In this way they managed to deport the unemployed, losers and adventurers - rejects of nineteenth century society. An van. Dienderen and Didier Volckaert use this song as their starting point and look for the great-great-grandchildren of Belgian émigrés in Guatemala. They bump into Belgian lions, originally shipped into Santo-Tomas in 1843, rich Belgian descendants, who claim to have brought Guatemala many economic advantages, among others, but they also participate and share this popular song with these Belgians.

As a sort of poetic road movie, -leading the audience from "de Muide", Ghent to Santo-Tomas, Guatemala, the film's aim is to offer a personal exploration of the urge for the green grass over the hill, the 'El Dorado'. It hints at abstract concepts such as cultural identity, nationalism, memory, paradise lost, diaspora narratives and nostalgia.

I was informed on the controversy by the Belgian consulate in Guatemala City. They emailed the articles in which the film was presented, together with some pictures copied from our website, and by citing me about our aim and perspectives on the film. Obviously, the newspaper had not consulted me about these articles. Carlos Vassaux, who was interviewed by us and who had written a thesis on the emigration to Vera-Paz, wrote long emails to me inquiring about the relation between the article, the quotes supposedly cited by me, and our research and film. He prepared an open letter "to assuage those offended and especially to educate people and offer some impartial views about the colonization intent"(email of 260503). One of the sentences that he wanted to verify was the following:

"que el rey Leopold I vio la colonización de Guatemala como un medio para reducir el nivel criminal de Bélgica a mediados del siglo XIX... es un dato que puede consultarse en cualquier libro de historia belga o guatemalteca. (that King Leopold I saw the colonization of Guatemala as a means to reduce the crime rate in Belgium in the midst of the XIX century... is a fact that can be consulted in any book of Belgian or Guatemalan history)

Vassaux inquired: *"I am not aware of any history book with such a statement, (regardless of the general fact that creation of jobs is always a way to decrease poverty and its consequences). Are you?"*

I had invested much time in trying to explain to Mr Vassaux the intentions of the film. In my reply I pointed out elements that toned down the statement and stressed that very few authors had written about the colony. I attached a file with the references by several authors to the aim of Leopold I to comprehend the colony as an attempt to reduce the level of criminality. My main point was that this aspect of the history was not the focus of the film, on the contrary, but that it became an issue because of the article and the stress it had put on it. Yet Carlos continued: *"One letter to the newspaper states: los cientos de personas que asistimos a la presentación del film somos testigos de dos hechos: allí dice claramente que Leopoldo I, al alentar la colonización belga en Guatemala, pretendía reducir el índice criminal en su país y segundo que Guillermo y Margarita Vassaux aparecen en dicho documental como descendientes de los colonizadores; ...quienes debieron informarse sobre el "segó" de dicho filme, antes de aparecer en el." (that the hundreds of persons that were present at the film presentation are witness to two facts: that Leopold I, when encouraging the Belgian colonization in Guatemala, pretended to reduce the criminal level in his own country and second, that Guillermo and Margarita Vassaux appear in the film as descendants of the colonizers;...who should have informed themselves about the bias of the film before accepting to appear in it.)*

Vassaux inquires: *"To which bias of the film could they be referring? Did you have a bias in making the film to emphasize that Leopold's motives were to reduce the level of crime in Belgium? Or to get rid of rejects, losers and adventurers, or was the non selection of appropriate colonists, a problem that cropped up after the return to Belgium of the first colonists, who described the lack of infrastructure in Sto Tomas, and especially the internal problems of the Company and the dismissal of De Puyd from the "Conseil de Direction", etc. Could you clarify me what was really the objective of the film as you thought it out?"*

The question on the bias of the film came as very surprising to me, especially since my intention was to present the history of the colony through testimonies of personalized impressions, without offering any truth claims on the history so as to offer *'a personal exploration of the urge for the green grass over the hill, the 'El Dorado'*. Yet the film and especially the articles seemed to be understood primarily as a tool for ventilating a perspective on Guatemala, in which descendants were portrayed as the offspring of criminals. It seemed that the following sentence disturbed many descendants of Belgians in Guatemala and particularly those in support of Oscar Berger, as he was competing to be elected as the president of Guatemala: *"In this way they managed to deport the unemployed, losers and adventurers - rejects of nineteenth century society."*

I also received various emails, mostly from relatives from Oscar Berger. I copy one of them without mentioning the name of the author:

“We will like to know where do you found material related that the Belgians who came to Santo-Tomas were mostly criminals, as we do not have any register of such a thing. As we know we have the real order (paper) where Leopoldo I decorated Xavier Vassaux. That is the story we know. I am reading a book of the investigation of Belgium people coming to Santo-Tomas and never find a place where mention about criminals. All journalists in the country have been publishing these materials of you and really affected our honor. I am speaking in the name of all the Belgium descendants in Guatemala. I will be waiting of your prompt response. thanks.”

What became clear is that relatives of the future president saw the articles as an attempt to put the campaign of Oscar Berger in a controversial light. Because they use as an argument ‘the honor of the families’, I must have offended them in ways that I didn’t anticipate. In my view, to be described as an adventurer seemed to be a compliment. Carlos Vassaux also questions the following point: *“The journalist quotes An saying: "En Belgica la situacion es descrita como caotica y fracasada porque muchas personas murieron en la aventura , ya que no existía una ventaja economica real". (In Belgium the situation is described as chaotic and a failure because many persons died in the adventure and there were no real economic advantages). I understood that Belgium saw economic potential in the immense amount of land offered and in the construction of the first Atlantic port of Central America, if the colonization would take place.”*

It is not my aim to analyze in depth how this difference in perspective can be explained, as I think I can only be partial about it. To settle the controversy somebody from the Belgian consulate of Guatemala proposed the following: *“I should like to know if you were the person who sent the synthesis of your film where it was presented as though Belgium send all the criminals of Belgium to get rid of them, this was a bad news because the actual consul of Belgium here is a descendant of these families.. and his father - who was the “alcalde” of Guatemala city 4 years ago, is now presenting for the presidential elections in november 2003. Please if you send others information to resume your film, do not mention this part of the story because it might be a bad reputation for M. Berger, who might be, we hope the next president of Guatemala.”*

These reactions on the film demonstrate the fluid aspect of the mediated relation between ‘author’ and ‘viewer’; it points out that the interpretation of the film continues to transform and hence that an ‘end result’ in some ways does not exist, given the different ‘viewers’ present in different screenings. The interaction between ‘author’, ‘other’ and ‘viewer’ continue to renovate, presenting different and unexpected perceptions depending on the context of the screening.

Epilogue II

By focusing on a production process of a documentary made by Didier Volckaert and myself, my intention was plural: firstly I offer these reflections as a way to contextualize the elaboration of chapter 1 in an attempt to produce a self-reflexive research, pointing at the intertwinement between *'processes of knowledge production, and the various contexts of such processes as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer'* as Alvesson and Sköldbberg put it. Secondly, in examining this process I hope to provide a more firm ground to compare the three cases I examine throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, by comparing aspects of a process that I have undergone as well. Furthermore, to offer a view on this process I have constructed a position of insider/outsider, where the latter position is encouraged on the one hand by my resorting to the use of English and on the other hand and more importantly, by structuring the process in several phases which have been examined through questions induced by the frame on production processes. I consequently sought to answer how the mediated interactions between 'author', 'other' and 'viewer' vary along the different phases in function of the specific focus of the medium as determined by the particular phase. Finally, by elaborating the different perspectives on these interactions and the use of differentiated sources, I hope to have presented an ethnographic research of the documentary film production process on the 'verapa' narratives that might come close to performative anthropology.



Film still, final image of *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*

Indirect Flow During a “Night Passage”

(Crewmember) *You missed this because you were in San Diego but we were on the whole night train shoot, outside in the freezing cold and arctic wind. Inside everybody was freaked out in the train, we finished like at 5 am and it was P.’s last night. P. and K., M. and I, after finishing loading the truck, when everything was all done, we went down by the docks, to this place called ‘Toxic beach’ which has all these tires sticking out of the mud. It’s like a very low rent, little punk rock park, with all these burnt out busses with graffiti on them, a junkie part of the city, a nice spot. So we went down and watched the sunrise -and smoked a bunch of pot. We hung out and talked about a lot of things, about experimental films. We talked about the film we were shooting of course. Always. And discussed how we would shoot it, how things would be different. And then we went out to have breakfast, where all the workers go who work in the docks before their work. We were all in our blurry mind state with not enough sleep and a lot of drugs. And at about 8 o’clock 9 am we went all home to bed, to sleep. Not an exciting anecdote but that was part of the best thing of this set: the relationships between us, fun and interesting people who were doing a lot of cool stuff. It was a good thing to meet them. In some ways it was almost like when you are climbing; you are with these people on this epic adventure and there is this huge process to get to the final outcome like the top of a mountain and then you have to come down. Often you are up on long nights and you are in this really stressed-yet-you-have-to-remain-calm situation. So you develop really intense relationships. Similar, on film shoots really. Where you are put in these situations for many hours at a time that are totally unnatural. And everyone is trying to perform as well as they absolutely can, you are not trying to do a bad job, its not like you bare working in a retail store where you don’t give a shit. It’s like climbing: you have to do a good job. Otherwise it’s not going to be successful. In these extreme circumstances, you form relationships that you normally wouldn’t form, certain truth and honesty come out that you just not experience in normal rounds of existence.*

“She, of the interval”¹

“In the ancient Chinese style of writing – known as the Small Seal Script – the calligraphy for the word Jian, which means interval, space, partition, shows a doorway with the picture of the moon in the middle. No matter where one is in life, one still has an interval of time to use wisely, advises Deng Ming-Dao for whom “the time when the moon shines through a doorway indicates both space and interval”. In this locus betwixt the world of logos and mythos, lunar light has the quiet power to transform sleep time into awakening time. In this (no)state of intense altered consciousness, one finds oneself being of both – of here and there, knowingly knowing not” (Trinh 1999: Xiv).

¹ Title of Chapter 2 in: Trinh, Minh-ha 1991. *When the Moon Waxes Red. Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York and London: Routledge.

The third case in my comparative exploration of the production process of (documentary) film deals with the feature film *Night Passage* of Trinh T. Minh-ha² and Jean-Paul Bourdier. Vietnamese award winning filmmaker and theorist Trinh is an influential and articulate voice in independent filmmaking, film studies, cultural studies, postcolonial theory and gender studies. In her writings and interviews, as well as in her films, Trinh argues in favor of a multicultural revision of knowledge, challenging reductive analyses of any sort. Produced at the intersection of creative and critical practices, Trinh's work can be situated in plural *intervals*: between art and theory, poetry and politics, fiction and documentary, and truth and fact, resisting any categorization and inviting the reader and the viewer in a reflective and sensual process of co-producing. Indeed, the notions of 'interval', 'the space between', and 'the third term', emerge consistently in her work in such a way as to expand conventional classifications, reflecting on hybrid spaces "*between viewer, maker and film; between image, sound and text; between interviewer and interviewee; between lover and resistance*" "in order to allow words set in motion dormant energies and to offer a passage from one space (visual, musical, verbal, mental, physical) to another" (Trinh 1999: xi).

"I would say that creating rhythm is a way of working with intervals – silences, pauses, pacing- and working with intervals means working with relationships in the wider sense of the term. Relationships between one word, one sentence, one idea and another; between one's voice and other women's voices; in short, between oneself and the other. What you are creating in relationships is not the mere product of an accumulative process, but rather, a musical accuracy –the precise rhythm and tuning that allow what you say and don't say to find its reverberation in other people" (Trinh 1999: 38).

In this fusion of passages, inviting a notion of difference, she explores among others things the materiality of film in the filmmaking process; West African cosmology and the significance of dwelling; the many meanings of the marginal, by examining Asian and African texts, theories of French writers such as Barthes; and so forth. By reflecting on these various issues, she aims at politicizing the aesthetic experience; challenging the habits of consumptive spectatorship and the furthering of issues of representation as related to questions of gender, ethnicity, and cultural differences. As such she defies not only the bordering of different disciplines, but she also questions practices, methodologies and intentions of specific disciplines such as anthropology, philosophy, postcolonial studies and film theory.

² Her works include: the films *Reassemblage* (40 mins, 1982), *Naked Spaces - Living is Round* (135 mins, 1985), *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (108 mins, 1989), *Shoot for the Contents* (102 mins, 1991), *A Tale of Love* (108 min, 1995), and *Night Passage* (98 mins, 2004). The books: *En minuscules* (poems, 1987), *Un Art sans oeuvre* (1981), *African Spaces - Designs for Living in Upper Volta*, (in coll. with Jean-Paul Bourdier, 1985), *Woman, Native, Other* (1989) *When the Moon Waxes Red*, (1991), *Framer Framed* (1992) and *Cinema Interval* (1999). Trinh Minh-ha taught at the National Conservatory of Music in Dakar, Senegal (1977-80); at universities such as Cornell, San Francisco State, Smith, and Harvard; she is presently Professor of Women's Studies and Film at the University of California, Berkeley.

In her work she develops a poetic and visual style, which resonates with issues such as hybridity, marginality, difference, resistance, autobiography, representation and more. The term *resonate* is deliberately chosen, since she explicitly decides to offer a non-linear, non-encyclopedic or non-academic account of these concepts, crisscrossing different disciplines, themes and styles so as to present relations between them. She uses the image of spirals to refer to her discourse: *“You, as the onlooker, position yourself differently according to different contexts and circumstances, but so does the ‘other’ whom you are looking at. Each constitutes a site of subjectivities whose movement is neither simply linear nor circular. In the spiraling movement, you never come back to the same, and when two spirals move together in a space, there are moments when they meet and others when they do not. Trying to find a trajectory that allows the two movements to meet as much as possible without subsuming one to the other is also how I see the process of translation”* (Ibid. 187).

There is no specific beginning nor ending in Trinh’s discourse and as such opens paths to a multitude of interpretations and opposes clear-cut definitions. This stance might also be applied to issues of identity such as the anthropological “other”, which is often understood as dichotomous, referring to certain colonial politics of anthropology. By creating binary divisions, Trinh points out that the self is situated in a veiled game of ideology and power and *“flattened down to a form of oppositional demarcation between dominant and dominated culture”* (Ibid. 63). The self that Trinh offers consists of a broad range of subjectivities. Again, the image of the spiral is useful to shed light on this idea. Instead of envisioning the self as an onion with a clear core, she creates a layered and dynamic complex, which can’t be reduced to simple definitions. By challenging and questioning concepts, by refusing static classification she demonstrates her affinity with French critical theories and traditional Asian philosophies: *“What interests me is not the return to the roots nor an assimilation of French theory but rather how I can use all tools that I have in their radical resistance to one another; how I can read French theory in light of Zen Buddhism or Taoism; and how to a certain extent, I can reread Zen Buddhism and Taoism in light of temporary critical continental philosophy. The process of cultural and theoretical hybridity gives rise to an “elsewhere within her” - a space that is not easy to recognize, hence to classify”* (Ibid. 63).

Trinh’s approach might be described as one of indirection and understatement, an approach that many find disturbing, as she doesn’t offer a clear and logical account in her discourse. Rather, her universe is one of extraordinary poetry, of striking visual imagery, raising the quality of evocation to beautiful heights.

“One can only approach things indirectly. Because in doing so, one not only goes toward the subject of one’s focus without killing it, but one also allows oneself to get acquainted with the envelope, that is, all the elements that surround, situate or simply relate to it” (Ibid. 33-34).

Because of this specific approach of indirectness and hybridity, her work offers endless re-entering. You can walk through a book of hers with specific topics in mind, such as the creative act, gender issues, or questions of the marginal, but also with a precise interest in the politics of China, West Africa or Vietnam. When you enter her work while concentrating on a particular issue, you are suddenly confronted with surprising associations. You will pass by several notions that you were not familiar with. The one thing that you will not find, however, is a clear cut definitive account, as she prefers (un)veiling over clarity, indirectness over logic, mysticism over concrete descriptions.

In her films and books she refers to the fictive and artificial nature of these symbolic systems (Ibid. 56). By reproducing the performance of writing and the theatricality of the film process, i.e. by dealing with the pseudo “truthfulness” in representation, Trinh points at the complexity of the politics of knowledge, and refuses to reduce it to a discourse of authenticity. “*Like in all my other films, the strategies I use usually point back to the making and viewing of the work*” (Ibid. 202). By inscribing the creative process in the production of knowledge, she proposes a critical stance on image building. “... *the demystification of the creative act has almost become an accepted fact: The writer or the artist is bound to look critically at the relations of production and can no longer indulge in the notion of “pure creativity”*” (Ibid. 224). By referring to the creative processes through the production, she contributes to (un)veil what happens within the “infinite relation of word and image” (Ibid. xi).

Interlacing a Conversation of a Passage

It is precisely because of this discourse on (un)veiling, her work on the ‘interval’ -as a place between moments, spaces and passages, combined with a sophisticated poetical indirectness, that I explore the production process of her work. During 1999, 2000 and 2001, I have spent several semesters at UC Berkeley as a visiting scholar of the Rhetoric department, where I enjoyed following Minh-ha’s courses. When she inquired whether I was interested in being the (second) assistant director (AD) of her next feature length film, I felt privileged, and saw this as an excellent opportunity to explore the elaboration of her film during the production process. Although I would work as a volunteer I appreciated the offer, as I was not only inspired by her written work but also by her films which I had seen from 1990’s onwards and were of particular significance to me given their challenging, daring and poetical qualities. The film is called *Night Passage*, and is described by Minh-ha as a work on friendship and death; she made it in homage to Kenji Miyazawa's novel, *Milky Way Railroad*. The shoot was scheduled during the month of July 2001, mostly during the night. The crew consisted of six professionals and some 20 volunteers. I shared the assistant directing function with a more experienced woman, who could only invest her time partly in the project so that I had to replace her whenever she could not make it. I didn’t have a precise job description, but Minh-ha stimulated me to understand assistance in its broadest possible sense. I invested my time in various tasks such as in the communication between the art and the production department, encouraging people so that the production schedule could be followed, helping

to organize the set, distributing food, drinks, and schedules, telephoning volunteers to make sure they would appear, helping actors to get dressed, trying to learn the script and the preparatory drawings by heart, trying to fix the walkie-talkies, helping to find extras, assisting the Director of Photography with the labeling of the tapes, etc.. In general, I mixed with all the people during the shoot given the various tasks I did, so that I became familiar with the crewmembers and their responsibilities. I was not present during the preparation, the editing, the post-production or the premiere of the film. The ethnographic research will therefore only deal with the moment of filming, and consequently, in contrast with the other two cases, will be fairly limited in scope.

Although there were moments when I could reflect on the process, given the number of tasks, the long hours and the amount of scenes, Minh-ha advised me to conduct interviews after the shoot. In August I interviewed 10 crewmembers from different departments, the crew being divided in units such as the production department, the art department, the sound department, etc... each directed by a professional who led a number of volunteers. The crewmembers that I selected for my interviews had various functions: there were heads of departments, volunteers, assistants and so on. With them I went in depth through various aspects of the mediated interactions during the process of filming such as the relation between volunteers and professionals, the flow of creativity on the set, the balance between improvisation and preparation, between documentary and fiction, the collaboration between Trinh Minh-ha and Jean-Paul Bourdier and so on. I had written a questionnaire, but in most of the cases I used it very loosely, as I wanted to have the conversation as informal as possible (for the questionnaire see addendum).

Although my research did not deal with the actors, the 'other' in this case, I would like to add that some roles were played by professional actors, some by acquaintances of Minh-ha and Jean-Paul, some by the cast and some by friends who inspired Minh-ha for some parts of the script. I would therefore want to point out that the 'other' in this case can be approached as a 'flow between fact and fiction', with some of them playing a part, others playing 'themselves'. The choice of crewmembers over actors for my investigation was more a question of organization of the interviews as the principal actors left the bay area after the last day of filming. This external factor consequently determines the type of interactions I will explore in this ethnography. Yet what was of even greater influence on the type of interaction I examined was Minh-ha's decision not to be interviewed before the film was edited. Although I regret her decision personally, as a researcher I can comprehend it through the reading of her books where she points out that it is not a pre-envisioned idea but the encounter with the location, the cast and crew, and further on, the exploration of the images and sounds that have been recorded, which determine the yet unmade film:

"I don't come into a project with a desire to address something specific. It is always in exploration and encounter – with a place, a group of people, a thought process, a force, an energy, for example – that ideas and images take shape" (Ibid. 89).

Later on, while emailing back and forth she added that her conception of a work contrasts with one where the 'author' interprets the process of a project as an execution of the elaboration of a script, so that talking ahead of a project doesn't present a problem. "Yet there's not much to say when one exists simultaneously with the work; one is only this empty vehicle through which the work is taking shape. The more one talks then, the more it runs away from oneself. The work does not exist before the making, even if there's a script with which one works. Fragments in my context are not opposed to the whole. A fragment is a fragment when it contains the whole and vice versa."

In the reflection of the filming of *Night Passage* I therefore weave citations of crewmembers and my own observations with quotes of Minh-ha that I found in her books, which seemed relevant to interlace with the topics discussed. Minh-ha's voice is thus of a different sort than the crewmembers', who commented on specific questions of mine. Rather, her quotes are in the first place answers to questions raised by others in a specific context different from that of the crewmembers, and ultimately directed at the readers of her books. Hence the research of the production process of *Night Passage* will deal with the relation between the 'other' and the 'author' through impressions of the interactions between the crewmembers, which are interwoven with published citations by Minh-ha mostly quoted from *Cinema Interval* (1999)³. The reference to the book and page the quote is taken from are indicated between brackets.

Most of the interviewees expressed their desire to remain anonymous. The citations of the crewmembers are moreover not individually differentiated: some citations might thus be from one single person, others from different persons. In contrast with the other cases, my 'voice' is mostly limited to the selection of citations of the crewmembers, the (underlined) questions and some additional remarks. Furthermore, I didn't confront these citations with other writers, as Minh-ha as an outspoken and published 'voice' seemed more than appropriate to consider the several statements. As such, this ethnography is more a conversation between crewmembers and a 'published' Minh-ha, where I function as an editing force than it is a personal exploration of a collective experience.

³ Trinh T. Minh-ha, 1999. *Cinema Interval*. New York and London: Routledge. This book brings together her recent conversations on film and art, life and theory, with Homi Bhabha, Deb Verhoeven, Annamaria Morelli, Bérénice Reynaud, Margaret Kelly, Linda Tyler - Sarah Williams - Toroa Pohatu and Tessa Barringer, Kim Hawkins, Paul Kalina, Nancy Chen, Gwendolyn Foster and Mary Zournazi. Edited from public conversations (1992), and printed in such publications as *World Art* (1997); *The Postcolonial Question. Common skies, Divided Horizons* (1996); *Artist and Influence* (1993); *The Independent* (1998); *Women's Studies Journal* (1994); *Film/Tape World* (1995); *Filmnews* (1992); *Visualizing Theory. Selected Essays From V.A.R 1990-1994* (1994); *Film Criticism* (1997) and *Foreign Dialogues* (1998).

The Author as a Plural Site

“Every time I use “I”, it’s just a site for other “I”s to crisscross, and it doesn’t have this personal-story quality. Not everything personal is political, but if you can politicize or socialize something personal, then the personal is not merely personal. In other words, my films deal with the vicissitudes, or the difficulties, of representation, it’s delusive to think that one can present a true self or a pure vision” (Ibid. 204).

Before delving into the specificities of the process of filming, it is important to grasp how Minh-ha relates to the ‘author’ function as this perception determines the interaction between the crewmembers and their relation with their job and the project. Similarly to Els Dietvorst, who thinks of an ‘author’ as a collaborating force, offering opportunities to others, without exploring personal trails, Minh-ha envisions the ‘author’ as a conceptual site, where personal interests and desires are interesting in so far as they can be politicized: *“When you are on the working site, the “zone” and the points of your focus come to you intuitively while you shoot, just as they are also carefully developed while you create with your camera. It is a mutual process of designation – you are inspired by something that designates you as you designate it in the way you look at it or listen to it via the tools you use to record it. I think the only thing that gives me some confidence in what I do is not what I know ahead of time, but the trust I have in working with “nothing”. This “jump in the void” is a most exciting moment of enablement, when you know that everything fragmented and seemingly unrelated around you can become the film, whose coherence – in discontinuity – is due to the fact that “I” constitutes a site where incongruous things can meet. You only have yourself and the idea that relationships can be created (or that old relationships can be altered and new ones formed) to work with, so you can go and shoot anything you want. One needs to be curious and alert, rather than be a body of information or a pattern of projections. During the process of making the film you see, you hear, you feel, you witness, you participate, and this is what dictates to you the form and the structure of the film. In other words, the subject matter is in the way you record and create it” (Ibid. 69).*

“A work begins, for example, with a throw of a dice. I would take up the element of chance and dwell on the configuration of the dice until their inherent relations rise to visibility and reveal to me something of our encounter. Listening to how things resonate among themselves has led me into totally unforeseen areas” (Ibid. 257).

For *Night Passage* Minh-ha’s partner, Jean-Paul Bourdier operated as the co-producer and the co-director, while also working as the production designer: *“Collaboration happens not when something common is shared between the collaborators, but when something that belongs to neither of them comes to pass between them. This is what happens between Jean-Paul and me when we work together” (Ibid. 244).*

For the crew this collaboration presented a challenge, because the divisions in functions between the couple were not clearly demarcated. Quite spontaneously after some time, it seemed as though some people turned more often to Minh-ha while others communicated with Jean-Paul. Whenever matters of acting needed to be discussed, I for my part turned to Jean-Paul, as he rehearsed with the actors before each take, whereas Minh-ha was more involved in the dressing and make up. Matters concerning production and the set up of the lighting were primarily discussed with him, whereas the frame, the movements of the camera and the sound seemed to be in Minh-ha's hand. Yet these aspects might also be discussed the other way around, with a shifting of the roles between them, depending on the location, their mood, the specific volunteers and so on: all this created a flow of energies between the two of them and consequently in the group as well.

(Crewmember) *It's very interesting and challenging to work for two directors, since the whole idea of a director refers to an author, a solitary vision. Especially with people who are married to each other and who have extremely opposite personalities. It's quite an interesting process.*

(Crewmember) *Well, Minh-ha is quiet, subdued, which made it rather hard to figure out what she wanted. Jean-Paul is sort of the flamboyant Frenchman who is running around with his hair sticking out all over the place, being the arty French style man. Do you feel there was a division between their responsibilities on the set? It seems that Minh-ha was sort of the creative force behind things and she had the final say. And Jean-Paul was much more active but he would give in to Minh-ha if she would not change things. So she had the final say.*

Parameters, an idiosyncratic Universe

"Light, setting, camera movement, sound, and text all have a presence, a logic, and a language of their own. Although they reflect upon one another, they are not intended to just illustrate the meaning of the narrative" (Ibid. 10).

"Lighting is therefore neither reduced to lighting the actors nor to filling in the space where the action takes place. On the contrary, the subject becomes lit as it falls or moves into rays of light. Neither being privileged, both actors and light become visible when the two cross each other's path" (Ibid. 11).

Minh-ha and Jean-Paul envisioned the shoot as a one take experience, meaning that an entire sequence needed to be filmed in one take only, a very daring and challenging decision, contrasting with mainstream style of filmmaking where inserts, close ups and different angles are used to break down a sequence in an easily consumable editing. The use of parameters such as frame, focus, light, are very dear to both of them, creating as they do an idiosyncratic language dialoguing or confronting with the 'story' or the performances of the actors.

(Crewmember) *The composition and framing of all the films had a particular style, which still remains quite mysterious to me and I don't know how to define it. I just know that I never need to let the camera get stopped in a conventional frame. The challenge of not making the image look conventional and making it look interesting is why I like to work with Min-ha and her very mysterious process. It's always been very important in her style that the camera is independent of the subject matter, so that it has a life of its own that's not dictated by the action of the characters being filmed. You know, I have all of her books and I've tried to read them and I seem to understand her better when I'm shooting for her than when I'm sitting down reading an explanation for why she did something. It seems to be something that I can't describe in words. I know in fact on this one I would repeatedly have to tell off people who seemed to be relentless in arguing with her that she needed coverage. They would not stop and I felt like I spent a huge amount of time saying "That's not her style, have you seen any of her previous films"? She wants to shoot the entire scene in one take and have that one take be interesting. She doesn't want to be cutting away and she doesn't use reaction shots or close-ups or coverage, period. And you know if a take got ruined because of something or somebody flubbing their lines or an ambulance or fire engine going through, people would say, "Well, let's just shoot some pick-up shot or coverage, then you can use that", I know that that's not her style.*

(Crewmember) *I disagree with her decision to not cut. It allows her a style and I give her the right to do that obviously, I mean she's the author. Yet for me it has two very large costs; one is that the takes are determined to be good basically on the criteria that they don't have any mistakes in them and that they were approximately correct. But you know when you ask a group of people, especially with a child on the set, shooting through the night to be at full energy and full focus and really nail a performance for a nine minute long scene, that's difficult. So what you end up doing: "O.K., so for the nine minutes, well, yeah that worked and that was the best one and felt about right", but I think it's composed of a lot of minutes in there that are kinda sub-optimal. You can push the average level of the performance up one notch or two notches. I think that if you took a look at it with a razor blade and divided things up, you could put a lot more hooks into the performance that take you along a little more thrilling ride, I think. And the other cost, I just really abhor zooms. Every home camera has a zoom on it. And so its associations put you towards the shot as an amateur. I just watched one of her other films that had no zooms in it and they were using the cutting and it felt totally natural. So I know that she knows how to do that. But the zooms were necessary because otherwise with a five minute long scene and a changing composition there's just and you know there're just very few dolly moves on this thing too. No booms or jibs or anything like that, so what it means is that the camera is really static and without any cutting, which can be difficult to resolve a composition into something acceptable, especially into a Western composition orientated eye which leaves very little space in the frame, you know.*

Viewer inscripted

In contrast with the project with Els Dietvorst's and our own project, where a personalized 'viewer' emerges – in the form of the 'Swallows', or in the form of people of the *Muide* and Santo-Tomas,- Minh-ha does not film for a specific 'viewer' related to her in a personal way, yet she is concerned with him/her, in a more abstract way, as she considers it part of the responsibility of the 'author' to create his/her audience: *"In my writing and filmmaking, it has always been important for me to carry out critical work in such a way that there is room for people to reflect on their own struggle and to use the tools offered so as to further it on their own terms. Such a work is radically incapable of prescription. Hence, these tools are sometimes also appropriated and turned against the filmmaker or writer, which is a risk I am willing to take"* (Ibid. 213). *".. in the context of "alternative", "experimental" films, to know or not to know whom you are making a film for can both leave you trapped in a form of escapism: You declare that you don't care about audience; you are simply content with the circulation of your work among friends and a number of marginalized workers like yourself; and you continue to protect yourself by remaining safely within identified limits. Whereas I think each film one makes is a bottle thrown into the sea. The fact that you always work on the very limits of the known and unknown audiences, you are bound to modify these limits whose demarcation changes each time and remains unpredictable to you. This is the context in which I said that the filmmaker is responsible for building his or her audience. So of importance today is to make a film in which the viewer – whether visually present or not – is inscribed in the way the film is scripted and shot"* (Ibid. 224).

Moreover, as the producer of her film, she is also responsible for the fund-raising, which she experiences as an inevitable and necessary way of negotiating on the perception of the 'viewer': *"While our close involvement in the process of fund-raising and distribution often proves to be frustrating, we also realize that this mutual challenge between the work and the film public, or between the creative gesture and the cinematic apparatus, is precisely what keeps independent filmmaking alive"* (Ibid. 225). The budget for this film was minimal, offered as small research grants from a state-owned institution, more than half of the budget came from Minh-ha and Jean-Paul. The script with its remarkable locations and stunning views of the bay area of California was very impressive in the number of scenes and the elaboration of the overall aesthetics, demanding a lot of creativity in terms of the handling of the budget.

(Crewmember) *Let me say that an immense amount of credit needs to go to the executive producer, what she pulled off is pretty phenomenal. You know she was the one that actually is responsible for coalescing the project into physical reality. You've got a certain amount of money, you know that's an unheard of amount of money. That's like the budget to make a trailer or a short to sell a film with, but not a serious budget to actually do the thing. So she did it, you know, she fucking did it. She bought everything that she needed to do and got everything pretty well handled.*

“Newbie’s” brilliance

Because of the tight budget, volunteering positions became a necessity, although Minh-ha and Jean-Paul also valued this type of collaboration to encourage stimulating, refreshing perceptions on the film process. By inviting volunteers, they supported multitasking opportunities, offering the volunteers different jobs, promoting the switching of roles and hence defying classifications of talents. A bank of volunteers was created, some came daily, others when they had the time or the energy. Most of them, like me, joined for the experience and for the inspiring work of Minh-ha and Jean-Paul, although it struck me how few people actually had seen or read the body of work both of them had produced. Yet the familiarity with their work was not recommended, on the contrary, as Minh-ha wrote: “*The story ... is headless and bottomless but one has to enter somewhere, one has to go out somewhere, and even though there is a beginning and an end to every story, the readers can actually enter and exit on any page they wish without the feeling that they have missed ‘the intrigue’ or the ‘main point’*” (Ibid. 37).

(Crewmember) *How did you motivate the volunteers to join the crew? I would refer to Trinh Min-ha’s work and explain a little bit of her background. I would immediately send them the treatment of the film; I spoke very highly of the different locations. Cause when you think about it: for someone who doesn’t have a lot of experience, myself included, to be at different locations, to be on a night shoot for a month, requires a lot: it’s a very demanding thing! Each day is a new experience. Each day there are new problems: new lighting situations, new production obstacles to overcome. For someone who is fresh out of college, or like myself, is switching careers, this is a tremendous opportunity: to be exposed to so many production situations. This is one of the things that I used to pull in volunteers. I also admitted to them that I was also a volunteer too. Because I also thought it was an opportunity to work with Minh-ha, to work with people from ILM, it’s a wonderful networking and learning opportunity.*

(Crewmember) *We didn’t really talk about multitasking or any of that before production began. I think that it was something people latched onto as we went and I think people feel more involved when things can change; one day they can be doing art production and the next day they may be doing less interesting stuff, but then they still hope that the day after something more interesting may happen. It’s a chance to really learn the full diverse set of skills that it takes to make film. So, I think that people are willing to go through that so that they may learn a larger set of the processes. My feeling is that it works well in some cases and it doesn’t work well in other cases. Certain people have assets that they can still multitask, but if you let them do their thing most of the time, you may end up having that department be more successful because they can really focus. I think that there’s a level of focus that you need. If you’re running around lighting candles, than you can’t tell if the over all composition is good because you’re too close into the project. In that way there are some pros and cons, but I do think that maybe in how it differs from having a small type of crew as in documentary, that it may tend to scatter the brains of the directors more than with a small crew.*

(Crewmember) *I just got out of my own department a lot, since I'd had some experience with lighting. Usually on a shoot, you'll have three experienced grips and one or two that aren't, but on this one B., everywhere he turned he had green people. That really means he's stretched pretty thin. And so we were getting called into acting positions and we were being called all over the place. That's all fine and dandy too, but that can create problems, it can create safety problems too. It can create performance problems with your own position. Performance problems? What do you mean? Well, you might not be ready to do your own thing. If you just stay in your own little world, you can usually handle the world that's there but if there's kind of a chaotic situation around and you need to help somebody just so the film can get actually made at all. You know the film has to get made, the stuff has to be put into the can and so I'm just saying if a person is straying away from their own thing; it may help the film get made, but it may sacrifice a certain portion.*

(Crewmember) *In a crew like ours where there are many inexperienced people they get to learn a lot of things. Which is good for them, you don't get stuck as a boomer: it's annoying all the time holding the boom up. X. was doing that, but s/he was also recording sound and sometimes s/he was helping us and doing Production Assistance stuff. So I think that was good for a lot of people. Yet on a smaller crew it might work more: on a crew with 5 people for instance you get sound, camera, Director of Photography (DP), director and a grip electric, you often do much more different sorts of jobs. It's like in a huge corporation: everyone got their specific cubicles where they live in and do their specific job. And if there's only five different people in the corporation, you tend to do a lot more of every sort of job.*

(Crewmember) *What was your opinion on the relation between volunteers and paid people? All of the volunteers wanted to know who was getting paid and how much they were making. And clearly, this was not information that I shared with anybody. They asked me questions like: 'What was the grant?' And then they said: 'How much does the shoot in Lake Anza cost?' 'How much does this or that cost?' They wanted justification for why they weren't paid or why their gas receipts weren't reimbursed.*

(Crewmember) *I was talking to my boyfriend, I don't know how it came up, about the difference between working on a project with a group of extremely experienced professionals and working with a group of "newbies", that are very green. When you work with a group of new people, it's in many ways a painful experience because they don't know what anything is. Many of them have never done this before and they don't know what you're talking about or any of the objects you ask them to bring. And it's quite a struggle, but then there's always a few that just bring this brilliance, something fresh and new.*

(Crewmember) *I definitely think that it's a little bit frustrating when you combine teaching and profession. I think in subtle ways volunteerism definitely has an effect on the final product. It's a matter of attention and energy for the directors to have to explain a lot more. One develops a language within a profession; the language of commands for a given*

medium in a given profession. So you can say to some one “I need a half – blue back fill, twenty degrees” or something like that. If the person can execute on that level of language then that frees up the people directing to really focus in on the fine points which is what they’re supposed to be focusing in on. And if they’re distracted by certain emotional things like frustration or anxiety about time, then it takes away from their attention. So, I think that’s where professionalism really has an edge over collaborating, multitasking, group of volunteers and stuff like that. That people can multitask and that they did, for me that’s more at that level for their own sake than it is for the benefit of the film because I think the time of the directors can be better employed, focusing in on the overarching issues, the macroscopic issues instead of being so micro. It’s too close: if you’re painting there, you can’t see the overall picture.

(Crewmember) So you think the occurrence of confusion and stress on the set was caused by the fact that people were volunteers? Well, the fact that we were just fairly inexperienced. And it is not that if they were paying us, we would work any harder. Because I couldn’t work any harder, but if they were paying someone else, like some union person then obviously things would be smoother, because they are doing these things like for ten years. But they don’t have money for that, which is fine by me because otherwise they wouldn’t have hired me. Do you think there is more engagement or more enthusiasm when you work with volunteers? Yeah, there has to be more enthusiasm. Otherwise we wouldn’t be there. We are just interested in the process and in the project. So yeah, there was a lot of enthusiasm, it worked out fine. Was the experience rewarding for you? Oh yeah. Totally: I learnt a hell of a lot. I met some cool people, I got some great contacts for further potential money paying opportunities, perhaps world travel opportunities. So yeah, it was cool! Would you do more volunteer work in the future? Yeah, it is a good way to learn more and get some experience and contacts, definitely. I wouldn’t do another feature right now and I rather do more paid work now. But if the right opportunity came up and I am interested then yeah, sure.

Flow of Creativity

Given the particular perception on authorship as an encounter and exploration of a set rather than an execution of a pre-scripted plan, Minh-ha and Jean-Paul created the possibility of discovering each take while installing, organizing, and elaborating the set. They invited the crewmembers to creatively think about their work and thus to explore their own talents.

(Crewmember) Often Jean-Paul wanted to take all the crewmembers and make them the cast and that became a real challenge because how can they work when there’re also appearing in the scenes (laughter). He particularly liked our Best Boy or the person who was supposed to turn on all the lights. And he kept casting him in the scene because he liked the way he looked. And I would say, “Jean-Paul, you cannot put the Best Boy in the movie” because

he has to stand here and not move and yet you want him to go turn on all the lights, set the lights, so that was ah, an interesting challenge (laughter).

Improvisation might not be the most relevant term to understand these creative forces, as some parameters such as light, frame, focus and the positions and the performance of the actors were quite defined. Yet very often as for these same aspects and others as well, the crewmembers felt the desire of the directors to go beyond a preset idea, investing in the particular aspects of the encounter with the space, location and actors.

(Crewmember) *I thought that Minh-ha and Jean-Paul were very open to people's own interpretations of what the scenes were. From a production standpoint this drove me up the wall. There was room for people's own interpretations: so they didn't box. Things weren't written in stone, weren't entirely organized. Part of Jean-Paul's direction was: 'Ok we can do it, we will figure it out when we get there'.*

(Crewmember) *Why I called it "improv"? It was like Minh-ha withheld certain information, I think purposely, like very far till the end, even when the script was unfinished, they gave me, like say, the first half, then a little bit more and then a little bit more. What would be the purpose? Of withholding? I think to not be too purposeful or have too much intention of what it will look like, that way we have to react to what we're given later. What the site has to offer. We had certain concepts that we are going to work on and use as framework and if some of them don't work then we toss them out, you know, but also in terms of a unified look, I think that was less the priority than just responding to the site.*

(Crewmember) *Is this more organic, spontaneous evolution of the set encouraging to you? Did you feel a creative flow? Yeah sometimes, I could say 'This light would look better over here' or logistically, 'This light needs to be here' and that was possible. But when you go to set something up, and then you needed to remove it then you were all bent out of shape, disappointed, mad or frustrated. But sometimes these were minor communication problems. After I talked to the three different people from whom the info needed to come, mainly Kathleen, Jean-Paul and Edwin, then you finally figured it out. Do you think that this open spirit towards things on the set, in the sense that they really let the set talk to them, was this challenging for you in comparison with your work on other sets? Yeah, it was challenging although it was not always agreeably challenging. Sometimes I wanted them to have their shit together a little bit more, that they knew exactly what they wanted, that would make my job a lot more easy. And that would make things go faster, that would mean that Jean-Paul would be less stressed out that the lights weren't done in time. So that's sort of an evolving circle of communication.*

(Crewmember) *I remember Y. saying: "There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians." All these different people who wanted to be important....*

(Crewmember) *You know, even in professional crews I see the same thing. It's like the crew is filled with a lot of wannabe directors. And they just have*

to put their two bits out there, I've just always seen it my entire life. Min-ha was actually very gracious about inviting suggestions, but that's sort of her style. Even during her public speaking I've so often been to. She invites criticism, she thrives on it. She just loves people to blast her in public, you know. And she gets some strength from it that I've always been intrigued by. And the same in the shoot, she would welcome people's thoughts. I don't know to what extent she might have incorporated them into the film, but she certainly invited that dialogue.

(Crewmember) There was a certain level of documentary film in that she had really left up to the performers, not the main performers, but the dancers, some of these experts to really give their sense to their performance. She might have said something very loose like: "Give an interpretation of death in water" and they just developed a dance. So essentially, we're just documenting that and then later she will discover what has the potency, the ability to convey something. So that 's very similar to her documentary approach. I think, but in terms of the others parts of the process, developing the script, things like that, I'm not so sure, I think it's the way the concepts were tied together and actually how in other scenes they enforce adhering to the script. And that she used people who were in similar fields sometimes with which she was writing about yet she still wrote it and she was very careful with her words. In that way it's more projected than it is documented in some ways, that part of the process.

(Crewmember) I'm not so sure that I would correlate this kind of improvisational or the spur-of-the-moment decision just with documentary as much as I would with it being a smaller independent film, and not just that, her process it doesn't have a crystal vision in the beginning. That there's a conceptual underlining infrastructure to the film and that especially because of the speed, the pace of the film the way the preparation was, it required that a lot of things were decided on the set. So, I see that for me, closer to like jazz, you know, where you have a loose structure of how the music is going to go, but what makes it really work is this improvisation that happens in the moment as you see these certain things that you discover as you're going and for me that's what the process relates to most. I definitely see that openness and that for her certain concepts get delivered, that those were the most important part and the actual look of it, was something that no one could really tell until later because we weren't trying to guess beforehand.

(Crewmember) I really respect Minh-ha's vision. It is something that takes a while to sink in, perhaps, but that is the real thing that I took away from the film. The other stuff is really about adjustments that might be made in the making of, the execution of the thing that we are talking about....but most of all, the resulting film is the thing. While I have not seen the finished cut, the intent and staging of some of the sequences were purely brilliant. I am fortunate to have been involved with this film.

Epilogue III

“What is involved is a state of alert in-betweenness and 'critical' non-knowingness, in which the bringing of reflective and cosmic memory to life - that is, to the formless of form- is infinitely more exigent than the attempt to 'express', to judge or evaluate” (Trinh 1991: 234).

The ethnography of *Night Passage* is limited to the phase of filming, without any reference to the preparations, editing or distribution of the film hence focusing on an ‘interval’ in the process. The interviews have been conducted with crewmembers only; due to organizational circumstances the ‘other’ as actor could not be consulted. Furthermore, the ‘author’ position is not investigated through a personal interview but through published quotes. This is explained by the particular perception on authorship Trinh Minh-ha develops, which she envisions as a plural site where “*one exists simultaneously with the work*”, by encountering and exploring the set, locations, the actors and later on the recorded images and sounds. Consequently, this ethnographic research focuses on the mediated interactions between ‘other’ and ‘author’ through impressions from crewmembers, which have been interlaced with printed citations of Trinh. The stance on authorship Trinh and Bourdier develop molds various aspects of the mediated interactions between crewmembers and their relation to their work. Given the indirect, un-purposeful encounter with the set, the crewmembers were invited to share this exploration and stimulated in developing creativity towards their function. This multitasking, multitalented property of the crew, was also encouraged by the high number of volunteers working on the set, due to a rather limited budget. Although volunteers need to learn specific competencies and to adapt a certain professional language, Trinh and Bourdier comprehend their contribution as a potential refreshing perspective on the dynamics of filmmaking. Given these various aspects, the shoot can be understood as driven by a flow of creativity, with its brilliance of unconventional film dynamics and its frantiness because of certain inertia - consistent with the size of the crew,- at the end of the ‘chain of command’.

I would therefore propose to understand the dynamics of the shoot on *Night Passage* by referring to indirectness, encounter and exploration as ‘root principles or cultural intuitions’. These intuitions are not strictly personalized but rather politicized, and consequently bring about a rather abstract, undetermined and encouraging set of interactions. Furthermore, these insights shape the relation between ‘author’, ‘other’ and ‘viewer’ so as to expand conventional classifications, reflecting on hybrid spaces created by the performance and the theatricality of the film process. By encountering a film set in an indirect way, stimulating its exploration as an in-between zone, Trinh points at the inevitable nature of the impact of the medium on interactions between the main agents involved and hence at the complexity of the politics of knowledge, which she thus refuses to reduce to a discourse of authenticity or pseudo-truthfulness.

Epilogue IV

“Should I not simply leave the account at the end of the play and let readers draw their own conclusions? Or, conversely, if I now conclude with “talk”, with an interpretive discourse pronounced from a higher lever of reflection, am I not trying to provide a more or less happy ending where there is in fact none?.. The problem boils down to this: How can this book be ended without canceling its purpose, ...? It seems to me that this can be done only by taking the process into a newer cycle, making room for a new story” (Fabian 1990: 258-259).

During several years this research has led me to such different places as Santo-Tomas (Guatemala), Berkeley (USA), the *Muide* (Belgium), the Anneessens area in Brussels, Florence (Italy) and San Diego (USA) in trying to understand what it is that annoyed me so much in several television documentaries, anthropological films and video art. I knew it had something to do with the obscuring of information, which to me seemed more than relevant in the assessment of the ‘author’ and the claims s/he makes in relation with his/her ‘viewer’. During this research I came to understand that it was not a matter of peeking behind the scenes of documentary filmmaking, of demystifying and breaking down the poetical explorations, nor with the promotional ‘making of’ documentaries on DVDs, but that my irritation had to do with assumptions of pivotal importance – so it seemed – of western representational systems, such as the linguistic and the pictorial system. The taxidermist operations which I wanted so fiercely to challenge, pointed right at these naturalistic connotations, which reminds this peculiar obsession with and bewitchment by the positivistic claims of representational systems, this odd addiction to realistic modes of representation. These claims seem even much more harsh in the audiovisual configuration, given its indexical qualities, which are ‘signs that bear a physical trace of what they refer to, such as fingerprint, X ray, or photograph’ (Nichols 1994: ix).

In order to challenge these assumptions, I have started an exploration to reveal mechanisms, which seemed to obscure important codes to grasp what might have happened: to deconstruct the “ineffable ideology” as Barthes formulates, of the aesthetics of these (documentary) films (Barthes 1973: 142). These mechanisms seemed to be located in the interval between the reality as it is experienced and the screening of the ‘represented reality’. I wondered what influences the many decisions in between these two moments in the production process of (documentary) filmmaking although they can hardly be traced by the viewing of the ‘end result’. The research I have been occupied with can therefore be described as investigating ‘meaning in action’, as Marcus and Fischer proposed (Marcus and Fischer 1986: 85), or as delving into ‘situated practices’ as Hobart has formulated (Hobart 1995: 67), and to deal with ‘cultural mediations that occur through film and video works’ (Ginsburg 1991: 94). Instead of trying to perceive this interval from a theoretical standpoint, I have focused on the ground, or in the field, where ‘off the map’ places of dominant media cartographies are my tribes (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002: 8).

This investigation was concerned with interactions between people. I suggest to look at the interval - between the reality as it is experienced and the screening of the ‘represented reality’ - from the perspective of the main agents involved, as Dornfeld and Mandel have been involved in (Dornfeld 1998 and 2002; Mandel 2002). Throughout my fieldwork I have listened, argued, discussed, negotiated with and looked at how the ‘author’, the ‘other’ and the ‘viewer’ engage with one another within a context of a “technology of seeing”, which is the result from particular technological, social and ideological forces (Winston 1996). The hypothesis that I have examined suggests to value the interactions between the main agents in (documentary) film productions as determined by the implications of the medium. I propose to conceive the mediated relationships between ‘author’, ‘other’ and ‘viewer’ as complex and changing along with the various roles of the main agents involved in reference to the specific aspects or phases and its parameters of the audiovisual configuration.

This mediating context relating to a present of an ‘author’, his crew and its mediating devices but also to a future, associated with a ‘viewer’ and a specific transmitted venue, cannot be erased during the process of interaction between ‘author’ and ‘other’. On the contrary, the standpoint I suggest is that the interactions specific for (documentary) film production are only to be understood as related to the medium, the audiovisual configuration. The positions of the main agents are hence inherently mediated. As Winston and Volckaert argue, not only is the audiovisual configuration a socially elaborated construal, which is ideologically embedded, but it has also certain specific parameters which cannot be ignored as they constitute the very operational forces of this configuration (Volckaert 1995; Winston 1996). I therefore propose the following perspective: the audiovisual configuration with its social, ideological, operational and technological features determines the interactions between the main agents during (documentary) film production.

My approach therefore shifts the attention deliberately from analyses exclusively focusing on the end result which might be a film, a documentary, an audiovisual reconstruction, as is classic in cultural studies or film studies towards a critical research on the mediated interactions and the context of interaction in which the result is submerged. As such, it is my aim to add an investigative tool in the examination of the rich potentiality of visuals in the construction of the self, on the one hand, and the formation of sodalities through those media, on the other, both presenting consequently important challenges to anthropology. By shifting this attention, I hope to have underscored the critique on textual discourses as a representational force in anthropology, reducing cultures to texts (Asad 1986; Fabian 1990; Pinxten 1997) and to have demonstrated the inadequateness of this interpretive stance to cope with the growing enmeshment of identity dynamics with the (audio)visual landscape, in which *“all of our ‘I’s are fraternizing with the multiple ‘they’s fashioned in the never-never land of the screen”* (Ruiz 1995: 30). These transformations confront anthropology with the limitations of its methodologies in relation to the ‘world’. It is not only the ‘word’ that is fruitful in exploring human transactions. Social science should methodologically explore other symbolic systems as well and *“develop alternative objectives and methodologies rather than attaching the visual to existing methodological principles and analytical frames”* (MacDougall 1997: 293 in Pink 2001: 5).

In the examination of this perspective I have followed Fabian’s reorientation as a movement from an interpretive to a performative anthropology – *“the kind where the ethnographer does not call the tune but plays along”* (Fabian 1990: 19). By focusing on the production process of a documentary made by Didier Volckaert and myself, *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* (2002), my intention was plural: firstly I offer these reflections as a way to contextualize the previous elaborations in an attempt to produce a self-reflexive research, pointing at the intertwinement between *“processes of knowledge production, and the various contexts of such processes as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer”* as Alvesson and Sköldbberg put it, or to grasp very literally what Fabian proposed as *“playing along”*.

Secondly, in examining this process I hope to provide a more firm ground to compare the three cases I examine throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, by comparing aspects of a process that I have undergone as well. Furthermore, to offer a view on this process I have constructed a position of insider/outsider, where the latter position is encouraged on the one hand by my resorting to the use of English and on the other hand and more importantly, by structuring the process in several phases which have been examined through questions induced by the frame on production processes. I consequently sought to answer how the mediated interactions between ‘author’, ‘other’ and ‘viewer’ vary along the different phases in function of the specific focus of the medium as determined by the particular phase.

Next, by elaborating the different perspectives on these interactions and the use of differentiated sources, I hope to have presented an ethnographic research of the documentary film production process on the 'verapa' narratives that might come close to performative anthropology. Finally, by referring to the DVD of the film I hope to have presented another impression on the mediated interactions between 'author', 'other' and 'viewer', but this time from the perspective of another symbolic system, thereby demonstrating the differences and similarities between the linguistic and the visual system (Goodman and Elgin 1988; Fauconnier, Lakoff and Sweetser 1994; Fauconnier 1997; Fauconnier and Turner 1999).

The socio-economical and cultural context of the production processes of *The March*, *The Burden*, *The Desert*, *The Boredom*, *The Anger* (Els Dietvorst), *Night Passage* (Trinh Minh-ha and Jean-Paul Bourdier) and *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* (Didier Volckaert and myself) is relatively similar – 'off the map' - so as to focus on the mediated interactions between the main agents. As I have experienced in each case a different period of investigation, I have differentiated the comparison between the cases along the phases examined. In the example of Els Dietvorst and the 'Swallows' I have reflected on the preparation, the research, the preliminary performances, the scripting and the shoot. Although I could compare these specific phases separately, according to the fieldwork, it seemed more efficient to group up these activities in two phases following a particular type of group dynamics: the preparations and the shoot. *Night Passage* has only been researched during the shoot. I have therefore organized the comparison in two phases: the first part on the preparatory phase highlighting the processes of *The March*, *The Burden*, *The Desert*, *The Boredom*, *The Anger* and *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz*; the filming phase took in account the process of *Night Passage* as well.

In reflecting on the preparatory phase of *The March*, *The Burden*, *The Desert*, *The Boredom*, *The Anger* I have proposed the notions of collectivity, utopia and positive energy as the 'cultural intuitions' specifying this phase and hence the mediated relations with the Swallows, the 'other'. These intuitions seemed to me combined with a particular focus on authorship, challenging the limits between the collective and the 'author' so as to make it possible for Els Dietvorst and Orla Barry, to engage in a collaborative process negotiating on several parameters of the scripting phase. This process resulted in a script presenting a flexible and playful collage of the (utopian) lives of the Swallows, yielding a rich and vital example of the concept of identity dynamics, and eluding stereotyping and even taxidermist representations.

The preparatory phase of *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* shows some similarities with the previous case. I believe we have in common an interest in exploring different perspectives on reality, that we share a context of respect, tolerance and solidarity with people of different descent, age, context, interest and desires, challenging stereotypes and prejudices, borders and disciplines. Furthermore, I also trace the same romantic and utopian aspirations in both the projects, combined with a somewhat activist outline. Yet I believe to understand a difference in the perception of the impact of the preparatory

phase: in my perception, the script of the Swallows became something of a final point, ending the preparatory phase to rupture the process of negotiation and collaborative authorship, and shift to another form of professionalism, one in which parameters are non negotiable because of a limited budget and a lack of (film) experience. Whereas the phase of the preparations of the Swallows had a rather precise ending, our research continued until the end of the editing. I believe this difference between the two cases seems to be born out of our desire to conceive of (documentary) filmmaking as a processual happening, which is understood as an intertwinement not only of an insider and an outsider perspective but also of form and content, so as to have a flexible and open relationship between these aspects. I therefore think that the two projects share interests and aspirations on the level of content, and some familiarities with the processual approach. But they differ in their approach as to dealing with the parameters of the medium: whereas Els was interested in negotiating them with the Swallows, instead of preparing a script I for my part conceived of an audiovisual treatment early on in this phase, a treatment which was modified throughout the interactions, experiences and perceptions later on during the process. Yet it was not intended for negotiating with the 'other', in the way Els did, but destined to be modified along the trajectory of the process as understood by us, who based this perspective on previous film experiences in anthropological and experimental filmmaking.

The difference on how to understand the interaction between form and content in the three cases seemed to be even more apparent during the phase of shooting *The March*, *The Burden*, *The Desert*, *The Boredom*, *The Anger*; *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* and *Night Passage*. Given the particular perception on authorship as an encounter and exploration of a set rather than an execution of a pre-scripted plan, - a plural site - Minh-ha and Jean-Paul created the possibility of discovering each take while installing, organizing, and elaborating the set. This dynamics of the shoot refers to indirectness, encounter and exploration as 'root principles or cultural intuitions'. These intuitions shape the relation between 'author', 'other' and 'viewer' so as to expand conventional classifications, reflecting on hybrid spaces created by the performance and the theatricality of the film process. As such, Minh-ha points at the inevitable nature of the impact of the medium on interactions between the main agents involved and hence at the complexity of the politics of knowledge, which she thus refuses to reduce to a discourse of authenticity or pseudo-truthfulness.

In reference to the authors' relation with the crewmembers, these intuitions invited the crew to creatively think about their work and thus to explore their own talents. This multitasking, multitalented property of the crew, was also encouraged by the high number of volunteers working on the set, due to a rather limited budget. Although volunteers need to learn specific competencies and to adopt a certain professional language, Trinh and Bourdier comprehend their contribution as a potentially refreshing perspective on the dynamics of filmmaking. Given these various aspects, the shoot can be understood as driven by a flow of creativity where the parameters of cinema were ultimately in the hands of Minh-ha and Jean-Paul as they envisioned the shoot as a one take experience, and worked very precisely with light patterns and art direction.

In contrast, during the shoot of *The March*, *The Burden*, *The Desert*, *The Boredom*, *The Anger* codes and values such as the parameters of cinema were in the hands of professionals, rendering impossible the negotiation on codes, and ultimately distancing Els from her Swallows. Moreover, although Els invited the crew to rehearsals and tried to make them sensitive to the overall social background of the project, it remained very difficult for a first-time director to entirely direct them in the Swallows' way, characterized by a more participatory way of creating. As Ginsburg suggests, the indigenous media present a kind of Faustian contract with the technologies of modernity, enabling some degree of agency to control representation under less-than-ideal conditions (1991). In the Swallows' case, the Faustian dilemma might be interpreted differently: although the script has been created collectively, since they create a 'real film', they inscribe their process in this dominant and hence constraining mode of production. In the project of the Swallows it is the very form of Western narratives that may undermine the mode of representation. This form can be evaluated by the organization of the crew, which was more rigid than anything the Swallows were used to. This was partly due to the number of people on the set and the need to organize them efficiently but also a type of filmmaking which has become commonplace in Western cinema and which, according to Ruiz, has turned into a predatory theory. Whenever Els or the Swallows felt uncertain over a specific choice or decision, due to a lack of experience or under too much pressure, it seemed necessary to rely upon the experience of the professional crewmembers instead of finding resources in their own flexible and dynamic methods that preceded the shoot.

Throughout the elaboration of the shoot of *Tu ne verras pas Verapaz* in contrast with the other cases, there was no script guiding our encounters with the 'other', as we wanted this 'other' to lead us to certain places, themes, objects or persons that triggered him/her in reference to the several concepts which interested us in the 'verapa' narratives. Although there was no script, there was an audiovisual treatment, which inspired us throughout the shoot, not in a dominating, restricting way, but with the intention of revealing possibilities. One could therefore say that the 'other' had some degree of say-so in the defining of the parameters we used, because of the trajectory s/he proposed, but ultimately they were in our hands.

A last point I like to discuss is the position of the 'viewer' during the shoot of the three films. In contrast with the project by Els Dietvorst and our own, where a personalized 'viewer' emerges – in the form of the 'Swallows', or in the form of people of the *Muide* and Santo-Tomas- Minh-ha does not film for a specific 'viewer' related to her in a personal way, although she is concerned with him/her in a more abstract way, as she considers it part of the responsibility of the 'author' to create his/her audience: "*I think each film one makes is a bottle thrown into the sea. The fact that you always work on the very limits of the known and unknown audiences, you are bound to modify these limits whose demarcation changes each time and remains unpredictable to you. This is the context in which I said that the filmmaker is responsible for building his or her audience*" (Trinh 1999: 224). Given these different approaches to the 'viewer' it is clear that the question of the audience has been raised throughout the production of these films, hence affirming the collapse of the divide between production and reception.

In sum, I have taken a visual anthropology approach so as to offer a way of understanding how community and arts projects create social interventions and mediated interactions. That is, not by simply analysing the end product - the final 'text' - but by attending ethnographically to the processes, relationships and identities that are integral to its production. I argue that researching processes rather than the final 'text' is of crucial importance in dealing with the way (cultural) identity and visual representation are intertwined (van. Dienderen 2003; 2004a and 2004b). In doing so, it is my aim to suggest an investigative tool for the examination of the rich potential of audiovisual media in the construction of the self and the formation of socialities. This tool allows me to assess the ideological and social forces at work in film production in a particular context.

With this analysis of the production process of three film projects, I hope to have demonstrated the value of an analysis of the interactions between the 'author' and the 'other' in which the 'viewer' is prefigured during (documentary) film production. Rather than coining (documentary) film production with concepts such as 'reality', 'authenticity', 'fiction' and 'faithful representation', I thus suggest that the mediated interactions during the production process determine the 'flow between fact and fiction' (Trinh 1990: 89). Qualitative methods mostly derived from performative and visual anthropology offer possibilities in investigating the mediated interactions between the different agents. As such, I hope to offer an alternative to a strictly interpretative, text-based analysis and representational discourse.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I hope to have presented the reader – you as the 'viewer' – with a context of interaction between the researcher/film maker, the participant and the cinematic disposition which may offer a way to dissolve the formaldehyde and in doing so allow the subject to regain its vitality. In short, I hope to have offered these interactions in a way that not only I but also you have been and will be able 'to play along'.

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New York, N.Y. 1986. Raymond Depardon. France. 10 mins.
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Visitors of the Night. 1998. An van. Dienderen and Didier Volckaert. Belgium. 34 mins.
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Voyage iconographique: le Martyre de Saint Sébastien. 1989. Eric Pauwels. Belgium. 52 mins.
Ymako: Invisible theatre for an African reality. 1998. Robin Shuffield and Laurent Van Lancker. 1998.
Yzer. 1996. An van. Dienderen. Belgium. 8 mins.
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ADDENDA

Seminars in Visual Anthropology at Ghent university (1995-2005)

. Collaborating performance, a non-taxidermist method

The work of artist Els Dietvorst is an interesting illustration of participatory filmmaking. I therefore launch some aspects of this type of filmmaking by situating seminars in Visual Anthropology initiated six years ago by the Ghent University and the documentary film department of Sint-Lukas (the School of Arts in Brussels)⁴. We assisted students from both schools in the production of documentaries on Belgian society. The interdisciplinary groups comprise both anthropology and film students. In general, the workshop explores the creative and critical use of cinema, focusing on the relation between aesthetics and cultural politics in a practical and theoretical manner. It challenges conventional notions of the mode of production, subjectivity, audience, and interpretation in relation to filmmaking, film viewing and the cinematic apparatus.

Our main concern is to research avenues that may question the accountability of images in a way relevant to the epistemology of visual representation. We argue that the mode of production of documentary images, their format, adds meaning and alters interpretation. Individuals change their behavior to 'perform' for the camera - and for an imagined audience. Moreover, filmmakers use specific conventions and techniques - such as camera angle, framing and editing - in representing the 'reality' that they are conveying. These codes of representation form, in fact, an artificial representational system. In the following, I propose some methodological strategies in developing a critical and self-reflective space within visual systems, based on our empirical experience.

. Visual diagnosis of interaction

This method starts from the following premises: if neither the truth nor reality can be represented, and the pictorial system in itself cannot generate meaning, as demonstrated in the previous chapters, how then can we film something 'relevant' about the other and evoke reality? How can the viewer adopt a critical attitude toward such 'evocations'? Collectivity on screen prompts questions on identity construction. As pointed out in chapter 1, Pinxten and Verstraete argue that the concept of identity proposed is free-floating, and not connected to an 'essence', it is instead thought of as a performance based on the interplay of narratives and labels within a certain socio-cultural context (Pinxten and Verstraete: 1998; Longman, Pinxten and Verstraete: 2003). This view on identity dynamics is fundamental in our visual anthropology seminars. Instead of claiming the truth, we are researching the interaction of the research process (Bourdieu 1980: Chap. 3). Ethnography is of necessity doubly biased (Pinxten 1997: 9). We conceive a 'fact' in ethnography as an item of knowledge usually expressed in a statement, which is, or can be, agreed upon by both the community of ethnographers and by the consultants of the culture concerned. The statement should be a true, correct or viable description of such cultural 'data' (Pinxten 1997: 9). This also holds

⁴ Initiated by Rik Pinxten and myself in 1995 and set up by Didier Volckaert, Eric Pauwels, Reinhart Cosaert, Laurent van Lancker, and Willem de Greef, with assistance from Els Dietvorst, Alex Claes, Renzo Martens and Tarik Elhaik

for visual data. It is not the reality of the subjects that can be visualized, nor are we aiming at depicting our own ethnocentric interpretation. It is the visual diagnosis of the interaction between researcher, subject and the impact of the system of representation that is being researched. *“Ethnographic films (which readily blur the boundaries between subjectivity and objectivity, observer and observed) address as their referent our relation to the historical present, usually the moment of filming. ... In viewing the scene in Silverlake Life when Tom Joslin lies dead and Mark Massi mourns his passing, the tremendous impact of such a moment lies, I believe, in the remains of an ethnographic referent that is not in the image, not in the visible evidence of death, not in the authentic location footage or in the historical moment now marked by it, but in the relation between all these aspects and the experiential moment of the encounter itself when this event unfolds again, not only as it was experienced at the time of filming by Mark Massi, and hence ethnographically, but also as it unfolds for the first time, for us. We experience the extraordinary indexical bond of history and the future we construct from it as they intertwine in the referential force field shaped in the present moment of historical consciousness”* (Nichols 1994: xii).

It is the experience ‘in-between’ that is to be visualized. It is not the truth, nor the authenticity of the other that is being traced but the ‘interval’ as Trinh Minh-ha describes it: *“Meaning can neither be imposed nor denied. Although every film is in itself a form of ordering and closing, each closure can defy its own closure, opening onto other closures, thereby emphasizing the interval between apertures and creating a space in which meaning remains fascinated by what escapes and exceeds it”* (Trinh 1990: 96).

I used a super8 camera in my film *Visitors of the Night* (1998) to illustrate the reactions of the Mosuo-people in China on my digital camera. The super8 images can therefore be presented as more ‘real’, more authentic in relation to the mode of production of this film as they evoke the scene of filmmaking. However, the medium itself (super8) can work as an imaginary process, evoking memories of the early 1970s when it was used to produce home movies. The super8 images filmed on location in China projected this nostalgic remembrance of (Western) time past. The complexity thus created reveals an approach to the real in a multi-layered way. It refuses to perceive reality as a good-bad fiction.

What we suggest as a methodological framework is a form of collaborative negotiation. The negotiation method implies that social or cultural-scientific research is based on the conviction that reality is shaped by the concept of continual negotiation. The ‘subject’ thus becomes a sort of ‘co-author’, present at different stages of the process. The codes of representation are explained to and contextualized for all those portrayed. By proceeding in this way, the construction of images, the way in which the image of ‘the other’ takes shape, is negotiated. This context also confirms the director as the creator of image, sound and editing as well as negotiator of parameters; in doing so it clearly outlines the personal ethics of the director. An image can be perceived as relevant when participant and filmmaker agree about its interpretation (its truth).

In the year 2000 we were encouraged by one of the directors of 'Brussels 2000', Guido Minne, to join a group called *Crossing Brussels*, founded by Eric Corijn of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) and funded by Brussels 2000. This group researched different public spaces in Brussels by means of three public buses. The buses were converted into an exhibition space, a cinema and a café, and parked in the researched public spaces in view of improving the collaboration between scientists and members of the community. The films produced by our students were shown in the bus located in the area where the films were made, in order to enhance the interaction and discussion of the production of the images. The preference for public buses was the result of careful deliberation: the recognizability and familiarity of these vehicles lowered the threshold for the inhabitants, and diminished the gap between themselves and the researcher. Also, the location of the buses 'on the spot' was perceived by the residents as a strong invitation to the lively discussions in the buses. The confrontation of students and their work with the residents lies at the heart of the commitment one needs to practise visual anthropology.

"Truth and meaning: the two are likely to be equated with one another. Yet, what is put forth as truth is often nothing more than a meaning. And what persists between the meaning of something and its truth is the interval, a break without which meaning would be fixed and truth congealed. This is perhaps why it is so difficult to talk about it, the interval. About the cinema. About" (Trinh 1991: 30). We do not expect more truthfulness or authenticity than this. If this image represents a recreation of the real, which is agreed upon by researcher and participant, then we can assume that we evoke something of the interaction between them. As cited by Nichols: *"...ethnographic film might, according to Stephen Tyler, respond to the call for evocation rather than representation in order to "provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry"* (Nichols 1994: 82).

It goes without saying that, as part of this method, stereotypes are constantly being challenged. This is achieved by developing a precise view on dealing with audiovisual media. This view is based on two crucial principles: one is that the interaction with the 'other' is 'mediated'. Audiovisuals are not neutral recording devices. The medium does not function as a mirror, reflecting whatever is being experienced in reality, but as a system in which different identities are created and reconstructed.

The medium has its own parameters, patterns and codes of representation that transform the subject. Attention is paid primarily to the interconnection between form and contents and the relation with the applicable context. The other principle is that dealing with audiovisual media is interpreted as a performative act. Its starting point is not a pre-set end result. It is the meeting that drives the process and claims its own medium. Experimental filmmakers, performance artists, immigrant artists, ethnic film directors, visual anthropologists, etc. provide inspiration.

Through the development of this method we try, on the one hand, to impart representation to the participant, or to at least give him or her a higher degree of control. Consequently, the system provides a guarantee for truth claims

without alleging to reveal the truth, represent reality or make an objective statement. This method shatters the illusion of showing other cultures but at the same provides an alternative for the cynical concept of exotic reconstruction. On the other hand, this system allows the viewer to gain insight into the construction of the representation: it also suggests the context of interaction between filmmaker, subject and their mediated relation. In this way the film offers the viewer a position of critique. By presenting a context of interaction between the researcher/film maker, the participant and the cinematic disposition, the viewer is presented with a more precise and relevant image, allowing the subject to regain its vitality.

In a research conducted among anthropology students at The University of Melbourne, Australia, Naomi Offler concluded that there is a strong link between how students negotiate their emotional reactions to the actions and behavior of ethnographic subjects on film and the degree to which accessibility to the subjects is made available within the film. Greater levels of accessibility lead to a broader understanding of the world of the subject. Not only the stereotype but also the emotional basis behind the formation of this stereotype needs to be understood and both emotionally and cognitively contextualized in relation to the film as a whole and the external material being used in conjunction with it (Offler 1999).

In our workshop we encourage the students to develop a collaborative framework in their research in order to produce a film process that is appreciated by both parties, the researchers and the participants. The book that accompanies the documentaries contains photographs of the production process. The edition on the fishermen of Ostend three years ago presented a rectangular photo shot by one of the students showing the subjects of the film. This photo was presented next to a square photo that was taken by one of the subjects and showed the group of students. In this way, the form generated the representation of the maker, a more sophisticated way of revealing the production process.

Furthermore, to enhance this interactive view, the subjects of the workshops are chosen within subclasses of Belgian society. The reason for this type of research is also to identify the 'other' as part of the same culture in pointing out the differences-within-the-same. Projects include the multicultural experience in Genk (1999), the fisher community in Ostend (1998) and the First World War trauma in Vinkt (1997).

. Formal play

In our workshops we suggest looking upon the mode of production as a site of critique. Because of the previously elaborated reasons, we think it is crucial to include the production mode and responses to it in the film. In this way the codes of representation are to be found in the film itself, therefore enhancing the accessibility of the subject's image. I do not, however, want to imply an academic formalized system of feedback within the film. I prefer to consider it as a formal play in which this type of self-reflection needs to find its own place

in the film. Or in other words: I believe it is necessary to explore artistically the formal aspects of imagining cultural groups. For example, when the film on Public Space in so-called Matonge, a neighbourhood in Brussels, was shown in the buses, the students were accused of stereotyping the African community. These reactions were recorded on a mini-disc player and used as a tool to deconstruct the original film in another editing.

This kind of formal playfulness was stimulated by the tradition in experimental filmmaking of the film school. In this tradition techniques of deconstruction and reconstruction in a plastic and textural way are elaborated. Experimental filmmakers mostly work in an independent way. They refuse affiliation with the predominant modes of production, and they manage to organize their own circuits, their own festivals and most of all their own forms and formats. A wide range of film and video makers, including Maya Deren, Peter Kubelka, Jonas Mekas, Su Friedrich, Bill Viola, Kidlat Tahimik, Tracey Moffatt and Chantal Akerman, are regarded as sources of inspiration here. Experimental film and ethnographic film have long been considered separate, autonomous practices in the margins of mainstream cinema. Catherine Russell explores the interplay between the two forms (Russell 1999).

Our workshops can be regarded as a playing field within this intertwining of traditions. We think it is important to open up this self-reflective and critical stance to a playful and explorative mode. In our view, formal renewal challenges conventional modes of object-subject relationships, perception of audiences, and content-form divisions. For instance, while researching the fisher community in Ostend, the students came across a stereotypical and deep-rooted expression: 'The fishermen are the Negroes of the city.' They used this phrase as a tool to provoke reactions within the fisher community and in the city of Ostend as a whole. In their documentary they assembled these recorded phrases with photos in black and white of the people who were responding. This process created a very strong image that deconstructed the stereotype but nonetheless located its background.

More info:

<http://cici.ugent.be/index.php?id=54&type=content>

SIC – Sound . Image . Culture

The workshops visual anthropology preceded the professional organization SIC, initiated by Didier Volckaert, Laurent Van Lancker, Eric Pauwels, Reinhart Cosaert and myself, coordinated by Sarah Késenne.

SIC offers an environment for the development of personal audiovisual creations, based on anthropological topics in which form and content are intertwined. SIC supports projects which are in between experimental filmmaking and performative anthropology and inspired by (issues and methods of) auto-ethnography. Participatory seminars and individual coaching accompany the development of the participants' projects.

SIC is open to maximum 10 participants each year. We select on the basis of a proposal of an audiovisual project (film, video, installation, sound piece,..) which reveals a genuine and personal relation to the subject.

SIC is organized from April till December.

Location: Brussels, Aalst (Belgium)

Contact: soundimageculture@gmail.com

<http://www.soundimageculture.com>

SIC is an organization of SIC vzw.asbl in collaboration with Netwerk, Center for the Arts (Aalst) and Les Brigittines (Brussels). With the support of the Flemish Community.