"Comment dire 'je' au cinema?"
Documentary as a mirror for the (ethical) self

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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).

Documentary 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).

Mainstream 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, 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 mainstream 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? Acclaimed filmmaker Jean Rouch stated that every documentary is essentially a self-portrait (Rouch ed. by Feld 2003). How can one describe and question the ethics implied by the ways the 'author' handles the codes and values intertwined with the mediated context in his/her relationship towards the subject and the prefigured viewer? In sum, how can we understand the interactions between the 'author', the 'other' and the 'viewer' in (documentary) filmmaking during the production process?

Addiction to realistic modes of representation

This article explores questions concerning the construction of documentaries and their implication on representation. In search of an efficient way to unfold this questioning, I read *Works and Lives. The Anthropologist as Author* by the noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz written in 1988. Geertz advocates anthropology as a representational discourse. In his 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. According to Winston, Western culture should be comprehended by "*a general cultural addiction to realistic modes of representation"* (Winston 1996, 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). 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. His aim 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 (mainstream) documentaries. I therefore take up Geertz's formulations of several pretensions of textual discourses to confront these with documentary practices.

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 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 Stella Bruzzi confirms: "*Documentaries are inevitably the result of the intrusion of the filmmaker onto the situation begin filmed, they are performative because they acknowledge the construction and artificiality of even the non-fiction film and propose, as the underpinning truth, the truth that emerges through the encounter between filmmakers, subjects and spectators*" (Bruzzi 2006, 11). 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 televisual 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 practizing 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 Ghent 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.

Mainstream 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 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 hermeneutic notions in trying to understand the types of assumptions that are being made on mainstream documentaries. 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).

Plural and mediated interactions[1]

To challenge the pretensions that are assumed by mainstream documentaries I propose to look at interactions between the author, the viewer and the other (van. Dienderen 2008). In contrast with Geertz's *Works and Lives*, I propose not to focus 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. 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. As such, I propose to

[1] This perspective 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.

view these positions as inherently mediated: they cannot be understood without referring to the medium. 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. Several aspects of the audiovisual construction 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.

Production Process as a site of critique

In my opinion, documentary film should be scrutinized from the point of view of the production process 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).

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. 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*.

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).

By way of conclusion, a starting point

This article tries to shed light on what it is that annoyed me so much in several mainstream documentaries. 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'. 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. The taxidermist operations point 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.

By using Geertz's critique it was my aim to challenge these connotations (pretensions, according to Geertz). In this article I stress the importance of deconstructing the "ineffable ideology" as Barthes formulates, of the aesthetics of these (documentary) films (Barthes 1973: 142). My article shifts the attention from the represented image to the interval between the reality as it is experienced and the screening of the 'represented reality'. I question the decisions in between these two moments during 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). This investigation is 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). 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.

My approach therefore shifts the attention deliberately from analyses exclusively focusing on the end result towards a critical research on the mediated interactions and the context of interaction in which the result is submerged. Rather than coining documentary films 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). Questioning the mediated position of the "filmmaker" in his/her relation to the "viewer" and the "other" allows us to critically assess his/her ethical decisions. In this way, one can understand Rouch's claim that documentary is before anything else a self-portrait, a mirror of the filmmaker's point of view. It is my conviction that by analyzing documentaries in this way one can offer a critical position, which allows us to discover what truth claims are presented by these films. As Williams claims: "*Truth is not "guaranteed" and cannot be transparently reflected by a mirror with a memory; yet some kinds of partial and contingent truths are nevertheless the always receding goal of the documentary tradition. Instead of careening between idealistic faith in documentary truth and cynical recourse to fiction, we do better to define documentary not as an essence of truth but as a set of strategies designed to choose from among a horizon of relative and contingent truths. The advantage, and the difficulty, of the definition is that it holds on to the concept of the real – indeed of a "real" at all – even in the face of tendencies to assimilate documentary entirely into the rules and norms of fiction"* (Williams 2005, 65).

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