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Aarhus Universitet

p.o.u.

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<http://imv.au.dk/publikationer/pov/POV.html>

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*The principal purpose of **p.o.v.** is to provide a framework for collaborative publication for those of us who study and teach film at the Department of Information and Media Studies at the University of Aarhus. We will also invite contributions from colleagues in other departments and at other universities. Our emphasis is on collaborative projects, enabling us to combine our efforts, each bringing his or her own point of view to bear on a given film or genre or theoretical problem. Consequently, the reader will find in each issue a variety of approaches to the film or question at hand – approaches which complete rather than compete with one another.*

*Every March issue of **p.o.v.** is devoted to the short fiction film.*

p.o.v.

Number 13, March 2002

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The Face of Time
(*Tidens ansikte*)



Elefteria Kalogritsa
(Sweden, 2000)

The Face of Time (Tidens ansikte)

Elefteria Kalogritsa

(Sweden, 2000) 10 min., color, 35 mm

Principal credits

Director and screenwriter	Elefteria Kalogritsa
Producer	Peter Arnbert
Photographer	Andra Lasmanis
Editors	Leif Eriksson and Elefteria Kalogritsa
Music	Stefano Musitano
Sound	Ulrika Flink

Awards and festivals

Best Swedish Short, Gothenburg Film Festival, February 2000
Best Swedish Short, Umeå Film Festival, September 2000
Special Prize, Brest International Short Film Festival, November 2000
"Therme di Montecatini Cup" Montecatini Int'l Short Film Festival 2001
Audience Award European Short Film Festival Mecal, Barcelona 2001

In competition at the following festivals:

International Doc Film Festival, Munich, May 2000
Art Film Festival, Bratislava, June 2000
Curtos Metragens, Vila do Conde, July 2000
Street Film Festival, Milan, July 2000
Odense Film Festival, August 2000
Drama, Greece, September 2000
International Short Film Festival, Sienna, November 2000
Vendôme, December 2000
Mediawave, Hungary, April-May, 2001
Krakow, May, 2001
St. Petersburg, June 2001
Int'l Short Film Festival, Montecatini, July 2001
Mecal Barcelona 2001
Buster, Copenhagen October 2001

Participated in the following festivals:

Sao Paulo International Film Festival, October-November 2000
Ankara, November 2000
Rio de Janeiro International Short Film Festival, December 2000
Singapore International Short Film Festival, April 2001
Injuve International Exhibition, Madrid, October 2001
Nordische Filmtage Lübeck, November 2001

Filmography - short films

1989 Den indre cirkeln (co-dir)
1992 Badet (co-dir)
1995 Mormor (co-dir)
1997 Middag (co-dir)
1998 Portrait of the cinematographer Sven Nykvist
1999 Portrait of the cinematographer Peter Mokrosinski
2000 The Face of Time (Tidens ansikte)

The Face of Time – Synopsis

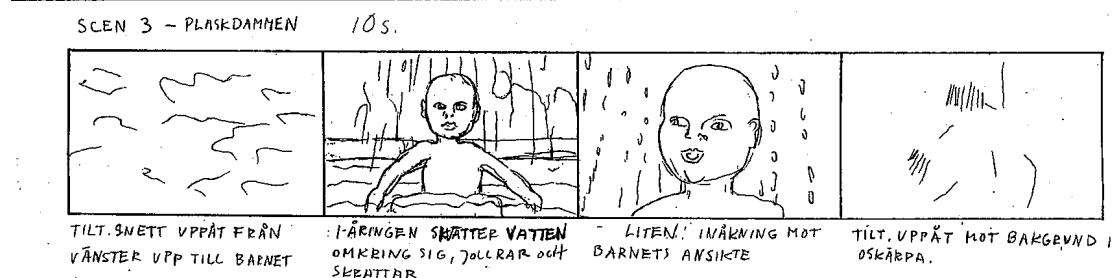
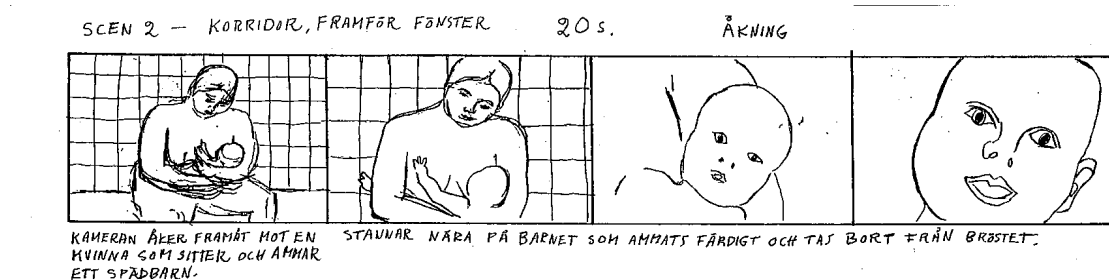
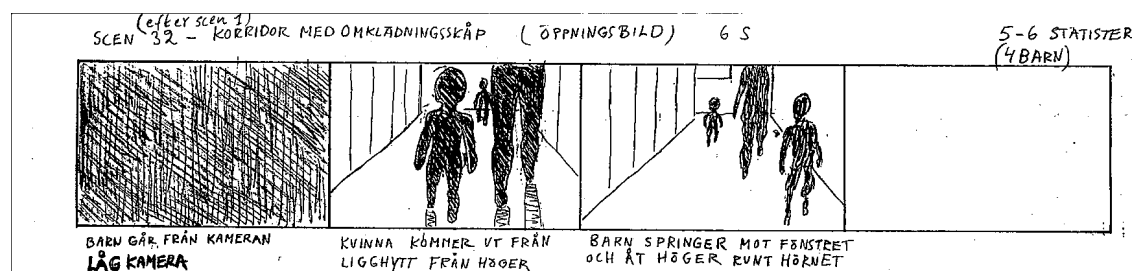
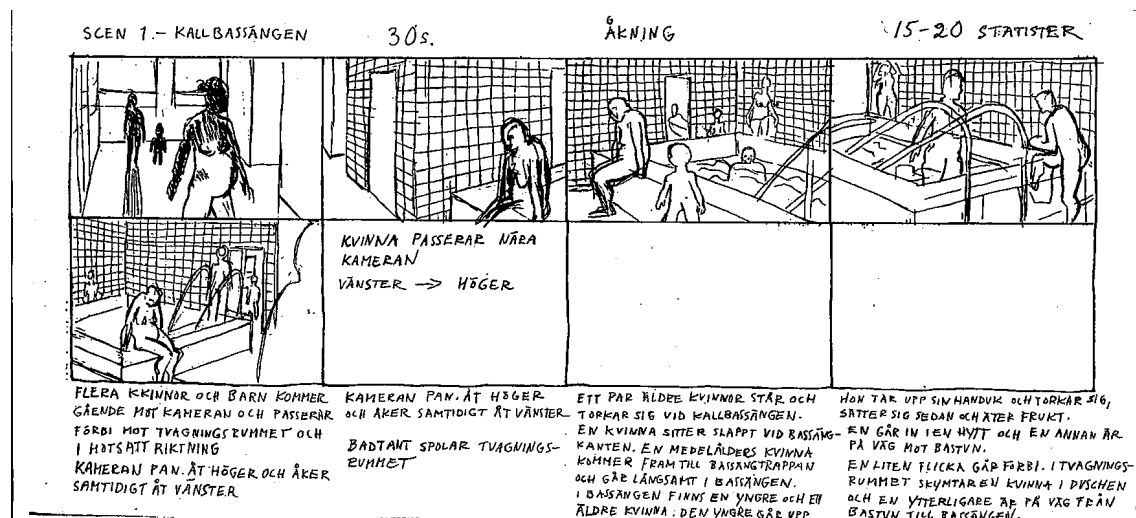
Reflections upon aging and changes in life. A day of brief encounters at the ladies' baths.

Biographical sketch

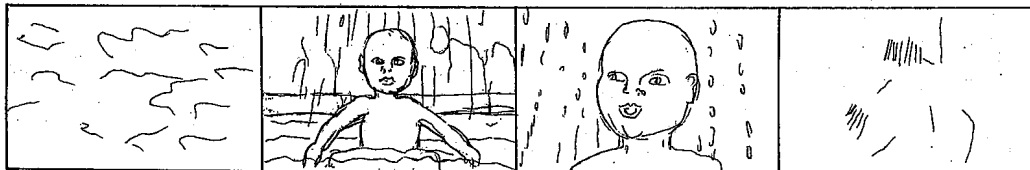
Elefteria Kalogritsa was born in Greece in 1960 and grew up in Sweden. She became interested in drawing and painting as a child and was accepted by a local school for basic art education at the age of 16. She continued her formal artistic studies while attending Hovedskous School of Art in Gothenburg from 1978 to 1984. She then began working in the field of painting and graphic art and her debut exhibition in 1985 was well received. In 1988, she began studies of film and video at the Film Academy in Gothenburg and made her first short film in 1989. Between 1989 and 1997, she wrote scripts, co-directed, edited and partially produced several short films and vignette films together with film colleague Håkan Carlbrand. *Tidens ansikte* is her latest short film. Presently she alternates between filmmaking and painting.

The Face of Time

Storyboard © Eleftheria Kalogritsa



SCEN 3 - PLASKDAMMEN 10s.



TILT. SNETT UPPÅT FRÅN
VÄNSTER UPP TILL BARNET

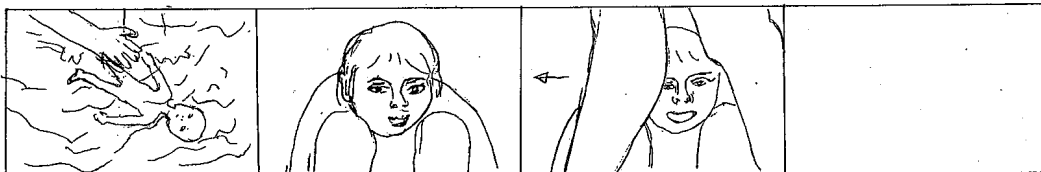
1-ÅRINGEN SKÄTTER VATTEN
OMKREING SIG, JOLLRAR OCH
SKRATTAR

LITEN. INÄRNING MOT
BARNETS ANSIKTE

TILT. UPPÅT MOT BAKGRUND I
OSKÄRPA.

SCEN 5 - PLASKDAMMEN 10 s

1 STATIST



DEN TREÅRIGA FLICKAN BADAR
SIN DOCKA. HON SÄNKER DOCKAN
UNDER VATTNET OCH LEKER ATT
DOCKAN DYKER OCH SIMMAR
UNDER VATTNET.

BÖRJA BILDEN MED DOCKANS
HUVUD OCH KROPP UPP OCH MED

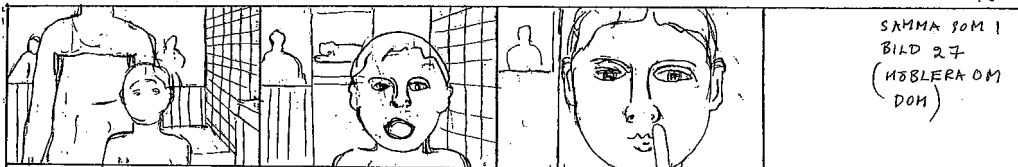
LÅG KAMERA.

TILT. UPP TILL FLICKANS ANSIKTE.
HON SITTER PÅ HUK I VATTNET
OCH LEKER KONCENTRERAT

BEN PASSERAR FÖRBI NÄRA
HÖGER - VÄNSTER

SCEN 6 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET 12s

7 STATISTER



FEMÅRINGEN KOMMER UT FRÅN BASTUN. FLICKAN STANNAR KVAR I FÖRRUMMET
MED MAMMAN. MAMMAN GÅR UT TILL TVAGNINGSRUMMET.

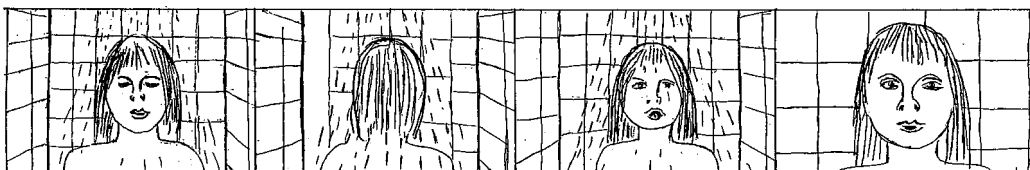
STÄRTA VID DÖRREN
KUPPA I RÖRELSEN

HON TRYCKER ANSIKET MOT
RUTAN, GRIMASERAR, GÅR EN
BIT IFRÅN OCH PETAR SIG I NÄSÄN
OGENERAT

KVINNA KOMMER UT FRÅN BASTUN
TILLHÖGER, SÄTTER SIG I FÖR-
RUMMET. FLERA KVINNOR
SITTER I BASTUN.

SAHMA SOM I
BILD 27
(HÖBLERA OM
DOH)

SCEN 7 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET, DUSCHEN 8 s



DEN SEXÅRIGA FLICKAN STÅR I
DUSCHEN OCH SVUNGER FÖR SIG SJÄLV.

TILTNING UPPFRÅN DUSCHEN
NED TILL FLICKANS ANSIKTE.

HON SNVRRAR RUNT, RUNT
MEDAN VATTNET STRILAR PÅ
HENNES HÅR OCH ANSIKTE.

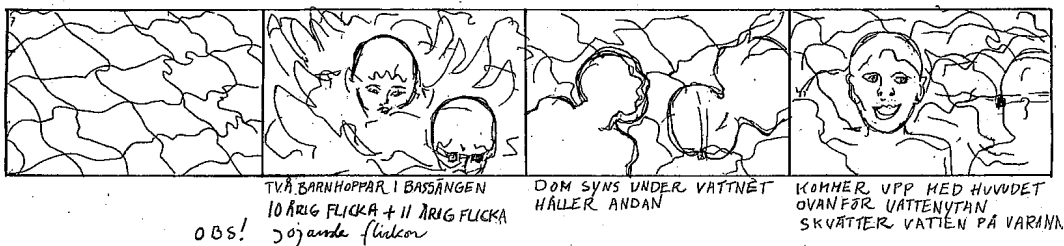
TVÅ HELA VARV - I ÅT YRDERA
HÄLLET.
HÅLLER I DUSCHSLANG.

KORT INÄRNING MOT HENNES
ANSIKTE.

LEENDE MED GLUGG.

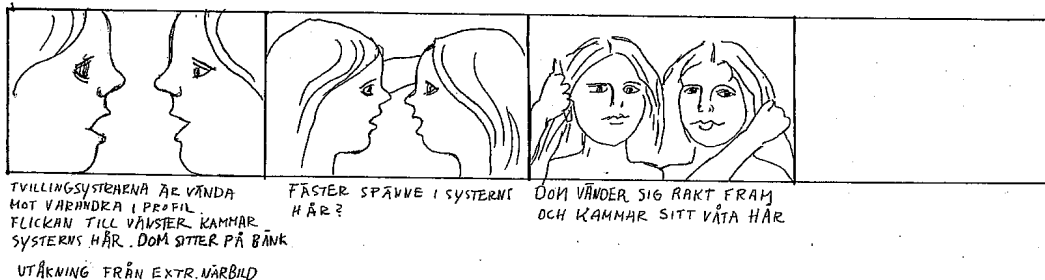
DUSCHEN STÄNDS AV, HON STÅR STILLA
NÅGRA SEKUNDER

SCEN 34 - KALLBASSÄNGEN 12 S



SCEN 8 - KORRIDOR, FRÄMÖR FÖNSTER 12 S

ÅKNING



SCEN 9 - BUBBELPOLEN 10 S

3-STATISTER



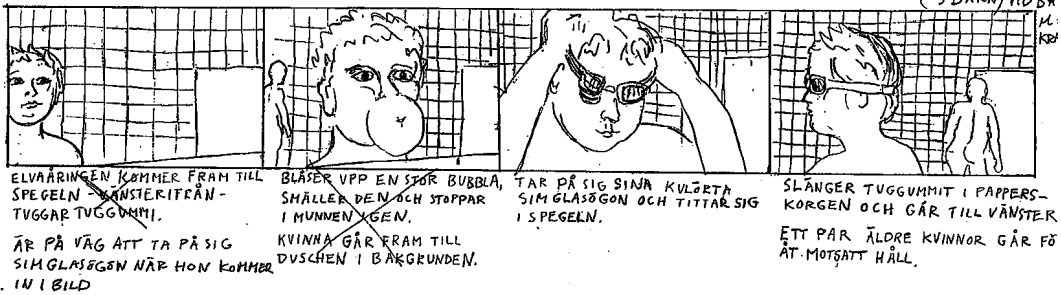
SCEN 10 - KORRIDOR MED FÖNSTER 12 S

ÅKNING

2-3 STATISTER



SCEN 11 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET 16 S



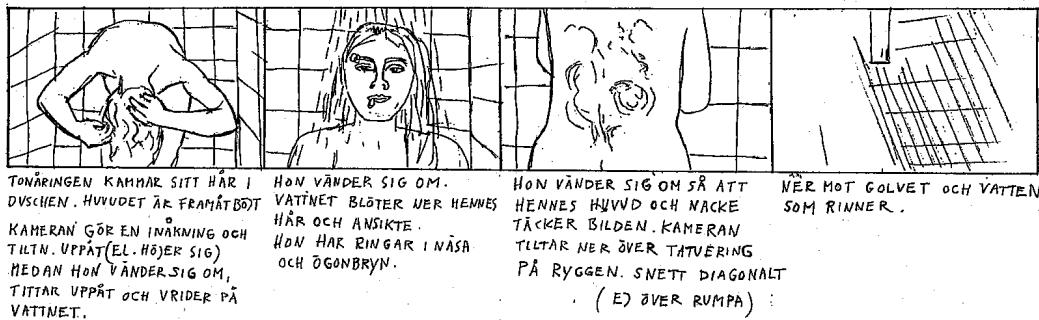
SCEN 12 - UTANFÖR LIGGHYT, VID STOR SPEGEL 20 S

AKNING

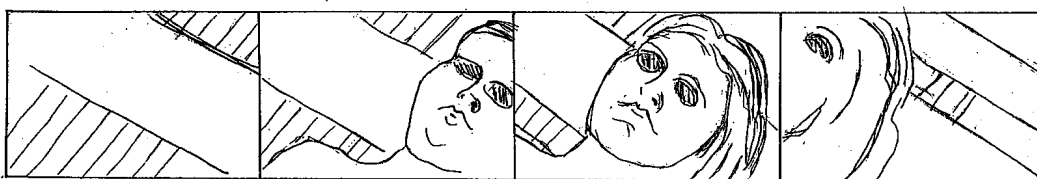
7-8 STATISTER



SCEN 13 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET, DUSCHEN 20 S



SCEN 14 - SOLARIET 11 S

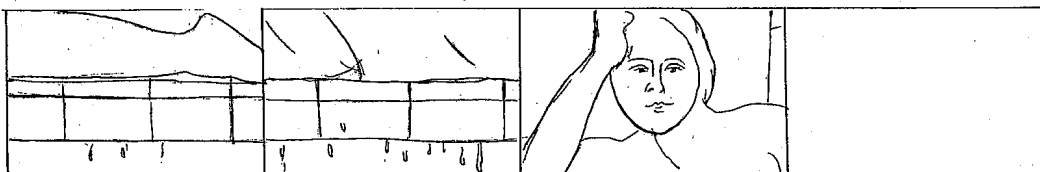


PÅN VÄNSTER-HÖGER - HÖGER-VÄNSTER (2 RIKTNINGAR)

DEN UNGA TJEJEN LIGGER OCH SOLAR MED MÖRKA SKYDDSGLAS PÅ ÖGONEN. ANSIKTET ÄR FUKTIGT AV SVETT.

SCEN 15 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET 13 S

ÅKNING



ÅKNING (HÖGER-VÄNSTER) LÄNGST
BÄNK OCH DROPPANDE VATTEN
LIGGANDE KROPP I NÄRBILD.

OBS! vänster - höger

TILT UPP TILL DEN UNGA KVINNANS
ANSIKTE. BLICKEN ÄR AVSLAPPAD
OCH DRÖMMANDE.
VATTEN STRILAR PÅ HUVUD OCH
KROPP UPPIFRÅN.

ALT. BILD TILT. NED TILL ANSIKTE
FRÅN KRAN OCH VIDARE NED MOT
RINNANDE OCH DROPPANDE VATTEN
PÅ GOLVET.

SCEN 16 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET 20 S HELBILD

10-15 STATISTER
+ BADTANT

EN MÖRKHUVAD KVINNA I 20 ÅRSÅLDERN
KOMMER IN FRÅN VÄNSTER I BILD
HENNES HÅR OCH ANSIKTE ÄR BLÖTT
I BAKGRUNDEN KVINNOR
I OCH RUNT BASSÄNGEN OCH I
KORRIDOREN.

HON VÄNDER SIG MOT
KAMERAN OCH TORKAR HÅR
OCH ANSIKTE MED EN HAND-
DUK.
EN KVINNA PASSERAR FÖRBI
PÅ HÖGERSIDA MOT BASSÄNGEN

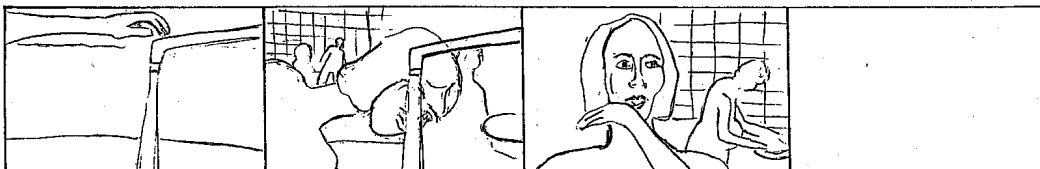
HON TORKAR ÖVERKROPPEN
EN VÄNNINNA KOMMER IN, LYFTER
UPP SITT BARN I FÄHNEN OCH
DOM GÅR ALLA TRE FÖRBI ÅT VÄNSTER
HÖGER IN I BASTUN.
DOM VÄXLAR NAGAN RERIK-EXUS
SEA DU BASTA? JA, KOMMER DU MED?

OBS! ANNAT UTSNITT. BASSÄNG SYNS
GENOM STOR SPEGEL VID LIGGHYTTER

OBS! SKÄRPEFLUTT TILL KVINNA SOM
BLIR TVAGD AV BADTANT I
SLUTET AV BILDEN

SCEN 17 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET, VID DISKBÄNK 12 S

4 STATISTER



HAND SÄTTER PÅ KRAN

KVINNAN BÖDER SIG NED OCH
DRICKER VATTEN, LÄMNAR
KRANEN ÖPPEN.
KVINNOR HÄNGER UPP HAND-
DUKAR PÅ VÄGGKROKAR
EN STÅR OCH SKÖDER SITT
ANSIKTE I HANDFATET I BAK-
GRUNDEN.

KAMERAN TILTAR MED HENNE
UPP, HON TORKAR SIG OM
HUVUDEN, TITTAR SIG I SPEGEL
PÅ VÄGGEN, ORDNAR MED
SITT HÅR.

GRAVID KVINNA I BAKGRUNDEN

SCEN 18 - TVAGNINGSRUMMET 20 S

4 STATISTER



TILT UPP FRÅN TVÄLLÖDDE
SOM DROPPAR PÅ GOLVET
TILT NED FRÅN BASTU OCH
FÖRUM I BILD, KVINNOR I
BÅDA RUMMEN.
EN GÅR UT TILL TVAGN-RUM

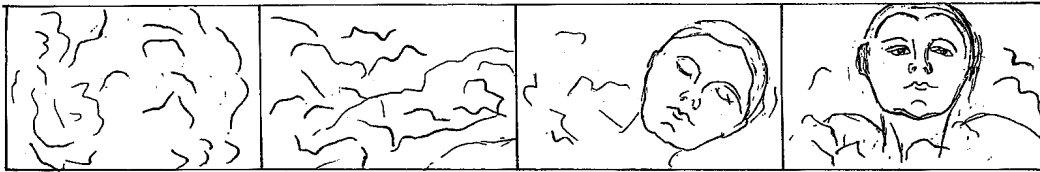
LÄNGST METALLBEN PÅ
TVAGNINGSBENEN

FRAM TILL KVINNA SOM BLIR
INTVÅLD OCH SKRUBBAD AV
BADTANT. KAMERAN VILAR PÅ
HENNE NÅGRA SEKUNDER.
I BAKGRUNDEN SYNS KVINNOR
GÅ IN TILL BASTUN OCH TILL
DUSCHARNA.

HON ÄNDRAR VINKELN PÅ HUVUDET
MEDHJ BADTANTEN SPOLAR AV
HENNES KROPP MED DUSCHSLANG
TILT. NEDÅT LÄNGST DROPPANDE
VATTEN OCH TVÄLLÖDDE PÅ
GOLVET.

SCEN 19 - BUBBELROLEN 8 S

2 STATISTER



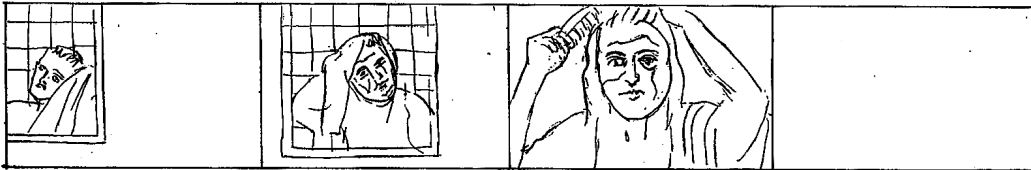
TILT. ÅT HÖGER ÖVER VATTNET FRAM TILL KVINNA SOM LIGGER DIAGONALT I PODEEN.
KROPPARNA AV TVÅ KVINNOR TILL SKYMTAR I VATTNET.

HON BLUNDAR AVSLAPPNAT.

ALT. BILD.

TILT. UPPÅT MOT ANSIKTE
RAKT FRAM.

SCEN 20 - KORRIDOR MED FÖNSTER 14 S



PAN. FRÅN HÖGER FRAM TILL
SPEGEL.
IMMA PÅ SPEGEL

KVINNA STÅR OCH FROTTERAR
SITT VATA HÅR.
HON SÄTTER SIG PÅ EN PALL
TILL VÄNSTER OM SPEGELN
KAMERAN TILTAR MED HENNE
NED.

OCH KAMMAR SITT HÅR.
HON HAR ÅRR I ANSIKTET.
HANDDUKEN LIGGER ÖVER
HENNES AXLAR.

ALT. BILD
HON RESER SIG UPP OCH GÅR.

SCEN 21 - LIGGHYTT NR 6 19 S

7 STATISTER



EN KVINNA I FYRTIOÅRS ÅLDERN
KOMMER IN I LIGGHYTEN.
BLANK OCH SVETIG I ANSIKTET.
BASSÄNG SYNS GENOM SPEGEL

HON TAR AV SIG BADHÖSSAN
FRAMFÖR SPEGELN.

TAR ETT WIENERBRÖD FRÅN
HYLLAN TILL VÄNTER
LUTAR SIG FRAM OCH SYMAR
SITT ANSIKTE MEDAN HON
ÄTER GLUPSKT.

HON SLICKAR SIG OM FINGRARN
OCH GÅR UT ÅT VÄNSTER.

EN ÄLDRE KVINNA GÅR LÅNG-
SAHT FÖRBI MED HASANDE STEG.

FRAMFÖR KALLBASÄNG

SCEN 22 - FÖRUMMET TILL BASSÄNG 16 S

7-8 STATISTER



DOM MEDELÅLDERS TVILLING-
SYSTRARNA SITTE RÄTT NÄRA
VARANDRA I SAMMA STOL

BILDEN BÖRJAR MED HAND
SOM TAR BADHÖSSA FRÅN STOL
VÄNSTER I BILD.

SNABB TILTNING UPP TILL ANSIKTET,
KVINNAN FÖRSÖKER SÄTTA PÅ SIG
BADHÖSSAN, SYSTEMEN HJÄLPER HENNE

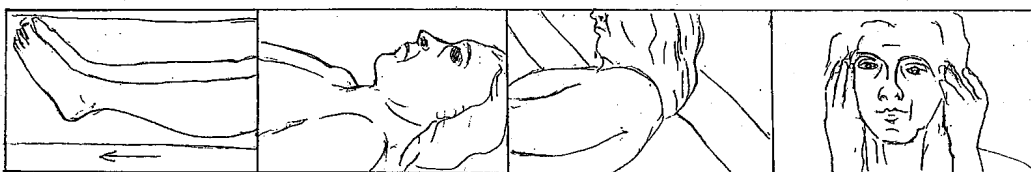
I BAKGRUNDEN FLEA KVINNOR
SOM SITTE RÄTT NÄRA
VARANDRA I SAMMA STOL
EN KOMMER UPP FRÅN
BASSÄNGEN, FLERA RÖR SIG
BAKOM BASSÄNGEN

OBS! TELEBILD

TVILLINGARNA PRESSAR SINA BRONMÖT
VARANDRA OCH TITTAR BAKSLUGT
IN I SPEGELN MEDAN DOM
SKRATTAR.

EN KVINNA GÅR FÖRBI, EN ANVÄN GÅR
RAKT FRAM IN I LIGGHYTT

SCEN 23 - SOLARIET 20 S



ÅRNING MED LÅG KAMERA LÅNGST
KROPP, ÅT HÖGER

FRAM TILL ANSIKTE I PROFIL. KVINNAN ÖPPNAR SOLARIET,
SOLARIET SLOCKNAR.

SÄTTER SIG UPP, TAR AV SIG
SKYDDSGLASEN OCH GNUGGAR
SIG I ANSIKTE, SER DAG OCH
VRVAKEN UT.

OBS! PAN ÅT VÄNSTER.

SCEN 24 - KORRIDOR MED FÖNSTER 12 S

5 STATISTER
BARN



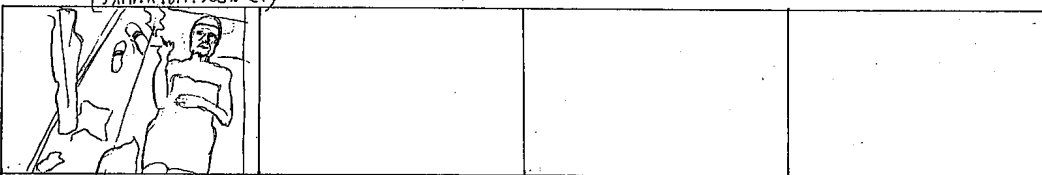
DEN GAMLA STÄDERSKAN KOMMER
GÅENDE MED HINK OCH RENGÖRINGSMEDEL.
HON ÄR TRÖTT OCH FÖRSUMMEN
I SINA EGNA TANKAR.

NÅGRA SMÅFLICKOR SPRINGER
FINTITRANDE FÖRBI HENNE I MOT-
SATT RIKTNING.

HON STANNAR FRAMFÖR EN
SPEGEL, SPAYAR GLASPUTS OCH
TORKAR AV SPEGELN.

TAR UPP EN TRASA UR HINKEN OCH
TORKAR AV SPEGELN.
GÅR SEDAN FÖRBI TILL VÄNSTER.

ALT. BILD
KVINNAN GÅR EMOT KAMERAN INVRAD
I EN BADLAKAN, STANNAR FRAMFÖR KAMERAN
OCH TITTAR SIG I SPEGELN. GÅR UR BILD
TILL VÄNSTER STRYKER SIG ÖVER HALSEN

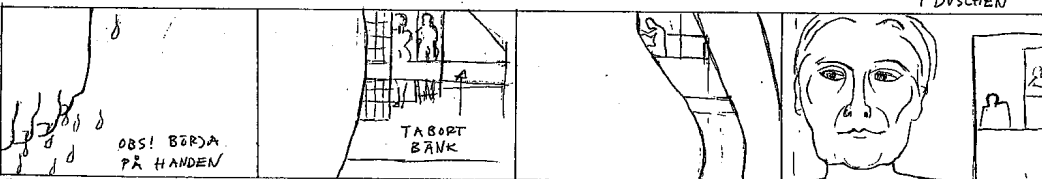
SCEN 25 - I EN LIGGHYTT 9 S
(SAMMA SOM SCEN 21)

DEN GAMLA KVINNAN LIGGER
PÅ BRITSEN OCH RÖKER EN
CIGARET.
HON ÄR AVSLAPPAD OCH NJUTER.
RUNT OMKING HENNE ÄR DET
ENSÄLIG RÖRA. KLÄDER, HÄNGER,
PÅ KROKAR, HANDBUK PÅ GOLVET,
TOFFLOR ETC.

HÖG KAMERA UPPTRÄN

SCEN 26 - TVAGHINGSRUMMET 15 S

+ BADTANT 3 STATISTER
I DUSCHEN



DEN GAMLA KVINNAN SITTER UPP
PÅ MARMORBÄNKEN
BADTANTEN SKOLJER AV HENNES
KROPP. VATTEN DROPPAR MOT
GOLVET.
LÅNGSAM TILT. UPPÅT LÅNGST
SIDAN AV KROPPEN

TILT. FORTSÄTTER
KVINNOR SYNS GÅ IN OCH UT
I DUSCHARNA.
skärpe flyttning till
duschande kvinnan

TILT. FORTSÄTTER
EN KVINNA SYNS GYMNASISERA
I BASTUN.
Diagonal rörelse ↗

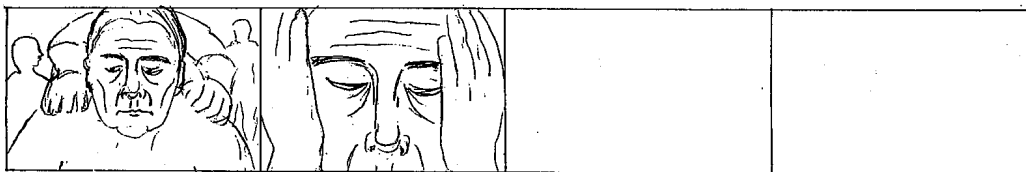
PAN ÅT VÄNSTER FRAM TILL
ANSIKTE I NÄRBILD
KVINNA GÅR IN I FÖRRUMMET TILL
BASTUN.

SCEN 27 - FÖRRUM, BASTU

12 S

ÅKNING

7 STATISTER



TILT. NER TILL DEN UTLÄNDSKA
KVINNAN. HON FÅR HASSAGE AV
VÄNNINAN SOM SITTER BAKOM.
I BAKGRUNDEN SKYMTAR FLERA
KVINNOR.
KVINNA ÖPPNAR DÖRREN, GÅR
IN, VIDARE IN I BASTUN.
OBS! STÖRRE UTSNITT

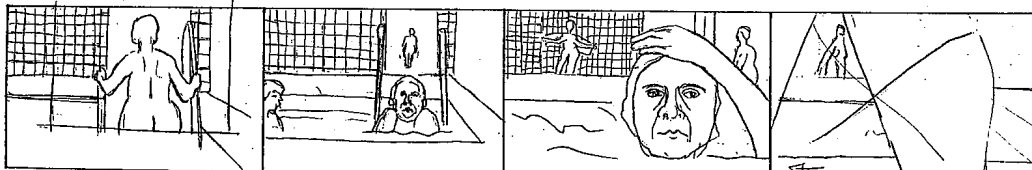
ALT. BILD. KORT INÅKNING
MOT KVINNANS ANSIKTE.

SPANNMYTERE

SCEN 28 - KALLBASSÄNGEN

12 S

7-8 STATISTER



DEN GAMLA KVINNAN GÅR I KALL-
BASSÄNGEN MED RYGGEN MOT
KAMERAN.

VÄNDER SIG OM I VATTNET
OCH GÅR "GUPPAR" FRAM TILL
MOTSTÅENDE BASSÄNGKANT.
EN YNGRE KVINNA SIMMAR
REDAN I BASSÄNGEN.

HON STÅR OCH GUPPAR SVAGT
STUND. I BAKGRUNDEN SYNS
DEN YNGRE KVINNAN GÅR UPP
OCH STÅR OCH TORKAR SIG
VID BASSÄNGEN.

KVINNA FRÅN HÖGER (LIGGHYT)
GÅR IN I TVÄGINGSRUMMET

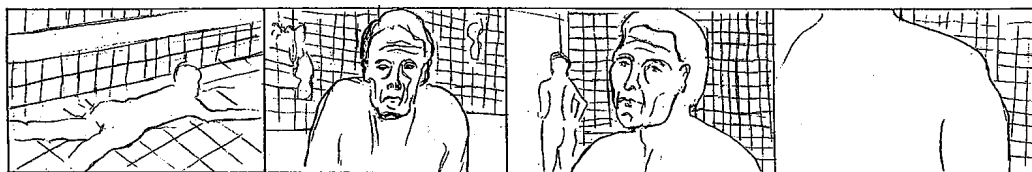
BARNBEN PASSERAR INÄRBILD
PÅ BASSÄNGKANTEN.
KVINNAN SIMMAR ÅT VÄNSTER.
TILT. NED MOT VATTENVIRVEL

SCEN 29 - VID KALLBASSÄNGEN

20 S

ÅKNING

3 TATISTER



TILT. NEDÅT MOT KVINNA I BASSÄNG-
EN. ÅKNING RUNT DEN
GAMLA KVINNAN VID BASSÄNG-
KANTEN.
KAMERAN SÄNKES LITE.

HON SITTER ALLDELES STILLA
UTAN ATT RÖRA SIG

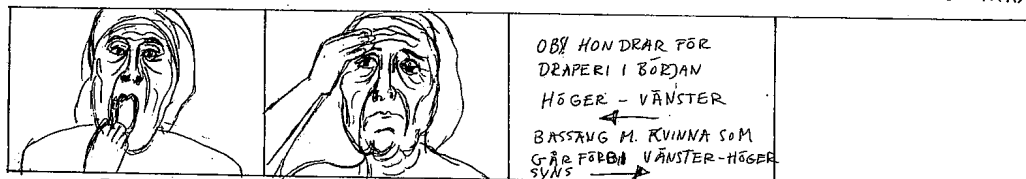
KAMERAN STANNAR SNETT
FRAMIFRÅN. LITEN INÅKNING
MOT ANSIKTET.
KVINNA GÅR IN I KARRUMMET
I BAKGRUNDEN.

KVINNA PASSERAR NÄRA FÖRBI.
VÄNSTER -> HÖGER

SCEN 30 - LIGGHYT NR 10

20 S

3 STATISTER



DEN, DARRHÄNTA, MYCKET GAMLA
DÄMMEN STÅR FRAMFÖR SPEGELN,
MÅLAR LÄPPARNA OMSÖRGSFULLT.
HON ÄR INSVEPT I ETT BAD-
LAKAN OCH HAR EN HAND-
DUKSTURBAN RUNT HÅRET.

HON FORMAR ÖGONBRYNEN
MED SALIV OCH GÅR SEDAN
UT UR HYTTEN ÅT HÖGER.

OBS! HON DRAR FÖR
DRAPERI I BÖRDAN
HÖGER - VÄNSTER
BASSÄNG M. KVINNA SOM
GÅR FÖRBI VÄNSTER-HÖGER
SYNS

SCEN 31 - KORRIDÖR MED OMKLÄDNINGSSKÅP

10 S

(SLUTBILD)

1 STATIST



EN MYCKET GAMMAL KVINNA
KOMMER FRÅN HÖGER LÄNGST
BORT I KORRIDÖREN OCH
GÅR LÅNGSAMT FRAMÅT

HON GÅR RAKT EMOT KAMERAN TILLS BILDEN BLIR HELT SVART.

An interview with Eleftheria Kalogritsa on *The Face of Time*

Richard Raskin

Can you tell me about the original idea for making The Face of Time?

The original idea was very simple. I wanted to do something very short, maybe only three or four minutes long, with the human face and the aging process. But the idea was too abstract and for a long time I didn't do anything more with it. Then I applied for funds for script development, which I received, but I still thought the idea was too abstract. I still wanted to do something about the aging process and I thought a lot about what *environment* would suit this idea, because I wanted nothing other than the human body and the human face. It took me a couple of months and then suddenly I realized that a public bath was the best place because there you can find all ages, all kinds of people, at the same place and at the same time. And it's also very natural, it's not something you have to construct. Other alternatives seemed artificial in comparison. So I developed the idea of a bathing house by concentrating on the human face and thought that this might be suitable for a slightly longer film.

Did you know from the start that it was woman's face and body you wanted to work with in connection with the aging process?

Yes. Maybe it's because women think more about the aging process and the way they look than men do. But I'm not sure. Maybe that was an unconscious reason for making that choice.

What about the title? Was that something you had in mind early in the process?

Yes, that was the title from the very beginning. It refers both to the cycle of aging and the human face. There are a lot of close-ups in the film.

It's a very interesting kind of storytelling that you've chosen to do. As you mentioned in an earlier conversation, it involves a documentary look and yet is actually a fiction in the sense that you decided what each of the people was going to do in front of the camera. Did you know from the start that you were going to use that combination?

My background is actually painting. And the earlier shorts I had made were very visual and not based so much on dialogue. That was my starting point. I wanted to make a film with no dialogue and to concentrate on the images. I don't think I really thought so much about the style of storytelling because it came naturally. I thought a lot about the transitions between the scenes or the images and the rhythm, but I didn't really think in terms of making a semi-documentary.

You storyboarded the entire film before the shooting began?

Yes, the film was shot in five days. Most of the crew was from Stockholm and the film was shot here in Gothenburg. I had only met the cinematographer twice before the shooting. And there were a lot of difficulties with the location because there were a lot of people involved, and a lot of practical problems with electricity and water, also with respect to safety. I had to plan everything carefully. The film was shot in a small area within a large bathing house. There were normally very few people in that area, and there are almost no windows there. It's very dark and very small. I went there a few

times with a video camera and with a girl who functioned as a model, so I could see what was possible to do technically, and how many people could be in one scene or another. The cinematographer and I had to do a lot of planning. Since there is almost no natural light, all of the scenes had to be lit.

The film could run no more than eight or maximum nine minutes with credits, because Swedish Television was a co-producer and the film had to fit into a ten-minute slot. That meant I also had to decide ahead of time approximately how long each image would last and how many shots there would be. There are a lot of people moving in and out all the time, and to be able to cut in a way that looked right and with transitions that would work was an interesting challenge. And of course you come up with better solutions during the shooting, but I tried to be well prepared because there were so many people involved. And some people had to wait around a whole day just to be in the background of a shot for a few seconds.

I assume that the people in your film aren't actors. And you told each of them what to do. Maybe we could take one or two examples. There's a very striking shot with two young girls facing each other and speaking some Slavic language.

Polish.

Do you remember what kind of instructions you gave them?

I told them to speak about anything other than the shooting or what we were doing on the location. That was the only thing they were not supposed to do, because if somebody who understands Polish heard them talk about the filming, that wouldn't be good. I just asked them to talk about something they do in school. Nothing more specific than that. The main thing I wanted there was the

symmetrical image. Sometimes you can feel that the shots are not documentary because they are clearly arranged. And sometimes I wanted the film to have the look of fiction, but without being too much arranged.

There's also a close-up of an older woman who rubs her finger along her teeth and smoothes her eyebrows down. In all these cases, you simply told each woman what you wanted her to do?

Yes, but I tried to think: is it possible that this woman would do these things. Is it going to look artificial if she does this? But actually it was in the storyboard that she should do this (*laughter*). I thought it was something that this type of woman might actually do if she were alone.

It certainly looked very natural and very convincing to me.

You think so? Some of the short shots required a lot of takes. For one shot, there was a young girl who puts on swimming goggles. She looks natural in the take we chose, but she was so stiff in the others. It's difficult because there was a crew of twelve people watching. But most of the people were very good, considering they were amateurs. They did a great job in a very difficult environment and the whole crew was very impressed by how seriously everyone took the work. It's very difficult just to *be* and not *do* much. It looks simple but sometimes it's more difficult than speaking a line of dialogue. A few of the extras had been in walk-on roles in other productions as well. Everyone was very good.

I don't know anything about your background. Did you go to film school or are you a self-taught filmmaker?

I went to something called the Film Academy in Gothenburg, but it's not a very long education. Then I took some short courses and did some scriptwriting workshops. That's my film education. I also have a painter's education but that's another matter. Sometimes I look at myself as a painter making films. (*Laughter.*)

That would certainly explain to some degree the great attention one can sense that you have given to the visual quality of your film. There's a tremendous richness in the visual experience of The Face of Time. Are your paintings a little bit like the films that you make?

Not really. They are more... free.

Are there other short films that have inspired you?

You mean to make this film or in general?

Either way?

Well there are a lot of shorts... Many people, when they start to make films, have a goal of making a feature film sometime in the future – what they would see as a “real” film. But for me, a short film is like poetry. Unfortunately it's sometimes hard to find good distribution for shorts, which is why people don't value this form as much as it deserves. I think it's quite difficult to make short films that say something. Because it's short, that doesn't make it simple. You have to put a lot of work into it, just as when you make a longer film. There are fewer days of shooting but that also makes it difficult because you have to be 100 percent concentrated during those few days of shooting so it's very intense and requires a lot of planning. Some years ago, I was also thinking I wanted to make a feature film at some point, but now I don't know... I really think the short is a wonderful form.

I couldn't agree with you more. You may have already begun answering my final question but I'll ask it anyway. Is there any advice you would give to student filmmakers about to make their own first short films?

To not be afraid of simplicity. It's very tempting to try to put too much into an idea when you make a short. I think it's important to *dare* to simplify. And also to let an idea mature. Even if an idea seems undeveloped, you have to be patient and give it time and not just throw it in the garbage can (*laughter*) because you haven't yet solved some problem in the idea. It's very easy to dismiss an idea and say: this is nothing, it's too simple.

June 6, 2001

Time, body and experience in *The Face of Time*

Mette Bahnsen and Kirsten Sørensen

The Face of Time is a poetic film about time, body and experience. Consisting of 32 shots, its beautiful images and languid speed portray female life from the embryonic stage to old age. Filmed at a women's bathhouse, it shows the female body at different ages and in various sizes and shapes.

We will examine three levels in the film that help create its high degree of complexity and brilliance: the symbolic, the physical/sensuous, and the psychological/social and cultural.

Life and death

The film's narrative is structured over a cycle of life and death, which we will now investigate from two different angles.

The film's first shot emerges from blackness and can be interpreted as that which comes before life. The next thing we see is a pregnant woman, standing in a hallway in the changing room in the bathhouse. This shot functions as an establishing shot, yet symbolically the hallway also comes to represent the path of life. The film's last shot returns to blackness after the old woman has walked down the same hallway towards the camera. This shot thus comes to represent death and that which comes after life. Hence, the film's framing adds a metaphysical level to the film as it marks a *before* and *after* to life. In this interpretation, all the shots in between the blackness before and after life represent life and its many stages.

At the same time, there is a symbolism in the film that opens up for another interpretation. In this perspective, the bathhouse can be seen as a metaphor for the world, and thus the place where you exist in the time between birth and death. This microcosm (the

bathhouse) has many similarities with the pregnant woman's womb (micro-microcosm), evoked at the beginning of the film. Both places (bathhouse and womb) are closed spaces where you are surrounded by water. You exist for a limited amount of time in this room while going through a metamorphosis and several phases of development. The conception and birth metaphors are visually played out in the first and last scenes, which as previously mentioned take place in the dark hallway in the changing room. Here the hallway represents the uterus, which both in connection with conception and birth marks the transition to new stages of development and of life. The children running towards the camera in the film's first shot can be seen as sperm, starting life and the film's narrative. The old lady in the last shot represents the end of the embryonic stage, and thus also of the film's narrative. The blackness at the end of the film can therefore be interpreted as both the end and the beginning of life, life and death thus being closely connected in the film's symbolic and visual structure.

Body and time

The narrative concept of the film is to portray the development and change of the body through time. On this level the focus is physiological: the bodies, hands, faces, eyes of women. Every shot deals with the changes of the body and how time leaves its mark on physiology.

The film also connects its representation of the sensual to the following: bodies touching, bodies in the water, eyes seeing, and hands feeling. In the beginning it is the baby's physical contact with the mother, and next the children touching each other through their game. Later, during their teenage years, the girls/women direct

their focus on their own bodies, combing their hair, letting the water flow over their bodies, and watching themselves in the mirrors. The grown women continue to watch themselves in the mirrors, drink the water, eat, smoke, bathe, and massage each other. The older women are characterized by no longer being in physical contact with anyone. Instead of acting on their own, they increasingly come to occupy an observing role.

Thus, different characteristics and patterns of action are connected to different ages, and the sensual perception of the world is used to describe this development. At this level each shot comes to represent *time*, with each transition adding years to the bodies.

This representation of time and thus of continuity in the film is also expressed in its visual style. The transitions between the shots are all fast dissolves and continuity between the shots is created in different ways. Sometimes it's the movement of the camera, leading from one shot into the next. At other times, it's a movement within pictures that resemble one another, and are brought together by dissolves, making the visual structure the dominant principle for the transitions. This creates a visual flow in the film that parallels the time perspective, while the representation of the bodies that become progressively older creates a narrative flow. The film's use of music and the sound of water as a recurring and connecting element is another means by which continuity is strengthened.

Experience

Whereas the previous narrative level deals with the material and physiological – the body, the senses and the natural – there is also a level in the film that deals with the social, the psychological and the cultural. This manifests itself in the way the bodies act and interact

and how this communication develops as the body ages. From the first babies, just looking, the development and socialization of the child is shown through game, song and language. For example, in shot 8, two girls speak to one another in Polish in a playful way, pretending to be grown up women, thus both practising an adult language and attitude. In their use of language there is an accentuation on sound, intonation and rhythm more than on the content of what they say. Later, in shot 26, which can be seen as a varied repetition of shot 8, we again see two sisters, now adult. Here they are still speaking, but we no longer see the explicit emphasis on the form, showing that the use of language in the adult sphere is more concerned with content.

With the young women we see another form of bodily consciousness, and a focus on looks emerges. At this age embellishing and decorating the body and face are important. This is illustrated by the girl putting on mascara, the girl with the tattoo, and the girl with the facial piercing, all of which evoke the transition from childhood to adulthood. This is particularly evident in a series of shots where we see women watching themselves in the mirror, indicating the division that the look from 'the other' and the mirror represents.

The grown-up and older women continue to pay attention to their looks. In contrast to the younger girls' focus on and experiments with their appearance, to the older women it is more a question of becoming aware of and investigating the changes in the body and face. There is a movement towards greater calm and maturity. The oldest women in the film are no longer as physically active. Parallel to the two babies at the beginning of the film, looking

forward to life, at the film's end we see two old women also looking ahead, but this time towards death.

The varied repetitions of narrative patterns in the different age groups and developmental stages indicate that we are not just seeing a progressive development. The repetitions concern needs and aspects that are common to all human beings and manifest at all ages, such as physical contact and belonging to or being outside of social groupings. In this way not just the differences between the age groups, but also the connections between them are emphasized, which is accurately expressed through the film's use of the varied repetitions.

The film creates an overall connection between all the women portrayed, not only through the continuity of time, the flow of the visual style and the soundtrack, but also through transitions and continuity in the narrative. One example of a narrative transition is seen between shot 20 and 22. In shot 20 we see a young woman with shoulder length curly hair, lying in a sun-bed and wearing protective goggles. In shot 22 the woman getting up from the sun-bed and removing her goggles also has shoulder length curly hair but is obviously a few years older than the first woman. The two shots have a direct narrative connection with each other, and the physical similarity of the two women might indicate that they are the same woman, at different ages. Apart from creating a dynamic as well as a connection between the shots, this also emphasizes the connection between the women and the age groups, once again pointing out the film's universal developmental perspective.

Embodied experience

The film creates a *metaphysical level* which portrays life and which contrasts life to that which comes before and after it. You can thus

say that every shot at this level represents *life*. The second level in the film, the *physiological level*, portrays the change of the body in the development from fetus to extreme old age. Here every shot comes to represent *time*. The third level is what we are calling a *psychological/social level*, where the focus is the transformation of the individual in the development from childhood to adulthood and finally old age; on this level every shot represents *experience*.

Letting these two levels (the physiological/sensual and the psychological/social) run simultaneously, *The Face of Time* creates a fusion of body and consciousness. This is one of the pillars of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological thoughts and philosophy concerning the body. He states that consciousness is shaped through the body. The body is the subject of the personality, and it is through the body that we are present in the world, speak, experience, and are in contact with things; it is life itself. Hence, it is via the body that the individual becomes a consciousness or soul that believes it is something in itself.

The Face of Time deals with this process, as consciousness and experience develop simultaneously with the aging of the body. The film also focuses on the contact of the bodies with one another, with water and with other things. The film presents different shapes of bodies and consciousnesses, but they all experience the same development. Thus, each individual in the film has more of a metonymical function, in contrast to a metaphorical one, where each individual must be viewed autonomously. The narrative structure and the presentation of different individuals therefore do not emphasize individuality, but instead accentuate that some life processes are the same for everyone.

Translation: Susanne Stranddorf

***The Face of Time* and life's trajectory**

Thomas Bjørner

The Face of Time shows in a very lyrical and metaphorical way a number of faces typical of various stages in life. The doubleness of the title contains the essence of the overall theme, in that the film not only portrays a variety of typical states of mind in the year 2000, but also depicts how human beings age, in an inevitable and natural process over time, from the beginning of life towards death – a state of gradual decay.

The sole setting of the film is a Swedish bathhouse, a closed room with women only. The female paradigm elucidates “life,” for life is after all conceived from women. The bathhouse serves as a contrast to a reality outside, yet at the same time as a mirror to the real world.

The Face of Time takes its point of departure in a shot of a pregnant woman, the beginning of life. Next, we see a newborn baby lying helpless and totally dependent in its mother’s arms. In the following shots, the baby slowly frees itself from the mother and progresses from carefully crawling around while exploring the world to washing its own hair. The mother/child relationship is at one and the same time inseparable and separable: inseparable because the umbilical cord once connected child and mother, and separable because the child needs to free itself from the mother. A child pushing away a baby doll in the water portrays this metaphorically. Yet the child is not ready to free itself totally and therefore quickly catches the doll again. Later, two girls playing

with a yo-yo present a similar theme. Their nakedness tells us in which stage of life they are. One of the girls is pre-pubescent, while the other is still a child. Suddenly the older girl is distracted from the game and stops playing with the yo-yo – a natural progression away from playing and the role of a child – while the other girl continues playing unhindered.

Another common theme in the closed bathhouse of life is variety. Here high and low, fat and slim are seen naked, liberated from their usual environment, everyday clothing, and matching roles. And the formation of identity intensifies concurrently with increasing age in the baths, as is the case in real life. Furthermore, a number of ethnic minorities are represented here. Children and young people are seen playing together across ethnic boundaries. However, at no stage in the film are older people seen together with other ethnic nationalities. In this way, the director holds out a socio-critical mirror as to how different peoples meet in real life.

A teenager is depicted in her exaggerated vanity, putting on make-up. Her face is a mask which is quickly going to crack, not only in the pool of the bathhouse but also in real life, where one's identity is hidden behind an assumed mask. In contrast to this, a stout and more self-assured girl is shown putting on her goggles. This is not a false mask that is going to crack but rather an act that will help her find her bearings in the water of life.

The mirror plays an important role in this short film. Since you cannot see your face with your own eyes, only the mirror can artificially reflect your appearance. Thus, you compose your own character and identity via the mirror. At a point when the music suddenly turns very gloomy, the face of a dreary 50-year-old woman appears in a mirror. It is obvious that her life experiences

have given her a sound beating. When she moves away from the mirror (and we as viewers realize that it was only a reflected image we had observed), we can now see that she has deep scars on one side of her face. Life has given her a mask that cannot be changed. Yet she still has not lost her spirits, and in her vanity she combs her hair so as to make life go on.

The aging process is depicted very differently. Two older women – twin sisters – are sitting on a bench holding each other, closely connected in an inner joy and an outer harmony. They are wearing identically coloured bathing caps in contrast to the monotonous, clinical white tiles of the baths. In contrast to this, some very lonely old women are portrayed: a prostrate, cigarette-smoking woman who seems to have resigned herself to the conditions of life; an elderly woman trying to straighten her eyebrows and to wipe clean her discoloured teeth in a denial of age and in an attempt to cling to something which has disappeared.

The short film ends with an older woman walking slowly toward the camera with the aid of a cane along a passage, the passage of life, in a certain and inevitable journey towards death. When the older woman reaches the end of the passage, the film ends in blackness.

The Face of Time is a very beautiful film, rich in symbolism and masterfully executed from beginning to end.

A moving picture: life between birth and death

Edvin Vestergaard Kau

Poetry

First shot: a pregnant woman standing in the locker room of a public bathhouse for women, preparing to take a swim. Last shot: an old woman in the same locker room walking from the depth of the picture towards the camera. Finally, her black silhouette blocks our view, and we are left with a black screen. The end. Between these two shots we are presented with a continuum of ages: babies, small girls, teenagers; young, mature, middle-aged, old, and very old women. There is not much of a plot, hardly a narrative, but a clear structure and a theme, visualized as a picture moving, almost, from birth to death. A cinematic poem with girls and women representing stages of life.

Structures and symbolic qualities

Apart from the general movement between the beginning and the end of life, different roles representing stages of the girls' and women's development are presented in a variety of ways. Series of shots and their characters are brought together in groups. They are joined or contrasted through the methods of editing. For the most part, the use of dissolves can be said to foreground the elements that some of the shots have in common; for example, the enjoyment and playfulness of the small girls in some of the first shots, or the teenage moods of the red-haired girl in the showers and the girl with the

tattoo in the following shot. This "gentle" way of making comparisons is also evident in the young and middle-aged women in the montage which includes the woman laughing as she is washed by another, the women in the bubbling water and the solarium, and the woman drying her hair with a towel. Other people also appear, if not in contrast to one another then as independent examples of types, ages, and moods (direct cuts bringing them together).

Also, within each shot we see compositions and choreographies of bodies and faces. This is done in beautiful patterns of space as well as light. Even if each shot has a particular person as its main character, in most cases there are some other ages and types represented beside them or in the background. In this way we get not just a single characterization but several mutual characterizations of persons, bodies, faces and ages per shot or scene.

During the first part of the film, one of the principles is an alternation between shots foregrounding the experience of water in different forms – swimming, jumping, showering and so forth – and the young characters doing other things out of the water. These situations, and especially the pleasant and even joyful experiences in the water, are mirrored in the later, more grown-up and focused part of the film. In this way, the individual shots as well as the first versus the second half of the film are mirrored through the use of water. And since some of the first examples clearly combine water with birth, happiness, and life, this is also carried into the later examples, with consequences for the symbolic interpretation of how mature and old women use water.

Furthermore, the poetic and symbolic qualities of the film are announced, so to speak, by its title and the perspective it opens for the audience. Does time have a face at all? Or is it just that the girls and

the women, their faces, are used as a way of showing the audience that the effects of time can be seen in our physical presence in space? As I see it, this mechanism works the other way around, lending the quality of time to the "face" in the title. Time is literally shown as part of our existence, and what the visual poetry of the film brings to the screen as a visible fact is this: all stages of life are present simultaneously. All the time, as it were.

The aesthetic principle

Some of the shots, or scenes as we might call them, deserve special attention, because they can lead us to an understanding of an important principle of the film's aesthetic practice, if not *the* most important visual pattern. The most elaborate shots are nos. 28, 30, and 31, near the end (the film has a total of 32 shots).

To take the last one first: The woman at the center of shot 31, probably the oldest of them all, perhaps apart from the lady in the very last scene, is shown with two young women swimming in the pool behind her. In a very elaborate movement the camera tracks to the right, moving from the swimmers to the old lady. Simultaneously panning slightly to the left, it centers her in the frame, at the same time bringing another young woman in sight to the left. So, while she is sitting in front, the film's aesthetic patterning of the material brings her together with the other, young and beautiful, characters populating the space. Her old body and her resignation is combined with the beauty and healthiness of the others and accentuated in definite contrast to them.

Before that, shot 30 shows a woman, perhaps in her late seventies, working on her make-up and checking it in a mirror. Before doing so she draws a curtain to the left behind her to have a little privacy.

However, it only blocks out part of the space in the background, and so, like her colleague in shot 31, she is also seen together with some of the other women.

Contrary to this, the woman in shot 29 is shown in her own little locker room. On the one hand the bird's-eye view may be said to make her look lonely, but on the other she seems to be enjoying a peaceful moment for private reflection.

Perhaps the most complicated and elaborate shot is no. 28. From the close-up of the very wrinkled hand of an old woman, an upward tilt and change of focus bring other women behind her in sight. One younger woman passes through the frame from background right towards foreground left. Her disappearance makes another young woman in the showers visible. While she is seen talking to a somewhat older woman, the camera continues its combination of tilt and pan left to end in a close-up of the old woman's face. She is wearing a ring; her earrings are in place; nail polish and make-up too; her hair is carefully done. She obviously still takes an interest in how her beauty and personality present themselves to the world.

The analyses of these shots show the heart of the film's aesthetic – as well as its poetic and human – principle. Meticulously staged and carefully choreographed it brings different ages together and integrates them into a whole: representations of life. Having analyzed these key shots it becomes apparent that this structure is at work in the film as a whole. (The sound is another element that greatly contributes to the unity of the film. Voices and noises are used very effectively to support the visual montage of characters and ages, and the subtle use of music binds the shots together and also adds to different moods). Different ages and the characters that represent them have their own moments in the foreground. But at

the same time we have this simultaneous presence of other ages of life.

Mirrors

Another way to describe the principle of holding different characters together within the space of each frame is to see them as stages of life mirroring each other. When the audience comprehends the poetic world of the frame, what is seen is not another girl or young woman beside or behind an old lady, but a symbolic version of what she may have been; and the other way around: from the baby's and girl's point of view the women are incarnations of possible futures in life.

As we have seen, the mirror structure is an integral part of the film's aesthetic practice, and I shall just mention one more example. The shot mentioned above with the young woman in streaming, bubbling water and the next one with the woman in the solarium, mirror each other. Apart from the wet woman juxtaposed with the dry and warm one, a pan in one direction is met by one in the other.

Girls and women mirror themselves in each other. From a certain age in their teens we see them concentrating on their own mirror images. Both mirror in a literal sense, and their surroundings create pictures of them in their own as well as other people's eyes. In a way they even mirror themselves in the gaze of the audience.

On the other hand, also the director, the poet, the painter of the pictures as well as the audience mirror themselves and their/our fate in the girls and the women through the gaze of the camera. In the mirror of the film we see and reflect upon our own born or unborn children, their childhood and adolescence, our life and the *time*

that creates the ever changing continuum between birth and death,
the *space* we live in.

Bean Cake



David Greenspan
(USA, 2001)



Bean Cake production shots

Bean Cake

David Greenspan

(USA, 2001), 12 min., 16 mm, b/w

Principal Cast and Production Credits

Uchida Taro	Ryuichi Miyakawa
Mihara O-Yoshi	Sayaka Hatano
Mr. Obe	Chikara Inoue
Taro's Mother	Naoko Daigo
Taguchi	Takuya Matsuda
Director	David Greenspan
Screenplay	David Greenspan, Noriko Kimura, Chris Zeller
Director of Photography	Bryan Donnell
Editor and sound editor	David Greenspan
Composer	Wataru Hokoyama
Producers	David Greenspan, Noriko Kimura, Trac Vu

Awards and Festivals

Palme d'Or for Best Short Film, Cannes International Film Festival, 2001
Best Student Short, Nashville Independent Film Festival, 2001
OMU prize for Promoting Cross Cultural Understanding, Sehsuechte
International Student Festival, Potsdam, 2001
National Finalist, Student Academy Awards, 2001
Competition short, Slamdance Film Festival (Park City, Utah) 2001
College Emmy, 2nd Prize Drama, Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 2001
IFP/West Los Angeles Film Festival, Official Selection, 2001
Rochester International Short Film Festival, 2001
Chicago Asian American Film Festival, 2001
Houston Worldfest, Official Selection, 2001
Method Fest (Pasadena), 2001
Palm Springs International Short Film Fest (2nd Place, Student Category)
Sao Paulo International Short Film Festival
American Short Shorts Film Festival (Japan)
One Reel Short Film Festival (Seattle, Washington)
Maui International Short Film Festival
Athens International Film Festival
Sendai Short Film Festival (Sendai, Japan)
Asiatica Filmmediale (Rome, Italy)
Calgary International Film Festival
Oldenburg Film Festival (Germany)
D.C. Asian Pacific American Film Festival (Washington, D.C.)
Taipei Golden Horse Film Festival
Ozu Memorial Film Festival (Nagano, Japan)
St. Louis International Film Festival
London International Film Festival
Rio De Janeiro International Short Film Festival
FIKE Film Festival (Portugal)

Synopsis

"What do you like more than anything in the world?" This is the question a teacher asks 9-year-old Taro on his first day of school. Taro is swift to respond: "Bean cake!" Wrong answer. It is 1933 in Tokyo, and the stern teacher tells Taro he will be punished until he holds the Emperor in higher regard than his favorite snack. Taro's refusal to budge from his original response leads to an ultimatum – change his answer or face expulsion – but it also prompts an unexpected friendship with a young girl, O-Yoshi. *Bean Cake* is based on a Japanese folktale, *The Red Bridal*, which was originally introduced to the West by Lafcadio Hearn.

David Greenspan

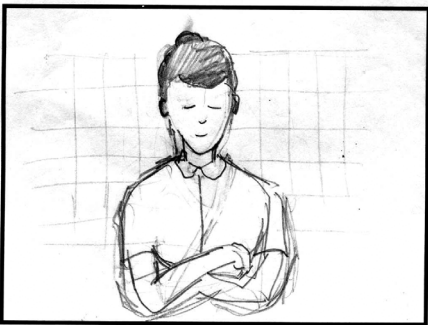
Born and raised in NYC, David spent a year at Stanford's Kyoto Center, where he made his first video as a part of the Kyoto University Film Society. He recently graduated from the graduate film school at the University of Southern California.

Bean Cake **The storyboard © David Greenspan**

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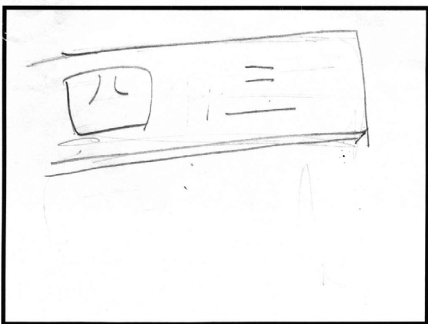
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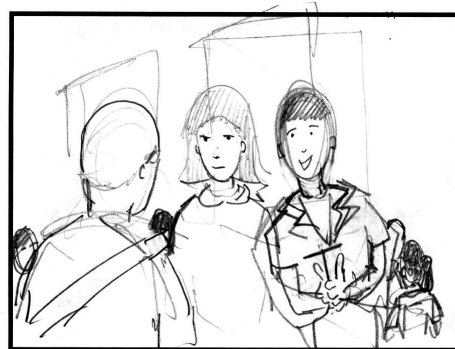
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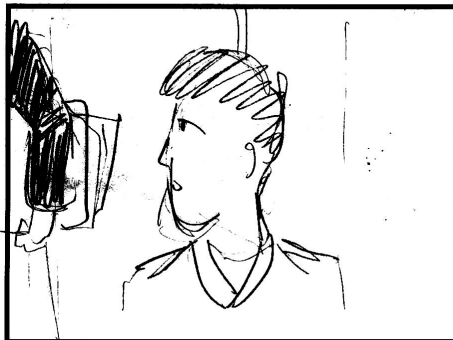
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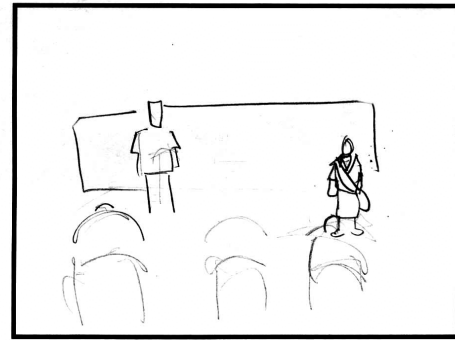
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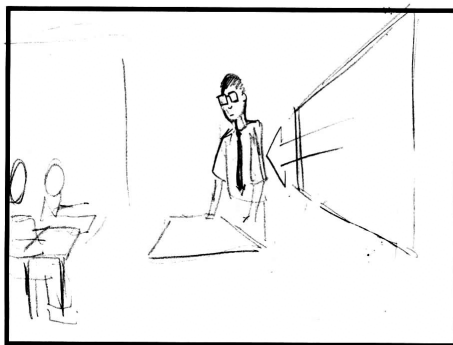
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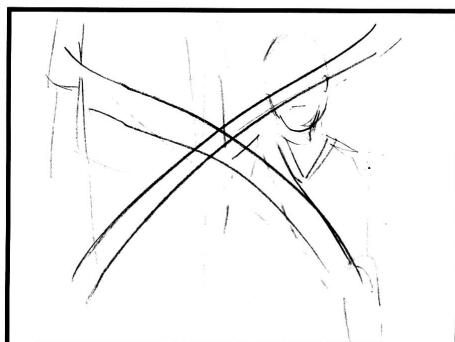
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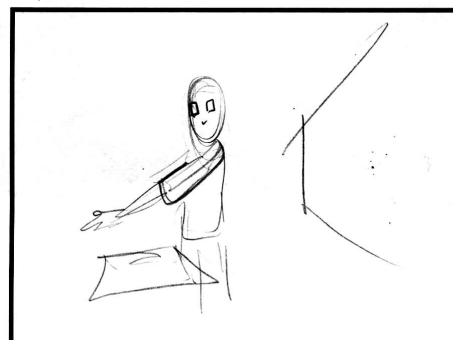


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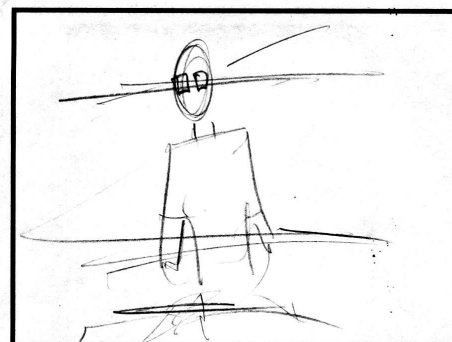
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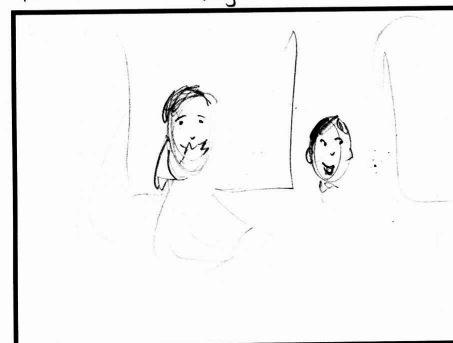
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Ohagi!



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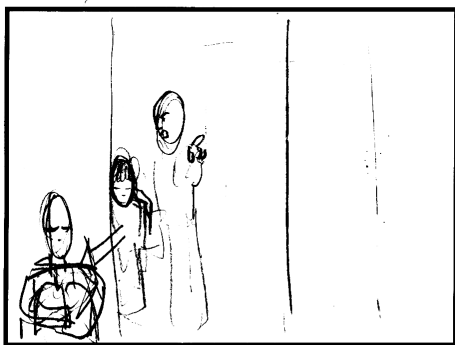
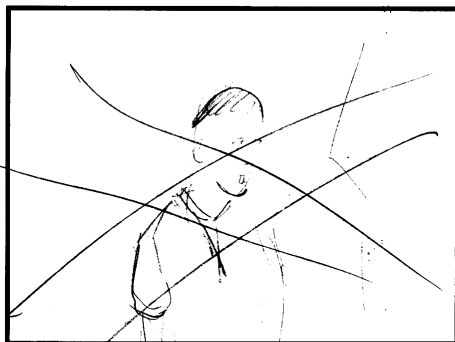
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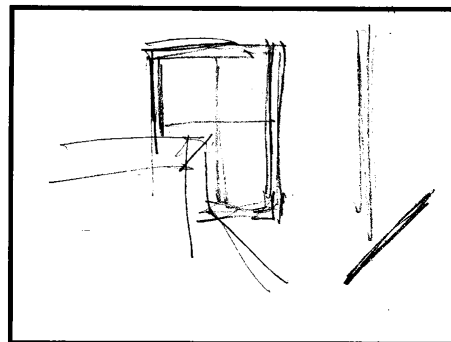
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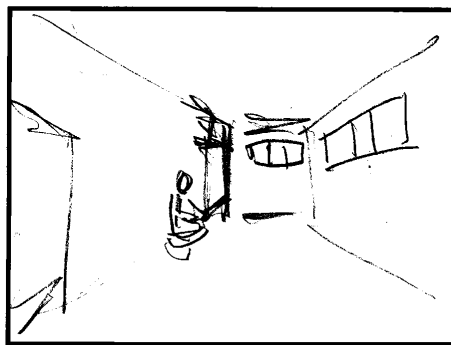
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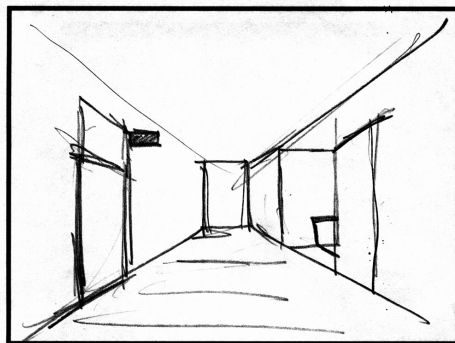
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Bean Cake production shots

An interview with David Greenspan on *Bean Cake*

Richard Raskin

I understand that Bean Cake was inspired by the Japanese folktale, The Red Bridal, first introduced to the West by Lafcadio Hearn in 1894. What was it about that folktale that captured your interest in the first place?

I always identify with stories about outsiders. But there were two moments in this story that captured my interest right away. The moment that Taro says "bean cake" instead of "the Emperor" was sublime. This act of childish naïve sincerity becomes an effortless and outrageous act of rebellion. When I read this part I just thought that Taro's answer was such a beautiful way to mock the ridiculousness of any time a group tries to impose an extreme obedience to a nation or religion or way of thinking. I also thought that the young girl's final line, "Do you love bean cakes more than me?" was so perfectly cute and smart. She teases and flirts with Taro and mocks the teacher's ideology in one breath.

Why did you choose to set your own adaptation in the Japan of the 1930s, rather than some other period?

At first I wanted to set my film in the exact same period and rural location of the original tale. I was for some time stuck on a literal adaptation of the setting and the story. My intention was to shoot in Japan or failing to build a set of a rural Japanese school (circa 1850s) on a sound stage in LA. When I realized that either of these two choices was going to be prohibitively expensive for a student film, I had my first realization about the need to compromise or adapt according to your resources as long as the heart of the story you are

trying to tell is not compromised. I realized that as long as the story took place before WWII that it really didn't matter when. And then the only location I could find in LA that looked anything remotely like a Japanese school was a large elementary school in Pasadena that had been built in the second decade of the Twentieth Century. I changed the story setting to a private school in Tokyo just before the war. Basically this moved the story as far into the future as possible without going past WWII. I also thought about the new character's backstory and imagined that his father was an officer in the Army and had been stationed recently in Manchuria, which explained some of his melancholy attitude. It was pointed out to me later that ten years after the time of the film, Taro would most likely be fighting in the war himself. This added a level of complexity I hadn't planned for.

Among the changes you made in your adaptation of the folktale, is your strengthening of Taro, making him a bit tougher. While in the folktale, at least in Lafcadio Hearn's telling of the story, Taro cries when first interrogated by the teacher, which makes the other children laugh even more, and then cries again when O-Yoshi tries to comfort him, your Taro never sheds a tear. What were your thoughts concerning these changes in his degree of self-control?

This was the key change that my co-script writer, Chris Zeller, introduced. I identified with the weak version of Taro in the original story. I could imagine myself feeling terribly ashamed at making such a huge mistake and not being able to handle the ridicule. I knew that there was something wrong with my literal adaptation (the first few drafts). Everyone I gave them to noted that there was no real conflict or climax or resolution. Taro just cries and Mihara makes him feel better. Chris tends to write very intense stories with

outer or overt conflict between characters and I was nervous about having him take a stab at a rewrite. I emphasized to him that I was going for a much quieter style of film than the ones he was used to making. I like to think of my style as less melodramatic than his. Anyway, I asked if he wanted to read the original story. He said no, that that would influence him too much. He took my old script and came up with Taro's reluctance to change his answer and the teacher's ultimatum. These changes were so crucial that I finally felt confident about actually shooting the script. In fact, Chris wanted to make Taro even more overtly defiant. I pulled him back and explained to the actor that the main reason he doesn't answer at first is because he is embarrassed and scared of saying the wrong thing. Later he refuses to change his answer because he is mad at the teacher for embarrassing him and not for political reasons.

The cushion and tops O-Yoshi brings to Taro are also your own inventions. Can you tell me why you added them to the story?

We took out the scene where Taro cries and O-Yoshi consoles him so we are left without a reason for Taro to fall for O-Yoshi. I hate love stories where we are supposed to assume that the male protagonist falls for the girl simply because she is pretty and for no other reason. I wanted scenes that concretely showed O-Yoshi's kindness towards him and showed them playing together, becoming friends. In the original story Lafcadio Hearn is able to simply write something like "and they played together and had such a wonderful time." I had to come up with something specific that expressed this. I called my Japanese tutor from high school and asked her to brainstorm some different kinds of games that kids in 1930s Japan might play. Somehow the tops felt like the quietest

game that could be played with just two kids and that was still somewhat visually interesting.

I understand that you are an admirer of Ozu. Are there specific shots in Bean Cake that you see as particularly influenced by Ozu's cinematography?

Definitely the first shot and the final scene. I toyed with the idea of having the characters look straight at the camera. There is that famous Ozu scene where four characters are sitting around a table and the bottle is always facing the same way from every perspective. I thought of Ozu's lack of camera movement and simple, center-punched compositions as a good way to take the hand of the director out of the camera work so that people could just concentrate on the story and the performances.

You directed your actors in Japanese. How does it happen that you speak Japanese?

I've been fascinated with Japanese culture since I was in 5th grade of elementary school. I started reading American comic books and a writer/artist named Frank Miller who was fascinated with Japan was using ninjas in all the comic books that he took over. So American superheroes like Wolverine and Daredevil were all of a sudden fighting ninjas. I thought it was the greatest. My parents took me into New York City to the Asia Society to practice calligraphy and do research on a report I was doing on ninjitsu in 6th grade. After having Japanese food and seeing movies by Kurosawa and Itami's "Tampopo" I decided I wanted to visit Japan. But I vowed I would study the language before I went. I studied with a

tutor in high school and then throughout college. My junior year of college I studied in Kyoto.

There are special challenges in directing child actors. Did you use any particular strategies in working with Riuichi Miyakawa and Sayaka Hatano?

First of all, I can't say this enough. These two kids are just so smart that the usual challenges that you hear about didn't come up. With Sayaka the only problem I had was that she didn't speak any English. My Japanese isn't perfect but once I got the basic idea of the scene and the emotion I wanted her to convey, she just got it. One or two takes. Ryuichi was a slightly different case. He has an incredible memory. I actually gave him very mechanical directions, like look at the teacher for two seconds and then look down for three seconds. I had to previsualize the timing exactly. Because he would do exactly what I said. But I could also tell him things like look surprised. Not that surprised. And he could dial these emotions up and down in discernible degrees. He just has such an expressive face. But he never really went over the top. Except once. The scene where his mom comes back to school and he calls out her name in sort of a whiny voice. I had to take a wild line that we recorded afterwards and slip it in because every on-camera take was so whiny. Other than that, however, he was always beautifully understated. Neither of them had acted before. I think that's the main reason their performances feel natural.

Were there special challenges involved with casting and with creating a Japanese set in Los Angeles and Pasadena?

I couldn't take an ad out in the trades, which is standard procedure, and find bilingual child actors. Adults were no problem. But my

producers and I ended up driving all over Southern California to every Japanese language school in existence. I also went to the large Japanese communities in downtown LA and Orange County during their O-Bon festivals and passed out fliers. The response was very thin. We hit the jackpot at two schools south of LA where the students are the children of Japanese executives that are in the US temporarily and are learning completely in Japanese as if they were still in Japan. The second and third generation Japanese Americans were either not good enough at Japanese or not good enough as actors. I originally was looking for a Grandfather for the mother role (as it is in the original story) but I simply couldn't find anyone. The location was a big stumbling block until a fellow USC student recommended the school that we eventually used in Pasadena. Except for the Northwest however, I think California is the only place in America I could have made this student film. I got a lot of support from the local Japanese community in Little Tokyo, where we found some of the props, textbooks, and the temple which let us use their Tea Room for Taro's living room in the first and last scenes.

You edited as well as directed Bean Cake (not to mention co-writing, co-producing and sound editing the film). Sometimes editors want to trim away shots – kill the darlings – that directors feel are essential. Did you make special efforts to see your film through new eyes when you worked in the editing room?

Probably not. I edited together basically what I had storyboarded. For the most part I was lucky and most things just fit into place the way I had imagined it. In some scenes however I think I definitely tried to use every angle that I had shot at first and gradually realized that simpler is better. I would sit at the Avid and watch the cuts with a friend and decide whether or not the shot was going on too long. You get a new perspective when you're forcing someone

else to watch your student film with you. You can really feel the length with an audience, no matter how small. Viewing it now, I think I let a few shots in the very first scene go on too long. But, I think you can get away with that more at the start of the film.

Were you inspired by any short films in particular?

I can't say that *Ohagi* was directly inspired by any short films in particular, but one of the best short films I've ever seen is also about kids in school. It's a love story fable packed with comedy called, *Mad Boy I'll Blow Your Blues Away, Be Mine*. It was directed by a USC student named Adam Collis. It is so funny and touching and entertaining in a very short period of time. It has much more energy and fun than my film.

Do you feel that storytelling in the short fiction film is essentially the same as storytelling in the feature film? Or does the short tell a story in ways that are not found in the feature?

I can't say I know how to tell a feature length story but I would guess that in many ways they are similar. If you are attempting a straight narrative, a character needs to face a challenge or a conflict and you need to get the audience to care about his goal or predicament. In both cases, unlike a novel, you need to express to the audience in shorthand things about your character, his situation and background. In a feature script, as I understand it, you get about 15 minutes or pages to establish the status quo and the characters. In a short that's what you usually get for the entire movie. But in a feature there are usually more characters. In both cases you should be trying to trim the fat, cutting most scenes that don't have anything to do with pushing the story forward. Now that's a standard Hollywood goal-oriented model. There are other types of storytel-

ling. I think in a short film you have more license to experiment. But a boring short film can feel longer, much longer, than a solid feature.

Do you feel there are fundamental differences between Eastern and Western storytelling, or that the principles of storytelling are essentially the same, regardless of the particular culture?

I don't think I'm qualified to give a very informed answer to this question. I think that all cultures share similar principles in storytelling as evidenced by some common myths which are present in all cultures. In Japan, for instance, there is a myth regarding the first gods of Japan, Izanagi and Izanami, that has many similarities to the Greek myth about Orpheus in the underworld. I think the difference in storytelling is no longer as pronounced as it once may have been because everyone is consuming Hollywood movies and books like Harry Potter that have been translated into many languages. I do find that third-world cinema has more examples of non-Hollywood story structure with ambiguous or unresolved endings and sometimes less of an emphasis on finding one main character's point of view.

Do you have any advice to give to student filmmakers about to make their own first short fiction films?

- 1) Take chances and don't try to please your professor or your friends, or any audience beside yourself. Make sure *you* like it. Make sure you believe in the message you're trying to communicate.
- 2) Make sure the camera style fits the content. Don't do crazy camera moves just for the sake of showing off your talent as a director. I guarantee someone has done the shot before and with better equipment. That said, if you have an interesting way to create a shot that is designed to communicate a specific feeling or idea, go for it.

- 3) Be aware of your resources. Don't go overboard worrying about production values. Concentrate more on communicating your story clearly.
- 4) For a very first project just make sure you get your point across. Films are a form of communication.
- 5) The two most important ingredients in a film are the script and the actors, and in that order. Camera work, sound, production design is important but secondary.
- 6) Don't neglect sound on the set. Good production sound saves you many hours in post production and adds to the audience's illusion of reality.
- 7) Don't be scared. Fear, self-censorship makes many people quit or never even try. I almost didn't do this project for that reason and I would have severely regretted that. I can say all this with the benefit of hindsight.

Is there anything else you would care to add about the making of Bean Cake, or about storytelling?

I think reaction shots (shots of the people listening to the conversation instead of the participants) are very important. They are the first things that get cut from a student shot list when you're running out of time on a set. I used a ton of them in the classroom scenes to elongate certain moments and tell the audience how I wanted them to feel about each moment of Taro's predicament. Reaction shots are very helpful.

4 October 2001

Bean Cake, or the Emperor's New Clothes

Mark Le Fanu

The militant and chauvinist spirit that asserted itself increasingly in Japan from the 1920s onwards, at some stage in the 1930s converting itself into fully-fledged fascism, must inevitably, one would think, have made its mark on the arts – especially on a public art form like cinema. Doubtless a fair number of crude propaganda films were made and circulated in that epoch, but either they have not survived, or else (what amounts to the same thing) they are still invisibly lodged in the archives. For paradoxical as it may sound, the thirties were a golden age for Japanese film. The great early masterpieces of Ozu, Naruse and Gosho that began to come out at this time were far from being militant spiritually: a good case could be made for claiming that they are among the most “humanist” films ever made. Their subject matter is the comedy of petit-bourgeois life, and like the slightly later films of Italian neo-realism (*Bicycle Thieves* for example) they cast a particularly tender eye on the behaviour of children; in the best instances, the gaze itself is childlike, you could say.

In *Bean Cake*, which won the main prize for Best Short at last year's Cannes Film Festival, the young American director David Greenspan sets out to recapture that particular cinematic innocence, and he does so in an original way. Without going to Japan (downtown LA and Pasadena serve as locations), he has made a Japanese movie, complete with an all-Japanese cast: a homage to

Ozu. Not exactly a pastiche (because pastiche implies irony and distance), more a sort of friendly appropriation. The object seems to have been to produce with minute exactitude “the sort of film that Ozu might have made” so that, coming across it unprepared, one could almost mistake it (within its limited terms of course: it is only 10 minutes long) for a lost or forgotten work of the master.

The story centres round a boy’s first day at a new school. He comes from out of town, as a transfer student, and his mother hasn’t yet had a chance to kit him out with the standard school uniform. So there he is, somewhat gawky in his kimono, timorous and tongue-tied, but made to feel at home by a kind girl, O-Yoshi, who asks him to sit at the desk next to hers. Ozu’s films are famously timeless, but logically we must here be in the 1930s (rather than, for example, the 1950s, to which the film’s visual style otherwise refers us) because there is talk of the Emperor and what the school owes to that august personage. Indeed, reference to the Emperor is the twist or the conceit which the film hinges on. “Most important in this world is our duty to serve the Emperor,” intones the male teacher to the class in front of him, proceeding to ask young Taro – whom he fears is not listening – what is most important for *him*. “Bean cakes,” replies the child innocently. Not the answer that was expected – or needed. The teacher can’t resist a bit of ideological bullying. “Do you like bean cakes more than this school?” he pursues. Followed by: “Do you like bean cakes more than your parents? Do you like bean cakes more than the EMPEROR?” The boy doesn’t reply to these last two provocations, and as a result gets sent out of the class for the rest of the day. A minor scandal: his poor mother will have to be informed of Taro’s stubbornness, to her shame.

Emperor-worship, as opposed to mere emperor respect, was a fundamental aspect of Japanese fascism that even today is hard for a Westerner to get a handle on. Debates continue to rage as to how culpable the Emperor (in private life a mild enough person with an unexceptionable interest in zoology and botany) actually was in dragging his country towards ruin. There are those who claim he was far from being a mere figurehead; and others who gallantly defend him. Whatever the historical and personal truth of the matter, there can be little dispute that for a number of years official homage to the Emperor, across all classes of society, was a sacred duty, rigorously enforceable: not to go along with it would have been perceived as a sort of bold public blasphemy.

So *Bean Cake*, after all, couldn't really have been made by Ozu: at least, not in the 1930s; and for different but related reasons, not in the 1950s or 1960s either. Its implicit criticism of Emperor-worship is in the strict sense of the term anachronistic. Even if Ozu felt the importunacy of the political demand, it's something he couldn't have expressed outright. An outside observer (the writer of this piece for example) is left to ponder whether this "matters" artistically. Maybe the anachronism is deliberate: postmodernist even – the point being that this is the kind of statement that Ozu *might* have made or *should* have made in some utopian other life where neither state censorship nor self-censorship prevail. Meanwhile, the *spirit* of the piece belongs to Ozu, and that is surely what matters for most people. *Bean Cake* is, after all, a rather sweet film. Like all the most successful shorts, its simplicity in a way defies commentary; there is almost nothing that can be said about it by a third party commentator that isn't in itself said better by the movie. "Uchida Taro, do you like bean cakes better than *me*?" asks the

charming O-Yoshi in the film's final scene, to which (since there is no-one around to observe the pair) there can be no answer except the boy's humorously shy look of protest. So the emperor is snubbed – but delicately. A suggestive complicity is set up between the two children that is a matter of looks and hesitancies rather than of direct statement. Short films, by their nature, are “conceptual” works of art, premised on a single idea, efficiently, lucidly explicated. There isn't room in them, as there is in longer feature films, for wayward or terrifying explorations of the human soul. “What you see is what you get,” as the cliché has it. Yet in the best instances, that *transparency* (which in essence is a kind of wit) turns out to be genuine and moving.

***Ohagi*: glimpses of a not-so-old Japan**

Anemone Platz

Ohagi da nee... The name of the sticky sweet cake made of glutinous rice and red azuki beans awakens at once childhood memories among the handful of elderly people who agreed to watch the film with me. Memories of hard work in the rice fields being rewarded with *ohagi* at certain seasonal turning points of the year. The children usually had to pound the half-cooked rice until it reached its characteristic sticky consistency (*mochi*). The difficulty lay in the fact that the rice grains should not be pounded completely but should be left "half killed," as they would be told. Forming this mass afterwards into small rice-balls would give them a smooth surface, but inside some tasty small grains would remain. Lastly these balls were to be covered with sweetened azuki bean paste, which of course was also homemade. After offering the best ones to their ancestors' spirits on the Buddhist house altar, they would take the bean cakes to the fields to celebrate the end of the rice planting in spring or the closing of the rice harvesting season in autumn.

Another occasion some of them apparently vividly remembered was the day they entered elementary school. Like Tarô's mother had made some to celebrate his first school day in the Lafcadio Hearn story (Hearn 1972: 247) that inspired Greenspan to make this film. Later on, also birthdays became a reason to celebrate with bean cakes, but at Tarô's time birthdays were so unimportant that they were often forgotten. In those days everybody from new-born to old

man would turn a year older on the first of January, a custom that was first changed in 1950. In any case, *ohagi* is nearly the only sweet that people born before World War II in rural Japan can think of when asked about it. Their families had rice and beans. Sugar was scarce and expensive and thus kept for these special occasions.

Tarô's fondness for bean cakes above anything else does not surprise anybody in this group. His silent fight with the teacher over the matter is followed with nods of goodwill and understanding. It is only natural that his urban schoolmates did not understand how important mother's *ohagi* could become for a little boy left alone in an environment where most if not all seem to be enemies. O-Yoshi's reaction when trying this delicacy in the last scene confirms her lack of understanding of it before this experience. It was possible for children in urban Japan to get several kinds of sweets. Their playgrounds used to be near small booths where elderly women sold colourful candies, little bean balls, sugar canes, and cheap toys. Every day they would gather there after school and spend the little pocket money they had received from their mothers for their afternoon snack (Fukaya 1996:184-186). To a child like Tarô, from the countryside, where cash was kept for the most urgent necessities, such a custom must have been unknown.

Connoisseurs of Japanese-style confection have been searching for an explanation as to how *ohagi* came into existence. The common way of making this kind of Japanese-style cake was to cover a little ball of sweet white or red bean paste with a layer of glutinous rice. That was not only easier but also cleaner to make. How, then, did it turn into the contrary? How did what should have been inside, the bean paste, come to be outside, and what should have been the skin, the *mochi*, become the content? Looking at the occasions on which

ohagi is made and enjoyed, one finds that they all precede something that is expected to produce a big change. A certain epoch is over and a new one will start. Thus it is interpreted as the symbol of a decisive change: what is inside moves outside and what has been outside disappears into the inside. Vernal and autumnal equinox days have traditionally been celebrated with *ohagi*. The end of winter and the beginning of spring brings about enormous changes in nature and thus in people's everyday lives. In the same way, the end of the summer gives way to autumn. In rural society this means the harvest and preparation for a long winter. The earth that had expanded in the period of growth shrinks and returns to a time of rest (Okuyama 2001: 303-304).

Whether this explanation is only speculative or corresponds to reality is not that important in this context; in any case it is a beautiful one. In Japanese traditions, which are very much coloured by their rural origin, *ohagi* marks the end of something and celebrates the new that is about to arrive. It is white and red, the colours that symbolize an auspicious occasion. They symbolise a short temporal pause, where people stop and reflect, feeling gratitude for what is ending and hoping for the future. Retrospectively for Tarô, his mother's bean cakes did not only mark the beginning of his new school life, but also the beginning of a new and special friendship, the one with Mihara O-Yoshi.

The custom of eating bean cakes on occasions that mark a turning point in the course of nature or a person's life is still alive today. The beginning of spring and autumn, certain events that mark the work in the rice fields, a grandchild's first school day, New Year and so on, are reasons for my co-viewers to make *ohagi* as they know it from their childhood days. Do you make them all yourself? Yes, of

course! After a moment of reconsidering silence: Well, a machine pounds the rice... Although the hand-pounded tastes so much better!

Watching the film of course also revives memories of school life in the thirties and later on, during the war, under the American occupation. For someone who is accustomed to the way the Japanese deal with this topic, it is no surprise that they show neither signs of aggression nor resentment.

The curriculum under the imperialistic ideology does not lead to long discussions, as someone not acquainted with Japan and the Japanese might have expected. That was then, and there was nothing an individual could have done about it.

Nobody remembers having worn a uniform to school, which corresponds to the reality of the time in rural Japan. During the first years of Shôwa (Shôwa 1 is 1926) children went to school dressed in Japanese-style clothing: when it was warm, a cotton summer kimono held together by a narrow belt, and in winter Japanese-style pantaloons. Only a few in each class, children of the rich or civil servants, would wear school clothing. They were the ones who attracted attention (Fukaya 1996: 200). Tarô came from Shikoku, an area belonging to the Japanese countryside. The surroundings to which he was accustomed would thus have accepted the way he was dressed. But he came to urban Tokyo, where changes of course had been quicker to settle in, although his classmates had probably just got accustomed to their school uniforms shortly before his arrival.

Apart from not being attentive to what the teacher was saying because of his concern over the class's reaction to his appearance, it

was most probably the first time in his life that he was confronted with such a clear imperialistic stance in school. The waves may not have reached the Japanese countryside by the beginning of the 1930s. The 1920s are known as the time when the ideas of free school had arrived and just settled in Japan (Fukaya 1996: 137-145). The turn to imperialism in the school curriculum was radical, but still it took time to take root all over the country.

Imperialistic slogans started to be repeated and called out in a chorus every day before teaching started. The government had just managed to establish a fair amount of national schools. Until then it had depended on private schools to realize six years of compulsory education for every child. That was a great step forward toward the implementation of an imperialistic ideology in the teaching (Honda 2000: 112-117). As my co-viewers see it, no child could have escaped from this machinery of propaganda.

But the scenes of 1933 in *Ohagi* still show the comparatively soft beginnings. Some years later the consequences of Tarô's answer to the teacher's question would have been much more severe, not only for himself, but most probably also for his parents for not educating their son in the right spirit.

There is one scene that left us all tense with fear and expectation for what might follow. It is the one where O-Yoshi offers Tarô a kneeling cushion. To sit in the Japanese style as a form of punishment should of course be done without any comfort. To give him a cushion is to challenge the teacher's order, and thus one expects consequences for both. But nothing happens, so we relax when the two start spinning tops, which in reality is another offence to the teacher's authority.

This sheds light on another important aspect in the Japanese context. Normally, a viewer not familiar with Japanese circumstances might think that Tarô missed out on playing with the other children, but he had also been lucky enough to escape the duty of cleaning the school after classes. However, for him this was no reason to feel lucky. It was the ultimate expression of being excluded and ignored by teacher and classmates. Being excluded from the group to which one ought to belong is one of the worst emotional punishments that a Japanese can suffer. First the children laughed at Tarô, then they completely ignored him. He is made into an outsider before even having been given the chance to become a part of the group. It is at this point only that O-Yoshi's kindness and support helps him to overcome insecurity and loneliness during his first school day. The two spinning tops seem to symbolize the friendship that is going to unite them and that ultimately leads Tarô to give the correct answer when asked the crucial question a last time. In this way he makes his first step toward becoming an accepted classmate.

With *Ohagi* David Greenspan manages to revive memories of times gone by. A sentiment of gratitude for having been offered this chance to remember among people who have had similar experiences in an atmosphere of common understanding spreads through the group of viewers. Each of them had been himself/herself the little Tarô for twelve minutes, going through the whole range of feelings, thoughts, and fears he went through. To me it looks like the awakening of a common dear dream. The fact that this short film was made by a foreigner is completely forgotten. That might be the highest reward a foreigner can get from the Japanese.

For David Greenspan, too, *ohagi* has obviously marked a turning point in his work life!

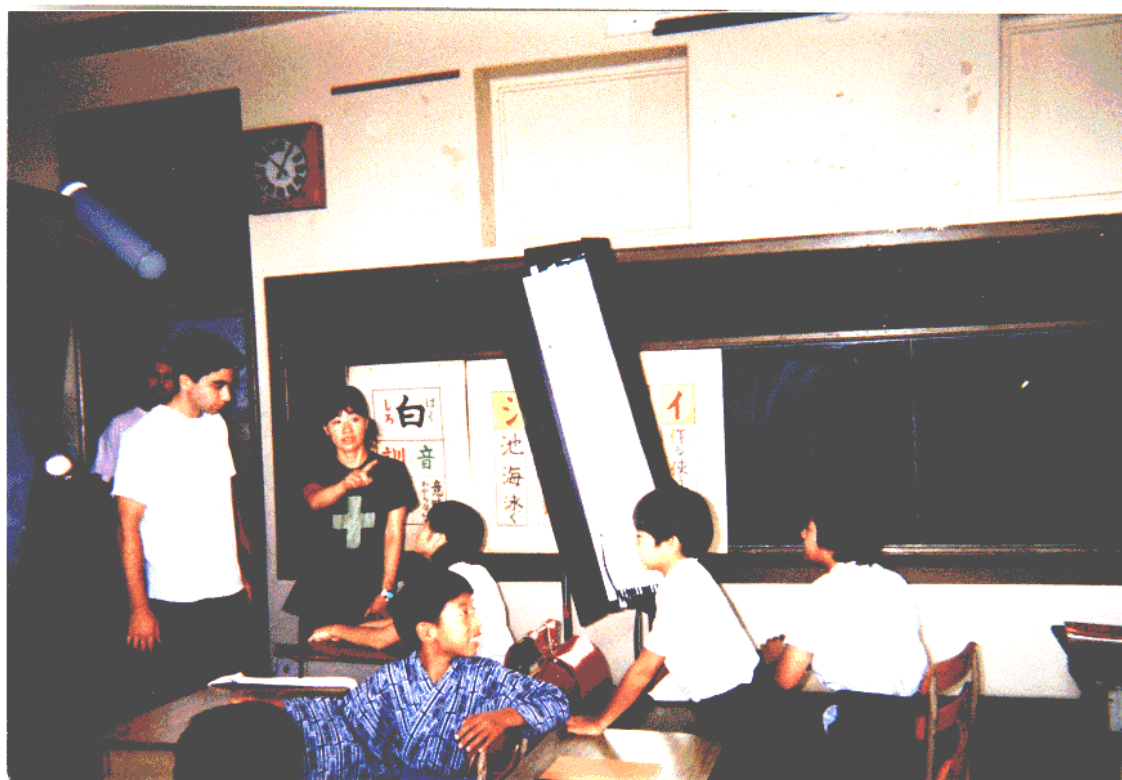
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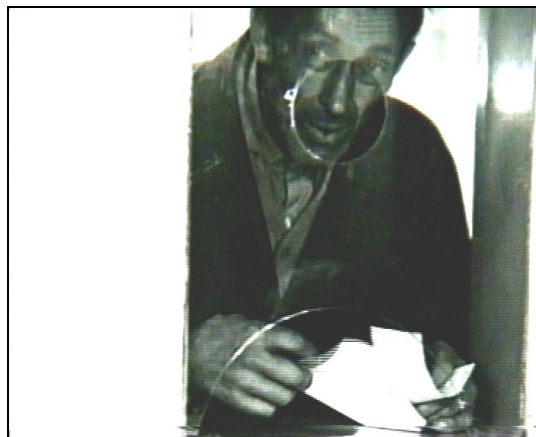
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Bean Cake production shots

The Office (Urząd)



Krzysztof Kieslowski
(Poland, 1966)

The Office (Urząd)
Krzysztof Kieslowski (1941-1996)
(Poland, 1966) 6 min., b/w, 35 mm

Principal credits

Director and screenplay	Krzysztof Kieslowski
Cinematography	Lechosław Trzesowski
Production company	Lodz Film School

Filmography

SHORT FILMS

1966: *The Tram (Tramwaj)*, *The Office (Urząd)*
1967: *Concert of Requests (Koncert życzeń)*
1968: *The Photograph (Zdjęcie)*
1969: *From the City of Lodz (Z miasta Łodzi)*,
1970: *I Was a Soldier (Byłem żołnierzem)*, *Factory (Fabryka)*
1971: *Before the Rally (Przed Rajdem)*
1972: *Refrain (Refren)*, *Between Wrocław and Zielona Góra (Między Wrocławiem a Zieloną Górą)*, *The Principles of Safety and Hygiene in a Copper Mine (Podstawy BHP w kopalni miedzi)*, *Workers '71: nothing about us without us (Robotnicy '71: Nic o nas bez nas)*
1973: *Bricklayer (Murarz)*, *Pedestrian Subway (Przejście podziemne)*
1974: *X-Ray (Przeswietlenie)*, *First Love (Pierwsza miłość)*
1975: *Curriculum Vitae (Zyciorys)*
1976: *Hospital (Szpital)*, *Slate (Kłaps)*
1977: *From a Night Porter's Point of View (Z punktu widzenia nocnego portiera)*, *I Don't Know (Nie wiem)*
1978: *Seven Women of Different Ages (Siedem kobiet w różnym wieku)*
1980: *Station (Dworzec)*, *Talking Heads (Gadające głowy)*
1988: *Seven Days a Week (Siedem dni w tygodniu)*

FEATURE FILMS

1975: *Personnel (Personel)*, *The Scar (Blizna)*
1976: *The Calm (Spokój)*,
1979: *Camera Buff (Amator)*
1981: *Blind Chance (Przypadek)*, *Short Working Day (Krotki dzien pracy)*
1984: *No End (Bez konca)*
1988: *Décalogue* (10 films, each 52 min. in length, including two cinema versions:
 A Short Film about Killing
 A Short Film about Love
1991: *La Double Vie de Véronique*
1993/94: *Trois couleurs: Bleu, Blanc, Rouge*

A visual Kafka in Poland

Ib Bondebjerg

The world fame of Kieslowski is tied to his ten-part *Decalogue* series (1988) and his film trilogy *Trois couleurs: Bleu, Blanc, Rouge* (1993-1994). They represent his move towards a modern European art film tradition to which he contributed with a strong moral and existential focus on the distance between despair and hope, isolation and love, individuality and social responsibility. But even in these feature films he carries his experiences with him from a Polish society in which people were suppressed under a communist bureaucracy. The concrete social, human, and political reality of this Kafka-like society and bureaucracy dominated his short films and documentaries from the start of his career as a filmmaker in the 1960s. Here often very simple visual registrations of social life and Polish institutions were filmed in such a way that a more symbolic dimension and a message between the lines were visible. In his later films more existential and symbolic themes dominated and the narratives were not always directly linked to specific social and political conditions. But still the settings and atmosphere gave the narrative space a realistic dimension that draws on the same experiences as the earlier more political feature films and his documentary films.

The student documentary film *The Office* (Urząd, 1966) is a very early example of the themes and tendencies in Kieslowski's documentary production before he became a modern European art film director in the 1980s. It was in fact his first film along with

another student short fiction, *The Tram* (Tramwaj, 1966). Most of his early films in the 60s and 70s were short documentary films with a strong, though often subdued, political critique and satire. Nevertheless, many of them were banned by the communist regime. Films like *The Photograph* (Zdjecie, 1968), *From the City of Lodz* (Z miasta Lodzi, 1969) – his graduation film from the Lodz Film school – *I was a Soldier* (Bylem Zolnierzem, 1970), *Factory* (Fabryka, 1970), *Refrain* (Refren, 1972), and perhaps his most well-known one, *From a Night Porter's Point of View* (Z punktu widzenia nocnego portiera, 1978), were all short, insightful, often subdued satirical or lyrical portraits of everyday life in Poland.

But Kieslowski also made longer documentaries such as *Workers '71* (Robotnicy '71, 1972), in which Kieslowski tries to portray the mentality of the working class at the time of the strikes and rebellion against Gomulka; the drama-documentary experiment *Curriculum Vitae* (Zyciorys, 1975), where a real party committee interrogates an actor in a fictional story; or *I don't know* (Nie wiem, 1977), with its confessions of a former factory manager. These films are very direct visual snapshots of reality in a Communist society, and often with a sharp political edge.

Even in his first feature films such as *Scar* (Blizna, 1976), about industrial disasters in the name of social welfare and development, or *Camera Buff* (Amator, 1979), a satire on political censorship in Poland, Kieslowski continues a clear political agenda, but again often with extensive use of visual symbolism and a very non-utopian political ideology. He is more interested in the ways in which contradictions always seem to appear, no matter what kind of system we talk about. The fall of the wall and the end of communism did not inspire a more positive outlook on life in

Kieslowski's films – the political despair was just replaced by existential and human despair. He remained a sharp existential and visual observer of human life as a mostly tragic or tragic-comic phenomenon. He is a modern, visual Kafka.

Kafka at the office

Kieslowski's first two short films point in two different directions and in many ways start the two major themes and tendencies in his whole oeuvre. The little short fiction film *The Tram* has the voyeur and love motif. It is a very simple story of a young man on a bus at night, completely taken by a beautiful young woman whom he is staring at and who gives him a smile when he closes the door to protect her from the draft. After leaving the bus he suddenly realizes as the bus drives away that he should have stayed to continue the relation and starts running after the bus, but too late (Insdorf, 1999: 11; Danusia Stok, 1993: 237). Already in this film we are inside the mind of numerous male characters in Kieslowski's later films.

The Office, on the other hand, is a poetical and satirical documentary film, a visual, political commentary on Polish reality and politics, but also with an interesting montage, sound-image relation, and framing. It is in some ways a documentary film in the tradition of American/European observational cinema (cinema direct/cinema vérité) but with stronger visual symbolism. The films uncommented visual portrayal of old people waiting in line to hand in applications for pensions, the staff behind the glass and the backstage archives, the very deliberate use of non sync or off-screen voices express the total alienation of people in this society. But the style also seems to underline the often quoted sentence by

Kieslowski about his minimal narrative style when asked about what the film school in Lodz taught him: "The Film School taught me how to look at the world. It showed me that life exists and that people talk, laugh, worry, suffer, steal, in this life, that all this can be photographed and that from all these photographs a story can be told. I didn't know that before" (Kieslowski in Danusia Stok, 1993: 46-47).

In this little film the story told by a montage of situations and small human portraits is one of old people on trial. It is also a story showing how these people simply don't understand how they can be on trial and the kind of system that produces this atmosphere of trial. But the camera reveals this and moves from the surface and deep into the heart of bureaucracy. Words, images, gestures, facial expressions, body language and so on, everything speaks in this film, revealing the system and its inhumane and 'Kafkaesque' nature.

The film is clearly divided into three rhetorical and visual statements and forms. *The first part* of the film is characterized by its impersonal, off-screen dialogue between clients and clerks. The dialogue is about forms and stamps that are missing; formulas and paperwork seem to rule everything here. No dialogue ever deals with the real social problems, but only with correct or incorrect procedures. So it is quite symbolic that the film disembodies the voices and that the camera at the same time moves around catching short glimpses of troubled faces, nervous hands fumbling with papers and so forth. The framing goes from medium to ultra close up, furthermore underlining the disembodied and alienating treatment of humans. They never seem to step out as distinct, concrete persons; they are just clients, faces, and passing things.

The second part of the film establishes a point of view just at the spot where client meets clerk, the glass dividing civic society and state bureaucracy. In this part of the film the focus is mostly from inside and out, so we see and identify with the clients. However, we also see the clerk for the first time. In the following parts, the point of view changes rather rapidly between the inside and finally also the outside view, the clients' point of view on the clerk. Again the image-sound relation and the framing are very symbolic. Even though for the first time in the film, we are able to hear speech in sync and thus identify a client speaking directly to the clerk and (though without ever seeing lips move) also the clerk answering, then on and off the film lapses back to the more impersonal off-screen dialogue. This underlines the inhuman, alienated relation and conversation. The framing of the clerk is at the same time just as symbolic and disembodied as the client's in the first part. What we see are hands filling out forms, hands sharpening a pencil, and not in one shot is it possible to establish a kind of direct eye contact between clerk and client. The film only shows facial shots of clerks looking to the side or down.

The third and last part of the film is even more explicit in its Kafkaesque view. It starts with the only completely silent sequence of the film. We see the clerk preparing her afternoon tea, and with the words, "Wait a moment," all the clients just wait in line, silent, while she drinks her tea. When the dialogue is resumed we are back in the completely random relation between dialogue and pictures: we see a series of different people in at the window, but none of them speak; the dialogue comes out of thin air and seems to live a life of its own. This aspect is gradually underlined and strengthened by intercuts from the deep backstage of the office, the archive. Here

stacks of papers bulge from every shelf. First the shots from this archive come in very short sequences, like inserts in the ongoing images from the office. But gradually the archive files become the main character, so that human and social life become totally alienated and disembodied. Visually all human life disappears and is substituted by bureaucratic stacks of papers, and this visual metaphor is furthermore marked by sound manipulation.

Just before we enter the archive a particular, absurd kind of dialogue takes place in which the clerk states that in order to get a pension one must fill in a form where everything one has ever done in life, all of one's jobs and places of work should be reported. These sentences are repeated again and again until the archive seems to echo these words. It is as if life is buried in these archives, trying to get out, but in vain. Instead, just before the end a door is slammed very hard and everything sort of closes down.

The documentary voices of Kieslowski

Kieslowski's film *The Office* is a clever documentary film with a sharp but subdued political message and critique of a communist bureaucracy. The film doesn't speak criticism but shows it indirectly through the whole montage and visual style and framing. On the surface this is just a report on and observation of Polish everyday life in the 60s, but in reality it is a death sentence for and burial of a society in which systems and procedures are superior to humans. But even though it is a specific, social critique of Poland in 1966 under communism, it is also a more general and existential portrait of bureaucracy at all times and in all kinds of societies.

The same kind of almost tongue-in-cheek strategy is found in a much stronger form in some of Kieslowski's documentaries from

the 70s. Most directly this can be seen in *From a Night Porter's Point of View*, where the main character embodies the controlling, bureaucratic mentality of the system. What seems to be a neutral and even empathetic portrait at the beginning of the film gradually becomes the revelation of a more and more fanatic and cruel control freak. The concrete observational documentation of this porter who not only performs his control at work, but also expands his wish to control and suppress to all aspects of private life and leisure time, therefore becomes a symbol for a whole society and its ruling class. The lack of distance and explicit critique makes the film's message even stronger and more shocking because the filmic identification process is used to create distance and dislike.

It is the same mechanism that gives us a really scary lesson in *Curriculum Vitae*, in which it is gradually revealed how far a real party committee is willing to go in its personal persecution of a fictionally constructed life story and person. What the film actually demonstrates is that the whole thing, also in the actual historical trials against people who did not submit completely to the system, was a more or less fictional construct.

A very strong documentary film from 1980 is *Station* (Dworzec); again, on one level this is a very lyrical and poetical observation of people coming and going at the central Station in Warsaw, people interested in ordinary things and each other, but at the same time it is a film demonstrating the 'big brother' tendencies of Polish society just nine years before the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. The film jumps between a big television screen in the waiting hall where the system addresses the people with obvious propaganda and constructed news, the surveillance cameras at the station, and everyday life. Just as in *The Office*, the observation of reality is

visually and rhetorically organized in such a way that we clearly get the feeling of being completely controlled and suppressed. This is very strongly emphasized at the end of the film with sequences shot from the surveillance camera control room, the point of view of the anonymous 'big brother.'

The visual, documentary strategy established in Kieslowski's first student film is thus amazingly mature and finished and was basically used throughout a large part of his other documentary films between 1960-1980. However, there are other tendencies where the observational style is used to show people trying to cope with a completely hopeless system, people doing a job and trying to avoid being identified with the system. One example is *The Mason* (Murarz, 1973), told in the first person by one of the early communist pioneers from the Stalin era before 1956. He looks back on his bureaucratic party future with dismay and he goes back to his job as a mason. His story is ironically told as he attends a May 1 parade with all its bombastic rhetoric and symbolism celebrating the working class heroes while in fact promoting conformity and a ruling party class. An even better example is *Hospital* (Szpital, 1976), a very realistic portrait of life at a hospital where conditions are hopeless and can only be survived by black humor and commitment beyond belief. Here no symbolism is needed – the pictures of reality loudly speak for themselves.

All in all, Kieslowski's contribution to the modern documentary film tradition is as important and solid as his feature film production. There is a clear line from these narratives of reality to his often very realistic fiction, and there is a just as strong thematic continuity. Furthermore, the documentary voice is both very critical and social in its refined ways of getting the message through and at

the same time symbolic and with general existential perspectives. They survive as visual expressions even though the reality on which they are built has long since changed, and the general aspects of their social message also make them a commentary on human conditions at all times.

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Kieslowski's *Grey*

Laurence Green

Much has been made, by critics and by Kieslowski himself, of the dramatic shift in Kieslowski's career in the early 1980s away from documentaries and towards fiction filmmaking. This late and definitive career shift makes Kieslowski a special case in the familiar trend of looking back at an artist's early works once s/he has secured widespread acclaim, and thus justifies taking this to the extreme of evaluating Kieslowski's student films, where there is plenty to impress.

Urząd is a remarkable little film and a textbook example of the unity of form and content. Edited with an officiousness that eloquently expresses the daily routine, the film seems to pile up helpless faces and bureaucratic requests with the same callous repetition that characterizes the tone of the faceless clerks. We do see their faces in fact, but the film's habit of repeatedly cutting away to shuffling papers, to the details of the official business going on, to the backs of heads, chiefly offers us glimpses of fragmented tasks, individuals, and lives.

A series of desperate and confused clients stand waiting behind the peep-hole barrier as the soundtrack keeps up a steady pace of absurdist jabber, but in fact, for such a short film, with so many cuts, there is still a surprising amount of waiting; while tea is made and pencils are sharpened, the line up is left at the mercy of policies and peons. Busy and lively editing seems a counterpoint to the inertia that greets virtually every administrative request essentially to insert square pegs into round holes. In the middle of the film, there are a few lines of synch dialogue in a couple of the exchanges

between clerk and client, but for the most part the soundtrack consists of wild tracks freely cut to picture after the fashion of what might be called an impressionistic collage. What is important is not so much any loyalty to the linear stories of those who are being addressed, filed and discarded like loose papers, but rather loyalty to the project of capturing the impression of being in that office, of being efficiently processed or serviced with such frustrating and unproductive results. The clerks' efficiency keeps the film clipping along so quickly that when it finally settles on one character, a tall bald man, and returns to him for four shots, our sympathy for him seems emphasized and singled out in a unique way. But is he any different from the others?

In his final shot, this man glances at the camera briefly and bends the frame of the documentary. Up until this point, a viewer could easily assume that *Urząd* was almost entirely shot with a hidden camera. It epitomizes the purest form of observational documentary where one suspects that the only directorial manipulation of the action is through camera placement and editing – no "creationism" or interventionist direction of the participants seems likely. Nonetheless, Kieslowski still seems compelled to humbly and honestly draw attention to the filmmaking process when the eyes of this one character fall on the lens, and consequently grant the director 'permission' to assert his authorial voice. As a result, the final sequence of *Urząd* drives home the film's theme with deft double entendre: the stacks of files both attest to how the clerks would answer "what have you done all your life?" and offer a kind of crowded cemetery where the sum total of people's lives amount not to headstones, but to shelf after shelf of lifetimes stored in forms, facts and dotted lines. It is the dates and appointments of the deper-

sonalized curriculum vitae that round out a life, rather than the epitaph, or any more expressive summary.

Because of the close-ups of hands recording facts and exchanging documents, *Urząd* seems to somehow anticipate Kieslowski's legendary choice to "escape from documentary" as well as his subsequent departure from filmmaking altogether. In Danusia Stok's interview, Kieslowski relates:

There was a necessity, a need – which was very exciting for us – to describe the world. We tried to describe this world and it was fascinating to describe something that hadn't been described yet. It's a feeling of bringing something to life... if we start describing something, we bring it to life...

[But] Not everything can be described. That's the documentary's great problem. It catches itself as if in its own trap.¹

Urząd is very much a film about the mundane, the everyday, and recreates this with Kieslowski's described vitality. But, if the film is criticizing all the bureaucratic records for failing to adequately contain or express, with their "yes" or "no" answers, the complexity of an individual's life, is the film saying anything about the success of documentary film itself in terms of measuring up to this task? Is this the "trap" in *Urząd*? Unlike the clerk's questionnaire, it is not the prerogative of this film to sum up anyone's life, but since the film explicitly challenges the assumption that these shelves full of file folders are effective repositories for capturing a life lived, what medium is it offering as an alternative? It seems to me, particularly in light of Kieslowski's later remarks, that there is something in *Urząd* that is suggestive of this implicit evaluation of film's potential as a medium to rise to such a challenge. In a sense, after *Urząd*, Kieslowski spent two careers, in Poland and then in France, trying to answer this question.

¹ Danusia Stok, ed. *Kieslowski on Kieslowski* (London: Faber & Faber, 1993), pp. 54-55, 86.

While the former Eastern bloc countries seem to represent the extreme of Kafkaesque officialese, the rest of the world is no stranger to the kind of bureaucratic agony depicted in *Urząd*. As a film production instructor, I have to admit I was heartened to see a student work so dedicated to the purity of its documentary form while at the same time concerned with offering a social message of arguably universal proportions. So few of the students I encounter are interested in speaking to such grandiose topics as social commentary or the human condition. Their work barely rises out of the university milieu in its focus, and only the best of it hints at the level of self-critique in Kieslowski's short. Add to this that the documentary is so polluted by fiction filmmaking techniques, journalistic ethics and now manipulative reality TV practices, that watching people being themselves instead of seeing characters playing themselves has become a rare treat.

This, ultimately, is both the appeal and dilemma of every great documentary: the alluring realism that leads us to conclude we've witnessed some kind of "truth" about a character or life, at odds with the nagging questions about just what dubious means the documentarian used or constructed to lead us to those ends. Whether *Urząd* is deceptively simple or simply effective, it remains a compact and impressive indictment of slow and senseless bureaucracy, which in many ways seems only to have worsened over the intervening decades and prompted diagnoses of "rage" variants rather than the quiet patience exhibited by Kieslowski's Poles. From our overly litigious present, it is tempting to ponder Kieslowski's own odyssey through obstacles of paperwork and permissions to secure the access for shooting *Urząd* in the first place.

On other short films

Editor's note on *Wind*.



In *p.o.v.* number 5 (March 1998), the reader will find the following material:

- data on *Wind* and on the director Marcell Iványi;
- a detailed reconstruction of the film with full descriptions and 22 stills;
- interviews with Marcell Iványi and Yvette Biró;
- two articles on this prize-winning short.

This material is available on our web site at:

http://imv.au.dk/publikationer/pov/Issue_05/POV_5cnt.html

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On *Wind*: a question of ethics

Antti Pönni

Marcell Iványi's film *Wind* (Hungary, 1996) begins with an image of three women standing and looking at something off-screen left. Instead of showing what the women see, the camera starts to pan right. It gradually shows a flat, rural landscape (Hungarian *puszta*?) with birds flying over the fields (van Gogh's crows come to mind), a couple of houses, men pulling a small carriage, a lonely tree. Finally, as the camera begins to approach its original position, a disturbing scene is revealed: men with their heads covered by sacs are hanging from wooden posts. As the camera moves on, still another man is seen who is being prepared for hanging. His head is covered and the hangman kicks the stool out from under the feet of the victim. As the hanged man dies the camera keeps on moving until it reaches its original position, showing again the three women. The women turn and walk towards the house in the background. The image fades to white and is replaced by another image. A photograph by Lucien Hervé, *The Three Women* (Audincourt, France, 1951) fills the screen; it was the inspiration for this film.

This description is no doubt "true" in the sense that it tells what "happens" in the film, and perhaps even gives an idea of what the film is "about." It is, however, insufficient because it doesn't really capture the disturbing and powerful emotional effect of the film. This effect lasts long after the film has ended and, indeed, in my view actually reaches its full force only after the film has ended.

How does one grasp this emotional effect? I would like to argue that the film could be described as taking the form of a question, or

more precisely: the form of a movement from one question to another. The film has a special kind of temporality that gradually moves one from seeing to feeling. Or, to put it in another way, the film moves from a dimension of factual knowledge and understanding to an ethical dimension – in the special sense that the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas has given to the term.

The first question

As the film begins, three old women are seen standing in a row outside a house. They all look intensely to the left. As the women keep on staring to the left, the camera slowly starts a panning movement to the right. Let us stop here for a moment.

The first image contains a very common cinematic figure: the gaze of a character (or in this case, the gaze of three characters) functions as a cue of an off-screen space. This cue might be described as a kind of question: "What do the women see?" The "answer" to that question would be a camera movement or a cut that would show the space they are looking at. At this point the image is a "question" only in a kind of casual "let's-wait-and-see" manner. There is perhaps mild curiosity about "what happens next" and about who these women are and what this film is about.

However, instead of moving to the left and showing what the women see, the camera starts panning in the opposite direction. As the camera begins its movement it becomes evident that no immediate answer to the expectation created by the characters' look will be given. At this moment, I would like to argue, a true "question" emerges.

What is the difference between these two "questions"? It is not that of content. What is being asked is the same thing: "What are

these women looking at? What do they see?" The difference between the two kinds of questions is rather a difference of intensity, a difference of significance. As it becomes clear that no immediate answer will be given, the initial question comes to the foreground. An almost unnoticed expectation or curiosity about the next image now becomes a highly conscious, even burning, question: *What are these women looking at?* It becomes evident that the gaze of the women is no longer a mere cue that only links one image or one space to another, but rather a key (or perhaps even *the* key) that will give direction to the entire viewing of the film. The answer to the question created by the gaze of the women now emerges as the main issue of the film; it no longer merely "poses" a question, but, in a manner of speaking, becomes itself a question.

The movement

After the initial image the camera moves to the right. The movement is slow but steady.

Slow: it does not "answer" the question – show the unseen space – immediately. The movement of the camera is delaying movement; it works (or literally moves) against the impatience of the spectator. While the movement may be slow as such, its slowness is also due to the delay it creates.

Steady: while the movement delays the answer, it also promises it. The camera keeps on panning to the right without interruptions, without major changes of pace, and especially without change of direction. The movement slows down a bit, then speeds up again, but it never turns back. It becomes clear that eventually the camera will reach the point where the women are looking. Eventually the question will be answered.

What the camera shows as it pans to the right might be described as a series of tableaux or still photographs rather than moving images. There is movement, to be sure – birds flying over the field, men walking across the frame pulling a small carriage – but in general the movement within the frame is kept to a minimum. Also, the movement within the frame (at this point of the film) is not "action"; it doesn't make things happen and it is more like part of the scenery. Or it is as if a movement had been added to a still photograph. The wind that makes people's clothes move slightly while they themselves are standing still is at times the only indicator of the fact that we are watching a moving image rather than a still photograph. The main movement remains that of the camera.

This disparity between the steady movement of the camera and the virtual absence of movement within the frame gives the film a peculiar kind of temporality. On the one hand, there is the world of the film, which seems to be at a standstill. On the other hand, there is the movement that lets that world be seen, the movement of the camera. There is a world where time seems to have stopped. And there is the movement of a gaze, which is also the gaze of the impatient spectator, who is waiting for the moment of the answer, the moment of seeing. In a sense, the time of the film is not running on the screen but in the spectator's mind. It is the time of waiting, the time of a question about to be answered.

The answer...

Finally the camera reaches the scene toward which the women are looking. The scene is revealed only gradually. First, a group of people is seen looking to the right. In the background a man-like figure is seen hanging from a post. A scarecrow? Or a hanged man?

As the camera moves forward more hanging figures are seen, and the latter guess is confirmed. Several men, dead, are hanging from wooden posts. People stand still, watching. Then a final post is seen. A man still alive, standing on a bench, is tied to it. Another man covers his head and the bench is kicked away. As the camera keeps moving to the right, the man's body shakes spasmodically as he dies. The camera leaves the dying man and again shows an empty landscape. The barking of dogs is heard. Finally the camera reaches its original position, showing again the three women. A song is heard with the words "open your eyes." The women turn and walk towards the house in the background.

Thus, the point toward which the women were looking in the beginning of the film is finally reached and the initial question is answered: the women were looking at a group of men being hanged (which is the only "action" that is seen in the film). But, in more ways than one, this answer is not satisfactory. The factual question – what the women were looking at – is answered. But the scene that is seen creates new questions that are much more disturbing than the original one. Not only is the hanging scene as such disturbing, but also the fact that after expectations have been built through the delay, it is shown in a seemingly very indifferent manner, and the reasons for the hanging are left unexplained. Who are these people? Why are they doing what they are doing? No clear answer to these questions is given.

The fact that the scene is presented to the viewer only after a delay gives it a kind of weight it would not otherwise have. The hanging would no doubt be a disturbing scene had there been, say, a direct cut from the three watching women to the hanging scene or had it been shown right from the start. The delay created by the

camera movement, however, intensifies the viewing process by creating an expectation that underlines the significance of the scene.

But that is not all. The question that has been "asked" by the film so far has been a factual or a cognitive question, a question related to understanding and knowledge. The initial question ("What do the women see?") has led to other related questions like "What is this place?" and "What will happen next?" But the questions the hanging scene raises are questions of a different type. They are questions about the motives and identity of the people seen. "Who are these people?", "Who are the hangmen and who are the victims?", "Why are they doing what they are doing?" Unlike the factual "what" questions, these new questions – they might be called "why" questions – remain unanswered. All we get to know is that people who seem to be peasants are hanging other people who also seem to be peasants. Why they are doing this is not told. There are no clues, no emotional reactions that show how to relate to this horrific scene. Only a matter-of-fact process of hanging that takes place in silence.

The shocking scene doesn't halt the camera. As the hanging goes on, the camera keeps on moving, indifferently, until it reaches its original position. This kind of detached approach doesn't, however, create an indifferent relation to what is happening. On the contrary, the emotional power of the scene only increases because it is not emphasized but only seen (literally) in passing.

...becomes an enigma

What happens in the film is thus a movement from a question of factual understanding to a question that has no answer, to an open-ended question. At the end of the film we have the answer to our original question; we "know." But at the same time we do not really

know anything. Our understanding has encountered a limit, a question that cannot be answered, an enigma that cannot be solved.

Is there really no answer? Couldn't we, in principle at least, find some kind of reason that would motivate what we have just seen, say, in psychological or political terms? Perhaps, but I believe that by refusing to give these kinds of "answers" the film points out that in the end they would all be insufficient. We cannot fully deal with the enigma of the hanging scene in terms of knowledge and understanding. By refusing all answers, keeping alive the question, the enigma, the film brings forth another dimension, a deeper dimension that could be called ethical.

The word "ethical" in this context refers to the special way the term has been used by the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. The key moment in the thinking of Levinas is the encounter with another person, the Other (*autrui*). The Other as truly *other* cannot ultimately be understood or appropriated. It is true that we can name or define the people we see in *Wind* as "men" or "women" or "peasants" or "the hangmen" or "the bystanders" or "the victims." But with these terms we cannot ultimately grasp who these people are. There is always something that escapes our ability to understand and to appropriate, to *explain*. According to Levinas, it is precisely this aspect in the Other that opens the ethical dimension.

Levinas calls the Other *as other* the Face. The Face, he says, speaks an ethical demand that can be expressed with the biblical formula "Thou shalt not kill." In terms of knowledge and understanding (or, as Levinas prefers to say, in ontological terms) the Other can indeed be defined as such and such, and even killed. But not ethically. Even if the Other was destroyed, annihilated, the ethical demand would remain, keeping the mind troubled. When

speaking of the ethical relation with the Other, Levinas uses terms like "infinity", "enigma" or "obsession". It seems to me that these terms also describe quite well the disturbing effect created by *Wind*.

The film's "indifference" towards the hanging, its refusal to give any psychological or political explanation to what is happening, creates precisely that kind of disturbing effect that Levinas sees in the ethical relation. The killing is laid bare as nothing else but killing pure and simple. The people are seen not as representatives of some political movement that might in some way legitimize or explain what they are doing. They are simply people killing and being killed. Who they are and what their motives are remains an open question, an enigma. The question of the film, instead of dying when the "answer" is reached, is revived and stays alive long after the film has ended. Like the Face that speaks the words "Thou shalt not kill," *Wind* leaves us obsessed with the question without an answer, the enigma of the Other.

KITCHEN SINK

Alison Maclean

(New Zealand, 1989), 14 minutes, 35 mm, b/w

Production credits and cast

Writer/Director	Alison Maclean
Producer	Bridget Ikin. Hibiscus Films
Photography	Stuart Dryburgh
Art director	Grant Major
Editor	David Coulsen
Sound design and mix	John McKay & Chris Burt
Music	The Headless Chickens
The Woman	Theresa Healey
The Man	Peter Tait
Schoolgirl	Annagreta Christian

Festivals and awards include:

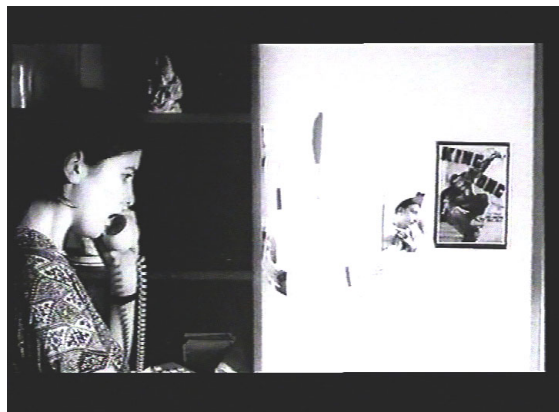
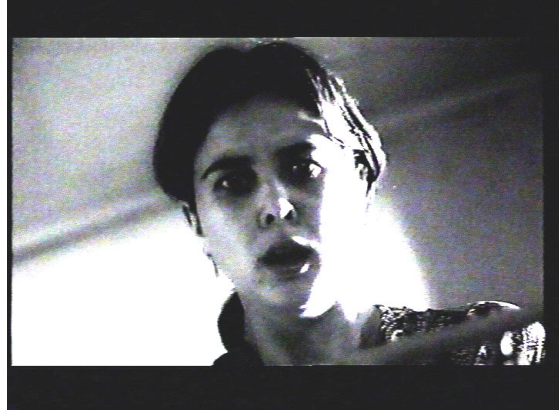
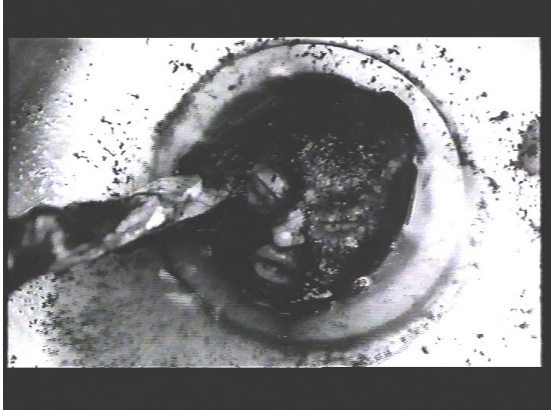
Selection for competition at the Cannes Film Festival, 1989
Certificate of Merit, Melbourne Film Festival, 1989
Audience Award for Best Short Film, Sydney Film Festival, 1989
Sitges International Film Festival, Spain, 1989
Best Short Film, Listener Film & Television Award, New Zealand, 1989
Best Short Film, Oporto International Film Festival, 1990
Special Jury Award (Short Narrative), Golden Gate Awards, San Francisco, 1990

Alison Maclean

Born in Ottawa, Canada, in 1958, Alison Maclean spent much of her childhood in Canada, emigrating to New Zealand with her parents as a teenager. She is a graduate of the Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland, where she majored in film and sculpture. She now lives in New York, where directing music videos is one of her major activities.

Alison Maclean on *Kitchen Sink*

The story came to me in much the same way as events unfold for the woman in the film. I could see this hair sticking out of the plughole and on closer inspection, the story began to emerge and to transform itself in quite a surprising way. It's a dark little fable about fear and desire – about a woman who re-fashions a monster into a man, and finds herself falling for her creation. In some sense I see it as a Pygmalion-type story, with the genders reversed.



Stills from *Kitchen Sink*, written and directed by Alison Maclean.

An interview with Alison Maclean on *Kitchen Sink*

Richard Raskin

You stated in an earlier interview that the story for Kitchen Sink came to you little by little, and I know that you wrote a detailed screenplay for the film. But did the story change at all along the way? Does the film depart in any significant ways from the original concept?

I came up with the idea in response to a kind of brief on the New Zealand Film Commission. They were asking for ideas for 13-minute shorts. It was a set budget and a set length. And I literally sat down one day and tried to think of a story that could work for that kind of scale. And I thought: something involving a woman, basically alone at home, where something might happen to her. And then it really kind of came very quickly in sequence and I saw the whole film. But the part that stumped me, that took me a long time to solve, was actually the ending. The rest was very clear to me, I could see the whole thing, right up to when this creature wakes up as a man, but I really didn't know what to do from there. And that probably took about four months or so, and I was mulling it over and trying out different ways of ending it – like having him speak, and making it kind of complicated – and then I finally thought of the final image, that seemed to bring the story full circle. But that took a bit of time.

Can you tell me anything about the casting of Theresa Healy and Peter Tait in the main roles?

Peter Tait was an actor I had used in another film I did called *Talk Back*. I just loved his face and his presence. Actually, in that other

film, he had played a kind of ex-con and so was a very different kind of character – a bit more aggressive in a way. But then he came in and did an audition for me for *Kitchen Sink*, and he just had this amazing quality – like someone who had just been born. A certain kind of innocence that is at odds with his appearance. He just has such a very strong, physical presence. So that was a very clear decision.

And then Teresa – I hadn't known her but I saw her photograph in a magazine. She was looking over a man's shoulder and straight out at the camera. And I decided when I saw that photograph that she would be perfect.

Can you give me any details about the shooting, working with Stuart Dryburgh?

We had worked on another job together when he was the d.p. [director of photography] and I guess I was a first a.d. [assistant director] or something. I knew him, from a couple of jobs actually. We worked pretty closely on the storyboard together. So we spent quite a bit of time working together and he storyboarded the whole film with me. He was great to work with.

Probably more than anything that I've ever done, it was a very charmed experience making that film. Everybody who was involved just rose to the challenge and came up with something that was beyond what I'd imagined. The whole was greater than the sum of its parts. The people who did the special effects, and Stuart's work, everybody's work hit a level that I hadn't imagined. It was really a very special experience. Of course I thought that filmmaking was

always going to be like that after that – but it hasn't been so much since [laughter].

I noticed that in one of the descriptions of Kitchen Sink, the film was described as a "minefield of metaphors," which I thought was quite appropriate. I'm usually reluctant to interpret films in Freudian terms but in this case, it's simply unmistakable. That there is birth symbolism seems fairly clear: a little creature is pulled up out of a hole, with what resembles an umbilical cord coiled up beside him. Do you see it that way?

But to me the story was about metamorphosis, so it was like a metaphor that kept changing – it was birth, and garbage... It just kept changing through all the different stages of that creature's evolution, and of her relationship with him. *That's* what I was having fun with. And I kept thinking about it as a strange, Pygmalion kind of story. That was the main idea I had.

O.K. *So not so much the birth part...*

Oh that's absolutely there, of course. That's definitely part of it but it's not the only part of it. It goes from a birth thing to a lover thing, so it totally changes.

Hair is of course very central. The story starts with hair in the drain, then the woman shaves off the creature's hair, and he touches her hair, and she pulls at hair on his neck at the end. Does hair in this story represent the animal part of human nature?

Maybe. I wouldn't have described it that way. It's funny. Hair seems to come up for me quite a bit. I'm not quite sure why that is. I honestly couldn't say. Because the first image I had was of a hair, and so everything came from that. And then it just seemed to be about continuing that image throughout and having it evolve. One of the visual references I had and thought about a lot as I was

making *Kitchen Sink* is a film called *Woman of the Dunes*. Very sensual textures of skin and hair and sand.

There's a shot where a King Kong poster is visible. Is that a joke?

Yes. Just the idea of a big, hairy creature. And the sexual overtones of that. Yeah, it was a joke [laughter].

One of the things your film was praised for was that it combines art film with horror movie. Can you say anything more about that combination?

I guess that tends to be the territory that I'm interested in generally. I am quite interested in genre and those kinds of narrative structures and playing with people's expectations, in terms of thriller or horror. I am quite attracted to that. But then, it's never a pure genre. It's almost just like a kind of framework to look at other more psychological things.

You know, I was quite inspired also by *The Fly*, which also does that. It's a horror film, but it's also quite a tender love story. I love the collision of those two dimensions...

Doesn't the guy in The Fly also have hairs growing out of his back?

Yeah, he also has little bristles.

Your film has also been described as replacing "female gothic" with "feminist fantastic." It's the word "feminist" that I'm especially interested in. Do you see Kitchen Sink in feminist terms?

I'm not quite sure what it means any more. I think it meant something in the 70s, in the earlier stages of the women's liberation movement, but now I'm not sure what it means. Only in the sense

that it's about female subjectivity and an interest in stories about women that haven't been told... If you turned the *Kitchen Sink* story around and made the main character a man – like the Pygmalion story, falling in love with a statue that he created, that kind of classic story – you wouldn't think it was a male story, you'd think it was a kind of mythical, universal story. It's funny that *Kitchen Sink* is called feminist, when it's just that the gender is the other way around.

Can you tell me a little bit about what you've been doing since 1989?

Well, I made *Crush* in 1992-1993 in New Zealand, which is the only feature I've made. That was something I had spent two or two and a half years writing, with another woman, Anne Kennedy, but largely alone. By that stage, I had already moved to Sydney and I just came back to make that film. Only about a year after that film was finished, I decided to move to New York. I came over here because I had some opportunities. I actually had a development deal for a while with Touchstone Pictures and was developing a script with them – which didn't work out, but that brought me over here and I ended up staying. Since I've been here, I've really concentrated on writing. I can't believe that I've done it, but I've written close to three feature scripts, and if someone had told me that I was going to do that before I got a chance to make another film, I would have felt like giving up. I've spent most of the last four or five years writing these scripts and trying to set them up, and for one reason or another being quite frustrated in that. Two films that I thought were almost certain to happen, haven't happened and are quite stopped for a variety of reasons. It just seems to be the nature of the business

and the kinds of films I want to make. It's not easy. They're perceived as risky and they're perceived as a little more idiosyncratic, so it's harder to get them financed. So I've worked on those three scripts, and I've also been involved with the development of a couple of others, and one which I didn't write and which is based on a book called *Jesus's Son*, it looks like I'm going to do in September. So I'm now in early pre-production for that.

I know you've also been doing some music videos.

Yeah, that's something that came my way recently, at the end of last year. And it's actually been really good for me. I've just finished my third one for this one woman who's an Australian girl called Natalie Imbruglia.

Torn is shown ten times a day in Denmark.

I know [*laughter*]. She's phenomenally successful, and this has all happened very quickly. It all happened after I made that video, because she was completely unknown then. It's been a blast. It's been great for me, because it's gotten me back into directing and making short pieces. Also I've gotten to try out some things that I've never done before. What I did with that first video with her had a kind of formal concept to it. But within that, there was a lot of freedom and a lot of improvising and play, and that's quite different from what I've done before, and I've always wanted to push myself in that direction, so I feel like I've given myself some confidence in just kind of working things out with actors on the spur of the moment and seeing them come to life. And that was really exciting to me. So it's actually been really rewarding. It's not that I want in any way to make a career of music videos. So now I've just made my

third, and in a strange way, they're kind of a triptych, one develops from the other. So it's been good.

On one of MTV's "pop up" video programs, they said that you didn't let the singer know when you were filming. Is that true?

Yes. It was sort of odd because the idea was to film in all the in-between parts. I got the idea from hanging out on the film set and watching the monitor. Just watching all those incredible "chance" things that happen when people don't think they're being filmed. Those were the moments I was interested in. So I gave them a script that was actually a re-written version of a scene from *Last Tango In Paris* that they were doing, and we were kind of working out the scene together, as you would with actors and a director, and then I had the shutter control and I was just turning it on and off. And any time I saw something interesting in front of the lens I would turn it on. And then any time I would go up to work with them or explain something to them, the d.p. would film me without me knowing it. And after a while we were all completely confused about when it was on and when it was off. It was a lot of fun.

What sort of time frame is involved in making music videos?

It varies. It basically depends on the budget. That was a simpler idea and we did it in one day. The second one, called *Big Mistake*, we shot in Barcelona. Natalie is walking down the street in Barcelona, and the camera just keeps moving through the entire video, from right to left. It's just one continuous move basically that's cut up. And so you cut between her walking and singing, and she passes various people and disturbances that she just walks past without them stopping

her. And then there's a man following her and he gets snarled up in all of these things. Things fall on him, and a fight breaks out around him. The camera just keeps moving on her and on him, so the whole thing moves constantly from right to left. It's sort of inspired by that traffic accident scene in Godard's *Weekend*.

And then this new one was a three-day shoot and a bit more ambitious. It was done in a theater, and was much more colorful and theatrical. And actually inspired by Hindu musicals.

What about the editing phase. How long do you spend on that?

This last one will probably take a week. There's quite a lot of work. It's surprising. You have a lot of choice. To make it work with the song. I've loved that part of it too, because music is one of my favorite parts of the whole process of making a film. Working with a composer, or finding music, or seeing how that works with images. Music was a big part of my life when I was younger. I played the cello and guitar. I love that about doing these videos, that you're working with music, and it's rhythmical. The other thing that's fun is that it's like I'm exploring ways – like with this last video – to be more abstract, more stylized, and yet to still have emotion there, and some truth in the performances. Yet within a form that's really quite artificial. Those are things that it's hard to do in a feature film. And yet I think that you can also bring that experience into narrative films in a way that can really energize them. It's experimentation. It's good.

You were born in Canada but you moved to New Zealand when you were fourteen. Considering the size of New Zealand, I think it's quite remarkable that so many internationally important short films come from there. Do

you have any way of accounting for the innovative quality of New Zealand short films?

I don't know. I guess it's partly the funding structure, which has been very supportive of short films in a way that just isn't possible here. If you're trying to make a short film here, you have to do it with your own money, pretty much. And there's no way of showing it. Whereas in New Zealand... Actually, it's a combination of things. There were a group of us back in the late '80s, who were making short films, and we lobbied together to create the short film fund. We were there at the inception of this fund. Also a group of us, including Gregor Nicholas, we were organizing our own screenings of short films, and advertising them and plastering the city with posters. And finding that there was a really big audience for them. But we sort of created it ourselves. That's a factor. And sometimes I think it has to do with the isolation that in some ways allows a space for originality, that you don't feel overwhelmed with the competition, the weight of all those other filmmakers out there or influences. You just feel a little bit removed.

And there have also been a few really important directors, like Vincent Ward and Jane Campion, who have been very inspiring to me and to many other filmmakers, because they have succeeded in making very strong, singular films that are uncompromising and that have at the same time been very successful internationally. So that sort of gives you confidence or courage that you could do that too.

Jane Campion I know but who is Vincent Ward?

He's really extraordinary. His features are *Vigil*, *The Navigator*, then he made *Map of the Human Heart*. He made a number of shorter films

before that, that won many awards. He made an extraordinary documentary called *In Spring One Plants Alone*, about an older Maori woman and her handicapped son, who live in a very remote community in the North Island. He lived with them. He also made an incredible film called *State of Siege*, based on a Janet Frame short story that's really devastating. He's an inspiration.

I'd like to ask a more general question now about the art of the short film. Do you think that storytelling in the short film is essentially the same as storytelling in the feature film?

No, I think it's very different. There are only certain kinds of stories that can work in a short film. It's so much about compression, and it can't be as psychological. It has to somehow suggest those things while having a simpler trajectory or story line. It's actually hard to find a story that can work in fifteen minutes. It's about compression, it's about suggesting things as opposed to developing something over time. That's one of the things I find exciting about it.

What advice would you give to student filmmakers who were in the process of designing their own short films?

I guess the main thing is: keep it really short. I've seen a lot of short films in my time and occasionally I've been a judge for short film festivals, so I've seen a large number, and my main criticism of at least half of them is that they are too long. The shorter the better. [laughter] Under fifteen minutes is good. Even ten. Other than that, it's hard to say. Studying short films that really work. And keeping it simple.

New York, 11 April 1998

On documentary filmmaking

Guidelines for producing a short documentary

Kirsten Sørensen, Mette Bahnsen, Henrik Holch,
Gitte Hvid and Lise Otte

This paper is based on our experiences during the making of the documentary short film *Jutta Ravn* (2000). Hopefully, readers will find some of these guidelines useful in the practical preparation and production of a documentary short.

Before shooting the film

- The starting point is, of course, to think of an interesting topic that all the members of the group are enthusiastic about. It is hard to give advice about this phase, except "be patient."
- It is important to formulate the basic idea of the film as precisely and clearly as possible. If you do not know why you want to make this film, what it is about and where the story is going, then it might not be a very good idea for a film.
- If you haven't previously worked in the documentary genre, it is a good idea to find some examples that you can draw inspiration from before laying down the aesthetics and method of your film.
- Discuss whether you prefer to have television or film documentaries as your primary source of inspiration. If you lean toward TV documentarism, the library – in Aarhus, especially the State and National Library – can be helpful (although it may take a few days to get the programmes). If you prefer documentary *films*, then (again in Aarhus) Filmhuset is the place to seek inspiration.

Find a selection of different documentaries, discuss the qualities of each film and note the good elements. This will probably give you an idea of how you want to structure your own film. During these screenings, however, keep in mind that most documentaries are not

made on the same basis as the short fiction film – this limits the degree to which you should be inspired.



The preparation phase is very time consuming in the documentary genre. It requires thorough research on your topic or source of inspiration. In order to get a fairly good understanding of your person and his or her story you need to visit him or her and make some test interviews. This will give you an impression of the person's limits and boundaries, and what s/he is willing to talk about.

If possible, bring a video camera (to the first meetings) to find out how the person reacts to the camera, and to let him/her get used to its presence before the actual shoot. It also gives you a chance to map the different locations and thus plan more precisely what you want to be in the film (a test film is the basis for working out a fairly accurate storyboard/preliminary script.)



As regards the screenplay, there are different ways of structuring the material in a documentary. In "Looking Two Ways" (1996) Toni de Bromhead examines the different forms of narration in a documentary film. She draws up four narrative principles (modalities). 1) The Linear Narrative Form, also known as classic Hollywood storytelling; 2) the Discursive Narrative Form, which gives priority to information, facts and logic; 3) the Episodic Narrative Form, which juxtaposes situations that have no narrative

or causal relations, and 4) the Poetic Narrative Form, which is built up around visual poetic associations.

The point is, of course, that the modalities (which structure the filmed material) involve the spectator in different ways. Bromhead says that one of the ways of making the viewer identify with the characters of the story is by using the rules for linear structure:

The ideal situation for realising a classic linear narrative remains the one of finding a charismatic personality who is working towards a goal along a road that is beset by frustrating obstacles (Bromhead, p. 38).

Thus, it might be helpful to look into the models for fiction already as you develop the idea, or as you write the script. At any rate you should consider how to catch the viewer's attention and keep his interest – and in this connection the modality you choose is important.

To those who question whether clarity is all that important, I can only say that it is *the* most important quality in the making of a film. [...] just as important as clarification, I think, is the need to simplify. A film director must have a sense of simplification. (François Truffaut, 1985, pp. 17 and 93)

A slogan like "Keep It Simple, Stupid" (K.I.S.S.) (David Mamet: *On Directing Film*) applies to the documentary as well.



The camera plays a role: it acts on the sender's (i.e. your) behalf. Remember that the camera angles and movements are significant for the degree to which you express respect for, solidarity with, antipathy against, etc., the people in the film. (In some respects you always make films about yourself – even though you are working in

groups). Before the shoot starts make sure you have agreed on certain principles for operating the camera (of course this is of special importance if the camera is operated by more than one member of the group).

A set of rules was drawn up every time [ed. that we were making films] – as a sort of denial of being able to have everything. I simply believed – and still believe – that the more precise your choices are, the more things you have excluded, the more inspired you can be within the framework that you have set for yourself. [...] Rules: To choose to give up something or other. To choose some simple moves, some simple means (Jørgen Leth in Leifer, 1999, p. 89; our translation).

It is a good idea to draw up a set of rules, some aesthetic narrative guidelines for what you can and cannot do. This will save you many discussions during the shoot and will ensure you a fairly coherent style (it easily becomes rather mixed with more than one director).

For instance, you can make rules about the interviews and the rooms where they should take place; whether or not the interviewer should be visible in the picture; whether the camera movements should be calm or swift; in which rooms or situations the camera should be on a tripod or handheld; whether the persons should be filmed from below, at eye-level, from above; if the interviewer's questions should be cut out (in which case a certain interview technique is required); whether you want to use voice-over commentary, and so on and so forth.

Note that one of the dangers of operating with a set of aesthetic rules (like using the storyboard method) is that the interviewee may become too "stiff" and tense. The rules are only meant to be guidelines – not dogmas – and you should be willing to change them as you go along.



There are many ethical questions involved in the production of a documentary. From the beginning you must consider whether you are portraying people appropriately. Are you twisting in any way the image(s) of your subject(s)? What should and should not be shown? (Is it essential to show a very messy kitchen?) Are you crossing their boundaries? Are you invading or exposing their privacy? Will they feel good about the film afterwards? How will the film influence their lives? and so on. Along with a documentary film project come some moral obligations, and the responsibility for the people involved goes beyond the finished film; you also have a responsibility for the emotional aftermath of the film. Respect for the people involved (which includes an honest representation of them) must come before making a great film.



In his article "The Voice of Documentary," Bill Nichols writes:

Documentary displays a tension arising from the attempt to make statements about life that are quite general, while necessarily using sounds and images that bear the inescapable trace of their particular historical origin. These sounds and images come to function as signs; they bear meaning, though the meaning is not really inherent in them but rather conferred upon them by their function within the text as a whole. We may think we hear history or reality speaking to us through a film, but what we really hear is the voice of the text, even when the voice tries to efface itself (Nichols in Rosenthal, 1998, p. 52).

It is important that you reflect on what sort of "voice" you want in your film already in the preparation phase (before working out a storyboard). For a theoretical background you might want to look into Nichols's four "Documentary Modes of Representation" (in *Representing Reality*, 1991): 1) The Expository Mode: The viewer is

addressed directly "with titles or voices that advance an argument about the historical world," and often images merely become illustrations of what the authoritative commentary (*voice of God*) maintains. A logical connection between sequences is predominant.

2) The Observational Mode: The camera acts as 'a fly on the wall,' style and mise-en-scène become invisible and in its purest form inter-titles, interview and voice-over commentary are excluded; the filmmaker is unobtrusive and the viewer is left to interpret reality for himself.

3) The Interactive Mode: Different kinds of dialogue and monologue are dominant. Most often these films are based on interviews. Although the filmmaker participates (e.g. in the role of 'provocateur'), the textual authority in this mode shifts towards the "social actors" (the authentic people) so that "their comments and responses provide a central part of the film's argument" (p. 44).

4) The Reflexive Mode: This renders visible the epistemological and aesthetic reflections that are the basis for the production, thus drawing attention to the process of filmmaking. It makes use of various kinds of *Verfremdungseffekt* and generally questions how a representation can "be adequate to that which it represents" (p. 57). (Nichols, who focuses on the documentary as a form of rhetoric, clearly lacks a fifth modus, namely the poetic in which an aesthetic approach to a given subject is predominant. The poetic representation focuses on experiencing the world, not on the objective representation of it; it attempts to perceive the world aesthetically, and is often emotional in a poetic way. Remember that a documentary can speak with many 'voices.'



If your film contains an interview session it is important that you experiment with different interview techniques before you start

shooting. It can be difficult to find the right technique; at any rate it should always be developed in accordance with the people in the film. Find out whether the person is dependent on the interviewer's response or if s/he is a natural storyteller. This is important when you decide whether the interview in the film should have a visible interviewer (dialogue) or a hidden interviewer (pseudo monologue). The choice of an inaudible interviewer challenges your interviewee to a larger extent: S/he must be able to handle a 3-4 second pause between your question and his or her answer while remaining natural and engaged. The interviewee should always make clear who and what s/he is talking about (without depending on the information incorporated in your questions). Not everyone can handle an interview situation like that. Many people are – to a large extent – dependent on the interview being more like a conversation.

As you develop your method for the interview, try out different ways of asking questions. Your questions should be phrased in such a way that the answers are delivered within a limited time and do not omit any important information.

Furthermore, you should test different interview set-ups (i.e. different positions of the camera, the microphone, the interviewer, the interviewee, lighting, and so on) for aesthetic reasons as well as out of consideration for the interviewee.

An interview is always an artificial situation, and it is important to make the interviewee feel as comfortable as possible – some people find it difficult to avoid looking into the camera if it is placed right in front of them.



Deciding what style of music (if any) you want in the film can be very time consuming. Your choice of music plays an important part in the overall impression of the film, and these discussions should not be postponed until the editing phase. Music is an important factor when it comes to creating a 'mood' in the film, and the wrong choice of music can ruin the production. Discuss whether the music should be supportive, controlling, disturbing, or contrapuntal in relation to what is visually expressed. If you make a test film on location, try out different types of music with the filmed material.



A storyboard might be useful even though you are making a documentary. By making a storyboard (instead of improvising your way through) you get a high degree of control. This ensures that the project is realistic within the given time.

By using a storyboard you reduce the risk of lacking important shots in the editing room. It is clear, however, that the storyboard of a documentary cannot be as accurate as that of a fiction film (which does not mean that it shouldn't be as detailed as possible): You cannot plan the exact length of the different shots, at least not those involving 'real-life' people. Try not to be too ambitious when it comes to the number of stories that you want people to tell. Telling a story often takes longer than you expect.

One of the fascinating aspects about filming reality is that it cannot be controlled. Invariably, new possibilities will turn up along the way. Thus, the storyboard should always be regarded as a

preliminary script that can be adjusted on location. Just remember that the danger of improvising a lot is that you might end up with a story lacking some of the essential elements.



As regards the storyboard, within the genre of the short fiction film the best short films tend (with some exceptions) to contain little or no dialogue (cf. Richard Raskin's *Five Parameters for Story Design in the Short Fiction Film* and *Kortfilm og novellefilm – der er forskel*). In the documentary short film the spoken word (monologue or dialogue) plays a more important role – especially within the ‘portrait’ sub-genre. Still, it is worth keeping Alfred Hitchcock's words in mind:

In many of the films now being made, there is very little cinema: they are mostly what I call "photographs of people talking". When we tell a story in cinema, we should resort to dialogue only when it's impossible to do otherwise. I always try first to tell a story the cinematic way [...]. (Truffaut, 1985, p. 61)

Consider whether you can give information 'the cinematic way' and *show* rather than have people *tell* the story (through talking-head monologue, explanatory voice-over, and so on).



The documentary is always a sort of creative adaptation of reality, regardless of whether the camera acts as "a fly on the wall" or a voice-over commentary intervenes and interprets the pictures for the viewer. In *Filmmaskinen* (1979) Jørgen Leth phrases it a bit differently:

Each choice is a fiction. That's how it is in my consciousness, anyway. Innocence is irretrievably lost (Leth, 1979, p. 123; our translation).

Further down the same page in *Filmmaskinen*, Jørgen Leth also writes: "Like a membrane, style (a series of choices) is pulled down over the authentic material." But the main issue must be how thick this membrane is – whether reality, so to speak, suffocates. And that depends on the degree of intervention, how the cinematic technique is used, and how the material is edited.

All documentaries are somewhere in between inventing and capturing reality, between the subjective and the objective, and although the distance between the two poles is short, you should reflect on where your film is placed between these poles. To what extent is your film obliged to depict reality? Are you inventing your own representations of real life in order to make reality more distinct? Are you placing authentic people in situations that they wouldn't otherwise have been in (as is the case with Nanook in Robert Flaherty's classic documentary *Nanook of the North* (1920-22))? Are you writing their lines and instructing them on playing themselves (as in Jon Bang Carlsen's *It's Now or Never* (1996))? Are you arranging tableaux or events which the characters take part in? Asking yourselves questions of this sort is essential in order to elucidate which form of modality you prefer in your film.

The Shooting Phase

Shoot the 'soft' things first (the daily chores). Don't shoot the interview until the person has become used to the presence of the camera as well as his/her role as an 'actor.'

As regards the interviews, compared to the interviewee the members of the film group are 'high status' (because you control the technical equipment and know what is to be filmed). In order to make the best of the interview and make the interviewee feel more comfortable, try to place yourselves in a low status position. You can tone down your high status position by pretending that you are not in complete control of the technical equipment. It may also have a relaxing effect if the interviewer improvises his other questions instead of reading off a script.

If a scene doesn't turn out as you planned (and it has to be re-shot), don't indicate that the interviewee didn't do well (even if that is the case). Instead, find some other excuses for re-shooting the scene; for instance, that the sound wasn't good enough, the picture was out of focus and so on.

When you need to check your filmed material, it is a good idea to leave one or two members of the group to chat with the interviewee (while the others check the pictures). Let the interviewee finish his or her story, even though you have already gotten what you wanted (to show respect for what s/he is saying).

In order to balance the unequal relationship between interviewer and interviewee and to make the interview situation less artificial, it might be a good idea for the interviewer to share some stories and contribute to the conversation.



Be careful about the technical side of the production. Making a documentary – filming 'reality' – is not an excuse for poor technical quality.



In order to make your persons appear as natural and spontaneous as possible, it is important to shoot the different scenes at psychologically the right times and places.

If the person is occupied with something, s/he is more likely to forget the camera.



If you use such camera movements as panning and tilting, make sure you have several takes of each shot in which the camera is moved at different speeds. This will give you more possibilities in the editing room.



If the camera is handheld it is important to keep it fairly steady. Make sure the picture pauses for 4-5 seconds every now and again, as this gives you a natural place to cut.



Avoid zooming unless you have deliberately chosen the aesthetics of television. It is difficult to edit a shot that contains a zoom. If you need to get closer to an object it is better to move the camera.



In general it is good to make the shots a little longer than first intended – you never know what you might need in the editing room.



Be ready to switch on the camera (or leave it on) if something unexpected happens that takes the full attention of your character to sort out. It might turn out to be a magical moment that you should consider using instead of one of the scenes from the script. In general, you need to be spontaneous and open to chance.



Shoot the general pictures in different formats (e.g. full shot as well as close shot). Often people find themselves lacking a particular format in the editing room. In general, extra pictures might come in handy.



Using the potential of cinematic techniques without drowning reality is a fine balancing act. On the other hand – don't rely so much on reality that you forget that you are actually making a film.



Be ready to make changes – maybe even to give up the original concept of the film (i.e. throw away the storyboard) if you find out that what you had planned doesn't really work. This goes for the shooting phase as well as the editing phase.

The editing phase

Basically, the editing principles of fiction and documentary are the same. However, there are more possibilities when editing a documentary, as you are not bound by causality in the same way and thus do not need to tell your story in a certain way, which gives you a high degree of freedom; you should therefore consider alternative ways of piecing the material together. Try to maintain a certain sensitivity towards the raw material in order to avoid forcing it in the wrong direction because you are too focused on the story you had planned to tell.



Rather than throwing the good story or the good feeling overboard, it might be better to give up on style, aesthetics or beautiful pictures. In his book *In the Blink of an Eye. A Perspective on Film Editing* (1995), Walter Murch says (in relation to the fiction film) that in order for a film to be fundamentally interesting, the main thing to strive for in the editing room is the evoking of emotion. Then, secondarily, comes the story. This principle of priority could be applied to the documentary as well (although from time to time it can be necessary to deviate from even the best of principles).



In the above-mentioned book Walter Murch gives a piece of advice that is not only useful when editing a fiction film:

...one way of looking at the process of making a film is to think of it as a search to identify what – for the particular film you are working on – is a uniquely 'bad bit' (Murch, 1995, p. 11).

Likewise, when editing a documentary it is a good idea to search for and identify 'bad bits.' Some shots that you previously thought were essential to the film often turn out to be 'bad bits' when the film begins to take form. Also, remember the old slogan: "Kill Your Darlings."

It can be difficult to identify the unnecessary 'darlings' or 'bad bits,' especially if you have become hypnotized by the material and are no longer able to see what works and what doesn't. It is always a good idea to get somebody to view your production with a fresh eye.

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Confessions of a Teacher "Documentarists" and "Fictionalists" – thoughts about selecting students for a documentary course

David Wingate

These notes are the result of a conversation with Richard Raskin in northern Finland in November of last year. We talked about what distinguishes documentary student filmmakers from fiction students. He asked me to write down some of my thoughts as an article for POV.

For five years in the early nineties I ran a documentary course in Norway. It was at the regional High School in Volda and lasted one academic year. We thought of it as a third year course, because applicants had to have done at least two years of media studies at university level and have at least a year of professional production experience. Selecting students for this course presented some interesting problems.

The course was getting a huge number of applications. This was part of the over-inflated interest among young people for media courses of all kinds and the growth of media education to cope with and exploit this "market." But how to find the right ones among all these applicants?

We were not allowed by the high school system to interview applicants, but with the Volda media department's approval, we short-listed about three times as many students as there were places for on the course and sent them written tasks to do. The results of these tasks then determined who was offered a place.

Among the material sent to them were still photographs, and they were asked to comment in various ways about these pictures. One of these photos was a portrait of a man in the middle of an on-going situation, taken on the fly, snapped just as he looks at the camera. The rather unkind question they were asked about this picture was this: "When you look at the man in this photo, do you feel he is like himself?"¹

Some of the applicants replied: "How the hell do I know, I never met him," or words to that effect, and this was a fair enough answer, of course. Others gave answers like: "Of course I have never met him, but when I look at the photo I think... " and so on. Others answered like this: " When I look at him, I think the camera and the photographer have made him feel... " and so on.

I found the results of this little task revealing and, I think, quite useful. I felt I did not want students who were too naïve about documentary's abilities to represent realities, but rather students who were already aware – either intuitively, or consciously – of pitfalls of documentary "authenticity." Personally I believe that documentary is, basically, impossible, but that it is nevertheless very necessary. A film culture that contained only fiction would not be a healthy one. In particular it seemed to me that, on this short course, I needed students who already understood that documentary realism is different from fictional realism and that a fictional photographer has a different kind of influence on what is in front of the camera than does a documentary photographer. I felt the one-year course was too short to have to teach them this from scratch.

¹ The "... is he like himself ?" question originated from Agneta Ekman Wingate. It was one she started using when she was a teacher of documentary still photography at Christer Strömholm's Foto Skolan in Stockholm in the '60s.

So a certain maturity and sophistication with regard to the paradoxes and dilemmas of documentary realism seemed to me to be a necessary pre-condition for recruiting students for the course and probably an important quality in people who wanted to become documentary makers. The little still photo task was an attempt to measure some of all this.

Obviously I wanted to find those students who, among all the applicants, were genuinely interested in documentary, who had a talent for documentary, and who were strongly motivated to learn more about it. More importantly, it seemed to me, I needed to avoid those who actually were more suited to do fictional films, but who had applied for this documentary course because they needed to get into film making.

So I began to imagine that I had to find ways of distinguishing between applicants who were “documentarists” as opposed to those who were “fictionalists.”

Obviously it was silly to propose that there are only two kinds of applicants – and obviously there are some examples in film history of film makers who can do both. Nevertheless, this simple dualistic model seemed to be useful in this particular student selection process.

But how to distinguish between the two? What might be the qualities of a typical “documentarist” student as opposed to a typical “fictionalist” student?

Another of the written tasks sent to the short-listed applicants was to describe a documentary they wanted to make, one that might possibly be their diploma film at the end of the course. It seemed to me that some of these written presentations clearly wanted to gather documentary material and use it in an illustrative way to support

their preconceived notions about how the world worked. These applicants seemed to want to confirm what they already believed about reality by making the proposed film. Their proposals tended to be like illustrated lectures and often hinted at rhetorical structures for the finished film.

Other applicants were clearly using their notions about reality more tentatively, as working hypotheses rather than beliefs, and wanted to test these by making the proposed film. They seemed to be genuinely curious about how the world worked, wanted to use the film to explore their curiosity and seemed to want to have their preconceived notions changed by the filming process. Their proposals tended to be observational films and hinted at narrative rather than rhetorical structures.

I found that those who seemed more open minded – in the sense that they were genuinely curious about the world – appealed to me more and I tended to select them. I had already decided that the documentary course should have a narrative and observational bias. Pragmatically, I had decided that work for the students after the course would be in television and observational narrative seemed to be the way television documentary was going at that time. So these kinds of student proposals tended to fit in the course because of this chosen bias. But I found myself thinking that an open mind and lively curiosity about realities, rather than wanting to illustrate preconceived beliefs, and the need to tell stories about things rather than argue about them, might actually be characteristics of the “documentarist” as opposed to the “fictionalist” student applicant.

During the 5 years I ran the course, I did sometimes select an applicant whom I suspected of being a “fictionalist” but who had many other attractive merits. Some of these students worked out

fine, or not so well. One of the things that seemed to occur with most of these typically “fictionalist” students was something I came to think about as the “field research angst syndrome.”

It was hard to get these students to go out and do research in the field. They seemed scared to start and often came back from field research trips feeling depressed and de-motivated. In contrast, the typical “documentarist” students enjoyed doing field research and came back from research trips refreshed and refilled with creative energy. So the “field research angst syndrome” became for me a characteristic of “fictionalist” students. Puzzling about this I came to certain provisional conclusions connected with the methods I had chosen for teaching documentary project development.

Working with the students, researching other filmmakers' and other documentary teachers' experiences and reflecting about my own, largely fiction film making experience, I began to see certain general characteristics of typical film project development processes. I tried to use these apparent general characteristics in my teaching methods.

Part of this resulted in a generalized model for how to teach the writing of documentary film proposals when applying for production financing.²

As another part of this, I found myself encouraging the students throughout the development process to imagine possible documentary film scenes. I realized that this was like the process of fiction film script writing, but nevertheless believed it was applicable to documentary.

² See articles in DOX magazine for June and September 2001 about the Sources 2 documentary workshops.

It seemed to me reasonable to suppose that if you were writing for the theatre, then you shut your eyes and imagined a stage. You put the actors on the stage, put up the scenery, you switched on your chosen lights and so on and you ran a bit of a possible play in your mind. You changed and improved it, still in your mind, and then you wrote down some notes about it so you could recall it later on.

If you were writing for radio fiction, then you shut your eyes and listened, creating possible sound scenarios in your mind. And if you were writing for film fiction, then you shut your eyes and ran possible film scenes back and forth in your mind as if you had an editing machine in your head. Then, as if you had a camera and a microphone in your head, you change the acting and “re-shoot,” change the dialogue and “re-record,” “re-edit” and so on, changing these imagined scenes, improving them until you are more satisfied with them. Then you noted them down so you could recall them later. As a fiction film writer your aim is to work all these notes about your imagined scenes into a film script.

This seemed to me to be a reasonable model for parts of a fictional development process.

I began to think of this ability to imagine film scenes in a film that has not been made yet – very concretely to see and hear them in your mind – as an essential part of teaching any film development process, documentary as well as fiction. I started to think of it as the “filmic imagination” and to regard it as an important faculty, something that any film course should continually measure, evaluate and train in its students.

I encouraged the documentary students to use their “filmic imaginations” in developing their films. This suited the “fictional-

ist” students because the “pre-scripting” of what they wanted to be their film felt for them like a natural part of the development process. But it was harder for the “documentarists,” especially early in the development of their documentary projects.

Nevertheless, I continued to encourage them all, before and after field research – indeed, throughout the whole development process and during the filming itself – to go on imagining concrete film scenes, but to always keep these provisional. They were encouraged to pre-imagine how to film scenes in considerable detail, in spite of knowing that they would have to reject most of these imaginings as the project developed. I wanted them to think of the imagined scenes as highly detailed sketches that were going to be rejected as the process developed. I tried to help them design parts of their field research to investigate whether these pre-imagined scenes were filmable “out there” in the real world. Almost invariably they were not, but I believed that having tried to imagine how to film it was an important preparation for actually having to film it. Later in the development process I would encourage them to imagine several ways of filming possible scenes – a series of “what if” scenarios – and ways of testing these possible scenarios and how to film them in the next stage of field research. In this way they could begin to appreciate what parts of the coming film were more predictable with regard to how they could be filmed, which parts were less predictable, and which parts were largely unpredictable.

An important restriction in this “filmic imagination” training method was that they were not to spend too much time trying to imagine the whole film. I encouraged them to pre-imagine individual scenes and groups of scenes and to think of these as the possible building blocks for the film. But they were not encouraged to imag-

ine putting these pre-imagined scenes and blocks together into a whole film. In particular they were encouraged not to put too much energy into imagining how to connect scenes or blocks to one another, but rather to keep thinking about them as provisional and free-floating building blocks which could be used to build several possible films.

The “documentarists” initially resisted this method. Early in the course, their “filmic imaginations” really did not get going until they had concrete material to work with. When they had done field research – begun to get to know the people, the places, the situations, the actions and so on, that they were going to film - then they could imagine ways of filming these things. So they tended to put off pre-imagining until late in the development process. This often meant, in the films they did early in the course, that they were not sufficiently prepared when the filming started.

Later in the course most of the “documentarists” learned to use their filmic imaginations earlier in development and tended to find the change energizing and motivating. They understood that all the filmic solutions they had imagined and had rejected were, in a sense, still “there” and helped them to focus on what they should film, no matter how they filmed it. A number of them, year after year, reported that they felt they could “improvise” better during the filming because of the imagined scenes they had rejected. Some of them even reported that the pre-imagined, but rejected scenes helped them during the editing. I regarded these things as successes for the method.

For the “fictionalists,” I believe, the method exaggerated, perhaps even created the “field research angst syndrome.” They felt I was encouraging them to build up “finished” film scenes in their heads

and they tended to become more attached to these imagined scenes than the “documentarists.”

They found it more difficult to regard their imagined scenes as provisional, just detailed, exploratory sketches that were going to be rejected later. In spite of my instructions, the “fictionalists” tended to build their imagined scenes together, linking them with elegant transitions, and they tended to become fond of these imagined links. So it was harder for them to keep the imagined parts of the film as free-floating building blocks. To a greater extent than the “documentarists,” they seemed to need to refer to the whole film in order to be able to pre-imagine its parts. So in their early films for the course, the “fictionalists” tended to spend too much time and energy too early in the development process pre-scripting too much of the film. This contrasted clearly with the “documentarists,” who, in their early films for the course, tended to wait until too late before beginning to pre-imagine scenes.

When it came to field research, the typical “fictionalists” did not want to do it. I had the feeling that they had built fiction-like “castles in the air.” They had become too attached to their castles and did want to go out into the real world because they knew they would find out that their castles could not be filmed. Some of them reported that it felt as though the documentary process was destroying their illusions. Field research forced them to revise their imagined films and they found this process painful.

In contrast, some of the “documentarists” – particularly the ones with a powerful curiosity about the how the world worked – seemed to actually enjoy pulling down their own castles in the air, feeling that the world had thus taught them something important.

So I think, in conclusion, it was less painful for the “fictionalists” to make illustrative, rhetorical and lecture-like films confirming the beliefs they already had about reality. And that narrative, observational documentary, the chosen bias for the course, was not really their *métier*.

Let me make a final observation.

On that Norwegian course the typical “documentarist” student personality, particularly of those who were best at gathering observational film material, was usually not particularly structuralist.

It was as if in order to be open to what was spontaneously happening in front of the observational documentary camera, the film maker should not be too consciously occupied with how the scene being filmed should fit into the whole film, otherwise they would miss the scene. They have to be very concretely present in the now of the filming process.

It was my impression that the students I worked with who were best at filming observationally, were often not so good as editors. It was as if their “documentarist” abilities, vitally necessary in the observational filming process, were different from the more structuralist and perhaps “fictionalist” requirements of the editing. Conversely, the best editors were often found among the students I thought of as being more “fictionalists.”

I felt that this probably meant that the editing of narrative structured, observational documentary is actually rather fiction-like and therefore liable to suit “fictionalist” students.

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