

Design Documentaries

Using documentary film to inspire design

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Abstract

Design is nowadays a thoroughly multidisciplinary discipline. It is called upon ever more in society and industry to address problems and create opportunities. As a result design touches on many aspects of our everyday lives, and knowledge about how people live is an important asset in design processes. This knowledge comes from many sources, to which this research aims to add one more: *design documentaries*.

This research brings four disciplines together: cultural studies, documentary film, user research and design. It focuses on developing a new method for discovery research, using video. In design processes discovery research is used from the start, to get access to knowledge about how people live. But that is not its only role. Ideally, it also inspires design processes. Video has been used to support both roles since the 1980s, but has never moved much beyond registering discovery research activities.

For the first time, this research adds documentary film to the multidisciplinary mix in design in a fundamental way. With more than a hundred years of experience in portraying everyday life, documentary film brings many inspiring ideas and techniques to discovery research for design. This research investigates specific aspects of documentary film history and specific film techniques, to draw out the significance and relevance of documentary film to design.

Documentary film has a strong connection to reality, and developed a rich film language. The films that inspire this research in particular present the perspectives of people behind and in front of the camera in conversation with each other, and invite viewers to join and continue these conversations. These three notions – reality, language and conversation – have become the foundation of design documentaries, a new method for discovery research in design. Design documentaries emerged from an exploratory filmmaking practice, inspired by documentary film ideas and techniques. As a method, design documentaries are not prescriptive. They are a tactic researchers and designers can adapt, rather than a strategy they can adopt.

With design documentaries, this research introduces documentary film as a new addition to the multidisciplinary mix in design, and invites researchers and designers to engage with video and everyday life creatively, to inform and inspire design processes.

to my parents,
Det Bazelmans and
Hans Raijmakers

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Raijmakers, B. (2005b) How can we use documentary film in design research? Brighton, Equator. (Poster, also presented at the 'Less is More' conference, Microsoft Research labs, Cambridge, 2005)

2006

Raijmakers, B., Gaver, W., & Bishay, J. (2006a) Design Documentaries: Inspiring Design Research Through Documentary Film. DIS2006. State College, PA , ACM press. (Full paper and conference presentation, also presented at the Equator conference, Glasgow; Film, Visualization, Narrative workshop, Royal Holloway, University of London; Mads Clausen Institute for Product Innovation University of Southern Denmark, Sønderborg, Denmark, all in 2006).

Raijmakers, B. (2006b) Inspiring multidisciplinary teams with design documentaries. 'How Smart Are We?', London, Design Plus. (Conference presentation)

Raijmakers, B., Faulkner, S. & March, W. (2006) Design Documentaries Workshop EPIC2006. Portland, OR.

Raby, F., March, W., Chang, M. & Raijmakers, B. (2006) Smart Street Workshop London, Royal College of Art

Raijmakers, B. (2006c) Design Documentaries Workshop at London School of Economics, September 2006, London.

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Introduction

I would like to start this investigation with a story. In the summer of 2006, I was walking around the Barbican in central London, with Suzi, an artist and Verity, an engineer. We were just walking around, without a particular goal, more interested in the conversation with each other than in getting somewhere; more interested in following our imagination than in travelling from A to B. We were exploring opportunities for the application of smart textiles, a loose term for new materials that both Verity and Suzi had worked with before. After a while, in the distance, we saw someone taking photographs of the cracks in the pavement of the Barbican. Made curious by this unusual behaviour, we went up to him and asked what he was doing. “I’m a painter,” he said, “and I’m photographing cracks as inspiration for my paintings... My paintings are ostensibly abstract, but they are always about the world – so I need to start with the world.” He paused, as if wondering whether he had lost us already. “But may I ask what *you* are doing,” he retorted, pointing at the camera following us. We all started to laugh, because it suddenly dawned on us that he had just perfectly explained what we were doing: taking inspiration from the world to create something. Something to do with drifting through a city, we explained. Something to do with storytelling too, as we had just picked up from the painter, and with chance encounters on the street. Perhaps something with stories that leave traces, like the cracks, so other people can stumble upon them later.¹

The wider context of this thesis is creating connections between designing technology and the people we design for, of which this story is an example. This research aims to give a particular answer to a general question: How can a multidisciplinary team find inspiration in everyday life, to innovate technological products and services? Its focus is to develop new methods for this activity, using documentary film to discover what matters to people. This leads to the research question of this thesis: *How can we use documentary film in discovery research?* I will first explore the broader context of this question, to show how it emerges from this context, before discussing the question itself in more detail.

Discovery research for design thinking

The wider context of this investigation can be understood by asking a few simple questions: What? When? Who? Where? How? And finally the perhaps most important question: Why?

¹ This true story is part of one of the films I made during my research, called *Drift* (2006). I walked around the Barbican with Suzi Webster and Verity Parker. The painter remains anonymous since we only met him briefly on the street and never saw him again. The film *Drift* and how it was made is discussed on page 124.

What design activity am I investigating?

It has become common practice in many design disciplines to include in the design process some kind of attention to the people one is designing for, or perhaps *with*, if their involvement is especially high. This makes sense in an economy and society where companies and governments make enormous investments in technological systems and mass-produced technological artefacts that aim to enhance people's lives in some way. One way to give these services and products a better chance to succeed is to ground them in the societies and cultures they are made for, into the everyday life practices of the people who will use them. That is why I went for a walk with Suzi and Verity around the Barbican.

Doing research to 'discover what matters to people'² is a best practice in design to achieve such grounding. Borrowing part from that phrase, I will call the research activity in design that I am investigating here discovery research. The term 'discovery research' carries in my research a meaning that is wider than its literal meaning, and its originating phrase might suggest. 'Discovery' here also points to creation and invention. It moves beyond finding what is already there. 'What matters' might suggest that it is already known what matters now and in the future, and that discovery research simply aims to uncover this. It is however crucial that indeterminate or "wicked"³ outcomes can be part of the result too. Design is a very universal activity. It can address almost anything⁴, and in its wake discovery research can too. As a result design and discovery research can take unexpected directions, making it impossible to nail these activities down. They remain indeterminate. The fact that most discovery research outcomes are not recognisable as wicked is because in much research, the indeterminate aspects have carefully been removed to create actionable insights. These are valuable in design processes, like design briefs are. Given the universality of design problems, indeterminateness is however an inalienable part of the character of most of them, and so is it of most discovery research subjects. And finally, discovery research is not just about people, even though people are at the core of the research activity. Beyond individuals, discovery research can also be aimed at other microscopic levels like situations, and at macroscopic levels like culture and society.

² This is how design consultancy IDEO formulates as the main goal of their research activity at the early stages of design processes (Fulton Suri, 2003).

³ I am borrowing again here, from Horst Rittel who entertainingly describes design problems as "wicked" problems, a "class of social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing." (Rittel in Buchanan, 1990, p. 13) A design brief aims often to take the wickedness out of the design problem to create a determinate or analytic problem, he adds.

⁴ Richard Buchanan, wondering why design problems are wicked, considers that "Design problems are "indeterminate" and "wicked" because design has no special subject matter of its own, apart from what a designer conceives it to be. The subject matter of design is potentially *universal* in scope, because design thinking may be applied to any area of human experience." (Buchanan, 1990, p. 15) The same is true for discovery research, whose subject matter is as broad as the potential subjects of design.

When is discovery research done?

Design processes are essentially iterative, and not linear. The same activities are repeated several times, in slightly different ways or with a different focus, sometimes in a different order. Discovery research is one of these activities. It is most intensely called upon early in the process, to find information and inspiration in the world and with people. But also later, discovery research can be a valuable activity in design processes, for instance to confront people or intervene in situations, with concepts and prototypes. Not to evaluate them, at least not in the same ways as usability research evaluates understanding, effectiveness and utility, but to see what these concepts and prototypes provoke in people and in particular situations. To see how people create cultural meaning with them for instance. We did not bring a prototype to show the painter in the Barbican, but our behaviour in a way was already a prototype of a service in the area of navigating through a city without a specific goal, the subject we were exploring, and he responded to that.

Who is doing discovery research?

Discovery research is clearly a part of design processes, but one does not have to be educated as a designer to do discovery research. Typically, design nowadays is done by a team of people from different backgrounds, ranging from creative, to engineering and social sciences, sometimes even humanities. Our little group in the Barbican reflects this mixture well, with my own background in cultural studies and the internet industry, working mostly with designers, Verity's academic background in engineering and knit work, and Suzi as an artist working with technology and media. We did our discovery research to prepare for a workshop with industrial design consultancy Therefore, who among many other clients work for TomTom navigation systems. We are all specialists, and generalists at the same time. IDEO calls us "T-shaped people" (Kelley and Littman, 2005, p. 75), to express deep knowledge of one subject, and general knowledge of many others, which allows people with different backgrounds to communicate with each other. The deep knowledge area that often plays an important role in discovery research are the social sciences like anthropology, cultural studies and sociology. They all use ethnography as a method, in many different disguises, to do research. We did as well, in the Barbican, observing and talking to people we met on the street. But the social scientists certainly are not the only ones who go out to do discovery research. Other disciplines join in, using the horizontal bar of their T, just like social scientists can participate in later stages and iterations of the design process.

Despite the fact I worked with people from many different backgrounds and disciplines, I use two simple categories to indicate them and myself throughout this thesis, for reasons of clarity. Because research is the main activity in discovery research, I will use the term researcher to indicate the *role* ethnographers, social scientists, designers, filmmakers, artists and engineers take in this activity, here mainly making films. If there was a team involved, I will call us a research team. The people who are the audience for the films are a mixed group too, of designers, ethnographers, social scientists, marketers, engineers and design managers. I will call this group

a (multidisciplinary) design team and its individual members designers, again indicating a role, because as a discipline design is the main targeted audience of design documentaries. The words researcher and designer suggest perhaps clear borders between the roles we take up and activities we do in researching and designing, but this is not intended. Rather, we are all T-shaped people with specialties and a broad understanding of many other disciplines, and the activities research and design can mix in iterative design processes.

All these professionals are however not the only ones doing the research. Equally important are the people we meet during our research, on the street, in their homes, perhaps in public transport or at work. These people are perhaps the subject of the research, but also participants in the research. They not only give access to what they do, think, dream and worry about; they contribute ideas, create situations for the research and sometimes even contest the analysis the researchers make⁵. The anonymous painter we met in the Barbican contributed more than the observation we could make and his answer to our question. He asked us the same question we asked him; he reversed the situation, and thus provided valuable insight and understanding to us. The coincidence that his activity was not very different from what we were doing allowed also a mutual understanding that undermines the conventional power relationship between researcher and subject, and made him into a participant in the research on more equal footing. It is this kind of relationship with participants that discovery research seeks.

Where does discovery research take place?

The activity of discovery research is universal by nature, just like design. As a consequence it takes place almost everywhere. Everyday life is an appropriate label for such a place because the everyday happens everywhere. But I will use a particular view on everyday life, as a place where people produce cultural and social meaning, partly through their use of designed products and services. Everyday life is here not seen as determined by brands and consumption, it is considered a place where people actively create contemporary society and popular culture, for instance through consumption.

A second aspect of the everyday is that it is dull and spectacular at the same time. Routines like working in a factory or office, or doing house chores are mixed with the unusual like excitement, astonishment or surprise, about an event, a person or perhaps a technological accomplishment like a video chat with a friend at the other side of the world, or even the other side of the street. Often there is a certain newness to this that can also wear off again quite quickly, but there are always new new phenomena⁶. The ordinary mixes with the extraordinary⁷. In

⁵ Jacob Buur calls the participants in his research for that reason co-authors (Buur et al., 2000)

⁶ I would argue that everyday life also offers 'small' surprising events that act as disruptions of routines. For instance my cycling home from work every day along the same route is mixed with occasional surprises that happen along the way, like someone shouting loudly across the street to the other side of the pedestrians crossing: "Don't look away – you know me!" after which they fell in each others arms, laughing. I observed this disruption in front of London's Charing Cross Station in 2007.

early modernity, shop windows and exhibitions⁸ were the phantasmagoria that opposed the boring side of everyday life. In today's postmodern society, new technologies and science, showcased in the Great Exhibition of 1851 for the first time on a large scale, are still a prominent source of popular spectacle, speculation and fantasy.

How is discovery research done?

There is a wide range of techniques to do discovery research. The merits and limitations of many of them will be discussed in this text. The universality of design and discovery research have given rise to techniques from as disparate disciplines as theatre and science. The ever-changing nature of society and culture, of people and everyday life, demand that discovery research keeps questioning and evolving the methods it uses. My investigation aims to make a contribution to this necessary critical engagement with methods by focusing on the use of video in discovery research. It does so by taking inspiration from documentary film techniques and theories. More than a hundred years of experience with showing everyday life on film, since 1895, position documentary film thinking and techniques as a unique, promising and very rich source for the further expansion of discovery research methods using video. My critical engagement with these methods includes thinking and making, reflecting and doing. I have studied documentary theory and films, and the reflections of many documentary filmmakers on their work. But I also made several films, for instance in the Barbican.

Why undertake this investigation?

In the exploration of the context in which this investigation takes place, it is also relevant to consider why one would embark on this enterprise. As said above, a critical engagement with discovery research methods is needed. This takes place in a wider context that can be called design thinking. Richard Buchanan describes design thinking as a "liberal art of technological culture" (Buchanan, 1990, p. 3), meaning that it is something every man and woman can and does participate in. In our technological culture everyone uses design thinking to get a grip on what happens around us – to make sense of our everyday life. Design thinking is a tool and

⁷ Ben Highmore uses the character of Sherlock Holmes to demonstrate how the particular mix of boredom, mystery and rationalism is central to everyday life since modernity. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the writer of the Sherlock Holmes stories, gave his main character a thoroughly ambivalent attitude towards the everyday. Holmes is easily bored by the everyday, he collapses under its weight and needs the spectacular to survive, which for instance leads him to drug use. But, "[i]f he [Holmes] loves the bizarre and mysterious side of the everyday, he loves its disenchantment through rationalism even more. Yet it is precisely this rationalism that transforms the insignificant and everyday into ciphers for the bizarre. Holmes' approach to the everyday generates mystery at the same time as it demystifies it." (Highmore, 2002a p. 4). This tangle of opposites needs to be unravelled to understand how it "figures the everyday as both known and unknown, comfortable and uncomfortable." [Ibid.]. Highmore argues that boredom is connected to routines of modern work life, in factories, bureaucracy and the industrialised home, and that mystery is connected to the unconscious and its gothic narratives. Rationalism binds these two aspects together "as an engine that drives these forces (...). Rationalism is not the antidote to myth and ritual, but the emergence of new myths and rituals under the banner of the 'true'." (Ibid., p. 5)

⁸ Such as The Great Exhibition of 1851 that led to the foundation of the Royal College of Art.

attitude that can be compared to what Michel de Certeau calls the “tactics”⁹ we use in our everyday life practices. Tactics are like ruses, largely unplanned but benefiting optimally from the situation, from any coincidence that occurs. Our meeting with the painter in the Barbican was not planned and could not be foreseen, but when we met him we knew immediately what to do to take maximum advantage from the situation, to create an insight together with the painter and a crucial sequence in the film. However beneficial that encounter was to the research, it cannot be repeated in exactly the same way by following a method, or applying a strategy.

Design thinking works similarly. It is inherently creative, like people’s use of tactics is creative. Both tactics and design thinking respond to specific situations, people and opportunities and emerge as a certain idea that is an answer to these particularities. If design thinking applies a particular tactic in a general way, in other words: strategically, it loses some of its power because it can no longer take advantage of the unique opportunities each situation offers. Tactics and design thinking both point at the creative force that exists in everyone’s everyday actions and thoughts, giving us to some extent control over our life by enabling us to participate in society and culture, and offering the opportunity to contribute to its development by expressing ourselves¹⁰.

Designers add signs, things, actions and thoughts¹¹ to the existing world for everyone to use, offering people more opportunities to engage in design thinking than they already have. Sometimes designers manage to raise design thinking to new levels by forging innovative relationships between signs, things, actions and thoughts that offer new opportunities to people

⁹ “A tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. (...) The space of the tactic is the space of the other. It is a maneuver “within the enemies field of vision,” as von Bülow put it, and within enemy territory. (...) It poaches them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse.” But: “What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment.” (De Certeau, 1984, p. 37) The influence of this military metaphor is still growing in social sciences.

¹⁰ Of course, the opposite is true at the same time: people are constructed *by* society and culture. The simultaneous existence of these two phenomena, their connectedness and the struggle between them is a major subject in cultural studies.

¹¹ Buchanan mentions signs, things, actions and thoughts as what results of design thinking by designers. - Signs are the result of designing “*symbolic and visual communications*”, using increasingly complex mixes of words, images and sound.

- Things are designed “*material objects*,” physical artefacts that interpret the relationship between products and human beings.

- Actions are “*activities and organized services*” that are designed to manage logistics and achieve an organic flow of experience in specific situations.

- Thoughts refers to the design of “*complex systems or environments for living working, playing and learning*” which need a central idea to become a balanced and functioning whole.

They should however not be seen as separate results stemming from separate activities by for instance respectively graphic designers, product designers, interaction designers and architects. Rather, these four results of design thinking are mixed up in combinations that stem from combined efforts of various design disciplines in response to how people mix their understanding of designed signs, things, actions and thoughts. (Buchanan, 1995, p. 3-9). For instance, a mobile phone is a thing offering many services or possible actions, but also a sign of contemporary living, both in how it looks (which model you use) and how you use it (the new behaviour and etiquette it generates), creating an environment where it is for instance possible and acceptable to make many arrangements in your social life at the last minute, leading to new experiences. The design thinking of designers and the users of mobile phones together makes this possible.

to participate in society and contribute to its further development¹². It is this kind of innovation that discovery research supports by connecting the design thinking of people in general to the design thinking of designers. It forges a creative relationship between the two by establishing extra opportunities for designers to find inspiration with the people they design for, and build on that inspiration to design amalgams of signs, things, actions and thoughts that offer people new opportunities to engage with the world and create meaning. This investigation aims to support this iterative, ever evolving process of design thinking by designers and people in general by offering new opportunities to both to engage in it.

To sum up, in this investigation documentary film is explored from the perspective of discovery research: with everyday life as its research location, with a focus on supporting design thinking, at the early stages of iterative design processes, and in multidisciplinary co-operations between professionals and participating (extra)ordinary people. Below is explained how this investigation is structured, by detailing which questions it aims to answer.

Research questions

My main research question is *How can we use documentary film in discovery research?* To answer this general question, I have developed several more specific questions. The first specific question deals with what documentary film theory and practice can bring to discovery research.

Which documentary film theories and techniques could be useful in discovery research?

In my answer to this question I will first review the current uses of video in discovery research in Chapter One, and then investigate documentary film in Chapters Two, Three and Four.

Documentary film theory has distinguished many different approaches to documentary film. These however cannot be seen as one system or genealogy, defining all possible documentaries. For this research I read the most influential documentary theories, from the following perspective: Which approaches to representing situations and people, as described by documentary theory, might be relevant to designers? The results are presented in Chapter Two.

Documentary film practice is often ahead of its theory; theory is mostly developed from the films that have been made. New ways of filmmaking are often found simply by trying. Many techniques and ideas have been defined and described, by filmmakers and film theorists. Also, one can sometimes simply see the techniques when watching films, and listening to filmmakers talking about how they made their films at screenings or in interviews. All of these sources give access to a large amount of practical ideas and techniques in documentary film. For this

¹² The mobile phone is of course one of many possible examples, with the related voicemail, ringtones, mobile blogging, Google local and so on. The design thinking of designers and engineers led to the introduction of mobile phones as a new communication tool with many capabilities and new opportunities. People using mobile phones use design thinking to take advantage of them in ways that fit their particular lives.

investigation I collected many of these, mainly from seminal documentary films and documentary films that are of particular interest to design. From this collection I developed my own list of ideas and techniques, from the following perspective: Which practical ideas and techniques to portray people and situations in documentary film might be relevant to interaction designers? Chapter Three presents the results of this investigation.

The theoretical approaches and practical techniques work together in films. How they come together in documentary film is demonstrated in Chapter Four by discussing two documentary films in detail.

The second set of (two) sub-questions aims to determine which new possibilities arise if designers make documentaries as a part of discovery research, inspired by documentary theories and practices. To stress their hybrid form, as well as their particular purpose, I will call these films *design documentaries*. What defines these films and how do they differ from documentary genres we already know?

How can designers appropriate documentary techniques when they are filming as part of their design research?

The practice of documentary filmmaking is clearly different from the practice of discovery research. Researchers and designers can take inspiration from documentary film theories, and will have to adapt some of its techniques, while adopting others to make them work in discovery research. I have pioneered this process by making several design documentaries, alone and with participants, professional filmmakers, designers, engineers and artists. I have monitored and described how documentary film inspired my films and how documentary film techniques and theories were appropriated during the course of my research, by myself and the filmmakers I worked with.

While making design documentaries with design teams as part of my research and often their projects, I got feedback on how I presented and used design documentaries as a method. I also organised and participated in workshops, gave lectures and presentations and occasionally taught graduate and postgraduate students, all in relation to design documentaries (see page ix). This helped me greatly to reflect on design documentaries as a discovery research method. See Chapters Five, Six and Seven for a description of the design documentaries I made, how they were used and my reflections on both. Appendix A comprises a dvd with all the films.

What are the characteristics of design documentaries?

In this investigation I see documentary filmmaking as the construction of a dialectic between the perspective of the filmmaker and the perspectives of the people in the film (see page 46). Many different views on this relationship have been suggested in documentary film theory. This investigation positions design documentaries between these views.

To clarify the characteristics of design documentaries, I will discuss connections between design documentaries and other discovery research methods and related theories. Writers and artists working in a documentary way are useful references and inspiration too because they too have appropriated documentary theories and techniques, albeit for other purposes than discovery research and in other fields than design. Chapter Eight defines the characteristics of design documentaries and brings all these references together.

The final research question addresses the best ways to present the results of this investigation to designers and other stakeholders in design and discovery research.

What do design documentaries add to current video use and how can this be further developed?

After describing the essence of design documentaries, it is useful to look at how they differ from current uses of video in discovery research. This hopefully makes it easier for designers and researchers to see what design documentaries bring to discovery research. The introduction of design documentaries to my peers has already started (see the list of publications and presentations, page ix). This has informed me how to define and present design documentaries for my discipline in the most appropriate way. A comparison of design documentaries with current uses of video and my ideas for the communication of design documentaries as a discovery research method to the wider design research community are discussed in the Conclusions. An overview of the structure of the dissertation is given below.

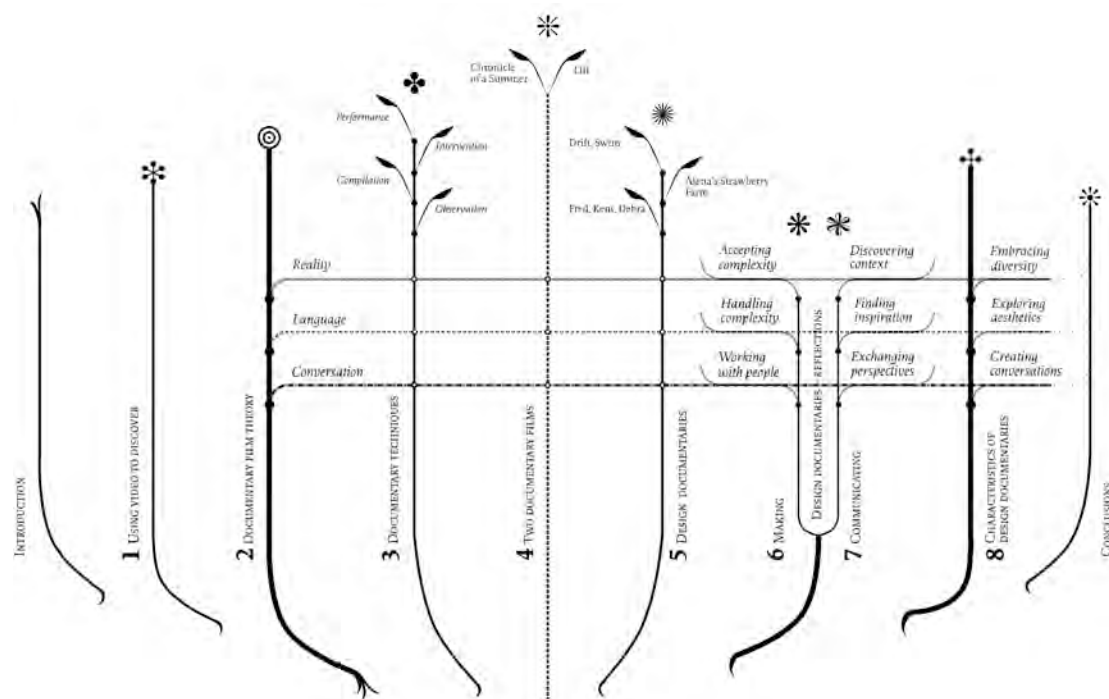


Figure 1 Structure of the dissertation

Methodology

The research I have done is qualitative. The philosophical perspective of this investigation is primarily interpretive. As a researcher I assumed I could only get access to the phenomena I wanted to study through social and cultural constructions, such as (film) language and shared meanings. In essence this means that I try to understand the practice of and theories behind discovery research, documentary film and design documentaries through the meanings that people assign to them, as well as through my own critical reflection on these practices and the more theoretical ideas behind them.

Interpretive research uses as a philosophical base hermeneutics and phenomenology. Hermeneutics studies the theories and methods of the interpretation of ‘texts,’ originally written text, but later also including for instance images, films, and now software¹³. Phenomenology requires the researcher to perceive the phenomena it studies intuitively, without preconceived ideas, and consequently reflect on and interpret these phenomena to gain insight from her or his experience¹⁴. Used together, they necessitate a balance between finding solid ground in existing work and openness to new ideas.

Methods

I conducted my research along three lines. First, I did scholarly research to study literature on discovery research, documentary film, design and several disciplines related to the study of everyday life. Secondly, I applied critical reflection to existing practices in documentary film, by analyzing films and talking to filmmakers, and also to practices in design, through projects I participated in and teaching. Thirdly, I developed my own independent practice of making design documentaries and reflected on this practice, with the help of designers. These three lines existed at most times next to each other, in parallel, intertwined, connected, sometimes tangled up and undone again a bit later on. I conducted my research from October 2003 to March 2007.

Qualitative research methods

The research methods I used are literature studies, film studies and case-studies.

I did scholarly research to study literature on several disciplines, of which the most important are design, Human Computer Interaction, discovery research, ethnography, documentary film (theory), everyday life theories and cultural studies. These disciplines partly overlap and are not clearly fenced off. The wide range of disciplines reflects that this research is

¹³ Hermeneutics originated in critical biblical scholarship: Bible studies during the Reformation, and Enlightenment attacks on religious ideologies. Biblical texts needed urgent clarification: “What rapidly emerged from a sustained consideration of the difficulties of translation and contextualization was the realization that *no* text could, in fact, ‘speak for itself.’” (Ferguson, 2006)

¹⁴ Phenomenology originated in the shock of modernity. It started with astonishment about the phenomena of the modern world already referred to above (see page 4): “The modern age (...) is not only the age of reason; it is, above all, the age of astonishment – the age of the phenomenal.” (Ferguson, 2006)

interdisciplinary. The large number of disciplines this research touches on made it impossible and irrelevant to conduct a complete and extensive literature study of all the related fields. Instead I have studied a selection of relevant seminal sources. References to this literature appears throughout most of the other chapters, whenever it is relevant to the argument that is made. The exception to this approach is literature on the use of video in discovery research, of which subject a complete literature study is presented in Chapter One because it represents the starting point for my investigation.

I applied critical reflection to existing practices in documentary film by reviewing documentary films, engaging in question and answer sessions with filmmakers at screenings during film festivals, and reading interviews with filmmakers. In these efforts I gave special attention to film aesthetics. Additional reflection on the practices of documentary filmmakers was offered by the master-classes in documentary filmmaking and documentary film seminars with filmmakers and film theorists, which I attended.

My case-studies are an empirical enquiry into the use of documentary film techniques in the real-life context of discovery research and design processes. I did this by participating in several design processes through making design documentaries. In my experiments, I used the results from literature study and documentary film analyses, as well as the more practice based inspirations from documentary filmmakers. Consequently I observed how the films were used and I evaluated their use with team members. I reflected upon the uses and responses critically, by myself as well as in lectures and workshops with designers and design students. I also applied critical reflection to existing practices in discovery research at the same occasions, often comparing them to design documentaries.

Data collection

I use secondary and primary data in my research.

My secondary data consists of the materials I have gathered about design and documentary film, and the other disciplines mentioned above. This includes academic and popular literature, some grey literature from magazines and the internet, documentary films and art. I have investigated literature and films from the discipline of documentary film in a discursive way, to pull ideas and techniques which could be beneficial to discovery research from them. I consequently use these as data in my further investigations.

My primary data is in the first place the films I made, and secondly my observations of how these films were used in design processes, the evaluations of the films I did with design researchers, filmmakers and design teams, and the responses I got from other designers and design students at lectures and workshops. Appendix A gives an overview of all the films I made during this research, most of which are included on dvd.

Modes of analysis

The three methods I use to gather, analyse and interpret my qualitative data use several modes of analysis. I interpret texts and documentary films using hermeneutics and critical reflection. For reviewing the documentary films I used in addition content analysis, semiotics and mise-en-scene analysis. To reflect on my practical work I used phenomenology and thinking-through-making.¹⁵ Filmmaking was an essential part of the modes of analysis. Making my films did not happen separately from my thinking. Creating my own data (the films) was a way of thinking about design documentaries. I imagined how films would look like and partly documented this in scripts, but the final result was always different without having always taken conscious decisions about what to change in the scripts or how to make the films. The making inspired the thinking and vice versa in an iterative process repeated several times in each separate case-study¹⁶. As a result, part of the knowledge that is created resides in the films. As such, the films are not only data, they are partly analysis and knowledge too and offer a critique on the existing practices of using video in discovery research by themselves.

Personal background and motivation

Finally in this introduction, it seems appropriate to provide a few words about the personal background I brought to this investigation. After all, doing interpretive research always involves part of yourself to become part of the research. As a result, the reader can rightfully ask who is behind this text. I have included a short biography and additional motivation in appendix B. It will hopefully also offer additional clarification as to why I did this research the way I did it.

¹⁵ Although they do not use the term, it describes well what Seago and Dunne (1997) discuss.

¹⁶ Designers Jack Schulze and Matt Webb say about their practice of thinking-through-making: "Sometimes our best thinking can be done with our hands, through a process of making, and through considering the object when done. The physical object tends to differ from the imagined one, and that difference challenges us to understand and develop it." (Schulze and Webb, 2005) This reflects well what I mean by thinking-through-making, although I would add my eyes and ears to my hands.

1 Using video to discover what matters to people

Video has become a popular media to use for discovery research in design. From using a video camera on the street to observe people's behaviour, to recording interviews with people, and mounting cameras in people's homes, video seems to be an uncomplicated way to capture everyday life. Nevertheless many researchers have had trouble using video. Despite the digitisation of video that makes working with it easier, the steps that follow after the shooting (transcription, selection, interpretation, analysis, editing, presentation) are often experienced as cumbersome. Looking at documentary film practices will not mitigate these difficulties, but they may make the work of dealing with film more effective.

In this chapter I will look at how researchers work and have worked with video to discover what matters to people in discovery research, the uses they have found for video and the problems they have run into. I will look at using video to observe participants, to cooperate with participants, to record performances of researchers, and to communicate research to multidisciplinary design teams.

Observation: Making notes on video

Video has become a companion of the traditional notepad and pencil in ethnographically inspired research on location. Researchers use video for instance as a backup for their observations (Blomberg et al., 1993, p. 133), to use later when their notes are not entirely clear or there is disagreement in the research team on the observations recorded in personal notebooks. These notebooks are often still used next to the video registration, but their disadvantage is that they are truly personal; mostly others can not make sense of the notes. Video registrations on the other hand can be accessed and understood to at least a certain level by others even if they were not present (ibid., 1993, p. 138). A typical quality of video registrations is that often elusive details are captured (Brun-Cottan and Wall, 1995, p. 68), parts of activities that were not noted in the field because they happened too quickly or because the researcher was not looking at the participant but in her or his notebook for instance. Of course, equally easily details can be missed because they happened before the camera could be pointed at them.

Video can be played in slow-motion or paused, to examine the activity very precisely, perhaps as a result of new information that became available only after the observation itself (ibid., 1995).

Because video registrations contain so much detail, they allow the researcher to capture the complexity of people's activities much better than observation and making notes on paper can (Blomberg et al., 1993, p. 137). Ethnographers often try to avoid imposing their own categories and labels on the activities of the people they observe. Video registrations support this approach because situations and activities are recorded 'as is,' they don't need to be translated into words or diagrams in a notebook. Through video, participants can speak in their own terms and use their own categorisations (Brun-Cottan and Wall, 1995, p. 63). These uses all celebrate the realistic qualities of video.

Collecting data with observation cameras

The most extreme celebration of the realistic qualities of video is perhaps the mounting of fixed cameras in someone's house to do unobtrusive observing without the researcher being present (Blomberg et al., 1993, p. 138). The unobtrusiveness is crucial if the recordings are to be seen as evidence that is collected and analysed with a scientific approach in mind. Also the data should be complete, since they are the only material the analyst works with; there are no observations made on location by the researchers themselves. Used like this the video registration becomes similar to the log book of a laboratory scientist (Buur et al., 2000, p. 340) who has to depend on his/her notes of the experiments during the analysis that follows later. To approach a situation one observes in such a scientific way can work if the activity one studies is very limited and well defined. If not, the amount of video data that is recorded can easily get out of hand, as for instance Crabtree and Rodden found when they mounted cameras to observe activities in the home:

We began our research with a large corpus of video data (some 6000 hours in total). Apart from the resources required to analyze this material (some 27 years, which puts such a task outside the constraints of design), the primary problem with such data is its partial character. The video was collected from cameras mounted in fixed locations, with the result that although a rich picture of life in the home is produced it is nonetheless incomplete as the fine, close-up details of peoples interactions are missed; as people move in and out of view; and as activities have a temporal order that extends beyond the recording cycle. (Crabtree and Rodden, 2002, p. 3)

This shows that the idea that video captures everything can turn easily into an illusion. On the one hand, the video data is not complete if nothing else. Participation in a situation allows researchers to experience what happens with all five senses. But video does not record smell, taste and touch, and seeing and hearing in the field works differently than watching a video where image and sound are focused on certain aspects of the situation and cannot be redirected anymore (Blomberg et al., 1993, p. 133, Gaver, 1992). On the other hand, an incomplete record can already be far too large to watch even once, let alone work on for longer than its running time. A complete recording that is manageable seems to be out of the question in this type of data-collection. To support the managing many automated analysis systems have been developed over the years, but they have not removed the problem that video is often considered too detailed and cumbersome to work with (Mackay et al., 2000, p. 72). Nevertheless, video registrations can be

useful. Crabtree et al found their 6000 hours of video data valuable when they applied a pattern-based approach to it (Crabtree et al., 2002). And video data is for instance also very useful in conversation analysis (see page 17).

But even if more flexible recording methods are chosen, such as following people for a day with a video camera or interviewing them, problems arise. Not all situations and activities are equally easy to record. In very noisy environments it might be hard to hear what people say to each other, depending on the microphones used. In very confined spaces it might not be possible to even be present as a researcher with a camera. Or participants might be doing something with their back turned to you in a space where you cannot move around freely (Blomberg et al, 1993, p. 139). Making video registrations can be difficult and requires filming skills that researchers need to develop over time. Experienced ethnographers develop techniques to make good recordings under difficult circumstances. For instance, following people on the street to record how they use their mobile phones taught people at Nokia some tricks including recording with a camera that appears not to be in use, using night-vision cameras in dark situations like a night club, and using wide-angled lenses (Blom et al., 2005, p. 38).

Of course, following people with video cameras also raises numerous ethical issues. Wendy MacKay (1995) lists several of them and argues that HCI cannot simply copy ethical guidelines from other disciplines but has to develop its own. I will return to the issue of ethics later, when I discuss my own practices (see page 144).

Making sense of video registrations

After situations and people have been recorded on video in the field, these recordings mostly need to be worked on before they can be communicated to others. Researchers need to go through the material, make selections, review, interpret or analyse parts, look at the material from different perspectives and develop insights. The interpretation of video is however not a straightforward process. Lucy Suchman found interpretation difficulties with using video in ethnographical studies of the workplace. To make the understanding that ethnographers normally achieve through their work visible on video is perhaps expecting too much:

Even the most seemingly unmediated, veridical representational forms like video recordings do not wear their meanings on their sleeves to be read definitely once and for all. Rather, the significance of the recordings is contingent upon their reading in the context of particular moments of interpretation, informed by particular interest. (L. Suchman, 1995, p. 58)

What Suchman talks about is subjectivity, guided by the perspective you take and the interests you may have as a researcher and designer. Brun-Cottan (1995, p. 66) gives a good example of this. When viewing a video recording of the operation of a copying machine system by expert users with the software engineers and ethnographers in the project, two very different interpretations were made. The video shows a worker who is scanning a stack of pages and sees before printing the stack on the screen of the copier that one page is upside down. He decides to put the page right and rescan the complete document. However, the system also allows to correct

the error electronically, on screen. The software engineers interpreted the behaviour of the worker as not taking full advantage of the features of the system, whereas the ethnographers understood it as the most efficient way to deal with his workload. The solution of the worker takes more time from the machine because the whole stack needs to be scanned again, but he can do other things while that is happening. Using the software tool to reposition one page in the scanned document would require more time and attention from the worker. The video recording allowed for two very different interpretations, because different, subjective, perspectives were taken: the software engineers took the features of the machine as their perspective, and the ethnographers took the situation of the worker as their perspective.

Jacob Buur has come to consider ambiguity and open-endedness of interpretation inherent to video. Through working with video, he changed his opinion on the nature of the medium:

Video is a fascinating representational media. At first it seems so much richer and more accurate in its account of events, than notes, drawings and diagrams. But working extensively with recording and editing of video materials reveals an ambiguity and open-endedness of interpretation that makes it surprisingly dependent on the participation of actors, recorders, editors and viewers. (Buur et al., 2000, p. 340)

A similar change of opinion is almost forced upon many researchers who work with video when the time comes to make sense of the recordings in some way. Then it becomes clear that many interpretations are possible and the situations that have been recorded can be represented in several ways. How to make a choice? And even more difficult is the justification of the choice. A relatively simple way of dealing with the multitude of possibilities is to select no more than a few clips from the notes and use them as illustrations in a presentation to the design team and possibly other stakeholders like management and clients. In business this is common practice; business-oriented stakeholders in a design project want “five bullets and a supporting video” (Wakeford, 2004, p. 33). In this context, the interpretation of the clips and the understanding they give is often firmly guided by the story the researcher tells; the bullet points tell what to read into the video clip. The clips themselves are fragments, they cannot really exist on their own, they illustrate research conclusions that are expressed in words.

One method that justifies the choice to analyse only certain moments of many hours of raw video footage is critical incident analysis (Flanagan, 1954). A critical incident is an event occurring during a task performance, that relates to the subject of the research. It is for instance used in usability studies, to determine which moments of the hours of video registration are worthwhile to analyse (Hartson and Castillo, 1998). It is less often used in discovery research, but for instance Eric Paulos and Tom Jenkins (2005) use a simple form of critical incident technique to select situations in an observational video of people putting something in or taking something out of a public trash can. MacKay (2002, 1999) uses the technique also in discovery research, in combination with video, for instance when interviewing people about their use of sticky notes. But here the problem of too much video footage is less pertinent because the researcher is guiding

the situation (see page 18ff. for a further discussion of this type of methods and page 19 for a further discussion of MacKay's work with video). The critical incident technique often aims specifically at finding problems people have for which then solutions can be designed. Once the critical incidents have been found, they are analysed in detail with the video as the main reference, sometimes using additional information from observation in the field as recorded in notebooks. The video fragments here are a means to arrive at an analysis. They might serve as illustrations of the findings, to prove their validity, but they do not add up to a film, nor can they express the findings of the researchers on their own, without verbal or written guidance.

Conversation analysis does not make a very limited selection of the video registrations before analysis. Rather it looks at large amounts of video "to examine social interaction to reveal organized practices or patterns of actions, under the fundamental assumption that interaction is structurally organized" (Woodruff et al., 2002, p. 257). Conversations people have are an important focus, but also gestures, and the use of objects are analysed. The idea is to analyse without a pre-conceived model in mind and to generalise from within the material, "to reveal a practice's generalizable orderliness" (ibid., 2002). This can turn into a very time-consuming effort if you don't know what you're looking for, but experienced conversation analysts can be selective by choosing only certain paths to explore (ibid., 2002, p. 261). It is also argued however that more fundamental (and more labour intensive) research into interactions between people and technology is very useful because they allow us to "demonstrate the relevance of environment to actual courses of action" (Heath and Hindmarsh, 2002, p. 118). Video registrations provide "unprecedented access" (ibid., 2002) to the situations conversation analysts are studying, by providing a record that can be played over and over again, allowing in-depth analysis and discussion between analysts. But it remains crucial, conversation analysts stress, to have been present yourself as a researcher in the recorded situations too, to become familiar with these situations (ibid., 2002, p. 107). The video registrations are a very useful tool to capture detailed data for analysis, they offer evidence, but they do not convey the situations fully enough to researchers to understand them without having been there.

All the methods using video registrations discussed here see the medium as a tool, comparable to a notebook and pencil. Sometimes it works better than being in the field with your notepad, and sometimes it doesn't. As we have seen, researchers can run into problems during recording, but also later during reviewing, selecting, analysing and interpreting. But the detailed record that video provides, and the possibility to view it over and over again, even at different speeds, provides a very rich source of material for researchers. None of the methods discussed here however makes use of the filmic qualities that video offers, rather they see the medium as CCTV, as a camera that is always on and must preferably be forgotten by the people that are being filmed so they will continue doing what they do as they always do it. A very different approach has

been explored and used too, by researchers who ask people to participate in the research they do and, more importantly, in the video recording itself.

Co-operation: Creating video with participants

In the previous section, people were observed through video. They generally gave consent to be observed, but they did not respond to specific requests of researchers. They were asked to do what they always do. In this section I will look at uses of video in discovery research where the researcher sets up situations, for instance an interview, to explore a certain subject together with the participant.

Using video in participatory design

As an alternative to recording as much as possible, researchers involve their participants in the recording by letting them partly decide what is being filmed. For instance, researchers ask their participants to give a guided tour of their home, or a normal workday (Buur et al., 2000, Mainwaring et al., 2004). During such a tour, the participant decides where to go next and the researcher follows with his or her camera. It is not unusual to ask a participant to repeat certain actions if they were not understood by the researcher or captured on video at first. Also if the researcher is particularly interested in certain aspects, s/he does not hesitate to ask questions (Buur et al., 2000, p. 341). This results in a continuous dialogue between the researcher and the participant about what is happening and why and transforms the research in a collaborative activity of researcher and participant. In design, when doing research there is often some awareness of a purpose or interest present when doing observations in the field. This guides the interventions the researcher makes during guided tours, and challenges participants to look at their own situations from a different perspective (Wenger in Binder, 1996). For Buur et al (2000, p. 343) the tension between what the participants want to tell and what the researchers want to record is crucial to the collaboration between them. The participants are seen as co-authors of the video and this invites arguments over what to record. These arguments are fruitful Buur argues, because they serve as a motor that drives the collaboration forward, it creates a conversation that continues throughout the research¹⁷.

Buur and his team use the video material from these guided tours to edit a portrait of the participant, concentrating on the ordinariness of the everyday of the participant and the chronology of the tour (ibid., 2000, p. 341). While editing, it is important though to see the video recordings not as data, but as the material to “create stories that frame the design problem and impose order on the complexity of everyday life” (ibid., 2000, p. 340). With designers doing research there is a real opportunity to do so because the skills of designers generally include

¹⁷ I found a similar effect in my own practice, not through arguments, but through collaboration (see page 120ff).

telling stories with visual means. The collaboration between designer and participant continues if the video portraits are shown to the participants and they can change and add parts of them if they think the portrait does not reflect their stories about what they normally do. These portraits function as the first design representations, setting the stage for the design work (ibid., 2000, p. 341).

The fact that these representations are audiovisual and not expressed in words or diagrams is crucial for the designers because they can “develop a foothold of insight in the new environment without losing direct reference to what [they] have seen and heard” (ibid., 2000, p. 342). This is a direct consequence of leaving the idea of video registrations as hard data that needs to be analysed in some way or another and moving towards video as a material to design with, like clay, with its own typical qualities:

Video is as McLuhan has pointed out a highly participatory media, where participation and emphatic engagement has to be invested to make sense of the material (McLuhan, 1964). This participation is much unlike what is involved in translating written or diagrammatic representations formatted by a long and delicate process of professionalisation (Latour, 1990), and it calls for ways of manipulating the material that can handle the ‘flow’ of real life interactions without detours of putting it ‘on print’. (Buur et al., 2000, p. 340-341)

Buur exploits these qualities by setting up collaborations between designers and participants at most stages of the research through video. He analyses video clips together with the participants with his Video Card Game technique (Buur and Soendergaard, 2000), and he co-authors speculative video scenarios with his participants to invite “more free-floating improvisations of ‘what could be’ in the everyday setting of our collaborators” (Buur et al., 2000, p. 343). In these scenarios he prefers the term ‘protagonists’ for his participants (ibid, p. 347), explicitly referring to Anthony Dunne’s use of the term for his speculative explorations with people, using video (Dunne, 1999).

The term protagonist stresses the fictional, speculative element in the video. Nevertheless, the video that results from Buur’s work are foremost straightforward registrations. He does not talk about the possibilities that film language offers to express ideas. Instead he focuses on the accuracy of the representations of situations in the films, from video portraits to speculative video scenarios, using registration as the style to communicate. In this sense the approach is not different from what was discussed in the previous section about video registrations. The difference lies in Buur’s participatory approach.

MacKay mentions similar uses of video in her papers (Mackay and Fayard, 1999, Mackay et al., 2000) and DVD tutorial (Mackay, 2002) on video artefacts. Like Buur, she gives examples from work situations only. The methods they use seem to work best with some kind of procedures as the situations that are being researched. MacKay starts with the observation of work situations, often in a conversational way using interviews; then a ‘video brainstorm’ is organised by the design team without the presence of the interviewees, where ideas are re-enacted and recorded on video to create ‘video prototypes.’ Finally, when software prototypes are introduced,

video is used for evaluation in situ. Like Buur, MacKay uses video in a very straight forward way, as a media for registering events, to review and use the video artefacts she creates immediately, in a workshop for instance, or at a later stage in the design process.

Asking people to record their own experiences

Another way of asking people to participate is to let them film their own experiences. Some researchers just leave the camera with the participants for a while in between visits, and let their participants decide what to record and what not. That can for instance result in participants leaving messages on tape for researchers or particular people in the design team about concerns or things they would like to be able to do with new software the team is developing for the participants (Brun-Cottan and Wall, 1995, p. 68). A more structured way of asking people to record their own experiences is asking them to keep a video-diary about specific activities or the use of specific services or products. This can be very informative, but it is often more than that because diaries typically focus on personal experiences and consequently result in rather personal storytelling. Cultural probes (Gaver et al., 1999) fit in this category too, with their emphasis on people's personal experience and self-recording. Even though they are not particularly focused on video – photography is used much more in this method – it would be possible to ask people to record video messages using this approach¹⁸. In general the focus on visual material and personal stories is informative and inspirational for designers, because they “provide rich texture about other people's physical and mental worlds, making it much easier to appreciate what matters to them than through words alone” (Fulton Suri, 2003, p. 43).

Asking people to capture their own experiences on video will result in personal videos, but they present their own perspective and not a perspective that someone else imposed. This personal perspective is exactly what the researchers who choose the method are looking for. At the same time it is a truism in social science and psychology that people are not accurate reporters of their own actions. This however does not need to be a problem if the research focuses more on feelings and thoughts than actions. Because feelings and thoughts are largely inaccessible to observation methods since they remain mostly invisible, alternative methods are required and self-reporting is a valuable possibility next to for instance interviewing. The often intimate stories participants record on video-diaries are however performed, but that does not disqualify them as truthful records of people's lives because performance is part of everyday life, as I will argue on page 46ff. The goal of this method is above all to provide personal perspectives and reflections that are unique and valuable in design processes, and video can be a good medium to record these stories, especially now that many people have video cameras at home and are familiar with how they work, both on a technical level and as instruments to tell a story.

¹⁸ The result would probably differ from what video-diaries are, depending on the assignment set by the designer. See page 187 for a more elaborate discussion of cultural probes.

Using video to register co-operations between researchers, designers and participants gives less problems with enormous amounts of video than mounting cameras in people's homes because the researchers are negotiating with the participants what is relevant to record or select from the recordings. The participants become co-authors of the videos (or even full authors if they make video-diaries) and of the research itself. The tension that comes with the co-operation is fruitful because it stimulates discussion and engagement between researchers, designers and participants. Cutting the video into small elements, video cards or artefacts, turn it into a sort of clay, a material that can be easily manipulated to design for instance scenarios. These methods do not analyse video and they do not see video as 'hard data,' contrary to the approach of researchers in the first section of this chapter. Instead they use video to explore possibilities for design, by themselves and the protagonists of their video clips. Nevertheless, they use video in a straightforward way, to register situations, paying little attention to film language for instance. Arguably, albeit perhaps unconsciously, video-diaries are using even more film language than the registrations of co-operations between researchers, designers and participants. Video-diaries are a genre in itself, and through its popularity on (reality) television, most people know intuitively which film language to use to create an intimate ego-document on video.

Role-play: Recording performances of researchers

Researchers sometimes also try things out themselves, in an effort to experience what the people they design for experience for instance. Or to provoke situations that might offer valuable insights to the design process. Both approaches are called participant research, to emphasise that the researcher participates in the research on the same level as the participants.

Taking the perspective of the people you design for

To understand the experiences of people you design for, it can sometimes help to step into their shoes and capture that experience on video so it can be communicated to and discussed with others. For instance, a researcher can take a patient's perspective in a hospital to record a confusing and disorienting journey with lots of blank ceilings and people in white coats who are hard to keep apart from your position on the bed (Fulton Suri, 2003) (see Figure 2). The result is a first person film that puts the emphasis on registering what the researcher sees and hears, to use that as a starting point for design.

At IDEO (where Fulton Suri works) people in a design team sometimes make video-diaries about experiences they have had that are relevant to the project at hand, as a way of starting up a conversation in the team about different perspectives on certain issues and as a way to develop respect for the different perspectives that exist inside the team (ibid., 2003). To discover what matters to those they design for, people at IDEO also are prepared to, for instance, put on heavy gloves, wear clouded glasses and bandage their legs to experience first hand how older people

with limited mobility and dexterity have to use a car (Pink, 2003, p. 104). This form of first person experience is much less about sound and vision, and much more about touch, showing that video is not suited to capture all experiences equally well. We experience in principle through all five senses whilst video can only capture image and sound, and even so it does this in a way that differs from how we see and hear.¹⁹



Figure 2 Researcher from IDEO taking the perspective of a patient in hospital (From Fulton Suri, 2003, p. 43)

Researchers appearing in their own videos

Researchers sometimes appear in their own videos, in front of the camera. They ask someone else to register what is happening while they interact with the people they want to learn from for their research. Interviews that show the researcher and registrations that include the questions s/he asks are a simple example of this approach, but many go beyond this. The research can take the form of setting up experiments with people and participating in these experiments as a researcher. An example of such an approach is the joint exploration and exploitation of the excitement of playgrounds including some simple new designed interventions (Heaton, 2004), leading to the inclusion of local children who use the playground as co-designers of new equipment (see page 173). Another example is a wifi and information exchange service set up by a designer at the front door of her house to explore neighbourhood relations and how they might grow through interventions such as providing a free service on the street (Jain, 2005) (see Figure 3).

¹⁹ This approach is building on a long tradition across many disciplines called participant research, in which hanging out with the people you are researching, or perhaps even disguising yourself as one of them to see how others react to you, is an often used technique. I discuss this approach more extensively in Chapter Eight, see page 170ff.

The two examples fit in a longer tradition of using theatre techniques in discovery research, such as ‘be your customer’ (IDEO, 2003), ‘bodystorming’ (ibid.) and ‘informance’ or ‘performance ethnography’ (Burns et al., 1994, Dishman, 2003, Laurel, 2003, MacDaniel Johnson, 2003)²⁰. Many of them use video to register what has been played and look at it again immediately afterwards, to support the discussion about what happened, or the video is used to communicate the most important discoveries to others later on in the design process, but almost always the function of video is little more than registering what happened.



Figure 3 *Yellow chair stories, a film by and with Anab Jain.*

These examples of role-play are focusing more on the experiments itself than on their filming. The registrations tell little stories because the filmed events are narrative by themselves, but they focus on capturing the experiences of the designer and the participants that are provoked by the experiments. In these approaches the researcher steps into the shoes of the people s/he is researching, perhaps aided by dressing up in a particular way in an effort to approach the experiences of her or his target group. Alternatively, s/he intervenes with ideas and/or objects (such as add-ons to a playground or yellow chair with a free wifi service), and uses them to start up a dialogue with the people s/he is designing for. In these situations, video is used to record what the researcher experiences, but also to show how people react to her or his presence, interventions and ideas. Similar to the use of video for observation and co-operation, role-play typically uses video to register an experience rather than to create an elaborate narrative through video, or to use film language extensively to explore situations and communicate insights.

²⁰ The value of theatre techniques for discovery research in general is beyond the scope of this chapter on uses of video, but will be discussed in Chapter Eight, see page 201ff.

Communication: Sharing experiences with a team

As illustrated throughout this chapter, video is used quite extensively in discovery research, across a range of practices and approaches. The three different types of research discussed above – observation, co-operation and role-play – all use straightforward registrations of the research activities on video. An important motivation for this use of video is the need to communicate results of the research from the people who actually do the research to a wider, multi-disciplinary team. Recently it has become clear that a problem still exists with communicating the results of such research (Bell, 2005). During a tour organised by the UK Department of Trade and Industry to learn about people centred research in technology companies on the West-Coast in the United States, a group of British researchers from industry and academia found that:

The impact of research is lost or won by the way that it is communicated. This might seem obvious; however, under commercial pressure of deadlines, researchers have to adapt their communication channels to suit. For example, if the time required to absorb the research is cut, this may leave very little time to get the main points of the research across to the design team; or when the output of research is aimed at both designers, who want context, but don't want to read it in a PowerPoint or a spreadsheet, and business, who want five bullets and a supporting video – these clashes of agendas and communications requirements are everyday challenges for researchers to balance. (N. e. Wakeford, 2004, p. 35)

Several researchers have turned to video to address these issues because video serves well to communicate people's (customers') everyday life to companies, from design studios to the board room: "corporate reality TV enables highly paid executives to cross the class divide and get a glimpse into the lives of regular people" (Silverman, 2005). To address these issues and opportunities, researchers have developed methods to communicate with video beyond just showing a few clips.

Co-viewing (Brun-Cottan and Wall, 1995) is a method that brings together even more people than just those who are involved in the design process. People involved in marketing, sales, installation and support can also be involved. Together, they view selected video material from the field, about the situations and people that the product or service is aimed at, and each discipline brings its own perspective to bear on that material. As a result:

Implications of certain features not apparent to the work practice team may be detected by others, and a greater variety of alternative suggestions for remedies or future enhancements may be generated. Though not all suggestions lead to mutually agreed-upon courses of action, they promote energetic and informative exchanges. They can, moreover, lead to valuable and time-saving early identification of possible sources of misunderstandings among people responsible for various aspects of a product's development. (Brun-Cottan and Wall, 1995, p. 66)

This of course is an advantage of communicating between team members from different disciplines in general, but what is crucial about the video material is that it provides a shared reference point for the disciplines that is hard to contest because it concerns the people who will use the result of the project. This does however not mean that such video material solves every

possible conflict. As we have seen above, video does not wear its meaning on its sleeve and multiple interpretations are possible. But at least these interpretations and perspectives are brought to the surface for all team members to see and deal with if they consider that appropriate.

Conclusion

The different approaches to registering discovery research on video discussed here range from as neutral as possible, by not even being present when the recording is done, to being very personal, by putting your participants' opinions or those of yourself as a designer at the centre of the filmed material. Between these two extremes of video registration many other possibilities exist and are used. Although they are all registrations, video is used differently in each of these positions on the spectrum between neutral and personal. When video registrations are recorded as hard data, they are above all a record, whereas video-diaries use the medium more as a tool to tell a story. Other approaches such as guided tours and designers appearing in the film themselves give results that are often somewhere between pure record and story.

What this overview shows is that there is a fairly rich spectrum of research approaches that consider video a very useful tool in their research practices. Clearly, if it can serve this wide range of uses, video is a versatile tool. The richness of approaches is however not reflected in the use of video as a medium. The idea that video is a good tool for taking notes of whatever situation is observed, intervened or created in the research, prevails. The richness of the approaches that see video as a useful tool translates into a relatively meagre use of the medium itself in terms of its formal qualities, from the framing of an image to editing techniques.

This lack compounds the problems that arise when it is necessary to make sense of the material that has been recorded, and when the results of the research need to be communicated. If the video material is fairly 'shapeless' (a separate issue from the quality of the research) because the camera has been used to register only, it is much harder to make sense of it and communicate with it. Even though some solutions have been found, like systematic conversation analysis and the use of video as a design material in participatory design, it seems valuable to explore the use of video and film in documentary film to further enrich its use in discovery research. Thus the goal of this work is to explore how discovery research can benefit from ideas and techniques in relation to filming everyday life that have been developed in documentary film for over a hundred years, in both theories and practices.

The next three chapters explore this opportunity by investigating documentary film from the perspective of discovery research. Chapter Two looks at relevant ideas in documentary film theory. Chapter Three looks at possibly useful film techniques from documentary film practice. Chapter Four looks at how the ideas from theory and the techniques from practice work together by discussing two documentary films.

2 Documentary film theory

Documentary film is far from a homogenous and well-defined genre of film, even though as a category it seems to be much stricter now than it has been in the past. We have become less relaxed about the category documentary film and define it more narrowly than it used to be (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 5). Nevertheless many different terms are still in use, such as non-fiction film, film essay and *court métrage* (short film). All of these are part of what I call documentary film. I am interested in a broad view on documentary film because it is my aim to explore new ways of using video in discovery research. Imposing strict limitations from the start is not helpful if one wants to explore.

First, this chapter focuses on theoretical ideas in documentary film that could be relevant to discovery research. These ideas are often developed by filmmakers through filming, and discussed in writing later by theorists or critics. Several filmmakers have taken up both roles; they film and they write. They explore theoretical thinking while scripting, filming or editing, resulting in films that make contributions to film theory. This is similar to what designers call thinking-through-making, (see page 12) which results in a designed object, environment and/or service which contains and expresses a contribution to knowledge. *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*, 1961) by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin is a seminal example of the exploration of theoretical ideas in a film. Parts of it are discussed in this chapter, and it will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four.

The discussion of ideas in this chapter does not take a chronological, historic approach to documentary film. I do not want to present documentary film development as an evolutionary process or some kind of family-tree because the development of documentary film is more diverse and complex than that. For instance, technological, geographical, philosophical and political aspects in different combinations have played key roles in the development of documentaries and their theories as this chapter will show. The focus here is on the thinking (documented in writing or on film) that has helped to shape documentary film since the earliest days of cinema and still does. These thoughts are grouped under three main ideas that strongly contribute to what documentary film is: film is like reality; film is like a language; film is like a conversation. Within these groups, a largely chronological presentation of the development of ideas is maintained.

The overview of theoretical ideas in this chapter creates a foundation for the focus on documentary practice – how documentary filmmakers work and the techniques they use – in the following chapter. The relationships between theoretical ideas and practical techniques are manifold, and will become visible in both chapters, but they cannot be summarised in one system as gradually will become clear too.

Film is like reality

Film has a strong capacity to mimic reality. This strength of the medium has led to a range of theoretical ideas that all in some way take the resemblance between film and reality as their focus.

Providing evidence

The term documentary can be traced back to Boleslaw Matuszewski, a Pole who published a book in Paris in 1898, three years after the invention of film by the Lumière brothers, called *La Photographie animée, ce qu'elle est, ce qu'elle doit être* ('Animated photography, what it is, what it must be,' cited in Winston, 1995, p. 8). He saw film as an instructional medium, documenting history, daily life, artistic performances, and even medical procedures, with strong roots in photography. Brian Winston argues that Matuszewski's vision for documentary film in all these areas was providing evidence and being a witness (ibid., 1995, p. 10). Winston is particularly preoccupied with the notion of film as evidence and witnessing through film and focuses in his thinking on film's capacity to mimic reality. He refers to science where these qualities of the medium were immediately recognised. From the start, film was claimed as a scientific instrument for making more accurate observations, following the footsteps of photography. The capabilities of film to mimic reality were foregrounded at the expense of its limitations. In the early 21st century it might seem strange, but the small black and white photos of the mid 19th century were at the time seen as precise copies of reality. In science they replaced painting and drawing as the visual media to make records of observations (ibid., 1995, p. 129); the camera became a scientific instrument. Bruno Latour considers scientific instruments like a thermometer to be an inscription device (Latour, 1987, p. 71), like a needle on a paper roll creating a graph of for instance humidity over time. When we see an instrument in action, we are attending an "audiovisual spectacle" (ibid.); the instrument creates visual inscriptions and the scientist gives a verbal explanation. These two also form the content of scientific papers, the key medium for the documentation of knowledge in science. Winston suggests that the position of the viewer of a documentary is not unlike witnessing one of Latours scientific experiments:

Watching 'actuality' on the screen is like watching the needles dance on the physiograph: the apparatus becomes transparent; the documentary becomes scientific inscription - evidence. (Winston, 1995, p. 137)

Today, this vision still influences how audiences see documentaries and the connection to science is documentary's "most potent legitimation for its evidential pretensions," argues Winston (ibid., 1995). The documentary itself is a scientific inscription, it is the evidence that proves the reality it reproduces exists.

Winston's claims focus on providing evidence, drawing parallels to science, but do not touch on how evidence is used. Evidence is generally interpreted to serve a certain purpose, for instance a scientific paper or a police investigation, or an argument in a documentary film. Stella

Bruzzi's discussion of the many interpretations given to Abraham Zapruder's accidental 8-mm film of President Kennedy's assassination demonstrates that filmic records are vulnerable evidence. Her example underlines that the audiovisual documents on which documentary films are built are always "open to re-interpretation, appropriation or even manipulation without these processes necessarily obscuring or rendering irretrievable the document's original meaning, context or content" (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 12)²¹. Several interpretations of the same evidence can exist next to each other without one subsuming the others, as happened with Zapruder's recording. Filmed documents are evidence, but they leave room for multiple interpretations. They are not a full record of the situations they show: "The document, though real, is incomplete." (ibid., 2000, p. 21). This view has several implications which go beyond the scope of this section. They are discussed in the sections on language (see page 36ff.) and conversation (see page 42ff.). But however the views on the nature of the evidence that documentary film gives may have changed and diversified over more than a century of film history, the idea that film is a document providing evidence has persisted since Matuszewski first mentioned the documenting qualities of film in 1898, shortly after the first film projections of the Lumière brothers.

Reducing noise

In 1895 in Paris, the projections of the Lumière brothers were what we would call today very grainy black and white images. Nevertheless people were amazed by the realism. Reports that they fled the cinema when they saw *Arrivée d'un train en gare à La Ciotat* (*Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, 1895) because they thought the train was entering the cinema seem to be untrue according to recent research (Loiperdinger, 2004), but they were perplexed by the accuracy of the movement of for instance the leaves on the trees. The limitations of these early films were pushed to the background by their accomplishments. This has remained the same until the present day. The introduction of synchronous sound (late 1920s), full colour (early 1940s) and the continuous improvement of the quality of sound and image ever since raised the realistic quality of the medium. Paradoxically, one could even argue that the introduction of realistic digital effects in the late 1990s, in for instance *Jurassic Park* (1993), raised people's expectations of how realistic film could be. The computer animated dinosaurs *look* very real, which does not necessarily say much about how real they *are* (see Figure 4).

The point here is that film can create very realistic images, and through technical improvements the realism gets better all the time. The basic idea in this argument is at the core of information theory: when a certain amount of data is sent, there is always some noise that comes with it, but the purpose is to reduce the noise as much as possible and technology is the solution to this.

²¹ Bruzzi argues that this is not a weakness that documentary films try to hide; to the contrary, it is a characteristic that has always been implicitly acknowledged. The fundamental issue is how documentary films invite us as viewers to access the evidence (the recordings) through our own interpretations.



*Figure 4 Reducing noise from Repas de bébé (1895) to Jurassic Park (1993)
The first film images of the Lumières looked amazingly realistic in the 19th century, but look very noisy today. The dinosaurs generated by a computer look very real, but they are not real.*

Catching life unawares

Documentary film has benefited from the reductions of noise in image and sound, but the claim on realism of the genre depends on more than technical achievements alone. Another pillar is formed by the idea that through film life can be ‘caught unawares’ as Dziga Vertov and his collaborators (which he called ‘kinoks’) formulated it in their *Kino Pravda* (“Truth Cinema”) manifestos in the late 1920s. The kinoks went as far as hiding the camera, for instance in a fake phone booth with the operator disguised as a telephone repairman. The idea that filmmaking must not influence or interfere with the situation it films comes again from science, where the instruments that measure the phenomena that are observed should not change these phenomena. The idea has remained influential in documentary film ever since. The kinoks were forced into their inflexible set up because of the size of the equipment, but also on this level the development of technology has helped. In the late 1950s the invention of portable synch sound film equipment allowed crews to go out on the streets and shoot from the shoulder while following people. A tripod was no longer needed and situations could be recorded as they developed.

In documentary film this led to the rise of direct cinema, mainly in the United States but also in the United Kingdom (under the banner of “Free Cinema”) and later elsewhere in the world.

The belief of its most active evangelists, for instance Robert Drew and Richard Leacock, was that thanks to the new portable equipment one could now film everyday life as it happens without interfering and changing situations. “To convey the feeling of being there” (Leacock cited in Winston, 1995, p. 149) became the main goal of filmmakers of Leacock's generation. For this reason the approach has become known as ‘fly-on-the-wall’ documentary. According to Winston, “the new equipment did not just bolster and protect documentary's truth claim; it enhanced and magnified it” (ibid., p. 145).

Direct cinema has always remained very strong in the English-speaking world, but it has changed too, towards more journalistic approaches where adding commentary and information in for instance titles and graphs have become acceptable practice in a style called *vérité* (ibid., p. 211), which is a confusing reference to *cinéma vérité*, the French counterpart of direct cinema, discussed below. The direct cinema approach comes close to journalism in that it creates reports on everyday life, not as news but more as the ‘feature’ articles in the weekend papers. The neutrality and objectivity that journalism aims for is often sought by direct cinema and *vérité* filmmakers too.

Being a witness

Further support for documentary's claim to realism comes from the idea of witnessing. It relates to the evidential power of film but focuses more on the experience of the audience watching the film than the film itself as a document. The idea of being a ‘witness’ is rooted in science as we have seen above, but also in law and journalism. Technological developments like the introduction of amateur 8mm film-cameras (1930s), camcorders (1980s) and videophones (2000s) have also contributed to our belief that life can be caught on film as it is lived, without changing it and that it can be witnessed by audiences around the world. The aforementioned Zapruder film clip (1963) for instance allows us to witness President Kennedy's assassination, thanks to an amateur who was there. The amateur camcorder shot of the beating of Rodney King (1991) in the United States allowed television audiences around the world to witness the brutality of the Los Angeles police (Nichols, 1994). Also the short video clips taken with mobile phones that nowadays appear in the news and online immediately after big news events, for instance disasters and terrorist attacks, suggests to audiences they are witnesses of these events.



Figure 5 Amateur images of different decades and different technologies. These images all suggest that the viewer witnesses the events through the films. From left to right: The Zapruder film (1963), the Rodney King clip (1991) and camera phone footage of the 7/7/2005 terrorist attacks in London.

The witness perspective in these examples from law and journalism sits comfortably in a scientific approach where the observation itself does not influence the situation significantly. The presence of the camera is downplayed and the experience of being there via transparent equipment of a neutral observer who does not participate is foregrounded. The less the situation is influenced, the more realistic the recording is thought to be. This is not a technology driven approach; rather, technology is used again and again to support the idea of witnessing. History shows that very different technologies in terms of image and sound quality and equipment sizes are capable of suggesting that life can be witnessed through film, captured as it is lived, from camera phones to IMAX cinema. Both blurry, shaking pictures of camera phones and the extreme sharpness of the best cinematographic cameras can provoke a strong feeling of witnessing an event, of actually being there and judging for yourself.

The feeling of being a witness is shared by many people when they see these films, and for that reason they have news value and are shown around the world. This does however not mean that everyone agrees about *what* they witness. As Bruzzi (2000) argued with the Zapruder film as an example, an accidental recording of a witness can be interpreted in many ways; its meaning can even be manipulated. The court case against four LAPD police officers accused of racial violence that was built on George Holliday's video clip of Rodney King's beating demonstrates this too. The four officers involved were indicted, but acquitted by the jury after the defence showed a slow-motion version of the video, suggesting it would help to look at the footage in detail, and argued that the video did not show who started the violence. Many others did nevertheless see concluding evidence of the brutality in the video clip and made their own judgements, leading to massive rioting causing the death of dozens on the streets of Los Angeles. Nichols concludes about witness footage that "to re-represent an event is clearly *not* to explain it" (1994, p. 121, original italics). The amateur film clips allow audiences to witness events, but they allow us also to disagree about what we see.

This may suggest that documentary film evidence is not capable of being objective. Selection, for instance where the camera is pointed, the framing of the image and when the shot starts and stops, renders the evidence incomplete. Since someone has chosen what to include in a documentary film and what not, it is unavoidably subjective. Noël Carroll (1996) argues this argument does not hold. Returning to the parallel between documentary film and science with regards to creating evidence, selection is not considered to render objectivity impossible in science, nor in history or journalism for that matter. Selectivity in itself does not guarantee bias and it is not incompatible with objectivity. The films of Zapruder and Holliday might not have been complete, but that does not mean they were not documenting reality objectively.

Telling stories

Even though early non-fiction film had strong roots in science, in many films the dramatisation of real life events was common. At the time, dramatisation and documentary were not considered as

incompatible as they are perhaps today. This was reflected in what is generally seen as the first definition of documentary film (following earlier more loose descriptions by for instance Matuszewski) by John Grierson, filmmaker, film critic and founder of the British documentary film movement. He defined documentary film as “the creative treatment of actuality” (Grierson, 1932, p. 8). ‘Treatment’ here refers to dramatisation, showing the wish to tell a story. Grierson saw dramatisation as an approach to communicating the truth, following American ideas of seeing the news and journalism as stories instead of reports. He recalled his visit to Chicago in 1924 as a source of inspiration for the birth of his theory of documentary film in the early 1930s:

What fascinated me as a European was the way the Hearst press and its imitators on every level of journalism had turned into a ‘*story*’ what we in Europe called a ‘*report*’. They had in fact made the *story* - that is to say a dramatic form - the basis of their means of communication. This seemed to me a highly logical way of approaching the problem of mass communication. What was most significant was that the story line was a peculiarly American story line. ... The active verb had become a hallmark of every worthwhile story. Something had to *do* something to something else. *Someone* had to do something to someone else. ... All I did in my theory of documentary film was to transfer that concept to film making, and declare that in the actual world of our observation there was always a dramatic form to be found. (Beveridge, 1978, p. 28-29)

Winston goes on to demonstrate that also ethnography (Atkinson cited in Winston, 1995, p. 118) and even scientific papers (Latour cited in Winston, 1995, p. 118) have a narrative. If narrative is in everything it cannot subvert truth claims of documentary films, concludes Winston, “*because it is not limited to fiction*” (1995, p. 118, original italics).

With his definition of documentary, Grierson had merely described existing practice in documentary film at the time. He saw Robert Flaherty’s *Nanook of the North* (1922), about the everyday life of the Inuit, as a key example of this new genre of dramatised realism. Flaherty’s film was completely dramatised. He had written a script in New York after the film material of his first visit to the Arctic was lost in a fire, and returned to record Nanook and his family for the second time. The Inuit had to act for several reasons: Flaherty wanted to show the everyday life they had decades ago (without guns for instance), he wanted the film to have a story (hence the script), and he sometimes had to build sets (like an igloo cut in half, to have enough light for filming (Nichols, 2001, p. 85), see Figure 6).

In the late 1940s, Grierson’s documentaries were more and more dependent on the studio for reconstruction of events and became hard to defend against criticism because they were too detached from everyday life. The people generally still re-enacted their own contemporary lives, but in completely artificial stage sets like a train wagon in which hanging objects were swayed by set assistants and with the protagonists swaying themselves too, to suggest it was moving through the night. Grierson’s film theory had led to films that were far removed from reality. Even worse, they depicted an idealised, sanitised version of reality. Reality was accepted as it was, and as a consequence the films run away from social meaning, argues Winston (1995, p. 38).



Figure 6 Stage sets in *Nanook of the North* and *Night Mail*
The igloo in Flaherty's Nanook of the North was a stage set on the North Pole: He had cut an igloo in half to have enough light to film. The fast moving train carriage in Grierson's *Night Mail* stood still in a studio, to allow the recording of sync sound.

But this had nothing to do with the fact they were dramatised. Much more important is that these films were made by a government body, Grierson's GPO film unit. They are presented as success stories of British society, even when they discuss problems like bad housing. Winston remarks that from a late 20th century perspective Grierson's combination of claims seems highly improbable: "The supposition that any "actuality" is left after "creative treatment" can now be seen as being at best naïve and at worst a mark of duplicity" (Winston, 1995, p. 11). Nevertheless, the use of dramatisation in documentary film does not subvert its claim on reality per se. Rather, it emphasises the need to tell a story, also in realism.

Approaching reality

In the 1940s directly after World War II, a new fiction film genre had come up that managed to be much closer to reality than Griersonian dramatised documentary found itself at the time. The Italian neorealists had left the studio and made their films on the streets, using the remnants of Italian society after the war as their décor for stories, often with non-actors playing their own lives in secondary and sometimes primary roles. *La terra trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948) is an example in which all roles are played by local (fisher)men and women. They dubbed the dialogues in the studio themselves, in their Sicilian dialect, because synch recording was not possible on the street (one of the reasons why the Griersonians stayed inside).

Inspired to a large degree by neorealist films, André Bazin, film critic, film theorist and co-founder of the influential French film journal *Cahiers du Cinéma*, formulated his 'integral realism' (Bazin, 1967, p. 15 and 21) in the 1940s and 1950s. He appreciated the mechanical reproduction qualities of the camera and microphone. Compared to Grierson, Bazin focused more on reality and less on creativity. He did however not deny the technical attributes that give the operator of the camera the opportunity to create an image. He argued for an aesthetic of integral realism and advocated the use of deep focus and wide shots which allows situations to be captured in their integrity. Bazin does not suggest that a representation on film and reality could be the same. Nevertheless he thinks that representations on film can be very realistic for viewers. He sees the

realistic qualities of film as its most interesting qualities and thinks that representation on film can come very close to reality. Bazin's realism focuses on *mise-en-scène*, on the space created by the camera placement and the movement and actions of people inside the shot. Montage, according to Bazin (1967, p. 36), "rules out ambiguity of expression." He disliked the focus of Russian filmmakers on a type of editing that aimed at a strong guidance of the audience (see page 38 for a discussion of this approach). Bazin saw neorealism turn away from strong guidance and "give back to the cinema a sense of the ambiguity of reality" (Bazin, 1967, p. 37), leaving it up to the viewers which meaning they derive from a film. His theoretical framework supports the ideas of evidence and witness, and at the same time complicates these ideas by emphasising the ambiguity of reality itself. Bazin appreciated that quality, and the freedom of interpretation it gives to the viewer. He brought evidence, witnessing and ambiguity together in his idea of integral realism. His view helps to understand how the amateur footage of Zapruder and Holliday could become so controversial.

What constitutes a documentary is not generic or stylistic criteria, such as a minimum of noise or lack of dramatisation, but above all how we look at it, argues Dai Vaughan (1999). He uses the example of a Laurel and Hardy film in which the duo trash a house, which became a documentary because they accidentally and unknowingly trashed another house than had been arranged for the purpose by the production team. Knowing this error, we can suddenly see the film as a documentary of unintended vandalism. "To see a film as a documentary is to see [it] (...) as signifying what it appears to record" (ibid, p. 84-85) is Vaughan's definition of documentary film. It can however not be expected that a film should represent an event exactly as it occurred, not practically, nor theoretically. There will always be a mismatch between record and signification and that is precisely the strength of documentary film, argues Vaughan, because it gives the viewer a choice: "Every hunter reads the spoor in his own way." (ibid, p. 88). With his definition he acknowledges that documentary film is built on a strong connection to reality, but he leaves it up to the viewer to forge that connection individually in the space created by the film.

Documentary film's claim to realism is perhaps its best known theoretical underpinning but it is not the only one. The focus on evidence, catching life unawares and being a witness suggests that the everyday can be known, understood and represented by observing it from an external, neutral perspective. Most of the uses of video discussed in Chapter One have the same focus and work with video from the same understanding. However, what happens inside people's heads, that is their mental experience, as well as their sensorial experience remains largely invisible for an observing camera. The realist approach in documentary film has addressed this problem by including narratives (in the dramatised films) and for instance observing situations in which people talk to or interview each other (in many direct cinema films). Bazin appreciated the realist approach more than an aesthetic one, but he saw reality as ambiguous. According to Bazin, reality could be known through film, but only if it was interpreted by the viewer.

Film is like a language

From the very beginning of documentary film, in parallel to realistic views, artistic approaches have also been explored by documentary filmmakers and they have claimed these approaches as being at the heart of the documentary project. Originally these efforts were aimed at claiming film as an art, countering the scientific image of the medium. But soon this would be followed by claims that an artistic approach could represent and understand experiences that remained outside the scope of scientific approaches.

Creating art

Film theorist Rudolph Arnheim warned in 1933 against the mechanical reproduction of the film camera and held a plea for film as art. He wrote:

As distinguished from the tools of the sculptor and the painter, which by themselves produce nothing resembling nature, the camera starts to turn and a likeness of the real world results mechanically. There is serious danger that the film maker will rest content with such shapeless reproduction. In order that the film artist may create a work of art it is important that he consciously stress the peculiarities of the medium. (Arnheim, 1933, p. 38)

Arnheim delivered his call after several filmmakers already had started to explore the medium's 'peculiarities' such as the use of different lenses, film emulsions, lighting, film speed, lab techniques such as dissolves and editing techniques such as juxtaposition. Arnheim addresses filmmakers in general, but documentary film as a genre had not become established yet really at that point – Russian filmmakers discussed the possible differences between fiction and non-fiction endlessly – and would not on continental Europe for a long time (in France documentaries still are also known as *court-métrages* (short films) or film essays). Vertov, although a promoter of the mechanical reproduction qualities of the camera, explored all of its qualities, not so much because he wanted to make art, but because he considered the camera a better observer than man. He was finding out what the camera could do and as a consequence entered the area that Arnheim wanted to be explored. Other filmmakers like Walter Ruttmann in Berlin, Joris Ivens in Amsterdam and Jean Vigo in Nice also discovered what the camera could do with their early films of everyday street life in the city. They used aesthetics and developed film language as a means to find the right form to convey their experiences. This is exactly what Arnheim urged filmmakers to do in order to bring film in the realm of art. He wanted filmmakers to explore the idiosyncrasies of the medium and make their personal experiences and perspectives part of their films, as artists do. Arnheim called this approach expressionism, as opposed to realism. As Monaco (1981, p. 316) formulates it, theories that “celebrate the raw material are essentially realist”, and theories that are “more concerned with the filmmaker’s expression of the raw materials” are essentially expressionist. This division runs through filmmaking and film theory from the earliest days of film, when the Lumières explored realism and Méliès (who made short fiction films inspired by theatre)

explored expressionist approaches. In documentary film expressionism can be understood as the filmmaker using film as a language to express an experience.

Surrealist filmmaker Jean Vigo and cameraman Boris Kaufman²² experimented in France with camera and editing techniques to develop a film language for *A Propos de Nice* (1930). Inconspicuous observation is at the core of their method when they film the rich on the terraces of the seafront boulevard in Nice. Kaufman writes “the method was to take by surprise facts, actions, attitudes, expressions and to stop shooting as soon as the subject became conscious of being photographed”. (MacDonald and Cousins, 1996, p. 84) They aimed to reveal a person’s “complete inner spirit through his purely external manifestations.” (ibid, p. 83) But Vigo and Kaufman also used trick shots to lay bare what is under the surface in a very literal way, for instance the shots of the woman on the terrace chair who wears different dresses in each shot, and finally is filmed naked, dissolving each shot into the next one. Another example is the shoe being polished that turns into a bare foot via a dissolve. Vigo follows the rules of observation in his film, but he also breaks them.

One aspect of film language he uses extensively is juxtaposition. Vigo and Kaufman wanted to comment on the “internationally lazy” (ibid, p. 84) on the boulevard in Nice, who they felt were neglecting their responsibilities in society. They chose to make their comment in a purely visual way:

We rejected out of hand anything that was picturesque without significance, any facile contrasts. The story had to be understood without commentary or subtitles. We shot the film relying on the evocation of ideas by purely visual means. Which is why, in the cutting, we were able to juxtapose the Promenade des Anglais with the Nice cemetery, where marble figures (baroque style) had the same ridiculous features as the human beings on the Promenade. (Boris Kaufman in ibid, p. 84)

Vigo and Kaufman used juxtaposition in two ways: aesthetic and dialectical. Both ways work well to get their comment across: the extreme differences in wealth, between the lazy rich of Europe and the hardworking local poor in Nice, are not tenable. They juxtapose several times rich people doing nothing but chatting, drinking, reading a paper or sunbathing on the seafront, not just with the marble cemetery statues, but also with poor people begging on the promenade, or working hard doing their washing. The technique has been used many times after and is now less fresh than it was then, but juxtaposing images is still a strong instrument in the hand of a filmmaker who wants to include their perspective in the observations they make in a purely visual way, without text on screen or a voice-over on the soundtrack.

²² Boris Kaufman is a brother of Mikhail Kaufman, Vertov’s cameraman, and of Dziga Vertov himself. Vertov changed his name because he wanted it to sound like a running camera: dziga dziga dziga; Vertov is derived from ‘to spin’ in Russian (Michelson et al, 1984, p. xviii). Boris was separated from his brothers in 1917 during the revolution and never saw his brothers again, but did write with them. Later he won an Oscar for best cinematography of *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954).



Figure 7 Juxtapositions in A propos de Nice by Vigo and B. Kaufman
 In the film, the lazy rich of Europe on the boulevard des Anglais in Nice are portrayed in contrast with marble statues on the cemetery and hardworking people in the backstreets, to express they are superfluous as a class.

Formalising montage

Ivens, Storck, Ruttman and Vigo worked with film as if it were a language but without being very analytical about it. The more analytical approach was taken by Russian filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin in the Soviet Union in the 1920s whose loose collection of essays mark the start of formalist film theory. Like expressionism, formalism opposes a realistic approach. Compared to expressionism, formalism focuses more on the *elements* that make film an expressive force; it has “a strong sense of the importance of function as well as form in art” (Monaco, 1981, p. 322). On a practical level, formalism had been explored even before the 1920s, around 1918, by Lev Kuleshov who performed his famous montage experiment with the face of actor Ivan Mozhukhin edited after a shot of a plate of soup, a girl and a coffin. As Pudovkin later wrote, even though the face of the actor was rather expressionless and actually three times the same shot of his face was used, audiences read different emotions from it: hunger after the soup, affection after the girl and sadness after the coffin (Monaco, 1981, p. 323). The idea that shots could take on a new meaning when linked (edited) in a certain way was also taken up by Esfir Shub, who applied montage ideas of her editing assistant Eisenstein to non-fiction film and invented the compilation film (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 22). She explored for instance juxtaposition before Vigo, comparing the sweat of the dancing rich to the sweat of the ploughing peasant²³.

Eisenstein is however known as the filmmaker who wrote most about the development of film language in the 1920s, mostly on his theory of montage. He did not specifically write about documentary; he wrote about film in general, and wasn't too pre-occupied with distinctions between documentary and fiction. Eisenstein developed his first montage theories from his film practice. Like Vertov, he made films and he wrote essays at the same time; he was thinking through filming and his filming emerged from his thinking. But he was also the rival of Vertov. Both were caught up in fierce polemic battle through the manifestos they published during the early years of the Soviet revolution. Eisenstein thought that Vertov's idea of Kino-Eye did not go far enough; it had the right focus on film as an art, but was not a tool for change. Kino-Eye was too contemplative, argued Eisenstein. He wanted a Kino-Fist instead (Eisenstein, 1925, p. 59),

²³ See page 67ff. for a further discussion of Shub's editing techniques.

emphasising that film needs to agitate its audience: “Soviet cinema must cut through the skull! It is not ‘through the combined vision of millions of eyes that we shall fight the bourgeois world (Vertov): we’d rapidly give them a million black eyes!’” (ibid). The audience was for Eisenstein his “basic material” that needed to be influenced “in the desired direction” (Eisenstein, 1924, p. 35).

Eisenstein used montage to create new ideas and a new social reality; for him films needed to be art and have a revolutionary goal. The goal of the Soviet filmmakers, including Vertov, was to support the class struggle of the young revolution instead of consolidating and supporting the status quo, like the Griersonians did. The realistic approaches of Vertov were however not very suitable for Eisenstein’s goal since they tended to deny and play down, and therefore restrict, the role of the filmmaker. Vertov focused instead on the camera as the powerful entity which could see reality differently from the human eye and offer us a different view on reality that is scientific in its preciseness and unmediated neutrality, he claimed.

Eisenstein used montage to achieve his goal of changing the moods and minds of audiences. He formulated for the first time a range of editing techniques that would become known as ‘intellectual montage,’ of which the best known is the ‘montage of attractions.’ Attractions are basic elements of a film shot that influence the experience of the spectator, in others words: agitate her or him. Eisenstein formulated his theory at first for theatre, but soon transported it to film:

An attraction (...) is any aggressive moment in theatre, i.e. any element of it that subjects the audience to emotional or psychological influence, verified by experience and mathematically calculated to produce specific emotional shocks in the spectator in their proper order within the whole. These shocks provide the only opportunity of perceiving the ideological aspect of what is being shown, the final ideological conclusion.” (Eisenstein, 1923, p. 30)

For instance, in *Strike (Stachka, 1925)* Eisenstein juxtaposes shots of soldiers firing at the strikers who run and fall in panic with shots of a bull being slaughtered. His technique is based on collision between shots rather than connections between them, which was Kuleshov’s approach (Monaco, 1981, p. 323). In montage of attractions the shots relate dialectically to each other, they collide and open up the possibility of new meaning to be created by the spectator. This makes films to a certain extent open-ended; the audience has to create (new) meaning. But there was little freedom to choose which meaning that was. Eisenstein did not hesitate to bluntly determine the meaning the audience was supposed to create. In line with the revolution around him, he argued that everything needed to change, not the least people’s thoughts. He saw a work of art, at least in cinema and theatre, as “first and foremost a tractor ploughing over the audience’s psyche in a particular class context.” (Eisenstein, 1925, p. 56) His strong belief in the power of cinema over the viewer’s mind and the way he argues for it may today seem propaganda rather than film theory, but it was still in line with what Kuleshov’s simple montage experiment had shown: by combining images the filmmaker can create a particular meaning. In a revolution this principle is equally useful as in advertising where Eisenstein’s montage of attractions is commonly used still today. How exactly this particular meaning is created would be found out only much later.

Encoding/decoding

Whether film really had the power to plough over people's minds, and if so, how it managed to do that, would be answered on a theoretical level by Christian Metz, in the 1970s. He developed a theory about how exactly audiences create meaning from film. His film theory is based on structuralism and its descendant semiotics, a generalised worldview developed by Ferdinand De Saussure that uses the idea of language as its basic tool (Monaco, 1981, p. 339). Structuralism looks at reality *as* a language, that is continually developed further in cultures and subcultures²⁴. Cinema is special because, as an audience we do not need knowledge of film language to understand a film, unlike we do need knowledge of for instance Dutch or the computer language C++ to understand a text (or computer programme) in that language²⁵. Language as it were emerges from cinema as it develops as a media and art: "It is not because the cinema is a language that it can tell such fine stories, but rather that it has become language because it has told such fine stories." (Metz, 1974, p. 47)

This points at an alternative understanding of Kuleshov's experiment. The Russian formalists concluded from the experiment that montage determines the meaning of a film, with all power in the hands of the editor. Metz mentions Béla Balázs's 1930 interpretation of the 1918 experiment (ibid). Balázs noted that if any two images are put together, even by chance, the viewer will discover a connection between them, and argued that this is the only thing that Kuleshov's experiment demonstrated. Filmmakers like the Russian formalists recognised this "connection" as a tool they could manipulate through montage, but, Metz says, "from the beginning their hand was forced by the viewer, or rather by a certain structure of the human mind" (ibid) because that is where the final meaning of a film is eventually created, not on the editing table. Metz, like the Russian formalists, is not particularly interested to make a distinction between fiction and non-fiction in his structuralist film theory. His theory describes both. "The subjects of film can be divided into the "realistic" and the "non-realistic," if one wishes, but the filmic vehicle's power to make real, to *realize*, is common to both genres." (ibid, p. 5).

Cultural studies builds on the notion mentioned by Metz that the viewer 'forces' the hand of the filmmaker with an approach that further explores the freedom people have and take to derive meaning from film and other media. Stuart Hall called this approach the 'encoding/decoding' model (Hall, 1980), to emphasise that someone who makes a film (or any other media) encodes messages in a way that semiotics explains, but that when the spectator decodes, the original messages do not necessarily have to come out. Differences often occur because spectators have their own histories, environments, economies, subcultures, worries,

²⁴ For this reason anthropologist Geertz considers man to be "an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun." (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) He takes "culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it therefore not an experimental science in search of laws, but an interpretive one in search of meaning." (ibid) See page 180 for a discussion of these views in relation to discovery research and design documentaries.

²⁵ There are of course exceptions to this, for instance a flashback might be hard to understand immediately if one has never seen one, and at least part of spoken language can be acquired without knowledge of the language system behind it.

dreams, i.e. their own context, in which they have to give a message a place. In other words, they appropriate the message. Hall takes with his encoding/decoding model a sociological approach, looking at how communication through media works in social groups and society, as opposed to the more individual model of the spectator in the dark cinema in Metz's theory. In both cases the process is no longer similar to information theory where data transfer is only hampered by some noise and information is in principle crystal clear. Metz and Hall enter media theory where not just information but also hopes and fears, rumours and myths, opinions and beliefs, and many other kinds of messages that carry mixed meanings depending on context, are communicated. In media theory, there is no longer just data transfer and some noise, but also interpretation and discussion about the messages that are sent.

The idea that film is like a language has its origin in the early days of film. It was supported by critics such as Arnheim to deliberately prevent film from becoming a purely scientific medium used only to observe. Expressionist films of for instance Vigo and Vertov explored the opportunities the medium offered to see reality in new ways, by making use of the unique properties of the camera and the opportunities montage offers, such as juxtaposition. Eisenstein developed film language in montage based on the idea that meaning was created by viewers in an almost mechanical way, as a result of the collision of film shots created on the editing table. How people create meaning from images that are edited together was formulated only much later. Metz used the theory of structuralism, that looks at reality in general as a language that is continually further developed in culture and subcultures, to argue that viewers of films create meaning. Not in a mechanical way however, as Eisenstein suggested, but in a much more cultural way, in relation to other things we know and experienced. Since people are all different this understanding leads to a multitude of different interpretations of film, as Hall argues. The idea that film is like a language has developed over many years and so far brought us to the understanding that film is encoded (constructed) by filmmakers and decoded (interpreted) by its audiences in a variety of ways depending on personal and cultural contexts.

In the early decades of film, there was much discussion between filmmakers on the tension between art and mechanical reproduction, between film as a language and film as reality. Both views existed since the early years, represented by respectively Méliès's theatrical films and the registrations of the Lumières. Although the two seem opposites, filmmakers freely experimented with both ideas, sometimes even in the same film as for instance Vigo and Vertov show. After all these were the beginning years of a new medium and film was a new area to explore. There was however a third approach to documentary filmmaking that was not explored until later, when filmmakers started to discuss their own roles and the filmmaking process in their films.

Film is like a conversation

From the 1950s, some fiction and non-fiction filmmakers started to focus on the relationships between filmmakers, people in the film and people watching the film. The film itself is what connects these three parties and makes parts of these relationships visible. But large parts of these relationships are not visible at all; they just exist inside people's heads and in discussions during the making of the film and after the viewing of the film. All these relationships create conversations of which the film is a part.

Shared filmmaking

As a filmmaker and as an anthropologist, Jean Rouch developed in the 1950s an approach to the use of film in ethnography that merged two fields, cinema and anthropology, and by doing so he went beyond the boundaries that had surrounded these fields until then: "he found a way of fusing the realism of Lumière with the fantasy of Méliès" (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 118). Rouch collaborated with the people he filmed, he participated in activities with them, both in front and behind the camera. In many of his films, how the film is made and the context in which the film is made became part of the film. He normally recruited a sound recordist from the people he is filming and he developed longstanding relationships with a range of Africans. This is why Rouch named his filmmaking "shared cinema" (Stoller, 1992, p. 193). He shares the experience of making the film with the people in the film and even the people who see the film. In several of his films he explains and shows, often at the beginning and at the end, how the film is made. For him, "film is not a device for collecting data but an 'arena' of inquiry" (1992, *ibid*), and we are all invited to enter that arena and take part in the inquiry. With his films, Rouch shows how to create such an arena and how it works.

The idea that the spectator is also in that arena was theorised by Jean-Luc Godard, filmmaker and theorist, a contemporary of Rouch and clearly influenced by his filming. Godard moved beyond material realism and psychological realism, and ended up with what Monaco (1981, p. 332) calls intellectual realism, a term for the conversational relationship between filmmaker and audience that is created through film. Godard turns the focus of film theory to the relationship between the filmmaker and the spectator, and states that the film experience is shaped by this relationship.

In *Chronicle of a Summer* Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin practiced and explored this approach; we see towards the end of the film a discussion between filmmakers and protagonists (in the role of the film's first audience) about the film and how realistic or even true and trustworthy the different parts are. In *Chronicle of a Summer* Rouch and Morin pioneered a new approach to documentary filmmaking they called *cinéma vérité*. In the film, interventions by the filmmakers like interviews and discussions with the protagonists are presented as new tools to portray everyday life of people in Paris. Rouch and Morin position themselves opposite the non-interference approach of direct cinema in the United States, coming up at the same time. The

name *cinéma vérité* was a reference to the *Kino Pravda* of Vertov and his *kinoks*. In an interview Rouch explains why he chose the term:

When Vertov spoke of *Kino-Pravda*, it wasn't simply filming the journal *Pravda*. It was an attempt to search for the truth. But he said it very clearly: the *ciné-vérité* is the truth of cinema, the truth that one can show in the cinema with a mechanical eye and an electronic ear. When I have a camera and a microphone, I'm not my usual self, I'm in a strange state, in a *ciné-transe*. This is the objectivity that one can expect, being perfectly conscious that the camera is there and that people know it. From that moment, we live in an audiovisual galaxy: a new truth emerges, *cinéma vérité*, which has nothing to do with normal reality. I would never talk that way to you had there not been a tape-recorder here... (Yakir, 1978, p. 7-8)

Rouch is not afraid to intervene; he thinks that through these interventions truth appears. He agrees with the idea of the realist observation that the camera changes the situations it enters if it is remarked, that people change their behaviour if they know they are filmed. But he disagrees that that would destroy what you want to film, on the contrary: “For Rouch, a camera does not capture reality, it creates reality – or *ciné-reality* – a set of images that evokes ideas and stimulates dialogue among observer, observed, and viewer” (Stoller, 1992, p. 193). Later, Rouch stated in an interview that *cinéma vérité* was maybe not the best name he could have given to his style of filming. ‘Cinema-sincerity’ would have been better, he considered, because as a filmmaker he asks the viewer to have confidence in the evidence that is shown on the screen, saying: “This is what I saw. I didn’t fake it, this is what happened. I didn’t pay anyone to fight, I didn’t change anyone’s behavior. I looked at what happened with my subjective eye and this is what I believe took place.” (Levin, 1971, p. 135)

Addressing ethics and politics

Godard’s focus on the conversational relationship between filmmaker and audience, and Rouch’s point that *cinéma vérité* creates reality lead towards a discussion of ethics and politics. Ethics become important because the circumstances in which the film was shot, how it was directed, the language it is using, all influence the conversation that is set up by it. If viewers mistrust the reality the film shows, because they fear the film might be misleading them, their trust relationship with the filmmaker is broken and the conversation that was flowing between filmmaker and audience through the film stops. Politics become important because the filmmaker will have an agenda or ideology for the conversation, consciously or not, and also viewers have one. The power inequalities and relations that exist between the different participants in the conversation that a film viewing experience is, politicise that conversation²⁶.

A contemporary answer to these issues offers filmmaker Trinh Min-ha, who is strongly critical of the power relationships between herself as a filmmaker, the people in the film, and the spectators. She is also an anthropologist, poet and musician and she uses a combination of

²⁶ A prime example of how this works out in a film offers Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) which has been accused of not being a documentary because it contained a strong opinion. The film is discussed on page 68.

these disciplines to explore the theory of documentary film, especially ethnographically inspired film, in her philosophical writing as well as her films. Rather than offering a rational critique on anthropology and ethnographic film she explores other ways of doing anthropology. In her first film *Reassemblage* (1982) Trinh states: “I don’t intend to speak about. Just speak near by.” Her films mix reality and fiction, as Rouch often did, and clearly show the traces of the production process:

Reassemblage is filmed in a way that might seem to mirror the fragmentary nature of the soundtrack. Jerky panning and emphatic editing continually make vivid the materiality of observation. Cross-cutting between different viewpoints and interrupting the conventions of documentary filmmaking, the film renders everyday culture as a complex assemblage that cannot be either holistically assembled or critically disassembled but can be only provisionally and inventively reassembled. (Highmore, 2002b, p. 214)

Trinh’s answer to the ethical and political issues raised by seeing film as a conversation is to create a multitude of stories and fragments of stories that don’t form a unity. It is up to the spectator to pick from it and create connections and meaning where he or she likes. Trinh may have “provisionally and inventively” reassembled her shots and other materials to create the film, but to make sense of the film the viewer has to reassemble the material in her or his own way, using equally temporary and resourceful tactics. As such, Trinh aims to avoid the power position she has as a filmmaker. How exactly she does this is further discussed on page 59.

Appreciating ambivalence

Like Trinh, Rouch rejects in his work as an ethnographer and filmmaker the search for absolutes. Rouch’s approach, originating in the late 1950s, is an important break away from the opposition between the realistic and the artistic approaches, between film as reality and film as language. These are oppositions anthropologists and filmmakers until then, and often still now, hang on to. Stoller (1992, p. 213) calls Rouch’s approach a “radically empirical anthropology” that “recognizes blatant incongruities, confounding ambiguities, and seemingly intolerable contradictions – the texture of life as it is experienced in the field.” Rouch challenges binary thinking and simply refuses to interpret the world in such a way because it does not reflect his experience in Africa and France – in everyday life. He does not accept the categories anthropology uses, like black/white, irrational/rational, village/city, truth/fiction, Africa/Europe. He “*plays* with these oppositions, rejecting an either/or position, always revealing the co-existence of both parts of the pair” (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 118, original italics). Editing is a technique that is very well suited to express this co-existence, by simply combining different situations in one story, image or film. Rouch uses editing to this purpose in many of his films, for instance when he cuts between the orderly life in the African city and the chaos of the ritual in the bush in *Les maîtres fous* (1955), and in *Jaguar* (1967) between the chaotic social life in the African city and the social order in the bush villages; a complete reversal that is illustrative for Rouch’s intellectual versatility.



Figure 8 Rouch plays with opposites in Les maîtres fous and Jaguar. Both films tell a story about everyday life in Africa and contrast life in the city with life in the bush. People in the films travel between the two and change as a result of their context. In Les maîtres fous the city is orderly and the bush chaotic, but in Jaguar Rouch reverses this characterisation.

One particular opposition Rouch likes to play with is fact/fiction. He developed the idea of what was later called “ethno-fiction” (Stoller, 1992, p. 143) to emphasise that in ethnography fiction is as important as facts. According to Rouch, “[t]he world in which we live is a twilight zone, an area of light and dark, truth and falsehood, reality and fiction” (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 117). Working in West-Africa with the Songhay and the Dogon (both oral cultures), but also in Paris, he focused on the mix of stories and facts in everyday life, and he learned that fiction and stories teach us things about the human condition that no rational cultural analysis based on distant observation can achieve. The African novelist and academic Chinua Achebe calls this the “truth of fiction” (cited in Stoller, 1992, p. 207). To Rouch this does not mean that factual filmmaking should be left completely in favour of fiction. Rather, he argues, we should use both; fiction techniques like storytelling, improvising, performing and acting must be incorporated in the working methods of ethnographers and documentary filmmakers. He explores these ideas extensively in his own films, for instance *The Human Pyramid* (*La pyramide humaine*, 1959) in which he sets up a fictional story about relationships between black and white young people in colonial Africa, exploring teenage love, jealousy and racism at the same time (see page 89 for a more elaborate discussion of this film).

Rouch’s ‘playing with oppositions’ is not an individual game; he does not play it alone. Everyone who participates in his films gets the opportunity to be part of the game, and the people who see the film can take part in it too (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 119). This above all makes his films intense conversations between filmmakers, protagonists and spectators. The approach to filming Rouch introduces is something like setting up a conversation. The flow of the conversation and the process of making the film are more important than any conclusion that might be reached. Ambivalence is appreciated over certainty because it reflects the experience of the ethnographer and filmmaker Rouch in the field. The story always continues beyond the film; the films don’t finalise the ethnographic research: “the work must go on” as Rouch told Stoller (2005).

Performing everyday life

With his point that the camera creates ciné-reality, and that people start to behave differently when the camera is running, Rouch addresses a key issue in documentary film. Bruzzi expands on this issue starting from an understanding of a documentary film as a dialectical analysis of the interaction between reality and representation. Bruzzi finds inspiration for her thinking on documentary film in documentary theatre theory developed by Peter Weiss (1971). He does not see the inevitable negotiation between the real and its representation in theatre as a problem but as something to value because it stimulates us to understand the factual world in a dialectical way. Bruzzi introduces this idea to documentary film. For her, filmmakers like Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield, who play a role in their own films like Rouch does, are “a fluid entity” (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 164) that shapes and is being shaped by the documentary s/he makes, and “thereby one constituent of a film’s ongoing dialectical analysis” (ibid.). The definition of documentary she uses concentrates on this dialectic: “documentaries are a negotiation between filmmaker and reality and, at heart, a performance” (ibid., p. 154).

Bruzzi refers to J. L. Austin’s (1970) description of the performative aspects of language. Austin defines performative utterances as simultaneously describing and performing an action, like saying ‘I do’ in a wedding ceremony. Bruzzi states that “documentaries, like Austin’s performatives, perform the actions they take” (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 155). Similarly, a documentary comes into being as it is performed in front of the camera by the people in the film, sometimes including the director, and derives its meaning from the interaction between that performance and reality. Some documentaries aim to make that process visible by showing the means used to produce them. Filmmakers like Rouch, Broomfield and Moore show the performativity of documentary very clearly by stepping into the image and turning themselves into performers. This creates rather than destroys reality. Performance has become a tool for people in everyday life as for instance in cultural studies Stuart Hall (1988) has shown for black ethnicity and Judith Butler (1990) has shown for gender. Our public personae are often different from our private ones; we dress for instance differently when we go out and we are all familiar with having more formal and more informal presentations of ourselves. We all have more than one identity and we are used to playing around with them, switching between them and stitching them in place continuously (Hall, 1992).

At the same time cameras have become much more familiar and omnipresent, turning the event of a camera being pointed at you into an everyday experience. This situation makes it rather futile to try to distinguish between acted and authentic moments of everyday life in for instance a home movie. Every moment is performed and truthful. Bruzzi cites Caryl Flinn to demonstrate what this means for documentary film:

Recent documentaries like Jennie Livingston’s *Paris is Burning* (1990) and documentary criticism – influenced by post-structuralist and postmodern theory – have cast the concept of pre-existing reality and its attendant notions of authenticity, truth and objectivity into permanent question (e.g. Allen, McGarry, Nichols, Rosenthal). In fact, it is

no stretch to say that documentary films, in many ways more so than other cinematic forms, reveal the constructed – indeed, performative – nature of the world around us. (Flinn cited in Bruzzi, 2000, p. 156)

The inevitable conclusion of this is that performance must be addressed and valued as a tool to seek the truth (as *cinéma vérité* does), and cannot be avoided and denied (as direct cinema does). That does not dismiss observational cinema all together; observation and performance can go well together as the direct cinema films about politicians and pop stars already showed in the 1960s, and performative documentaries up to today still show.

Cinéma vérité is a good example of dealing with the performative nature of the world around us because it deliberately creates situations in front of the camera in which subjects and film-makers interact to enact the truth of the documentary film. Bruzzi (2000, p. 126) calls this “the performance for the camera (...) as the truth around which a documentary is built”. In other words, documentary film is a performative exchange between the people in the film, filmmakers and spectators, similar to the many performed interactions between people in everyday life. In the end, documentary film is something like everyday life.

Conclusion

For more than a hundred years, filmmakers have used a wide range of approaches to making documentary films. These approaches can be summed up as considering film as something like reality, like a language and like a conversation. The three approaches do not exist entirely separately; most filmmakers make use of more than one of them in their films, albeit with a different emphasis. Neither are these approaches very homogenous; they combine different ideas. Approaching film as reality unites for instance ideas about evidence and witnessing, catching life unawares, eliminating noise, but also about telling stories and ambiguity. Film as a language connects ideas about montage and compilation, creating art, semiotics and the decoding of film by audiences. Finally, film as a conversation focuses on shared filmmaking, power relations, ethics, politics, performance in everyday life, and appreciates ambiguity. Together, these approaches illustrate the richness of documentary filmmaking, and its continuous evolvement through thinking (developing theory) and making films, sometimes at the same time. Attributing such an important role to practice in the development of thoughts is not dissimilar to how design progresses as a discipline and can be expected to create an understanding between the two disciplines.

Compared to the richness of approaches in documentary film, the use of video in discovery research (see Chapter One) is built on an intentionally limited view of film. The main approach that is taken is ‘film is like reality,’ and even then the breath of ideas in this approach as presented in this chapter has not been taken up. Video is hardly approached as an audiovisual language in discovery research. This is in a way surprising if designers are doing the research, because designers do have the skills to tell a story with visual means. This points to an

opportunity, which I will explore in my own filmmaking practice (see Chapter 5 and further). Approaching film as a conversation resonates with participatory discovery research methods. But here again, the use of video is largely depending on the mimicking qualities of film; the participations that are set up seldom influence how situations are filmed and footage is edited.

The richness of approaches in documentary film theory discussed in this chapter suggests there are many more ways to use video in discovery research than designers and researchers currently employ. To support further exploration of these opportunities, the next two chapters will first look at how documentary filmmakers use the ideas discussed here in their filmmaking practices.

3 Documentary film techniques

The three, broad ideas in documentary filmmaking carved out in the previous chapter – documentary film is like reality, like a language and like a conversation – have emerged from and are the result of the practice of filmmaking. The ideas are not the laws of documentary filmmaking, nor can they be applied to filmmaking through techniques. The ideas are important *in* documentary filmmaking and the films make them visible and give them form. Documentary film techniques are used by filmmakers to make films, and their relation to the ideas can be understood as the practical tools that work together with the more theoretical ideas in the films and the filmmaking process. This chapter explores the more practical aspects of documentary filmmaking through these techniques.

Some techniques exist for more than a hundred years; filmmakers have explored and developed techniques since 1895. This chapter groups them as observation, compilation, intervention and performance techniques. Observation techniques are driven by a desire to disturb the situations that are being filmed as little as possible. Intervention techniques on the other hand interfere in situations by asking questions, adding narration, and so on. Compilation techniques use archive film material or found footage such as newsreels, home movies and television broadcasts to create a new film. Performance techniques recreate situations that happened in the past through re-enactment or create completely new situations with the protagonists. Also the filmmaker can perform a role, for instance to elicit responses from protagonists.

The categorisation of the techniques into four groups does not imply that there are only four distinct types of documentary films. Many films use a combination of techniques, for instance observations and interventions, to tell their story. Other films strictly adhere to one technique, for instance by using archival film without the addition of commentary. This chapter will discuss examples from both kinds of films, and concentrate on the techniques rather than the films as a whole. But the discussion in this chapter is distinctively bottom-up. It starts from specific films and the practice of filmmaking, instead of offering a typology of four techniques. The films were selected for their potential to inspire new ways of using video in discovery research and are not here used or intended to give an overview of documentary film history.

Most films discussed here use all three ideas and several techniques at the same time. Therefore this chapter does not discuss entire films. To explicate the techniques, a detailed discussion of film sequences, how these were made, what filmmakers say about their practice in relation to a technique, reflections from critics and theorists, and so on, turned out to be more useful. This amounts in this chapter to a large and very diverse collection of techniques that served as a main source of inspiration for my filmmaking practice in discovery research. To further

facilitate that purpose, I will incidentally hint at opportunities that could be created in discovery research and known difficulties that could be addressed through documentary film techniques, where appropriate.

Observation

Observation techniques have been used since the very first days of filmmaking, at the end of the 19th century. The Lumières' early films, such as *Sortie d'usine* (*Workers Leaving the Factory*, 1895), *Arrivée d'un train en gare à La Ciotat* (*Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, 1895), *Démolition d'un mur* (*Demolition of a Wall*, 1895), *Répas de bébé* (*Baby's Meal*, 1895) and *Barque sortant du port* (*A Boat Leaving Harbour*, 1895) show the straightforward recording of events that is typical for observation techniques. In each of these films we see an image made by a camera on a tripod, without any movement of the camera, panning or tilting. The actions shown begin and end in the same shot, no editing is applied; the films are in fact just one shot long. Spectators were amazed by the reality of the images. As Loiperdinger (2004) recently recalled, the most astonishing fact for the audience was that the leaves of the bushes behind the baby eating all moved – every single one of them. This strong likeness to reality gave film its character of an accurate observer of reality, even though the images at the time were black and white and very grainy. However, already at this very early stage of film history the capabilities of film to observe events in a new way were explored too. In *Demolishing a Wall* the Lumières show how the wall miraculously erects itself from the dust after it has been hammered down. The shot is shown in reverse; a great spectacle if you see it for the first time as people in the late 19th Century did. The film offers an early glimpse of the power that the filmmaker has even if s/he only observes. By resurrecting the wall from dust, the Lumière brothers allowed the viewers of *Demolishing a Wall* a new way of seeing the simple event they



Figure 9 Demolition of a Wall by the Lumière brothers shows the action in reverse too

filmed. The Lumières added a perspective to the shot, and to the event, by reversing the shot. This kind of experimentation was further developed by for instance Vertov with his Kino-Eye group (see page 52) and Vigo (see page 37). Since the first films made by the Lumières and the first experiment they did with adding perspective to the camera's observations, many other observation techniques have been developed in documentary film. Some are very cautious with adding perspective, others are explicitly creating opportunities to do so, as the examples below demonstrate. Whatever approach a filmmaker prefers, it is clear that there are many ways of

observing with a camera. This shows that in observation techniques too, the idea that film is like a language is clearly present, and that using observation as a technique does not limit filmmakers to the view that film is like reality. Filmmakers do differ a lot however in how they use film language, and in how much of their own voice and perspective is visible in their films.

Record footage

Simply recording what is happening, what is being observed, is typical for the observational film methods that take a scientific perspective. Not surprisingly perhaps, this method was and is popular in anthropological documentaries, where for many the camera is a second notebook, helping to make field notes. This suggests that recording in the field is a very straightforward action, like putting a camera on a tripod and pushing the record button, without being influenced by or influencing what is happening in front of the camera. The equipment is set up in a position that gives a good overview, and the camera is left running from the beginning of an action until it is completed. Chapter One showed that this technique is still popular in discovery research. It is the most straightforward interpretation of the theoretical idea that film is like reality. The material that results from this approach is sometimes called record footage.

Visual note-taking in anthropology: Mead and Bateson

Anthropology has used film right from the beginning of the medium, in 1895, to make ethnographic films. The camera was considered an objective tool to make notes of human behaviour. The term 'record-footage' was actually coined by a visual anthropologist, David MacDougall (Winston, 1995, p. 171). He wanted to stress the minimal influence of the film-maker, during and after the shooting of the film, and the function of the camera as a collector of evidence. For ethnographers, the camera was and is a way to make notes of their observations. The audio track often consists of spoken notes of the observer. But ideas about how to take notes on film have developed over the years, creating a wide range of filmmaking practices in anthropology. Observations in the style of record-footage have always stayed part of it. Margaret Mead writes in the 1970s for instance that anthropology needs "long sequences from one point of view" which provide anthropology with "unedited stretches of instrumental observation on which scientific work must be based." (Mead, 1974, cited in: Winston, 1995, p. 175) For the series of films *Character Formation in Different Cultures* which she made with Gregory Bateson in 1936-38 on Bali they "treated the cameras in the field as recording instruments, not as devices for illustrating our theses." (Bateson and Mead, 1942, cited in: Grimshaw, 2001, pp. 87-88) The films exemplify the straightforward recording typical for record footage, although Mead edited them as educational films, explaining situations more than observing them. She used a selection of the visual notes she recorded to illustrate and explain her understanding in a way similar to what ethnographers in design projects still do today.

Most record footage remains inaccessible; it exists as visual notes on the shelves of anthropologists. The method, it seems, is used more to shoot film and keep the footage as data, than to make actual documentary films. To get from footage to a film (or notes to a coherent text for that matter) some level of analysis, interpretation or narrativation is necessary and the record footage method does not provide for that step of the process. The technique is mainly focused on capturing activities of people in their entirety, and is not bothered very much by editing the footage into a film. Visual anthropologists like Bateson, Mead and the McDougalls are exceptions because they want to communicate their research through film rather than text. Also adventurers like Cooper and Schoedsack, who made the epic documentary *Grass: A nation's battle for life* (1925) are an exception because they shot very spectacular record footage of the epic battle of the Bakhtiari tribe who cross a mountain range and fast streaming icy rivers in what is now Iran every year with their cattle that needed little extra narrative because the event itself was a story with beginning (departure) and end (arrival). Their subject already contained a compelling story that appeals to a broad audience. As in most video for discovery research however, record footage is meant to support rather than tell the story of the researcher, and exists as a selection of clips rather than a film with a story.

Exploring the medium

With record footage the focus is almost entirely on what is happening in front of the camera. But from very early on filmmakers also explored the possibilities of the equipment they used: their camera, sound equipment and editing table, or in other words the exploration of film as a language. This experimentation with form and aesthetics continues to be important to documentary filmmakers. These are the kind of experiments that allow filmmakers to add their own perspective to the films they make. It is also the kind of exploration that is in general lacking when researchers use video for discovery research.

Using the camera as a sensor: Vertov

An explorative thinking through filmmaking approach was used extensively in the 1920s by Russian filmmakers around Dziga Vertov. They called themselves kinoks, after their film method 'Kinoglaz' (Kino-Eye) (Michelson, 1984, p. 5) and they aimed to support the communist revolution with a new film language based on facts. They opposed Hollywood's dream factory and want to build a 'factory of facts' (Tsivian, 1999). Mikhail Kaufman, Vertov's cameraman in and outside the frame in the most famous film of the kinoks *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), described the feeling shared by the crew while making the film as "we felt that we were intellectual engineers, that we were constructing thought out of figurative material," (ibid) reflecting the general feeling of the period that, with a rational approach and the right technology, man can create anything. It also demonstrates that these filmmakers are taking a very different approach than the record footage technique suggests. The kinoks wanted to express their ideas in film, using everyday life literally as the material they shape.



Figure 10 Exploring what a camera can see in *Man With a Movie Camera* by Vertov

*Kino-Eye: Life Caught Unawares*²⁷ (*Kinoglaz*, 1924) is the first film in which the kinoks clearly set out their idea that the camera is an improved version of the human eye. The film aims to demonstrate that the camera can see things that we cannot, can move in ways and enter places we cannot, and that it sees the world in a better, more precise way. Vertov followed futurist ideas in his belief that, since the camera is a machine, it can do a better, more precise job in registering than the human eye, and that every possibility the camera and film editing offer should be exploited. In one of the many Kino-Eye manifestos he writes:

“I am kino-eye, I am a mechanical eye. I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.

Now and forever, I free myself from human immobility, I am in constant motion, I draw near, then away from objects, I crawl under, I climb onto them. I move apace with the muzzle of a galloping horse, I plunge full speed into a crowd, I outstrip running soldiers, I fall on my back, I ascend with an airplane, I plunge and soar together with plunging and soaring bodies. Now I, a camera, fling myself along their resultant, manoeuvring in the chaos of movement composed of the most complex combinations.” (Michelson, 1984, p. 17)

Vertov also connected to the scientific roots of the film medium as a method to measure and observe when he said “I, a machine, show you the world as only I can see it.” The kinoks saw the camera as a sensor, like a thermometer or a microscope, that makes observations more precise but above all lead them to new observations, some of which are very spectacular. Vertov called the Kino-Eye method the “scientifically experimental method of exploring the visible world.” (ibid, p. 87) The kinoks used every possible shooting technique of the time: acceleration, microscopy, reverse action, animation, camera movement, and considered these not trick effects but normal methods to be fully used.

For the kinoks, the focus on camera technology was not a goal in itself however. Observation remained central to the techniques of the kinoks and their films show this. The act of looking is stressed a few times in *Kino-Eye* by the insert of a close up of an eye, for instance in the sequences where we observe people in a mental illness institute and when we see young homeless people waking up in the street. These sequences, and others, are edited in a fast pace,

²⁷ The second part of the English title refers to filming people without them noticing it, essential to observation according to Vertov (see page 30).

directing the gaze of the spectator firmly. This might not be a surprising editing style in a film that foremost observes. But it fits Vertov's goal to show the world in a new way. His observations point at the things he wants the viewer to discover and learn, for instance the journey of bread from corn in the field to a slice on your plate. This might seem boring because it is overly didactic, but because it is filmed in reverse, it presents these mundane events in a new way, making the didacticism acceptable. Through the way they are filmed, things that might be considered too mundane to pay attention to become interesting again. Reversing the bread sequence makes the familiar look strange, urging the viewer to look and think again, about the production processes and all the labour involved for instance – a popular theme in revolutionary Russia.

The kinoks have added considerably to the development of the language of film by creating new perspectives on everyday life with their exploring camera. They showed that observation as a technique does not need to restrict itself to seeing film as something like reality alone. Film is also a language, even when it is used to observe. Observation is a technique that supports the realist quality of film but Vertov shows it can also move beyond that role. Not coincidentally this approach to observation was inspired by the 1917 revolution that stimulated people to look at the everyday differently and reinvent it. Film was looked upon as a means to support and create change in society. This goal is not very different from what discovery research and design in innovation projects often aim for. Vertov and his kinoks demonstrated that film can play a role in developing a new way of looking at the everyday as a step towards seeing opportunities for intervention and change. Aesthetic experiments played a key role in this because they led towards a new “essence of ‘I see’” as Vertov described the new perspectives on everyday life he found through his filmmaking. At his time he was not the only one experimenting, for instance Jean Vigo (see page 37), Joris Ivens (see page 58) as well as many others played an important role in developing film language in observational films too.

Guiding the perspective with music and sound: Kossakovsky

It may be rather obvious that filmmakers experimented with the possibilities of a technology when it was still new and unexplored. But these experiments have always continued and are still possible and still make sense, as Viktor Kossakovsky shows with his film *Tische! (Quiet!, 2003)*. A filmmaker can hardly show more explicitly that s/he takes a perspective than Kossakovsky does with this film. He filmed from his St. Petersburg window, for over a year, initially without the idea of making a film. This is pure observation, from a distance and from above (the second floor?). Whatever we see, we see it from Kossakovsky's window; the framing changes but the perspective is fixed, it remains the same for 82 minutes, the length of the film. We see the seasons come by and we see daily life repeat itself. It is clear that Kossakovsky has taken a long period to shoot this film. He shot just when he was at home. Not a single shot was staged (Storyville, 2003). We see reflections in street puddles, ladies chatting on a bench in the snow, leaves blown by the wind, a man waiting with flowers, an arrest being made. Central to the film is the repetitive

digging up of the street, with very temporary results. It becomes funny after a while, helped by music and slightly speeded up film sequences. The road works present themselves eventually as a metaphor for the ad hoc repairs of post-Soviet Russian society. The visual style of the film is eclectic, but also poetic. For Kossakovsky, the idea for the film started when he first saw the smoke and the red asphalt and thought it was beautiful (ibid). But he did not remain with that idea exclusively. The images he combines range from colours and shapes one can see in an oily puddle to the journalistic factualness of an arrest shot with a hidden camera. He experiments with his camera as much as the kinoks and Vigo did but adds new techniques. He uses for instance long lenses and zooming quite a lot, technology that did not yet exist in the 1920s. This allows him to go from the poetic to the factual in one shot, for instance when he starts with a black screen with dots and lines, slowly zooming out and revealing that we were looking into a basement across the street while it is snowing. Zooming out even more we see a scene of street workers digging up the street once more and we start to observe their mundane activities.



Figure 11 Poetic and mundane images in *Tische!* by Kossakovsky

Obviously, Kossakovsky expresses his ambivalent perspective on Russian society through the images he selects and combines, as the kinoks and Vigo did. But he also uses music and sound to give this personal perspective on the road works as a metaphor for society. In the film, a frantic piano turns the digging up of the road into slapstick. A more melancholic piano makes us see a ballet between cranes filling a hole with sand. Kossakovsky says that if you want you can see a lot in simple situations:

“In any drop of water you can see the whole world if you want to. In any piece of asphalt you can see all of Russia I would say. That’s why I used the phrase from Gogol: ‘There are two misfortunes in Russia – roads and fools.’ That’s easy to say if you’re a writer. But of you’re a documentary maker you have to show that.” (ibid)

Kossakovsky sees it as his task as a filmmaker to make visible for others what he sees in that piece of asphalt; he wants to bring his perspective across by showing his street in unusual ways, and adds even more perspective with music and sounds. Here an important part of the showing is letting us listen. We hear some of the sounds that people, trees, tools and machines make, especially when the window is open. Many of these sounds seem to come from the special effects studio of the *Gerausmacher*. Their artificialness underlines the distance between the observed and the observer. It also points the gaze of the viewer to certain events in the image. This is a

simple and subtle method to add a second perspective of the filmmaker onto the image, on top of the perspective he creates with his framing of the shot. Sound was not available to the kinoks and Vigo, they could only suggest which live music to play during the projection. Kossakovsky shows, as many have done before him, that one can experiment as much with sound and music as one can with camera and editing techniques. His experiments demonstrate that sound and music can be used to add perspective as much as camera and editing did in the early experiments of the kinoks and Vigo.

Creating a pretext: Van der Keuken

Another contemporary filmmaker who used observation as his main technique but clearly included his own perspective too is Johan van der Keuken. In his film *Brass Unbound (Bewogen Koper, 1993)* Van der Keuken shows how brass bands have developed their own ways of making music around the world, in Nepal, Surinam, Indonesia and Ghana. One sequence shows a street from behind the large brass tuba that travels to a burial in Surinam. As Van der Keuken explained during a film class in Paris, he had set up the situation carefully:

“I had the idea of asking the tuba player to sit in the back of an open truck with me sitting on a chair facing him and going through the whole journey with him. What we get with this shot from over the shoulder is the character’s throat which breathes in, absorbs the real. As for the actual world behind him all we ever see of it is in the corner of the screen. (...) [The tuba] is an eye, it is a throat, it is the idea of the cinema as something that eats reality. Instead of making it the subject of a documentary, it is inserted into something else, on the edges.” (Van der Keuken, 2001, p. 6)



Figure 12 Van der Keuken films a Surinam street in Brass Unbound

But what he catches in his shot is the unexpected in the background, the things that the truck passes in the street. Van der Keuken’s perspective allows coincidence to play a role in his film. Through his framing, his looking sideways one could say, the tuba is literally situated in its context. Van der Keuken takes time to capture the world around the tuba while filming and spends time in the actual film to show it to us. This is important to him:

“You might say that these shots are much too long, because we could have covered the voyage of the tuba in a minute. But what interests us are things like, for example, the guy who says “fuck you!” to the camera. These are the things that we are very happy to catch. In a sense, it is movement itself that interests us, in its length, and not only the summary of things. Also over to one side, behind the tuba, we can see the poverty in the surroundings. All these things are recorded by means of a pretext.” (Van der Keuken, 2001, pp. 6-7)

The tuba functions a pretext for looking sideways, and allows Van der Keuken to catch things that he could not have predicted, he allows the shot to surprise him.

Another typical Van der Keuken shot in several of his films is the slight reframing of his image in the shot several times and finally returning to his original framing as if he liked that better; you literally see him thinking about the image while he is shooting it. As he said himself, his thought processes could not take place in another medium than film because they cannot be separated from the moving images and sounds that generated the thoughts in the first place. (Van der Keuken, 1980, p. 71) This reflects precisely what in design is called thinking-through-making, the idea that making something can create new ideas and that it is not always the best way to think first and then make (see page 12).

To Van der Keuken it was important to show *how* something exists, in addition to *what* exists (ibid, p. 122). This demonstrates that he was not satisfied with showing what happened in front of his camera; he wanted to add his own thought processes, which were provoked by these observations. These thoughts helped to shape his observations during the shooting and later also helped to create the connections he makes while editing his films. Looking at the film medium as a material to think and work with also determines how Van der Keuken thought about the documentary form. To him the images and sounds are treated and processed in several ways during the film production process, like a painter uses his or her paint (ibid, p. 56).

The exploration of the aesthetic and formal qualities of film by documentary filmmakers, from early filmmaking until today, demonstrates how documentary film developed and keeps developing as a language to tell stories about reality. These filmmakers use film language as a means to engage with reality and respond to it. The Kinoks, Kossakovsky and Van der Keuken comment on reality by making use of different elements of film language, for instance music, framing, panning and zooming but observation always remains central to their methods. They show that observation does not need to be distanced, neutral and untouched by what is observed, like record footage films suggest. Instead, they use the perspectives they develop while filming to comment on the situations in their films. This response creates a dialectic relationship between the content of the film and its representation by the filmmaker. This opposition allows the film to become a discussion between the subject of the film and the view of the filmmaker, which is not necessarily resolved in the film. None of the films mentioned in this section presents a fixed conclusion, even though they are very different and some are clearly didactic.

De/re/construction

Understanding that observations have a perspective has led some filmmakers to analysing their experiences as observers and to consequently consider how their experiences could best be communicated through film. For instance, this can result in deconstructing a situation into small events, gestures or movements which are then reconstructed on film in a way that reflects the

original experience of the filmmaker. This may seem very analytic and rational, but in practice it is not because filmmakers can still respond intuitively to the situations they film. At the editing table they can also experiment, with rhythm for instance, an important tool in (re)constructing experiences. Rhythm is an important aspect of experience, and in film it can be manipulated in many ways.

Scripting an observational documentary: Ivens

In his silent short film *Rain (Regen, 1929)* Joris Ivens shows a summer shower in Amsterdam, editing beautiful images of rain in the city in a rhythmic way. *Rain* creates an atmosphere more than it tells a story. The basic element of the subject to Ivens is ‘wetness’; he reminded himself constantly that rain is wet and that the film must make the viewer feel wet: “When they think they can’t get any wetter, *double* the wetness, show the raindrops falling in the water of the canal – make it super-wet” (ibid, p. 37). The film is edited with rhythm as a main principle, building on the movement of water in the shots. The rhythm flows, smooth, fast, suddenly changing direction, all inspired by the movement of water it seems. Ivens reported that people are surprised to see a clear sky when they step out of the cinema on a sunny day after seeing the film (ibid, p. 37). *Rain* succeeds very well in letting the audience *experience* rain, supposedly like Ivens experiences rain himself²⁸.

Shortly after *Rain*, Ivens started to make films that include other people’s perspectives too, and even the perspectives of things or forces of nature. *New Earth (Nieuwe Gronden, 1934)* shows how new land is created in The Netherlands by building dikes. Ivens shot the final closure of a large dike with three cameras. He told the operators of the cameras to identify with a different element each. The sea-camera took the perspective of the sea, refusing to give way, the camera that took the perspective of the dike fights against the sea, and the camera that took the perspective of the crane operator is full of confidence he will win his battle with the sea. All three cameras and their operators were “emotionally attached” (Ivens, 1969, p. 95) to their own perspective in the struggle. The competition between the perspectives continued even over lunch during the shooting, with the camera(wo)men all boasting that their protagonist (sea, earth or man and technology) will win today. This results in a dramatic sequence in the film because the different experiences are played out against each other in a rhythmic sequence. Just like in his early film poem *Rain*, Ivens meticulously studied the movements and rhythm of the water, land, people and machines he filmed in *New Earth*. As a cameraman Ivens identified with these movements. He analysed for instance the movements dike builders make by trying to lift large basalt blocks himself, for *Zuiderzee* (1930). During the many showings of *Zuiderzee* in the Soviet Union in 1932 the audiences of workers that did the same kind of labour were surprised to see their experience so well matched on the screen (ibid p. 59-60).

²⁸ This experience is similar to what McCarthy and Wright (2004) call a “felt experience” (see page 168).

In the effort and aim to recreate experiences on film, Ivens first analysed them, by asking questions like: What does it mean to get wet from rain? or What does it mean to struggle against the sea? The answers he initially wrote down in a script. Such a script is mostly based on previous observations that the filmmaker then aims to repeat with a camera present. As such the observational film is constructed from bits and pieces, from smaller observations that fit together as a puzzle that shows the bigger picture. Ivens spent four months collecting all the images he needed to make the 12-minute *Rain*. He slept with his camera next to his bed to get the rain on his slanted studio window in the morning and he had a network of rain-watching friends around Amsterdam who warn him if certain rain effects he has scripted occur at one of his chosen locations. (Ivens, 1969, p. 36) However, his method does not entirely get rid of the situations that are found while filming. *Rain* is scripted, Ivens wrote several versions with Mannus Franken before shooting, but he learned from *Rain* that “making such a film of atmosphere, (...) you couldn’t stick to the script and the script should not get too detailed. (...) the rain guided the camera into secret wet paths we had never dreamed of when we outlined the film” (ibid, p. 35). During filming Ivens was aware that certain situations would never occur again, and that he had to shoot them there and then to have them in his film (ibid, p.36).

Despite his commitment to analysis, Ivens saw clearly that a purely rational and analytic approach does not give a good representation of the experiences he wants to convey. He sought ways to bring emotion to the shooting and editing of his films, such as making viewers feel wet and identifying with what he filmed as a cameraman and constructing a dramatic battle between different perspectives in a sequence. His methods introduced emotion as a valuable factor in documentary film:

“[...] On the whole, we all recognise the danger of too much naturalism in our documentary work. We are learning to conceive documentary film as an emotional representation of facts. Therefore we must learn to think of a documentary as a wide variety of styles – all for the purpose of achieving the maximum expressiveness and conviction.” (Joris Ivens in Delmar, 1979, pp. 104-105)

The ‘emotional representation of facts’ is a definition of documentary film which clearly acknowledges the perspective of the filmmaker and positions him or her in between the people in the film and the people in the audience, not as a window or a fly, but as a person who balances analysis and emotions.

Taking multiple perspectives: Trinh

Filmmaker Trinh Minh-ha is a feminist and cultural theorist, musician and poet. She thinks and theorises through making films; for her, writing and filming are two different activities that allow her to think in different ways (Trinh, 1999). Her thinking is at times very analytic, but it can be poetic and emotional too. As such, she tries to balance the same things as Ivens. In her first film, *Reassemblage* (1982), she explores how she can avoid a top-down view on the Senegalese women who are the main subject of the film, using the rhythm of her shooting and editing. One of her ways of addressing the power relations between the people in front of and behind the camera

is to focus on the perception of reality and not reality itself, for instance by including reflections on the film medium in the film itself. In *Reassemblage* she explores different methods to reflect. What it means to take a perspective is one of them. Her voice-over says at one point:

“Stressing the observer's objectivity
Circles round the object of curiosity
Different views from different angles”
(Trinh, 1982)

Stressing her objectivity is the opposite of what Trinh tries to achieve; she does not aim to stay neutral or invisible by carefully compiling a selection of shots that together give a neutral image of the ‘object’. *Reassemblage* shows a constant changing of angles and sudden breaks in the shots, creating a very irregular rhythm which makes the film “disquieting” according to some and “sloppy” to others (Trinh, 1992, p. 115). When Trinh focuses on a person, she does not show her from a single perspective. She explores different positions, near-by and from a distance, and from different sides without the aim to finally choose a ‘best’ view of the person during the shooting or during the editing. She is thinking while filming, like Van der Keuken, but her movements are much more volatile than his, also because they are not always finished before the shot is cut. For Trinh this filming method comes intuitively; she says that when she is filming, she sees “life looking at me.” (Trinh, 1982) There is a relationship between her and the world she films. The uneasiness of the people in her shots is reflected in the “erratic and unassuming moves” (Trinh, 1992, p. 115) of the camera. MacDonald phrases this in his interview with Trinh about her film:

“The subject always stays in its world and you try to figure out what your relationship to it is. It’s exactly the opposite of “taking a position”: it’s seeing what different positions reveal”. (ibid)



Figure 13 *Reassemblage* by Trinh

By not taking a fixed or preferred position herself in her film, Trinh does not allow the viewer to comfortably follow her. Her rhythm is not easy to follow and certainly does not flow smoothly. Every viewer has to put effort in her/his own exploration of the perspectives offered in the film. The aim of Trinh to “just speak nearby” instead of “speak about” (Trinh, 1982) the women in her film results in a multitude of stories and perspectives to which each viewer can develop her or his own relationships. As a result, *Reassemblage* sets up a conversation between its viewers, the filmmaker and the people in the film, using observation as a technique. This demonstrates that observation can not only move beyond the theoretical idea of film as reality by using film language, as Vertov found, but can also contribute to the idea of film as a conversation.

Trinh leaves it for a large part up to the viewer to create a synthesis from the observations and reflections she offers, unlike Ivens who in the films discussed above offers the viewer a clear synthesis of his observations and the perspectives he developed. Ivens used rhythm in these films to recreate experiences in a natural flow. He wanted to communicate how he, or for instance a dike worker, feels. His filming and editing move with the movements of the dike worker, or the rain falling down and washing through the city. Trinh also focuses on her own experiences and those of others, but moves beyond recreating them. She interrogates her experiences by pulling them apart in fragments and reassembles them in many different attempts that bear the signs of provisional stitching, resulting in an unstable rhythm that makes the hand of the filmmaker always palpable.

Neutral observation

The experiments with film language that started in the 1920s did not replace the neutral observation that started with record footage. The realist approach has continued to remain strong through film history. To many it is even synonymous to documentary filmmaking. Fly-on-the-wall has become a household name for documentaries that advocate neutral observation without interference of the filmmaker. The introduction of portable equipment in the late 1950s gave new support to these ideas because it became possible to follow people in their everyday activities without asking them to stop and repeat things, or discussing what they were going to do before the camera rolled. The direct cinema filmmakers took up the role of invisible observers (despite they did not like the term fly-on-the-wall), claiming to be objective and downplaying their influence on what the viewers see (see page 30). At the beginning of the 1960s these claims were presented as unproblematic, as if life can be recorded as it exists. The camera was seen as a scientific instrument that collects objective evidence that can be judged freely by an audience.

Following people around is one direct cinema observation method that works well if you want to learn about what someone is doing in his or her everyday life. You simply follow them with a camera and they bring you to different locations where you have to improvise how you are going to record it, making the most of existing light and sound conditions. Often, a hand-held camera is used because that keeps the camera(wo)man mobile and allows for quick reactions to changing situations. The technique was first developed by filmmakers who followed politicians and pop stars. Classic examples are John F. Kennedy campaigning in *Primary* (1960), by Robert Drew, and Bob Dylan during his 1965 UK tour in *Don't Look Back* (1966), by D.A. Pennebaker. Direct cinema filmmakers' non-interference adage makes them dependent on other people producing the action. As a result they have always been very interested in showing encounters between people, in particular famous pop stars or controversial politicians who always have things happening around them.

Critics have attacked direct cinema filmmakers for breaking their own rules in their editing, suggesting they added meaning through editing. For example, in one of direct cinema's classics, *Salesman* (Albert and David Maysles, 1969), there is a scene in which the main protagonist, a door-to-door bible salesman who travels the US with a few colleagues, realises he will not manage to meet his sales targets. He is shown in a hotel room while staring out of the window, supposedly in despair of his future. For this sequence, material from different hotel rooms was pulled together without clearly indicating this to the viewer (Bruzzi, 2000, p. 71). In an interview Albert Maysles explained that in the editing room an "other kind of truth" (other than the truth in uncut raw film footage) comes forward through "extracting and juxtaposing the raw material into a more meaningful and coherent storytelling form." (Levin, 1971, p. 277) It is hard to give this second truth a place in direct cinema, but it shows that the filmmaker has powerful tools to construct a story from her or his perspective with material obtained through otherwise neutral observation.

Hanging around and selection in direct cinema: Wiseman

Frederick Wiseman does not follow a person but films in institutions, places where people work like a hospital (*Hospital*, 1970) or a school (*High School*, 1968 and *High School II*, 1995). He looks at how groups of individuals fit in these institutions, which is different from the focus of most direct cinema filmmakers on interesting individuals. Wiseman prefers to show many people as opposed to portraying only one or two. This relates to his wish to approach the complexity of society, and not simplify it. Complexity in his film *Domestic Violence* (2001) becomes evident through the many stories of women who all have their own reasons and explanations for the violence they got into. Through hearing all these stories, the viewer slowly starts to understand the problem and why domestic violence is so difficult to solve. Often the women have been in abusive relationships for a long time and so have their mothers, making it hard for them to imagine not being in such a situation. Viewers of *Domestic Violence* go through the same process of slowly understanding this, just like the women arriving at the refuge. A thorough and thoughtful approach like this can result, as it often does with Wiseman, in a film that shows great empathy and creates empathy with viewers.

To be able to film *Domestic Violence*, Wiseman had to spend about eight weeks in the refuge (Wiseman, 2003). Direct cinema techniques can require a lot of time to shoot because the filmmaker is not supposed to provoke events or even ask a question. This method asks for situations in which things happen by themselves, where interesting encounters or confrontations between people occur. One can for instance observe relatively easily how women are counselled in a refuge for domestic violence, but it is much more difficult to observe domestic violence at home when it happens. Neutral observation is not equally useful in all situations.



Figure 14 *Scenes in the refuge from Domestic Violence by Wiseman*

Wiseman's method might best be described as 'hanging around.' This works well if you want to observe a group that is in a certain situation (for instance being ill) and shares a physical location (for instance a hospital). To get used to the situation, understand what is going on and also to allow people to get used to you as a filmmaker or researcher, you need to hang around. After some time (ranging from hours to days or weeks), people start to forget about your presence and just continue doing what they are always doing, not paying any attention to the filmmakers anymore. According to Wiseman, people in front of his camera expect a certain role of him as a filmmaker, which is to be quietly in the corner observing, not muddling with their affairs (Wiseman, 2003). His opinion stands radically opposite to Rouch's co-operation with participants in shared cinema (see page 42).

Wiseman does not operate his camera himself. He works with two people, for camera and sound. As the director, he keeps an eye on the situation as a whole, and points the camera operator to the shots he wants with hand signals. The selections he makes, that is when and what to shoot, is a matter of intuition to Wiseman:

In shooting, the motivation to record a particular sequence may result from the way someone walks or is dressed; or a hunch, the intuition that something interesting may develop when two people begin to talk. (...) During the shooting there is no time to do an analysis of the various elements that make the sequence 'good'; attention has to be directed to 'getting' the sequence so that the detailed analysis can be made later. (MacDonald and Cousins, 1996, p. 279)

Following hunches while hanging around for shooting only works if with an open mind for the unknown. Wiseman voices here a key motivation behind the methods of direct cinema: a great openness towards unexpected events in front of the camera and the willingness to learn something through the filming itself. The "detailed analysis" he refers to takes place during the editing of the film.

During the editing process for documentary films, selection is again a crucial activity: "Say you're at a place for four hundred hours and you shoot forty hours and you use ninety minutes. All that is selection, all that is choice." (Wiseman, cited in: Levin, 1971, pp. 316-317) Wiseman approaches this second selection process by reliving the experience during the shooting through reviewing the material. This gives him two experiences (first during shooting and

later during viewing the footage) of the events that he builds his film on. The final editing reflects his understanding of these experiences (ibid). Selection is the process that brings him from the 100 hours on the set to the 90 minutes in the edited film. However inevitable it may be, selection by the filmmaker might seem contradictory to what direct cinema aims for. It does however not need to be, as Carroll showed in Chapter Two (see page 32), if you compare it to how journalism, history and science use selection and still can avoid accusations of doing interventions and adding opinion.

Empathetic observation

Record footage and direct cinema advocates have always downplayed or even denied a personal voice in the films they make. Other filmmakers, like Vigo, Vertov, Ivens, Trinh, Kossakovsky and Van der Keuken have created their films around their own perspectives while adhering to observation as their main technique. They explore the specific qualities of the medium and see their films as constructions. In between these two opposites are filmmakers who clearly acknowledge their personal influence and consequently develop methods that take their privileged positions behind the camera, tape-recorder and editing table as a starting point. They accept that they bring their own perspective into their films and build their methods around this notion. One approach taken by several filmmakers is very modest: they put themselves in the service of the people in front of the camera. They craft a subtle balance between the story of the people in the film and the perspective of the filmmakers.

Building relationships: Philibert and the MacDougalls

Nicholas Philibert makes films in a strongly observational tradition. His film *To Be and to Have* (*Être et avoir*, 2002) is a purely observational film, and a very modest film too, about a rural primary school in France. This film and others by him show a strong relationship between him and the people he films. Even though Philibert is never to be seen and hardly ever to be heard himself the audience notices that his presence gives confidence to people and that the relationship between the film-maker and the people he films is based on trust. Philibert's reflections on his films and how he makes them show that the relationships he builds with his subjects are based on empathy:

I often say about my work.. I don't do films 'about', I do films 'with'. The nuance is very important. It means that I don't make documentaries with an expert eye, with the desire to give a speech on the reality I'm filming. I don't have a didactic approach. It's not my intention to provide the viewer with lots of facts. Instead I try to tell a story and bring out emotions. I try to create a liaison (*rencontre*) between the viewers and the people on the screen. To generate feelings and emotions, and perhaps bring forward questions. But definitely not to give answers. (Philibert, 2003)

Philibert clearly tries not to intervene, for example he does not add artificial lighting or even change the light. His method could easily be seen as similar to Wiseman's direct cinema methods, although *To Be and To Have* is more obviously structured than *Domestic Violence* for instance. But Philibert does not aim to be invisible in the classroom (Philibert, 2005). *To Be and to*

Have has many sequences of very little, very normal or even banal events. Yet they are clearly important to the children, and Philibert has noted that and filmed them so viewers can note it too: “I think that my presence, the fact that I’m there, following what’s going on, paying attention, is very important for me and that comes across, that can be seen in the film and in the result, that can be seen on the roll, it comes through.” (ibid)

An important aspect of the relationships Philibert builds with his protagonists is helping to raise their self-confidence, to feel at ease on camera. This can only be done by first gaining their trust. He wants them to feel comfortable. If they don’t feel comfortable he doesn’t film them (ibid). This is clearly visible in *Every Little Thing (La moindre des choses, 1997)*, the film he made about psychiatric patients in a retreat in a French forest. The fact that these patients, who know they are vulnerable, really open up in front of his camera expresses their trust in Philibert. He doesn’t force doors to film people at their worst moments, a popular technique in many of the films that follow people in a fly-on-the-wall style. Philibert films what his protagonists give him. This is clearly different from the method of filmmakers like Wiseman who wants to blend into the background and hopes that people will forget he is there with his camera.

In visual anthropology this method of building relationships has been used too. It is for instance key to the work of Judith and David MacDougall who have made many ethnographic films together. Grimshaw (2001, p. 130) characterises the relationships they build as based on “humility and respect,” expressing the “filmmakers’ sensitivity towards their subject.” Through the empathetic relationships that filmmakers like Philibert and the MacDougalls build with their protagonists, the viewers are let in on the experiences of the people in the film. Moments of everyday life that may seem banal to an outside, distant observer become meaningful if we see them through the eyes of a filmmaker who has built a strong relationship with the people in his or her film.

Identify with the protagonists: Longinotto and Ayisi

One step beyond empathising with others is identifying with others. Empathising means sharing the feelings of someone else, but identification suggests you imagine to be the other person, are able to see the circumstances from their perspective, and feel what they feel. In fiction films, filmmakers have developed techniques of telling a story in such a way that the viewer easily identifies with the protagonist. Documentary filmmakers have experimented with these techniques too. A clear example is *Sisters in Law* (2005), a documentary on the law system in Cameroon by Kim Longinotto and Florence Ayisi. The film introduces Vera and Beatrice, two female lawyers in Cameroon, who handle cases of domestic violence and child abuse with great confidence, resulting in the first convictions ever in their country for these charges. We can easily identify with the lawyers because the formal settings of the courtroom and the interrogations are filmed like fiction films, taking the perspective of the lawyers by for instance looking over their shoulder to the accused.

The perspective of the filmmakers is very close to that of the two lawyers. The lawyers are present in most of the scenes and we often look where they look. We are also encouraged to adopt their view on the abuse of women and children. Ayisi stresses that they wanted to show something positive from Africa. What they show are very horrible stories, but they also show that with enough stamina and confidence change is possible. This is the real perspective of the filmmakers, and of the lawyers. The relationship between filmmakers and their main protagonists is clear: the filmmakers help to spread the perspective of their protagonists, aimed at changing society. But however strongly they identify with the people in their film, the filmmakers stay outside the world of their protagonists. They feel close to that world and allow the viewer to feel close to it as well, but they do not show their presence in that world; they remain observers.

Observation may be the best known technique for making documentary film, with its engrained characteristic of capturing everyday life as it is lived. This makes it an ally of the theoretical idea that film is like reality. The many different ways of observing in documentary film show however that the technique harbours a much richer spectrum of possible ways of looking at and filming people and situations. Observation in documentary film ranges from keeping a distance at all times to building relationships with the protagonists in the film, and from downplaying the influence of the cinematic apparatus to exploring all the kinds of observations a camera can make. This connects the technique firmly to also the two other theoretical ideas of documentary film: film as a language and film as a conversation. Sometimes camera observations can be very different from what the human eye perceives, as for instance Vertov discovered. Others, such as Trinh, explore the power related to different perspectives to observe from. Yet others focus on the uniqueness of their personal observations, as Kossakovsky does. Or they reconstruct experiences on film by observing and analysing them in detail, as Ivens has done. Some filmmakers aim to keep their own perspective out of the film and for others it is their starting point to make a film. What binds all these filmmakers is that observation is a central technique in what they do, and together they have enriched observation and those still filming keep doing so.

The second group of techniques observes only film material, at the editing table, because they all build their films from found footage and never use a camera.

Compilation

Filmmakers use compilation techniques to edit found or archive footage into a film. Often this footage has already served a purpose, and is taken from an archive that may be institutional or personal. In the early days of film, especially in the 1920s in the Soviet Union, filmmakers experimented with editing existing material to find out how film in general can create meaning and tell a story. Kuleshov's experiments (see page 38) led to perhaps the most important lesson learned by Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s: the meaning of a film is created through editing. This

discovery is the basis for a whole range of compilation techniques that use film material often in a critical and dialectical way. Other films using compilation techniques stay much closer to the original meaning of the material they use and don't question its meaning; rather, the archival film fragments become the illustration of the neutral narration. Many films about the Second World War and other major historical events are examples of this. I will not explore this fairly straightforward use of existing film material in these films here. Instead, I concentrate on filmmakers who, since the 1920s, have made critical use of compilation techniques and taken documentary material from very different sources, ranging from newsreels to commercials and home movies.

Juxtapositions and the reversal of meaning: Shub

Among Soviet filmmakers in the 1920s, Shub was one of the key figures to explore editing. Eisenstein experimented with editing techniques in features, and Vertov did the same for non-fiction film. Shub applied what Eisenstein calls 'intellectual montage' (see page 39), based on the idea of creating meaning out of the 'collision' of film shots, to newsreels and home movies²⁹.

Using aesthetics to combine different sources

By the mid 1920s Shub was a skilled editor and experimented with diverse archive material. As an editor, she saw opportunities for the use of existing film material to tell the story of the 1917 revolution ten years after the event. Very little film material on the actual revolutionary events was available but Shub found ways to use what was then considered 'counter-revolutionary' film like home movies of Tsar Nikolai II. Combining this material with old footage from newsreels, she made *The Fall of the Romanovs* (1927). Despite the different sources from which Shub drew her material, and the many camera operators that filmed it, she insisted there needed to be a certain aesthetic unity in the material that were brought together in the editing process. Shub found that she should not only look into the original meaning of images but also at their formal qualities, like framing, contrast and movement. To construct new meaning from her found footage, she had to experiment with aesthetic aspects of compilation film³⁰.

Her story of the revolution creates meaning that is contrary to the originally intended meaning of the footage. A technique she developed in this film is the juxtaposition of images to give them a new, often opposing meaning. Weisfeld's description of a scene from the film is a good example:

²⁹ This stands opposite the idea that montage connects shots of film to create continuity, as for instance the classical Hollywood system does. Hollywood montage creates continuity across time gaps; parts of the action are cut out, but it is suggested that the movement continues. For instance, in one shot a car leaves a house and in the next it arrives at a shop. The duration of the actual trip is many times longer than the two shots in the film but the viewer sees this as a continuous movement from house to shop.

³⁰ Kuleshov argued in 1918 that this is a general aspect of film: "Montage is to cinema what colour composition is to painting or a harmonic sequence of sounds is to music." (Kuleshov (1918) in Taylor and Christie (eds.) 1988, p. 46). A recent example that shows how important aesthetics are in compilation film is Simon Pummell's *Body Song* (2002) which brings together material from all possible sources to make a full-length film about human life, from birth to death.

A crowd of elegant idlers are dancing [a mazurka on the awninged deck of a yacht].
The dancing tires some of them. They drink wine.
Title: 'It made me sweat.'
And again they dance.
Title: '...sweat.'
A peasant, exhausted by his work, ploughs a furrow...
(Leyda, 1964, p. 28, from Ilya Weisfeld's foreword to Shub's *Krupnym planom*, p. 25)

Our familiarity today with these kind of oppositions in editing shows how well accepted this technique, which was invented for propaganda, has become in features, documentaries and commercials.

Taking a political position

Soviet filmmakers like Shub discovered in the 1920s that montage is not neutral, but that it gives the editor the power to tell a story from a certain perspective. Film is discovered as a language that can express a certain point of view: "By the juxtaposition of these 'bits of reality', [Shub] was able to achieve effects of irony, absurdity, pathos, and grandeur that few of the bits had intrinsically." (Leyda, 1960, p. 224) In the revolutionary Soviet society of the 1920s this opportunity is of course perceived in ideological and political terms, but also elsewhere in Europe filmmakers started to use editing techniques to subvert the originally intended meaning of film images, by re-editing newsreels to cater to political needs (ibid, p. 28ff.). Vigo used the same idea a few years later in *A propos de Nice* (see page 37).

Through her juxtapositions of content and her aesthetic choices Shub took a political position. She considered herself a constructivist who appeals to the intellect of the audience, as opposed to 'played' film that appeals to the emotions of the audience (Roberts, 1991, p. 153). She did not want to impose meaning on her audience without giving them the opportunity to notice. Rather, she wanted to present her film in a very organised, rational way:

To mount documentary it is necessary to be clear: the spectator should have time not only to see people and events well but also to understand them. (Roberts, 1991, p. 154)

As a consequence, Shub maintained as a montage principle to not cut up the sequences she finds in newsreels. Rather she presents the sequences and shots she finds in their full length. Even though Shub did not even leave the editing room and the archive to make a film, in the late 1920s she was considered to make films with more documentary quality than her contemporaries who are surrounded by everyday life during their work with a camera on the streets, such as Vertov who used a lot of brief shots and fast editing techniques (Yampolski, 1991, p. 161). This shows that already in the 1920s, the discussion on how everyday life can be portrayed accurately was not just a discussion on mimicking reality. It has always also been a discussion about language, and about the aesthetic means used to relate experiences and situations from people's everyday life.

Reviews of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 911* (2004) show the relevance of a discussion on language and aesthetics in documentary film today. A typical juxtaposition Moore creates is the shot of an Iraqi woman crying about the people she lost in her bombed house and Britney Spears

giving her support to the war. Some reviewers argue this is not fair to Spears, because we start to see her stardom as a tool to coerce us into doing bad things. But Moore thinks that if she gets involved in recruiting she is a representative of the people who destroyed that home, and he is free to use her image of youth and happiness to emphasise the sorrow of the Iraqi woman (Smith, 2004, p. 25). Other reviews claim Moore is doing nothing else than documentary filmmakers have been doing for ever: bringing his perspective to the films he makes (Menand, 2004). Filmmakers like Moore follow Shub and Eisenstein in their openness about the constructive aspects of the films they make, and the collisions they set up to let the audience create meaning. This is not necessarily propaganda; it is how films work, also documentary films. The biggest accomplishment of *Fahrenheit 911* is perhaps that it has reminded many audiences, not the least in the United States, that documentaries are different from journalism and that they are supposed to have an opinion.

Radical scavenging and construction of meaning: De Antonio

The function of the newsreels of the 1920s was taken over by live television broadcasts in the 1950s. Emile de Antonio turned the material of one famous live television event, the Army-McCarthy hearings in the United States in 1954³¹, into a compilation film without the addition of any narration. Out of 188 hours of material he bought from ABC television, De Antonio edited *Point of Order* (1964), a 93 minute film that, according to its maker, did not attack the person McCarthy, but the American political system that had created McCarthyism, the witch hunt for people who were supposedly involved in communist activities (Weiner, 1971, p. 8). *Point of Order* offers a didactic message, but without explaining everything. De Antonio used only the material of the televised hearings, but re-edited it completely by putting images and statements in a different order and context (see below for an example). He was even criticised for not railing against McCarthy hard enough, and not clarifying events with a voice-over. These were however his deliberate choices.

De Antonio saw it as his task to offer the material to his audience, and consequently it is the task of the viewers to create their own explanations. Waugh (1985, p. 244) calls De Antonio's editing "democratic didacticism" because it allows the viewer to read the film on at least two levels: the intended meaning of the footage and the perspective added by reconstituting the material. A dialectic between these two levels emerges and forces viewers to develop their own opinions. Like Shub and Vigo, De Antonio used a combination of aesthetic and dialectic/political approaches to montage. Neither of these filmmakers can separate the two. Aesthetically, De Antonio considered explanatory narration "boring as hell" and "too easy (...). When you come to a filmic problem you solve it by just having a voice telling you what it is" (ibid., 1985); he preferred to rely entirely on filmic means to make his point. Politically, he considered using narration to

³¹ Communist-hunter Senator McCarthy was accused of pressuring the Army into giving favourable treatment to one of his former aids, but he was found not guilty at the end of the hearings. They did end his career though because he was seen bullying on live television and the public no longer trusted him afterwards.

explain that everything has “a kind of contempt built into it” (ibid., 1985), as if the viewers are not capable of understanding the film without all that narration. All too often, the voice-over in a film irons out all controversy and discussion. Apart from his aesthetic objections, adding a voice-over does not serve the political purpose that De Antonio had with his films. His construction technique deliberately leaves it up to the viewer to leap over the gaps between different sounds and images from the archive. This helped De Antonio to set up a conversation with his viewers, and stimulates conversation between audience members, because not everything is explained in detail. He created meaning with his dialectical structure, but the viewer has to construct meaning too. This could also serve discovery research, when research results need to raise discussion and create understanding rather than present fixed conclusions.

Aesthetics derived from painting and music

Aesthetically, De Antonio was influenced by painting and music. He said that his compilation film method is “a collage junk idea I got from my painter friends,” (Rosenthal, 1978, p. 4) referring to painters like Robert Rauschenberg who was working with collage techniques at the time. Music and painting showed him in the 1960s that people, viewers and listeners, are perfectly capable of making ‘a leap’; that people can combine images, sound and voices into a story or discussion and that not everything needs to be explained in full by the film itself. De Antonio constructed his films out of existing materials but the construction is not seamless. The image for instance changes while the sound continues, and vice versa, an image freezes while the sound continues, and so on. About these film aesthetics De Antonio said that people can easily understand them without narration because “after all, it’s exactly what goes on in a Beatles song; it’s what we’ve been prepared for by our painting” (Weiner, 1971, p. 12).

Today these techniques are common sense in most genres of television and film, but even so, historic documentary films are still very reluctant to use them as rigorously as De Antonio for instance did to express the isolation of McCarthy at the end of the Army-McCarthy hearings. He combined images from several earlier moments in the hearings into one sequence where McCarthy continues to talk into the microphone while we see cutaways of people getting up and leaving, and finally a shot of the empty hall. The sequence is constructed by De Antonio out of material from several days (and a still of the empty hall) but the meaning is true to what actually happened during the event: at the end McCarthy was no longer taken seriously and eventually he stood alone (Rosenthal, 1978, p. 7). De Antonio could have used narration to present that conclusion, but the sequence is stronger if the viewer draws such a conclusion him or herself.

Distinguishing ethics from objectivity

De Antonio readily admitted that he constructed the last sequence of his film to express his point of view that McCarthy had lost touch with the American people, and he even admits that he is prejudiced and has a political agenda. But even his adversaries have not been able to find even one distortion in *Point of Order* (ibid., Rosenthal, 1978, p. 10). This need not come as a surprise



Figure 15 End sequence of *Point of Order* by De Antonio.

knowing De Antonio's working method, which he calls "radical scavenging" (Weiner, 1971, p. 3). He considered doing research for a film very important because through it the knowledge that makes him an expert on the subject is built up. Being an expert enabled him to show the material he had found "just like a comic strip or something would be laid out in a collage," (M. Weiss, 1974, p. 31) as De Antonio says. As a result, the effect of the material is much greater than when it would be merely held together by a voice-over that suggests objectivity. De Antonio considered it foolish to pretend to be objective, but he insisted he was honest: "Honesty and objectivity are not the same thing. Nor are they even that closely related" (ibid., 1974, p. 35). He made a distinction between ethics and objectivity, and argued, like many other documentary filmmakers did and do, that ethics are important because they are the only guarantee eventually that what the viewer sees is true. For this reason it is important for viewers, critics and theorists to know how documentary films are made, and indeed in reviews, criticism and theory this has always been an important aspect. Knowing how a film is made, and discussing the implications, helps viewers to decide if what they see is true. This is exactly how De Antonio wanted his democratic didacticism to work: the viewer creates the meaning from the film and decides on its value.

Compilation techniques in our media society: Farocki

In the 1990s, German filmmaker Harun Farocki made a few found footage films using many compilation techniques that clearly relate to the then popular music genres hip-hop and dub. For him, as for De Antonio, popular culture is an important source of inspiration. In 1993 Farocki made

his film *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher* (*A Day in the Life of the Consumer*), using nothing apart from 1,000 tv commercials out of the 10,000 he had viewed. The film shows one day from waking up in the morning all the way to waking up again the next morning. Farocki stitches the everyday situations that many commercials are made of, the little dramas they create and solve through the product or service they sell, together into one day. This is a film about the everyday in German society because the commercials are part of the everyday of everyone who watches television. They are part of everyday life, and they show the ideal, often exciting everyday as envisioned by certain people at a certain time. But they also show the routines of the everyday³². By editing commercials together into a film about an average day, Farocki creates a dialectic between these two positions.

Another film Farocki made two years later, *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* (*Workers Leaving the Factory*, 1995), uses material from exactly one century of filmmaking to explore the first situation that was ever filmed: workers leaving the factory of the Lumière brothers in 1895. Here the material is much more diverse than in *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher*: it ranges from newsreels to feature films to commercials. Both films perform a kind of archaeology of society through the moving images society itself creates. Film and television are sources from which Farocki derives how the everyday is lived. Taking such an approach fits the media society that we live in since the late 20th century very well. Filmmakers, musicians and other popular culture creators have discovered this is an interesting way to reflect on society. They acknowledge that television images are no longer about everyday life, they have become part of the everyday. This understanding is relevant to discovery research too because it points at the possibility to study existing images as a way to understand certain groups of people (German consumers in *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher*) or situations (leaving the workplace in *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*). Farocki's films show that such research is not merely finding the right images; it is very much about how you stitch them together too.

Zapping as a contemporary form of montage

The idea to make *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher* came when Farocki was one night zapping through the channels of his television and he 'edited' with his remote control a Lux filter cigarettes ad together with an ad for Lux soap (Baumgärtel, 2002, p. 238). The finished film still reflects the aesthetic of zapping, but Farocki has also imposed a clear narrative structure on his material: one average day from dawn to dawn. In doing so he manages to free the adds from their original context and give the viewer the opportunity to find new meanings for the all too familiar images. His narrative makes the familiarity of television commercials strange³³.

³² This combination of the mundane and the exciting is typical for the everyday, as was discussed on page 4.

³³ Making the familiar strange (see page 190) is a well known technique to reflect on the everyday, in art and also in discovery research. Surrealism uses the technique often for instance as do the Cultural Probes in discovery research (B. Gaver et al., 1999).



Figure 16 From the morning sequence in *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher* by Farocki

For instance, in the morning commute sequence of *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher* we see people who are stuck in traffic (this turns out to be the ideal moment to use Nivea hand cream) and people in a tram bumping into each other because the driver slams the brakes (this becomes an ideal moment to promote a washing powder because the jumper of the person our protagonist bumps into does not smell very fresh). We see only parts of the commercials and because of the context and narrative in which they are presented we at first see them as references to routine morning commutes. The promotions pop up in an unnatural way in this context which makes both them and the commute look strange and unusual.

Farocki fragments his material but he puts it together again too, in the simple but strong narrative of one day and one night. This recontextualisation allows new ways of seeing the routine everyday activities, the ads and the promoted products. He makes the familiar look strange. Farocki not really inverts the original meaning of the commercials, like Shub did with her juxtapositions, he turns the fragments he uses inside out: the morning commute becomes the main activity in the clip where it was previously only a backdrop, and the promotion of washing powder is now secondary. He emphasises that his prime goal is not to criticise advertising: “Advertising is like the Church: even if you are not a believer, you must acknowledge its artfulness. Advertising has always made critique harmless by ironically incorporating it.” (ibid, p. 239, my own translation). Instead, he distorts the commercials by creating new, structured combinations of fragments of them. This condensation creates new ways of seeing the

commercials and thinking about them. Farocki speculates with *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher* how an ideal day in consuming Germany could look like by following the suggestions television commercials offer rather than criticising them.

The compilation techniques Farocki uses are derived from zapping as a contemporary form of montage, utilised by most television viewers. Zapping fragments television channels and recombines them in new ways. Farocki applies the same technique to shots and sequences. In a way this is related to the collisions and juxtapositions that Shub created with her version of intellectual montage. But the version that Farocki uses is created for a media-literate audience, something that did not yet exist in Shub's time. As we have seen, Shub preferred to keep her found sequences intact because "the spectator should have time not only to see people and events well but also to understand them" (Roberts, 1991, p. 154). In our media society, Farocki does not need more than fragments of less than a second sometimes to make whole worlds understandable because people understand these fragments as references.

Repetition and scratching to present different perspectives

Another technique that Farocki uses abundantly is repetition, in particular the form that is known in hip hop and dub music as scratching. In *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* repetition is what holds the film together on an aesthetical level. Repetition is of course present in showing the same situation, workers leaving the factory, over and over again. Farocki shows many different shots of this situation from documentary and fiction films, but he also repeats the same shot or sequence of a film. The Lumière film returns often, but also for instance fragments from a promotional film for gate security technology is shown many times, often as a comment on another clip. Sometimes we see the promotion for no more than a few seconds, but that is enough because we have seen it before and it returns later. It works like a sample in hip hop music; it comments, it refers, it creates a certain atmosphere and provides rhythm to the film. All of this is done by the different 'samples' (as fragments are called in hip hop and dub) of the promotional clip on gate security in *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*.

In *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher* Farocki uses for instance the image of a skyline by night (taken from an ad for a video camera) as a sample to give rhythm to the section on the evening and early night, and a shot of waves breaking on the beach does the same in the morning sequence. We also see many different scenes of drinking coffee and eating sandwiches at breakfast in the morning, from commercials of every decade since the 1950s, showing that in all these years we kept the same routines. Repetition in this film reminds us of the repetitiveness, the routines, of everyday life. The technique adds to both the style and the content of the film.

Also longer shots are repeated. The Lumière film *Workers Leaving the Factory (Sortie d'usine, 1895)*, about 40 seconds long, comes back many times in *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* but different every time, sometimes it is in slow motion, and sometimes Farocki uses the early cinema technique of focusing through a peephole, for instance to show how some of the women

pull each other skirts. A long tracking shot from *Clash by Night* (Fritz Lang, 1952) is shown twice, first we see Marilyn Monroe exiting a fish packing factory for her lunch break to meet and chat with her boyfriend without any comments or additions. Then Farocki repeats the sequence with his voice-over commenting that the scene illustrates how we become individuals again after we leave the factory gate, the image freezes sometimes to illustrate this or when he needs more time to talk, and he interjects clips from two other films to comment on the sequence too.

The ways in which Farocki uses repetition and scratching helps viewers to encounter the more didactical aspects of his comments with their own ideas. At first he shows a sequence without much interpretation. Later, when it is repeated, we get interpretations but often more than one. Repetition can be used as a way to hammer fixed ideas into people's heads, but Farocki shows that it can do the opposite too: allow viewers to see a shot or sequence from different perspectives and create a conversation or discussion between these views. He uses film language (freeze frame, peephole, juxtaposition of similar shots, narration) to present a range of possible perspectives that not easily consolidate into a univocal conclusion. Instead, they provoke a discussion that is left to the viewer to continue and perhaps resolve in his or her own way.

Feeding discussions with speculation

A third technique Farocki uses is best described as speculation. His voice-over in *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* sometimes simply provides the context to a clip that is necessary to understand it, but at other moments it openly speculates on possible meanings of the images we see. For instance, at the beginning of the film he presents four shots of workers leaving the factory in different decades. The film of the Lumière factory in Lyon, in 1895, shows everyone walking fast, “as if something pulls them forward and no one wants to stand still in front of the factory,” interprets Farocki; 1975 in Emden at the Volkswagen factory the workers run “as if something pulls them forward too”; 1926 in Detroit we see running workers, “as if they have already lost too much time”; 1957, workers in Lyon “are running as if they know where they will find a better place” [my own translations]. Farocki cannot know these things for sure, his narration is tentative; he is speculating about the reasons for the behaviour of the workers.



Figure 17 *Three times a factory gate in Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik by Farocki*

His commentary is an essay that deliberately opens up different interpretations by trying out and speculating upon several possible interpretations of the film fragments. The tone of his voice, tentative and definitely not authoritative, and what he says leaves enough open to make

your own interpretations as a viewer. He unpacks the issues instead of concluding on them. The viewer can discuss issues, and if s/he likes draw conclusions, on different levels: What has changed over a hundred years of working in a factory? What kind of struggles have happened between workers and factory owners, around the gate of the factory? What kind of society do we live in and how did it change over those hundred years? How are people disciplined by the factory, can you see it in their clothing, or in how they behave? These are questions that are not directly asked by the film but they can easily come up when watching the film. This does not mean that the film refuses to make any statements. The speculation does lead to something one could call conclusions, but it is more up to the viewer to draw the conclusions than to the filmmaker, Farocki seems to argue.

Gradually it starts to emerge for instance that the factory gate film fragments show that over the last hundred years we have shifted from a society that disciplines people to a society based on controlling people. The speculation Farocki uses stimulates his conversation with the viewers on the subject of the film whereas a more didactical authoritative approach would have made such a conversation impossible. Speculation as a technique allows Farocki to present many different perspectives on the documentary material he collected, not just by using the voice-over, but also by using for instance fiction films from factory gates. He makes use of the power of film to represent reality, to show us situations of workers leaving a factory for exactly a hundred years, but he also questions these representations with his own tentative views and speculations, and stimulates the viewer to do the same. As a filmmaker he seems to do his research more with the viewer than for the viewer.

Farocki shows the cuts and stitches he has made in both films. In *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik* for instance when he presents the Fritz Lang sequence in its entirety first and then a second time with narration, slow motion, freeze frames, and other clips that serve as comments. The honesty De Antonio talks about (see page 70) is clearly present in Farocki's films because he shows the constructions he makes in the films themselves, for every viewer to see. The techniques Farocki uses create dialectic relationships between his shots. Because the constructions remain visible, the films invite the viewers to add to the discussions that emerge from the films. In design processes such discussions are valuable to a team that needs to work with the results of a small group of researchers who bring their findings from the field to the team meetings and write them down in reports. Researchers could learn from the techniques that Farocki uses to stimulate discussion in the teams they do their research for.

Personal archives and home movies: Caouette

The material used by Shub, De Antonio and Farocki is very diverse, yet they show that it is possible to find aesthetics that bring their diverse sources together into one coherent film. With the growing importance of the moving image in our media society, more sources and ever more amounts of material become available. Camcorders and video phones have made moving image

producers of many people and video blogs, MySpace and YouTube give access to this personal film material. In particular home movies have proven over recent years that they can be interesting and valuable material for documentary films using compilation techniques. A well known examples is Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* (2004), a very personal and disturbing portrait of the filmmaker and his mentally ill mother told using music video editing techniques like split screen and layered images. Caouette uses many graphic video filters, loud music and fast editing to turn his home movies of performances he did as a kid, audio recordings, video diaries, answer phone messages, and movie clips into a disquieting story. This soul-searching self-portrait gives deep insight into the feelings of Caouette and his mother without accusing



Figure 18 Caouette's home movies in Tarnation look like music videos. Using his personal archive of home movies made since he was 12, video filters, answer phone messages and often loud music, Caouette uses style elements of music videos to paint a disturbing picture of his youth and his mother's mental illness.

others of their misfortune. *Tarnation* has the same openness as the other films discussed in this section. Viewers may be disturbed by the content of the film, and perhaps too by the overwhelming visual style and occasionally loud pop music that give the film a strong resemblance to music videos, but we are not guided to a conclusion. Caouette shows that extreme interference with the source material does not need to lead to a strong grip on the exact message of the film.

Filmmakers also tap into this enormous source of home movie material to make films on subjects that are filmed with camcorders by many different people. These tapes can be acquired from people through for instance an announcement or direct solicitation. This approach to sourcing material may be of specific interest to discovery research. Many people have tapes at home and are sometimes willing to send them as Albert Elings and Eugenie Jansen found when they made *Royal Wedding Tapes* (2002) a compilation film about the royal wedding of the Dutch crown prince in 2002. They handed out pre-stamped envelopes to filming people in the audience and got some 100 tapes of the event from video enthusiasts. Out of the material they edited a one hour film following the chronology of the day, seen through the eyes of the public. They use split screen techniques extensively to show how many people see the same things, but slightly differently. This leaves much room for interpretation by the viewer who can discuss similarities and differences without the guidance of narration or titles. The only guidance the film offers is the

occasional comments of the enthusiasts themselves, made during the filming. To discovery research, this technique shows how the perspectives of a group of people can be brought together in a story without losing the diversity of the individual contributions. It is largely up to the viewer to discover what is most relevant or inspiring.

Many diaries of video enthusiasts can be found online on MySpace and YouTube, which has democratised the distribution of home (-made) movies. The further development of compilation techniques may benefit from this development because access to found footage was always difficult and very time-consuming. Also archives of institutional film and video have emerged online, for instance on archive.org, and keep growing steadily. The compilation techniques presented in this section show that these sources are valuable material for explorative documentary films that manage to give new meanings to the footage they found in archives, thus setting up discussions on the subjects the footage is (sometimes only loosely) related to.

Compilation techniques have existed since the early days of filmmaking, and continue to be used and reinvented by filmmakers, both in terms of where the source material is found and how it is treated, as for instance Caouette shows. The principle behind this technique has remained the same: use archive film or found footage to make a film, instead of shooting your own material. Compilation films are made on the editing table; their makers do not venture out into the world. The focus on editing gives this group of techniques a strong connection to the idea that film is like a language. Nevertheless they have a clear relation to reality too, because what keeps the diverse images in compilation films together best perhaps is their shared relation to a particular reality: the subject of the film. The hundred years of moving images that Farocki brings together in the subject 'workers leaving the factory' are enormously diverse but strongly connected too because of their shared theme that is strongly rooted in reality. Finally, techniques such as juxtaposition (Shub), the construction of meaning (De Antonio), and repetition to present different perspectives (Farocki) demonstrate that compilation techniques have always been used to set up conversations too. All three ideas of documentary film are expressed in compilation techniques.

Intervention

The techniques discussed so far – observation and compilation – do not interfere in the situations they show. Of course, there is an interaction between the filmmaker and her or his protagonists in observation techniques. The people normally know they are filmed. This interaction however is never overt – the gaze into the camera that most filmmakers try to avoid is the only acknowledgement of it. Trinh makes the relationship between herself as observing filmmaker and the African women she films visible by politicising it in *Reassemblage* (see page 59) but she does not interfere in the situations she films other than on the editing table where she reassembles her fragments and adds her narration. Compilation techniques intervene in situations by definition

only on the editing table where they create a view or several views on the situations in the shots that were found in the archive.

This section looks at techniques of filmmakers who engage directly with the situations and people they film, for instance by participating in the events they film. Filmmakers might even set up a situation specifically for the film, such as an interview. In doing so, they move beyond observation, even if they just observe the events they intervene in or cause. This leads to a direct interaction between filmmaker and protagonist. The filmmakers who are discussed below, for instance Rouch whose shared cinema was already introduced in Chapter Two (see page 42), make this interaction explicit. As a result reality, or *ciné-reality* as Rouch calls it (see page 43), is created rather than found. The interaction foregrounds the idea that a documentary is built around a truth that emerges at the moment of the encounter between filmmaker and protagonist in the presence of a film camera. In discovery research this approach to eliciting answers from participants is not unfamiliar, but the film camera seldom actively participates in or contributes to the interaction between researcher and participant as Chapter One showed. Mostly the interaction is observed from a distance. The intervention techniques discussed here actively use the opportunities film as a language and as a conversation offer.

Cooperating with the protagonists: Rouch

As an anthropologist, Jean Rouch did not see how he could exercise his profession without being a filmmaker, so he combined these two disciplines from the beginning of his career, in the 1940s. He spent much of his time in West-Africa, but also studied Parisians. He made his best known film with sociologist Edgar Morin in Paris: *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961). The film marks the beginning of *cinéma vérité*³⁴. With *cinéma vérité* Rouch introduced a range of new ideas and techniques to documentary filmmaking, partly sparked by the introduction of the same lightweight camera and sync tape recorder that started direct cinema (see page 30). The equipment made filmmakers mobile outside the studio, but *cinéma vérité* is certainly not a by-product of this technological advancement. Rather, it worked the other way around: the new ideas about filmmaking required new, more mobile equipment and Rouch was actively involved in developing and testing that equipment because he saw use for it. His use was however very different from what the direct cinema filmmakers propagated.

Acknowledging the presence of the filmmakers and the camera

As consequence of Rouch's practice of shared filmmaking, which involved cooperating with his protagonists (see page 42), it did not make any sense to downplay the presence of the camera as observational cinema often does. To the contrary, in *cinéma vérité* Rouch regularly made the filmmaking itself part of his films. *Jaguar* (1967), *Hunting the Lion with Bow and Arrow* (*La chasse au lion à l'arc*, 1965), *Les maîtres fous* (*The Mad Masters*, 1959), *Les tambours d'avant Tourou et*

³⁴ See page 42 for a brief introduction to the film as a key example of *cinéma vérité*, and see Chapter Four for an extensive analysis of several of its sequences.

Bitti (1967), *The Human Pyramid* (*La pyramide humaine*, 1961), and *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*, 1961) are all films that clearly acknowledge the presence of the filmmakers on screen. This goes beyond showing the film crew is present; even the filmmaking process is part of the film itself. For instance, at the beginning of *The Human Pyramid* we see Rouch talk to the protagonists to explain what the film is about and how it will be made; he explains the role the participants have in developing the story during the filming and the open ended, improvisational approach of the film in general. *Chronicle of a Summer* shows even more of the filmmaking process. The film opens with a discussion between the filmmakers and one of the protagonists



Figure 19 Asking passers-by “Are you happy?” in *Chronicle of a Summer*. Rouch and Morin make the filmmaking process visible by discussing the idea to interview people on the street with the protagonist. The situations they film on the street are created for the film and bring out another reality than the one that can be observed, a *ciné-reality* as Rouch says.

(Marceline) about going out on the streets to interview people before we see her trying this, in 1960, completely new method on the streets of Paris, scaring some people with their unfamiliar microphone and unusual question ‘Are you happy?’. At the time a such an undirected question confused many people. The film shows they don’t really know what is expected from them, and what answer they could give. Unexpected answers and reactions are the result, which makes the sequence interesting.

At the end of *Chronicle of a Summer* we see many of the participants in a projection room, watching the film and discussing its value and truthfulness, and the last sequence shows Rouch and Morin strolling between glass cases with ethnographic exhibits in the *Musée de l’Homme*, discussing these reactions (see Figure 30 on page 109). They conclude that the film provokes a discussion rather than simply communicating the ideas they developed while making the film. “That’s the difficulty of communicating something,” says Morin, “we are in the know...” meaning

they are part of the events they want to communicate³⁵ (Feld, 2003, p. 328). Hiding the filmmaking process in *Chronicle of a Summer* would have been impossible; Rouch and Morin are as much part of the film as their protagonists and the people on the streets of Paris. Including the filmmaking process and the response of the protagonists to the film is an appropriate and elegant acknowledgement of this.

Participating in the experience of the protagonists

Rouch always operated the camera himself, and the technique he developed reflects very much his ideas of shared cinema and acknowledgement of the filmmaking process. He used a handheld camera, something he picked up in 1945 when that was still a taboo in filmmaking. Typical for his improvisational attitude and his appreciation of chance, he first started filming from his shoulder when he lost his tripod in Africa and another was not at hand (Levin, 1971, p. 133). Later, he considered himself to have been lucky to have lost the tripod because it freed him as a filmmaker and allowed him to take part in the situations he shot.

For me the only way to film is to walk with the camera, taking it where it is most effective and improvising another type of ballet with it, trying to make it as alive as the people it is filming. I consider this dynamic improvisation to be a first synthesis of Vertov's ciné-eye and Flaherty's participating camera. (...) Leading or following a dancer, priest, or craftsman, [the cameraman-director] is no longer himself, but a mechanical eye accompanied by an electronic ear. It is this strange state of transformation that takes place in the filmmaker that I have called, analogously to possession phenomena, "ciné-trance." (Rouch, 1973, p. 38-39)

So, for instance in *Jaguar*, we follow Damouré, Lam and Ilo who travel from Niger to the Gold Coast and back as migrant workers. The experience of being a migrant is reflected by the camera work: "Rouch's camera, never still but always in movement, swooping, turning and dizzily mobile, is a full participant in the existential experience which migration represents" (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 103). Rouch's camera becomes part of the situations and experiences he films, he is not an outsider filming social reality from a distance. This has consequences for the viewing experience: "Rouch's films evoke the smells of the market and the textures of objects. Rouch's visual and acoustic sensuality – his embodiment as a filmmaker – gives his films a sense of ethnographic presence" (Stoller, 1992, p. 216). His improvisational style is central in creating this experience for the viewer and does not remain limited to the filming itself. The narration Rouch delivers in for instance *Les maîtres fous* shows a similar unrehearsed approach (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 99), and so does the narration by his main protagonists in the films he shot silently, like *Jaguar* and *Moi, un noir* (1958). Rouch's improvisations are very playful, and it has been noted that play is a central notion in his films and work: "His presence in each film is distinctive. He hovers like a capricious spirit, he is provocative, he grins, he has fun. We feel that he is enjoying himself - unlike Morin, for example, in *Chronicle [sic] d'un été*" (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 118). His films are like games with

³⁵ *Nous sommes dans le bain* is the line Morin uses, which is subtitled in the film as "We're in for trouble," but the idiom rather means 'we have our hand in this,' 'we are implicated, complicit.' In other words: we are part of this. Feld (2003, p. 328) translates it as 'we are in the know' in his integral translation of the film, and includes a footnote that explains the idiom along similar lines as I have done here.

certain rules, but offer also the opportunity to bend the rules, find the cracks between them and make up new rules along the way if the old rules no longer work. This is how Rouch played the game, how he made films and did his ethnography, how his collaborators and protagonists did it, and also how the viewers can watch the films. Everyone is invited to take part in the same experience.

Highly stylised interviews: Morris

Interviewing is a technique that was originally developed in law, and later journalism, as a way of doing investigations in pursuit of truth (Winston, 1995, p. 14off.). Documentary filmmakers have picked up the technique but don't necessarily take the same approach lawyers, policemen or journalists do. Of the many examples of interviewing in documentary film, *Shoah* (Claude Lanzmann, 1985) is perhaps the most famous one. This nine and a half hour film recalls the holocaust through interviews alone, without using a single meter of archive footage. The film is above all a monument for the remembrance of the holocaust as an unthinkable human tragedy caused by humans (Lanzmann interviews both victims and Nazis). On a minor level, it is also a monument for interviewing on film as an invaluable technique to elicit stories from people even when they rather not talk about their experiences.

Interviewing is also central to the work of Errol Morris. He developed a highly stylised way of interviewing. He even invented a new apparatus for it, the 'interrotron,' which allows the interviewee to look Morris in the eyes while at the same time looking straight in to the lens of the camera. Using two modified teleprompters, Morris projects an image of himself in front of the camera and interviews his protagonists while he is out of sight for them³⁶ (A. Kaufman, not dated). He does not use his device always; sometimes he simply sits next to the camera and asks his questions to the participant directly. This of course results in the classic interview situation with the interviewee looking out of the frame, to the interviewer, and makes the viewer slightly more an outsider in the conversation. The interrotron is one example of how much effort Morris puts in stylising his documentaries, albeit in unusual ways.

Eliciting answers you could not have imagined

With his films, Morris looks at how people know what they know. He takes this perspective as a filmmaker, when interviewing people, when doing his research, and when shooting and editing his films. He compares his work to being a private detective, a job he took up in New York City when he was out of work at the beginning of his filmmaking career, and he thinks there is little difference; "I wasn't doing anything different from what I was doing all along: just talking to

³⁶ The effect on film is double-edged: on the one hand it feels as if we are part of the conversation because the interviewee looks at us – a similar effect as the video diary technique where the protagonist looks straight into the camera to make a statement, but is alone when s/he records the message. On the other hand, the interviewee seems far away, as if talking to us via a video link, because we notice that they are not talking to Morris directly but through some kind of machine. This is reinforced by the sound of Morris' voice that appears to come through an intercom system.

people, getting them to talk to me, and trying to remember stuff' (Bloom, 2004, p. 47). In his interviews, Morris is not looking for the straight answer that a hard-boiled detective or sound-bite that a journalist might seek:

It's never clear what a "straight answer" might be. Questions and answers are very peculiar. They're often interesting when the answer has nothing whatsoever to do with the question (ibid).

To get answers that have nothing to do with his questions, Morris's interview technique is focused on letting people talk. "The idea is not to listen to what people say, but to keep them talking" as Hoberman recalls that Morris once told him (Bruzzi, 2006, p. 258). Letting people talk freely does however not mean Morris sees them as authorities on everything they talk about, and he certainly does not believe everything they say. He argues for example:

There is this idea that narration [what people tell you in interviews] gives us information about the world, when actually it gives us information about the speaker; he reveals both his world and the radical disjunction between his world and the world at large. Looking at that disjunction is the enterprise of all my movies (Morris in: Bowen, 1997, p. 49).

The similarities between filmmaking and detective work are explicitly signalled in *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), about a murder case. To Morris, "the film's charm and interest derives from putting you in that detective mode of listening and looking, of trying to figure out of what you hear is true or false." (Bowen, 1997, p. 76). The film is famous for proving that a man who was in prison for 12 years, of which some time on death row, was innocent. But the interviews in the film do not simply present this conclusion to the viewer; we have to find out what is true and what not by reading between the lines. The people in the film reveal themselves and their view on the world through the things they say. Because Morris lets them talk, reflect, contradict themselves and "contradict their contradictions" (Bowen, 1997, p. 48), he gives us viewers the opportunity to draw our own conclusions from everything the protagonists say.

Combining interviews with research material to empower viewers

Morris helps his viewers, and himself, to read between the lines by offering the results of his own research as a counterweight to the stories people tell him in interviews. He strongly believes in good research. He does his research not just before an interview; also afterwards and in between interviews he checks the statements people have made. In subsequent interviews he then brings his findings forward – not necessarily to confront people but to achieve a deeper understanding of a situation or of something they have told him. In *The Thin Blue Line* the two sources of knowledge – the interviews and Morris' research through reconstructions based on police documents – are combined in the film. The stories of the interviewees are reconstructed and re-enacted in a detailed, almost glamorous way using for instance artificial lighting and slow motion. His use of re-enactment is fundamentally different from Flaherty's, Grierson's and Ivens' re-enactment. Contrary to them, Morris does not suggest the re-enactments show what actually happened. They show what his interviewees told him and the reconstructions sometimes contradict each other: "the purpose was to bring you deeper and deeper and deeper into the

mystery of what actually happened.” (Morris, 2005) As viewers we are put in the position of the detective who has to figure out how to fit all this together and ultimately we have to draw our own conclusions.



Figure 20 Highly stylised reconstructions in *The Thin Blue Line*

Style does not guarantee truth – not in editing and not elsewhere

Editing interviews involves making selections. It is not unusual to interview people for hours when you are going to use only minutes in a film. Often the questions of the filmmaker are edited out. Morris does this most of the time too. The order of the fragments in the film is often no longer the order in which they were recorded. Heavy editing of interview material is not unusual. Morris does it all the time:

I have always heavily edited my interviews. The tracks have been cut up. Almost as if they were worked over with a Vege-matic. Chop, chop, chop, chop. And the idea is - I could be wrong – to clarify what people are saying. (...) But I always try to cover my tracks. I put images over the cuts in the soundtrack. And I hide all of the cuts (Morris, 2005).

The images used to cover up the cuts are sometimes taken during the interviews (like people’s hands and nodding interviewers) but Morris prefers a range of other options such as police documents and re-enactments of the situations people talk about (*The Thin Blue Line*), illustrative

shots of the activities people talk about (*Fast, Cheap & Out of Control*, 1997) or photographs, custom-made graphics and archival film (*The Fog of War*, 2004). The effect of this covering up is that the story told by the interviewee seems to flow naturally, as if nothing has been cut out. Whatever the type of images he chooses, they are always highly stylised, as the re-enactments in *The Thin Blue Line*. He uses a glamorous style, but, argues Morris, “that's just stylistic stuff” (Negroponte, 1997, p. 25). To him, style doesn't guarantee truth, nor does style make it impossible to find truth. Deliberately he breaks all the ‘rules’ of direct cinema:

Instead of using lightweight equipment, we tried to use the heaviest equipment that we could afford. (...) I tried to be always as obtrusive as possible. One of the great no-no's in making films, you're told, "People are not supposed to look at the camera." (...) Well, I had people looking directly at the camera, talking directly to the camera. (...) Now, was what I did, any less, any more truthful than cinema verite³⁷? I would say no more, no less truthful (Morris, 2005).

Morris sees it as his contribution to documentary filmmaking that he has introduced many techniques that are common to fiction filmmaking (Negroponte, 1997, p. 25).

With intervention techniques documentary filmmakers interfere in the situations they show. They participate in the situations they film, and in the activities of their protagonists. Other intervention techniques set up situations for a film – interviews for instance. A third way to intervene was already discussed in relation to Farocki's *Arbeiter verlassen die Fabrik*: narration by a voice-over (see page 75ff.). All these interventions create reality through the filmmaking process. They demonstrate that reality is not something that only exists outside filmmaking. It can be created in very simple ways, for instance by interviewing as Morris does, or by discussing with people as Rouch does. The engagement of filmmakers with protagonists expresses the idea that films are conversations in a very literal way. There is also a connection to film as a language. A voice-over can for instance have a specific tone, such as the speculative voice of Farocki. Interviews can be recorded and edited in many ways as Morris shows, and Rouch's playful interactions with his protagonists influence his movements with the camera. In this group of techniques again all three ideas of documentary filmmaking are used. And again there are no strict or systematic relationships between the techniques and the ideas. Rather, the ideas are expressed by the techniques in many different ways and filmmakers again and again find new ways to do so as part of their filmmaking.

The fourth and last group of techniques is arranged around performance as a technique to make documentary films.

³⁷ Morris refers here to the ‘American cinema verite’ of Leacock, the Maysles brothers and Wiseman (see page 61), which I have called direct cinema.

Performance

Performance techniques may seem incompatible with documentary filmmaking, but what is often seen as the first documentary made is a completely performed film. *Nanook of the North* (1922) by Robert Flaherty was scripted in New York and acted out in the Arctic, by Inuit who are re-enacting the lives of previous generations, not their own (see page 33). Ever since, performance has been discussed and further developed as a technique to make documentary films. Below some remarkable examples of the use of performance techniques, by participants and directors, are discussed. In this discussion, performance is seen as a part of everyday life, like Bruzzi, Butler and Hall argue (see page 46): we all perform parts of our everyday lives, not for a camera but for our children, parents, boss, colleagues, teachers, students, et cetera, and in public life in general.

These performance techniques offer inspiration for the use of video in discovery research in design. They could help to expand and reflect on research methods that use performance too, like informance, focus troupes and bodystorming (see page 201). In particular, they could diversify the way these performance-related methods use video, which is now mostly limited to capturing the performed situations in a record-footage style (see page 51).

Re-enactment

As a term, re-enactment covers a wide range of techniques which all somehow let people in front of the camera re-enact a situation from their own (or people similar to them) everyday lives. They are not actors and generally act in a film for the first time. For their acting, they draw inspiration from their own lives.

Romanticising the past with re-enactment: Flaherty

Nanook of the North (1922) was the first to prove that non-fiction films could be a box-office success. The film set off Flaherty's career as a filmmaker. He had seen himself more as an anthropologist but noticed that the film material he came home with was not engaging at all (MacDonald and Cousins, 1996, p. 37). It needed narrative, he decided and this brought him to re-enactment as a technique which he consequently used in most of his films.



Figure 21 *The main character in Man of Aran by Flaherty*

His masterpiece is *Man of Aran* (1934) about a family on one of the Isles of Aran off the west coast of Ireland. The structure and approach of the film is similar to *Nanook of the North*: the main characters form a family of three but in real life they are not a family. They do live on Aran though. The storyline is similar to *Nanook of the North* too: we witness man's struggle against nature. To make the story more heroic, they however re-enact scenes their ancestors lived. The main event of the film is hunting the basking shark with nothing else than a rowing boat, handheld harpoon and ropes. Hunting like this was no longer practiced in the early 1930s on Aran, and Flaherty had to bring an expert from elsewhere to teach the people of Aran how to do it (Barnouw, 1974, p. 98). Arguably, this takes Flaherty's technique beyond re-enactment to acting, although an important aspect is that these amateur actors from Aran act out situations from their own cultural and family history.

Flaherty asks much from his actors. He brings the fishermen of Aran into dangerous situations, for instance when the rowing boat blows ashore in high seas. But he always develops a strong bond with the people he films: "He won me and my soul out of me as well" said Pat Mullen, an islander who interpreted for Flaherty (Barnouw, 1974, p. 98). Flaherty's amateur actors get paid a salary for their efforts and see it simply as work, in a remote place where almost no work is available. The bond with his actors is strengthened because Flaherty has the habit of developing his film on location, and making a first print of the negative to show it to the people he works with. This was difficult to achieve in the Arctic and also hard on the Aran isles. But it is crucial to Flaherty's method of re-enactment because it clarifies to his actors, who mostly never saw a film before, what they are participating in. Building a relationship with the people you film is crucial to Flaherty's method of re-enactment. He had all the time to do this because he generally spent at least two years on location for his films, as he did on Aran. The relationships that Flaherty built are not really visible in his films, but he depended on them to make the films. He already used the shared cinema approach that would be explicitly formulated by Rouch in the 1950s (see page 42), and it is no surprise that Rouch mentions Flaherty next to Vertov as his main influences (see page 81).

Man of Aran is Flaherty's masterpiece because it is beautifully filmed, well edited and has an elaborate soundtrack. The shark hunting is very dangerous – the shark is longer than the primitive boat – but the film presents us beautiful images edited in a wonderful rhythm to a soundtrack that treats the shouts of the men as a musical instrument. Flaherty can put a scene like this together because he has full control over his actors. The shark is the only unpredictable element. This is an advantage of re-enactment. It allows the filmmaker to use the exact film language s/he likes, and if a shot was not captured in the best way, the actors can do the same thing again immediately, or later if the rushes have disappointed. It is up to the director to decide. This is how Flaherty achieved beautiful photography. He could wait for the best circumstances, the best light, wind and so on, get his actors together, find the best position for the camera and shout 'action.'

Flaherty has been criticised not because he uses re-enactment as a technique, but because his films do not acknowledge the social reality of his age. Rotha (1952, p. 107) for instance writes “(...) the Flaherty method is an evasion of the issues that matter most in the modern world, is devoid of any attempt at serious social analysis.” Flaherty for instance does not make any reference to the role of the landlords of Aran or the poverty of the people he films, nor does he address or even mention colonial exploitation of people in his other films. His films show a reactionary view on society, a sentimental escape to the past that has little to do with the 1930s Flaherty and his participants live in. Rotha criticises Flaherty’s films because according to him the documentary method “should not avoid the economic relationships which govern the present productive system, and consequently, determine the cultural, social and aesthetic attitudes of society” (ibid). One can of course argue about such economic determinism, but documentary film derives its believability from a strong connection to reality (see page 28ff.) and one can wonder how strong this connection still is in *Man of Aran*. The re-enactments of the past are not a problem in themselves, but the sentimental, reactionary view on the past, brought forward by the beautification of the struggle against nature, is. Re-enactment is only a cog in this machine: it allows Flaherty to mould reality into the story he wants to tell, but it does not force him to romanticise reality as he chooses to do.

Avoiding exotic dirt with political re-enactment: Ivens and Storck

Re-enactment can also be used to make an overtly political film. Joris Ivens and Henri Storck used the same techniques to record several crucial scenes for an overtly political film in the Belgian mines in the same period, *Borinage* (1933). They wanted to film situations that had taken place in the past, to show how the miners had invented tactics to resist the power of the police. It was not possible to wait or even provoke these situations because the filmmakers would have been arrested and Ivens would have been thrown out of the country, not having a permit to film in Belgium.

They re-enacted for instance an attempt to evict a miner’s family who had not paid their rent from their house (Ivens, 1969, p. 89ff). The tactic the miners used was to have at least one miner sit on every piece of furniture in the house. Since the police had orders to remove furniture and not people the miners could stare down the police who would give up waiting after a while. For the eviction Ivens and Storck rented two police uniforms from the opera in Brussels and filmed in a house where an attempt to evict happened recently, with the family and their neighbours who prevented it. Also a demonstration and a tactic to have illegal one-minute meetings in the street were filmed. The re-enacted demonstration was discovered by the police, who thought it was a real one and gave everyone a beating, which of course confirmed the veridicality of the reconstruction. The miners however did not forget they were filming and quickly brought the camera to safety (ibid., 1969, p. 92).

In *Borinage* Ivens and Storck deliberately avoided beautification, despite having every opportunity to make a very beautiful film, certainly in the re-enacted scenes where they could control everything. An aesthetically pleasing image would however distract the viewer, they thought, and keep him or her from thinking “This is dirty – this smells bad – this is not a place for human beings to live.” (ibid., 1969, p. 88). They actively took precautions like changing the nice effect of a shadow on a pile of dirty plates to avoid this kind of distraction of the audience. In his autobiography, Ivens mentions the pitfall of ‘exotic dirt’ that he actively avoided in *Borinage*. He wanted to make the dirt look repellent to the audience because that would help to make the film a weapon for the miners in their struggle. He mentions Elton and Anstey’s *Housing Problems* (1935, made in Grierson’s film group) as an example of making dirt look “interesting and strange” and accuses Grierson of falling into the “error of exotic dirt” because “you could not smell these London slums.” (ibid., 1969) The photography of *Borinage* was criticised because it was not considered ‘interesting’ but Ivens and Storck “felt it would be insulting to people in such extreme hardship to use any style of photography that would prevent the direct honest communication of their pain to the spectator” (ibid., 1969, p. 87). Re-enactment helped them to achieve their goal of ‘honest communication,’ demonstrating it is a tool whose effect on the film’s connection with reality depends on how the filmmaker uses it.

Fiction

Next to being used in re-enactment, performance techniques are also used to create fictional elements in documentary films. One could argue that Flaherty and Grierson (see page 32) and perhaps even Ivens and Storck themselves use fiction because they include stories that never happened exactly as they were filmed. Nevertheless they stayed close to what happened in the recent or distant past. The film techniques discussed below do not reconstruct something that happened before. Instead they create reality.

Expressing the co-existence of opposites in ethno-fiction: Rouch

Rouch plays with the dichotomy of truth and fiction in his films (see page 44). He considers this to be a false opposition and circumvents it by accessing the “truth of fiction,” a concept coined by African literary writer and critic Chinua Achebe (cited in Stoller, 1992, p. 207). For Rouch the truth of fiction is revealed in what he calls “ethno-fiction,” a mixture of ethnography and filmmaking, and of documentary and fiction:

For me as an ethnographer and filmmaker, there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction. The cinema, the art of the double, is already a transition from the real world to the imaginary world, and ethnography, the science of the thought systems of others, is a permanent crossing point from one conceptual universe to another; acrobatic gymnastics where losing one's footing is the least of the risks. (Rouch in a 1981 postscript to his interview with Enrico Fulchignoni, in Feld, 2003, p. 185)

Talking about *Jaguar*, Rouch explains how ethno-fiction works in practice. In his account of shooting the sequence of Damouré, Lam and Ilo, who are crossing the border between Niger and

Gold Coast illegally as part of their migrant journey, Rouch simply walked up to the customs office, and asks a police officer: “I am shooting a film of some people, do you mind?” without explaining what he was trying to film. Rouch makes a shot of the officer with in the back – without the officer knowing or seeing – his friends crossing the border illegally. It was the shot Rouch and his team needed, but at the same time the proof they needed that illegal crossings were possible. So they did not bother to go back and do a legal crossing, showing their papers. They had set up an illegal border crossing and filmed it; that was all they needed. (Rouch interviewed by Marshall and Adams, in Feld, 2003, p. 205)

The first complete film that Rouch made using ethno-fiction is *The Human Pyramid* (1959). At the start of the film he gets a group of students in Ivory Coast together to make a film about how relationships between black and white young people can exist without racism. He proposes to them to use ethno-fiction and invites them all to contribute to the scenario which they will write during the making of the film. The outcome is not preset. Rouch warns them that someone will have to play the racist and others victims of racism, and that they have to stick to this role, like villains in other films do. “So everything is staged?” asks one of the students. “What do you mean by staged?” Rouch replies, “I create an experience.” For Rouch, the camera does not capture reality, it creates reality – or ciné-reality as he calls it (see page 43). He knew his protagonists would change their normal behaviour in front of the camera. But that does not destroy what he wants to film. It creates what he wants to film: a dialogue between him as an observer, the protagonists and even the imagined viewer of the film because both he and his protagonists think about how the story can be told best.

Creating ciné-reality is for Rouch a playful activity. In the opening titles that follow the dialogues with the students, the film is announced as an experiment that is a game, and Rouch presents himself as “happy to film how it evolves.” The film consequently builds on the experiences of the young participants to create scenes and a storyline. Racism is mixed with falling in love and jealousy, friendships and fights. The normal hostilities between teenagers over friendships and love relationships gets mixed up with racism until the two can no longer be separated by the viewer. It is a typical teenagers’ story that is different only because it is set in colonial Africa and black and white students mix, which was unusual for 1959. The film is clearly grounded in the lives of the teenagers, but also in their imaginations. Apparently it was real enough for African countries to ban the film across the continent. Racism at the time was a problem that was better left unmentioned (Yakir, 1978).

Making ethnographical films using ethno-fiction mixes up the difference between real and unreal, description and imagination, and shows not only that the extremes of these pairs co-exist, but that one can play with combinations of these extremes too. Stoller remarks this reflects our condition in contemporary late consumer capitalism particularly well (Stoller, 1992, p. 208), thus obliterating another opposition that Rouch loves to trash too, between ‘primitive’ African societies and ‘civilised’ European ones. This works the other way around as well. If the situations

that are researched are characterised by the co-existence of oppositions, research techniques that know how to combine oppositions, such as fact and fiction in ethno-fiction, are particular well suited to investigate these situations.

The different performance techniques discussed above, relating to re-enactment, reconstruction and ethno-fiction, all use acting of some kind. The borders between these techniques are not as clear as the use of different terms might suggest. They should be seen as examples of how performance techniques can be used in documentary forms, not as separate techniques that should be followed precisely. All these techniques involve performances by the participants in a film, but they are not the only ones who can perform in a documentary. The filmmakers can play a role too.

The filmmaker as protagonist

A very personal way of making a documentary is to make it about yourself. The format is often called video-diary, or video-letter, reflecting its popularity since the video camera became available to the general public. It has spread through art (for instance Sadie Benning's films), television (for instance *Videonation* (Mohr and Rose, 1993–2000) on the BBC) and also discovery research (for instance Berg et al., 2003) where it is sometimes called auto-ethnography (see page 20). Recent examples in documentary film are for instance Caouette's *Tarnation* (2003) discussed earlier (see page 77) and Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004), a video diary of his 30 days MacDonald's-only diet. It is clear that filmmakers like Caouette and Spurlock perform themselves and their everyday. They are constantly aware they are on camera. But, given that everyday life can be seen as a performance (see page 46), this does not make their stories less genuine..

Journeys of a reflexive filmmaker: McElwee

Like Caouette and Spurlock, Ross McElwee makes very personal films. With *Sherman's March* (1986) he made a film about himself and his relationships with women from the South of the United States, but at the same time many other subjects like the march of general Sherman in the American Civil War, Burt Reynolds and the possibility of nuclear holocaust. He is hardly visible in the frame, but his personal narration is omnipresent without being a strong guide to the viewer, unlike in most non-fiction films such as nature and historical documentaries. Soon after he started filmmaking, McElwee got dissatisfied with simply observing and narrations that attempt to be objective. He rather preferred to include his personal response to the world he experiences, an approach he calls "subjective narration" (Poppy, not dated). As a consequence the viewer has to discover for him/herself what the film is about and how to understand it. In McElwee's films, the viewer embarks on a quest with the filmmaker, who keeps a diary of everything that happens along the way. About *Sherman's March* McElwee says "I want the viewer to sort of muddle through the first part of the film with me. Films are about life and life isn't succinct or neat, and I want them to find the film along with me" (G. Kaufman, 1993, p. 56). This reminds us that McElwee's

films are about more than himself; they are also about the lives of the people he meets, everyday life in more general terms, and the culture McElwee lives in.

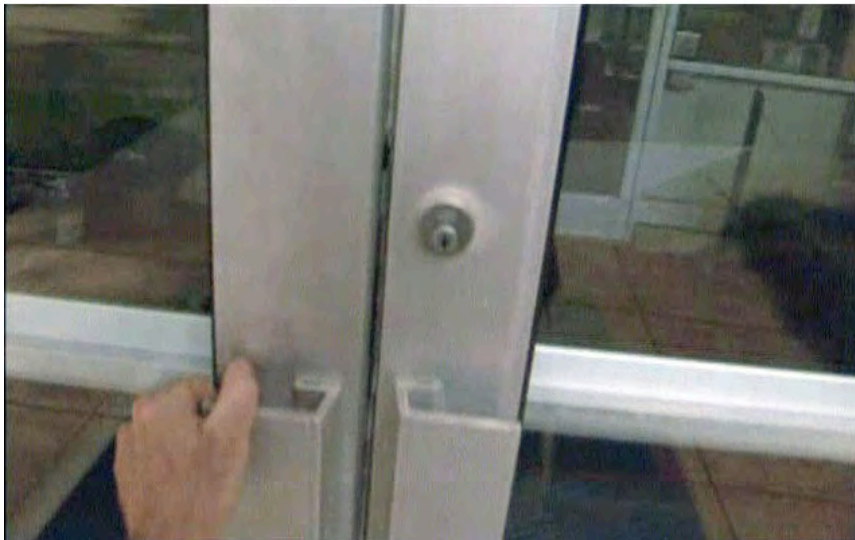


Figure 22 McElwee is visible in his own films, here *Bright Leaves*

In his most recent film, *Bright Leaves* (2003), McElwee's performance techniques have become more elaborate because he steps much more into the frame than he did in *Sherman's March*. *Bright Leaves* shows him regularly presenting reflexive monologues (often about a previous sequence in the film), confronting the viewer with the fact that s/he is watching a film. He deliberately tries to infect the viewer with the same kind of reflection he engages in himself: "Suddenly you see the filmmaker addressing the camera, and you're forced, if it's working correctly, to question not only what he's doing but what you're doing as an audience member, and I like that." (Lucia, 1993, p. 34). This is not distracting from the film. The audience is drawn into the story by making them aware that the story is told, an old storytelling technique.

It is hard to say what *Bright Leaves* is about. The film has even more diverse content than *Sherman's March*. A few themes keep the film together: his family, the tobacco industry, smoking and the landscape of North Carolina. But also an old Gary Cooper movie about tobacco growers

(*Bright Leaf*, Michael Curtiz, 1950) and parking lots. McElwee recorded *Bright Leaves* over a period of five years, without a clear script, as part of his everyday life. He worked mostly alone, sometimes with a soundman, who is occasionally replaced by his teenage son Adrian (who consequently brings skateboarding as a subject into the film). The film serendipitously moves from one situation to another, from a party to an evening out bowling to a marriage for instance. Every time there is plenty to talk about; everyone can chat about smoking habits or family just like everyone has an opinion on the weather. But McElwee also visits places to explicitly talk to someone, like his nephew (a film reel collector) who shows him *Bright Leaf*, the Gary Cooper movie that he thinks is based on the story of how the McElwee family lost their tobacco company to their competitors.

What holds *Bright Leaves* together and makes it interesting is the personality of the filmmaker. McElwee does not hammer down a point like Moore does in his films (see page 68), he does not even seem to have a point. He presents a mixed bag of facts and experiences hold together loosely by his on-screen persona and 'tobacco' as a very broad theme. His heterogeneous reflexive style has to do with making films on his own he thinks: "One person is bound to be more subjective and produce a quirkier film" (G. Kaufman, 1993, p. 49).

McElwee's performance results in a personal perspective on many subjects and allows him to bring in almost any material. This leads to a film that sets up a conversation, in the sense that was discussed in Chapter Two (see page 42ff.). The conversation takes place in the film itself, with the director reflecting on it all the time, and it takes place between the film and the viewer, who is left to judge for him/herself. The performance technique of McElwee, his filmmaking and the way he reflects on his filmmaking in the film, holds this all together.

The filmmaker as a provocative persona: Broomfield

Nick Broomfield, like McElwee, is happy to appear in his own films, as a director. Broomfield is aware that the relationship he has with the people in his film can change how they behave: "I think what's important is the interaction between the film-makers and those being filmed, and that the audience is aware of that interaction so they can make decisions of their own" (Broomfield in: Wise, 2002, p. 18). Therefore he actively constructs this relationship to serve the purpose of the film. He uses his involvement in the films he makes to provoke the protagonists into showing who they are.

A clear example is how he approaches Eugene Terreblanche in *The Leader, His Driver and the Driver's Wife* (1991). Terreblanche is the leader of the South-African neo-Nazi AWB, and the film is for its first two-thirds a diary of Broomfield trying to get an interview with him. The attention Broomfield gives to this process in the film, including everything that goes wrong, is typical for his focus on relationships with his characters. He adjusts his on-screen persona to what suits him best in these circumstances. For instance, when he finally is going to meet Terreblanche for the interview, he is too late and when Terreblanche demands an explanation, he

only mumbles that the crew was having a cup of tea. This makes Terreblanche even more angry, showing a side of him that he normally would not show in an interview. Broomfield deliberately provokes him and Terreblanche responds to a level that it becomes comic but very revealing. In the actual interview this is exacerbated when Terreblanche does not understand the question Broomfield asks and gets angrier and angrier. All the time, Broomfield is pretending to be naïve playing he does not understand what is wrong, repeating and rephrasing his question over and over again.

Although he is clearly performing in this scene, the situation that arises is very spontaneous. Broomfield confirms this when he says “The crucial encounters are very quick and unscripted and they give me an enormous flood of adrenalin.” (MacDonald and Cousins, 1996, p. 364). As Bruzzi (2000, p. 177) notes, the film may be “manipulated and preconceived,” but Broomfield’s way of making films does not allow him to do a second take of the same situation. This makes Broomfield’s performance technique spontaneous. The performances of his persona are creating reality, ciné-reality, as Rouch does with ethno-fiction. Broomfield developed a naïve, provocative alter ego to serve his films. McElwee does the same, albeit with a different, more reflexive persona: “I am creating a deadpan persona, heightened in an attempt to attain some sort of comic level. I’m creating a persona for the film that’s based upon who I am, but it isn’t exactly me.” They both see their performances as a tool to make their film, and, as Broomfield says, “capture the spontaneity and immediacy of life” that for him is central to documentary filmmaking.

Performance techniques, like the other three groups of techniques presented in this chapter, are not a well-defined, neatly separated set of tools available to the documentary filmmaker at any situation. Instead, the term performance points at an array of possibilities to use role-play in some way in documentary film. How exactly it can be used depends on the circumstances, who makes the film and so on. Sometimes it might be necessary to use re-enactment because the events the filmmaker wants to show have taken place in the past. This brings documentary film close to the language of fiction films, because scenes can be set up exactly as the filmmaker wants, and demonstrates that language used in fiction film is not necessarily different from language in documentary film. Re-enactment allows filmmakers to bring everyday life and reality of the past into a film as Flaherty, Ivens and Storck show. Ethno-fiction is more speculative and playful because it explores situations that might exist, as Rouch does with his protagonists in several of his films. His approach foregrounds the idea of conversation. Finally, filmmakers can also play a role in their own films, as McElwee and Broomfield show, and use their own performance as a technique to create reality, or offer a certain perspective on it. Their own role-play becomes part of the language the filmmakers use to set up a conversation with their protagonists.

Conclusion

This chapter has amassed a large collection of documentary film techniques, grouped as observation, compilation, intervention and performance techniques. A bottom-up approach to discussing film techniques was used, that started with particular films and film sequences instead of a typology. These sequences were selected for their potential to inspire new ways of using video in discovery research.

Each of these four groups of techniques comprises a heterogeneous collection of modes of documentary filmmaking. The observation techniques venture out from registration in record footage, similar to current uses of video in discovery research, to several directions such as more personal, more distanced, more reconstructed, more empathetic, more exploring, more scripted, and more deconstructed observations. There is also no single relationship between these techniques and the idea that film is like reality. All these techniques have a relationship with that idea, but these relationships are all different as the discussion of the techniques makes clear. The same situation exists for the three other groups of techniques.

Compilation techniques make use of archive material and found footage. They offer the potential for the reversal of meaning through juxtaposition, the construction of meaning out of scavenged film material, zapping and scratching to support speculation and use home movie footage as material for highly stylised and personal expression.

Intervention techniques centre on the cooperation between filmmakers and protagonists; the films are more reflexive and show the filmmakers' active participation in their subjects' activities, acknowledging the presence of the film apparatus, eliciting answers through interviewing, or adding their own perspective in a voice-over.

Performance techniques comprise re-enactment of past events, ethno-fiction to speculate with protagonists, and filmmakers who perform a role in their own films. Together, this kaleidoscopic collection of documentary film techniques serves as a source of inspiration for finding new ways to use video in discovery research. The collection could easily be expanded by adding more examples to each group, but it is already rich enough to serve as the source of inspiration for my own filmmaking practice, and that of others who want to expand their uses of video in discovery research.

All the techniques have been developed through practice, while making films. Since the first years of film, at the end of the 19th century, filmmakers have experimented with cameras, later also editing and again later sound. Also the theoretical ideas of documentary filmmaking discussed in the previous chapter were often developed in practice, by trying things out in a way that is very similar to the thinking-through-making approach in design (see page 12). This creates a strong link between practice and theory, and this chapter has demonstrated that many of the techniques that have been developed can be related to the theoretical ideas discussed in the previous chapter. The relationship is not always straightforward though. There are no simple

relationships between the ideas and techniques, nor can a system or matrix showing their relations exist. That would simplify the ways in which the ideas exist in films and techniques are used in filmmaking too much. Instead the ideas and techniques have relations with each other in numerous different ways in films. I developed the ideas and techniques as tools that facilitate discussions on documentary films and how they are made. They aim to be practical instruments that support the enrichment of the use of video in discovery research.

The next chapter gives several examples of how the ideas and techniques relate to each other by discussing two films: *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) and *Lift* (2001).

4 Two documentary films – *Chronicle of a Summer* and *Lift*

Chapter Two developed three ideas of documentary film, and Chapter Three presented four groups of techniques documentary filmmakers use. They have many relations in films but do not form a system that describes types of films, as was discussed. Together, they offer a broad view on documentary film because the ideas and techniques can be recognised in many films. But it also gave a somewhat fragmented view on what documentary films are because mostly sequences of films were used to support and explicate the ideas and techniques, and complete films were not discussed in depth. The level between these two consists of the films themselves, and they are the focus of this chapter. By making the techniques and ideas work together, filmmakers create a film rather than a pile of shots or a registration. The films are important to this research because the new ways to use video in discovery research aim to move beyond registration, towards being films. In my practice I aim to make films inspired by the ideas and techniques I found in documentary film. The results will be presented in Chapter Five.

Two films are discussed here to show how they combine these techniques and approaches. First I will describe *Chronicle of a Summer* (*Chronique d'un été*, Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, France, 1961), and then *Lift* (Marc Isaacs, United Kingdom, 2001)³⁸. Both films have been chosen for their relevance to discovery research. *Chronicle of a Summer* is a film that is also sociological research, and experiments with new research techniques. In film history it is seen as the first *cinéma vérité* film. The film is seminal because it very explicitly and elegantly introduces many ways to turn a documentary film into a conversation. The film as a whole, as well as separate sequences can be seen as discovery research still today. *Lift* has been chosen because it is a short, contemporary, small-scale film that exemplifies how documentary film could be used in discovery research in a simple and elegant way.

Chronicle of a Summer

The story of *Chronicle of a Summer* is complex and mundane at the same time. The filmmakers introduce a group of young Parisians as the main participants in an ethnographic, sociological investigation to understand the lives of ordinary people in Paris in the summer of 1960. *Chronicle of a Summer* is a seminal documentary film, and at the same time it is an anthropological exercise. At the time it seemed to be a pivotal moment in history because the war in Algeria could

³⁸ *Chronicle of a Summer* is available on dvd, but only in its original French spoken version and without English subtitles unfortunately, from fnac.com. *Lift* can be viewed online in its entirety (25') on the Channel Four website: http://www.channel4.com/fourdocs/archive/the_lift.html.

end and in Congo another war could start soon. It was right before the independence of many colonies in Africa. This historical background is present in the film and becomes personal as relationships between black and white people are discussed. But the film focuses mainly on the young Parisians – workers in factories and offices, students and artists and asks them: How do you live? I will discuss three of them below: Angélo, a worker at Renault who sees no future for factory workers; Marceline, a Jewish girl who survived the concentration camps and thinks her work is boring; and Landry, a student from Africa who finds it difficult to adapt to French life. The filmmakers connect the lives of these people by bringing them together and including them in the research the film does. In *Chronicle of a Summer*, filmmaking and doing research are indistinguishable which makes the film an interesting case-study for the use of video in discovery research. In my analysis I will concentrate on how Rouch and Morin use cinematic techniques and ideas like the ones discussed in Chapters Two and Three to do the research and communicate their findings through making a *film* – not writing a research report or creating presentations that utilise unedited film clips. *Chronicle of a Summer* became one of the most influential documentary films because it introduced the idea of *cinéma vérité* (see page 42). It also won the Prix de la Critique Internationale at the film festival in Cannes in 1961.

Stories from Parisian everyday life

The film starts in the streets of Paris, in the early hours of the morning when workers go to factories and offices. On the soundtrack we hear the sirens of factories. Crowds of people emerge from the metro and walk towards us. These are the anonymous crowds of the city, but they are filmed in a friendly way. Some people are singled out and we can see them as individuals, some of them even look into the camera. Rouch speaks the commentary with these introducing shots: “This film was not played by actors, but lived by men and women who have given a few moments of their lives to a new experiment in *cinéma vérité*.”³⁹ Hearing these lines while seeing the people walking in the street, we can easily start to fantasise about the everyday lives of the people that pass by. The opening sequence expresses that these people are not anonymous and all have personal stories to tell; it looks as if they are presented as the actors of the film.

The film brings us some of these stories, Rouch seems to suggest with his commentary, and this is soon confirmed as the narrative unfolds. At the end of the film we are reminded of the fact that the stories we heard, from students, workers, artists, and people on the streets of Paris, are just a few of the countless stories the crowds of Paris could tell. After their last scene, the filmmakers go out to the street and the camera loses them between the people on the Champs Elysées. In the end titles that follow also “unknown people we met in Paris” are mentioned as part of the cast. This refers of course to the random people on the streets who are asked questions in

³⁹ This and subsequent transcripts follow the titles of the US distribution copy of *Chronicle of a Summer*, as published by Feld (2003).

the film, but it seems that additionally the people walking on the streets of Paris are thanked for their contribution as an important character in the film.

These sequences at the beginning and end of *Chronicle of a Summer* are a cinematic way of positioning us in the middle of the everyday lives of the people who the film is about. In the opening sequence the people walk towards us, giving the impression we are going to meet them; and in the closing sequence they walk away from us, as if they leave us behind now their stories have been told. This offers the context for the film. We are reminded that the film is about ordinary people leading normal everyday lives.



Figure 23 Sequences from the beginning and end of *Chronicle of a Summer*. The beginning and end of the film show the crowds of Paris to suggest that the film is about normal everyday life, that anyone in the city could have participated in this film. In the first shots, people come towards us as if we are introduced to them. In the last shots they walk away from us. In the titles the “unknown people we met in Paris” are mentioned on the list of participants.

Just like the crowds of the city are presented as an important character in the film, Paris is presented as its main location. In the first, dark morning shots, we see factories in the suburbs of

a city and immediately after that the Eiffel tower on the horizon. Within 30 seconds of the start of the film, we know we are in Paris. This is confirmed several times during the film, for instance when people emerge from a Parisian metro station; when we see the typical Parisian rooftops behind student Jean-Pierre standing on his balcony; and when Marceline walks on Place de la Concorde during her monologue, with again the Eiffel tower on the horizon. When the protagonists are filmed, the cameramen pay attention to the background too, reminding us that the characters live in Paris and that the city has an influence on the people we hear speaking. Paris is the stage on which they perform their everyday lives (see page 46ff.).

The film introduces several characters, most of whom did not know each other before the film was made. *Chronicle of a Summer* brings them together in conversations and ethnographically inspired research, using techniques and ideas Rouch experimented with before in Africa (see pages 42ff., 79ff. and 89ff.).

A day in the life of Angélo, a Renault worker

Angélo is introduced as a character in a conversation with several workers at the home of Marceline. They talk about how mind-numbing the repetitive nature of their work at the factory is, and how the 9 hours work a day leaves no time for other activities besides eating and sleeping. Jean recites the routines like a mantra: “(...) then you have your coffee... you take the same route everyday to get to the station... you walk up the stairs, you get on the train, then you arrive,... you go in the same door everyday. Then the time clock, you punch in every day. (...)” (Rouch and Morin, 1961, p. 290). Consequently, similar repetitions are shown in an observational sequence of 24 hours in the life of Angélo (see Figure 24). We see Angélo waking up, drinking his coffee in bed, and going into the Renault factory. In the factory the workers do repetitious work, making small metal parts with heavy, noisy machines. During their lunch break they remain at their workplace and eat while the factory stands still. After work Angélo goes home on the bus, walking up the long stairs to his home. He does his judo exercises in the courtyard, eats, reads and goes to sleep. All the time there is only soft background noise, and the sounds that Angélo makes. Sometimes he carries the tape recorder and the sound we hear is from his perspective (he is for instance audibly out of breath when he climbs the stairs). Angélo never addresses the camera, and in contrast with the previous conversation scene he is not engaged with the situation at all, except when he is doing his judo exercises. But even then, he is very much internally focused. This whole sequence expresses very skilfully that Angélo’s life is mundane and uneventful by focusing on his daily routines. Angélo is not recognisable as the lively person in the preceding conversation. The contrast is created with cinematic means, by using film language. The controlled movements of the workers in the factory are juxtaposed visually with the free movements of Angélo when he does his exercises.



Figure 24 24 hours of Angélo's life.

This sequence demonstrates that Angelo is only working (at Renault), eating and sleeping. Note the difference between movements in the factory (small, controlled gestures) and while he is doing his judo exercises (gestures unencumbered by his environment).

The everyday mind-numbing experience of Angélo can be felt by the viewer when seeing his daily routines: besides working, sleeping and eating all he does is his judo exercises and briefly read a book at night. Repetition as a main experience in the workers' lives is cinematically represented by repetition as a film technique. Content and technique reinforce each other to create a filmic experience of mind-numbing routines that can be felt by the viewer if s/he identifies with Angélo.

The conversation has a different effect. During the conversation we understand rationally that Angélo has a repetitive life, but only when we see what he does day after day, we start to feel how mind-numbing it must be. This part of the story is told in two different ways, with different effects. The language that is used affects the understanding of the viewer.

After the visualisation of Angélo's 24 boring hours in a day, Morin introduces him to African student Landry, another main character of the film (see Figure 25). Morin explains that Angélo had asked for the meeting after he saw Landry at one of the screenings, an example of how the protagonists are connected through the film. They have a discussion about the position



Figure 25 Angélo meets Landry. Landry is a student who immigrated recently from Africa to France. The conversation is set up by Morin, the filmmaker because Angélo saw Landry at one of the screenings of rushes and wanted to talk to him. They discuss the position of workers in France from both their perspectives, and also how Landry adapts to living in France as an African.

of the worker in France, which is bad from Angélo's perspective, but apparently good from Landry's position because he sees many people own a car. He knows little of them otherwise. Landry does say however that he would never want to work in a factory himself though because there is a lot of noise and you don't get to be outside. Angélo confirms his reservations. A friendship forms in front of the camera, as Morin will remark in the discussion after the projection at the end of the film. This scene contrasts strongly with the 24 hours of Angélo, just like the conversation with the other workers before. Angélo is lively and rebellious in his comments on the

position of the French worker: They may own a car but for lunch they can afford only a starter at the factory restaurant and their lives are boring, like his own.

Landry is a bit dazed by these remarks. He explains how he has to adapt to France as an African and how many Africans have an inferiority complex. Angélo confirms that many workers have such a complex too. They find out they have more in common than they originally thought. Angélo and Landry discover that black and white people, Africans and Europeans, students and workers are not living opposite lives but instead share many experiences, like an inferiority complex. The film allows the viewer to discover this too, through the conversations and observations, without explicitly being told by the filmmakers.

The history of Marceline, a young Jewish office worker

Marceline is the first character that is introduced in the film, when she talks with Rouch and Morin about participating in their *cinéma vérité* experiment that explores how Parisians live (see Figure 19, page 80). She becomes one of the central characters, whose house is also used for some of the many conversations between protagonists of the film. At one of these conversations, this one on a café terrace, the opposition between black and white is discussed in the context of racial violence in Congo (see Figure 26). Not hindered by a possible sensitivity of the subject, Rouch provokes Marceline teasingly (amidst much laughter) to talk about how she felt when she danced with a black man on 14 juillet, the national holiday. This leads to a discussion about African solidarity with the blacks in Congo, which exists say Landry and Raymond, two African students, if white people are the opponent. Marceline recognises this because she feels solidarity with Jews all over the world. Then Rouch provokes Landry and Raymond by asking if they know what the tattooed number on Marceline's arm means. They don't. Someone suggests it's her telephone number but Raymond rejects this because 78-750 is too long for that. When Marceline explains she was in a concentration camp, this gives a personal turn to the discussion about racial tensions. It confronts everyone with how sinister the subject is, despite their light-hearted exploration of ethnic oppositions. Nadine cries. This approach is typical for Rouch. He often manages to address sensitive subjects by taking a playful approach at first, using the documentary idea of conversation and intervention as a film technique. The holocaust, and the racial violence in Congo at the time, are serious subjects that may seem hard to discuss. But Rouch and Morin are more interested in how young people in the Paris of 1960 think and feel about these subjects than in formulating their own moral positions. The film, in particular the *cinéma vérité* approach, allows them to set up, or provoke the discussion and communicate what cannot be observed: the perspectives of these young people.



Figure 26 Contrasting situations: discussions and thoughts
 At one of the café conversations, ethnic solidarity is discussed in the context of racial violence in Congo, Marceline's dance with a black man, and the holocaust. Despite the sinister subject, the discussion is lively thanks to Rouch's playful provocations. Consequently, we see Marceline walking alone in Paris and hear her personal thoughts, spoken while she was walking with the tape recorder. This explores another opposition: between her past in the concentration camps, where she lost her family and how this experience is present in her life in Paris.

After the conversation on the terrace, the film continues with a monologue from Marceline while she walks on Place de la Concorde and later into Les Halles. She walks with the tape recorder, like Angélo when he climbs the stairs. Marceline is all by herself, alone like Angélo is in his 24 hour observation sequence. The crew is too far away (pushing a car with the camera in

the back) to hear what she says about her experiences in the concentration camp. She often talks about this to her friends. It is part of her character, so it needed to be in the film. The location was chosen to evoke these memories. At the Place de la Concorde, a film with German soldiers was made (unfortunately they had left when the crew arrived), and Les Halles resembles a train station, which triggered Marceline to talk about her return which she had never done before. The context influences the situation that is filmed; it helps to provoke Marceline's thoughts. Seeing her alone in the vast empty space of Place de la Concorde and later as a tiny silhouette in Les Halles also magnifies her mental state for the viewer. The way the scene is filmed reinforces the memories she recalls and helps to concentrate on them. The stage that was set for the characters in the first shots of the film helps Marceline to perform, and helps the viewer to understand her performance⁴⁰. The story of Marceline is told through film, not just through her words.

Playing with oppositions between city and coast

Towards the end of the film, the protagonists manage to break away from the pressure of the city and the worries of their everyday lives: they go on holidays to the Riviera. The film creates a strong visual opposition between city and coast (see Figure 27). In the last sequence before holiday starts, Renault worker Angélo explains to Rouch and Morin the troubles he got into after the filming they did at the factory. His boss told him "So you're making movies now?", and makes clear he sees Angélo as a troublemaker. Asked by Rouch what future he has at Renault Angélo answers: "Absolutely nothing." Next we see a factory worker with in the background written on the wall "Vive les vacances" (Hurrah for the holidays), and everyone leaves the factory gates. Morin and Marceline are meanwhile on the streets of Paris with a newspaper that carries a headline about the possibility of war in Congo.

All these rather dark images of city life are juxtaposed to the brightness and openness of the sea in the next sequence. The sea images have a completely different atmosphere. This contrast compounds the complexity of the city and the dark future its inhabitants see ahead. Angélo is not the only one with problems – the stories of the other characters revealed all kinds of problems, from mental to financial. The simplicity of the sea and the carefree atmosphere of the holidays are not presented as completely strange to the protagonists, nor as how life always should be. They are presented as an opposite of city life that is at the same time an integral part of the everyday life of the characters of the film. Using film language, for instance the juxtaposition of dark and bright shots, and of interior and exterior shots, Rouch and Morin manage to communicate that everyday life is complex and full of contradictions, and that the answer to the main question of the film – How do you live? – can be found in the ways that people find to deal with this inconsistency. This is one of the main messages of the film and it is told at several occasions but always in a cinematic way without aiming to dissect it and create an

⁴⁰ How truthful her performance is has been the subject of many debates in documentary film writing, and even in one of the last scenes in the film itself during the discussions after the rough edit viewing (see page 107).



Figure 27 Contrast between the city and the coast. The contrast is emphasised through the visual style of the film. The city with all its worries and problems is dark and crowded, the coast is bright and has lots of open space. Not only in the discussions there is a play with oppositions, it is created in the images too.

overview. There is always another side to things, *Chronicle of a Summer* seems to say. If life is dark, it is bright too. If racial tensions in Congo result in death, we can still make fun about the stereotypes of how black and white people dance. This is very much the view of Rouch, who plays with oppositions in his films because that is how he experiences everyday life (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 118).

The ethnographic research of Landry, African student

The water skier who introduces the bright open space of the coast brings us to Nadine and Landry who are swimming in the sea and we follow them ashore while the voice of Rouch says: “And that’s how Landry has become the black explorer of France on vacation.” Like Rouch and Morin investigate how young people in Paris live, an African student in France explores how the French

take their holidays on the Riviera. The introduction of this role is metaphorical, as if Landry washes ashore in a strange land that he aims to explore. His role is visualised and filled with meaning already before he starts.



Figure 28 Landry as an ethnographer at the French Riviera. Landry is introduced as an ethnographer who studies the holiday behaviour of the French at the Riviera. He talks to a cover girl, who is presented as a local of the native Jet Set. He also watches bull fighting with his friend Nadine but finds it very cruel.

The role Landry has is typical of another approach Rouch and Morin take in their film in general: they see the protagonists as participants in their research rather than the subjects of the research. Landry and also for instance Marceline and Nadine (see page 22) do part of the research, replacing Rouch and Morin. The camera observes how they do their research. Landry interviews a cover girl on the boulevard about life in Saint Tropez, and shadows her for a while. He goes to a bull fight with Nadine and studies the event like a European ethnographer could study a ritual in Africa; he participates in the experience of watching the bull fight in an effort to understand it.

The film as conversation

The characters in *Chronicle of a Summer* are young Parisians from different walks of life: students, office and factory workers, artists. Some are friends of the filmmakers and others are friends of friends. Rouch and Morin bring them together for the film, in informal discussions during meals

and in cafés. The conversations that arise from those encounters are central to the film because they offer insight into the complexities of everyday life in Paris in 1960, and how people deal with them. One thing that comes out clearly is that opposites co-exist as was discussed above. The situations are carefully planned as informal and convivial to loosen everyone up and make them forget the camera and bright film lights (see Figure 29). This seems to work, in particular with larger groups. In the first scene Marceline is alone with Rouch and Morin and still nervous despite the considerable number of empty wine bottles on the table in front of them. She has not forgotten the camera – she even looks at it, slightly nervous.



Figure 29 *Creating the right atmosphere.*
Rouch and Morin use drinks and food to loosen the atmosphere for the conversations.

The conversations extend at the end of the film into a discussion about the film itself when the participants view a rough edit in a small cinema (see Figure 30). They scrutinise the truthfulness of the film in particular, commenting on each others' performances in the film. What one finds immodesty, another sees as self-searching. For instance when Marceline speaks to herself about her concentration camp experiences someone sees this as embarrassing because it is too personal, but nevertheless he is taken in completely. Someone else says: "If the sequence of Marceline is much more perfect than the others... you say that it is truer than true... it's because she is acting." Marceline herself says: "They were extremely personal memories (...) at the moment I said them I said them with feelings, but I was absolutely not involved with those feelings between shootings (...)." This discussion complicates the performances in the film, like the film complicates its subject everyday life. Performance and truth are also co-existing opposites, in the film and in life, just like the opposites Europe-Africa, student-worker, etcetera. After the discussion in the cinema, Rouch and Morin evaluate their project and how their protagonists responded to it while walking through the Musée de l'Homme. Morin thinks that the protagonists are neither exhibitionists nor actors. Rouch and Morin agree that Marceline was not



Figure 30 Conversations about the film. Rouch and Morin discuss with all participants the truthfulness of the film at a viewing. Afterwards, they discuss together what they have achieved.

acting at the Place de la Concorde when they filmed her. They think that they get such diverse responses to the film because the viewers are not guided by the filmmakers and consequently approach the film as everyday life itself, with the usual uncertainties and speculations about people's real thoughts and intentions. This brings the filmmakers back to the starting point of the film, the first scene when they explain to Marceline they want to make a film about everyday life in Paris. They have not only made a film about everyday life, but also one that is similar to everyday life. Morin reflects on this as follows:

We did not merely play the divine role of authors who speak through the mouths of their characters, and show the public the sentiments they should feel, their norms of good and bad. It is also because there is this relative freedom, and not only because we filmed under the least cinema-like conditions possible, that we have approached the cinema of life. But in approaching thus we have also approached all the confusion of life. (...) and we have provoked the viewer to judge as a human being. (Morin, 1960, p. 259)

Chronicle of a Summer is first and foremost a film, and not a film as a byproduct of sociological and ethnographic research. For Rouch making the film – using his *cinéma vérité* ideas – is research, He considers *cinéma vérité* the best way to do his research and to communicate its results. Technical innovations made *Chronicle of a Summer* possible: the sync sound recordings with portable equipment on the street helped create the “relative freedom” Morin mentions. Today this freedom to film is available to anyone with a camcorder and a computer to edit the footage. Yet few people have fulfilled the promise that everyone can now make a great film about (their) everyday life, with a few notable exceptions like Caouette's *Tarnation* (see page 77). Technically, making a film like *Chronicle of a Summer* has become much easier than it was almost 50 years ago. This brings such an effort, albeit perhaps on a smaller scale, within the reach of discovery research as well. But the main achievement of *Chronicle of a Summer* is not technical, nor does the film automatically arise from the new technical possibilities Rouch and Morin had. Instead, crucial for the film are their ideas about doing research using a combination of observation, intervention and performance techniques, and their views on everyday life as complex, film as a language to explore and communicate experiences, and conversations as a way to let emerge what people have on their minds, including their fears and dreams. These techniques and ideas are as important and useful in documentary filmmaking today as they were in 1960. They offer a major challenge and an important source of inspiration to discovery research, that I have called upon when making my own films (see Chapter Five).

Lift

When exploring how discovery research and filmmaking can work together, *Lift* is a recent short film (25 minutes) that deserves attention because it is set up as a documentary film, for British television, but at the same time easy to envision as discovery research. The project is small and simple enough to execute as discovery research (unlike *Chronicle of a Summer*, in most projects at least). At the same time this film demonstrates how several film techniques and ideas,

discussed in Chapters Three and Two respectively, can work together – and create a coherent film with a simple beginning, middle and end.

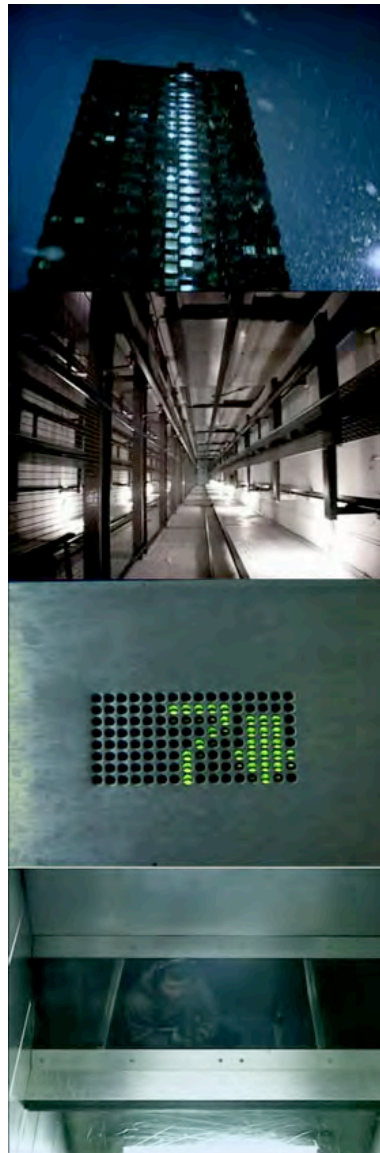


Figure 31 Sequence from the beginning of *Lift*.
The opening shots of *Lift* firmly position the viewer in a lift of a council estate tower block, waiting for the first people to enter the lift. The filmmaker acknowledges his own presence immediately by filming his own reflection.

Setting the stage

Isaacs starts his film with setting the stage (see Figure 31), just like Rouch and Morin do. We see moving cables, a lift shaft, a typical council estate tower block and, back in the lift, the reflection of the filmmaker in the steel walls and the electronic sign indicating the floors. This short sequence tells us the filmmaker is in a working lift, waiting for people to enter. No words are spoken to explain this; the film does not have any narration. In a very short time, a clear stage is set for the characters of the film.

When the first person enters (an older lady, called Lily as we learn later) she immediately acknowledges the filmmaker by shouting to someone who wants to enter too they can't come in



Figure 32 *Introducing the residents.*
Lily is the first person to enter the lift, and she shouts to other people to stay out because “can’t you see there’s reporters in here?!” She grins to the filmmaker and says “mazeltov” when she leaves the lift. Her Jewish identity is juxtaposed to two Muslim women in the next shot, an appropriate introduction to the very diverse population of the towerblock.

because “there’s reporters here.” She manages to keep him out and when the doors are closed she turns to Isaacs with a broad smile. She does not say anything further until she leaves the lift and greets with “mazeltov” from which we learn she is Jewish. The next shot shows two women with head scarves in the lift, creating an opposition between Jews and Muslims in the building (see Figure 32).

We are only just over one and a half minutes into the film and already much has been told – even oppositions have been set up that can drive the narrative of the film further. This shows that films can set up a story very economically. This is an important quality for discovery research, where communicating efficiently is important.

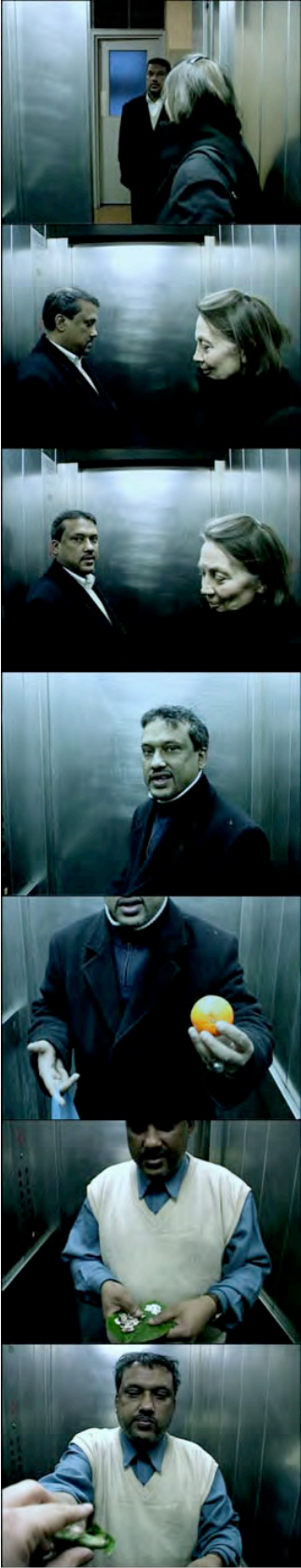


Figure 33 *Getting to know to residents better.*
Isaacs develops relationships with the people he meets in the lift, resulting in intimate stories but also food one man offers him several times.

Developing relationships with the characters

The presence of Isaacs in the lift is not hidden, he is very present in the film even though we never see him properly. From the beginning we see reflections, feet or other signs of him. People talk to him and later he also asks them questions. In an ironical wink to direct cinema (see page 30), Isaacs also shows a fly on the wall of the lift a few times, but at the end the fly is on the floor, almost dead. This is a filmmakers' joke but relevant because throughout the film it is very clear that the people in the lift are aware of the camera and the filmmaker at all times, even when they are drunk. This is not a fly-on-the-wall documentary, hence the dead fly. These people perform in the lift, but through their performances truths of their lives come out (see below).

Several people we meet in the lift return throughout the film (see Figure 33). As viewers, we slowly get to know them better and we see how Isaacs builds a relationship with them. One of them is a South-Asian man who after a few friendly chats offers food to Isaacs, who happily accepts a banana and something wrapped in a leaf. Later in the film Isaacs starts to ask personal questions of people, but he can only do so because he has built a relationship with some of the people in the lift (see Figure 33). This takes time; he was in the lift regularly over a period of three weeks (Isaacs, 2005). The approach is very different from asking passers-by on the street if they are happy.

Personal stories, concerns, memories and dreams

The film contains many little narrative threads which develop through the brief stories that people tell. For instance one young single man goes out quite a lot and always tells what he is going to do, and later we hear what happened. This makes the viewer curious how the story continues. The young man tells his stories voluntarily, Isaacs does not need to get him going with a question. He for instance justifies his strong aftershave with: "me being a single man... see what happens tonight..." But when he returns later on, drunk, the first thing he says is: "I didn't pull."

With Isaacs in the lift, the space gradually turns into a confession box where people tell their most personal memories, concerns and dreams. The filmmaker stimulates them to do so with questions like "What is your favourite childhood memory?", "Is religion important in your life?" and "What did you dream last night?". People respond to these questions thoughtfully and sometimes even return later to a previous answer they gave, adding detail because they have reconsidered their answer. Here the film shows the result of the relationships Isaacs built with his participants. They seem to confide in Isaacs like one confides with a friend. For instance, one guy tells how he suffered mentally when his parents both died within the space of two months. Several people get extremely reflective in the lift, and also outside it. They think about Isaacs' questions. One woman even returns to Isaacs with a completely different answer than she initially gave. When he asked if religion were important in her life, it made her realise in the days after Isaacs asked, that it actually is very important in her life whereas she had answered him it wasn't

really. The people in the lift get intrigued by Isaacs questions, perhaps because, as someone says, no one has asked them these simple questions before.

Isaacs uses a combination of observation, intervention and performance techniques. It is hard to see where one technique stops and the other starts, but that is not important. The four categories are a tool to discuss documentary techniques, not as a tool to classify films or film sequences. *Lift* shows how the techniques can reinforce each other when they are combined. When for instance the young single man enters the lift he always performs a laddish character and starts boasting. Isaacs intervenes with questions, about his strong aftershave for example. Through the camera Isaacs observes at the same time, for instance that in the corner of his mouth the curry he had in Brick Lane left its trace. The three techniques work together to build the man's story.

Also the three ideas of documentary filmmaking discussed in Chapter Two come together in *Lift*. Everyday life in the tower block is presented as unpredictable and complex because people of very different backgrounds live together. Ethnic tensions can be felt, and some people openly talk about it. Young and old people live together in the block, but lead very different lives. Families and singles are in the block too. The characters of the film seem to have little in common except living in the same building. This reflects reality in East-London, where Isaacs filmed, well. He uses film language to tell the stories of the lift, right from the beginning of the film. And finally he builds relationships with the people in the lift, resulting in intimate responses to his questions as if the lift is a confession box.

Conclusion

The three ideas I distinguished in Chapter Two (reality, language and conversation) are mixed in *Lift* and it does not make sense to separate them from each other. Together they form a film that uses observations of the filmmaker, interventions by filmmaker and participants, and performances of both too. These three different documentary film techniques cannot be separated either. Together, ideas and techniques have helped to create a film that presents itself as a story from everyday life with all its idiosyncrasies and complex details intact. This is something discovery research tries to achieve too. *Lift* shows that documentary film can be close to discovery research, even though the intended audiences are very different. What *Lift* achieves is however more than most discovery research because it elegantly communicates the stories it builds from the information it collects in the lift with cinematic means. Communicating research well is found difficult in discovery research as was noted in Chapter One (see page 24). *Lift* shows that improvement is possible if the ideas and techniques described in Chapters Two and Three are combined. In particular the self-contained nature of films seems to be important to communicate well with the viewers.

Chronicle of a Summer does the same as *Lift*. It mixes the three ideas and several documentary film techniques to tell a story about everyday life. Rouch and Morin started the film as sociological research using ethnographic methods, to answer the question “How do Parisians live?” but their main goal was always to make a film above anything else. Their project is research, but research through making a film. Their research is not filmed – the film is their research. This is also the starting point for my own filmmaking practice. The films I made explore how documentary filmmaking can be(come) discovery research.

The next chapter describes most of the films I made during my research. Chapter Six discusses issues that came up while making the films, and Chapter Seven does the same for issues that emerged from their use by designers and multidisciplinary design teams. In both chapters, I will reflect on my films as discovery research, but also on their relation to documentary film ideas and techniques.

5 Design documentaries – the films

Informed and inspired by the practices and theories of documentary film, I have made films for and with design teams to explore new video-based methods for discovery research in design processes. I involved professional documentary filmmakers in doing research for several projects. This chapter describes these experiments and the process of their making, before unpacking several issues that arose in Chapters Six and Seven. It discusses how I as well as other researchers, filmmakers and designers adopted and adapted documentary film ideas and techniques, many of which have been described in Chapters Two, Three and Four. I used my practice not to illustrate preconceived ideas but to develop ideas in an iterative process of alternately filming and thinking, and thinking through filming. It does not matter what comes first, the thinking or the filming, what matters is that they happen at the same time or close to each other in time. This process is as familiar in design, where it is called thinking-through-making (see page 12) as it is in documentary film, where filmmakers as Rouch and Godard, to name only two, have been recognised as people who develop film theory through their filmmaking. *Chronicle of a Summer*, discussed at length in the previous chapter, is an influential example of this approach.

After introducing the films in this chapter, the issues that emerged from the process of making the films are discussed in Chapter Six. All films were used by designers or multidisciplinary design teams in their normal work, or in situations that reflect their normal working situations. The issues that arose from their responses are discussed in Chapter Seven. All three chapters contribute to the characteristics of design documentaries which I develop in Chapter Eight.

All the films described in this chapter are included as Appendix A on dvd⁴¹. If you have not seen the films yet, this is a good moment to watch them, while reading this chapter.

The films made for this research

I will call the films I made during my practice presented in this chapter *design documentaries* because they use documentary film ideas and techniques for discovery research in design. They move beyond documentary filmmaking per se because they appropriate its practices as this chapter will show. They also move beyond current uses of video in discovery research as described in Chapter One. The name design documentaries was chosen to stress their hybrid form and their particular purpose.

⁴¹ Excerpts of the films can also be viewed online at designdocumentaries.com.

The design documentaries I present here show new opportunities for using video in discovery research on a hands-on level. I worked together with many different people, among who were professional documentary filmmakers, designers, engineers, artists, MA students and participants in the films themselves. As explained in the introduction, and despite the fact I worked with people from many different backgrounds and disciplines, I use two simple categories to indicate the people (besides the participants) involved in making and using the films, including myself. Because research is the main activity in discovery research, I will use the term researcher to indicate the *role* ethnographers, social scientists, designers, filmmakers, artists and engineers take in this activity. The people who view the films as a source of information and inspiration for something they are making, are a mixed group too. I will call this group a (multidisciplinary) design team and its individual members designers, again indicating a role. As people, we can take on different roles and are all T-shaped (see page 3), with specialties and a broad understanding of many other disciplines, and the activities of research and design – and thus the roles we play – can mix in iterative design processes.

Three films on heart patients

For Philips Medical Systems in Seattle, I made a series of three short films about heart patients. Philips was planning a project in the area of personal devices for heart monitoring and communication, and conducted 30 interviews with heart patients in the San Diego area to inform the design process. Based on these interviews they developed three personas called Fred, Kent and Debra. Personas (Cooper, 1999) are archetypal characters based on interviews with potential future users⁴². Because they were not satisfied with how the personas were communicated to the multidisciplinary design team, using posters with stories and stock photography, Philips contacted me to ask if I could make film portraits of the personas. They thought that perhaps film would better communicate the information they had collated. We agreed on a project where I would use different documentary film techniques to create three responses to the personas rather than recreating the personas themselves.

Fred

For *Fred* (2004), one of the first films I made⁴³, I tried to use as much as possible of the material that the Philips researchers had already collected. I had access to the interview tapes and photographs the participants had all taken as part of a diary study. The poster served as my script as I tried to construct meaning from the material available to me. In order to maximise authenticity, it seemed unwise to use any professional stock photography (as the poster did). I wanted to use the photos the heart patients had taken themselves, to make the film genuine⁴⁴. However, I recontextualised the photos, for instance using the photographed houses to illustrate

⁴² See page 184 for a more elaborate description of personas and their relation to design documentaries.

⁴³ See appendix A for a full list of the films, which are also included on the accompanying dvd.

⁴⁴ Like the use of home movies in for instance Caouette's *Tarnation* (see page 77) make his film genuine.

the activities of Fred's building company and the portraits of the heart patients as pictures of his poker friends. Title cards at the beginning and end of the film indicate that the film is constructed with the original photos of seven different heart patients, making sure that the origin of the photos does not go unnoticed⁴⁵.

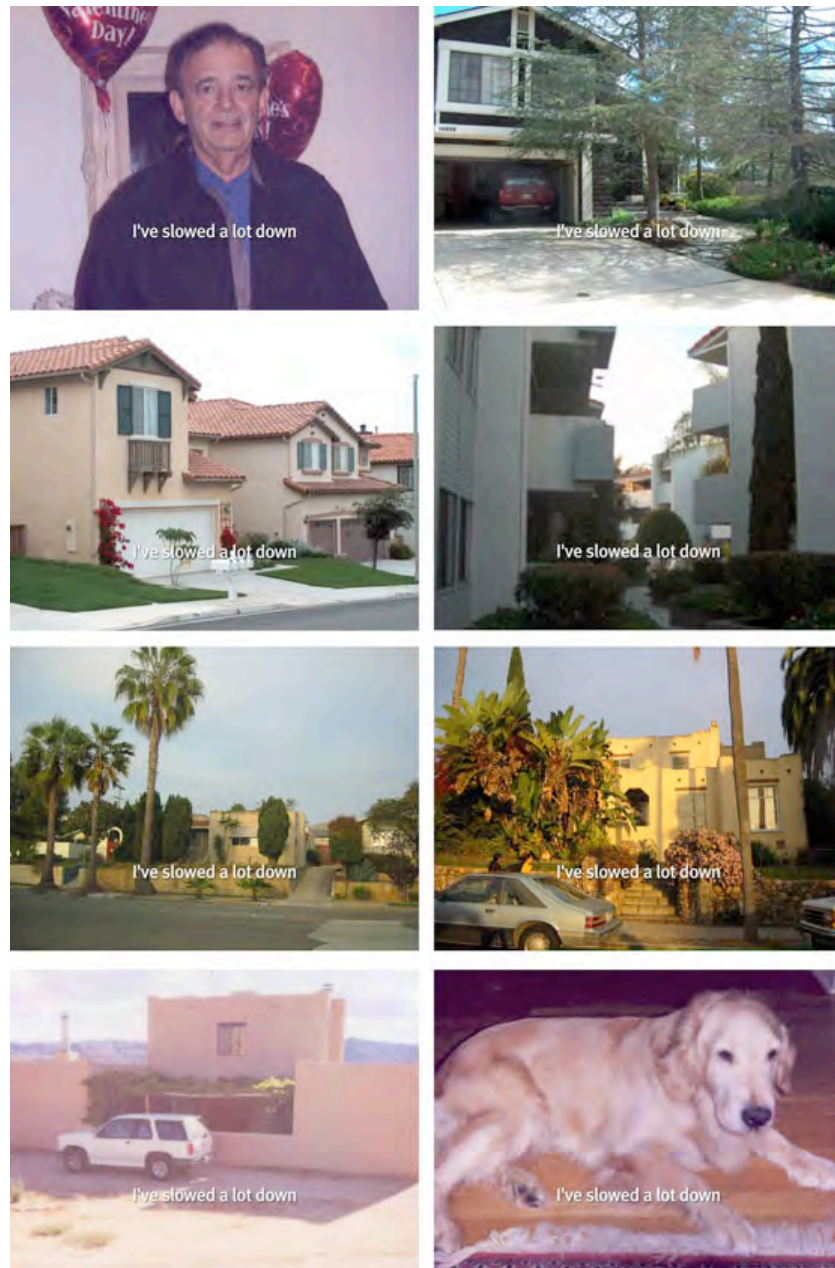


Figure 34 Repurposed photos of seven heart patients' houses in Fred. To illustrate the building activities of Fred after his heart attack, photos taken by different heart patients of their own home were presented in a new context. The text is present in the image as a contrast to the busy life Fred still leads.

Even after repurposing of some of the photographs the number of available photos was not sufficient to make the film, so I had to create some additional footage myself. To contrast with

⁴⁵ This repurposing of images was inspired by Shub's (see page 67) and Moore's (see page 68) reversal of the original meaning of archive images, turning footage originally favourable to the Romanovs and Britney Spears against them.

the photos of the heart patients, the extra material was shot on video. I created long, static shots of situations that comment on Fred's activities as told through the interview excerpts. This sometimes takes the form of a juxtaposition⁴⁶. For instance a sped up shot of people preparing a plane for take-off refers to Fred's hectic life before the heart attack, contrasting with the quiet life that Fred has to live after his heart attack, represented by a slow zoom in on a photo of a model plane on his kitchen table.

Finally, after a first screening with Philips, I added a few short quotes from the voice over as text to the image. These texts, for instance "I don't want to be lied to," represent the core values of the persona. They scroll into the frame and remain visible for a while, acting as a header for the scene and as messages for viewers to take with them. This helps to easily remember the main issues the film is raising, a guidance Philips was keen to offer to the design team.

Kent

The second film breaks further away from the material that was gathered during the interviews because it turned out to be limited (I had to add my own video for instance) when making *Fred*. I wanted to show a heart patient in his or her everyday situation on video. *Kent* (2004) uses only key elements of the persona poster, as a first plan or outline which contained no more than eight headlines such as 'I'm learning to accept help from those who care about me.'

Via the British Heart Foundation I found David Jones⁴⁷, a heart patient who wanted to cooperate in making the film. He had started a self-help group of heart patients after his heart attack (participating in self-help groups was a crucial part of the persona Kent too). The outline was discussed with David, following Rouch's idea of collaborating with the people in the film, in particular ethno-fiction (see page 89). He recognised himself in the outline and considered it to be about him from the beginning. From this resulted a co-written script, now containing both the slogans from the Kent-persona poster and situations from David's life as a heart patient in London.

To shoot the film, different documentary techniques and approaches were used. Several scenes from the heart patient's life were observed, like how he organises and chairs a gathering of his heart patient community. But I also intervened, as Isaacs does when he slowly develops relationships with the people he films in the lift of a east-London tower block (see page 114). For instance, to find out what 'cleaning up my lifestyle' meant for him I asked questions based on my knowledge of the persona and underlying interviews. The interviewing was conducted more like a

⁴⁶ Similar to Vigo's juxtapositions of the international lazy rich on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice with the poor working hard in the backstreets (see page 37). The contrast between the rich and the poor in Vigo's film seems untenable, like the contrasts in Fred's life.

⁴⁷ This is his real name. I use his full name instead of initials or a made-up name to express that he is an equal member of the crew who made the film, and contributed to it like other crew members did (see p. 4 for a more elaborate discussion of this). His name also appears on the titles of the film. Participants of the other films described below are fully named too, for similar reasons.

conversation than a scripted interview, like the casual style of interviewing that Morris uses in his films (see page 82) and I edited my questions out, like Morris did in *The Thin Blue Line*.

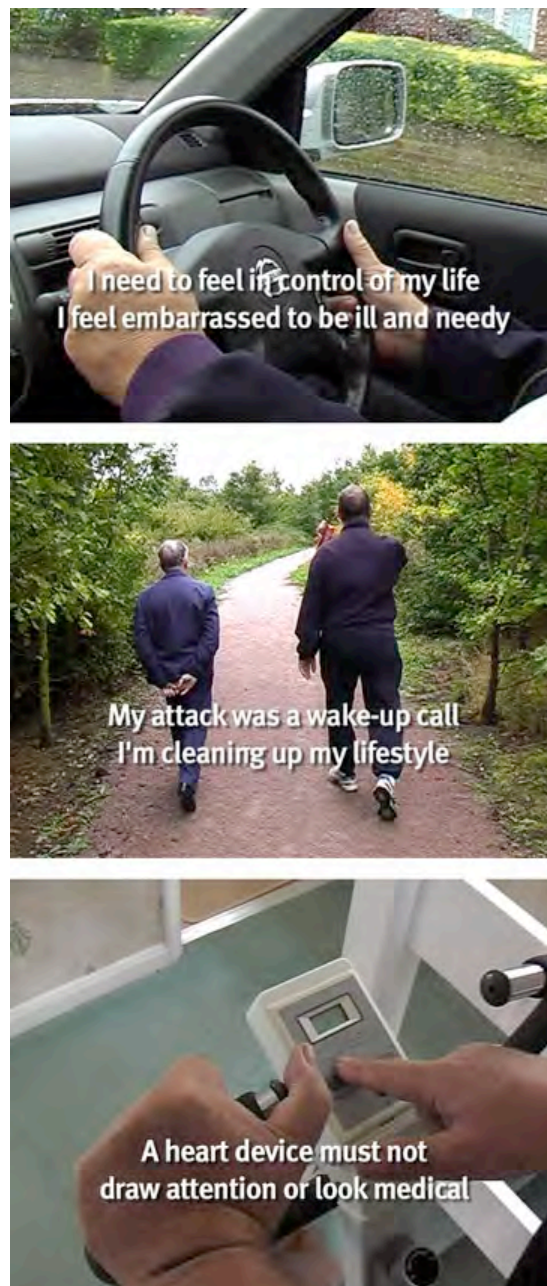


Figure 35 Three film locations chosen by heart patient David in Kent. The text in the images is part of the outline of the film I gave to David. He chose to show these situations in response: Driving home after his first heart attack, walking with his neighbour John every Sunday, and the only device he uses for his health now is a home trainer.

In the editing, voice-overs spoken by three different people (two women and a man) were added to show that *Kent* is not a film about one person but a personal story based on many heart patients' experiences. A title card relates these voice-overs to nine interviews with American heart patients. This creates a dialectic between the two perspectives, because there is sometimes an opposition between what David says and the persona-based voice-overs.

Debra

The third film for Philips Medical Systems, *Debra* (2004), takes a different step away from the persona posters by using performance techniques. I asked a second heart patient from London, Joan Impleton, to respond to the persona Debra in a personal way, comparing stories of her own everyday life to those of Debra. As a starting point I wrote a letter to Joan. The letter was

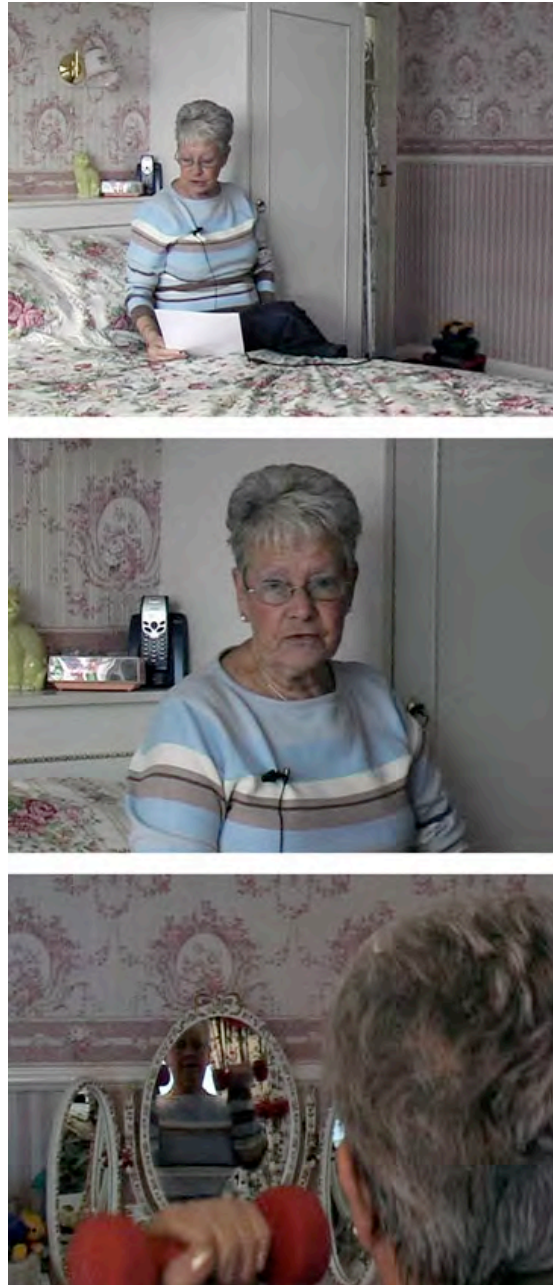


Figure 36 Joan responds to the fictional letter of Debra via video in Debra. After reading part of the letter I wrote in the name of persona Debra, heart patient Joan looks up to the camera and addresses Debra directly with her performed response. Wide shots and cutaways show her perfectly organised environment.

supposedly written by Debra, based on the poster, but in reality was a fiction based on the persona. I explained to Joan that Debra was not a real person but a fictional character based on interviews with nine North American heart patients, and asked her to respond with a video-

letter⁴⁸. She first wrote a letter back to Debra, on paper, which indicated that she understood the game and was prepared to play it. We used parts of her written letter for the recording of the video-letter.

Joan co-operated with me during the shooting⁴⁹. On the first day of filming we recorded several versions of her reading the letter, stopping at self-chosen moments to look up to the camera and respond with a story of her own. I shot some good responses of her to the letter, but she had trouble remembering which comment she wanted to make where, while at the same time making sure she was presenting herself in a natural way. The second day we worked together I had brought a rough cut of the shots we did on the first day. This allowed me to show Joan how I envisioned the film and how well she did with her answers. This gave her the confidence she needed to complete the film. Together we decided to make a scene-by-scene plan by cutting up the letter from Debra in eight pieces. The issues Joan wanted to raise in response were bullet-pointed below the letter sections. When the camera was running, she spoke spontaneously based on the prompts she had written down. Each shot was recorded three to four times, until both she and I were satisfied with her performance.

We selected the locations in Joan's house together, but I decided on the framing. Mostly I chose a wide shot to show how perfectly organised and decorated her house is, in contrast to Debra's house (shown on a few photos from one of the American heart patients Debra was based on). In addition I filmed details of the rooms where we recorded the video letter and some activities of Joan, like walking the dogs and meeting her friend.

Two films on smart textiles

I made *Fred*, *Kent* and *Debra* on my own, with help from the participants. Researchers and also documentary filmmakers often work alone, but doing research with a team and making films with a team is common too. To explore making design documentaries with a team including professional documentary filmmakers, I made two films in the Summer of 2006: *Drift* and *Swim*. Both investigate how smart textiles could fit in our current everyday life⁵⁰. When we made the films, the differences between crew, researchers, designers, artists, engineers and participants was not always clear: several crew members took on different roles at different times. This is typical for shared filmmaking, inspired by Rouch (see page 42). It also fits the idea that people in multidisciplinary teams must have more than one skill and can take on several roles (see page 3). The total number of people involved in making *Drift* was six, and in *Swim* seven. The main

⁴⁸ The choice for the video letter format was inspired by video diaries like Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (see page 91). In the film he regularly talks directly into the camera, establishing a strong link between himself and the viewer. This is typical for the video diary format. Joan establishes the same bond with the viewer in *Debra*. This is also another example of ethno-fiction (see page 89) because Debra's letter is fictional.

⁴⁹ We worked together in the spirit of the shared filmmaking practised by Rouch who collaborates with his protagonists in most of his films (see page 42).

⁵⁰ DesignPlus in London commissioned the two films and two workshops based on the films with industrial and fashion designers. The results of the workshops and the films were presented at the 'How Smart Are We?' conference for the fashion and textile industry in London, September 2006.

difference with the heart patients films, apart from the organisational effects of dealing with a large group of people, was that in *Drift* and *Swim* professional documentary filmmakers brought their own practices into the project which had its effect on process and results as will become clear below.

Drift

Drift chronicles our research aimed at informing and inspiring the application of smart textiles in navigation products and services, focusing on aimlessly walking through a city and getting lost as a pleasurable experience. As a location I had chosen the Barbican in London – a loved and despised icon of modern architecture. Two smart textile experts, artist Suzi Webster and electrical engineer Verity Parker, were included in the research from a very early stage. Discussions with them about ‘drifting,’ an activity of the Situationists in the 1950s to explore a city, inspired me to change the subject slightly to ‘navigating a city without a specific goal.’ This finally led to choosing the colour yellow and circular shapes as guides for two separate ‘drifts’ around the Barbican.



Figure 37 Walking around the Barbican following circles in *Drift*. Inspired by the Situationists, we drifted from circle to circle, shown in the film as almost abstract shapes isolated from the environment in close-ups. The wide shots show how we are also guided by the built environment that determines where we can go and where not.

The first scripts were used to explore possible directions in which we could take the research. Later, specific situations and how they could be shot were scripted too, partly through

photographs that illustrated atmosphere and possible camera angles. References to documentary films, in particular *Chronicle of a Summer* (see Chapter Four) were used to further detail ideas. During shooting the collaboration with Verity and Suzi continued and intensified. In the film they have conversations with me, in the role of researcher. We also go out together to the Barbican where we meet for instance the painter in the scene introduced on page 1. The conversation format shows that several perspectives are in discussion with each other in the film. Other perspectives are added by the camerawork. We used fairly wide shots to demonstrate how the built environment limits and inspires our drifting. In contrast, extreme close-ups of yellow coloured things and circular shapes, the guides of our drifts, represent our decisions to follow idiosyncratic details.

Drift presents itself as the story of my own quest, as researcher, through the narration that drives the film forward and bridges gaps between scenes⁵¹. The narration is serendipitous and runs as a thread through the film, connecting an eclectic combination of subjects, for instance smart textiles, patterns, getting lost, abstract painting, interactive art, dead ends and disappearing computers. The film leaves it up to the viewer to make more and other connections between these subjects than the narrator does.

Swim

The second film about smart textiles was shot and edited in parallel with *Drift*. We edited *Swim* (2006), about the experience of swimming, as a series of five short clips each with their own subject. After an introduction, four different subjects are presented in two-minute clips: chlorine, counting, wetsuit and hassle. I identified the subjects during the making of the film itself, through the conversation between swimmers Geke van Dijk and Bernice Pan we filmed, and conversations with them beforehand. The issues were important for both of them, though sometimes differently. They are perspectives on swimming as a leisure activity. For instance, in the six minute introduction film swimming laps is presented as a being in a bubble with your own thoughts. This feeling, expressed by the swimmers in the film, was used as a structuring principle for the film. It is communicated visually and emotionally instead of through text.

I studied the movements of the swimmers with the camera and tried to find ways of filming beyond simply registering the swimming by moving with the swimmers and the water⁵². In the film, the movements of swimmers, water and camera create a dreamy atmosphere. These shots are accompanied by sound fragments of the conversation between Geke and Bernice outside the pool and the conversation one of them has with Stan Swallow, engineer and Asha Thompson, designer, of Intelligent Textiles Ltd. These snatches of conversation do not inform the viewer about what s/he sees. They are a separate track although it is often possible to imagine

⁵¹ The way the narration is used takes inspiration from McElwee's films like *Sherman's March* and *Bright Leaves* (see page 91).

⁵² I was inspired by Ivens' suggestion to represent facts emotionally instead of rationally or analytically if you want to express experiences (see page 58).



Figure 38 The experience of being in a bubble while swimming laps in Swim. Images of moving water with occasionally a swimmer passing through the frame communicate the experience of the swimmers of being in a personal space, where they hear fragments of conversations they had about swimming and smart textiles.

relationships between the images and voices. As in *Drift*, I finally added narration of the researcher (here Geke, one of the swimmers, in a double role) in the editing, to connect the different parts of the film. As in *Drift*, the perspectives are combined without drawing any conclusions. The format of emulating thoughts floating in your mind during swimming nevertheless allowed the film to bring many perspectives together in a coherent and meaningful way.

Alena's Strawberry Farm

When making the previous films, I was always in charge of the project, directing and editing the films even when I involved a crew of professional filmmakers. For a third project I took again a different approach by hiring a professional documentary filmmaker as a director. In the summer of 2006, the Interaction Research Studio at Goldsmiths College in London involved me in the Mobile Cultures project they had recently started with France Telecom/Orange in Rennes. Hiring Chinese filmmaker Xiaoxiao Sun offered me an opportunity to observe what effect giving an open brief to a documentary filmmaker who works mostly independently had on us as a team⁵³ and our discovery

⁵³ The team consisted of five designers/researchers from London (Andy Boucher, Bill Gaver, Nadine Jarvis, Tobie Kerridge and myself) and two from Rennes (Nathalie Portolan and Sylvie Courcelle).

research. We wanted to develop new design concepts for telecom services through exploring the everyday life of people who spend long periods away from home. One particular group we focused were seasonal migrant workers. We got in touch with a group of East European fruit pickers on a farm in Kent who live for up to six months on a caravan park at the farm.



Figure 39 Three perspectives in Alena's Strawberry Farm. Students from many different East European countries do seasonal work on a farm in Kent, and mix making fun with each other with complicated long-distance relationships and sad goodbyes at the end of Summer.

Xiaoxiao mostly worked alone, but was supported before and during shooting by our project team. Twice she stayed at the farm for several days at a time and she went for shorter visits as well. When at the farm she lived in one of the caravans among the East Europeans. She filmed during the day in one of the locations where they work on the farm, doing short interviews during breaks. After work there was more time to communicate because the workers spend most of their free time at the farm too. Xiaoxiao hung around at the farm, like Wiseman hangs around in the locations where he films (see page 61). Her style was observational, but she also included interviews, sometimes done by me and Nadine Jarvis, designer in our team, when we joined Xiaoxiao for a day. Contrary to Wiseman she did not become invisible to the people she films

because she interacts with them. Even when she observes she sometimes communicates with her protagonists.

The 14 minute chronicle of life on the farm presents three different atmospheres that mix in the film. First, we see the happy life of young people working and living together, earning their own money (and very much aware of the independence that comes with it). Secondly the film focuses on the dreams these young East Europeans have for their futures, beyond the happy life they live at the farm. Here doubts and dilemmas arise, often emotional because they relate to personal relationships and questions about where to settle down in Europe. Thirdly we see that at the end of summer, the happy times are over because friendships and relationships are broken up when they go back to Eastern Europe. These three perspectives, constructed by the filmmaker, are real for many of the workers at the farm, but they are not homogenous because they play out differently for each individual. The film presents three heterogeneous views, creating a balance between them and avoiding letting any one dominate, like I avoided drawing conclusions in my films.

More films

Besides the three larger film projects, I did several smaller experiments with design documentaries. Through making these films, and using and discussing them with designers, additional insights were gained, to which I will refer in the discussion below. I introduce four films here briefly too, in the order they were made.

Storage and Clutter in the Home

For the Equator team at the Royal College of Art I shot *Storage and Clutter in the Home* (2004), a series of short film clips on how people store and display things in their home. The clips are all 1-2 minutes and contain no more than a few shots. I am present as filmmaker and interviewer, on the

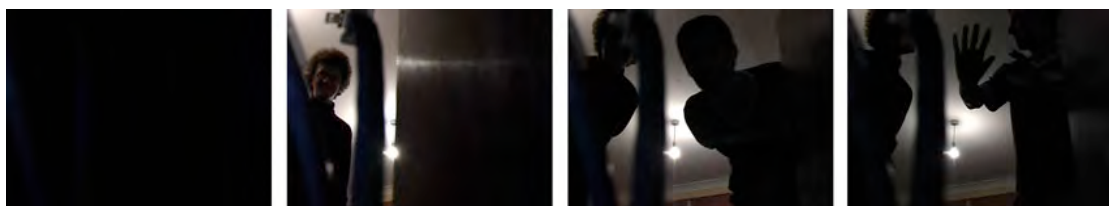


Figure 40 *Filming from the cupboard in Storage and Clutter in the Home. The participant discusses what he keeps in his cupboard under the stairs with the researcher.*

soundtrack and sometimes in the image too. The clips are an example of documentary intervention techniques with some elements of performance. One clip in particular resonated with the designers I showed it to because it inspired them. For the clip, the camera was put in a cupboard, pointing at the participant and the filmmaker. It effectively takes the perspective of the objects in the cupboard that are the topic of the conversation. The challenging questions turn the

interview in a situation that is slightly performed, in a playful way, by both filmmaker and protagonist⁵⁴.

The Guest

I made *The Guest* (2005) for a joint project of the Royal College of Art and the University of Sussex, with Jenny Hislop and Sue Venn who research social aspects of sleep and sleeplessness. In the project, designers and sociologists co-operated to explore possible collaborations between their disciplines. We decided to use video diaries, a type of auto-ethnography, to record the different



Figure 41 Video diaries and kitchen interviews in The Guest. Contains four different perspectives, three of which are presented as video diaries. The fourth perspective is my own as a researcher cum filmmaker, sitting at the breakfast table after the night Jenny stayed over.

perspectives of Sue and her family with three teenage children, and Jenny who stays over for the night as a guest. Jenny, Sue and her oldest daughter all made a short video diary to express their views on the joy and disturbance Jenny caused as a guest. In the film, these personal accounts are contrasted with interviews I have, as a researcher cum filmmaker, with Sue and Jenny at the breakfast table the next morning⁵⁵. They are done in between other things, like preparing breakfast and getting kids to school. By choosing this way of recording experiences, I managed to find a range of different perspectives, and connect them into one story.

Media Mediators Vlog

In their project *Media Mediators* Tobie Kerridge and Andy Law, research associates at the Helen Hamlyn Research Centre (2004-2005), developed moving objects for the home without a prescribed function but with an existing repertoire of movements like dropping or rolling, and



Figure 42 Different steps of the making of the Media Mediators on the video blog 2-3 Minute video diaries made by the researcher, designers and participants chronicle the design process of the Media Mediators.

⁵⁴ Challenging a participant like this is not unusual in documentary film. For instance Nick Broomfield challenges his protagonists regularly, playing a rather naïve film director (see page 93).

⁵⁵ These are conversational interviews similar to how Morris interviews (see page 82).

connectivity to a personal computer that can be tweaked or hacked by users to build their own functionality. One of the goals of the project was to explore different ways of co-creation with users inspired by the Open Source movement (Raymond, 1997). I helped the team to make video diaries of the project to support this approach. The 2-3 minute diary entries on video were all immediately posted on the internet at mediamediators.blogspot.com in a video-blog (vlog), to facilitate communication between designers and participants. Participants later shot video diaries of their experiences, which I edited and added to the vlog.

This collection of short films did not serve as an initial assessment of a situation for or by the design team to inform and inspire their project, like the films described above do. Instead they capture the making of the Media Mediators, and present this to the first users of the objects as a source of inspiration for their creative use of these objects and further development of what they do. The roles are reversed here: the designers provide the inspiration to the participants through the films to hack into the objects. As such, the diaries of the participants are an example of using discovery research at a late stage in the design process (see page 3).

The Thrill films Pleasure, Frisson and Excitement

For Brendan Walker's Fairground: Thrill Laboratory project at the Science Museum (2006), I coached MA students Michael Burton, Jessica Charlesworth and Thomas Wynne-Morgan at our Design Interactions department in making three 2 minute films. The project presented three events in the Science Museum where fairground experiences were explored in different ways, and one was through our films. The Thrill films were not explicitly created for a design process, but they easily could have served a design process for a fairground, or even something else related to one of the three experiences. For the designers, making their film was like doing research; a way to explore and understand experiences, and then communicate that understanding to others.



Figure 43 Fairgrounds archive images and found footage in Thrill film Frisson

These films are different from most other experiments I did because they are made completely out of archive footage and offered an opportunity to work with compilation techniques like zapping, scratching and repetition⁵⁶ and examples of how movements in different shots can flow together⁵⁷. This is visible in the results: the editing of the films is clearly guided by the rhythm in the movements of the fairground rides, the people in the shots, and the camera. This takes the

⁵⁶ The ideas for the films were inspired by Farocki's compilation films (see page 71).

⁵⁷ This was influenced by our analysis of the compilation film *Body Song* (Simon Pummel, 2002).

films beyond an exposé about fairground experiences towards an exploration of these experiences.

Conclusion

Design documentaries appropriate both documentary film and discovery research. The films we have made – I worked with participants, students, professional filmmakers and people from many design related disciplines – demonstrate that documentary filmmaking and thinking can be adapted and adopted in many different ways and situations. At the same time, the application of documentary film changed the practice of discovery research. Making design documentaries turned out to be an iterative process where documentary film influences discovery research and vice versa. On a more practical level, thinking inspired making and making inspired thinking. The two activities merged together into a thinking-through-making process.

The choice of projects and approaches for the design documentaries we have made aimed to cover all the main aspects of documentary film that were described in Chapters Two and Three. We adapted and adopted ideas about how documentary film approaches reality, is a language and a way to set up conversations as described in Chapter Two. We also used and appropriated documentary techniques from all four groups – observation, compilation, intervention and performance – described in Chapter Three. When making the design documentaries, it was confirmed that both categorisations are useful as a terminology to work with – as a tool to facilitate discussion and thinking – but that in practice they often flow together, blurring the borders between them, as also the discussion of *Chronicle of a Summer* and *Lift* in Chapter Four showed.

My filmmaking practice has confirmed for design documentaries what was already found for documentary film: the techniques, nor the ideas are neatly boxed and do not exist entirely separate. They combine, connect and merge in ways that make them inseparable. They are meant to facilitate discussions about making and understanding design documentaries. It makes little sense to say: “I will make a design documentary based on the idea that film is like reality using observation as my film technique” because such an approach will not lead to a film. It will result in the registration of a situation, similar to the examples in Chapter One, because film language is not taken into account and the idea that film is a conversation is ignored. Instead, in design documentaries the research subject in combination with the view and creativity of the researcher will determine which people and situations are relevant to investigate and that will guide which combination of film techniques is most appropriate to use, and determine how the three ideas of documentary film are expressed in the film. There are no formulas, nor manuals, but there are many possibilities, opportunities and inspiring examples. In De Certeau’s terms, we have used the techniques and ideas tactically (see page 6) because using them strategically would have simplified them too much and kept us from benefiting from their full potential.

Several aspects of design documentaries that have come up during their making and their use deserve further exploration. The broad, heterogeneous mix of issues is unpacked in Chapters Six and Seven, in relation to the three themes reality, language and conversation. Together, these reflections aim to investigate how adopting and adapting documentary techniques and ideas supports, changes and adds to the practices of doing and communicating discovery research.

6 Learning from making design documentaries

When setting up the different projects and films for my practice, I deliberately chose to work in a range of different contexts and roles. Some of the films were made by me alone, without a crew. Others were made by a large crew with myself in the role of director. Yet another film was made with me as a coach of the director. Sometimes I involved designers, artists and engineers, and sometimes professional documentary filmmakers. Most of the films were made with participants, but some used only archival material.

The reason to create this diversity in my practice was that I wanted to explore new ways of using video for discovery research based on the richness of the ideas and techniques of documentary film. In my study of documentary film I found many different ways of filmmaking, from very individual to large-scale projects. The protagonists of the films I have studied are a heterogeneous group too, including participants and filmmakers, and take up different roles, from someone who is being followed, to interviewee, to actor. The diversity in documentary film seemed to reflect the diversity of methods used in discovery research and of the people involved in design processes and the roles they take on. Documentary film seemed to be able to accommodate such diversity and I wanted to explore this in my practice, instead of for instance focusing on one technique, one way of making the films and one type of setting for the use of the films. Such a focus would have limited the view on the potential of design documentaries to a specific, strict method that was successful (or not). This research rather aims to explore design documentaries as an opportunity – more than a fixed method – that has been experimented with in several different design processes. This will hopefully allow others to find specific situations in their practice in which they can take up the opportunity of design documentaries and appropriate them to their own needs.

The issues that are explored in this chapter emerged from making design documentaries in various situations and different constellations. They aim to clarify what design documentaries are and what their contribution to discovery research is. They also clarify more practical aspects of making design documentaries.

Like reality: Finding a complex and diverse everyday life

Documentary film has a strong connection to reality, Chapter Two argued. This connection has existed from the start of film history, has taken many different forms since and is still evolving, as Chapters Two, Three and Four have corroborated and illustrated. The design documentaries I have made build on this connection to ground the discovery research that is done through each film

firmly into everyday life. By making use of documentary techniques to connect to reality, such as catching life unawares (see page 30), I was able to bring the complexity and diversity of the everyday into my research and my films, albeit not always equally successfully.

Participants as a guide

In my practice I took an holistic approach to reality and everyday life, accepting the everyday in its entirety, as a whole, and not as a sum of several parts that can be isolated from each other and analysed separately.

I entered each of the film projects with a broad description of a subject, and an open mind. Deliberately I did not know beforehand what I would film. This might sound naïve, and perhaps suggests that my research was undirected if not random. I had a safeguard though: the participants I worked with in most films. I had put my trust in them as guides who would lead me into the subject area I was investigating. And indeed through them, I found situations and heard stories I couldn't possibly have imagined myself beforehand, for instance because I am not a heart patient myself. I was researching their everyday lives, and they would obviously know best which aspects of their everyday life were most crucial in relation to the subject we⁵⁸ were looking into.

A possible problem with relying so much on the participants is that they are often keen to give the answers they think are expected from them in research. This is not necessarily the information or stories a researcher is looking for. I tried to get around this general problem in research by establishing trust relationships with the participants and treating them as equals rather than subjects questioned by an all-knowing researcher. This gave participants often the confidence to forget about worrying if their contribution was appropriate, and took away the propensity to find out what I wanted first. For instance, Joan built confidence from seeing the rough edit of our first shooting day for the video letter. The second day she had much less difficulty saying what she wanted to say.

Building relationships with the participants helped me to take the experiences of the participants as a starting point for the research and the making of the film. They guided me into aspects of everyday life unknown to me. Many documentary filmmakers use this technique. Longinotto and Ayisi for instance used it with the female lawyer and judge in Cameroon for *Sisters in Law* (see page 65), Morris uses it when he says he finds ways to let his interviewees talk instead of asking hard-boiled questions in *The Thin Blue Line* (see page 82) and McElwee uses it in *Sherman's March* where the women he meets determine large parts of the story of the film (see page 91). Later in this chapter (see page 141) I will discuss developing relationships with participants more in depth.

⁵⁸ Because most of the films were made by more people than me alone – in all films except *Fred* I co-operated with participants and/or crewmembers – I use 'we' to indicate the cooperation with participants and sometimes also a crew. Whenever my personal intentions are discussed I use I.

Filmmaking as a pretext

Doing research with participants as a guide requires access to their world, to the situations and context of their everyday life. This access is particular difficult to get for researchers if it is not yet entirely clear what exactly the research is about because an open approach has been chosen. The propensity of the participants to fulfil expectations of the researcher, already noted above, can create an impasse in such a situation because neither party knows how to proceed. This raises the question how to get access to the world of the participants to explore their environment while retaining the freedom to find out later what exactly the research is about.

In several of my projects we were confronted with this issue. Telling participants we wanted to make a documentary film proved to be an ideal pretext to be around for a good reason, without forcing ourselves to be very clear and precise about what we wanted to look at or discuss. Since it was a documentary we were making, participants understood that we had to explore, be curious and ask (sometimes strange) questions. Their familiarity with the genre allowed me to have a very good look around David's house for *Kent* and in Joan's house for *Debra*. I used the opportunity to take shots of their interiors as a way of providing context for their stories. For *Alena's Strawberry Farm* Xiaoxiao hung around on the farm at length, gradually developing relationships with several people, and learning about many aspects of working and living at the farm. She needed that time to find out what her film was going to be about, while filming all the time. The camera in her hands was a *carte blanche* to be at the farm and nose around almost anywhere. In such a situation, a filmmaker can choose how to behave relatively freely. For instance you can observe without participating, you can also intervene and ask people questions, or participate in their activities. All of these techniques, and many more, are known as part of filmmaking by many people. Most participants won't be surprised if you first observe them for a while and then suddenly ask a question.

Some of the many techniques filmmakers developed for this have been described in Chapters Three and Four. They offer access to many different kinds of experiences of the participants, including very personal stories. For instance, the video diaries in *The Guest* clearly reveal things the participants normally would not say easily, let alone to a researcher they only just met. For instance, Jenny tells that for her it is really important to keep everything in exactly the place where she finds it in the room of Sue's daughter, in order not to disturb her. But she has to open the curtains in the room because otherwise she feels fenced in. For the daughter, on the other hand, it turns out that keeping the curtains closed is very important because she has this fear that something could enter her room from outside if they are open. Likewise, the video letter in *Debra* offered access to intimate experiences of the heart patient because she immediately understood that a letter was a personal way of communicating. In Van der Keuken's *Brass Unbound* the shot of the tuba on the back of a truck was an elegant pretext to observe the Surinam street for minutes (see page 56). Van der Keuken shows that a pretext can also help to get just one shot instead of access to a location for several weeks, like the strawberry farm.

Nevertheless, before being able to hang around, to make a film or even make only one shot, it is necessary to gain access to the situation first. We had to make arrangements with the farm, and other locations where we filmed. Once these are made, filming is be a great pretext to do research.

Possibly chaotic results

Both characteristics of making design documentaries above – letting yourself be guided by participants and using filmmaking as a pretext to explore the world of the participants freely – lead to a very open-ended approach to research. This is not unusual in most documentary films, nor in some discovery research. But it does lead to a consequence: the result of the open, holistic approach to everyday lives of the participants is a very diverse and heterogeneous collection of stories, experiences, observations and perspectives. In principle, these are all equally valuable and true. Given the starting point for the research and films in my projects, an holistic approach to everyday life, this is not surprising. But it does raise the issue of how to deal with the potentially chaotic results of these approaches.

Like a language: Dealing with complexity and diversity

Being confronted with a wide array of stories, observations, opinions etc. is not unusual for documentary filmmakers. In fact it occurs in almost every film project. Filmmakers have many different ways of dealing with this at every stage of the filmmaking process. Outlining and scripting techniques can help to structure documentaries from the day the research for the film starts, and editing techniques are of course a crucial tool for all filmmakers to create some kind of coherency in their films. But also during shooting it is important to find connections. The main goal in all three activities is to find connections between all the elements that the filmmaker considers relevant, partly following participants' suggestions. From this, understanding can be built and consequently used to make perspectives of the researcher part of the design documentary.

Script writing as research

It may seem contradictory to script a design documentary if the goal is to have an open attitude towards your research subject. Scripting doesn't however mean that everything is determined beforehand as in many Hollywood features. A script can be no more than a very simple outline, like I had for *Kent*: Eight slogans such as "I'm learning to accept help from those who care about me" presented to David with the request to think of situations in his everyday life that somehow responded to these slogans. However simple the slogans may have been in terms of a script (perhaps they are better thought of as an outline) they did structure the potential endless possibilities I encountered when I needed to make a film about David's life as a heart patient. For *Debra* I used a similar scripting trick with the letter I wrote and asked her to respond to. This gave

her some structure, but not enough to limit her unduly in what she could come up with. Above all, the outline and the letter provided me and the participant with a procedure to work with in the very open brief – make a film about a heart patient in response to the persona Kent, or Debra – I had set myself. They also slightly guided the participants perhaps but there was always the option to disagree with what the outline and letter said and speak up against them, which they both did at times. For the rest they saw it as their task to personalise my written starting point and make it theirs⁵⁹.

Working with a team to make *Swim* and *Drift* meant I had to change some of the practices I developed when making films on my own. I had to communicate my ideas to the crew and used scripts in different formats for that. These scripts kept evolving⁶⁰. Writing and rewriting the script proved to be particularly useful for communicating ideas to the participants, and later the crew of professional filmmakers, and was at the same time research in itself. During filming we were often forced to change plans because of external circumstances like problems with permission, light, equipment and time. Partly this was solved on the spot by improvising but sometimes there was more time to rethink and rewrite the script for the next shooting day. Even during editing the rewriting of scripts continued. As it turned out, it was faster to explore different ways of telling the story by writing it, sometimes storyboarding it, than by actually editing it. As a result, writing scripts became part of every stage of the research and filmmaking process, as a practice that supported the film and at the same time the research.

Scripts can be useful in design documentaries, as they sometimes are in documentary film, but only to a certain extent because they cannot predict what you will find during shooting. Scripts should therefore not become too detailed⁶¹ and leave enough room to keep an open attitude towards the reality the film tries to connect to.

Exploring situations with camera and microphone

Another part of dealing with a large range of relevant situations and experiences is deciding how to record them on video. The scripting helps to decide what to record, but doesn't always give details about how to shoot. Positioning the camera, framing, camera movements, the use of a tripod, how to use microphones and so on all involve making choices about what aspects of the

⁵⁹ David said at one stage even that he thought the film should be called David instead of Kent, because it was clearly entirely about him, he thought. I didn't because the film needed to respond to the persona Kent and the voice-overs (which David had not heard yet then), were supposed to signify that more than one person – that is, the persona – was speaking through the film.

⁶⁰ When I was writing the first script for *Drift*, I discussed with both participants separately about how their work could fit in the film. In particular discussions with Suzi about 'drifting,' an activity of the Situationists in the 1950s to explore a city, inspired me to change the subject slightly to 'navigating a city without a specific goal.' This finally led to choosing the colour yellow and circular shapes as guides for two separate 'drifts' around the Barbican. The first scripts were used to explore possible directions in which I could take the research. In later versions first specific situations and then the way in which these situations could be shot were scripted too, including some photographs that illustrated atmosphere and possible camera angles. References to documentary films, in particular *Chronique d'un Été* (see Chapter Four) were used to further detail ideas, atmosphere and ways of shooting.

⁶¹ Ivens noted this for instance when he shot *Rain* (see page 58).

subject under investigation will be in film, or most present in the film. Film language has an enormously rich variety in techniques to highlight aspects of a situation, from making a close-up to using sound to focus on a particular aspect in the image. For instance, Kossakovsky's *Tische!* (see page 54) can be seen as an original catalogue of numerous camera and sound techniques. His film is also a good example of how the situation offers opportunities to use certain techniques, as opposed to having to decide on techniques beforehand, in the script for instance. As Ivens noted in relation to scripting, see Footnote 61, many very good opportunities only become available during shooting. Opportunities to record something in a particular way are offered by situations and participants, which guarantees that the valued connection to reality discussed in the previous section is strongly in place.

The shooting of the swimming in *Swim* offers an example from my own practice. I studied the movements of the swimmers with the camera and tried to find ways of filming their experience of 'being in a bubble' as they had described it to me. I was looking for an emotional representation of that experience instead of a rational one. I tried to go with the movement of the swimmers and the water⁶². In the film this results in a range of close-ups of swimming people and moving water without fixed references like the edge of the pool, often filmed with a camera that moves too⁶³. I moved the camera along with the swimmers, without knowing what exactly I would get on tape. My goal was to capture the experience of swimming, to make the viewers feel as swimmers, and I knew that would not happen with a camera on a tripod at the side of the pool showing a wide shot of a swimmer. I used the camera to find out what would be the best way of filming, by moving it along with the swimmers at different speeds, sometimes asking the swimmers to go faster, or slower. The experiments resulted in images in which nothing seems to stand still. These kind of shots were hard to storyboard (I tried), and impossible to think up behind a desk; the thinking happened during the shooting, in response to what I found (out). The images provoked an emotional response of the design team (see page 153): The viewers could identify with the swimmers and understand or even feel their experience.

Many techniques I decided to use on location, in response to the situations I found. This process is often intuitive, because it is based on tacit experience but also because there is often little time to think before having to shoot. What you want to get can be gone in seconds; not every situation has the luxury of the swimming where I could ask the swimmers to move faster, slower or use a certain stroke.

⁶² I was inspired by Ivens' suggestion to represent facts emotionally instead of rationally or analytically if you want to express experiences (see page 58).

⁶³ The filming of the swimming was also inspired by the use of the camera as a sensor in Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (see page 52). In its manifesto Vertov's group claims that the camera is a machine that sees the world in a way that humans cannot see it. I used this idea to explore the movements of the swimmers in the pool.

Adding your perspective as a researcher

Film language can be used to explore situations and experiences and find meaning in them, as was discussed in the previous paragraph. Another, complementary use is expressing the perspective of the filmmaker. As a researcher I used this possibility often to deal with the multitude of opportunities that a certain subject offered. My perspective came sometimes from previous work by other researchers, the interviews and personas of Philips for instance. For *Fred* I added new meaning to the photos of the heart patients by presenting them in a filmic way, using zooming, panning and other camera movements. My gaze as a filmmaker and researcher narrativises the photos and brings extra meaning to the film⁶⁴. Also in *Fred*, I used juxtaposition as a technique to highlight the contrasts that exist in persona Fred's lifestyle. This served as a tool to present contradictions and co-existing opposites like Fred's measures to have a quiet lifestyle versus his simultaneous involvement in many activities like building houses.

My perspectives were not only based on previous research, I also developed them during the research itself. This process is visible in *Drift* which has the structure and perspective of a quest by the researcher, myself, inspired by for instance McElwee (see page 91). *Drift* chronicles my research aimed at informing and inspiring the application of smart textiles in navigation services step by step and the narration takes the viewer through all these steps⁶⁵. The film uses narration to create a storyline that builds on serendipity as a connecting principle, as McElwee does in an extreme form.

Editing offers of course many opportunities to add perspective. I added for instance my own perspective to *Swim* by editing particular conversation fragments to the images that express the bubble experience of the swimmers. Xiaoxiao uses music to add her perspective to *Alena's Strawberry Farm*. Music and sound determines the atmosphere of a filmed situation to a great extent. If you put happy music with a scene, it looks very different from when you add sad music. Kossakovsky uses this technique a lot in *Tische!*, to give his ironic view on Russian workers who repair his street poorly, and through them his views of Russian society (see page 54). In *Alena's Strawberry Farm*, Xiaoxiao uses for instance the song *Let's go out tonight* when the East Europeans go to the Tesco supermarket for their shopping with the farm's bus. The song dominates the sound track and sets a melancholic atmosphere. Here too the use of music is

⁶⁴ The technique is used in many documentary films, most notably by documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, who had the effect named after him in video editing software.

⁶⁵ For instance, to connect a story of Verity about conductive knitwear that replaces parts of electrical circuits to drifting through the Barbican, I speak the following text while we see microscopic photos of textile, a yellow grid on the street with moving cars and psycho-geographic maps of the Situationists: "I wonder what disappears in these textiles. And how to find something that is disappearing? Can we see it if we put the textile under the microscope? These images make knit work look like a power grid, it could even be the internet..."

If you don't know where you are going perhaps the best thing to do is to get lost. There are ways to get lost. In the 1950s the Situationists have developed some, they were very good at it. They called it *dérives* or drifting."

By using narration as something to hold on to for the viewer, it becomes possible to present an eclectic combination of subjects in *Drift*: smart textiles, patterns, getting lost, abstract painting, interactive art, dead ends and disappearing computers.

ironic, but this shows only later, when we see that the bus with the nicely dressed young people brings them to Tesco instead of a club or café.

Using perspective does not need to involve the filmmaker as a gatekeeper who decides which aspect of reality is most important to present. It can be merely structuring several aspects of the research subject in a meaningful way, leaving it open to the viewer to develop further insights. Serendipitous narration proved for instance to be very useful to hold rather disparate findings together. The film leaves it up to the viewer to make more and other connections between these subjects than the narrator. As such, adding perspectives of the filmmaker is literally an addition, more than a limitation. This makes the film more complex perhaps – it at least will clearly move beyond the record footage approach (see page 51) – but also more structured. This facilitates the navigation of the stories, experiences and so on for the viewers, and in addition offers some examples of how one can look at the diverse complex situations that are presented.

Storytelling

As the exposé of documentary techniques in Chapter Three already suggested there is an enormous and very diverse array of techniques available in film language to structure the large amount of situations and experiences most discovery research into everyday life is confronted with, without necessarily simplifying it. What all these techniques share is that they help the film to find direction and tell a story to its viewers. How that story is told depends on the researcher. All techniques are not equally interesting to everyone. Personal skills and preferences are important to guide the choice for techniques, next to the subject of the research, or more precisely the participants and situations that are chosen to feature in the film. One researcher is more comfortable with observing from a distance or speaking narration, another prefers to engage into conversation and activities with the participants, testing ideas with them. I am more inclined towards the latter, but there are many more positions possible between and outside this opposition that are attractive to me too. Above all I prefer methods that allow inconsistencies and opposites in the story of the film to exist, as also my selection of film techniques for Chapter Three will have made clear. But even within that selection many different approaches have become visible as tools to use in discovery research.

Like conversation: Working with people

The third idea of documentary film introduced in Chapter Two was that film is like a conversation between filmmakers, participants and viewers. In my practice I have worked with many people to make the films, in several different constructions. Only one film I made by myself (*Fred*). All the other films I made with participants and/or crew members. This section discusses some of the issues that came up in these co-operations. They all relate to working with people in the

circumstances described in the previous two sections. The relationships with the viewers are discussed in Chapter Seven (see page 158ff.).

Developing relationships with participants

When starting new research, and making a new design documentary, I always met new people. Participants were mostly people I had not met before. Because the research and making the films was often spread over several appointments of, not unusually a whole day each, there was time to develop a trust relationship. A very personal subject, like health as with the heart patients, helped to create a personal relationship sooner. Also, doing the filmmaking alone seemed to make the relationship more intense. Also personality differences between people matter: it is easier to have good contact with some than with others. The quality of the relationship is very important though, because it will determine how much the participant wants to 'give' to you as a researcher, not only in terms of information per se, but also the quality of the stories, for instance how intimate they are. Investing time and effort in a good relationship is important for design documentaries because as a researcher one is asking a lot from participants: not just their stories but also an appearance or performance on video.

Xiaoxiao's approach at the strawberry farm is a good example of such an investment. She participated in the experience of the workers by living in the same place as they did. This helped Xiaoxiao to observe all the activities of the fruit-pickers so she could make a choice what to film. But more importantly it helped to get in touch with them, chat with them informally, not just about the film. When I visited Xiaoxiao at the farm for a day with Nadine, there were already a few people Xiaoxiao had developed a relationship with. She had gained their trust and found a way to communicate across language and cultural barriers. This approaches the practice of Philibert who says he makes films *with* people, instead of *about* them (see page 64). The goal of Philibert's observational cinema is similar to that Xiaoxiao's: finding out what is important to the people in front of the camera. To be able to find out, developing a good relationship is indispensable.

Making *Kent* and *Debra* with David and Joan was only possible because a relationship developed between us. The good relationship between me and David can be noticed in the film because he clearly feels at ease to talk about very personal subjects like the experience he had during his first heart attack. As a result, the viewer can experience an open relationship with David too, similar to how this works in Philibert's films. The cooperation with Joan went better step by step, as she and I gained trust and confidence that the approach I suggested would work. Trust is a key aspect of the relationship that develops between researcher and participant(s) I found in all my films; the confidence of participants often is built on their trust.

Gaining trust

Because trust is such an important aspect of research, and filmmaking, with the quality of the design documentary often depending on it heavily, it is worthwhile to unpack this a bit further. First, it is important to consider trust as a process that develops over time, as, and in parallel with,

the relationship between researcher and participant that develops. This can take the form of a conversation that evolves during the filmmaking process. If there is a crew they can take part in this conversation. Secondly, to help trust build up, I tried to understand the reasons participants have to collaborate. For instance, these can be contributing to a good cause, as the heart patients certainly felt, or an interesting and creative exploration, as the participants in *Drift* and *Swim* possibly considered. Motivation might also include publicity for their work, as the participants in *Swim* mentioned. Vanity could be a reason too; after all I have invited them to participate and not someone else. Two participants requested explicitly to not show a certain part of their house because they thought it would not look good. I granted these wishes because I knew it was important to build trust with the participants, and I was aware that losing trust can be done a lot quicker and easier than rebuilding it – a third aspect of gaining trust.

A possible problem of building trust and relationships with the participants can be that you grow too familiar with the participant to see certain aspects of their behaviour or everyday life. When you first meet a participant everything is still new and all kinds of little things from how they make a cheese sandwich to their gaze seem special and worthwhile recording. Later when you start to know them better, you might no longer notice these things. It is difficult to keep the strange strange as the relationship develops. I tried to avoid the effects of familiarisation by starting the filming early: at the first time I would meet people on the location we had chosen to film I always took my camera⁶⁶. This tactic is used by filmmakers too, sometimes applied even more rigidly if they have a separate researcher, who does all the contact before the shooting, allowing the filmmaker to see the participant only minutes before the camera is switched on⁶⁷.

Responsibilities

As a researcher making films, I had to be aware of the responsibility that came with the role and the projects I had taken on. Showing participants that you accept responsibility also helps to gain trust. Which responsibility exactly must be accepted depends strongly on the project. In general the health and safety of the participants is important of course, which means you cannot ask them to engage in dangerous situations. This may sound easier than it is because what is safe for the filmmaker can be dangerous for someone else. In particular with the heart patients this was relevant, but I had to depend on them to indicate what was possible to do and what not. David was very good at indicating that he could come visit me at work but would need a taxi from the tube station to my college. Also I did discuss with David and Joan how long we could work on a

⁶⁶ I had meetings with some of the participants before filming, but always elsewhere. In the first meetings I also tried to avoid the subjects I wanted to talk with them about in the film. Otherwise we would have to do the conversation again and that would have been hard because they would feel they had already told me the story. Instead I focused on letting them know me better, and chatting on general things from the weather to what parts of Britain I had seen since I started living in London. Of course we also discussed what I expected from them and they had ample opportunity to ask questions about the project before agreeing to participate.

⁶⁷ I learned this during a course in 2003 with documentary filmmaker Frans Bromet who was very adamant about this.

day and stuck to that. These conversations are also part of building the trust relationship of course⁶⁸.

Another responsibility comes with the filming itself and how the raw material is edited. Here, there is a responsibility consists in treating people respectfully, and not harming them psychologically or damaging their public image and reputation. Again this is difficult to make more precise on a general level. In the end it comes down to the ethics of the filmmaker who is in power of the image, as is also acknowledged in documentary filmmaking. It does help if you are aware of possible caveats and problems such as listed by MacKay (1995) for the HCI community, based on examples from practice. An approach I took in for instance *Drift* is to show in the film itself how the material was obtained. *Drift* explains how it was made, in particular the walks around the Barbican, by showing how we find the people we talk to. That allows the viewers to draw their own conclusions on the ethics of the researchers. In the heart patient films I included title cards to explain how the material was obtained and from whom. Furthermore it is generally possible to provide some background information about how the film was made at a screening. Viewers are generally interested in this kind of information because it helps them to interpret the film (this is discussed further in the next chapter on page 155).

Finally there is obviously a responsibility to represent people's opinions and stories fairly. I did not take this as a requirement to include everything people told me, but rather as a requirement to present people's perspectives honestly, as they view the world. I allowed them to speak for themselves. This means I cannot take responsibility for what they said – that responsibility is their own. My responsibility is to present what they said and not something completely different by for instance using what was said out of context, implying another meaning. Nor did I want to make a moral judgement about people's statements, as for instance Moore does in his politically motivated films (see page 68). This is not to say that political statements do not belong in design documentaries. To the contrary, they can be very relevant, but my approaches to design documentaries is to present a conversation between several perspectives rather than a moral judgement on its subject. This approach fits well with the goal of design documentaries to represent different perspectives of people and not bring everything together in one conclusion of the filmmaker.

⁶⁸ Documentary filmmakers have very different attitudes to this. Wiseman once told in a post-screening Q&A I attended that he never interfered, and as a example he gave a situation from *Domestic Violence* when he accompanied the police to a home of a woman who had been beaten by her husband, who had consequently fled the house. She did not dare to stay home and could go nowhere else, but the policemen did not know where she could go either so advised her to stay. Wiseman did know a refuge where she could stay but did not interfere, not even afterwards when he had stopped filming. He felt he should never ever muddle in the affairs of his protagonists because that would blur his role as a filmmaker, quietly observing from the corner. He felt he would violate the trust relationship that was agreed silently: that he would never interfere. (Wiseman, 2003)

Ethics

As trust, ethics is a conversation of the researcher, and possibly the crew, with the participant. I did not use a set of rules I could follow without thinking and without taking the particularities of the situation into consideration. However, treating people with respect, as discussed above, is of course a necessity for ethical behaviour. This is part of the trust relationship with the participant. Sometimes it can be for instance necessary to safeguard a participant from exposing themselves in a silly or overly intimate way⁶⁹.

To make sure participants agree with the use of the material that is going to be shot from them, they are often asked to sign a consent form. This form not only aims to safeguard the participant, it even more so safeguards the researcher. Telling in this respect was the difference I found between consent forms in industry discovery research projects and documentary filmmaking. During a discovery research project I taught with someone from industry we compared the two. The industry form guaranteed the participant that only people related to the project will see the material. On the contrary, the documentary film form expressed the efforts the filmmaker will do to get the material shown in as many places as possible, preferably on television. The first form appeals to the privacy concerns people may have, the second to our vanity and wish to be important. But in fact they both serve above everything else the needs of the commissioner of the film: industry wants to maintain secrecy towards competitors and filmmakers want to reach a large audience. Design documentaries might fall in either category, depending on how a project is financed, through industry seeking confidentiality or academia seeking the dissemination of knowledge. Some of my projects were in one camp and some in the other.

The heart patient films were subject to a confidentiality agreement with Philips and this was reflected in the consent forms I had signed by David and Joan at the end of the project. Asking to sign a consent form at the start of the project can be threatening to participants, I considered, because they do not know yet what exactly they are agreeing to, nor could I explain because it was not yet clear what we would film and how. The solution I found was to tell them we would have to sign a consent form at the end of the process, after seeing the final film, when we both would know what we were signing. Even though this contains the risk that after the film is done you do not get a signature, this worked fine. I felt I did not take a big risk because I was closely co-operating with David and Joan and had ample opportunity to address any concerns they might have during our collaboration. I just needed to be sensitive to possible concerns and discuss them immediately if I noticed them. To support this approach I stimulated participants to tell me if they did not want me to record certain things, which at two occasions they indeed did, while filming *Debra* and *Swim*.

⁶⁹ There are however ways around this, for instance by using what participants have said, but making it impossible for the viewer to link it back to the person who said it. Artist Gillian Wearing disguised people who told her intimate stories on video in *Confess all on video. Don't worry, you will be in disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian* (1994). Designers Dunne and Raby did this for instance in their film *Evidence Doll* (2005) by hiring actresses to speak the quotes they had taken from interviews.

Establishing agreement with the painter at the Barbican (see page 1) worked differently. His behaviour might seem silly at first sight, but then he explains very well why he photographs the cracks and his behaviour becomes interesting and suddenly very relevant to the film, allowing the viewer to appreciate what he does instead of dismissing it. I recognised his story would have this effect in the film immediately when we were shooting it, and explain in the film itself (to the painter) that what he does is in fact similar to what we were doing in our project: finding inspiration in the world. Our conversation with him, about what he and we were doing, was our inspiration like the cracks were his. The scene shows how the situation came into being, the reason for making the film was explained to the painter in the film itself, and his (positive) response was filmed too. The situation in the film is complete and shows the painter agrees with what we do. There is also enough clarity and honesty in the film for the viewer to determine what happened, and that this did not damage the painter. The scene in the film demonstrated his agreement.

However agreement with the participants has been achieved, the researcher will always determine how the film is used. This power brings a big responsibility with it. It is up to the researcher to portray the (accidental) participant in a respectful way, and to be honest about how the film recording was obtained. In the end I believe that is where the ethics of design documentaries depend on, similar to documentary film where the reputation of the director is at stake if this responsibility is not taken seriously. Reputation in industry and academia is just as important as it is in the public environment where documentary filmmakers work. Furthermore, it should be noted that ethics will remain a discussion with temporary and local conclusions, as the use of moving images in society changes and issues like privacy remain differently understood between (sub)cultures.

Conclusion

The design documentaries I made raised practical, theoretical and ethical issues which can be grouped around the three aspects that characterise documentary film: their connections to reality, film language as a tool to tell a story, and the relationships and conversations that evolve during the making of a film. As the collection of issues raised in this chapter demonstrates, a rulebook for how to make a design documentary cannot be given. Instead, good practice seems to be close to the existing, diverse practice in documentary filmmaking where possible ways of dealing with similar issues have been explored extensively. Which practices are most useful or appropriate depends on the situation at hand and the participants involved. But above all it depends on the researchers who make the design documentary. Their personal skills, experience and ethical stance determines how the film is made and the research is done.

The openness of design documentaries as a discovery research method is a basic characteristic as this chapter has shown. The films are open to the complexity and diversity of

reality; open to many different ways of dealing with the multitude of stories, experiences and observations that result from that open attitude; and open to having conversations with participants about the subject of the film, how it could be filmed, and ethical and political aspects of the research. To be able to deal with all this openness it is again pertinent that the researcher brings her or his personal skills, ideas, experience and perspectives to the project. Similar to how a documentary filmmaker uses her or his creative influence to characterise a film, as an auteur, the creativity of the researcher who makes a design documentary will have a crucial impact on the film, and thus on the research.

The discussion of the issues surrounding the making of design documentaries in this chapter makes it possible to evaluate how they deal with the problems of video being cumbersome, mentioned in Chapter One (see page 13). Design documentaries change the most common process of discovery research. Instead of a division of the work in three consecutive stages – often called data collection, data analysis and presentation of results – these three activities are conducted largely at the same time. Filmmaking processes have different steps too, roughly they are preparation, shooting and editing, but these do not map onto the stages of discovery research. All three discovery research stages are present in each of the steps of filmmaking and the activities themselves are different too. During preparations for the films we were involved in researching the subject of the film, collecting material and finding people who could contribute, perhaps as participants, and also thinking about how to bring all this material together in a story that could be communicated, for instance through writing outlines or scripts. During shooting we were still collecting material, finding situations and people that could be part of the films, and thinking again about how to communicate, for instance through mise-en-scene and framing. During editing the material that had been shot was viewed several times to find shots that we wanted to include, additional shots were made, possible interpretations of shots and sequences were explored and there was a continuous focus on how to communicate the research. This process returns to aspects of collecting, understanding and presenting data⁷⁰ several times, which makes it iterative.

In several ways the processes we used to make design documentaries addressed the problems many users of video in discovery research have. They are all related to the fact we were always conscious that we were making a film. Because we considered the function of the shots we prepared and took, we did not end up with enormous amounts of material. Our prior considerations also helped to select shots because there was already a plan for the film before the editing started. Even more important was that these considerations had already gone through several iterations and discussions with participants and crew members, making the function of the material in the film even more clear. The idea that documentary film is a conversation played an important, guiding role in the filmmaking process, influencing not only the content of the

⁷⁰ The use of the word data perhaps hides that the activities have changed too, but if a broad understanding of data is taken, the comparison still holds.

research but also how it was conducted. It prevented us from ending up with very large amounts of video that were hard to access and difficult to edit. As such, some of the problems with video in discovery research were successfully addressed, even though that was not the initial purpose of this research. The process we followed also made clear that we went beyond beautification of video recordings for discovery research. The design documentaries might be more beautiful than most videos in discovery research (or not – tastes differ) through their focus on film language, but more importantly they influence the process of discovery research and its results with their focus on both conversation and language.

The next chapter reflects on communicating discovery research with design documentaries, based on the experiences I had in my practice with showing and discussing the films to designers and multidisciplinary design teams.

7 Learning from communicating research with design documentaries

This research aims to present design documentaries as an opportunity that has been explored in a range of different research and design processes, and can be created and used in different circumstances, for different purposes. The research does not focus on developing a method that has strict guidelines or a manual, as was explained in the previous chapter. This has some consequences for how I collected responses from design teams on design documentaries they used and what I did with the responses.

Firstly, I did not aim to make a formal comparison between design teams who worked with design documentaries and teams that didn't. This would not be possible in any meaningful way because design processes strongly depend on context and purpose, and consequently it is impossible to find identical design processes in real-life settings. Also this would require long-term involvement with design teams and force me to focus on one or very few design documentaries. I considered it more relevant to explore a broad range of possible uses than to invest in one in-depth investigation of one project, one design team, one design context, and so on.

Secondly, I did not try to trace if design documentaries directly influenced design outcomes. There is generally no direct relation between discovery research findings and design results, unless the research provided a clear-cut insight that can be translated one on one to a design proposal. Sometimes discovery research aims for these very specific insights, as when IDEO found that children hold toothbrushes in a different way from adults, and concluded that an ergonomic children's toothbrush should have a thick round handle (Hunter, 2006). In many cases, however, research into everyday life aims to set up a more open-ended conversation with people about what matters to them, and this is what design documentaries aim for. Such an approach results in detailed insights, as well as holistic impressions, about how people live on many levels, not just problems or inconveniences they may experience. Open-ended research often also aims to provide inspiration to designers and create empathy for participants. All these research results influence the outcomes of design processes, but they do so together with many other aspects. Their influence is more general, on the design process as a whole and the design team involved in it.

Lastly, I will not provide much detailed evidence in my discussion of how design teams used my design documentaries, such as full transcripts of responses or design work. I did record or keep detailed notes of most of the discussions I had with design teams about the design documentaries they watched, and will quote from these in this chapter to illustrate my description

of how design teams responded to the design documentaries they saw. But since I did not aim for a comprehensive evaluation of design documentaries as a method, I did not invest in following design processes, set up interviews and discussions, make transcripts of these or conduct a detailed analysis.

What I did aim for was to put the approach that design documentaries propose into practice in design processes. My basic goal was to assess whether this new method would be accepted by design teams, and if so, what sorts of benefits might be described. To make the responses valuable it was important to introduce design documentaries in realistic situations, preferably existing design projects or situations that closely mimicked these. Also the design documentaries should be made and used with several design teams, in different contexts, and end in different films to give a broad view on how they might function in design processes, in particular how they can communicate research results to multidisciplinary design teams and the benefits these teams might see in the method.

Therefore the purpose for which I made my films was always a design process, but the nature and locality of this process differed considerably. Some of the films were used by large multinational industry, others by design research groups in academia, or by smaller design practices or individual designers. Sometimes I organised a workshop where the films were used, and sometimes a workshop was set up and led by a design manager who commissioned the films without me attending. This diversity of contexts allowed me to explore different opportunities for design documentaries to communicate research and play a role in design processes.

To get valuable responses it was most important to let the designers and design teams view and discuss the films as they normally would use discovery research that is made available to them. During this process they were asked to reflect on the films as (a way to communicate) research. They explored with me opportunities that are opened up by design documentaries for the communication of discovery research and for new roles of discovery research in design processes. This chapter presents their responses and my reflection on them in relation to the same three themes that structured the previous chapter – like reality, like a language and like a conversation – because these themes were useful in my conversations with the designers and design teams. But first a description of the situations in which the main films were presented is given.

Presenting the films

In general, the films were shown and discussed in workshops. The primary goal of these workshops was to use the films to develop more engaged intuitions about the people for whom the team was going to design or already designing. The circumstances in which the three large design documentaries were used are described below.

Fred, Kent and Debra

The three films Philips Medical Systems commissioned to me were made in London for a multidisciplinary design team in Seattle. I did not meet the team in person before or after making the films. I talked to Jon Bishay (team leader and one of the interviewers of the heart patients in San Diego) over the phone about my plans several times before the filming, and we also discussed versions of the films before they were shown to his team, about twenty people including designers, engineers, project managers and marketers, on 28 July 2005. The primary goal of the viewing was to use the films to develop more engaged intuitions about the people for whom the team was designing at-home medical products.

Each film was shown separately, followed by a free-ranging discussion of the particular characters depicted, more general points about similar patients, speculations about design implications, and reflections about the effectiveness of the films themselves as communicators of the research and means to develop more engaged intuitions. The films were introduced by Jon as alternatives to the persona posters they had used before, but serving the same goal: presenting the population they are designing for to the team. The discussions were recorded on video and sent to me over the internet. Later I discussed twice with Jon the effect the films had had on the team over email and the phone.

My goal in this project was, besides exploring opportunities to bring documentary film ideas and techniques into discovery research, to explore issues around communicating discovery research to a team that had not at all been involved in the research process. The large geographical distance helped to keep the research I did in London clearly separated from the design team and forced the films to communicate the results of my research – I could not add details or explanations.

Drift and Swim

My goal in the smart textiles projects was twofold. First, I wanted to work with designers, engineers and artists in the research because I had not done that in the project with Philips. Secondly I wanted to explore the capabilities of the films to communicate the research to a group of designers of which some had participated in the research and others not. The projects were set up to serve these two goals. I did my research – made the design documentaries – with part of the design team and invited additional designers to a workshop where we brainstormed concepts for smart textiles in relation to the films.

To explore concepts in response to *Drift*, industrial design consultancy Therefore hosted a 3-hour workshop in September 2006. The artist and the engineer who had participated in making *Drift* were present, two industrial designers of Therefore⁷¹ participated and I chaired the workshop. I started with handing out a brief I had written for the workshop, outlining ‘wandering through a city’ as the activity we were designing for, and smart textiles as the material we were supposed to

⁷¹ Jim Fullalove and Andy Clift

use, both in relation to navigation products and services. Then I introduced *Drift* as the result of our research, to inform and inspire the concept development. We viewed the film and immediately afterwards we discussed what aspects of the film had inspired everyone present most, before engaging in three iterative cycles of brainstorming, to explore people and situations, navigation supports, and finally elaborate on one selected idea. We ended the meeting with an evaluation of how the film communicated the research and had played a role in the concept development. The entire workshop was recorded on video for reference purposes.

Swim was used in a similar way and setting. The workshop was chaired by researcher in the film, and the engineer and designer who were in the film were present too. A sportswear designer of Gul⁷² participated in the workshop without any prior involvement in the research. The workshop had a duration of three hours and a similar structure, except that *Swim* was divided in five clips. The group watched the introduction film at the start and the chair introduced the other four clips during the iterative brainstorm when the issues in the clip were raised by the participants. I recorded the entire workshop on video for future reference, and did not participate in the brainstorm. But at the end when the group discussed the value of the film clips in the workshop I joined them.

Both situations allowed me to learn about how the films communicated the research to people previously not involved in the research (the designers of *Therefore* and *Gul*). I and others who took part in the research brought occasionally experiences we had during the making of the films into the discussion. This allowed me to study a common situation in which part of the team has done the research and part not. Suzi, Verity and I were part of the research team and the design team.

Alena's Strawberry Farm

The third large project I was involved in was a collaboration between academia and industry. We had workshop meetings in London and Paris, often for a full day. At one of these occasions, in Paris on 9 October 2006, we showed the rough cut of *Alena's Strawberry Farm* to the team: two researchers/designers of France Telecom/Orange⁷³ and three of Goldsmiths College⁷⁴, plus myself. We did not all see the film for the first time: Nadine and I had helped Xiaoxiao with making the film and others from Goldsmiths had viewed the film already at the studio in London.

Before seeing the film, Nadine showed the group in the workshop pictures of the farm she had taken. She explained the situation on the farm, pointing to details as well as more general aspects of how the East European students lived at the farm. She also showed some first results from a very limited cultural probes study (see page 187) with maps, postcards and photographs. Directly after this we viewed the film, and discussed its contents in relation to the main focus of our project: mobile cultures. What could we learn from the film? What inspired us?

⁷² Warren Valentine

⁷³ Nathalie Portolan and Sylvie Courcelle

⁷⁴ Bill Gaver, Andy Boucher and Nadine Jarvis

The situation also allowed me to observe possible differences between responses on the photos and on the film. We did not develop concepts or design ideas at the workshop. Our focus was still on research; we wanted to learn about and from the mobile cultures we were investigating and find inspiration in them. I took notes of the discussion in the workshop as it evolved.

This situation allowed me to see how a design documentary can work in a design process at a very early stage, when the research is still explorative and the ideas for design are not yet formed, in contrast to for instance for the Philips team who knew they wanted to make a personal heart monitor. Also I could observe how a design documentary can work in combination with other research methods.

The nature of the feedback I asked for from all viewers was not precise information on what elements they had taken from the films and what they had used it for because my aim was not to conduct a detailed evaluation of the films, but instead to assess the overall approach. Instead I, firstly, wanted to explore with the viewers what opportunities design documentaries offer to communicate everyday life situations, experiences and stories – the access the films gave to realities that mattered to the viewers. Secondly, I stimulated viewers to criticise the films as films – not just as research. This guided viewers to discuss aspects of film language and how different uses of film language influenced the information and inspiration they offered. Finally I asked for responses to the open-endedness of the films, which aimed to involve the viewers in the conversations that were set up in the films. These three main focuses for the feedback reflect the main ideas on which design documentaries are built, explained in chapter two and discussed in Chapter Six in relation to making design documentaries. The remaining pages of this chapter discuss the responses I got from the designers and teams who used the films, grouped around these three themes: reality, language and conversation.

Like reality: Discovering people, context and details

The viewers of the films recognised intuitively the strong connection to reality design documentaries offer. Several viewers reported that watching the film was as if they were in the situations the film showed. The pool sequences in *Swim* for instance had this effect: “Watching the film was like being there, in the pool.” Another viewer said seeing the film was “a sensory experience.” The effect this had on the brainstorm was according to one of them that “a lot of things wouldn’t have come up if the film hadn’t put us there so well.” The designers viewing *Drift* considered this to be a quality of film in general. “We were there,” said one of them. “I think you have a more visceral response” said someone else, emphasising a direct, felt connection to the situations in *Drift*. This was highly appreciated as a welcome addition to existing sources of information for projects, especially by the industrial designers of Therefore who appreciated that *Drift* talked about “experience” because that is normally not mentioned in their briefs. Experience

seems to be the key concept these responses focus on; words like 'sensory' and 'visceral' also point towards the physical aspects of experience. The experiences reflect the feeling documentary theory calls 'being a witness' (see page 31). Most design documentaries we made used this quality of documentary film and when they did, this was recognised and appreciated by the viewers.

Focusing on people, not just their needs

The focus on experiences of people in the films was different from what most of the design teams usually receive as input for their projects. Often input about the people they are designing for focuses on needs and produces a set of requirements for the team. The team at Philips recognised and appreciated that the films focused on the heart patients as people, and not just representatives of a set of needs and requirements. For instance the team valued the ambiguity of the heart patient in *Kent*:

I see a very common dichotomy of mind, where on the one hand they know, for their own best help [sic], when there is a question they ought to ask for help, but then there is that recognition that really underneath that all that I really don't want to have any help. So there is this double mindedness, that I really know you should ask for help, but for some reason, upbringing or whatever, I don't do that. (Response to viewing of *Kent* by Philips Medical Systems team member, Seattle, 28 July 2005)

Seeing real people in design documentaries helped design teams to bring their discussions beyond stereotypes because the people shown, and their experiences, were too detailed and complex to be accommodated in stereotypes. This for instance was also clear in the discussions in the Mobile Cultures team. At one stage the team viewed pictures with explanations of the researcher who had been at the strawberry farm (see page 152). In the discussion that followed some stereotypes about for instance exploitation of seasonal migrant workers were brought up. But when the team saw *Alena's Strawberry Farm* immediately after, the stereotypes were no longer tenable because the situation turned out to be much more complex with lots of good sides to the circumstances and payment for the workers.

It was important however to explain, to the Philips team in particular, the consequence of this approach: the films did not intend to present user requirements. Instead they aimed to give the team members more engaged intuitions for the everyday lives of heart patients. Saying this at the outset, and repeating it after the viewing of the first film, prevented team members from being frustrated that more focused conclusions were not offered. Their expectations needed to be managed because this approach was unusual to them.

Hungry for everyday details

Some viewers at Philips said the persona posters were more informative, but the films gave a much better feeling for who the people are. They were not sure if that was because the films contained more information. In fact, the films contained only about half the number of words as the posters. Seeing and hearing heart patients in their own context, however, provides new

information, as does hearing how they express themselves (for instance their intonation). The team valued access to incidental details that might or might not be important for design – the patients’ activities, homes, aesthetic tastes, ways of expression, etc. – since these things made the personas look more like real people who might use future products. Nonetheless, the team thought that the films could delve a bit deeper into the everyday lives of heart patients, showing, for instance, what it is like to not feel entirely right after dinner and how frightening that is. They expressed a need to know how these very ‘normal’ events really play out in a heart patient’s daily life. They recognised the value of film in capturing personal stories and were eager to get access to more of these kinds of details.

Attention to detail can make a film stronger. In the workshop where I showed *Swim* this was recognised by the participants who noticed that the swimmers had wet hair during their conversation. They appreciated this attention to detail because to them, it made the conversation they heard more authentic, and the film more believable. I could confirm that the swimmers had indeed swum before their conversation. The viewers appreciated also that the experiences presented in the film were authentic; that the swimmers in the film were really experienced in swimming laps as a form of exercise and that they were talking about their own experiences. The details had to be authentic, and the experiences of the swimmers had to be their own.

The viewers of *Swim* expected however that the film was constructed to some level, just by looking at it. They knew to a certain extent how films are made, like most people. This is general knowledge, part of our audiovisual literacy. They understood intuitively you have to set up a situation like the conversation between the swimmers deliberately to be able to film it. I explained that the shots of the swimming were actually taken much later, in sessions on two different days. The reversal of order in the shooting compared to the presentation in the film did not diminish the viewers’ feeling that what they had seen was authentic though. They did not object to the fact that the film, and the research, was constructed in such a way. Construction and authenticity can go together in design documentaries, just like in documentary film, without compromising the believability of the film. Ivens found for instance the same when making *Rain*, which represents only one shower in Amsterdam but was shot over many weeks (see page 58).

Like a language: Appreciating selection and construction

The viewers of *Swim* and others understood that films are constructed because this is general knowledge, part of people’s audiovisual literacy. Seeing the design documentaries helped to explore, with the viewers, how this construction could be made useful in discovery research.

Appreciating selection as a research skill

Several of the viewers asked how the choices that the filmmakers made came about. They understood, using common audiovisual literacy, that the films were constructed and that choices

had been made by the researchers to include some things and exclude others. Initially, some were worried that the films limited their freedom to brainstorm, and would have preferred to receive the raw material from the filming to make their own selections, because they would probably have chose other shots and edited other sequences than the researchers had.

One of the viewers of *Swim* wondered if that had not determined the direction of the brainstorm for smart textile concepts. My answer to this was that of course it had, for instance by working with the lap swimmers and not kids playing in the pool. One of the designers watching *Drift* had similar worries. He thought that the film had in a way dictated what the brainstorm was about. If that is the choice of the client that is fine, he considered, but if the goal is to have an open brainstorm about smart textiles and navigation, the film was too limited. On the other hand, a viewer who had participated in making *Swim* appreciated the time compression that was achieved through his interview, bringing a two hour shoot down to a five minute sequence. It had only improved the story he thought.

These responses show two things. Firstly that viewers do wonder about how the film was made and take this into account when watching and using it in their work. Constructions and formats are not invisible; viewers can reason about them and are able to make a judgement about the influence of the format on the content of the film, for instance what has been left out. Secondly, these responses show that the viewers accept selection as a valuable skill in research, to boil things down to their essence. This corresponds with Carroll's argument that selection in itself is not a problem in documentary film, because it isn't in science and journalism either (see page 32). The viewers just wanted to make sure the selection served the right purpose, informing the brief for the project they were working on in an appropriate way.

Encouraging imagination

The format of most films was deliberately open-ended: we left for instance gaps in the story, or the image, that the viewers had to fill in themselves; we wanted to start a conversation but not to finish it (see below). Gaps in *Swim* were for instance everything a swimmer does before actually getting into the water, and also getting out, showering, drying, dressing, and so on. Little signals that these stages existed were given, for instance by a shot of a towel over a railing, or a pair of slippers at the side of the pool. The swimming took up most time in the film though, together with the conversation of the swimmers afterwards. Between these two also a big gap existed of course. This gap is called an ellipse in editing: the film indicates something happened between two shots but it doesn't show it. Viewers understand that a part has been skipped and fill this in themselves.

In *Swim*, using ellipses stimulated the creativity of the viewers, as they noted themselves. *Storage and Clutter in the Home* had a similar effect on the imagination of the designers who viewed it, but through a different technique. In one of the clips the camera was put in a closed cupboard, showing just darkness at first, and after we open the door showing only the protagonist

and me, interviewing him. We talk about the objects in the cupboard but these are never shown. The designers liked this because it was left to their imagination what these objects looked like. They imagined a whole landscape in that cupboard (the description of the protagonist was a bit strange), and would not have done so, they said, if the contents of the cupboard had been shown. These experiences of the viewers show how selection in film can act as a catalyst for the imagination. This is a general quality of film. Not showing things is for instance a key aspect of making horror movies. Our imagination has a stronger effect than a movie image.

Constructing an open format

Gaps in the films were generally appreciated, but there is a limit to how much openness a viewer can deal with. This limit is different for everyone. One of the designers who saw *Drift* mentioned that at times he thought the film was irritatingly random. Especially when filming the colour yellow and circular shapes, the camera sometimes wandered off too far from the story to his taste, and thoughts such as “I don’t want you to go and follow the daffodil now” crossed his mind. Several films struck a good balance with most viewers though. The structure of *Debra* was considered very coherent: “it was very clear: question – answer” as one engineer said. The link to the group of people behind the information given was not made as easily here, but instead depended on an understanding of the situation that was not conveyed directly by the film. Also in *Alena’s Strawberry Farm* the different perspectives in the film were considered well-balanced. The film is certainly open-ended, and suggests working at the farm is a mixed experience for the young Eastern Europeans, but it is not hard to follow. The same holds for *Swim*. It has a clear structure, representing the in-the-bubble experience of the swimmers, but at the same time allows fragments of two different conversations to be combined freely in the editing, allowing multiple interpretations.

Hearing several voices speak in *Kent* and seeing several people’s pictures with one voice in *Fred* was sometimes distracting or confusing for the team at Philips. Our reasoning behind these forms of presentation was that *Kent* and *Fred* were actually group portraits, even though they show only one person. But people sometimes wondered who was talking. “Too many faces one voice,” one team member said about *Fred*, “I was probably thinking it was one persons life all the time but again I realise too it is a collage of many people’s lives.” To some degree, this effect is one we had hoped to achieve by creating films that were superficially about individuals but also based on wider research with more people. We hoped this dual reading would integrate the breadth and authority of general research with engagement and identification with a single character. For some viewers, however, this tension might have become merely confusing because the idea of seeing one individual and hearing three more who have no apparent relation to what the image shows, was arguably not well enough introduced in the film. Combining several sources in a single character seems to have potential to allow several forms of engagement with a film, but needs to be handled carefully if it is not to be opaque or frustrating.

Like a conversation: Exploring perspectives and interpretations

One of the goals of design documentaries is to set up a conversation between the participants, researchers and designers, as was discussed before (see page 140ff.). The aim is to start the conversation during filmmaking, make it visible in the finished film, and continue it in the design process, with the design team. Researchers can be present in the team to give additional explanations, but connecting to the participants mainly happens through the film. When I put design documentaries into practice with design teams, several opportunities to set up conversations through this new method emerged.

Establishing emotional connections

In the Swim workshop the participants all connected to the swimmers in the film in slightly different ways. One of the participants got “emotionally linked” to the swimmers through the film, it was a sensory experience for her: “All the words that came out were emotive and the film was beautifully shot, the swimming was a beautiful experience.” Another said it got him in “the right frame of mind,” even shots of just moving water helped and made him want to smell chlorine. A third participant said the main difference between having some footage of a pool that is observational, neutral, and not edited into a story, and these films was emotion; the films made him think about swimming in a personal way. These are all different ways of expressing empathy with the swimmers.

Design documentaries can give viewers an emotional experience by inviting them to identify with the protagonists. The emotional identification of the Swim workshop participants provided them with an incentive to develop ideas in the brainstorm. That incentive was stronger than the purely practical approach of solving problems, which they could also have taken in the workshop. Instead, they focused on how a swimmer feels when, for instance, stepping out of the water and out of the comfortable personal bubble in the water. Consequently, the discussion moved beyond preventing swimmers from feeling cold to thinking of ways to maintain the bubble that existed in the water.

Similar emotional connections occurred in the Philips team. Perhaps the most striking result from the films was that they encouraged design team members to tell stories about similar experiences of their friends and relatives with heart problems. This suggests that the films were able to create a situation where such stories appeared relevant, which stimulated team members to come forward and contribute their own experiences. In the films the heart patients talk frankly about emotions, in particular the heart patient in *Kent*, and that set a precedent for the team. The team reported that reading a poster or a marketing manager’s trip report rarely triggers this sort of discussion. Focus groups where the team ‘meets’ heart patients behind one-way glass did not have the same effect either. In a way this is the same effect we saw in the Swim workshop, where participants brought their own swimming experiences into the discussion after seeing the film. Talking about swimming makes one however less vulnerable than talking about heart problems of

friends and relatives, especially in a work situation with colleagues. The films, by setting an example, managed to create a situation and atmosphere where the team members felt safe to relate emotional, personal stories which strengthened the emotional connection between the team members and the heart patients they were designing for⁷⁵.

Providing solid ground for speculation

Design documentaries provide design teams with a context of stories, objects, situations and above all characters that support them with inspiration and information during the design process. The films stimulated team members of Philips to speculate concretely about how their work might affect the individual patients. For instance, the persona Fred was mentioned as someone who might try to analyse his own ECG, given an appropriate device, because he is so fanatical about knowing everything about his heart condition. However, the team saw a clear danger in this possibility because Fred is not skilled in reading ECGs. In general, the films made it possible to envision how people might use something, what the dangers of that use might be and how these could be avoided. The speculation that was needed for this envisioning was firmly grounded in the films. One way to inspire this kind of envisioning is to leave gaps in the film, as was discussed above for *Swim* and *Storage and Clutter in the Home*, because these gaps invite viewers to imagine the missing parts of the story. A requirement for this to happen is that enough details are provided, and the characters are believable so one can empathise with them.

Embedding films in the design process

One of the responses to *Drift* was that the 18 minutes the film runs are a bit too long. Even after the first few minutes, the viewers started getting ideas, they reported afterwards, but they had to wait another 15 minutes before they could mention them. We responded to this suggestion by keeping *Swim* much shorter and dividing it up in a 6 minute introduction and four 2-3 minute clips on particular subjects. All together *Swim* runs about 15 minutes, almost as long as *Drift*, but it was presented differently. We started the discussion about swimming and smart textiles after viewing the introduction film, and interjected the other clips when we found that the discussion moved towards one of the four subjects.

Presenting *Swim* in several parts throughout the workshop worked very well for all participants, who agreed it was better than showing everything at the beginning. The main point they took from all of the films – the experience of swimming in a pool – was already clear after viewing the introduction clip. The other clips added detail to how it feels to be in a wet environment. “You jump up a few levels from ‘wet’ because of how the film represents feeling wet,” one of the viewers said. The participants were slightly surprised that the filmmakers could predict which subjects would come up during the brainstorm, but when we explained these

⁷⁵ Documentary filmmakers often strive for such an emotional link too; they let their audience identify with the protagonists in the film. For instance Nicolas Philibert does so in *To Be and To Have*, where the viewer identifies with the teacher and especially children in a rural French school, or in *In the Land of the Deaf* where the viewer identifies with deaf people, some of them children (see page 64ff.).

issues emerged from the conversation between the swimmers – in other words our research – they understood that the choice of these subjects was not as random as they might have thought at first. The clips of course did not exactly copy the issues raised in the workshop; instead they enriched them by adding new perspectives to the subjects that emerged in the workshop. The viewers appreciated that not all clips and subjects were presented at the start of the brainstorm: “Like this we felt more ownership over them” one of the viewers said.

The *Swim* film clips provided an example of using design documentaries in workshops as a material to work with, beyond providing a complete film as information and inspiration at the beginning of a workshop. In my case-studies I did not use video as material as much as others have done this, for instance by involving participants and designers in the selection and grouping of clips as Buur et al do (see page 18ff.). Nevertheless the methods of Buur and others, and the experiments I have done with *Swim*, *Storage and Clutter in the Home* and *Media Mediators Vlog*⁷⁶ suggests that design documentaries can also provide material to be used in design processes. Cutting a longer film up in smaller clips already creates a different attitude for viewers, simply because it is not possible to sit back and watch the complete film at once – every clip needs to be chosen and started separately. The clips become a kind of ‘clay’ that can take many different forms, depending on how they are viewed and used.

Not only short clips allow the design team to actively engage with design documentaries as material. For the Mobile Cultures project, one of the designers made a small book including (mainly) stills from *Alena’s Strawberry Farm* and some text, as a report on the first phase of the design project. This is another way of using, or perhaps rather re-using, a design documentary as raw material in the design process. This approach does not force the designer to follow the story of the film; the annotated stills can instead continue the conversation that was started up by the design documentary by adding new perspectives to it, juxtaposing parts of the film and many other techniques. This approach to reusing film material in another medium could take inspiration from the compilation techniques discussed in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

The responses of designers and design teams to the films supported my assumptions about the potential value of using documentary techniques and ideas in discovery research. Getting in touch so closely with the daily life of the people for whom they were designing was clearly

⁷⁶ Two of my case-studies also resulted in a series of clips rather than a complete edited film: *Storage and Clutter in the Home* and the *Media Mediators Vlog*. The twelve clips of *Storage and Clutter in the Home* were presented on a webpage in two different ways: as a list with just a few words on a still of the clip as a header, and in an interactive way through the Korsakow system (see www.korsakow.com/kisy), presented as an interactive film on a webpage. The Media Mediator’s 2-3 minute diary entries on video were all immediately posted on the internet at mediamediators.blogspot.com in a video-blog (vlog), a diary made up of short films. Both collections of clips allowed viewers to find their own way through the material. They can both still be seen as design documentary experiments because they make use of several documentary film techniques.

appreciated by the teams and designers, and raised their appetite for more details of the everyday. They were not worried about the films being constructed and selective – if they were made aware of this – as long as the selections were supported by the limitations set by the brief of the project. Selections were even appreciated for the positive effect they could have on their imagination, which they used to fill in the gaps left in the films. The opportunity to identify with the characters in the design documentaries was appreciated too, because it helped designers to establish emotional connections with the people they were designing for, and provided solid ground for the envisioning of uses of possible future products and services. The films did not overwhelm the viewers; instead they stimulated designers and team members to come up with their own stories and speculations and to develop their own perspectives.

These are not necessarily the only opportunities that design documentaries can offer. These initial responses should be read as an indication of the potential of this new method to conduct and communicate discovery research. More, other opportunities to do so might exist. They can be explored by making more design documentaries as a way of doing discovery research in design processes.

These initial responses do show however that, firstly, the teams appreciated the access to the people they were designing for. Several designers mentioned they as if they were at the locations in the film during the viewing. This indicates they recognised and appreciated that design documentaries are 'like reality'. Secondly, the expressive nature of the films was generally liked. Issues of construction and selection were not considered problematic, to the contrary: Selectivity in some films sparked the imagination. The influence of formats on the content of the films was recognised, indicating the audiovisual literacy of the viewers, their understanding of film language. The fact that researchers had added their perspective using film language was generally considered a contribution to the films because it stimulated designers to bring their own perspectives to the discussion. Thirdly, the open character of the films, an important consequence of using the idea of conversation during filmmaking, as was concluded in the previous chapter, was appreciated by the design teams if they were expecting an open-ended research presentation, and not for instance information about the product they were designing. The open-endedness of the films contributed to the discussion, together with the film language used.

The three different ideas in documentary film that I used to structure what I learned in this and the previous chapter were in practice of course not as strictly divided in the responses. When discussing the effect of design documentaries on the communication of discovery research and their influence on design processes, they merge into one response. People in the design teams could compare to other discovery research they had experience with, but not with documentary film ideas that were unfamiliar to them. The team leader at Philips demonstrates how the three ideas for his team merged together when he summed up the effect of the films on giving his team more engaged intuitions about heart patients as:

[That] people started relating their own stories about friends or relatives coping with heart problems is a proof point of the effectiveness of this approach. I've never seen this involved reaction as a result of 'reading a poster' or 'marketing manager's trip report'. Getting engineers/designers to attend Focus Groups and then listen to users first hand, will stimulate the discussion that the viewing the film does. However, the focus group environment (room with one way glass), doesn't allow the users to speak from their own environment and from an informational point of view, we know we can learn a tremendous amount about users by observing the everyday world that surrounds them. The film format, of course, enables the engineers and designers to see what objects and people are part of the user's everyday life. (Personal email communication with Jon Bishay, team leader Philips Medical Systems Seattle, 10 Aug 2005)

The last chapter before the conclusions brings the issues that emerged from the making of the films with participants and crew members, and the issues that arose from using the films to communicate discovery research to design teams, together in an effort to derive from these experiments the main characteristics of design documentaries.

8 The characteristics of design documentaries

Based on the issues that emerged from my thinking-through-making practice, this chapter describes the characteristics of design documentaries on three levels: their connections to reality, their uses of film language, and the ways they communicate, through conversations, ideas among participants, researchers and designers. This does not involve a description of the strengths and weaknesses of design documentaries because such an evaluation is premature at this stage of exploring the opportunities they offer. Nor does this chapter map the films I made as typical representatives of particular characteristics of design documentaries I will mention. Just as documentary films are unique applications of the ideas and techniques of documentary film (as explained in Chapter Four), every design documentary is a unique appropriation of these ideas and techniques. Therefore I concluded in Chapter Six that writing a manual for the design documentaries approach is not useful.

Instead, the characteristics of design documentaries are presented here as a description of new possibilities for the use of video in discovery research, in response to the opportunities formulated at the end of Chapter One: to move the use of video beyond registration, and to address the difficulties with communicating the richness of discovery research to multidisciplinary teams (see page 25).

The previous chapter concluded that, considering the responses from design teams, it is worthwhile to further explore design documentaries as a new discovery research method. Thus this chapter steps back to describe the space that design documentaries open up. This description builds on the origin of design documentaries in documentary film, and also on their context in other discovery research methods. Chapter One focused on discovery research using video; here I consider methods using other media that relate to the ideas on which design documentaries are built, around the notions of reality, language and conversation.

The other two disciplines I use in this chapter to describe the characteristics of design documentaries are presented as sources of inspiration, next to documentary film, for the further exploration of the newly opened space. They are cultural theories with a focus on everyday life and (visual) art. Both inspired my own thinking-through-making process and I consider them to be helpful for further explorations of design documentaries as a method.

Altogether, I use in this chapter four disciplines – documentary film, discovery research, cultural theory and art – to help describe the characteristics of design documentaries, and through this, the space that has been opened up by them. This space is worthwhile to explore further, to which the reader is invited by thinking, making, and thinking-through-making, as I have done.

Embracing a diverse and complex everyday life

Documentary films have a strong connection to reality in several ways, as was discussed in Chapter Two. Design documentaries build on these connections, exploiting and exploring them in different manners. The designers and multidisciplinary teams that saw and used the films appreciated the realistic nature of the films very much. Often that was what made the films valuable to them as responses in Chapter Six demonstrate. For them, the fact they were seeing and, through the film, identifying with real people in their own environment made the design documentaries stand out from other, more traditional research that does not offer them such direct access to reality. This connection was strongly supported by the holistic approach to reality and everyday life that the design documentaries took (see page 134). This is the first characteristic of design documentaries: an holistic approach to reality resulting in a view on everyday life as diverse and complex.

Open to the unexpected

None of the design documentaries was shot in a completely controlled and predictable environment; they all were made from the point of view that everyday life is too complex and idiosyncratic to be predictable, making it impossible to completely script the film beforehand (see page 137). In the outlines and scripts I nevertheless made for some of the films, I did not try to control the situations entirely. Rather, I aimed at setting up situations that allowed for unexpected things to happen, like the encounter with the painter in *Drift*. Or I let the participant do part of the scripting, like Joan did for *Debra*. I always started the filming without knowing exactly what I would find; making the film was doing the research. I explored through the camera, with the microphone and at the editing table. The open attitude towards the subject I was investigating allowed reality to find ways into the research and the films I could not have foreseen. Such unanticipated findings are crucial in discovery research, and also in most documentary films, from the scripted *Rain* (see page 58) to the observed *Tische!* (see page 54), and from the compiled *Ein Tag ins Leben der Endverbraucher* (see page 71) to the performed *The Human Pyramid* (see page 90). The unexpected lets the complexity of the everyday, its messiness and idiosyncrasy, persist in design documentaries.

Unknown unknowns

Designers are interested in the unknown as much as documentary filmmakers and researchers are. This is not just curiosity that comes with creativity, it makes sense from a business point of view to look for the unknown if you want to innovate. Design and innovation consultancy IDEO uses a simple matrix to point out what kind of knowledge they are after in their research for clients who want to innovate (Bontoft, 2005) (see Figure 44).

	Know	Don't Know
Know	What you know	Gaps in your knowledge
Don't Know	Tacit knowledge	Your ignorance

Figure 44 Know-Don't know matrix by IDEO
 IDEO uses this matrix to point out that the most valuable insights for innovation are in the ignorance quadrant. Research methods that are at least partly participant-lead are needed to get to this knowledge, because designers and researchers by definition do not know what they are looking for (Bontoft, 2005).

The matrix shows four states of knowledge. Unexpected insights often come from the lower right 'ignorance' quadrant, where you find things that you did not know you didn't know. Researchers can enter this quadrant only if the participants in the research lead them there; by definition the researchers do not know what they are looking for. As a consequence the participants must have the opportunity to control the research in some respect, for instance by letting them determine what situations are filmed (see page 134).

Designers are also aware that their ignorance is a fruitful area to explore. For instance Tony Dunne and Fiona Raby deliberately looked 'under the surface' of intended uses of electronic devices to find inspiration for their work on the Design Noir project and encountered everyday practices that are rich and complex in their nature:

"Beneath the glossy surface of official design lurks a dark and strange world driven by real human needs. A place where electronic objects co-star in a noir thriller, working with likeminded individuals to escape normalisation and ensure that even a totally manufactured environment has room for danger, adventure and transgression. We don't think that design can ever fully anticipate the richness of this unofficial world and neither should it" (Dunne and Raby, 2001, p. 6).

Design opportunities arise from unintended use in different fields, from art (the focus of Dunne and Raby) to industry, where IDEO found that: "Things used in unintended ways usually indicate something about people's needs. And needs often translate into design opportunities." (Fulton Suri and IDEO, 2005, p. 164). Both Dunne and Raby and IDEO demonstrate that being aware of your ignorance and finding ways to access it with the help of participants is beneficial to companies who are innovating their products and services. Asking participants to help explore areas that are hidden in your ignorance as a researcher is a well-known method in documentary film too, as for instance the psychiatric patients in *Every Little Thing* (see page 64) and the judge and lawyer in *Sisters in Law* (see page 65) show, and these documentary filmmakers have

developed ways of filming which appreciate the guidance of the participant, such as the over-shoulder shot, but they often combine it with their own views. The approach is also valuable to design documentaries, as for instance *Kent*, *Debra* and *Alena's Strawberry Farm* demonstrate.

Including context

Participants can lead researchers to things they did not imagine existed, but the attention of discovery research is not entirely focused on people alone. The context in which people act, think and feel – live – is equally important. Looking at people in their context is part of an holistic approach to reality. The context becomes part of the investigation; it is important to understand it through the research and to represent it in the findings. Often, the context provides the clues for understanding why people behave, think and feel in a certain way. Design documentaries show context in many ways, for instance by taking wide shots that literally show the context on screen as in *Debra* and *Drift*, by including cutaways to different parts of the environment, also in *Debra* and *Drift* (see pages 123 and 125), or via narration by adding voices to the soundtrack to provide other, related opinions as in *Kent*. The context of the people in our design documentaries was mostly included in the films, inspired by documentary techniques such as Van der Keuken's filming of a Surinam street as the context of the brass band, using the tuba as a pretext (see page 56). The backstreets of the boulevard in Nice, with the hard-working poor, are another example of context, presented by Vigo in juxtaposition to the lazy rich on the boulevard (see page 37).

Design ethnography

In discovery research focusing on people in their context is not uncommon either. Anthropologists are often called upon to do this kind of research that, in industry, is loosely called design ethnography. Design documentaries share their holistic view with this approach. Design ethnography is an emerging discipline in industries such as manufacturing, marketing, and high technology, that draws on anthropology, psychology, sociology, cultural studies and other social science disciplines (Bell, 2001). Looking at the design of interactive products and services from a social science perspective might seem strange at first, but, as Paul Dourish (2001, p. 56) notes, "the significance becomes clear when we look at the *context* in which computation is put to work. (...) Computation is part of a richer fabric of relationships between people, institutions, and practices that sociology can help us explore." Even though design ethnography cannot take a view as long and holistic as sociology and anthropology in academia, where scholars do research that can take years, its practitioners still "attempt to understand peoples' experiences holistically, rather than just in interactions with technology" (Bell, 2001, p. 2). This implies for instance that the context in which people perform their interactions is important to look at in discovery research. Based on her observations of how people use copy machines, Lucy Suchman (1987) introduced the idea that our actions arise from the situations in which we perform those actions. She shows that actions are largely improvised responses to the setting in which they occur. She had mainly Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Human Computer Interaction (HCI) in mind when she

wrote: “Rather than attempting to abstract action away from its circumstances and represent it as a rational plan, the approach is to study how people use their circumstances to achieve intelligent action” (L. Suchman, 1987, p. 50). In this approach, people are independent actors in the world; we don’t execute plans like computers do. We make use of the circumstances we find or bring ourselves into to develop and decide on our actions and we often improvise while doing so. The contrast between the two is big, as Dourish notes:

Suchman provided detailed analysis of the interactional problems arising from the mismatch between, on the one hand, the clean-cut, abstract and stable models that a system might have of interaction, and on the other hand, the much more messy, immediate, and fluid circumstances in which the system's users find themselves. (Dourish, 2001, p. 73)

Suchman shows the logic behind the unintended uses of technology that also Fulton Suri (2004) found. Her view is clearly an holistic approach to a complex reality, and offers access to unanticipated knowledge.

The globalisation of technology and its diverse, localised uses demonstrate that context is also important on a much wider, cultural level. Genevieve Bell describes the paradox that many multinational companies like her own, Intel, face. On the one hand they produce for a global market, but on the other they have to acknowledge that this market is far from homogenous – the cultural contexts in which their customers use their products and services vary enormously. The same product in different cultures around the world “acquires different meanings, lives in different parts of our homes, conveys different messages, performs different tasks, and it even satisfies different needs” (Bell, 2001, p. 8). If a company, like Intel does, wants to serve this multi-faceted global market, it needs to understand these differences and embrace them as starting points for its product and service innovations.

Design documentaries take the complexity and diversity of peoples’ everyday lives as their point of departure too. The methods and ideas they take from documentary film are an answer to certain concerns regarding discovery research they share with design ethnography, such as the attention for the cultural context in which people live and the direct context of people’s activities in everyday life. To address these concerns, design documentaries take inspiration from documentary film, rather than ethnography, in an attempt to communicate these contexts in an audiovisually compelling way. The two disciplines are however not always strictly separated as for instance Rouch, Van der Keuken and Trinh demonstrate.

Witnessing situations

The observations made in people’s work places, homes and on the streets, have to somehow be communicated to design teams who cannot join the researchers when they do their observations. The reports they make about the people they encounter and situations they witness often take the form of sharing stories, photographs, quotes from participants and perhaps some video. This is all presented as evidence of the research trip, by a researcher who was a witness of the events shown. Documentary film has a similar function for its viewers, as was discussed in Chapter Two;

Winston positions documentary film in the realm of evidence (see page 28) and witness (see page 31).

Witnessing situations through film and using films as evidence are basic qualities of documentary film that became part of design documentaries too. These qualities fit very well in the presentation of a diverse, complex reality that the films aim for because such an approach suggests that the viewer can be a witness her/himself and take her/his own evidence from the film. For instance when watching *Drift* the designers felt as if they were walking in the Barbican with the researchers (see page 153), and the people in the Swim workshop felt as if they were in the pool when they saw *Swim* (see page 158). They witnessed the events that the films showed. But their viewing experience went beyond just seeing and image, they felt as if they were there. The viewers of *Swim* expressed that they wanted to smell chlorine, and the viewers of *Drift* said they felt anxiety about walking up to strangers and talk to them like we did. Their experience of watching *Swim* and *Drift* was similar to what McCarthy and Wright (2004) call a “felt experience.” Part of the physical aspect of being in the pool and walking around the Barbican, the physical responses one could have when being in these situations, was communicated with the films. This effect is known in filmmaking as identification with the protagonists (see page 65); the viewer imagines to be in the position of the protagonist and explores the experience of being in that position.

In discovery research, video is sometimes used to capture events the researchers witnessed. But the emphasis is seldom on how the experience of the witness can best be communicated (see page 24). Instead, more attention is given to non-video methods that make use of the idea of witnessing situations and collecting evidence. Of these, in particular shadowing and participant observation share approaches with design documentaries. They generally aim to catch life unawares. They are discussed below.

Catching life unawares

The methods that have been developed to get access to the ‘ignorance quadrant’ of IDEO’s matrix (see page 165) focus on somehow entering the world of the participants. Observations that do not disturb the participants’ usual behaviour are popular because one of the goals of this type of research is to give the lead to the participants and not disturb their normal doings. In documentary film this approach is called ‘catching life unawares’ (see page 30); it was pioneered by Vertov in for instance *Kino Eye* when he disguised the camera as a phone booth. When making the design documentaries I learned that hiding the camera is not necessary to catch life unawares. In all the films the people being filmed knew they were on camera, but they did not pay much attention to the camera after a while, effectively allowing the filmmakers to catch their live unawares. The swimmers in *Swim* were simply doing their laps as they normally do; David in *Kent* chaired his heart patient community the same way he does every month, and the strawberry

pickers performed their goodbye ritual, throwing leaving colleagues in the rejected strawberries skip, as they have always done.

Shadowing

Shadowing, recording one day in someone's life or behaving like a fly on the wall, techniques that were familiar in documentary film (see page 30) well before they were used in discovery research, are all methods to observe what participants do in their own environment. The main idea is that the researchers follow the participant for an agreed period of time, wherever s/he goes. For example, Katherine Gough (2004) shadowed supermarket shoppers in the United Kingdom when she did research for Faraday Packaging Partnership and Marks & Spencer on the packaging of food. She went shopping with people to discover how they choose food in the supermarket and discovered for instance that several people tried to smell the food. She also went home with people to see how they unpackaged and stored their food, and disposed of the packaging. As a result she described five different categories of issues with food packaging that the packaging industry should pay attention to in a user-centred design process. These issues were discovered in practice, by going through all the moves of for instance everyday food selection in the supermarket with actual consumers and talking to them about the choices they made when they were making them, in the supermarket and in the kitchen.



Figure 45 Following shoppers to observe their behaviour. Katharine Gough follows supermarket shoppers during shopping and in their kitchens to find out how they deal with packaging and what they think about it. Smelling food through the packaging was not always easy for instance. She developed a model that brings all the important aspects of packaging from the consumer's point of view together.

Doing these observations outside the lab can be hard since the researcher cannot always be prepared for all the situations s/he will come across, especially if participants do not stay in one location (Blom et al., 2005). Other researchers have avoided these problems by looking at the traces that people's activities left behind, for instance by looking at wear patterns, or the placement and organisation of things (Fulton Suri and IDEO, 2005), a method called 'behavioural archaeology' (IDEO, 2003). Design researchers Eric Paulos and Elizabeth Goodman (2004) are inspired by artists who use shadowing techniques, like Sophie Calle (Calle and Baudrillard, 1988) who secretly followed a man she vaguely knew in Paris, becoming gradually obsessed and

following him eventually to Venice while keeping a diary and taking pictures. Artists like Calle inspire designers to do research in a more personal and creative way. I will discuss her work further later in this chapter (see page 183).

Shadowing is a useful technique for design documentaries too. I have used it in *Kent, Drift* and *Media Mediators Vlog* for instance, and Xiaoxiao uses it in *Alena's Strawberry Farm*. I was influenced by projects such as discussed above, but not for how to film the situations I encountered. For the filming I took inspiration from documentary films such as *Don't Look Now* in which Bob Dylan is followed on his first United Kingdom tour (see page 61), *Salesman* where bible salesmen in the United States are followed for months (see page 62), and *Chronicle of a Summer* which reconstructs a day in the life of a Renault factory worker by following him from waking up to going to sleep (see page 101).

Participant observation

Through observations from a distance alone it is hard to look inside people's heads, so some ethnographers participate in the activities of the people they observe, a technique generally known as 'participant observation' (Bell, 2001, p. 1, Millen, 2000, p. 283). Bell uses this as a way of getting at "people's real desires and thoughts (...) [and] deep cultural patterns that implicate everything that people do" (2001, p. 2). Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski was the first to experiment with this method, in the 1910s (Malinowski, 1922). Many levels of participation are possible, from spending a limited time with participants to going undercover for a longer period. The method has spread into many different disciplines such as industry, journalism, art and also documentary film. Participant observation is equally interesting to design documentaries, which can learn from these other disciplines, where individuals have found original ways of participating – invisible to others or openly.

A classic example in industrial design is the research of Patricia Moore (Moore and Conn, 1985), who dressed up as an 85 year old woman to experience society first hand from the perspective of older people. She concluded that the ergonomic guidelines designers work with, and the consumer profiles of marketers are aimed at 'normal' people, whereas many people actually do not fit these norms and profiles. Moore concluded that society does not exist of two groups, able-bodied and disabled people, but of an enormous diversity of 'differently abled' people and that design did not provide products and services for that diversity.



Figure 46 Patricia Moore as an 85 year old woman. She used this disguise to experience society from the perspective of older people. In reality she was around 30 years old. She travelled to more than 100 cities in the United States over the course of three years wearing this disguise.

In journalism, similar undercover research was first done by Hunter S. Thompson (1966) who spent a year on the road with West Coast Hell's Angels and wrote a book about it, and started a genre called 'new journalism' where the author writes in the first person and brings himself into the story as a participant. Günter Wallraff (1985) went undercover as a Turkish migrant worker for two years, putting classifieds in news papers offering himself as a foreign worker. He wore dark contact lenses and a wig and wanted to find out how immigrant workers are treated, in industry and in public. He did not speak Turkish, but that was not a problem since the bosses who hired him and Germans who met him did not either.

Artist Nikki S. Lee (Lee, not dated) participates in subcultures (punk, yuppie, hip-hop, but also for instance older people) for a period of 3 weeks up to 3 months. She makes new friends and dresses and behaves like them.



Figure 47 Artist Nikki S. Lee as a punk, hip hop babe, yuppie and older woman. This form of participation is not done undercover but openly as a work of art. It is partly created by the participants of the subculture, who teach her how to behave and take snapshots that in blown-up form ultimately end up in the gallery as works of art.

She too does an extreme form of participant observation, but she is not under cover, she always makes clear to the people she is with that she is doing an art project. She puts much effort in learning body language and performing well. She documents her participations in a visual way by letting her new friends take snapshots of her in her new environment, with them. Snapshots are a familiar medium for most people. As Lee's work shows, people know how to behave in front of a snapshot camera, and the way they pose is exemplary for the subculture too.

Lee's visual approach is inspiring for design documentaries for several reasons. She moves beyond interviewing and observing while not remaining invisible; she participates in the subcultures she studies by taking on a disguise without going undercover. In academic and most industry research it is difficult to do research like Thompson and Wallraff did for ethical reasons, certainly if it is necessary to make some kind of visual record that includes people. For that reason, Moore had to rely on writing and speaking about her experiences. Lee found a way around this. I did not dress up to look more like the participants in one of the design documentaries, but I did participate in activities with participants in *Drift*, Xiaoxiao participated in life on the farm and

researcher Geke swam lanes in *Swim*. Similar to the journalism and art projects using participant observation, we gave ample attention to how the experience of participating is communicated.



Figure 48 Stills from *Broken Bones* by Martin Heaton. An exploration of a playground with children participating in cheerful interactions with appropriated playground equipment and foam rubber additions the designer brought.

Designer Martin Heaton did participant research that reflects the work of Moore, Thompson, Wallraff and Lee. He worked with children at a London playground for his project *Broken Bones* (2004). In the film about his research and interventions on the playground he acts as a kid in terms of how he plays with the equipment that is present and the foam rubber additions he introduces. By participating he explores the limitations of the contemporary playground with the children, rather than letting them explore for him. This leads to a very cheerful interaction and exploration that would have been much more boring had he given the children some tasks to perform or only asked them questions. The film he made allows the viewers to witness his participant observations. The cheerfulness of the experience of the kids and himself is communicated well by a camera that moves with him and the kids instead of observing from a distance. The camera seems to take part in the activity as a separate actor who moves between the other participants, similar to what Vertov describes in his *Kino-Eye* manifesto (see page 52) and shows in *Man With a Movie Camera*. This technique helps to approach the felt

experience of the participants. In particular *Swim* also applies it to communicate the experience of the swimmers doing their laps.

Swim shows, like *Broken Bones*, that participating instead of observing from a distance gives access to a range of different experiences of reality, both of the researchers and of the participants. Including all or at least several of these experiences fits the goal of design documentaries to access the diversity and complexity of reality. Secondly, *Swim* and *Broken Bones* show that these experiences can be communicated to the design team in a rich audiovisual way if attention is given to filming techniques, just like Thompson, Wallraff and Lee give attention to aesthetic aspects of their work. This will be explored further in the second section of this chapter, see page 178ff.). Participant observation originated in anthropology with Malinowski, but since then it has been taken up by many other disciplines which have appropriated it to fit their own needs and ideas. In particular those disciplines that gave attention to how to communicate the experiences of the participating observer resonate with design documentaries. Besides the disciplines discussed above, documentary film is of course a major source of inspiration too. Filmmakers sometimes participate in the activities they film, for instance to understand the experience they try to communicate better. Rouch's shared cinema is a prominent example (see page 81) that makes the participation reciprocal: he involves the participants also in the filmmaking experience. His African collaborators for instance contribute to the script, record the sound and deliver ad hoc narration to several of his films. They help to create the record of the participation, similar but much more elaborate than Lee's snapshot photographers do.

Keeping ambiguity alive

An important quality of design documentaries is that they are able to combine apparent opposites in one story, just like everyday life itself does. Rouch noted this quality of the everyday too and brought it into his films (see page 44). Bazin called this the ambiguity of reality and mentioned that for a film to approximate reality, it needs to keep this ambiguity alive (Bazin, 1967, p. 37). A design documentary does this by presenting idiosyncratic, inconsistent behaviour of people as a source of inspiration for designers without the need to be precise about what exactly people want or which needs they have. For instance, the inconsistencies in the narrative of *Fred*, with simultaneous stories about slowing down and his many endeavours, paint an ambiguous picture of his everyday life. Avoiding conclusions in the narratives of the films, like in *Fred* but also in others, stimulated the viewers to compare and discuss perspectives presented in the films (see page 157).

Ambiguity plays a key role in making the films valuable in design processes. There are several advantages in allowing the ambiguity of everyday life to be reflected in a design process and its outcomes (Gaver et al., 2003, p. 1). Several of the suggestions for "tactics" to use ambiguity in designed systems are similar to techniques we used in design documentaries and

can be applied to discovery research too⁷⁷. For instance, the tactic “Cast doubt on sources to provoke independent assessment” (ibid., 2003, p. 6) reflects how the voice-overs in *Kent* are constructed to represent different but related views of heart patients (see page 120). By using ambiguity as “a powerful tool for designers to raise topics or ask questions while renouncing the possibility of dictating their answers (...) ambiguity not only represents a useful resource, but a powerful sign of respect for users as well,” Gaver, Beaver et al. (2003, p. 8) conclude. Rouch uses the same technique when he plays with oppositions (see page 44). This can be connected to his idea of shared cinema (see page 42), where he puts part of his control as a filmmaker in the hands of his participants. This allows different perspectives on reality to enter the film and creates ambiguous stories and atmospheres. It demonstrates respect for the protagonists involved, as well as the filmmakers themselves. Everyone has the opportunity to bring their view into the film because these views can co-exist. The same can be said about using ambiguity in design documentaries; it shows respect for both participants and researchers, and also the viewers of the films. Issues are raised and statements are made without fixing participants in stereotypes and without dictating viewers what to think of participants. The discussions that arise from including these differences in design documentaries are the subject of the third section of this chapter, about their conversational aspects.

Art photography

The power of visual presentation in the communication of ambiguities is as clear in documentary film as in some collections of photographs. The ambiguous qualities of everyday life can be communicated very well visually as for instance Kyoichi Tzusuki’s photos of apartment interiors in central Tokyo and Martin Parr’s collection of people on the mobile phone demonstrate. Design documentaries take most inspiration from documentary film, but it is valuable to consider briefly the wider context of visual communication through still images that surrounds design documentaries, in particular the opportunities it offers for communicating ambiguity in discovery research.

To show how people really live, as a kind of antidote to his work as a stylist for interior design magazines, Tzusuki started to photograph the interiors of the apartments of his friends in downtown Tokyo. The result is *Tokyo, A Certain Style* (1999), a book with more than 400 photographs of interiors, almost all crammed with stuff, leaving hardly any space for people to move about. Most photos are accompanied by a short text that points to some detail in the cluttered image. One person just throws most of his stuff on the floor and walks over it. This breaks some of the VHS-cassettes but he considers that a part of life as he lives it. Someone else has put a bathtub in his kitchen, making it impossible to cook anything but a cup of tea,

⁷⁷ Gaver, Boucher et al. also use ambiguity in discovery research in the cultural probes. Through the probes they ask ambiguous questions, and get ambiguous returns (Gaver, Boucher et al, 2004a).

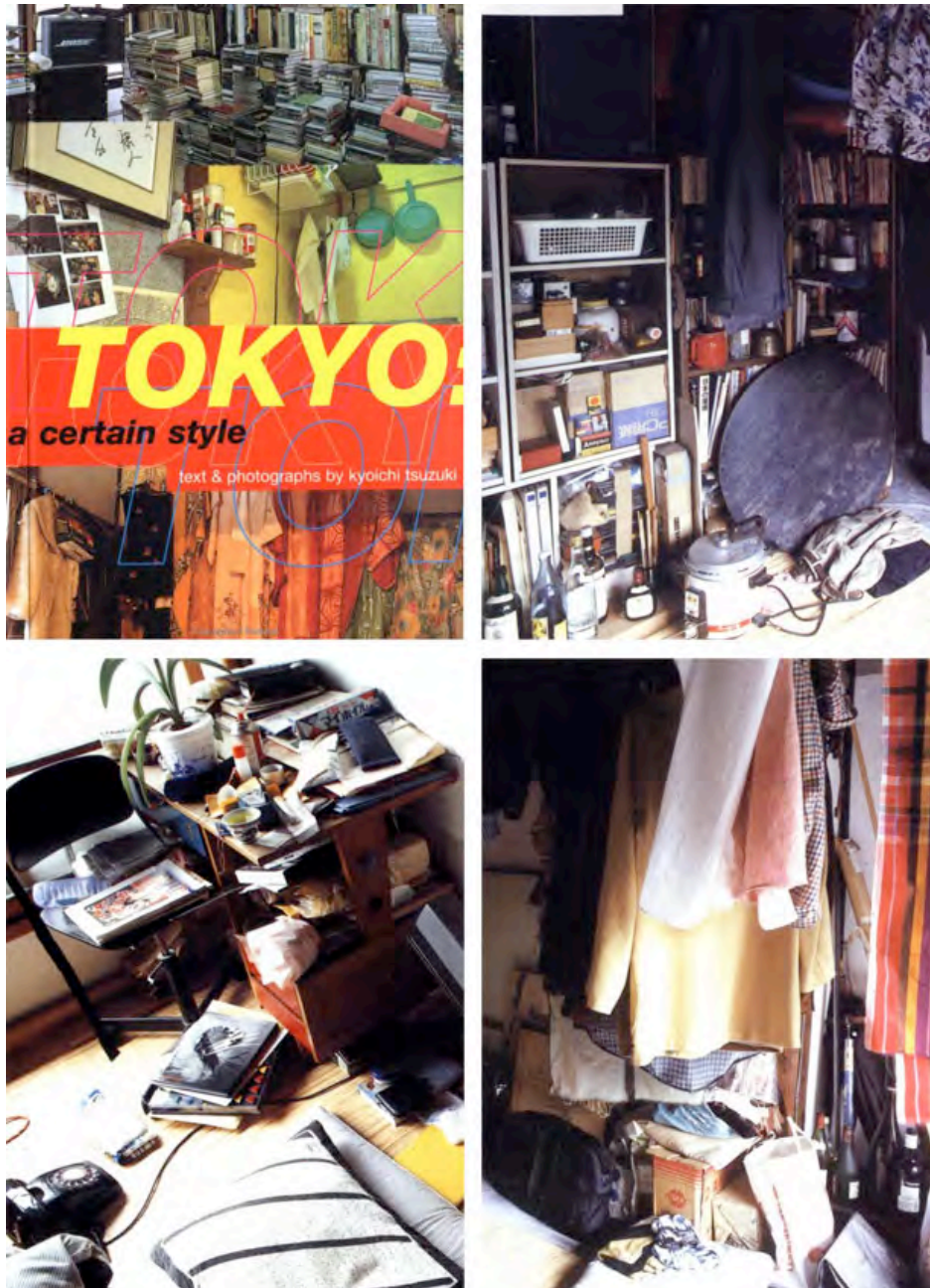


Figure 49 *Tokyo Interiors* by Kyoichi Tzuzuki
A book with more than 400 photographs of central Tokyo apartments of only a few square meters each. The cluttered interiors illustrate the enormous diversity and idiosyncrasy of people's amateur interior design and DIY solutions.

because he likes taking a bath more than cooking. In his pictures and stories Tzuzuki shows the messy sides of daily life. The pictures indicate the limited value of norms that describe how people on average live; instead the opposite – the diversity – is most striking.

Parr's study of people talking into a mobile phone all around the world has a similar effect. Here people are prominent instead of absent. One of the things that strikes most is the diversity of the people versus the relatively homogeneity of the models of the phones (Parr photographed between 1998 and 2002). The way people use the phones is also quite different. The photos show their posture, what they wear, how they hold their phones, etcetera.



Figure 50 Martin Parr's *The Phone Book* 1998-2002 (Parr, 2002)
Containing more than a hundred pictures of people on their mobile phone. They are only categorised by location, and no text is added. Together they offer a very diverse range of styles of mobile phone usage, to be analysed by the viewer.

The power of these photo collections is that they are large and not analysed. The only structure given by the editors is a simple categorisation; a typology in Tzuzuki's book and a geographical indication in Parr's. These books are empirical, unfinished studies of human diversity that have kept the ambiguities their makers found alive, to deal with by the viewer in any way that fits her/his purpose – which can be discovery research. Few documentaries give this much freedom to their viewers, but some do, in particular film essays such as *Sunless* (*Sans soleil*, Chris Marker, 1984) and the much less known *Quilts* (An Qi Ju, 2003)⁷⁸. I used the idea in a small film experiment I did at the beginning of my research when I observed people getting on and off the platform of a Routemaster bus in London for *On/Off the Bus* (see Appendix A).

The first of the three main characteristics of design documentaries is their holistic view on everyday life, embracing its diversity and complexity. This characteristic has its origin in the idea that documentary film is like reality. Previously, in Chapters Five and Six, was discussed how it influences the ways in which design documentaries are made and used. This chapter has explored the characteristic in a wider context, showing that design documentaries share their

⁷⁸ For the Chinese documentary *Quilts* (2003) by An Qi Ju spent a year asking people in China to tell a story about their quilt and presents these in a loose, serendipitous structure without any narration. The film takes quilts as its main subject but talks about complex personal things from love and lust to death, while giving an equally complex view on Chinese culture and society, in particular the currently enormous differences between modernity and tradition everyone in China has to deal with.

view on everyday life with other methods used in discovery research such as design ethnography, shadowing and participant observation. All of these, like design documentaries, are open to the unexpected and find it important to include context in the research. By finding ways to witness everyday life, they aim to catch life as it is lived. These similarities show that design documentaries have a view on everyday life that is not unfamiliar in discovery research, and shares concerns with other discovery research methods about how to act upon this view. In particular how the ambiguities that are part of the diversity and complexity of everyday life can be appreciated in the research and preserved in its results, is important to design documentaries. They take documentary film as their main inspiration for addressing this concern, and found many ideas and techniques that are valuable as previous chapters have shown. The wider context to this is communicating ambiguities through images, which offers additional valuable inspiration to design documentaries. For instance, the collections that some photographers create around particular situations or activities of people keep ambiguity alive by offering the photos in a loose structure, without further explanation or analysis. The discussion of the wider context of the first characteristic of design documentaries, their embracement of a diverse, complex everyday life, points towards issues that move beyond *what* stories design documentaries tell, towards *how* they tell their stories. This is the focus of the next section.

Exploring aesthetics to communicate experiences

Some methods in discovery research use a creative language to gather data and communicate with participants in the research, and to present results to the design team. Their attention for how a story is communicated has similarities with a concern that is central to design documentaries: the attention that is given to film language. This attention moves beyond making research videos beautiful because it has a strong connection to the content of the films, for instance their aim to communicate ambiguity as the previous section argued. This focus of design documentaries is firmly grounded in documentary film history. Filmmakers have always explored film language in direct relation to the stories they wanted to tell. The language is an integral part of the story, as the examples given in Chapters Two, Three and Four show. In the films we made, the observation, compilation, intervention and performance techniques that create the language of design documentaries have been explored. In this section the wider context of this principle of language being inseparable from the story is discussed by exploring the role of aesthetics in discovery research, ethnography and everyday life theories. Examples from literature and art, such as Thompson, Wallraff, Lee, Tzusuki and Parr in the previous section, often point at opportunities for discovery research to use language on a deep level, like filmmakers do, creating access to for instance ambiguous content. For this reason, more examples are added here, next to the examples from documentary film which remain the most important inspiration for design documentaries.

Constructing stories

Design documentaries are constructed rather than just recorded in a neutral way. They use an audiovisual language to show people and situations. Camera, microphone and editing are used to show particular aspects of the research subject. As was concluded in Chapter One, this is unusual for the use of video in discovery research, where the camera is mostly used to show ‘everything,’ or at least as much as possible. Design documentaries do not hide the fact they are constructed. The researchers make choices like documentary filmmakers do. The main reason for the openly constructed nature of design documentaries is the wish to move beyond selected raw video material as supporting evidence in an oral presentation, towards telling a story with audiovisual means. The wish to tell a story has consequences though. It means that the raw material cannot be presented as loose clips; some kind of coherence must be constructed between the separate shots. In the filmmaking process this is abundantly clear via editing. Shots cannot be glued together randomly, the filmmaker needs to develop relationships between them. These relationships are the understanding that the filmmaker develops of the subject of the film. Of course some of these relationships, but not all, have been foreseen or discovered during shooting.

This is not unlike what happens in discovery research, when the data that was collected (an empirical effort), is organised and arranged into an understanding (an analytical effort). This understanding can be achieved on different levels, from a window into another world to deep cultural patterns, as Bell argued (see page 166). The deeper levels cannot be observed, they are derived from thinking, from developing relationships between observations.

Paul Dourish (2006) makes a clear distinction between empirical and analytical efforts of ethnography, and emphasises that its analytical side can simply not be ignored without discarding ethnography altogether. Analysis is an inalienable part of ethnography because “ethnography makes conceptual claims; it theorizes its subjects” (ibid., 2006, p. 543). As a consequence “ethnography presents not simply observations but relationships between observations, it is inherently interpretive.” (ibid., 2006) Ethnography has to interpret the observations it makes to arrive at an understanding of the relationships between them; its analysis is an interpretive effort. This is not very different from what a documentary filmmaker does. S/he has to interpret the shots on the editing table, as a viewer, as a first step towards creating relationships between them and building a story from those relationships. Design documentaries follow the practices of filmmakers when editing the material that has been shot. In doing so, shots (observations) are analysed and relations between them are developed. This practice compares to what ethnographers do with data to develop an understanding from it, that is, to what ethnographers call analysis.

Thick description

Social scientist and anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) is an early and still influential advocate, also in interaction design, of using an interpretive approach in ethnography. He describes the concept of culture as “essentially semiotic” and believes that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.” (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) He takes “culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it therefore not an experimental science in search of laws, but an interpretive one in search of meaning.” (ibid., 1973) This creates an approach that is essentially different from scientific inquiry. Geertz responds with this statement to Durkheim who saw reality as governed by social laws, like the solar system is governed by the laws of physics. Durkheim saw the discovery of these laws as the task of the sociology. Geertz however sees reality as something that is achieved by people, and not, as Durkheim suggests, something by which people are ruled. He takes a more cultural approach by focusing on how people create meaning, and thus achieve social order.

Geertz applied his interpretive approach to his ethnographic practice in for instance Indonesia and Morocco, and through this practice he developed ideas about understanding culture and people’s everyday life that are influential in ethnographically inspired discovery research methods (see for instance Forlizzi and McCormack, 2000, Hughes et al., 1992), but also in human sciences such as cultural studies (Gray, 2003), and consumer behaviour studies in marketing (Szmigin and Foxall, 2000). The main concept he is cited for is “thick description,” (Geertz, 1973, p. 7) a way of describing not only the surface one can observe (‘thin description’), for instance the actions of people, but also the layers below that, for instance people’s thoughts and beliefs, which give meaning to these observations. He considers it the task of ethnography to formulate these layered structures of meaning. Using thick descriptions allow the complexity of the phenomenon that is studied to persist. Ethnography shares this concern for preserving the diversity and complexity of everyday life in the research with design documentaries as was argued in the first part of this chapter.

But how is thick description achieved? In ethnography, as the name suggest, thick description is achieved through writing. Ethnography is a form of reportage that builds cultural understanding through written reports; it is a literary form (Anderson in Dourish, 2006, p. 543). This has consequences. First, the written account is the focus of the ethnographic effort (and not doing the observations for instance) because it is the final outcome, it is what remains. And secondly, it is important *how* the account is written, “we must pay considerable attention to its rhetorical form and construction” (Dourish, 2006, p. 543). Such attention to the text is not strange to design documentaries. Following documentary film, they take as a starting point that the film has to communicate the story. If the film does not convey an understanding or communicates it badly, the understanding does simply not exist for the viewer. In this sense, film behaves like a written text. In more general, cultural terms it is a text, an audiovisual text, and can be constructed, understood and analysed like written texts albeit in different ways. In ethnography it

is not unusual to use film as a text. Films by Flaherty (see page 86), Rouch (see page 42), Mead and Bateson (see page 51), and the MacDougalls (see page 64) are key examples.

A focus on the text, in particular how the text is filmed, is unusual when video is used for discovery research, as was concluded in Chapter One. Design documentaries in contrast give ample attention to how the participants' experiences and perspectives, and those of the researchers, are communicated through the audiovisual text. The second main characteristic of design documentaries is that they explore the aesthetics they use to communicate experiences.

Communicating experiences

Aesthetics may be associated with beauty and high culture by many, but that is not its origin, and not its only domain. Here, the focus is on the aesthetics of everyday life. When the term aesthetics emerged at the end of the 18th century, in German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten's writings, it was going to give "philosophical and scientific attention to sensory, corporeal experience (perhaps the very stuff of the everyday)" (Highmore, 2002a, p.20). At that time, philosophy suddenly seems to discover a whole realm outside the mental enclave of thinking (Eagleton cited in Highmore, 2002a, p. 20). It has proven to be difficult though to enter this area without colonising it with the rational ideas of logic. If scientific methods are applied to the understanding and representation of everyday life, the object of the study itself often remains outside the area of investigation. "How often is the particularity of the everyday lost as it is transformed in the process of description and interpretation?" wonders Highmore (2002, p.20). If a rationalistic discourse moves into an area that does not follow logical reasoning – for instance the idiosyncratic ways in which we move things around, store, use and display them in our home – the 'stuff-ness' that made the subject interesting in the first place is lost (ibid). This leads to the conclusion that the everyday is not fully represented in research nor theory and points at a world in the don't know–don't know quadrant in Bontoft's matrix (see Figure 44 on page 165).

Highmore suggests that it would be a good start to acknowledge that "no form of discourse is ever going to be 'proper' (appropriate) to everyday life. The everyday will necessarily exceed attempts to apprehend it. (...) different forms of representation are going to produce different versions of the everyday." (Highmore, 2002a, p.21) This need not be a problem, because it is not necessary to fully describe the everyday to engage with it theoretically; research that describes the everyday partially is valuable for understanding it too. But the observation that different representations of the everyday produce different understandings does mean that experimentation with representations, i.e. experimentation with aesthetics, is required or at least valuable. Aesthetics are crucial to understanding the everyday for two reasons; first because some of its concerns are focused on the experience of the everyday; and secondly because aesthetics is concerned with how experience can be communicated, with the form experience takes when it is represented.

Everyday life theories

Some cultural theories of everyday life also see everyday life as “characterised by ambiguities, instabilities and equivocations” (Highmore, 2002a, p. 17). Surrealism with its eye for the marvellous in the everyday, De Certeau’s poetics of everyday life, Benjamin’s trash aesthetics and even Mass Observation’s science of everyday life, all have always refused to see the everyday as only boring and tedious. They prefer to see the opposite: the everyday as “the marvellous and the extra-ordinary,” or at least as a dialectic combination of the two (ibid., 2002a). As a result, the means of representation of the everyday that are chosen by these theories, for instance montage, can produce a result that seems to be the opposite of the plain and the common (ibid., 2002a). This offers discovery research opportunities to keep the ambiguous in the everyday alive for design teams to explore themselves. Design documentaries are such a communication tool and for instance the compilation techniques that we used in the Thrill films (see page 130) benefited from techniques that were pioneered by Surrealism. And the tactics people use in everyday life (De Certeau, 1984) became for instance very clear in *Storage and Clutter in the Home* without forcing a conclusion about the value of these tactics upon the viewers.

Documentary film offers an alternative for a rationalist discourse that loses important aspects of the everyday it tries to study, because film does not need to rationalise to communicate experiences. It can add rationalisation, for instance by adding a voice-over or by asking a participant to reflect, but it is not obliged to. *Storage and Clutter in the Home* manages to convey some of the stuff-ness of the storage practices of its protagonists by just letting them tell about what objects are where, and letting them take stuff in and out of drawers and cupboards. Because film can simply show this, without rationalisation, it has relatively easy access to the sensorial experience of the everyday. This may be one of the reasons that video is used in discovery research, despite the complaints that some researchers make about how cumbersome it is to work with video (see page 13). It simply shows experiences that are hard to rationalise and hard to describe; it is easy to describe what people do, but hard to describe how it feels to do it without literary skills. It is hard to film how something feels too, and one film does a better job to communicate experiences than another. Showing situations from the perspective of the protagonists, for instance shot from over their shoulder as Ayisi and Longinotto do in *Sisters in Law* (see page 65), helps viewers to identify with experiences of people on screen. Not everyone will agree on which film communicates experiences best, which shows that experimentation with aesthetics is necessary as Highmore suggested. Everyday life theories and documentary film offer inspiration to set up these experiments in design documentaries.

Aesthetics in discovery research

Discovery research has done its own part of experimentation with aesthetics to represent people’s experiences of the everyday. It has for instance taken inspiration from art and literature, as is exemplified throughout this chapter, but not yet from documentary film. Design documentaries

open up a new source of inspiration for discovery research; Chapters Two, Three and Four offer many examples⁷⁹. Below, different approaches to aesthetics in discovery research are discussed in their relation to literature and art as a source of inspiration.

The aesthetic choices a filmmaker and researcher make are not only depending on the subject of the research, the situations and people who are filmed, but also on personal preferences and skills of the researcher/film-maker. A realist approach that keeps a certain distance to its subject may fit some, who want to film as Wiseman (see page 62), but others are more confident with an interventionist approach that challenges the participants, and creates a tense atmosphere in the film through its framing and editing, such as Broomfield (see page 93).

Engaging with aesthetics does not necessarily mean moving beyond a realist approach. Choosing a realist aesthetics to represent people's experiences is very well possible. I have done so in several of the design documentaries, inspired by the realist approach some documentary film-makers take. Both direct cinema and *cinéma vérité* have developed realist aesthetics, the first by interfering as little as possible in the situations they film, and the second by doing deliberate interventions and even setting up situations that otherwise would not have existed. Realist aesthetics are popular in discovery research too. The examples of shadowing and participant observation that were discussed in the previous section both were filmed in a realist aesthetic, with for instance shaky images if the camera follows someone, sometimes awkward framing and cuts that disrupt comfortable viewing because movements do not continue and the location of the attention in the image suddenly shifts. Gough (2004) films herself while shadowing and interviewing her participants, in a casual way with a handheld camera. Heaton (2004) has involved someone else to film his observations but also this person is focused on the action and tries to follow the movements of the children and Heaton. It is not clear whether they have given much thought to how to film the situations they observed, but in general if it has not, this often results in an aesthetic that is assumed to be more authentic. This has become a recognisable style, even to the level that it has become used by feature films like *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) to make the story more believable. Feature films that tell a true story also use sometimes a 'documentary-style' aesthetic to raise believability. Broomfield, who mostly made documentary films, has used this for instance in his second feature *Ghosts* (2007), about a Chinese illegal worker in the United Kingdom (see page 184).

Even if life is caught unawares, it does not mean that a realist approach to aesthetics must be taken. Gough and Heaton take a realist approach, but for instance artist Calle's shadowing in *Suite Venetienne* (Calle and Baudrillard, 1988) catches life unawares while applying a formalist aesthetic to represent her experiences (see page 38). Aesthetics are not the same as methods or techniques to do research. The same method allows for different aesthetic approaches, and the same aesthetic can be applied on different research methods. Aesthetics

⁷⁹ Online, at designdocumentaries.com, I have collected more descriptions of documentary films that may serve as inspiration for experimentation with video in discovery research.



Figure 51 Ghosts by Nick Broomfield
Nick Broomfield chose a realist aesthetic for his first feature film Ghosts (2007) which tells a true story about an illegal Chinese worker in the UK and the ordeals she had to go through to get to Europe.

determine in what form the research is communicated, and through this partly determines how the research is executed too. If for instance the aim is to communicate the experiences of the participants through film, the research will have to be recorded on film and part of the research will be the filming itself. The loose connection between aesthetics and methods reflects the opportunities and need Highmore sees for experimentation with the representation of the everyday. Below these opportunities are further explored by looking at two discovery research methods, the different formalist approaches they take, and how art and literature have influenced their aesthetics. I will also compare the aesthetics used in these methods to some of the aesthetic approaches I used in design documentaries.

Personas

Personas are fictional characters, each based on several factual interviews with participants. The method was originally developed by Alan Cooper (1999). After clustering the interview answers into groups, fictional descriptions of characters are made, including their age, sex, habits and quirks. Its final form is often accompanied by a small stock photograph to give the persona a face. Connected to the description are scenarios, “stories about people and their activities” (Carroll,

2000, p. 46), in which the persona responds to situations relevant for the design project at hand. The aim is to facilitate empathy with the target group of the design effort through these personas by letting designers think from the perspective of these characters when designing.

The elicitation of empathy, however, requires a literary writing skill beyond the ability to make simple descriptions. This limits the power of personas because not all researchers have these skills, nor is highlighted that these are important. Personas can suffer from the same problem as many characters in scenarios which are developed in design processes to explain concepts. Lene Nielsen (2002) argues that these characters are in practice mostly one-dimensional; they are ‘flat characters.’ The reader does not get to know enough about them to know if the scenario can really solve the problems they encounter in it. This reduces their believability and opportunities for identification by the reader considerably. She urges the further development of literary skills, especially to enrich characters in scenarios. This is, of course, a call for more attention to the aesthetics of personas.

Creators of personas could take inspiration from artist Jop van Bennekom who makes Re-Magazine, “a magazine about one person” (Van Bennekom and Holleman, 1997-2005). Re-magazine was an inspiration for *Fred*, *Kent* and *Debra*, as I will discuss below. Each Re-magazine, co-edited by artist Arnoud Holleman and with contributions of many others, is about one mundane aspect of the everyday life of a fictitious character who is firmly rooted in reality. For instance, number 10 ‘Claudia’ (2003), is about being a very tall woman, number 11 ‘Marcel’ (2004, see Figure 52), is about “Food Coma” and number 12 ‘Hester’ (2005), is about being depressed. The articles are based on existing stories from the everyday life of the artists and interviews they conduct for the magazine. These references are clearly mentioned at the back of some of the magazines. The methods for data collection are not very different from how data is collected for personas, but the way the characters are presented is very different because a formalist aesthetics has been used (see page 186).

The method and results used here faintly resemble personas, but the presentation of Re-Magazine is much more imaginative, while still offering many connections to daily life facts and stories. It seems like Re-Magazine has taken the genre of personas a step further by thinking much more about the form in which to present the story.

Personas have been taken up widely in industry, for instance Philips (Bueno and Rameckers, 2003) and Microsoft (Pruitt and Grudin, 2003) use them extensively. They are presented in different forms, from one A4 sheet descriptions with a passport photo, to posters that mix text with (often stock) photography. To achieve a good literary and visual quality in a persona is not easy however. The Philips Medical team in Seattle I worked with for instance reported that the persona posters that were originally developed by Philips did not present characters they could identify with easily (see page 118). Although formally not personas, the protagonists in *Fred*, *Kent* and *Debra*, gave the design team characters they could believe in (see page 154). This was achieved through exploring several different aesthetics. For instance, a



Figure 52 Re-magazine 11: Marcel Winter/Spring 2004, 'Food Coma.' The magazine reports about one person, Marcel, who is a fictitious construction based on interviews and other research. The main character is cast as a character for a film or a model for a photo shoot. Marcel is personified by actor Marcel Musters. Photo shoots with well-known photographers are set up for the visuals. Van Bennekom designs Re-Magazine himself.

formalist aesthetics was used to set up the dialogue between heart patient Joan and persona Debra in the video letter, adopting the visual language that is also used by correspondents to address a tv-audience via satellite. In *Fred* formalist aesthetics were also used, for instance to edit the photos together. One example is the long movement down across several photos of interiors to strengthen the feeling of depression the voice-over talks about. As the team at Philips reported, these aesthetics contributed to the believability of the personas and their willingness to identify with them. The experiences of the heart patients were better communicated through the films than through the posters.

Cultural probes

Surrealism, and other arts movements that turn everyday familiarities into strange objects and situations, like Dada and Situationism, inspired the cultural probes (Gaver et al., 1999, Gaver and Dunne, 1999), a discovery research method that focuses on data collection and avoids analysis. Typically, designers create a package that contains a range of tasks and requests for the volunteering receiver that might be somewhat unclear or even confusing. This is deliberate because the probes try to “use, judiciously, tactics of ambiguity, absurdity, and mystery throughout, as a way of provoking new perspectives on everyday life” (ibid., 1999, p. 26). The participants are asked to return each of the tasks by post once they have completed them, generally resulting in a steady stream of mailed cards, maps and objects coming into the design studio.

These are not analysed; “results are impossible to analyze or even interpret clearly because they reflect too many layers of influence and constraint” (Gaver et al., 2004a, p. 55). The designers express their ideas about everyday life in the probe tasks they send out, the participants try to interpret the probes and express their ideas in the probe returns, which the designers then have to interpret. Subjectivity inevitably is part of this process and is explicitly appreciated by this method. The perspectives of the participants are equally present in the probes as the perspectives of the researchers and designers are.

The aesthetic approach of the cultural probes is not applied to analyse data, it is used to generate data. The probe packages are carefully designed by designers involved in the research. They discard the neutral graphic design that generally is chosen for questionnaires and diary studies in favour of an more expressive aesthetic, for instance a glass packaged in thick paper with the request to listen to sounds around the home with it and write what you hear on the glass itself. The ideas and perspectives of the researchers and designers is expressed by the probes they make. This, of course, is deliberate. Gaver, Dunne et al. explained to their volunteers when they gave them their probe packages: “They’re a way for us to get to know you better, and for you to get to know us.” (1999, p. 22). The probes communicate experiences between participants and researchers/designers in both ways.



Figure 53 Cultural probes

The cultural probes present a range of surprising, sometimes confusing tasks to volunteers in carefully designed way, and ask them to return the photos, postcards, notes and objects by post. At the left the probe package and one task is shown, at the right are two returns.

The cultural probes are an example of how discovery research can take inspiration from art. Among its inspirations from art, Gillian Wearing's work *Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say* (1992-1993) was important because Wearing found a way to let people reveal things about their inner worlds (Gaver, 2003). This work consists of over 600 photographs of people in the streets of Central London and Naples, holding a large white paper sheet on which they have written their thoughts at that moment. It is a clear example of the kind of formal experimentation with aesthetics propagated by Highmore, just like the cultural probes are. He suggests that if the appropriate forms of attending to the everyday have proven to overlook certain things, than "the everyday might benefit from the attention of purposefully inappropriate forms of representation. Or rather, the everyday might be more productively glimpsed if the propriety of discourses is refused." (Highmore, 2002a, p. 21, original italics). *Signs that say...* can be seen as an experiment in social anthropology that uses an inappropriate form which helps Wearing to catch people off-guard and reveal their inner thoughts. The artist approached these people on the streets and many simply divulged what was on their minds at that moment. The artwork gives a rare insight in the minds of the normally anonymous people around us in the city and it shows that (some) people do allow you to just go up to them and ask them what they think.



Figure 54 Signs that say.... by Gillian Wearing.
 The full title of this work is Signs that say what you want them to say and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say (1992-1993) . Artist Gillian Wearing asked people on the street to write their thoughts at that moment on a sheet of paper and let her take a photograph.

For *Debra* I experimented with aesthetics too, partly inspired by cultural probes and *Signs that say...*, in particular their expressive approaches to eliciting answers from people. I sent Joan a fictional (paper) letter in the name of persona Debra and asked her to respond to it on video. Joan wrote back to Debra/me (on paper) showing she understood the game, wanted to continue it and had a story to tell. Later we recorded the video letter, using parts of her first written letter. This process is also a way of explicitly using aesthetics to ask questions to the participants, initially textual (a personal letter) and later visual (the video letter).

Joan did not have trouble answering Debra’s letter, she was happy to play along and contribute. She sent an immediate response. In documentary film people are often happy if they get the opportunity to express their thoughts and show their life to an audience, just like Wearing’s participants seem to have no trouble with divulging their inner thoughts. David and Joan, the heart patients featuring in *Kent* and *Debra*, both explicitly expressed their will to contribute too. For them, most important was that they felt they could make a contribution to the improvement of the lives of people in similar situations as theirs.

Connecting research to design

Using aesthetics in discovery research, as a tool to communicate experiences of participants and researchers to design teams (with personas for instance), or experiences of researchers and designers to participants (with the cultural probes for instance), brings research closer to design. In design, thinking about aesthetics and using aesthetics as a tool to create meaning are more common than in research. Documentary filmmakers are familiar with aesthetics too, as the many examples of how experiences can be communicated in Chapter Three abundantly show. Many of the techniques documentary films use are not unfamiliar to design; they are often more unfamiliar to research. The explicit use of aesthetics in research thus opens a door for designers to get more involved in the research process because designers can contribute design skills to the research. For instance, editing techniques like juxtaposition and rhythm that were needed to bring the diversity of archive footage together in a coherent aesthetic, were not entirely new to the designers who made the Thrill films.

Other aesthetic techniques are well known in both research and design and help to bring the two disciplines together in projects. For instance, ‘making the familiar strange’ is a technique to find new ways of seeing and understanding the familiar, both in research and in design. With his book *The Psychology of Everyday Things*, Donald Norman (1988) let us see familiar things like a door handles in a new way by defamiliarising them. Dunne and Raby (2001) present in their book *Design Noir* strange furniture for the home, like a ‘nipple chair,’ that makes us look differently at chairs. The nipples start to move if they sense electromagnetic radiation; they alarm the sitter by vibrating in her/his back. What Norman achieves through an unfamiliar way of looking and describing, Dunne and Raby achieve through designing unfamiliar objects. Both are



Figure 55 The Psychology of Everyday Things and the Nipple Chair. In *The Psychology of Everyday Things* (1988) Norman introduces making familiar things strange as an aesthetic method to investigate the user-friendliness of familiar everyday objects. Dunne and Raby’s Nipple Chair (*Design Noir*, 2001) is one of the designs they developed to explore how familiar objects like tables and chairs could become strange again if they responded to electromagnetic radiation.

involved in aesthetics because both communicate defamiliarised experiences, one through writing, the others through designing, and writing about their designs.

Bell, Blythe et al. (2005) used defamiliarisation to develop alternate visions of culturally situated technologies for the home in both ethnography and design. They consider defamiliarisation to be “first and foremost a literary device, a style of writing,” (ibid., 2005, p. 169) and thus recognise it as a aesthetic approach that is available to everyone who can write. They use it to understand one of the most familiar things – the home – through ethnography, and to outline a series of strategies for design that defamiliarise the accepted approaches to designing technology for the home.

For *Drift*, we defamiliarised walking through the city, inspired by the Situationists, and the design documentary chose an aesthetic approach that contributed to the idea by including many extreme close-ups of yellow and circular things that cannot always immediately be recognised and allow the viewer to look differently at a familiar environment. Here the defamiliarisation also created a text to communicate it, but an audiovisual one. This turned out to work equally well as written defamiliarisations, because the film inspired the design team to look at wandering through the city in a new way.

The creative approach that design documentaries take to the audiovisual language that they use helps to bring research and design closer together. Constructing stories with attention for aesthetic choices improves the communication of research to a design team and opens up new opportunities for collaboration between the two disciplines.

The second characteristic of design documentaries is experimenting with aesthetics as a way to communicate experiences of participants and researchers. This exploration is happening in the empirical part of discovery research, when researchers and designers communicate with participants to gather data. Cultural probes are an example of this aesthetic approach to asking questions. But also the analytic part of discovery research uses aesthetics. For instance personas use literary techniques (albeit often in a very limited way) to create the fictional characters that are the result of the clustering of data like interview fragments. Design documentaries use aesthetics both during the empirical and the analytic part of the research. From preparations like scripting, to shooting, and editing, there is constant attention for how to communicate through film, building on editing and story telling techniques from documentary film. When the analysis continues in the conversations with the design team, these techniques again play a role because the team often wants to know how the film was made. At all of these stages experimenting with aesthetics helps to explore aspects of everyday life that otherwise remain inaccessible, for instance through using ‘making the familiar strange’ as a research approach. Finally, exploring aesthetics in discovery research, for instance through design documentaries, brings research and design closer together because designers are already familiar with using aesthetics as a tool to communicate, often even more so than researchers.

The first characteristic of design documentaries, their embrace of a diverse, complex everyday life, focuses on *what* stories design documentaries tell; the second characteristic focuses on *how* they tell their stories; the last section looks at the *role* of the storytelling in design documentaries.

Using differences in interpretation to create conversations

The stories of design documentaries are not from the filmmaker(s) alone, nor only from the participants. They make the films together and both their perspectives on the subject of the research are included. As was argued in Chapters Five and Six, this leads to conversations between these perspectives in which also the viewers take part after seeing the film. The third and last characteristic of design documentaries focuses on interpretation as a key aspect of these conversations. When making a design documentary, the people (researchers, participants and designers) who participate in preparing, shooting, editing and viewing of the film interpret continuously the ‘material’ – situations, people’s stories and experiences, film shots and sequences – they encounter. These interpretations lead to discussions because they often differ from each other. As such, they are central to the idea that films are like conversations, as was discussed in Chapter Two.

Conversations between participants, researchers and designers

During the making of the design documentaries, as well as when they were used in workshops or otherwise in design processes, there were always conversations about the subject of the research. They usually started between participants and researchers, to later continue between researchers and designers, and finally –through the films – also dialogues between participants and designers occurred. The first two dialogues were conducted directly between people, but the dialogues between participants and designers evolved despite the people involved never met each other. Members of design teams took up perspectives from the people they had seen in the films and started to think and argue from these participants’ perspectives. These created conversations in which the participants were represented by designers. For instance, the people at Philips started to discuss from Fred’s perspective about how he would interpret data from his heart himself and avoid the doctor (see page 159), and the people in the Swim workshop talked from the perspective of being a swimmer (see page 158). These short-lived impersonations allowed other team members to engage directly with views of participants, as if in a dialogue. In *Drift* and *Swim* (some of) the participants in the films were also taking part in the workshops, allowing a direct dialogue between participant and designer to exist as well. The three dialogues together, between participants, researchers and designers, form a triangle of exchanges (see Figure 56). Together, the dialogues form a conversation.

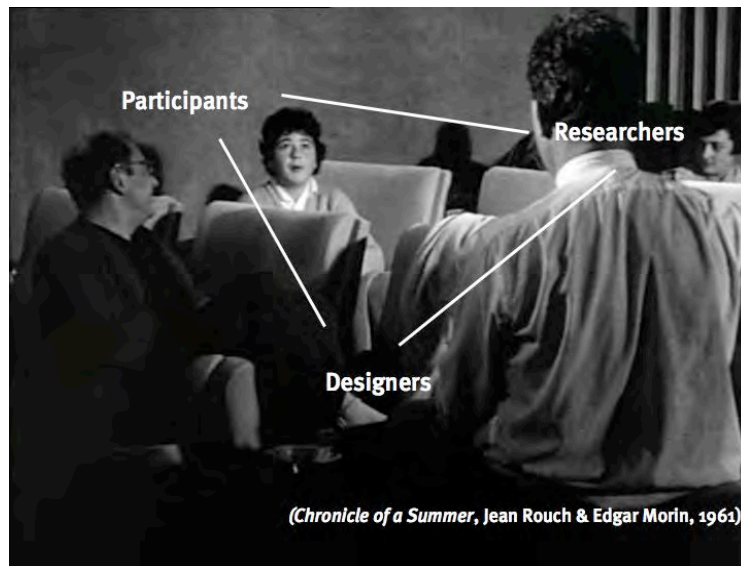


Figure 56 Triangle of dialogues
 A triangle of dialogues between participants, researchers and designers occurs when making and consequently using a design documentary. The image shows the protagonists of *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) who at the end of the film attend its first projection and discuss it with the filmmakers and each other.

In the triangle of dialogues, the viewers of design documentaries build relationships with participants through establishing emotional connections (see page 158) with them in the films, through empathy and identification for instance. This allows both researchers and designers to step into the shoes of the participants, and they can see the world from their perspectives. Viewers of *Fred, Kent and Debra* from the design team at Philips used the films as supporting evidence for their understandings of how heart patients could use the monitoring device the team was designing. Their reluctance to give easy access to heart monitoring data collected by the device was motivated by their observation in the film that a heart patient like Fred would start interpreting himself and not go to a doctor (see page 159). The relationships built with participants in the films are a valuable resource for design because these can last during the design process and serve as a reference for design ideas. Film works particularly well as a media to develop relationships with people you can't, or don't, meet in person. Film techniques help to establish these identifications, like the over-shoulder shot that lets the viewer see the world from the protagonist's perspective (see page 65). Also if someone appears to look the viewer straight in the eye a strong relationship is established – a technique that is used in *Debra*, inspired by video diaries.

The idea to concentrate on the conversations that arise during the making and use of design documentaries was inspired by documentary film, in particular the films of Rouch and the thinking that comes with them. As an anthropologist, Rouch saw making a film as something not very different from setting up a conversation. In Chapter Two this has been discussed extensively (see page 45), and Chapter Four gives an analysis of *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) to exemplify Rouch's view. To him, the flow of the conversation is much more important than any conclusion

that might be reached during its course. The lack of conclusions, or their insignificance, shifts the attention from drawing conclusions to developing interpretations. Broomfield (see page 93) and McElwee (see page 91) also show in some of their films that the process of making the film was built on differences in interpretation that lead to conversations, and sometimes disputes too, with their participants.

Interpretive research

Design documentaries, in relation to the conversations they set up, have similarities with the interpretive effort ethnographic research makes. Ethnography is inherently interpretive because it presents *relationships* between observations, not just the observations themselves, and these relationships have to be constructed as part of the research, in the analysis. The goal is “not to generalize across cases but to generalize within them” (Geertz, 1973, p. 26), to preserve a connection between the abstractions and the details of the situations from which these were developed. In other words, it is not a goal to formulate laws that govern cultures because these are too abstract and too far removed from the details of the observations. This reflects a semiotic view on culture as discussed above (see page 180). Geertz formulates very boldly what interpretation in this view means:

Cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses, not discovering the Continent of Meaning and mapping out its bodyless landscape. (Geertz, 1973, p. 20)

He mentions conclusions, but these are “explanatory” and not final. Elsewhere he says that commitment to a semiotic concept of culture and an interpretive approach leads to ethnographic assertions that are “essentially contestable” (which he clearly sees as a positive characteristic) and an anthropology “whose progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate. What gets better is the precision with which we vex each other” (ibid., 1973, p. 29). Geertz describes ethnography as a dialogue that continually flows. Rouch foreshadowed this approach in his work in the 1950s, before Geertz formulated it, by making his films contestable if not controversial: *Les maîtres fous* was banned in the United Kingdom because it ridiculed British colonial government according to the interpretation of the British censor. The jury of the Venice film festival had a different interpretation and gave the film a prestigious prize. Design documentaries set up conversations at a different scale of course, in the teams that make and use the films, but they too use differences in interpretation to stimulate discussion.

Taking the interpretation as a tool for analysis, for instance to create thick descriptions (see page 180), has as a consequence that the analysis is reflexive:

(...) ethnography is not only “about” the culture under study, but equally, implicitly or explicitly, “about” the cultural perspective from which it is written and that of the audience to whom it is presented. Clifford Geertz famously described culture – the object of anthropological ethnographic inquiry – as “stories that people tell themselves about themselves” (Dourish, 2006, p. 544).

In the creation of thick descriptions and the conversations between researchers, subjective views of both participants and researchers are essential to move the debate forward. Discussion is central to interpretive approaches. This does however not mean that interpretive approaches have to be located at the extreme opposite of objectivity. There is a range of positions possible between complete objectivity and complete subjectivity, and losing complete objectivity does not mean that “one might as well let one's sentiments run loose. (...) [T]hat is like saying that as a perfectly aseptic environment is impossible, one might as well conduct surgery in the sewer.” (Geertz, 1973, p. 30) Interpretive approaches have opened up a range of possible methods that, through developing positions and a discussion, take the perspective of the researcher on board as an essential part of the research itself. The researchers have to develop their positions in such a way that they are firmly grounded in the data they collect in the field, and the positions have to be made believable and acceptable to their peers. New positions lead to new knowledge if the research community accepts the ideas through discussion. More generally this is called an interpretive methodology, and it is used in many disciplines. The process of interpretation is not unfamiliar to design either, where critiquing and discussing each other's work in ‘crits’ is a best practice. Designers are aware of the need to develop a perspective on the situations and activities of people they design for, and that they need to convince other designers and stakeholders in the design team of their perspective. This too is a conversation, that is – ideally – connected to the conversation emerging from the research.

The conversations ethnographers engage in as a way of analysis, the way they refine their debate to create anthropological knowledge, and the way they have theorised this methodology, in particular through Geertz, has hardly been picked up in design ethnography (Dourish, 2006). The empirical methods of ethnography have been adopted and adapted, but its analytical methods and methodology hardly have. Unlike design ethnography, design documentaries share both methodological and conceptual aims with the semiotic perspective on culture of Geertz. Similar to documentary films, design documentaries are a text that is part of a semiotic culture. From documentary film, design documentaries inherit a deeply engrained realisation that they contribute to a debate rather than provide incontestable knowledge. Their film-text is created and interpreted by participants, researchers and designers in different groupings and situations. They ‘encode’ and ‘decode’ the text, as Hall (see page 40) suggests, in the triangle of dialogues introduced above.

Refiguring ‘users’ as actors

The role of the participants in the conversations deserves special attention. Participants are full contributors, with their own particular position in the process, like researchers and designers who have their own particular positions. For their view on the role and position of participants (and more generally on people using products and services), design documentaries take inspiration from the notion that culture is semiotic. To follow Dourish's words, participants are “actors who

collectively create the circumstances, contexts, and consequences of technology use” (2006, p. 546). This is different from the view that people appropriate technology if they have trouble using it. In HCI, in particular usability studies, appropriation is seen as an indication for possible improvement of the design. Instead, the ethnographic view considers technology as a site for social and cultural production (ibid., 2006). People create meaning in culture and society through their use of technology; they ‘fill’ technology with meaning once they get their hands on it. This production of meaning, too, is a conversation, between those who made the technological product or service, and those who use it.

Everyday life theories like De Certeau’s ‘Practices of Everyday Life’ (1984) and Surrealism refuse to see the everyday as the locus for the reproduction of dominant social relations. Rather, they see it as “a site for resistance, revolution and transformation” (Highmore, 2002a, p. 17). This ‘site’ could be influenced through design, as Plowman (2003) suggests. Social theories could be ‘materialised’ through design, an effort from which both social scientists and designers could benefit. One example of such materialisation could be to design products and services that not only allow for but actively support and stimulate the large scale anonymous creativity of people as described in De Certeau’s practice of everyday life theory: “For De Certeau, every man or woman could be regarded as the “producer” of his/her own through the art of recycling objects, adapting and transforming readymade products.” (ibid., 2003, p. 38) This resonates strongly with for instance the placebo furniture that Dunne and Raby made in their Design Noir project (Dunne and Raby, 2001), the weight furniture by Gaver et al. (2004b), the media mediators by Kerridge and Law (see page 129), and more in general the suggestion to use ambiguity as a resource for design by Gaver et al. Plowman’s remark also applies to design documentaries because they make these productive, creative, sometimes subversive, practices of people visible and available to design as a source of inspiration, and serves as a reminder that people do create the final meanings of products and services which is not necessarily the same as the meaning the designers intended.

If appropriation of technology is not seen as a fault in the design, it can still offer inspiration to designers. This completes the dialogue between designer and people using design: People receive a product in which the ideas of the designer (and the culture in which it originates) are encoded and create meaning. The decoding of these ideas by people using the product involves interpretation and appropriation, which creates (not necessarily the same) meaning. This meaning can be received (observed) by the designer who decodes it (interprets it) and can choose to use it as a source of inspiration for design again. The dialogue occurs through the product, through its design and through its use.

The book *Thoughtless Acts?* amasses an inspirational collection of observations of one side of this dialogue, the ways in which people engage with things and physical environments:

In daily life we make interpretations about the stuff around us all the time – how it might work and what we can do with it. We develop an exquisite awareness of the possibilities and sensory qualities of different materials, forms, and textures. This awareness is evident from our actions, even when we are not conscious of them—these are our

"thoughtless acts." Understanding these intuitive interpretations might be a significant source of insight for designers. (Fulton Suri and IDEO, 2005, p. 164)



Figure 57 Thoughtless acts? by Jane Fulton Suri. Thoughtless acts show “how we actively shape our environment and how we in turn are shaped by it.” From top left, clockwise: conforming?, adapting?, signaling? and reacting? These are four examples from seven categories of thoughtless acts, collected for the book by Fulton Suri and IDEO.

Jane Fulton Suri recognises too that this is a dialogue: “We see directly how design plays into our lives, how we actively shape our environment, and how we in turn are shaped by it.” (ibid., 2005, p. 166) This makes people who intuitively or consciously use design important contributors to design processes, through design thinking (see page 5). They contribute as the creators of the meaning that designed products, services and environments accumulate in society and culture.

The encoding-decoding dialogue between designers and users of which *Thoughtless Acts?* gives many examples, and De Certeau's creative tactics on which this dialogue is based, offer an understanding of how people engage with their environment. They clarify how people actively engage with the world and people around them, creating social and cultural meaning. This understanding is also used in design documentaries. For instance in *Kent*, David Jones creates meaning through organising the King of Hearts community, but also by walking every Sunday morning with his neighbour and showing his photos of Egypt. These activities show something of him as a person, but at the same time create meaning in the world. Showing the holiday photos for instance creates the idea that you can still go to Egypt if you have a problem with your heart. David defies the dominant cultural understanding of heart patients and makes it clear that going to Egypt is not a physical impossibility. He tells about discussions he had about this with friends and how having survived the heart attack urged him to go and fulfil his dream to see the Pyramids. To a designer of personal heart monitoring devices this is interesting because s/he learns that they are also designing to overcome dominant social and cultural understandings of the consequences of being a heart patient.

Sharing

The design documentaries we made often used sharing as a principle for collaboration. I shared the research process with the participants and the crews of the films, and I shared the process of interpretation, understanding and learning from the research, with them too, for instance by looking at rough cuts of the films with participants (see page 123). This is not dissimilar from Rouch's shared filmmaking and shared anthropology (see page 42). He collaborates with the people he films in front and behind the camera; he makes a story with them and takes them on as crew members. He shares the experience of making the film and doing the research with his participants – he even looks at (rough cuts of) the film with them. This is not unusual in documentary filmmaking, certainly not in ethnographic films. Robert Flaherty managed to develop his film in an igloo on the North pole in the 1920s and show it to his participants (see page 32). Joris Ivens took his participants in *Power and the Land* in the 1940s to a cinema because they had never seen a film before and he wanted to explain to them why they had to repeat their activities several times for the camera (Ivens, 1969). After the design documentaries had been finished, I finally also let the designers and design teams participate in the interpretive analysis of the films. This added another layer to the sharing that had started already before the first second of film had been shot.

Ethnography in industry

In design ethnography in industry, as it is mostly reported in HCI, the relationship between researchers and participants is generally very different. Suchman (2002) sees similarities between the work of early anthropologists for colonial administrators, who needed objective, instrumental results they could act on, and requests from contemporary industry which demands

actionable insights from ethnographers, ready to be used in design processes, in particular for workplaces. She calls for a different role of design ethnography in industry, arguing that ethnography should not describe the behaviour of target groups for technologies. Instead they should set the stage for producers and consumers of technology to meet each other and help forge partnerships between them. She calls the design that results from these encounters “artful integrations” (Suchman, 2000) which respect and expand local practice instead of using it as a mere backdrop for the designed system.

Design documentaries follow the idea of shared cinema of Rouch, and take up the suggestion that Suchman makes. They set up encounters between participants, researchers and designers in the form of conversations that continue in the design process, with an imagined presence of the participants in the design through empathy and identification (see page 158). In *Kent* and *Debra* the participants participated in the research and filmmaking by writing part of the outline or script, choosing locations (Joan even thought about what to wear), and we also viewed a rough edit of part of the film together and discussed it – after which their personal participation ended. But members of the design team empathised or identified with the protagonists in the films and this gave them a role in the design process. In *Drift* and *Swim* some of the participants in the filmmaking (for instance a researcher who was a swimmer, an artist and engineer who did the drifts) were also present in the workshops. They could take on different roles in the workshop, and also in the field work, because they had double positions: researcher and swimmer, artist and drifter, etcetera, resulting in a shared process where emotional connections to oneself in a different position, as well as emotional connections to others were made (see page 158). These connections do not guarantee the artful integrations Suchman proposes, but they support design teams in developing them. In principle design documentaries could also provide actionable insights that can be used immediately, but these would then have to emerge from the discussion between all people involved. Their open nature and the understanding that emerges from the films through discussion do not allow one insight to dominate and suppress other interpretations if it has not grown from a shared understanding.

The films at the centre of the conversations

Design documentaries create conversations. They are at the centre of the dialogues between participants, researchers and designers during their making and use. These dialogues would not have happened without the film. The discussions between participants and researchers whilst making the films are not just about the subject of the film, they are also about how to film, how to communicate the subject of the investigation. In discussions between researchers and designers in workshops the films form a basis for explorations of the subject and are regularly referred to. Design documentaries are an important reference for everyone participating in the conversation. They are positioned in the middle of the conversation as the media from which many of the stories that are told in the conversation originate, and at the same time the bearer of some of these

stories. Therefore design documentaries can be positioned in the middle of the triangle introduced above.

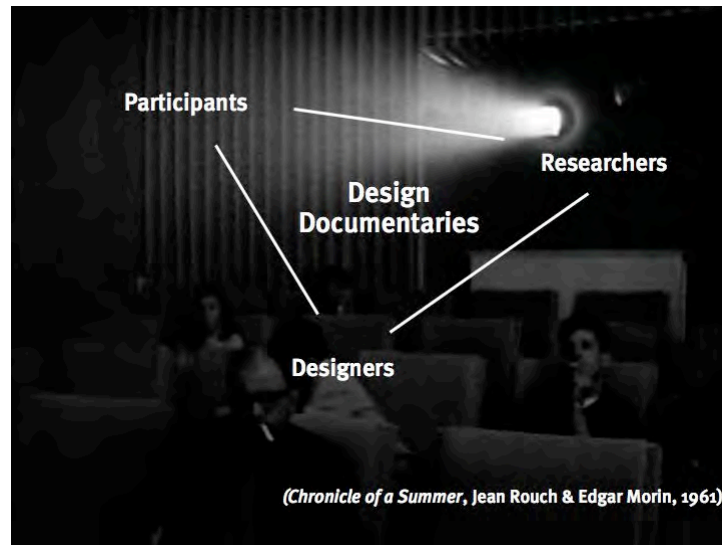


Figure 58 Facilitating triangular conversation. Design documentaries sit in the middle of the conversation triangle between participants, researchers and designers. The image shows the projection of Chronicle of a Summer (1961) to its protagonists.

Most discovery research communicates results in a report in some format or another, often a written document or PowerPoint presentation (Wakeford, 2006). These reports are knowledge containers and act as a shared reference throughout the design process, as design documentaries do. Two other non-written examples of a shared reference fulfil similar functions as design documentaries and offer insight into how such shared references play a central role in discussions in the triangle of participants, researchers and designers. They are culture capsules and theatre techniques.

Culture capsules

Driven by political events that prevented them to travel from the USA to China, ethnographers at Intel experimented with a “culture capsule” (Foucault et al., 2004). Through desk research, material from earlier visits to China by other ethnographers in the company, they gathered material about and from China. Referencing this material, above all photographs, the ethnographers started to decorate a conference room at Intel as a Chinese home office including furniture, books, jewellery boxes, and so on. The result was an immersive environment that was used as physical inspiration for the designers who spent time in the room to do their design, away from their desks. Secondly, it provided a showcase for the ethnographic and design work on the project to others in the company. This greatly helped to demonstrate the strong connection between the research and the design concepts. The clear presence of the cultural capsule in the design process and in the company show that it is important to have a shared reference that can be seen and discussed. Design documentaries offer such a reference too, but more in terms of an experience (the experience of watching) than a physical reference.

Theatre techniques

Several methods in discovery research use theatre techniques. They have in common that experiences or situations are acted out, sometimes with participants, sometimes with designers, often with both. Professional actors are sometimes involved too. Participants play themselves, or take up roles. Designers and researchers sometimes play roles too. The acted scenes become a shared experience that is referred to during the design process which starts during or after the role-play. Methods like ‘be your customer,’ (IDEO, 2003) ‘bodystorming’ (ibid.) and ‘informance’ or ‘performance ethnography’ (Burns et al., 1994, Dishman, 2003, Laurel, 2003, MacDaniel Johnson, 2003) all ask participants, researchers and designers to explore and understand situations through taking part in them, on location or in the design studio. The purpose can be both explorative and evaluative, depending on the stage in the design process. Informance draws on a theatrical practice called Technique Acting, which builds on James Lang’s Theory of Emotion (Laurel, 2003, p. 49-50). This theory says that mimicking someone’s physical postures, facial expressions and expressive gestures invokes in the actor the emotional state of that person. These methods, based on theatre techniques and theory, confirm through the connections they build between researchers and participants the relevance of the use of performance in discovery research. Design documentaries use performance, following their use in documentary film and theoretical ideas that state that everyday life is performed (see page 46). They share performance as a valuable tool to discover what matters to people with the methods discussed here.

Sometimes the people you are designing for participate in workshops as actors re-enacting their own everyday situations or directing the researchers and designers through the situations (Newell et al., 2006, Svanaes and Seland, 2004). These workshops, sometimes called ‘focus troupes,’ (Sato and Salvador, 1999) are aimed at exploring future situations and use often very rough prototypes to get people’s imagination going. To stimulate the imagination of the actors if they have to perform in a different location like the design studio, sometimes stage sets are created (Dishman, 2003). Newell et al. (2006) take inspiration from Forum Theatre, a type of improvisation theatre originally from Brazil that gave people in the favelas a political voice. They use Forum Theatre because it was specifically developed to encourage audience participation, in this case dialogues between participants and designers. Professional actors write, based on research, and play scripts that do not contain an ‘ending.’ Possible endings are discussed with the audience. Newell et al. report that the genre they used is “very powerful for facilitating discussions about sensitive issues and, via discussions within the audience and between the audience and the actors (who stay in role), it can change the mind sets of the audience” (ibid., 2006, p. 113). Theatre techniques in general and the application of Forum Theatre in particular are examples of how in discovery research data gathering and analysis are mixed and can be at the middle of a conversation in the design team. This resembles the continuous process of interpretation that is a part of design documentaries as the triangle of dialogues shows. As such

these theatre techniques are closely related to the third characteristic of design documentaries: interpretations that create conversations.

Avoiding conclusions

The conversations that evolved from making and using the design documentaries, and in particular the central role that the films play in this, show that making design documentaries is the beginning of the conversations. Many of the discussions that occur around the making are in some way, however minimal, present in the films themselves. But these conversations must be put into the films deliberately to allow them to continue in the design process, with designers who see the film.

Not every film stimulates further conversations equally well. A major stimulus for sparking discussion is to avoid conclusions in the film and, instead, allow others – viewers – to find interpretations in conversation with each other. Reaching perfect consensus is not the goal; it is more important to hone the conversation on what matters to the participants, in their lives and their world, and the perspectives designers and researchers can have. This fits of course with the semiotic understanding of culture discussed above (see page 180). Geertz sees thick descriptions in a similar way: they should feed discussion and refine debate (1973, p. 29). Newell, Morgan et al.'s use of Forum Theatre (2006) uses the same idea too: they do not include endings in their role-play and instead let the audience discuss possible endings.

In his films, Rouch has found many ways to stimulate discussions, mainly by playing with opposites (see page 44), which serves an inspiration for design documentaries. He challenges binary thinking simply because he does not experience the situations and locations of his research, and everyday life in general as binary. Rouch particularly likes to mix fact and fiction, for instance in ethno-fiction. *Fred*, *Kent* and *Debra* do this too, with the purpose to avoid a homogenous portrait of one person in the films. Each of the films mixes fact and fiction in a different way. *Fred* uses pictures from seven heart patients as the personal photos of one fictional character. *Kent* has voice-overs from a fictional character commenting on David's life, and *Debra* is an exchange of letters between a fictional character and Joan. *Alena's Strawberry Farm* contains unresolved tensions around co-existing opposites like the happy life on the farm and the sad goodbyes, the packaging of strawberries for Tesco and the shopping at Tesco, and many more. Most of the other films contain opposites that remain open-ended too and this stimulated the viewers to continue the thought process (see page 156).

Playing with perspectives

Next to opposing content, design documentaries contain a range of perspectives to choose from. In design documentaries it is beneficial to the conversations that are set up to deliberately include perspectives that do not easily merge into one smooth narrative. Instead, through the differences they contain, they urge viewers to evaluate perspectives and opinions in discussion with themselves and their design team members. Design documentaries use this technique, for

instance in *Alena's Strawberry Farm* which presents at least three different perspectives (see page 128). The other design documentaries each contain several perspectives too, often supported by the aesthetics of the film (see page 139).

In video art interesting ways of presenting many different perspectives in a exhibition space have been used, for instance by Kutlug Ataman with his installation *Küba* in which he presents the stories of people living in the Küba borough of Istanbul each on their own television, with a seat for one viewer in front of the screen. The visitor to the exhibition switches between perspectives by taking different seats. This opens up opportunities for presenting design documentaries in spaces of for instance companies, as a kind of installation.



Figure 59 Küba by Kutlug Ataman. The installation Küba (London 2005) presented many different perspectives from residents who live in the same neighbourhood in Istanbul. Every TV set offers another personal story.

The dvd *Lagos Wide & Close* (Van der Haak, 2005) offers an inspirational way of combining two very different perspectives in one presentation. One perspective is closely connected to the perspectives of the people living in Lagos, Nigeria's capital of over 10 million people. The camera is close to people all the time and shows the city from the point of view of its inhabitants. The second perspective is that of a city planner, looking down from the sky as if the city were a map. These shots are mostly taken from a helicopter. The two perspectives determine the aesthetics of the film and its viewing experience by offering two tracks on the DVD and allowing the viewer to change between them at any time.

Design documentaries are collections of perspectives that do not offer final consensus on the subject of the research. The range of opinions they present is diverse, because different people are involved. The participants can have very different positions in society, culture and life, and what they try to achieve can be very different. In addition, the positions and goals of researchers and designers who add their professional and personal perspectives during the research are diverse and different too. In design documentaries, all these perspectives are included in one edited, narrative structure that will almost certainly contain opposites because they have such different origins. To this mix of perspectives are added the professional and personal perspectives of the viewers in the design team when the film is shown and discussed (see page 158ff.). Such a wide range of perspectives may seem problematic, but in design processes it can be beneficial to have access to many perspectives, as for instance Tom Kelley



Figure 60 Lagos Wide & Close by Bregtje van der Haak. The dvd Lagos Wide & Close offers two perspectives on Nigeria's capital. One track on the dvd gives a view from on the ground, as Lagos' inhabitants experience their city (at the left) and the other from a distance, in its most extreme form from a helicopter, representing the view of the city planner. The viewer of the dvd can switch between the two perspectives at any time during the interactive film.

(Kelley and Littman, 2005) argues in *The Ten Faces of Innovation* where he discusses ten different perspectives on the design process, from anthropologist to cross-pollinator and storyteller. Kelley sees these perspectives as roles that members of a multidisciplinary team can play, and stresses they are not job descriptions. That would take the flexibility out of the perspectives. It is important that people can take more than one perspective because that allows them to understand other views better. In this context he speaks of "T-shaped people" (ibid, p.266) who combine deep knowledge of one discipline with a more superficial understanding of many more disciplines.

Documentary film often presents a range of incompatible, even conflicting perspectives, for instance to raise (political) awareness in society, as, to name only two examples, many of Joris Ivens' and Michael Moore's films show. *Alena's Strawberry Farm* is not necessarily a political film, but it does have a subject, migrant workers in the UK, that is politically sensitive. It took us some effort to convince the farmer that we were different from the popular press that has written unfavourable stories about the farmers and their workers. The film is not apolitical though, the oppositions between work and opportunities in West and East Europe, and their consequences

for young people, are clearly present but it takes a much more balanced view than for instance Moore's films (see page 68). Playing with perspectives can be done in many different ways, one more controversial than the other.

The third characteristic of design documentaries emerges from the way they are made and used as a part of design processes. The storytelling they do has a role to play in these design processes: present different perspectives on the research subject and provoke interpretations of these perspectives during the making and viewing of the films. The perspectives and interpretations are related to each other in a triangle of conversations between participants, researchers and designers. Design documentaries are positioned in the middle of this triangle as the vehicle that initiates and stimulates these conversations.

Conclusion

The three characteristics of design documentaries articulated in this chapter have strong relations with the three ideas from documentary theory presented in Chapter Two. The first characteristic – embracing a diverse and complex everyday life – respects and appreciates the ambiguities of everyday life and builds on film being 'like reality' to find ways to preserve these ambiguities in discovery research and the way it is communicated. The second characteristic – exploring aesthetics to communicate experiences – exploits the richness of film as a language to express and communicate research to design teams and also between researchers and participants. The third characteristic - using differences in interpretation to create conversations – extends the conversations implicit in documentary film to ongoing discussions between participants, researchers and designers in research and design processes. The documentary film techniques presented in Chapter Three, grouped as observation, compilation, intervention and performance techniques, support making and understanding design documentaries and contribute all to each of the three characteristics.

Design documentaries are firmly grounded in documentary film, but at the same time they share concerns and aims with a number of practices and theories in discovery research, as this chapter has shown. This takes design documentaries beyond documentary films per se. They serve a different purpose: Informing and inspiring design processes. As the three characteristics demonstrate, design documentaries apply the ideas of documentary film theory to discovery research and in doing so find new ways of seeing and understanding these ideas. The idea that film is like reality shifts to a focus on preserving ambiguities of everyday life in discovery research. Using film as a language allows design documentaries to express and communicate these ambiguities and the perspectives we develop during the research in a new audiovisual language that not only allows us to tell our stories in new ways, it also allows us to tell new stories. Finally, the idea that film is a conversation is adopted during the making of design documentaries, but

adapted and further expanded when they are viewed and used in design processes. It will be clear that design documentaries bring more to discovery research than better-looking videos (which, as I have shown, is not always the hallmark of sophisticated documentary filmmaking). They deeply interfere with how discovery research is conducted and the conversations that result from it. The conclusions will elaborate further on this.

The characteristics of design documentaries describe a new space for discovery research. The addition of documentary film as a discipline to the multidisciplinary mix in design has opened this space. To further explore it, elements that inspired design documentaries from four different disciplines – documentary film, discovery research, cultural theory and art – have been discussed here. This chapter has described and further explored the new space by looking at relations between design documentaries and particular elements of these four disciplines. This positions design documentaries in a particular context that can further inspire its development as a method in discovery research.

In the Conclusions that follow, the three characteristics of design documentaries discussed in this chapter will be used to discuss the current use of video in discovery research once more, after the review given in Chapter One. In this discussion I will conclude on the contribution that design documentaries make to the use of video in discovery research, and suggest ways to further develop this contribution in the future.

Conclusions

This investigation has explored new ways of using video, inspired by documentary film, in discovery research for design. A review of current video practices, a study of documentary film theories and techniques, and making films myself has expanded the research in parallel and iteratively. Practice has influenced scholarly research and *vice versa*. To emphasise the hybrid origin and nature of my films, I called them *design documentaries*. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight of this dissertation present reflections on my practice. I have identified the issues that emerge from making and using design documentaries in industrial, academic and mixed projects, and described the characteristics of design documentaries more generally.

New ways of using video in discovery research

In these conclusions, I want to reconnect design documentaries with existing video practices in discovery research. Starting again from current uses of video in discovery research, but now with the knowledge of what design documentaries can be and can do, I aim to establish the opportunities for design documentaries in discovery research for design. The three-part structure I developed to describe documentary theory, and gradually developed and adapted to characterise design documentaries, will also serve as a framework here. Simple as it may be, it has proved to be useful to explore and describe the complexities and diversity of design documentaries.

New ways of exploring a complex and diverse everyday life

This research has explored documentary film in search of additional ways of dealing with video as a record of everyday life, or reality in general. Over more than a hundred years, documentary filmmakers developed numerous different techniques in an attempt to create a direct connection to reality in their films. I have specifically selected techniques that are directly relevant to the conceptualisation of design documentaries and have focused on observation, compilation, intervention and performance techniques, all of which documentary filmmakers continue to use, contributing to audiovisual culture and literacy in our society. In all these techniques, the basic idea of documentary film that it has a strong connection to reality remains important, from Grierson's creative treatment of reality to Rouch's ethno-fiction, from Trinh's reassemblage to Caouette's filtered home-movies.

Design documentaries introduce these groups of techniques to discovery research. They can be used in addition to the registration technique that dominates the current use of video. Observation techniques alone already are a rich source of inspiration, from Vertov's use of the camera as a sensor to Philibert's empathetic observation. The films I made and contributed to, experiment with techniques from all four groups, mentioned above. The techniques allow design

documentaries to have an open approach to reality, meaning that the complexity and diversity of reality is not over-simplified by them. Ambiguous attitudes of people, the East European fruit pickers in *Alena's Strawberry Farm* for instance, can be communicated very well. Viewers can recognise themselves or others in these attitudes and identify with the protagonists because they are believable as people, as opposed to stereotypes. Also, viewers have the freedom to see a design documentary in different ways, for instance identify with different protagonists, or discover different details in the context the film offers. The openness of the films allows for this, together with the complexity and diversity of reality they have captured.

The open character of design documentaries has a downside however: unwieldy footage is always potentially imminent. Allowing the messiness of everyday life to enter the design documentary, potentially also allows the film to become a mess. The dissatisfaction with current uses of video in discovery research concerns exactly this point. Filmmakers keep rediscovering this, and keep finding ways to deal with this. Two major approaches for this have been developed in documentary film as I argued in Chapter Two, and I have introduced them both to design documentaries as an answer to this dissatisfaction with video in discovery research. They are film language and conversations in and around films.

New ways of exploring and expressing discovery research

Film language is hardly given attention in video for discovery research as Chapter One has shown: Most uses of video depend on video registration. With the use of film language, design documentaries move beyond using video for registration. Given the many possible ways to explore reality, some consideration is needed to decide which way is most appropriate for the research at hand. This is not a matter of following guidelines; instead creativity is necessary to find the best approach. A design documentary engages in audiovisual storytelling and those doing the research are the storytellers, supported by the participants. Storytelling is what positions design documentaries closer to documentary film than to video registrations. It also helps to counter unwieldy footage because it gives structure to the shooting. Already during recording ideas form about which story to tell and these guide what is recorded and how it is shot.

Through the storytelling, in film language, the people doing the research take on a creative role. Creative skills have always been important and valuable in discovery research, as the many different approaches discussed in Chapter One demonstrate. Different ways of observing, compiling, intervening and performing are used as research techniques, proving that creativity is an important asset for a researcher. But so far this creativity has hardly been applied to the use of video. Design documentaries take this next step and invite researchers to apply their creativity to the way they communicate research to design. They invite researchers to explore aesthetics as part of doing discovery research.

As I have argued in my Introduction, the word 'researcher' as I use it denotes a role, not a person. People from different backgrounds and disciplines can take up this role. In discovery

research, having a background in design, social sciences, psychology, anthropology or cultural studies is not unusual, but training in audiovisual skills in these disciplines is often limited. Perhaps audiovisual communication skills are most solidly trained and constantly developed in design. Design documentaries offer an excellent opportunity for people with a design background to use these skills in discovery research in new ways. At the same time, if discovery research is communicated through audiovisual storytelling in design documentaries, it connects better to the visual communication that already occurs in design processes, facilitating the flow of information and inspiration between research and design.

New ways of communicating between participants, researchers and designers

The audiovisual storytelling of documentary films is open as a result of the complex and diverse of reality they have captured. This openness takes form as conversations between the people involved: filmmakers and protagonists. The conversation continues once the viewers see the film, bringing their own experiences and ideas into the discussion the film presents them. The result is a triangular conversation that evolves around the film, during its making and also its viewings, as I have argued in Chapter Two. Design documentaries follow this approach of documentary film, creating conversations during their making (sometimes visible in the film, as in *Swim* and *Drift*) and around their use in design processes, as Chapters Six and Seven have shown. Different viewers often took different ideas from the films I made and engaged in discussion with each other about these different perspectives, adding their own interpretations to the mix presented by the film. The interpretations given by the participants and the researchers in the film are discussed and as result new interpretations were added.

For discovery research, these conversations are valuable. Firstly, they offer new opportunities to engage with participants. Making a film together with participants proved a good way to establish a relationship with them. The participants in all the films I made contributed considerably to not only the research but also to how it was communicated in the film. In *Swim* for instance the format directly emerged from how the swimmers described their experience, as being in a bubble. Each design documentary I made offered new ways to cooperate with the participants in the research. Together we had to find out which experiences, opinions and stories to communicate, and how that could best be done. This openness of the method is very beneficial to the research because it invites exploration and allows the discovery of ‘unknown unknowns’ (see page 164). It allows the complexity and diversity of everyday life to be part of the research, including intimate aspects of people’s lives as I learned from making for instance *Kent*, *Debra* and *The Guest*.

The open conversations during the making of a design documentary, between participants and filmmakers, do not need to be limited to the lives of the participants. Also ideas, concepts or even prototypes developed by researchers and designers can be brought into this discussion. I experimented with this in most films, most visibly perhaps in *Drift* and the *Media*

Mediators Vlog. As such, design documentaries can also be used to explore design ideas, concepts and prototypes. This is not a form of evaluation, to determine if the concepts work and what needs to be improved. Design documentaries can be an exploration of real life situations in which they could play a speculative role, to inspire further development in following iterative cycles of the design process.

The three characteristics of design documentaries – embracing diversity, exploring aesthetics and creating conversations – mix with each other in the new ways to do discovery research that design documentaries offer. They are based on the three ideas and four groups of techniques borrowed from documentary film. These three characteristics indicate that research can be part of design, and design can be part of research: design documentaries create shared spaces for research and design in new ways. They make mixing and moving between research and design easier, which will help design processes to become more iterative and make it easier for design to connect to everyday life.

The contexts in which design documentaries operate

After zooming in on the opportunities design documentaries offer to enhance the use of video in discovery research, it seems appropriate to zoom out and look at the context in which design documentaries exert these opportunities, and how they can do this, with the help of the documentary film discipline.

Adding an arts and humanities discipline to design and HCI

More and more disciplines have been appropriated into the multidisciplinary mix that is nowadays common in design. From this view, documentary film is a new addition. As a discipline, documentary film can be positioned in the arts and humanities. In design the influence of disciplines from the arts and humanities is not unfamiliar and has a long tradition, for instance through the Bauhaus movement. In comparison, for Human Computer Interaction (HCI) it is fairly new to see disciplines from the arts and humanities arrive in the multidisciplinary mix. But in both design and HCI, documentary film is new to the mix of disciplines. The first conclusion about the context of design documentaries can be that they add a new discipline, documentary film, to the already broad mix of disciplines involved in design and HCI, and that this addition is part of a more general influence of the arts and humanities.

Stimulating cooperation between disciplines in design and HCI

The integration of all these disciplines has again and again raised the question of how working together across disciplines can best be done in order to be beneficial. Multi-disciplinary teams that cooperate fruitfully require collaborators who understand other disciplines to a certain extent and can communicate with them. Wright et al (2005) argue, in line with the idea of T-shaped

people (see page 3), that the quality of the dialogue between the disciplines is crucial for the quality of collaborative work. They suggest HCI should follow a programme of ‘radical interdisciplinary research’ and take design as a central focus, similar to the multidisciplinary collaboration that Buchanan refers to as a liberal arts of design (Buchanan, 1990). Both argue strongly in favour of a solid contribution of the arts and humanities to the mix of disciplines. Wright mentions two requirements for a programme of radical interdisciplinarity, and the inclusion of more disciplines from the arts and humanities, to succeed. First, a much deeper understanding of what design thinking is in HCI and the other disciplines involved is needed. Secondly, it is necessary to explore how dialogue across boundaries between disciplines can be achieved. Design documentaries explicitly aim to contribute to this second requirement. They offer new ways of doing discovery research that are, from beginning to end, a conversation between researchers, participants and designers. Since design documentaries are conversations themselves, the research does not need to be done first and then brought into the multidisciplinary conversation. This leads to the second conclusion about the contexts of design documentaries: the conversations they set up stimulate cooperation between disciplines in design, and thus aim to contribute to a programme of radical interdisciplinarity in HCI and design.

Building on audiovisual literacy in media society

The interdisciplinary language that is spoken in the conversations set up by design documentaries builds on a skill that is wide spread. In the same way as everyone can and does participate in design thinking to get a grip on the technological culture in which we live (Buchanan, 1990) (see page 5), everyone develops an audiovisual literacy to make sense of our media culture. Audiovisual literacy is well developed in media societies and, as with design thinking, creativity is part of the skill. Design documentaries use the audiovisual literacy of their participants and (multidisciplinary) viewers to set up the triangular conversation with the researchers who made the film. The third conclusion about the context of design documentaries is that audiovisual literacy in our media society offers a solid foundation for doing discovery research using design documentaries, and in relation to that, interdisciplinary cooperation in HCI and design.

Documentary film as a source of inspiration

Audiovisual literacy is not static. It continuously evolves through the media we use. As a genre, documentary film makes an important contribution to the development of audiovisual literacy skills in general, by offering dialectical analyses of the interaction between reality and how it is represented in film, to paraphrase Bruzzi’s (2000) definition of the genre. Documentary film’s contribution to the further development of audiovisual literacy is formed by finding new ways for film to connect to and create reality, by a continuous exploration of film language, and by the conversations the films evoke and contain. The development of the radical interdisciplinary programme of HCI and design can be supported by taking documentary film as a source of

inspiration for the further development of an interdisciplinary language based on audiovisual literacy. The fourth and last conclusion is that documentary film can serve as a source of inspiration to further develop the use of audiovisual literacy in interdisciplinary communication in HCI and design, through making design documentaries.

The introduction promised this work would aim for new ways to engage with design thinking for both people in general and designers, in design processes. Design documentaries aim to fulfil that promise, not just by offering a new connection between everyday life practices (design thinking, tactics) and professional design practices, but also through the way they engage in and communicate discovery research, building on the ideas and practices of documentary film.

Future work

Deliberately, every research has limitations alongside its accomplishments. Partly, these come with the methodology and methods that are followed. Taking an interpretive perspective as the philosophical orientation of this research, and the basis on which my methods build, allows other interpretations than mine of the phenomena I have investigated. I tested my interpretations at several stages of the research, with my supervisors and during presentations of my work at several universities and conferences and workshops (see page ix). This no doubt made them stronger, but certainly not incontestable. Being contestable is part of the essence and value of interpretive research in my opinion, an opinion shared with, for instance, Geertz (see page 194). The discussion about this work has, modestly, started and hopefully continues.

The number of design documentaries I made was deliberately limited, as was the range of design processes in which I could try their effect. I tried many different approaches to making the films, and many different environments in which to use them, which gave me a good idea of the opportunities the method offers, but little insight in its detailed effects in particular situations over longer time. The choice was deliberate, because I wanted to explore and investigate design documentaries as an idea rather than a prescriptive method that could be followed step by step. As a consequence, how to make a design documentary needs to be reinvented for each project, inspired by ideas and techniques from documentary film, previous design documentaries, and the participants, researchers, designers and possibly filmmakers who are involved in the project. Thinking through making films is the method I used and recommend. Engaging in the practice of making films will develop the method further, building on the personal skills and preferences of the people involved (see page 140), and documentary film as an inspiration. Ideally, design documentaries are never fixed but keep evolving as a method under these influences.

These limitations point to the fact that design documentaries as a method for discovery research are above all an idea. My personal interest in relation to pushing the idea further would be to work more with professional documentary filmmakers to see how their particular skills and

views (which can differ considerably between them) can influence design processes. Secondly I would like to further develop my own filming and research skills by making more design documentaries in design projects.

Above all it is the goal of design documentaries to serve as inspiration for the enrichment of our uses of video in discovery research, and through this practical approach influence the way we think about connecting everyday life to design processes. It will be clear that the work does not finish here; as Jean Rouch said: “The work must go on.” (see page 45)

Appendix A

The films I made during my research

Films marked with an * are included on the dvd attached to the inside of the back cover of this thesis.

On/Off the bus (2003, 3')

Observing different ways of using the Routemaster bus platform, inspired by Michel de Certeau's text on everyday life in cities.

Milton Keynes CitiTag trial (2004, 4')

Capturing the experience of a multiplayer electronic tagging game by running with the players on an open field. Part of a project with Yanna Vogiazou at Open University and HP labs/Mobile Bristol.

Bristol CitiTag trial (2004, 4')

Observing how playing the CitiTag game blends in with everyday life on St Augustin's Parade in Bristol city centre. Part of a project with Yanna Vogiazou at Open University and HP labs/Mobile Bristol.

Equator video ethnography (2004, 12 films of approx. 2')*

Interviews with two people in their homes about clutter and how they store and display things around the house. Presented as 12 clips connected to each other through keywords in an interactive interface. Part of the EPSRC-funded Equator project.

Fred (2004, 7')*

Portrait of a heart patient persona based on 7 interviews by Philips Medical Systems in Seattle. Reality and fiction are mixed by making a compilation of the material that was collected during the interviews. Commissioned by Philips.

Kent (2004, 11')*

A heart patient in London embodies the persona Kent (developed by Philips Medical Systems based on 9 interviews) by presenting parts of his own everyday life as illustrations of key issues for Kent. Commissioned by Philips.

Debra (2005, 10')*

The filmmaker wrote a letter in the name of Debra, a persona based on 9 interviews by Philips Medical Systems, to Joan, a heart patient in London. Joan responds with a video letter to Debra, comparing their everyday lives. Commissioned by Philips.

Snow train (2005, 3')

Investigation of the possibilities a train ride offers for dreaming, as suggested by Michel de Certeau.

The guest (2005, 7' and 3')*

The disruptions caused by a guest staying over in a family house as seen from the different perspectives of the people involved. In co-operation with Sue Venn and Jenny Hislop as part of a workshop of the Royal College of Art, INCITE at the University of Surrey and Goldsmiths College.

Media Mediators vlog (2005-6)*

Weblog on video (a vlog) of the creation, adoptions and appropriations of abstract moving objects connected to processes on personal computers in the home. With Tobie Kerridge and Andy Law, who created the objects for a Helen Hamlyn Research Centre project commissioned by Philips Design.

Drift (2006, 18')*

An exploration of how smart textiles can help people to navigate in a city if they are wandering around more than going from A to B. An engineer and an artist who work with smart textiles walk around the Barbican in London with the filmmaker, meeting people and finding stories that at the end of the film inspire a product design team of Therefore Ltd. who develop navigation systems. Commissioned by Design Plus for the How Smart Are We? conference.

Swim (2006, 6' + 4 times 3')*

A conversation about swimming and how smart textiles could enrich the experience of swimmers in a pool. The filmmaker observes two swimmers doing their lanes while we hear their thoughts about swimming and smart textiles, including fragments of a conversation one of them had with engineer Stan Swallow and weaver Asha Thompson of Intelligent Textiles Ltd. Commissioned by Design Plus for the How Smart Are We? conference.

Three thrill films (2006, 3 times 2') (coach)*

Three Royal College of Art students made a short compilation films about the thrill of fairgrounds, for an evening about science and thrill in the Science Museum. I produced the films and coached the filmmakers. Commissioned by artist Brendan Walker/Aerial FM.

Alena's strawberry farm (2006, 14') (coach)*

A film about the everyday lives of migrant fruit pickers at a strawberry farm in Kent. How do they manage to live in two countries and two cultures, and how do they keep in touch with friends and families? The film is made by Chinese documentary filmmaker XiaoXiao Sun and commissioned by Goldsmiths College/Interaction Research and France Telecom/Orange.

Appendix B

Personal background and motivation

To give an impression who is behind this text I have added a few words about the personal background I brought to this research. It will hopefully also offer additional clarification as to why I did this research the way I did it.

Before coming to London for this research project, I lived 23 years in Amsterdam, where I moved to do my MA studies, first in medicine (which I did not finish), then in cultural studies where I focused on how people use media and technology. I took ten years to complete my MA, largely because I was involved in many other things at the same time, things that turned out to be equally if not more influential for the knowledge, skills and attitudes I developed during these ten years. Besides being a student I was also involved in projects as a photographer, graphic designer, filmmaker, film projectionist, and book editor. Many of these activities took place in the Amsterdam squatter movement, and cultural and political institutions in Amsterdam, which both offered ample opportunity to start new initiatives with a group of friends and simply do things yourself, inventing how to do them along the way. It was a logical continuation of the exploration of creativity that had always been nurtured by my mother, artist, and father, architect. As kids we were always encouraged to make things, from jewellery to super-8 films – I made my first film when I was 10, about aliens landing in our little village Knegsel near Eindhoven. The squatters movement is I guess where I learned to be entrepreneurial too. Setting up your own ‘collective’ was common. I started a graphic design group, a film group and joined an independent critical publishing house.

In the early 1990s, after my MA, I started a non-profit organisation with seven other recent graduates, to bring our cultural studies ideas into practice in journalism, education and audience research. Soon after, we helped the public internet to burst onto the scene in Amsterdam – a very bottom-up event. Our organisation shifted focus to the internet as the main media we worked for, both commercially and non-commercially. We eventually became a company with 25 employees, owned and directed by me and my partner, who had been my other half in most of what I described above since shortly after I moved to Amsterdam.

We sold the company in 2000, to a large international Dutch design company who was hardly engaged yet in user research for interactive media. The main challenge we sought was to integrate user research with design. In an international 700+ people company going through the internet bust (but surviving it well), this was challenging indeed. Many things worked and many did not. The experience showed me that there are many opportunities to further develop collaborations between cultural studies inspired research into people’s everyday life and design,

with its potential to change everyday life, culture and society. A company and commercial projects seemed however not the ideal context to really develop these opportunities. Doctoral research seemed to offer a better environment for this. This dissertation is a testament to what I hopefully, and with the support of many who I thank in the acknowledgements, have achieved.

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