

Virkelighedens Digterhjerte (Uddrag)

Jon Bang Carlsen

3: Om at opfinde virkeligheden

Jeg opfatter den dokumentariske film som en kunstart. Og kunsten har altid skænket mig en uventet vinkel på tilværelsen, som skubber mig fremad i mit eget liv og giver mig muligheden for at handle i modsætning til den form for endimensionel journalistik, som gør folk til overinformede intellektuelle forsteninge, der aldrig vil fordøje det virkelighedsfragment, de lige oplevede på skærmen.

Med ryggen til deres egen verden sidder de og stirrer på en fremmed verden, som de ikke evner at trænge ind i, fordi historien blev fortalt af et mediemonster fra det ydre rum, som ingen af os deler følelser med.

Det er vigtigt at basere vores fortællinger på en række bevidste kunstneriske valg, så vi ikke som voyeur eller fluen på væggen udspioneerer livet, men deltager i det.

Ved at foretage kunstneriske valg gør vi os selv sårbar og synlige. Derved kan dialogen mellem os og den verden, vi vil berette om, blive frugtbar. Ved at investere os selv og vores egne erfaringer i den filmiske fortælling opnår vi den moralske ret til at fortælle historier, som jo aldrig kun er vores, men en del af et fælles følelsesmæssigt landskab. Kun ved at fabulere om verden kan vi bringe orden i vores indtryk og fange det uoverskuelige i en form, som gør det uoverskuelige aflæseligt.

"At opfinde virkeligheden" er en simpel nødvendighed. Hvis vi bare lader kameraet spejle virkeligheden, ser vi kun kroppen og ikke den sjæl, som bevæger den. Kun hvis du er talentfuld nok til at digte dig ind bag det tilsyneladende, og kun hvis du er modig nok til at være kompromisløst ærlig i din sansning af verden, vil du en gang imellem kunne skabe en fortælling, som kan bruges af andre.

Men det er en krævende disciplin, fordi du arbejder i det overbefolkede ingenmandsland mellem fiktion og dokumentation, hvor selv den mest skrásikre dramaturg må bevare sin ydmyghed over for livets uforudsigelighed og insistere på den autenticitet, som giver dokumentarfilmen dens uforlignelige fortællemæssige styrke.

Uden filmisk autenticitet kommer der ikke nogen rene toner ud af klaveret, ligegyldigt hvor godt du spiller, for du kan kun forholde dig fabulerende til virkeligheden ved at have benene solidt plantet i den.

For selvfølgelig bærer virkeligheden også maske. Det er filmmagerens opgave at komme bag om masken på den enkleste måde, og det er ofte uhyre kompliceret. Masken er tyk, så tyk, at vi indimellem kommer i tvivl og forledes til at tro, at masken er ansiget.

For mig er dokumentarfilmen ikke mere "virkeligt" end fiktionsfilmen, og fiktionsfilmen er ikke mere fabulerende end dokumentarfilmen. Der findes ikke nogen "virkelighed", som ikke set fra en anden vinkel kan afsløres som en drøm. For at fortælle om virkeligheden må man definere sandheden på en måde, så den ikke udelukker løgnen.

Derfor ser jeg heller ikke fiktionsfilm og dokumentarisme som to forskellige kunstneriske discipliner, men blot som divergerende måder at skabe en filmisk fortælling på. Som en maler, der finder stumper af virkelighed og bruger dem til at komponere sit billede med, sat over for en maler, der maler direkte fra tuben til lærredet.

Had enten du arbejder med fiktionsfilm eller dokumentarfilm, fortæller du historier. Den eneste måde du kan nærme dig verden, er ved at fantasere om vores fælles scene, som den opstår i spændingsfeltet mellem den konkrete fysiske verden og din sjæl, der fordøjer virkeligheden og kaster et bearbejdet billede tilbage i hovedet på verden.

Verden, sådan som den helt konkret strømmer ind gennem et menneskes øje, ville se helt anderledes ud, hvis øjet kunne projicere den tilbage. Og det er præcis, hvad vi filmmagere kan. Ved at fordøje virkeligheden i billeder og lyd og sende den forandret tilbage i hovedet på den ydre verden træder den dokumentariske film for alvor i karakter og trænger ind bag det tilsyneladende – ind dør, hvor livet leveres.

Det er filmmagernes "store nummer", og som i alle rigtige cirkusforestillinger har udøverne deres hemmelige tricks – som for eksempel at forandre virkelighedens detaljer, for at artisten kan blive let nok til at svæve hen over manegen.

Da jeg optog *Før gæsterne kommer* (1984) om to ældre kvinder på Fanø, som er ved at forårsåbne et gammelt badehotel, elskede jeg hotellet, men fandt udsigten fra vinduerne forkert i forhold til historien. Derfor fik vi fremstillet falske vinduer og transporterede dem ud i de landskaber, som jeg syntes berigede filmens mood.

Jeg nægter at være tilfældighedernes gidsel, selv om jeg maler med virkelighed på penslen.

I mine øjne skal filmmageren ikke nøjes med at affilme verden, som den nu engang udfolder sig foran optikken, for siden at klippe den til i passende længder. Filmen skal fordøje det sete, præcis som vi mennesker gør, for siden at tilpasse virkeligheden éns egen oplevelse af den. Ellers bliver det hele meningsløst som mad, der passerer igennem kroppen uden at give næring.

Enhver kunstnerisk formulering må rive sig fri af sit kildemateriale og skabe et "eget" univers med egne såvel etiske som æstetiske love. Derfor vil den gængse identifikation mellem dokumentarisme og sandfærdighed altid være fejlagtig, og ligeledes den gængse identifikation mellem fiktion og fri fantasi.

For at fortælle om en verden, som er uendelig og ustoppelig i sin udtryksrigdom, må man træffe ultimative og manipulative valg, der i enkelte lykkelige øjeblikke alligevel opnår at fange det ustoppelige i en fast form, som vi kan spejle os i og beriges af.

For mig er konflikten mellem virkeligheden og vores drømme ikke et kunstnerisk problem, men et menneskeligt grundvilkår centralt for hele vores måde at opleve livet på.

Mens jeg filmede *Min irlske dagbog* (1996), skød jeg en lille scene i en irlsk landsbyskole. Lærerinden spurgte Trevor på syv om, hvem han så, når han kiggede sig selv i spejlet. Uden at kunne svare blev drengen ved med at stirre genert på sit spejlbillede.

4: Om at bruge virkeligheden som springbræt

Jeg har aldrig haft noget problem med at tage virkeligheden for højtidelig. I min metodefilm *How to Invent Reality* (1996), som jeg optog i forbindelsen med produktionen af *It's Now or Never* i Irland, siger jeg: "Fra min første film har jeg befundet mig i et tåget ingenmandsland, hvor grænsen mellem fiktion og dokumentarisme langsomt forsvinder. Jeg sidder i tidsubstemt isolationsfængsel bag mine egne øjne og ser interesseret ud på verden. Jeg kan ikke dele synsvinkel med andre, hvor gerne jeg end ville. Jeg kan kun se verden ved at belyse den med mig selv. Derfor er min egen skygge altid en stor del af den færdige film, og derfor har mine film ikke noget med sandhed at gøre. De er mine sansninger af verden, intet andet."

"Bare studer virkeligheden," sagde mine lærere for mange år siden på Den Danske Filmskole. Men når jeg så på verden, opfattede jeg meget mere end det, som faktisk mødte mine øjne.

Hvad er det sande billede? Personligt valgte jeg at bruge virkeligheden som springbræt.

Og engang havnede jeg i Phoenix, Arizona, sammen med en Vietnamveteran fra den yderste højrefløj, som kedede sig ad helvede til i forstædersnes stilhed. Desperat prøvede han at overtale den tryghedssøgende amerikanske middelklasse til at forsvere sig med våben mod de mexicanske horder, som snart ville invadere deres "suburban bliss". Men selv om han fik pustet ild i angsten hos forstadsfamilierne, kedede det også den gamle soldat ad helvede til at se dem stå ude i ørkenen i deres pænt strøgne camouflagetoj og skyde forbi målet med deres velpudsede pumpguns. Adrenalinjunkien fra "those special missions behind enemy lines, where the helicopter dropped me off at last light and I had no idea who was waiting for me just below in the darkness of the jungle," havde endelig mødt en fjende, han ikke kunne besejre. Kedsomheden. Boredom.

Så var det, vi dukkede op med vores kamera og bad ham spille sig selv. Pludselig sprang adrenalinens kilde igen. At træde ind foran et kamera og stå ansigt til ansigt med et ukendt publikum var dødsens farligt for en mand, som det meste af sit professionelle liv havde arbejdet undercover. Inden længe kæmpede han og jeg indædt om, hvor grænserne gik for hans virkelighed.

Hvis jeg selv indimellem som filmmager bevægede mig på små svinekærinder uden for virkelighedens domæne, så vendte han resolut ryggen til sin egen virkelighed. At vise kameraet sine trøstesløse hverdage i selskab med middelklassens uheroiske forstadskrigere var meningsløst for ham. Spild af film. En hån mod publikum. Boredom.

Til glæde for kameraet ville han skabe en krig i Phoenix, Arizona. Han ville angribe en flok forbrydere, der havde kidnappet en kvinde i en shopping mall, indhente svinene til hest, fandenivoldsk ride op over bilen og medhestens bagben sparke forruden og forbryderne fæs i smadde for slutteligt at bringe kvinden tilbage, siddende udmatet, men smilende på hans hest med ryggen mod den ensomme kriger. Krig og kærlighed.

Kk.

Han ville, at filmen skulle vise alt andet end den kedsomhed, der som en langsomt virkende giftgas forpestede hans liv i Phoenix' fredsommelige forstæder.

Efter en lang kamp, der udmattede os begge, skrev jeg en historie om hans liv, som det set gennem mine øjne udspillede sig i ingenmandslandet mellem hans drømme og hans virkelighed. Jeg prøvede at give hans dagligdag en form, så både det liv, der umiddelbart kunne ses af kameraet, og det liv, som lå gemt i hans sind, blev synligt for publikum. For selvfølgelig fulgte jeg med ham ind i drømmene. De fyldte betydeligt mere i hans hjerte end hverdagene i de alt for stille forstæder. "To hesitate is to die," gentog han igen og igen, midt i et landskab, som var én lang tøven.

Kampen mellem det synlige og det usynlige i eks-krigerens liv var vigtig og nødvendiggjorde, at jeg som filmmager var rede til at vende ryggen til den prosaiske virkelighed for at komme hele vejen rundt om min hovedperson.

Men ligegyldigt hvor megen fri fantasi eller løgn den filmiske fortælling indeholder, så er "fortællingen" det mest eksakte, vi har, hvis den er kompromisløst ærlig over for de følelser, vi bærer derinde bag vore øjne, hvor vi er unikke og kun kan gisne om andre menneskers forhold til verden.

"We just shoot him," sagde bestyrelsesformanden for den overlevelsesskole i Arizona, hvor min hovedperson var headmaster. Jeg havde netop mundligt fremlagt mit filmprojekt, og de bevæbnede mænd diskuterede, hvilken klemme de havde på mig, hvis jeg misbrugte materialet tilbage i mit kommunistiske hjemland, Danmark. Det blev konklusionen på mødet.

"We just shoot him."

Dét er en stor fordel ved at arbejde med skuespillere, som spiller rollen frem for at være den. De skyder for det meste ikke filmmageren, hvis de er utilfredse med resultatet.

Underligt nok.

5: Om at tegne med tvivlens blyant

En af filmmediets største svagheder er dets tilsyneladende evne til at "vise det hele". Denne totalitet stiller sig i vejen for tilskuerens mest frugtbare sanse-apparat, nemlig evnen til at digte verden færdig og derved placere sig i den filmiske fortællings univers.

Som kunstart lider filmen under samme svaghed som amatørmaleriet, nemlig at man ofte har tendens til at male helt ud til rammen. Antydningens kunst bliver kvalt i et væld af ligegyldige informationer, som dræber tilskuerens meddigtende sans. Der findes i billedsproget en dynamik mellem dét, som vises, og dét, som ikke vises, og når filmen er slut, står dét, som ikke blev vist, ofte stærkest på nethinden. Kameraet egner sig i det hele taget bedst til at ase verden—frem for at glo lige på den med sit til tider alt for bastante blik.

Hvilken lidelse at måtte se og se uden en gang imellem at kunne sløre verden ved at sænke øjenlåget. Visse steder i verden bruges dét at holde folks øjne konstant åbne efter sigende som tortur.

Ventetiden mellem menneskers handlinger er det visuelle landskab, som siger mig mest. Mennesker har altid forekommet mig mest fotogene, når de ikke gemmer sig bag handlinger, men når tvivlen om handlingens relevans åbner deres ansigter og gør dem smukke. Når mennesker befinner sig imellem handlinger, må de sænke skjoldene for at se på verden og beslutte sig for en ny retning. Tvivlen oplyser deres ansigter og giver kameraet en chance for at se mennesket bag handlingens maske.

I filmens verden skjules skuespilleres ansigter ofte bag handlinger af mediefolk, som er nervøse for, om synet af tvivl på stjernernes ansigter skal slække plottets jerngreb i publikum og ødelægge box office. Tvivl erude blandt action men. To hesitate is to die.

For mig er evnen til tvivl en af de smukkeste menneskelige egenskaber, og det er deprimerende at opleve, hvordan tvivlen konstant forsøges elimineret fra det mentale landskab i både den dokumentariske og den fiktionelle film.

At vise tvivl er ikke en svaghed, men et tegn på, at en person ikke er forstenet i sit syn på verden. Ved siden af kærligheden er tvivlen en af fortællingens grundpiller. Hver eneste indstilling i filmen skal vokse ud af tvivlen. Uden tvivl er der ingen historie, ingen udvikling, ingen identificerbare karakterer, og derfor mister mediet sin evne til at kommunikere på et dybere plan end de sædvanlige femoghalvfems biler, der eksploderer for fødderne af The Statue of Liberty. Igen og igen som en traumatiseret isbjørn, der gentager de samme ulykkelige bevægelser i sit fangenskab.

Som en kultur i krampe.

Det er for at få tvivlen som medspiller, at jeg er så fascineret og afhængig af "det autentiske ansigt". Kun det ansigt, som er sminket af tiden, kan bære pausen, uden at livet kollapsede af kedsomhed for dets fødder. Den professionelle skuespiller, som spiller "en anden", bæres igennem af historiens fremdrift, af dens suspense, af plottet. Hans ellers hendes autenticitet er for svag til at stå alene uden at blive båret oppe af handlingen. Det kan kun det ansigt, som ikke kan afsminkes. Det autentiske ansigt, der er uddannet på hverdagens skuespillerskole, som kun sætter skuespilleren i stand til at spille én rolle. Sit livs rolle.

Som storforbruger af virkelighedsfragmenter kæmper jeg for at bevare øjeblikkets autenticitet, men heldigvis overrumpler virkeligheden mig hele tiden og tvinger mig til at slå hul på min filmiske form, så pulsen i materialet ikke dør og efterlader mig med en formfuldendt skabelon af en film uden et selvstændigt jeg, som forbinder sig med livet uden for filmens rum.

Som søn af en billedhugger ved jeg, hvor vigtigt det er, at porcelænsfigurer af og til falder på gulvet og smadres, så man slipper fri af formens klaustrofobi og igen med tvivlen som blyant kan forsøge at tegne sig frem til en ny form.

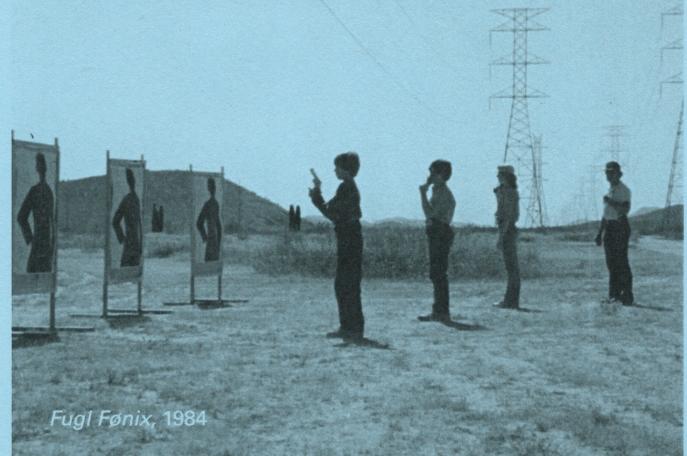
Kun amatører foregiver at have fuldstændig kontrol over egne film. De professionelle ved, at man ofte bliver forvirret eller blandet af følelserne i materialet og må gå videre med bind for øjnene. Og det er ikke nogen dårligt ting at miste kontrollen over materialet, for det tvinger os filmmagere til at prøve at lytte os igennem til verden bag sædvanens syntaks.

Virkeligheden er transparent, og man skal ikke blive overrasket, hvis man pludselig ser sit eget forvirrede ansigt blandt de agerende. Tit og ofte føles det, som om livet foran kameraet kigger "den forkerte vej" gennem optikken. Det føles som at få en fisk på krogen, der er stærkere end dig selv og som der-for trækker dig ud i havet, så alle dine skudplaner opløses i saltvand og bliver vidunderligt ulæselige.

Virkelighedens Digterhjerte by Jon Bang Carlsen was originally published in *At opfine virkeligheden: tekster om film og liv* (Copenhagen: Tiderne Skifter, 2017).



Hotel of the Stars, 1981



Fugl Fønix, 1984

How To Film Becoming Invisible

Hélène Cixous, 2006

"Do you know Hagazussa?" asks the Voice of the Voice. Hagazussa, says the film, was a witch who became invisible by dint of going from village to village—like the horse cart's wheels we follow on the ribbon of road which vanishes into the fog at the back of the screen to the rhythm of disappearance—and all that was left of her were the traces of her invisibility, the traces and the invisibility. Only those who have the gift of invisibility are invisible. Spectral presence, spectral power. The Voice of the film is soft, enchanting, monotonous, tenderly spectral. Invisible. Present. Powerful presence of the Voice that evokes.

"Do you know Ruth Beckermann?" I (Hélène Cixous) do not know her, I say. But as soon as I take the Paper Bridge, die papiere Brücke, its paths, its voices, its mists, its rivers, its passages, I realize that I recognize her, that I have always already known her. With joy I make her acquaintance again [re-connais], and I salute her, poet in images, painter in words, Voice that listens to the voices of old, the voices of the ages, today. When everything has been erased, when everything has gone up in smoke from the concentration camp chimneys, or been buried in communal graves or cemeteries which are in turn disappearing, only the voices remain—the innumerable voices of all colors, tones, timbers, accents, which floated in the air of the Austro-Hungarian Empire where Ruth Beckermann's family, like my family (the Kleins, the Jonases), prospered and traded, like the Kleins, the Grosses, the Jews of "Conversation in the Mountains" by Paul Celan, all these musical speakers in the German language seasoned with delicious accents, the Romanians, Ruthenians, Jews, Armenians, Hungarians, Poles, Ukrainians, all coexisting and splashing about in the streets of Bukovina, this province sometimes Austro-Hungarian, sometimes Romanian, then Russian, like so many other countries carried off by history slipping over bridges from one bank to the other, from one nationality to the other. This is the history of Ruth Beckermann's family. It is the history of the Klein family, which was Hungarian, German, Czechoslovak and today Slovakian—and tomorrow? They all speak a German that is either "Hoch," beautiful, noble, pure, or an alloy colored with Yiddish or Viennese.

O the peoples of the voice, who are slipping away, becoming invisible. When they are no longer here, who will "bear witness for the witness?" Then comes the voice of Ruth Beckermann, the voice that listens, that looks, and that records. With an invisible tape recorder and camera. No, this is not a documentary, it is a living work which pushes the filmic art beyond its contiguities with poetry, narrative, introspection, by putting the most subtle resources of metaphor and metonymy to work for the desire to Safeguard. Guard what? Signs, traits, the sublimated spirit of the Lives of a certain world, of a certain culture, which is very precise and at the same time a synonym for humankind. Imagine an exemplary, loving anthropology. The marvelous representativity of an individual standing for the universe.

With metaphor and metonymy, by transport, displacement, condensation, with cart, and ferry, drifting over lands and seas, space in uninterrupted, time is uninterrupted. Today goes to visit yesterday. Ruth Beckermann, born in Vienna returns to Vienna, her voyage circular, the voyage of life passes through Israel, Palestine, Radautz, the astrakhan tailor's boutique gives onto the shirt-seller's boutique, Ruth Beckermann's father's boutique, in the background I see my great-grand-father's sack factory, my grandfather's jute factory, skins touch the heart, hands touch each other. We are on a voyage. Not to arrive. Not even to depart. To be at the window and to watch beings and cities happening.

The window: the first window: is it the one in the house in Vienna through which Ruth Beckermann does not look, says the voice? But then who looks? Who sees the intersection of the noble city of Vienna through the veiled window? If it is not her, Ruth Beckermann, then it is the cat. Because it is not only Jews who look in this film, not only voices. There is also: the cat. In the beginning at the window, there is the cat. At the end, there is the cat at the window.

I watch this sublime film. My cat watches the magic screen of the eternal present with me. She sits before the cat in the film.

Thus goes the film: from cat to cat. A window refers to another window. A bridge leads to another bridge. An iron bridge turns into a paper bridge. A legend tells a story. The roll of paper becomes film. The camera is rolling. The first window crystallizes the second window. The Voice is at the window. We do not see the interior this time. The gaze travels outside, the City goes by. The outside makes the inside: the invisible inside is a bus. Outside, Vienna. People come and go. On the film's outbound voyage we travel towards the west of Vienna. On the film's return we take the invisible Bus which looks, in the opposite direction, towards the East.

The Bus is a metaphor. Of course. Metaphor also or supplement of the camera. The Voice is in the Bus as the soul is in the camera. We take the bus in order to watch the city pass, slip by. The cart leads the gaze, which follows its back, in the fading here below.

The attic: it is up there that everything happens, in sublimation. It is "said" through images that memory is the point of view of the above, from above.

The technique: a *mise en abyme*, but natural, in successive depths, as in a remembered, recollected life: life is a narrative, the narrative makes life. The camera of the heart looks at each scene with intensity. I have come from afar, says she (the Voice, the Camera), to look through the lens, through the keyhole of time, slightly opening the curtains, because to see what is so resistant and so precarious, what remains, there must be a sort of little machination which makes appear, an optical charm. We recognize here the work of the Veil, of Veils, Curtains, mists, the thickness of windows. Vapors. "Vapors" on the frozen sea which with its hybrid surface, liquid, solid—comes to mix Romania with Yugoslavia. Vapor—Veiling, unveiling. Unveiling. Un/veil [Dé-voile]. Vaporous thick un/veils of the Mikvah. Ah! The Mikvah. The Mikvah of Czernowitz is a bit misused. Now the bodies one discerns through its opaque steam are Bukovinian peasant women, who are right to use this odd disused sauna. It is no longer the bodies of Jewish women. Do you know the Mikvah?

In England, says my aunt Eri (ninety-two years old, life voyage: Osnabrück, Paris, Osnabrück, Turkey, Haifa—Palestine, Köln, Manchester), in England all the girls, still today, 2006, if they get married they go to the Mikvah. It was, it is, the ritual purification bath for the Jewish woman. After menstruation, before marriage. Now these robust, intermingled bodies are those of peasants. A child walks in father Beckermann's memory, a child in the Voice, a child in the long Czernowitz street, in the film. Who speaks? Sometimes I, sometimes you. Who looks. Like a child who looks with the most living of curiosities. My mother Eve (ninety-five years old Strasbourg Germany Osnabrück Paris Oran Algeria Paris) Eve Klein watches Ruth Beckermann watching. Like children who watch.

I am sitting in the dining room and I am watching Paper Bridge. I am sitting with my mother Eve Klein and her sister Eri. Eve my German mother is ninety-five years old, my aunt the little one is ninety-two. We watch. On one hand I watch Ruth Beckermann watch the life of her people, her parents, the Jews, those of Vienna, those of Bucovina, of Israel, of Russia, those from everywhere called "the survivors". I watch Ruth Beckermann outlive the survivors, follow them live them, hyper-see them.

On the other hand I watch my two old goddesses watch those other Jews, of The Paper Bridge, the same ones, not exactly the same, my two old voyaging goddesses, first Germany in the beginning Osnabrück from there to Algeria, to Palestine, Hungary, Austro-Hungary, Czechoslovakia, from there to Germany, to France, to England, to the USA, from there to Israel, to France.

According to the endless merry-go-round of these human elements whose memory is forever being relit like Hanukkah candles. At the same time I watch myself watching on one side and on the other. The gazes go from one bank to the other, take bridges which lead from the visible to the spectral, from the present to the past, return burdened with time, the past is still moving, hesitates to become the past past. It has the uncertain consistence of rivers. The past walks sometimes with a child's gait sometimes an old man's, in the streets of Radautz, in the mud of Czernowitz. Czernowitz, city without age, as if there was only one century, very ancient, and which continues. Czernowitz, birthplace of Ruth Beckermann's father. And of Paul Celan, the greatest German language poet of this endless century. His name is not pronounced by the Voice. I do not know why. Perhaps it is like the name of God? It is Everywhere nowhere.

Ruth Beckermann thinks about Oma Rosa, her Viennese grand-mother who survived during the war by being silent, hidden in the toilets of Vienna. Oma went from time to time into the forest to talk to her Voice with her Voice. Can one forget one's own voice? This is a real question. It is the question of the Voice of the Film. Oma's own voice is also the voice of Ruth Beckermann's Voice: a voice survives if it is heard. It is also the voice of Omi Rosi, my grand-mother the mother of Eve and Eri. From voice to voice. We, the echoes. As the Voice, Ruth Beckermann, says, "everything is simple," from a certain point of hearing. Everything is so simple in this film, so sublimely subtle and attentive, that one might not notice, everything is so delicate.

For example: the three peasants with their headscarves, embarrassed, Jewish (this cannot be seen) with the hen. The woman caresses the hen. It is her hen. Then she has its throat cut. Everything is so simple. It is a ritual cutting of the throat. I closed my eyes as soon as I saw the knife. I know. My aunt watches the plucked hens. They are being plucked. Another unveiling. "I remember when we did that," says my aunt Eri. "My mother received the hens like that and the maid does it." The throat-cutter. "The Schauchet," says Eri, "that word's a bit Yiddish. Schauchet: the one who made things kosher, and did circumcisions too." That Rabbi has a lot of work to do in this remainder of a country where the Jews oscillate in the impossible: they want to leave and to stay at the same time. Leavestay. "Yiddisches deutsch," says Eri. At first, my two Germans vacillated: Viennese is not German.

Then they gently slid into the film through the window.

Everything is simple and stubborn. How I know that obstinacy, that endurance. Herbert Gropper, who leads the visit of the dead, takes advantage of the endurance of the cemetery with a thousand mossy tombs: he passes into immortality, by the grace of the film Ruth Beckermann is making. His cheeky image, his cordial voice, his humor will survive. He too has a knack (knack: chic: Geschick skill, Schicksal destiny) for passing from one bank to the other. As for the cemetery, it will be encircled in order to resist time. At least two hundred years. After which we'll see.

The endurance and obstinacy of Frau Rosenheck, who struts about: does she not have two students, doesn't she still have two students? What do they study? Ivrit, naturally. Her students emigrate. She too will become invisible. But for the film.

The Voice listens, says nothing, lets live. Treasures, humble pearls of humanity. We are going to cry. We laugh. "I like Romania," it says softly, "because everyone is corruptible: no system can be maintained there." Eri says: "When the Romanian Jews came to Israel people said: we must lock the doors. They are thieves, even if they're Jewish." I laugh. Who is what? A face, from a painting. Surprise: a face painted with watercolors. This is how the extraordinary Scene of Theresienstadt begins. We no longer know where we are, who we are. These Jews are imitation Jews, more Jewish than Jews. They play dead, they play survivors, they play themselves. They are going to be filmed in a reconstitution!!! What are the differences between Jews, Jews who pretend to be Jews, post-Jews, filmed Jews, Jews who film, etc. It makes you dizzy. Cruelty makes its grotesque and magnificent nest behind the scenes. Ruth Beckermann's stroke of genius: we remain on the border. No pathos. Teresienstadt where Omi's sisters and brother died. Are we not actors, spectators of the theatre of the world? This is how one saves, and is saved: atrocious reality becomes theater, narrative on condition: one's gaze must be soft as a voice that keeps the calm of immortality. The different species of the living and the surviving are ready to quarrel, to swear at each other, each one according to its truth or special effects.

And this minimal terrifying saga ends with a veil: the white tablecloth with the overturned plastic cups. The yellow chairs are empty. We are perhaps frail sturdy cups overturned on the tablecloth of the world? The tablecloth became a frozen sea. Or else we are hard ice cubes, which can melt... Everything depends on the meditative gentleness of the being who watches.

How beautiful you are, world seen by eyes without violence, the just eyes of Ruth Beckermann.

This gaze is not innate: the Voice tells us that it arrived at this gaze, this is the only voyage, in the end, which will have arrived somewhere. At a serene reconciliation with all the cruel, wounding and shameful aspects of reality, as with the figures of love and of fidelity as well. This Gaze, Ruth Beckermann's Gaze, must have gazed at itself: there was a time when it looked with shame at the Jewish storekeepers of Vienna, thus with a shameful Jew's gaze. Now this Gaze has arrived at Seeing. Simply seeing: Life. Which is beautiful, and makes us laugh.

In the end, there is Silence, the suspension of torment. The silence of the Photos which let themselves be looked at and look at us. Freeze-frame of human faces.

Here is a little girl. Photos of the Voice. It is her signature: to look with the intensity and the innocence of a little girl.

Or of a cat.

In the end, at the window, there is the cat: "Am I Jewish? Or Jewess?" thinks the cat, who is perhaps a she-cat.

In the end I think of Ruth Beckermann, of the steady Voice of her Gaze. Of the grace of her attention. Passion without passion. Compassion. I think we owe her a moment of kindness.

22-1-2006

Translated from French by Eric Prenowitz





Jenny, 1977



Paper Bridge, 1987

Terrassen
Ruth Beckermann and Jon Bang Carlsen

On the occasion of the Danish launch of the recently published anthology *Strangers Within: Documentary Encounter*, Terrassen presents a two day programme with two of the contributors to the book: the Danish director Jon Bang Carlsen and the Austrian director Ruth Beckermann.

Jon Bang Carlsen's text *The Image of the Village* and Ruth Beckermann's text *In Praise of Detours* both reflect on the making of their films that will be screening at Bio Benjamin at Cinemateket over the two days.

- + Saturday January 7, 16.30 / 19.00
- + Sunday January 8, 16.30 / 19.30 / 21.30
- + Bio Benjamin, Cinemateket (Gothersgade, 1123 KBH)
- + Free entrance

Films

Saturday January 7

Jon Bang Carlsen

16.30: Phoenix Bird (1984, 48 min.) + Hotel of the Stars (1981, 58 min.) with an introduction by Terrassen + a brief conversation with Jon Bang Carlsen.

19.00: Jenny (1977, 38 min.) + Before the Guests Arrive (1986, 18 min.) + Addicted to Solitude (1999, 60 min.) with an introduction by Terrassen + a conversation with Jon Bang Carlsen.

After the screening *Strangers Within* will be launched and sold for a special price.

Sunday January 8

Ruth Beckermann

16.30: The Paper Bridge (1987, 95 min.) with an introduction by Terrassen + a short video introduction by Ruth Beckermann.

19.30: Towards Jerusalem (1991, 85 min.) with an introduction by Terrassen + a short video introduction by Ruth Beckermann.

21.30: Those Who Go Those Who Stay (2013, 75 min.) with an introduction by Terrassen + a short video introduction by Ruth Beckermann.

"*Making films and travelling means to move around in unsafe zones, to be always ready for surprises. To lose your way, to go astray in order to discover something that you could not foresee but is perhaps exactly what you were looking for. Every detour changes the destination.*"

—Ruth Beckermann

The screenings are kindly supported by the Austrian Embassy Copenhagen

About the anthology

Strangers Within is an anthology exploring the idea of documentary as encounter through essays, stories, interviews and other creative responses by filmmakers, artists, and writers. The texts engage with the risks of encounter, unsettling assumptions about the distinctions between host and guest; stranger and friend; self and other; documentarian and protagonist. Opening up a series of questions about the mystery of another person, whose difference and unknowability is already a part of one's self, the anthology offers a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the convergences between encounter, hospitality and autobiography.

Published by Prototype Publishing

Edited by Therese Henningsen and Juliette Joffé

With Khalik Allah, Ruth Beckermann, Jon Bang Carlsen, Adam Christensen, Annie Ernaux, Gareth Evans, Jane Fawcett, Xiaolu Guo, Ummama Hamido, Therese Henningsen, Marc Isaacs, Mary Jiménez Freeman-Morris, Juliette Joffé, Andrew and Eden Kötting, David MacDougall, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Toni Morrison, Bruno de Wachter and Andrea Luka Zimmerman.

Terrassen is a roving cinema in Copenhagen that engages with the social life of film. All screenings are free and open to everyone. For information on past and future screenings visit www.terrassen.bio.