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**Town of Strangers: The Performative 'Making-of' Film and the
Production of Reality**

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TOWN OF STRANGERS

The Performative 'Making-of' Film and the Production of Reality



Production Shot from *Town of Strangers*

Treasa O'Brien

March 2018

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy*

University of Westminster

This thesis is dedicated to the 50,000 people who got trapped in Greece as they were travelling to other parts of Europe on 23 March 2016 when Fortress Europe closed its borders.

Author's Declaration

I declare that all of the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

ABSTRACT

This practice-based research project comprises two related components: a feature length film *Town of Strangers* (80 mins) and this written thesis (c. 50,000 words). The film *Town of Strangers* is an exploration of longing and belonging in the lives of several people with hybrid identities in the small Irish town of Gort, Co. Galway, who responded to a casting call in September 2015 by the filmmaker. This thesis text explicates the methodology and context for the film, which aims to explore documentary filmmaking as the production of reality rather than as observable truth.

The research examines the place of the filmmaker, in relation to the subjects represented in the film. It searches for ways to respond to Lila Abu-Lughod's call to make the lives of others less other (1991), and to Sara Ahmed's concept of the stranger (2000). It presents the embedded research period as a literary ethnofiction in the first chapter, placing the author at the centre of the research in the third person. This is extended to the performance of the filmmaker as another character in the film, in the third person, and proposes that this construction is an expanded form of first person filmmaking.

The thesis proposes the concept of the 'performative making-of' film as a primary generative form. It reflects on the discoveries made through the processes of scriptwriting, auditioning, storytelling, fabulation, ethnofiction and making-of methods. It frames the overall method as a form of reflexive lucid dreaming, in the dynamic between surrender and control, in both the shooting and the editing processes. The thesis and the film are framed as an encounter between filmmaker and subjects, filmmaker and the material, and between the filmmaker and herself.

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ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL

Town of Strangers

dir. Treasa O'Brien, 2018, Ireland, 82'

Link to full film: <https://vimeo.com/278705298>

Password: rightbrain



Still from Town of Strangers

The Blow-in

dir. Treasa O'Brien, 2016, Ireland/Spain/Germany, 9'

<https://treasaobrien.wordpress.com/films/the-blow-in/>

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I wish to extend my deepest thanks to the people who fabulated and dreamt with me, and participated in the journey of *Town of Strangers*, trusting me with their representations. Tashakor, Shukran, Obrigada & Cheers Mate to:

Hamid

Elham

Dido

Ralf

Chloe

Josie

Ana

Rosa

Rowan

and T.

"If you are happy in a dream, Ammu, does that count? Estha asked.

"Does what count?"

"The happiness does it count?"

She knew exactly what he meant, her son with his spoiled puff.

Because the truth is, that only what counts, counts ...

"If you eat fish in a dream, does it count?"

Does it mean you've eaten fish?

- Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

INTRODUCTION

'What do the films document? Is it that very move towards the other?
Or do they in fact *perform* that move, thereby showing that
documenting and performing are inseparable?'

(Mieke Bal, in Lebow & Juhasz, 2015, p177)

a) **The Stranger as an Other**

Town of Strangers searches for methods of working with the other in documentary filmmaking practice to express how we live our lives in our imagination, and how the stories we tell ourselves about our lives are performed as we tell them. These methods are experimental and are practiced as forms of research into how reality, or truth, is produced in filmmaking and how a filmmaker can consciously try to make the lives of others less other (Abu-Lughod, 1991). This research aims to contribute to a new understanding of the politics of performativity and participation in cinema through a re-interpretation of the agency of the subject as storyteller.

The foundational idea for this practice-based doctoral project was to use a fictional script I had been working on to create the situation for a 'making-of' film to happen and potentially take over from it. I moved to the small town of Gort in the west of Ireland in 2015, where I had set this fictional script and spent a few months researching in the area before calling auditions for the film. Gort boasted two superlative statistics; it was the town with the most nationalities in Ireland, relative to its small population¹; and it was the town worst hit by austerity².

During the research period, I became more and more interested in how people had come to Gort and if, or how, they perceived themselves to be strangers and/or 'blow-ins'. A blow-in is an Irish term (usually benign) for someone who is not native to the immediate area; they could be from the next village or from much further afield. I started to use the term 'stranger' in my interactions with local people and in the filming. When I first met Gerry, a local butcher and a folk healer, he told me that the town was sometimes known as the 'Town of Strangers'. This became the working title of the film before I really knew what the film would become. Looking back, I realise now that this was a first step in the performativity of the film – by naming it, I somehow set in motion the processes of how it would become itself.

I asked people, who came to the auditions, to describe what a stranger meant to them. Through this process, I started to read the experience of the auditions themselves as an encounter between strangers, which implicated me as one of these strangers. The idea of the stranger grew in my imagination, until I realised it informed how I was imagining Gort, and my position here – and, crucially, how I imagined the residents of Gort imagined me. If I recognised them as strangers to me, then I must also recognise myself as a stranger to them, and even to myself. Ana, one of the subject-participants of *Town of Strangers*, knew this intuitively when she answered my question, during her audition, 'What is a stranger?' with 'You! You are the stranger!'³

Julia Kristeva, in *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991), looks at the history of the foreigner's search for belonging and their exclusion from social groups and citizenship. Kristeva concludes by asking us to acknowledge the stranger

inside ourselves, as a way to build empathy between 'ourselves' and the foreigner. Building on Freudian psychoanalysis, she asks "How could one tolerate the stranger if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself?" (1991, p182). It may seem a sympathetic stance, a journey towards the other that recognises otherness in one's self, but it is written from the standpoint of the non-stranger or the non-foreigner. Sara Ahmed (2000, p6) criticises Kristeva's concept of the 'stranger within' as one that privileges the journey of self-discovery. We cannot all be strangers. Ahmed sees Kristeva's stranger within ourselves as too universalising and one that makes invisible the political processes that others the stranger along racial lines (Ahmed, 2005, p96).

When Ana said "You! You are the stranger", did she mean that relatively speaking there are so many foreigners in Gort that I, the white Irish woman, am in the minority? Or did she mean that, from her perspective, she is not a stranger; the strangers are those she does not identify with such as Irish people. We cannot identify as strangers because each person's identity is familiar to them, so being a stranger depends on your perspective. We can only view strangers as those other to ourselves, not ourselves or within ourselves. To identify as a foreigner or stranger is to internalise a projected identity from someone else upon you. Hence Ana's assertion "You! You are the stranger" is an iteration of selfhood. The stranger is not within, the stranger must be out there in order for our selfhood to remain intact. So we can all be strangers at different moments depending on who is identifying but we cannot all be strangers at the same time.

Sara Ahmed troubles the concept of the stranger as a figure, in her book *Strange Encounters*, even when positively constructed, as one that means a

'granting of figurability' to the stranger (2000, p4-6), which ultimately reinforces otherness. Ahmed writes of how the stranger is fetishised in community alert programmes, like 'Stranger Danger'; how it is commodified by capitalism (example of The Body Shop and its 'ethnic' products), and how the stranger is co-opted by language, such as 'multiculturalism' and 'diversity' (2000, p6). *Town of Strangers*, the film project and the written thesis, is self-conscious about the danger of stranger fetishisation and aims to resist it throughout. I was conscious, from the beginning, of the risk in my project of reinforcing the figure of the stranger as a caricature, a figure divorced from its own history. Rather than locate the stranger within ourselves, Ahmed explores encounter as a way to encourage empathy and collectivity without universalising.

One strategy I adopted was to make this film in a town where I am both an insider and an outsider and to construct my own position as one that questions who is a stranger. I am from Ireland, so I am not a 'foreigner' but I am a 'blow-in' in the town of Gort. The repetition of the phrase 'the stranger' in Chapter One: *A Stranger Came to Town* takes the name stranger from mystery to familiarity to parody. By granting it such repetitive figurability, and making it obvious that it is a thin proxy for my own self, I show the figure of the stranger as self-reflexively and ironically constructed.

In my account of Gort in Chapter One in which I assume the character of the stranger, I write performatively of my position and identity in relation to other people, using the third person. Thus, my 'character' is 'the stranger' and becomes a subject of my own study. I write of the other strangers I meet in Gort *in relation to* my own self as a stranger who has recently arrived there. Thus, I grant this figurability to all subjects, including myself. In fabulating

Gort, everyone is *constructed* as a stranger, which is significantly different to being fetishised, represented as, or reduced to, one. Gallinat & Collins (2010, p3) observe that anthropologists were always ‘implicated in “the field”’; that they were, inevitably, constructing what they came to re-present’. The fact that this becomes true of *Town of Strangers* is no accident; the film is hinged upon its own performativity as a making-of film.

Collins & Anselma (2010, p18) write: ‘No anthropologist can afford to omit consideration of the possibility that they may themselves be their own, intimate informants’. My own presence is one of the research methods and subjects in this project; what Paul Willis (1980, p89) calls the ‘manifest posture’ – my body as my research instrument, my presence as the method to receive knowledge and to relate to others. I explore my own position, in relation to the research and the film, throughout the thesis, but most especially in Chapter Two.

This project responds to Lila Abu-Lughod’s (1991, p473) urging to anthropologists ‘to write about lives so as to constitute others as less other’ which I extend as a challenge to *film* lives so as to constitute others as less other. As I construct, and fabulate the character of myself, I am simultaneously constructing my relationship with others. The others, in this case, are inhabitants of Gort, who are not a generic group; they are many and they are complex and they are each particular in themselves. By writing myself into the ‘description’ of Gort as a vulnerable human being with my own hybridised identity and my ongoing search for home and community, I become more than a reflexive ethnographic filmmaker; I become one character, amongst others, in Gort. This approach to myself as an other

amongst others, or a stranger recognising strangers, aims to make those others less other by horizontalising the treatment of their selves and myself.

b) Thesis Structure - Chapter Summary

This thesis is structured into four chapters. I interweave contextual references with reflections on my methodology throughout, as they inform each other. The thesis is an explication of method based on the case study of the film project *Town of Strangers*.

Chapter One: A Stranger Came to Town is an experiment in ethnofictional writing about place and people, that uses the invention of writing about my own position in the third person, and making a character of myself as ‘the stranger’ in relation to Gort, and its strangers. It is writing as practice rather than writing about practice. The chapter also functions as an exploration of the research period I spent in the town of Gort prior to filming. I experiment with ethnofiction writing as a literary form, something that later finds expression in the film, as a cinematic ethnofictional method, in how I work with subjects and, especially, in how I construct myself in the third person within the film. The style of this chapter is intentionally subjective, novelistic, and gossipy, and not, therefore, academic in tone.

Note: Chapter One does not use Harvard Westminster parenthesis referencing within the text, as it would disrupt the flow of this experimental ethnofiction. Instead, I have put all the sources and references for this section into the endnotes at the end of the Chapter.

Chapter Two: The Invention of Self: Performing Auto-Ethnography in the

Third Person explores the social, political and philosophical context underpinning the approach and themes of the film *Town of Strangers*, conscientising the positionality of the filmmaker and the relationship between filmmaker and subject-participants. Adapting Lila Abu-Lughod's call to arms from writing to filmmaking (1991, p473), I pose the question: Are there ways to *film* lives so as to constitute others as less other? This chapter continues to tell the story of my arrival in Gort as a fiction scriptwriter; how this informed my relationship to the place and the people; and how that script fell away as the film began to generate itself in response to those encounters. I explore the role of the ethnofictional writing that I practiced in Chapter One, and how that method extended into an expression of myself as the constructed character of 'T' in *Town of Strangers*, the film. This performative act functions as a Deleuzian 'power of the false' and as an extension of first person filmmaking, but in the third person.

Chapter Three: Making-of: Encounter and the Production of Reality

proposes a method and genre of filmmaking that I call 'making-of', which is a term I am re-interpreting and applying to a performative and reflexive method of filmmaking. It explores *Town of Strangers* as a primary making-of film that produces its own reality. This chapter begins with a literary review of the contextual field of the performative turn in documentary studies, especially drawing on the theories of Stella Bruzzi and Judith Butler. I identify and define methods and facets of the performative making-of film and explore them in relation to several contextual films that I re-interpret as primary making-of films, along with a section on the subgenre of the audition film. I then reflect on my own methodology of auditioning in *Town of Strangers*.

Chapter Four: Making-of and Lucid Dreaming in *Town of Strangers* is a deep reflection on the methods I explored and the discoveries I made in the process of making the film. The overall method is framed as reflexive lucid dreaming as a process of working, in the moment of the encounter of shooting scenes with the subject-participants and in the encounter between the material and me in the editing room. I discuss Rouchian ethnofiction and Deleuzian fabulation as methods that I drew on when creating scenes based on the 'dreams, lies, memories and gossip'⁴ I asked for, and were told to me, in the auditions. I discuss these methods as a making-with process as well as a making-of process. I consider moments of rupture and resistance within the film as lines of flight that arose through the interactions between the subject-participants, the camera and myself. This chapter explores the overall methodology of the making-of film as one of unraveling the film at the same time that it is being built.

c) The Production of Reality

The research into documentary as a production of reality has its seeds in earlier film projects of mine that I wanted to investigate more thoroughly through this doctorate project. In *Turnip Story* (Teresa O'Brien, 2010) [see Appendix 1 for link], I recorded family members separately telling versions of the same story of a family memory. I asked them to re-enact the scene, filming with Super-8 to give it the aura of a home movie from the time the story was set, sometime in the Seventies. I included myself as one of the collective performing selves. The result was a non-linear narrative of overlapping subjective story fragments. What I learnt from making that film

is that memory is performative and that the only truth is the truth of the film itself.

In *Spirit of Shuhada Street* (Treasa O'Brien, UK/ Palestine, 2011) [see Appendix 1 for link], I created a situation with people in the film in which we staged the re-opening of a street. The street, in Al-Khalil/Hebron in West Bank Palestine, has been closed off to Palestinians by Israeli military order since 1994. I asked people to imagine and to act 'as if' it were re-opened. I was interested in what it might be like to act as if you have already won. What might such a moment generate for the people affected by the closure of the street? I did not know. It was a reality that did not yet exist.

We created the situation (in a different, but similar, street nearby where it was safe to do so) but we did not script anything. People came and performed the re-opening of their shops and sang together. Some made speeches to the camera about how the street had been opened, and thanked Obama for changing his policy and intervening. The effect of this fabulation was to make it possible, and real, for a moment, *through the act of filming*.

In *Spirit of Shuhada Street*, the situation of filming provided an opportunity for the protagonists to imagine together a future aspiration – that they had won what they are currently struggling for – and to escape their collective victimhood for a moment. For Ilona Hongisto, writing on Deleuzian fabulation, 'making fiction' is the creative story-telling act that has an immediate impact on the lives of the filmed subjects (2018, p192). We performatively played with this imagined future event as a ritual of desire. The 'actors' played an imagined projection of themselves at some future time, and fabulated their speeches and interactions. We didn't really open

Shuhada Street, but we did really stage a re-opening of Shuhada Street. It was that second reality, staged for the film that we created through the performative ritual of fabulated celebration.

Hongisto, drawing on Deleuze, conceptualises 'fabulation [as] an act of resistance to hierarchical social structures and dominant myths' (2011, p11). The act of imagining and celebrating a moment that you are organising around and struggling for, such as the re-opening of Shuhada Street, is, in itself, an act of resistance. For a moment at least, the reality of winning is manifested in how the participants perform their celebrations. It became a rehearsal for the future. They took the street back. The moment of fabulation was a rupture in an otherwise conventional documentary, and it marked a turning point for me in how I understood documentary to be the production of, rather than the observation of, reality.

The experience of making these films, and the intuitive methods I used, have percolated in my head and found various expressions in my subsequent films.

d) The Relationship between the Film Practice and the Written Thesis

This practice-based doctoral thesis has offered me an opportunity to think more deeply on the ideas and issues above, through reading texts and reading films, and to experiment with various methods in the filmmaking and to reflect on those processes through the exposition of writing.

I developed an experimental method of interweaving writing and practice, during my research period, which I later developed into an auto-

ethnographic method in the filmmaking. There has been a methodological process that has been informed by the research and vice versa. This process moves from ethnofiction to the making-of film via the audition process through to the concept of the performative making-of film. Drawing on this idea and that of Deleuze's fabulation, the film's methodology relies on the performative gesture as an improvisational method to create subjective truth rather than document an objective reality. The story of this thesis ends with a reflection on the editing process as lucid dreaming which is also a performative method. By including the editing process as well as the research and pro-filmic event as methods of making, the thesis reflects on the editing process as one of fabulation, and as a performative method also. In the quotation I used to open this introduction, Mieke Bal proposes that documenting and performing are inseparable. In *Town of Strangers*, the film performs its move towards the other, through the construct of my performed self. The thesis reflects on and discusses this as a methodological approach. *Town of Strangers*, the film and the written thesis, are concerned with the potential of documentary film as a performative genre, which produces its own reality through the making-of method itself. Reflexive processes are thus apparent in the bodies of the written thesis and in the film.

NOTES

¹ During the 'Celtic Tiger' years, Gort experienced an influx of immigration from Brazil, so that at one time almost half of the local population was Brazilian. Official figures are lower, but many Brazilians came and went at a fast rate, and many more were (and are) undocumented. At that time it was a high concentration for a small town and accounted for about 10% of the Irish Brazilian population of 20,000 Brazilians in Ireland. This figure doesn't account for the undocumented or those not registered in accommodation, or those who came and went more casually for a year or two. Ref, RTE Archive 2006

² Galway Advertiser [2014]. 'CEDRA report finds Gort hit hardest by recession', 6 March. Available from <http://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/67478/cedra-report-finds-gort-hit-hardest-by-recession> [Accessed 21 April 2016]

³ Ana in audition reel, cut from the final version of the film



Production Shot, *Town of Strangers*

PEOPLE OF GORT DO YOU WANT TO BE IN A FILM?



SAT 19 SEPT
12-6pm
TOWN HALL
CHURCH ST.

TOWN OF STRANGERS is an independent film that will combine fiction and documentary scenes set in the Gort area. No acting experience necessary.

All Welcome - we are looking for locals of all ages, genders and nationalities.

Different languages and non-verbal expression encouraged.

Tell us a story, a memory, a lie, a piece of gossip or a dream ...

Call 087 0544909 for more information or to make a time for your audition

Ei você!

QUER PARTICIPAR DE UM FILME?



Sab 19 Setembro

12-6pm

TOWN HALL
CHURCH ST.

TOWN OF STRANGERS é um filme independente que irá combinar cenas de ficção e documentário previstos na área de Gort..Não é necessário experiência em atuação. Todos são bem-vindo - nós estamos procurando por moradores de todas as idades, sexos e nacionalidades. Diferentes línguas e expressão não-verbal incentivada. Conte-nos uma história, uma memória, uma mentira, um pedaço de fofoca ou um sonho ...

Ligue para 087 0544909 para mais informações e para marcar um horário para sua audição

Chapter One

A STRANGER CAME TO TOWN

1.1 A Blow-in

A stranger came to town.

But we are used to strangers here.

The first time anyone remembers seeing the stranger was in December 2014. It was one of those rare winter days where the sun was actually warm and the sky was the kind of blue that opened your soul. It had been raining or overcast for a month already. On her first visit, she was quiet and observant. She hid herself in a rain-jacket and looked around a lot from under the hood. Furrowed brow. Blue eyes, open face, taking it all in. She came several times over the winter and spring, blowing in off the bus, and was seen skulking around the charity shops, striking up conversations with housewives. There are five charity shops in Gort. Everything here has been worn before. What was she looking for? Yearning for? Did she think Gort is cosmopolitan because of all the nationalities that live here? If so, she is mistaken. Gort is just like any other small Irish town; everyone is dying to get out of it.

She liked to drink coffee in The Gallery Café. There are posters and signs about what's going on in the town. It has a small terrace overlooking the square and it's a good spot to watch people from. It's a place where you are watched, too. She was spotted several times in Walsh's pub drinking half

glasses of Guinness pretending to read, but she was listening. Glistening and gleaning gossip.



Aerial Shot of Gort from *Town of Strangers* drone shoot

1.2 Town of Butchers

Gort is a town of butchers. There were three abattoirs in Gort back in the day. In summer the stench would knock you out. The bluebottles were the size of a child's fist. People were used to the sound of them and to the evening sun slanting through their translucent blue. As well as the main meat factory at the edge of town, there was a pig factory on Dame Street and a chicken factory on Parnell Street and, on Fridays, there was the livestock mart in the main square. Meat was everywhere, dead and alive. No tourists came to Gort. They all went west to Galway, Doolin and Lisdoonvarna. It was the meat industry that attracted the first Brazilians to Gort in the late Nineties. An Irish businessman living in Brazil organised work permits for the first

twenty-five, when a factory in Vila Fabril closed down and put hundreds of skilled labourers out of work.

The stranger was asking about the meat factory. Like the Brazilians, the stranger is interested in it too. People came for the meat factory but what do they stay for? In the pub, she heard that Murphy's factory burnt down a few times, and has been closed for a few years now. She was intrigued by this. The owners claimed they were 'accidents', and made a pile of insurance money out of it, but her informant added "how frozen meat goes on fire by itself is a mystery"¹. Some say it was an accident, some say it was lit by disgruntled workers. The most popular *fofoca* (Portuguese for gossip) is that it was an inside job by the Murphys themselves, to claim insurance and to save them from having to pay better wages, as meat prices were falling and workers were starting to demand more rights. Although many Brazilians were glad of the work, it wasn't all rosy in the meat factory. Murphy was not known as a good boss. He took advantage of people and did not pay them well enough, or on time. But "he is not a racist", she is assured as her mouth tightens. "He behaves equally shitty towards everyone"².

She took a walk down to the grounds of the old factory at the edge of town. It is an eerie place now, since it was abandoned after the last 'fire'. There is a used car business out front, run by some Polish lads and, behind the factory, a Nigerian man fixes tractors. At the entrance to the abandoned abattoir, there are signs in two languages, English and Portuguese, warning people that they may be searched on entering or leaving the factory.

The building has been abandoned by humans, but pigeons have squatted it. Thousands of them. It's difficult to find a pathway through the pigeon-shit

and feathers on the ground it is so thick. The winter sun wanes through the windows, lighting up corners here and there, and breaking up the dark spaces. There are gates and grids and troughs and pens and overhead hooks and the remnants of cranes for lifting the animals. It's a ghostly place. It's silent now, but it's easy to imagine the sounds that used to come from there: the clanging railings, the low bellow of the cattle, the higher pitched screeches when they got to the choppers, the clamour of hooves, shouts from the workers in English and Brazilian Portuguese echoing around the hard surfaces. The cows were the only softness in this hard place.

1.3 Town of Migrants

When the factory closed in 2007, most of the Brazilians – and Polish, Romanian, and Irish too – were put out of work, and many left the town. Those who stayed on in Gort found work in the only other factory in town, making table-tops, or worked in construction or hospitality or in the old-age nursing homes. From slaughterhouse to nursing home. The stranger shivered. Some opened their own businesses, mainly hairdressing and beauty salons (Gort has too many!) and a printing shop. There was also black market casual labour available where you could get paid cash per day helping with construction or on a farm. You just turned up at a *pedra* (the stone) in the square, and if you hung around long enough outside the betting shop, someone might come and pick you up for a day's labour. They worked them hard; they really earned that money. They worked twice as hard as an Irish person and for half the pay. Many were undocumented and did not speak English, and that made it easier to exploit them. There were some fair

employers like the Gallery Café that had mostly Brazilian staff in the kitchen, but there were also cowboys³ who took advantage of people.



A Pedra /The Stone, still from *Town of Strangers*

The stranger hung out at a *pedra* and listened to the stories there. She heard about a fella who had been at it for a while, and who held up a sign saying 'No Stones No Turf', as it was the toughest labour. But later on, it was harder to be choosy. When there were too many people waiting at a *pedra*, and not enough work, they bargained hard. One day, the morning passed and no one had come to offer work. At eleven o'clock, an old farmer came by in a 4x4 vehicle, rolled down his window, and asked who would spend the day picking stones for 80 euro. They all said they would. Then he said "who will do it for 70?" And they clamoured around the car. Then he went down to 60, 50 and some of the lads who had just arrived and the lads who had young children said "ok" to that, and he went on like that, until he said "who will do it for a tenner?" There was silence. Then Guilherme said he'd do it, and everyone else looked at the ground and didn't meet one another's eye as he stepped into the farmer's brand new range rover. That was when the

taste was turning sour, and the tiger⁴ was bleating in Ireland. And people started to think of going home. Home-home.

The town of Gort itself is unremarkable. Some Germans who have been living there for the last twenty years and run a framing business jokingly refer to it as 'Grot'. Others are more proud and call it Gorgeous Gort, but there is always a hint of irony in this moniker. There used to be a youth club in the town, the 'No Name Club', but that too has shut its doors. It's like everyone has given up. Young people in Grot have nothing to stay for. And the old are grotting away, lonely. Their children grow up and leave. There's no work here anymore. Grot is a depressing place. Now. But it wasn't always this way.

Everything has changed here in the last twenty years. For the first time ever, Ireland experienced more inward migration than outward. In Gort, there was a baby boom from the young people who stuck around, and the Brazilians, of course, made a huge difference to the place. It fascinated the stranger that Gort had become the place of choice for hundreds of Brazilians to migrate to, for work opportunities. The first Brazilians came to Gort in the late Nineties. They say a third up to a half of the population of Gort was Brazilian ten years ago and that is only counting the documented ones⁵. Now, with austerity, the work has dried up, and some have returned to Brazil or moved elsewhere, but many have settled here, and about a quarter of Gort's population is currently Brazilian. In the 2008-9 period, the recession, and the decision to impose austerity measures by the EU, hit Ireland and more people left Ireland than came in. That was the year that the stranger left Ireland too. The stranger is part of a statistic. Seven years later, she returns in another guise. Uncertain of her place. She turns to a place *like* home.

Irish identity and history are bound up with emigration stories. Ireland has had a dwindling population since famine times⁶ but has been rising for the first time in recent years. Generations of people have been reared in Ireland to emigrate, but the stranger's generation had choices. The exodus from Ireland continued until the 1990s when there was an unprecedented growth in immigration. This was partly due to the opening up of EU work permits and the 'Celtic Tiger' economic boom. The boom made Irish people upwardly mobile; the nouveau riche bought second and third homes, and went on shopping trips to New York. Coffee shops sprang up everywhere and churches were deconsecrated and made into nightclubs. Everyone was in debt and spending like money was going out of fashion. (And it did go out of fashion). There was almost full employment for the first time in Irish history. It was the last EU member state to experience higher immigration than emigration⁷. Between 2000-2007, immigration increased threefold and within ten years it had the third highest immigration rate in the EU⁸. Some were returning Irish, the majority were non-Irish seeking work, and a minority were seeking asylum⁹. By 2009, a quarter of all births were to mothers who had immigrated to Ireland¹⁰.

Gort was one of the worst affected areas in Ireland by austerity policies.¹¹ In the last ten years, Gort's population has dramatically contracted. The Irish, as well as many who came to find work here, are leaving again. The trend in Ireland has reversed and now it has the highest emigration rate in the EU¹². Gort has gone from poor to rich and back to poor in one generation. A young man getting his hair cut in the same barbershop as the stranger, tells her that she is ten years too late. Ten years ago the town was booming. Gort has not quite gone back to how it used to be. Gort's homogenous

ethnic and cultural population has been mixed up. It is, on the one hand, a sleepy country town with few opportunities, and yet it is also a 'multicultural' place. It is in a delicate balance between globalising and traditional. The stranger has met people from many places who live in this town: Polish, English, Nigerians, Afghans, Romanians, Germans, Spanish, French, but Brazilians are by far the majority of the non-Irish population in Gort. Some are 'economic migrants', others are looking for an 'alternative' lifestyle, such as the new agers and hippies who came here from England, Germany and Spain in the 1970s and live in the surrounding countryside.

Now that Gort is experiencing some of the highest emigration and unemployment in Ireland, house prices have plummeted¹³. Austerity policies, and subsequent lack of work in the meat industry and construction, have meant some Brazilians went to find work elsewhere in Ireland or returned to Anapolis. Stricter border controls mean that it is more difficult to enter or return.

Many stay in Gort, as they have become used to it as their home, or they think they have a better chance at saving up money here, and new people still come to join their families and friends. Some say that they appreciate the safety of Gort, in comparison to where they are from in Brazil. They feel it is a gentler place for their children to grow up¹⁴, even if they themselves remain homesick, and tied to no job or a bad job here.

1.4 The Gatekeeper

The stranger heard many people mention Frank. “You should talk to Frank,” said the word of mouth. She arranged to meet him in O’Sullivan’s Hotel on the square, and they ended up talking all afternoon. Or rather Frank talked all afternoon. The stranger mostly listened. O’Sullivan’s Hotel has an old world charm about it. Most of its clientele are over 65, and the food is overcooked, but there is a ‘no-nonsense’ big-helpings air about it. The restaurant is full of old farmers, men and women eating their dinner in the middle of the day. Men in groups drinking pints. Old school. The stranger ordered bacon and cabbage; the taste of it reminded her of childhood visits to her aunt’s farm.



Frank, photo: Treasa O’Brien

Sixty, smiling, fisherman’s beard, dancing blue eyes, gift of the gab, heart of gold, innocent, mischievous, young-at-heart, excited Frank. Plans to move to Barcelona to the mountains, breaking up with his partner, and speaks so

highly of her. Frank is a man of many lives, a Scot reared on 'pieces'¹⁵. From the streets of Glasgow, Frank lived in Germany, Brazil, El Salvador, Cricklewood, Hawaii and here, in Ireland, he reinvented himself as the Community Development Officer for undocumented Brazilian migrants in Gort. Carpenter. Football coach. Loves a joke, adores a pun, and respects poetry, especially when recited aloud. When the stranger responds to his queries on her own intentions here, she answers that her project involves some kind of exploration of the condition of being a stranger. She feels her explanation is vague and clumsy, revealing her own uncertainty that it will lead anywhere. Frank stops and pulls out a Hāfez book. He reads a poem aloud, relishing the words:

'Your love should never be offered to the mouth of a Stranger
Only to someone who has the valor and daring to cut pieces of their
soul off with a knife
Then weave them into a blanket to protect you.'¹⁶



Frank encounters a turkey, Still from *Town of Strangers*

The poem affected the stranger. She wondered if she had the courage to cut off pieces of her soul to make a film in this town. Was she daring enough to be the kind of stranger that people would offer themselves to be in her film? Would she be the kind of stranger that would protect them as she wove her story into theirs?

The stranger and Frank became friends, and he introduced her to many people in Gort. He trusted her, even though he did not understand her project, but he seemed to understand that neither did she. He reflected on that first meeting later:

*'When I first met the Stranger, I couldn't help but draw parallels to my own arrival as the stranger 11 years before. Her quest, as explained by her in brief, was not clear to me. Perhaps a lack of clarity is an asset as certain outcomes can never be envisaged. Ultimate objectivity? The story ultimately is allowed to tell itself with perhaps the least manipulation.'*¹⁷

1.5 Little Brazil

At the height of it, in the late Nineties and early Noughties, the Brazilians made Gort a vibrant place. Frank views it as a success story of 'cultural integration' that should be studied for application elsewhere. He puts this success down to the fact that many people knew one another already, or arrived through social or family networks, so that there was already a good sense of community amongst the Brazilians themselves. Also, there were mixed genders; men came first but quickly brought families. In general, they are not big drinkers; they are family people, Catholics, hard workers. The

work was plentiful, and the richer Irish benefitted from the cheap labour. And most Gort locals were curious about the new people coming to their boring town.

Frank is good for sorting out *fofoca* and nipping it in the bud. People trust Frank and tell him things that are going on within the community. He used to hold weekly meetings, where he tried to sort out differences and misunderstandings, by sharing information and dissipating any *fofoca* such as rumours that the Gardaí (Irish for police) were coming to do raids on undocumented people. Sometimes, this was scaremongering gossip that put people on edge and made them distrust everyone. There were scams where Brazilians already living in Gort told new people, coming next, that the buses from the airport in Ireland were dangerous, and then charged them 150 euro for a 'taxi' to Gort. Scams where they got people jobs and took big cuts for themselves. The Irish were known for this when they worked on construction sites in London back in the day; it happens everywhere - some opportunistic people fecking over their own in a crisis. But, for the most part, they looked out for each other.

Most of the Brazilians are from the same place, a town called Vila Fabril (factory town), in Anapolis in the middle of Brazil. A factory in Vila Fabril closed down and an Irish businessman, who worked in the meat industry there, saw an opportunity to bring skilled cheap labour to meat factories in Ireland, including Gort. He brought over a couple of lads and got them work permits and away they went. Doing a job the upwardly mobile Celtic Tiger Irish cubs did not want to do. Then, they told their families about the good life here and they came too. They worked hard, saved the money and sent a lot of it back home. New houses have been built in Vila Fabril from the

remittances and the savings people sent back. There are Irish flags and Dunnes Stores ornaments in some of the houses in Vila Fabril¹⁸. Most came with documents, but others did not, or they overstayed and so lost their tourist visas. Some said they were Portuguese at the airport. And they were always worried about raids and deportations. It became harder to get in, during recent years. And if you left, harder to come back. But mostly, the spectre of raids were *fofoca*, though real raids did happen in other towns.¹⁹

These Brazilians are not 'sexy' samba types from Rio, nor capoeiristas from Bahia. Although there are a few from Sao Paolo, most of them are culchies²⁰. Maybe that's why they fit in so well here. Rednecks and innocents. Country boys and small town girls. God-fearing hardworking, family values people. They go to church. And they like a drop, too!²¹

Life was good in Gort in those days. You could work your way up, like the American Dream. Ireland was booming. Gort was beaming. The usually boring annual St Patrick's Day parade, where tractors were the highlight, became much more 'multicultural', colourful and musical. There was a Brazilian festival²² and the Brazilians taught the locals how to dance the *quadrilha* in the square. And they made food. A lot! Dona Júlia, grandmother and the oldest Brazilian resident in Gort, has a cooking business which she operates from her home. She makes the best *feijoada*, *quentao* and *canjica*, but the stranger thinks her lasagne is too salty. You can eat in Dona Júlia's kitchen or you can place an order and pick it up. There was street life in Gort back then. The Brazilians used to hang around the Early 'Til Late shop which installed phones with cheap rates for people to call home. This was before the internet, skype and smartphone apps became so ubiquitous. Whatsapp and skyping are how most of them stay in touch now,

which has meant that the social element of meeting up in public to use these payphones has disappeared.



Brazilian Social Dance in Gort, still from *Town of Strangers*

In general, local people in Gort were friendly to the Brazilians. Curious. They livened the place up for the locals who were so bored with life. As there was plenty of work, they weren't seen as a threat. There was the odd fight between Brazilians and locals, when drinking, usually between men about women, but, overall, there was more craic than trouble. People miss the good old times in Gort – so many friends have left and so many businesses have closed down as well as the meat factory: two nightclubs, seven pubs, the traditional music festival, the Brazilian festival, the samba band. Fr. Kevin stopped doing the Saturday evening mass in Portuguese in order to encourage Brazilians to go to the other services and to integrate more. However, most Brazilians have switched allegiances to one of the four Evangelical churches in the town, as they offer a better social life.

The situation is getting harder all the time for Brazilians here, with stricter controls over visas and residency permits. There is a Brazilian family in Gort with a wee lad who has cerebral palsy and he is receiving treatment here, and they are having a hard time seeking leave to remain. The stranger has an Irish friend (not from Gort) whose Brazilian boyfriend was deported at the airport. He had been here before and had stayed on a few months past his visa. They are fighting it on a de facto spouse basis, as they've been together for more than two years. There was that young fella, Leonardo, who was on the telly²³ a few years ago, saying how much he missed Gort and the hurling. He had been waiting to turn eighteen to return to Gort and says he feels more Irish than Brazilian and missed it terribly in the five years he was away.

1.6 The Stranger Migrates to Gort

The stranger blew in and out of Gort for short visits here and there during the Winter and Spring. Her red van was spotted in the back of the petrol station near the laundry, where she sometimes stayed overnight. In May 2015, she moved to somewhere on the outskirts of Gort. There was not much of her seen in that first month, except when she came into town for firewood and supplies. It was rumoured that she was staying in a cabin in the nearby karst landscape of the Burren National Park, belonging to an Irish friend who spent a lot of time in Latin America. Some said she was hiding out from a crime she had committed. Or a lover she had betrayed. Some said she was writing a film script about Gort.

In June, the stranger moved into Gort fulltime for the summer, renting a room from Ana, from Brazil, who lives next door to Dona Júlia. Ana, aged 29, has been in Gort three years and is undocumented. She is afraid to apply for leave to remain as once she is on the books, she is also in danger of being refused and then deported. She is a chef in The Gallery Café and likes her work, mainly because of the people she works with, who she says are like family for her. Ana's father died at the end of that Summer and she couldn't go back to be with her family without risking everything. She mourned him on Facebook.



Ana and Mickey, Still from *The Blow-in*

Ana talks to her dog Mickey as though he was human; she tells him about her family in Brazil. Ana told the stranger about her online dating experiences - most of the men were married, and when she mentions she is Brazilian, men take it as a code word for 'easy'. Ana met her boyfriend online; he calls over sometimes. He is quiet and introverted. One year on, he has never introduced her to any of his family or his friends. Ana was shy but, little by little, she trusted the stranger more. They discussed the stranger's film together. Ana thought *Town of Strangers* was a very 'creepy' title, and referred from then on to the stranger's project as the 'creepy film'. She

wants the stranger to make a horror film in Gort. They also discussed the idea of making a soap opera in Gort about Brazilian-Irish relationships.

1.7 The 'Natives'

'Did you hear the one about the bank robbery in Gort?

'Twas held up by two locals and a white man'.²⁴

This joke was told to the stranger by a locally born 18-year-old white man in a barbershop in Gort. Wolfgang, the German who has the framing shop, and has lived here for three decades, tells her: "They didn't accept our kind thirty years ago but the Brazilians changed that." The stranger is intrigued by this comment. For her, a white German man is the epitome of privilege and yet, he says, he needed the mass immigration of Brazilians into Gort to feel that he is accepted by the locals here as a 'blow-in'. Everything is relative.

Not everyone thanks the Brazilians for rejuvenating Gort. Frank introduced the stranger to Doreen, a septuagenarian proprietor of a B&B in the centre of the town. Frank has described her as a 'character'. Doreen does not walk; she struts like she owns Gort. When you ask her how she is, she answers "Magnificent!" Doreen found the stranger very charming at first and vice versa. The stranger brought cake and was interested in hearing about all the guests she has had and her memories of Gort. But when the conversation turned to refugees coming to Ireland, Doreen told her she is afraid of Muslims coming to Gort. "The Brazilians are okay, they are like us really," she says, "but I don't want these people coming here hiding behind veils." The stranger told Doreen that they are building a mosque in her home town

in Kerry, and Doreen is shocked. She asks Doreen if she remembers when Irish women had to wear veils when they went to church. And black shawls for a year if they were in mourning. Doreen shoots her a look. A look with a blade in it. And then she tells the stranger how very busy she is and would the stranger run along now. The stranger returned another day and asked her if she would be in her film but Doreen refused. Doreen does not trust the stranger.

In Molloy's hardware shop one day in late August, the stranger was buying a hot water bottle. Was she really that cold, or was she buying it as a ruse to talk to the proprietor, a busybody who knows everyone's business? The stranger was asking Mrs. Molloy what she thought about refugees coming here.

"Oh God help us, I don't think so! 'Tis we'll be paying for them in taxes. We have to look after our own".

The stranger reminded her how everyone says how well the Brazilians integrated in Gort, and continued "surely 'twould be no harm to take some refugees looking for a livelihood here. It seems like a good precedent." Mrs. Molloy called the Brazilians 'non-nationals' and complained, "all the men do is drink while the women support them with cleaning jobs". The stranger was gobsmacked. She forgets how small town Ireland can be so small-minded: people can be friendly and curious but also people can be closed, insular and fearful of 'outsiders'. The stranger swallowed and asked Mrs. Molloy if she would talk about this with her on camera. She got an emphatic and rude no. It knocked off some of the romance that the stranger felt for the old world charm of that shop!

Mrs. Molloy and Doreen are 'characters'. That's what they call them here. That curious word. In Ireland, to call someone a 'character' can be the highest compliment you can pay someone. Or it can also be a veiled warning about someone. At the same time, to call someone a character can be a euphemism for someone absolutely mad, someone who is a caricature of themselves, someone we know is cracked, but yet we find them entertaining. And they have the sense enough to entertain us. It is a kind and fond way of calling someone crazy. Because there are some kinds of crazy that we respect as a resistance to the norm - even if we don't agree with their views. There are many characters in Gort. So the norm is set at a different bar.

The stranger had arrived trying to get to know the Brazilian community, but as she spent time here, she realised that the locals, who had lived here all their lives were also part of Gort's story. She grew fond of Liam Gillane who ran a small shop on the square. Liam, aged 72, was born in the back room of the shop, when it used to be a bakery, and had never lived anywhere else. Liam told her that a local farmer had killed himself the week before. Forty-seven. Everyone expressed surprise but we all knew why he did it. We have all thought about doing it, says he. It was a massive wake, stretching all the way down George's Street. And that was one of the only nights in recent memory when there was a bit of life in the town. Liam told her a dark story:

'There was a fella came into the shop here one day and asked for a rope. And I said 'Are you doing a bit of D.I.Y.?' He looked at me and then said 'yes', and laughed darkly. 'I'm going to hang myself', says he. 'How's that for D.I.Y?' 'Well, says I, that rope won't do you, why don't you try this one?', and I gave him a better, stronger piece of

rope. That was twenty years ago and he's been coming into the shop ever since.'



Liam Gillane in his shop on the Square, photo: Treasa O'Brien

Liam laughs at his own story. The Irish are proud of darkness and understatement, hence the war in Northern Ireland was called The Troubles. And the famine was called The Great Hunger. People with mental illnesses are suffering from their nerves. And alcoholics are people who like a drop.

Liam told her how Gort used to be a thriving market town, with a cattle mart every week in the square. The mart is now moved a couple of miles outside the town²⁵. The square is mainly used as a carpark now. On Friday morning, some local farmers and traders try to hold a market here, but they have to wedge the stalls in between the cars. People pass them by on their way to Lidl, Aldi and Supervalu, three huge supermarkets that have almost put everyone else out of business. Before the bypass was built, when the town was on the main road to Galway, there used to be passing business for all the independent family-run shops in town. When the market was in full swing

years ago, people would come in from the countryside and all the neighbouring villages. And people did their shopping: wellingtons, cattle feed, flour, sugar; there was a deaf tailor to whom you could bring your clothes for mending. The pubs would be full afterwards and people would swap stories. And there was Keane's, the oldest shop in Gort, hardly changed since the 19th century²⁶ and run by the same family. It had a wee bar in the back and you'd hear all the news that way. The shop is still open but the bar is now closed.

There are many people in Gort who welcome and support the 'blow-ins'. There is Margaret, a schoolteacher, who encourages locals to learn Portuguese as well as the Brazilian kids to learn Irish. She created activities for the kids at school and included the parents too. Margaret's husband died this summer. Margaret was still grieving deeply when she met the stranger and ended up talking about her late husband and then told her own life story. She was surprised how cathartic it was to tell everything to a stranger. She had been avoiding people who knew him lately. The stranger told Margaret about the script she was writing and described the characters of the two young women in it who burned down the chicken factory in town. She was looking to cast a local Brazilian and an Irish woman, an introvert and an extrovert. Margaret suggested two of her students, Chloe and Josie, and put them in touch.

1.8 Chloe and Josie: First Encounter



Chloe and Josie, still from *Town of Strangers*

The stranger went to visit Chloe, who turned out to be her neighbour. She is from a settled Traveller²⁷ family, and is a live wire. Tall and with a huge mane of red hair, and a trowel full of makeup, she stands out in Gort. She is 16 and is one of the most popular girls in school. Her mother, Teresa, told the stranger that she got bullied at school and called names for being a Traveller. She threw a mug at a fella who called her a 'pikey' and got into trouble for it. Josie is Brazilian, 20-years-old, and is here to learn English, and is in the same year as Chloe in school. She lives with two of her seven sisters who run a small hairdressing salon on the square. Josie is very involved in one of the Evangelist churches and choreographs dances based on stories from the Bible with her friend Ravylla and her little sister. Chloe and Josie are excited at the prospect of being in a film, but the stranger is not what they expected a film director to be like. She dresses terribly and doesn't wear make-up.

The girls secretly want to give her a makeover. And the stranger wants the girls not to wear any make-up on set.

The stranger wants to work with these two girls to improvise scenes from her script, and to bring their own experience from their lives and mix it with the situations in the script. She writes about some of the people that she meets; she writes them into the script and wants to work with those people to play themselves. She has written a scene where Chloe will visit a healer for a mysterious ailment. She has heard, from the word of mouth, about a local healer who has a gift. He is a seventh son of a seventh son. And he is also a butcher.

1.9 The Healer

Gerry remembers that the first time he met the stranger was when she called into the meat shop. She was checking him out, he thinks. She loitered for a while and only bought a banana. He thinks she might be one of them vegetarians. She called him later that same afternoon and told him she needed healing. He told her to come over to his house the next morning.

Gerry is a large, squarish man of 50-odd, with one sleepy eye, a broad smile, an easy laugh and a keen interest in dogs, horses and country & western music. He is a happy man. He runs the family business of being an independent butcher, which is no mean feat with three major supermarkets, and three other small butcher-shops to compete with, in a town of 2000 people and with scandals in the media about pork. He also sells local fruit and vegetables, eggs and honey. He is a flirt, and likes to tease and banter

and gossip with everyone that comes through the door. Gerry lives next door to the butcher's shop and does his healing sessions on Wednesday mornings in the living room of his house. People travel from all over the country, and queue up in his sitting room to see him. In this room the next day, the stranger heard many testimonies from clients who were waiting to see him. Most of them had back problems and had been there before, or had a family member who had been cured. It seems he has learned anatomy from being a butcher and working with living greyhounds that his family races. And the rest is 'a gift'.



Gerry Healing a Horse, still from *Town of Strangers*

When the stranger visited Gerry as a patient, he asked her to pose by the window so that he could see her posture. He used a homemade diviner made out of a clothes hanger and red electrical tape (she asked him to verify the materials) to check for any 'blockages'. He laid his hands behind her and she felt herself pulled back. He said he had unblocked a stone in the river of

her energy flow in her back. The stranger felt no difference between before and after the treatment. She asked him about his gift. He told her he is a seventh son but that he doesn't really believe in that. He does believe he has a gift for healing backs though. He says that different people have different cures in them: "some fella might have a gift for curing ringworm, another person might have a gift for curing thrush". At the end of the five minutes, he asked the stranger if she would like to come and observe him at work, and she said, "how did you know I'd like to do that?" He said she would have to come and observe him on dogs, not people. Gerry works with people on Wednesday mornings, horses in the afternoon and dogs in the evening. The rest of the week he works in the meat-shop. The stranger is fascinated by the irony of a butcher, who chops up dead animals for a living, and is also someone who heals living beings using similar knowledge. Gerry thinks that *she* is a character. And he thinks she may have a gift herself, though he's not sure what it is. But he told her he senses something in her.

She returned a week later and observed him on a sunny evening working on several dogs in the backyard behind his house. Many of the dog-owners were Travellers, or extremely shy country farmers. Gerry has a way of making people feel at ease, and makes everyone seem interesting, even the awkward teenage girls who sometimes accompanied their fathers and dogs. He was firm but kind with the dogs and used the same technique he had used on the stranger to divine the dogs' energy. For one, he made a bone adjustment; and for another, he suggested rest and a change of diet. The stranger joined Gerry the week after that on his Wednesday afternoon session with horses, out the back of the hurling field in Kilbeacanty, two miles outside town. Gerry has a matter-of-fact attitude to his profession and does both the butchering and the healing with the same respect, care and banter.

He embodies a sense of the mundane meeting the divine, the prose meeting the poetic. When he is on the job, and she is there, she is quiet, respectful and un-intrusive. When she calls into the butcher shop, they gossip and banter and have the craic with other customers. He teases her about her new haircut, which he thinks is a bit 'extreme'. She filmed him on several occasions, and he said that he didn't mind at all; but when she asked him to develop something more with her, he had a change of heart. He said she could film him, but not publish anything on social media or on the TV. He says he is flattered and says he'll help her in any way that he can, but he won't be in the film. He says he doesn't want fame for his gift. But there might be more to it than that; he may be afraid of publicity because he has no licence and he also takes donations (small amounts, but many) and he may fear getting caught for tax²⁸. The stranger is disappointed but continues to visit him in the hope that he may change his mind.

1.10 Hamid: First Encounter

Next door to Gerry's butcher shop is a pizzeria and kebab shop. The lighting is a vast flickering strip-light, there is no music, and most of the clientele are drunk and rude. The stranger called in with her 'casting call' posters and started chatting with Hamid and Farid, both from Afghanistan, who work there. Hamid moved to Gort from Dublin around the same time as the stranger, and lives above the pizzeria. Farid lives in Galway with his wife and two children, and commutes back and forth every day. She asks Farid about his dreams. He describes a recurring dream he has about bombs in Afghanistan. Hamid hushes him and tells him to cheer up and talk about something else. He presents himself as a light-hearted friendly guy to the

stranger. They joke and smile about some of the customers that come in. Hamid tells her that some clients accused him of overcharging them, and tried to start a fight; he tries to tell it as a funny story but the stranger can see how ugly it is and how Hamid is afraid, even though he tries to brush it off. His eyes have a sadness in them, but his face changes completely when he smiles, a spark lights up inside him. The stranger wants to make him smile more.



Hamid and T, still from *Town of Strangers*

1.11 Writer's Block

The stranger has been living here for a few months now, and she is becoming more of a familiar face around Gort. She has been getting to know people here. She strikes up conversations in the charity shops, in the cafes and pubs, and on the street. She is seeking 'subjects' for her film. She is open and friendly and very curious. But do people trust her? She tries to fit in everywhere, like a chameleon. She can banter with a priest, play pool with the young lads; she attends Evangelical services and dances with the hippies.

But there is something unsettling about her eagerness to get to know everyone. She is not always discriminate. She is on the lookout for new people and also getting to know better those that interest her. Gerry, the butcher and healer, calls her 'a free spirit'. What is she doing here? Why is she interested in Gort, of all places?

Meanwhile, the stranger had writer's block. She was writing a film script based on a story she had written several years before arriving in the town and was developing it by interweaving stories and characters from Gort, with the idea of casting locals in the film. Her encounters were a form of casting for the film she might make. She wanted the story and the people to cohere but they still felt separate. The people she was most interested in did not want to be filmed. She felt burned from the disappointment of investing her energy in people whom she wanted to cast that summer, who would eventually claim to be camera shy²⁹. It is not only a matter of trust. It is also a matter of desire. Some people want to share their stories due to a need to be heard, to be witnessed, or to support their ego. But not everyone desires this.

If the solution was to wait until later on in an unfolding relationship with someone, before she asked them to be in her film, then it felt like she was being dishonest about her motives for the friendship. On the other hand, if she said it too soon, it coloured the interaction too much, and put people on edge. She decided she needed to keep working on the relationships she was forging but did not want to depend on them entirely. Also she felt like she was making genuine friendships that she wanted to develop whether they participated in her film or not, so did not want to depend on anyone and then have it turn sour; it should stay a choice without judgment. She

reflected that her method was slow and laborious and was not yielding much fruit. So, she decided to do a formal casting call, with the expectation that anyone who would come along would presumably have the desire to be in a film.

1.12 The Barbershop



Still from *Town of Strangers*

A Romanian couple opened up a barbershop next to Liam Gillane's shop, called Timeless Barbers. Ariadna supports her husband, Matt, in the business but she tells the stranger that her real dream would be to have a café of her own. She finds it hard to make friends here, because her partner is jealous of her spending time without him. They fight over this in private but, in public, they seem like the happiest and most in-love couple you could hope to meet³⁰. The stranger arrived in one day, asking if she could put up posters for the film auditions. When he heard she was going to make a film in Gort,

the young fella getting his hair cut laughed and told her she was ten years too late. She asked him why. He told her that "Gort was a thriving place with lots of music and nightlife and now it's dead. One third of the pubs have closed here", he complained. "The Brazilians breathed new life in to the town but now many have left. You should go over to Kinvara, 10 miles from here by the sea, it's more craic". "A drinking town with a fishing problem" says his friend who is sitting waiting for him. They are only 18 and 19 so their memories of Gort ten years ago might be coloured more from what they have heard than by what they have experienced. The first lad says to her "There's no room for refugees here", and it is like watching a mouthpiece of his parents speaking through him. She has heard similar sentiments from older residents of Gort. It is one thing when old people react like this but she expects more from young men! Aren't they supposed to be idealistic? The stranger asked him why he has chosen to stay in Gort, and he answered, "I'm only being reared here, I won't stay".



Still from *Town of Strangers*

One of the first questions everyone asks the stranger in Gort is ‘why Gort?’ betraying an astonishment that acknowledges the low esteem in which they hold Gort. But, much as one complains about their family but will defend them to the last if a stranger does, so is the love/hate sense of loyalty with place and community in Gort. Except for Véronique. She openly admits her hatred of Gort.

1.13 Véronique



Véronique's House, research image for *The Blow-in*, Photo: Treasa O'Brien

Véronique lives on the edge of town, by the Punchbowl (a deep natural river cavern), in that big pink house that looks like a quintessential house or home, like the image you might see on a child's alphabet card with the letter 'H'. The stranger had been speaking with another stranger in one of the charity shops that morning, and when she popped into a café, she saw him there with Véronique, and they invited her to join them. Véronique had come here twenty years ago one fateful summer, as she described it, during a heat wave

that was never again to be repeated, and that gave her a false impression of Ireland. She fell for a musician; they married and had four children together. She asked the stranger just as many personal and direct questions as the stranger asked her. She asked her why did she want to make films? Why had she come to Gort? Had she ever been in love? What was home to her? The stranger liked this inquisition very much; it challenged her in a way that made her realise how performative she had become in playing the role of the stranger, as the filmmaker, as the 'blow-in', in town. These discussions with Véronique felt more like an exchange between friends than between strangers. She was finding it difficult to separate the film from her life in these days. Even though she was not filming much with a camera, she felt like she was always making the film in every action and encounter that she had in Gort. She was spending time with several people – beekeepers, home-schoolers, butchers, bartenders, cooks, hippies – and sometimes the social interactions left her exhausted. Even though she knew it was irrational, she couldn't help but feel rejected when someone said 'no' to being in her film, after she had spent time building a relationship with them. She immersed herself fully into many situations and found the connections exhilarating at the time, but sometimes she just needed to lie low, so she did not have to meet anyone. With Véronique it didn't feel like an effort. Véronique was drawn to the stranger straightaway and reflected on their first meeting:

'No sooner had I sat down with my friend M in front of a cup of coffee, then he said: "I met a really special woman in the charity shop a little while earlier"..."Oh? And what was it that was so special about her?" "Well, she's here to make a film about Gort". I nearly choked on my coffee: "What? ... What can there be to film in Gort?" She definitely

had to be “special” to find something of interest in that drabbest of places ... The next thing, the door was pushed and in came a young woman. Funny how I knew straight away it was ‘her’ ... Funny too how it felt as though until that moment, everything had felt like a black-and-white movie, and suddenly it was flooded with colours!’³¹



Véronique, Still from *The Blow-in*

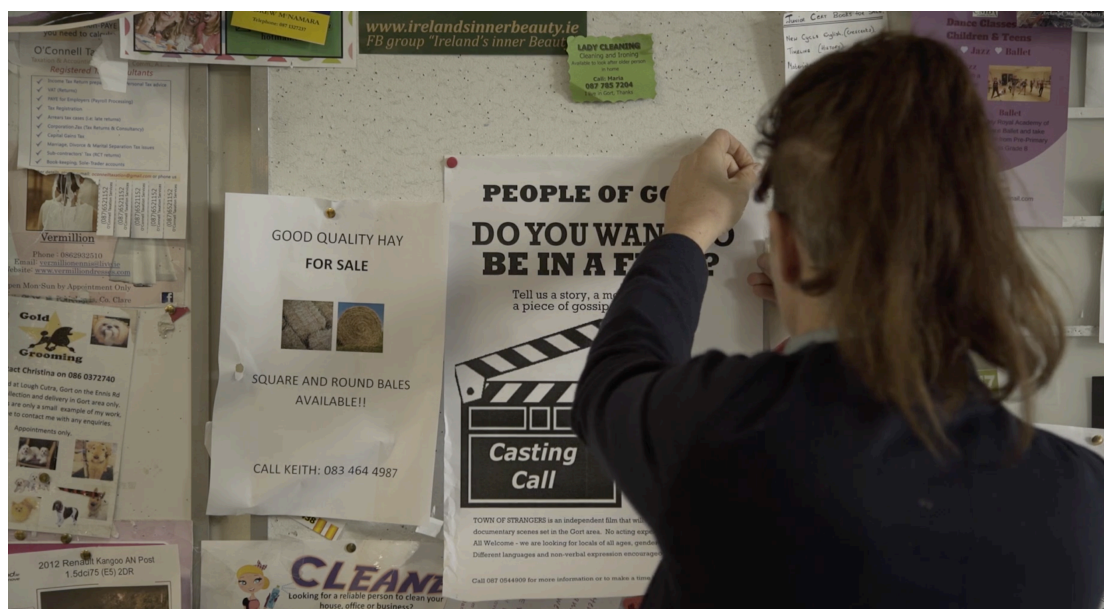
1.14 Postering

Putting up the audition posters was sometimes unnerving, but ultimately empowering for the stranger. It was a kind of ‘coming out’ in her role as a filmmaker. She was forced, during every encounter while putting up the posters, to talk about the film and her ideas with people. The posters included the phrase: “Tell us a story, a memory, a lie, a piece of gossip or a dream ...”. Nilton, a Brazilian who runs the printing shop on the square, likes this phrase so much that he used a highlighter pen to help make it stand out.

The stranger returns to the pizzeria with posters for the film auditions. She asks Farid and Hamid if they will come to the auditions. Farid says he will not

be able to come because of a family commitment. Hamid looks away and smiles shyly when she asks him to come along. She doesn't want to convince him, but she wants to make sure that he knows he would be very welcome. Hamid promises her he will come. But she is getting used to people saying yes and meaning no, so she practices not being disappointed if he does not.

She is both apprehensive and excited about the auditions. She has asked some of the people she has met this summer to come along, but she doesn't know who else, if anyone, will turn up. The posters are in English and Portuguese. The stranger has asked Frank to be the production assistant at the Casting Call. Frank is bilingual and knows everyone, and will be warm and welcoming. He obliged, although he was sceptical: *"I worried that the stranger would get little or no response to her requests for other 'strangers' to tell their stories."*³²



T puts up a casting call poster, Still from *Town of Strangers*

The stranger was worried too. She fantasised about a Makhmalbaf situation³³ where thousands would turn up and break down the doors of the theatre.

And then she spun the other way worrying that nobody at all would come. Or if they did come, that she would have to perform, that she would ultimately be the one being auditioned over and over as the filmmaker 'blow-in' who had come to town. Everyone would want to know her business and intentions.

These casting call encounters would be dependent on an implicit trust or deal in place – a social contract created by the situation of the auditions. They would create the conditions for a different kind of encounter than building friendships, one that was clear about the encounter between strangers connecting, being mediated through a camera. This would be different to her approach of chatting up strangers in charity shops, pubs and cafes and trying to build up trust, and then later asking the person if she could film with them. She wanted to see what would come from the auditions beyond their primary function – she thought that maybe the auditions could even become a part of the film itself that would reflect on the process of filming in Gort and also generate content for the script she was writing. It might spin off into some of making-of as the film. Perhaps she would throw away that script and let herself be open only to the people and stories that would arrive at the auditions. That night before the casting call she had a vivid dream ...

She dreamt that the people she encountered were all dreaming the same dream about her: she is in her van driving through town with a loudspeaker calling for auditions. In her dream she feared that they would wake up and realise they were dreaming and that, when they awoke, she would cease to exist. She awoke herself first - sweating, relieved, wondering.

NOTES

- ¹ Verbatim sentence from conversation with ex-meat factory worker who still does odd jobs of construction for the Murphys, recorded in reflective diary, January 2015.
- ² From same conversation with ex-meat factory worker, from reflective diary, January 2015
- ³ 'Cowboy' in Irish parlance can mean someone trying to 'get one over on you' or trick you in business
- ⁴ Celtic Tiger, the name given to the boom period in the Irish economy, from mid-1990s to the mid-2000s
- ⁵ Ref. RTE Archive. 2006
- ⁶ The Great Hunger is the name given to the famine of 1848 in Ireland – it was the year that the potato crop failed. The blame was given to the reliance on the potato, but in fact there was plenty of food – wheat, cattle, and other goods - being produced, but they were exported to England. Ireland's population pre-Famine was about 8million and in the next 5-year period, 2 million people were lost – 1 million deaths and 1 million emigrated. Of those that emigrated many more died – the ships that took them to America were called 'coffin ships', and a wake (funeral) was held to see them off – for even if they lived, they would never return. That period also saw a displacement of people from the countryside to the cities, especially depopulating the west of Ireland.
- ⁷ Migration Policy, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/ireland-rapid-immigration-recession>, (Accessed 18/04/16)
- ⁸ European Migration Network, <http://emn.ie/emn/statistics> (Accessed 18/04/16)
- ⁹ 'Among the various categories of non-EU nationals coming to Ireland in the last decade, the great majority have been workers (about 280,000 work permits were issued during from 1998 to 2008), followed by asylum seekers (74,000 applications made from 1998 to 2008), and students and dependents', Statistics from the Migration Policy Institute <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/ireland-rapid-immigration-recession> (Accessed 17/4/16)
- ¹⁰ Barry, Aoife, 'Ireland has the highest birth rate in the EU', *The Journal*, published 28 June 2011, statistics cited from the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI) Perinatal Statistics Report 2009, which was release in 2011, <http://www.thejournal.ie/ireland-has-highest-birth-rate-in-the-eu-2-164772-Jun2011/> (Accessed 10/02/16)
- ¹¹ 'Of all the towns in Ireland the recession hit Gort the hardest, falling from the top 10 per cent in 2002 to the bottom 10 per cent by 2011' from author unknown, 'CEDRA report finds Gort hit hardest by recession', in *Galway Advertiser*, 6 March 2014, <http://www.advertiser.ie/galway/article/67478/cedra-report-finds-gort-hit-hardest-by-recession> (Accessed 21/04/16)
- ¹² Kenny, Ciara, 'Ireland has highest net emigration level in Europe', *Irish Times*, published 21 Nov 2013, using Eurostat figures: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/ireland-has-highest-net-emigration-level-in-europe-1.1601685> (Accessed 17/04/16)
- ¹³ Corless, Nicola, 'Magnified Economic Decline in Gort' in *Clare Champion*, <http://www.clarechampion.ie/economic-decline-gort/> (Accessed 05/02/16). This article includes statistics on Gort's unemployment, population decline and emigration in the period 2002-6. Gort's labour was reliant on the meat-processing factory and construction work (21% employed in construction in 2006) and its population fell by 1/6 in the 2002-6 period.
- ¹⁴ "'I like it here, it's quiet, better for the children'" – Integration in Ireland's 'Little Brazil'", published in *The Journal*, 23 Nov 2014, <http://www.thejournal.ie/gort-Brazil-galway-integration-1793970-Nov2014/> (Accessed 10/02/16)
- ¹⁵ Frank explained 'pieces' to the stranger: where he grew up, it was common for people to pour porridge into a drawer and cut out pieces of it to give to children who would call to any door when hungry looking for a 'piece'.
- ¹⁶ Hāfez, *The Divan*, published 2003 by جى حون (first published 1380), <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/46117-there-are-different-wells-within-your-heart-some-fill-with>, (Accessed 18 April 2016)
- ¹⁷ Murray, Frank, in an email to the stranger, 18/02/16. In writing about myself as the stranger in the third person, I tried to imagine how 'others' saw me. As I recognise that this is a projection, I decided to invite contributions into the text from some of those 'others' that I had gotten to know as participant-subjects of the film and whom I describe thickly in the text. I wanted to contest the objectivity of the ethnographer's account, and experiment with a method to make 'the lives of others

less other', by allowing 'them' to write about me as I did about them. It is a method that acknowledges the interpretive document as subjective and tries to multiply those subjectivities by inviting various voices into the text. I invited Veronique, Frank, Ana, Ari, Dido and Carol to contribute to the text. I asked them each to write about when they first met or heard of me. Looking at Frank's reflection now, the idea of the film being generative already had its seeds in that uncertainty and openness to chance.

¹⁸ Devereux, Kathriona, (presenter), 'Brasileiros em Gort: Small Worlds RTE1', Online Video Documentary, originally aired on RTE1, 2 Dec 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZuOS3Ei5l8>, (Accessed 10/02/16)

¹⁹ Corr, Shauna, 'Brazilian 'illegal immigrants' arrested in raid on Tyrone home', *Tyrone Times*, published 9 Oct 2015, <http://www.tyronetimes.co.uk/news/tyrone-news/brazilian-illegal-immigrants-arrested-in-raid-on-tyrone-home-1-7002307> (Accessed 09/02/16)

²⁰ A 'culchie' is a word used in Ireland to describe someone from the countryside, a bit like 'bama' (made famous by Beyoncé) or country bumpkin. It's often used derogatorily but the stranger is interested in reclaiming it. She is a culchie. Or was before she moved to London, but you know the saying, 'you can take the girl out of the country but you can't take the country out of the girl'.

²¹ This description is an amalgamation from conversations in pubs with locals about Brazilians in Gort

²² The festival ran for four years. The last edition was in 2006. See Festival Website <http://brasilianfestivalgort.blogspot.ie/> (Accessed 05/02/16)

²³ Devereux, Kathriona, (presenter), 'Brasileiros em Gort: Small Worlds RTE1', Online Video Documentary, originally aired on RTE1, 2 Dec 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZuOS3Ei5l8>, (Accessed 10/02/16)

²⁴ Recorded on camera by the stranger, Sept 2015.

²⁵ The mart features in *Town of Strangers*. Liam Gillane is in *The Blow-in* (Teresa O'Brien, 2016, 8') with Ariadna, mentioned later when the stranger puts up posters in the barbershop. See Appendix for link to the film.

²⁶ Keane's on Bridge St. is listed in *Slater's Commercial Directory of Ireland – 1881 – Gort*, <http://www.celticcousins.net/ireland/1881gort.htm> (Accessed online 18/02/16)

²⁷ Travellers are a (recently officially recognised) ethnic group in Ireland, who historically worked with tin and traded horses and were itinerant. Traditionally living in handcrafted wooden caravans, and later in factory built caravans, most Irish Travellers now live in houses and are known by the oxymoron of 'settled Travellers'.

²⁸ Gerry did agree that the stranger could use what she had already filmed and also agreed to act as himself in the scene where he 'heals' Chloe, but other than that he refused to come to the auditions or participate in any further filming.

²⁹ The stranger met many more potential and eventual film participants, but there is not enough space in this chapter to go into detail on every encounter. You can read about some of these, such as Babs an Irish beekeeper and her friend Carol, a Spanish woman who home-schools her children, on a blog the stranger wrote about the making of *The Blow-in* here, under the title O'Brien, Teresa, 'How to Make Friends and Influence People (Into Being in a Film)', published online by Europoly/Goethe Institute, 15 August 2015:

<http://blog.goethe.de/europoly/pages/europoly/archives/241-How-to-make-friends-and-influence-people-into-being-in-a-film.html> (last accessed 22/04/2016)

³⁰ Ariadna participated in *The Blow-in* and also came to the auditions for *Town of Strangers*. She was very proud of her appearance in *The Blow-in*, but when I returned a few months after the auditions to film more with her, her demeanour had changed. Over time, I found out that it was due to her partner that she would not continue filming. Even though it was something that she really wanted to do, he would not 'allow' it.

³¹ Castellanos, Véronique, in an email to the stranger 6 Feb 2016

³² Murray, Frank, excerpt from an email to the stranger, 18/02/16

³³ Reference to Makhmalbaf, Mohsen (director), *Salaam Cinema*, Iran, 1995. In this film, thousands of people turned up to his auditions, and broke down the doorway. He decided then to make a film only about the auditions. This film is discussed in more detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Chapter Two

THE INVENTION OF SELF:

PERFORMING AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY IN THE THIRD PERSON

'All great literature is one of two stories; a man [sic] goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town.'¹

Introduction

This chapter reflects upon my research period in Gort, and on my positionality in relation to the place and the people, some of whom became part of the film *Town of Strangers*. It presents my research as an 'ethnography of the particular' as proposed by Lila Abu-Lughod (1991). I reflect on my research writing practices and how they later developed in the filmmaking methodology. Firstly, I discuss my scriptwriting practice; how it informed the type of relationships I made with people and place; and later, even though I abandoned the script idea, how it appears as a haunting presence in some of the scenes. Secondly, I discuss the diaristic and ethnographic journals of my research period, and how I extended those into an ethnofictional writing practice, that eventually became Chapter One of this thesis.

In Chapter One: *A Stranger Comes to Town*, I invented the character of 'The Stranger', and wrote her performatively into the text. Towards the end of the editing process of the film, two years later, I constructed myself into the film as a (ninth) character, 'T', and here I reflect on how that method, of performative construction of self, in the writing and in the filmmaking,

extends from first person filmmaking into the form of a reflexive subjective 'third person' filmmaking. My written and cinematic practices of constructing myself as 'The Stranger' in the written practice, and as the character of 'T' in the film *Town of Strangers*, is here explored in the context of ethnofiction literature, auto-ethnography and autofiction, and as a Deleuzian 'power of the false'. I examine its effect as a response to Abu-Lughod's challenge to ethnographic writing (1991, p473), a challenge that I then extend to documentary filmmaking: to make the lives of others less other.

2.1 Ethnography of the Particular

I see the town of Gort, and my research there, as an 'ethnography of the particular', a place from which to write *from*, as well as to write about. Lila Abu-Lughod advocated an 'ethnography of the particular' in her essay 'Writing Against Culture' (1991). She developed this method while working with Bedouin women in Egypt in her own ethnographic practice, and as a critical response to Clifford and Marcus' approach to ethnographic writing in *Writing Culture* (1986). This was an influential collection of essays, which questioned modernist notions of representations of reality and contributed to the postmodern turn in ethnographic writing and practice. Abu-Lughod's text critiqued the assumption in *Writing Culture* that culture itself is a general form. She proposed that there is only the specific and the particular to write *from*. She also criticised *Writing Culture* for its exclusion of feminists and 'halfies'².

I posit that it also excludes the indigenous insider voice, a.k.a the anthropologist at home, or the 'witch' that Geertz (1983, p57) writes against.

Abu-Lughod cites Strathern's description of the difference between anthropologists and feminist scholars, in terms of 'the nature of the investigator's relationship to the Other' (Strathern, 1985, p289, cited by Abu-Lughod, 1991, p467). For Abu-Lughod, what is critical is the self/other relationship; one that she finds anthropology seems to have a different relationship with, than feminism does, due to its history as 'a discipline built on the historically constructed divide between the West and the non-West'³. She asks: 'what happens when the 'other' that the anthropologist is studying is simultaneously constructed as, at least partially, a self?' (1991, p472)

This question immediately inverts the self/other relationship: when the other becomes the self, the anthropologist can recognise *herself* as the other, rather than the people she studies. The other is always, at least partially, a self. My position, as author and researcher of the film *Town of Strangers*, is one of insider and outsider; thus I am both anthropologist and other. I am the witch inside the research that Geertz writes against. But, I am also an outsider looking in, constructing myself as an other, as well as a self. I apply Abu-Lughod's methodology and concept of 'writing from the particular' as a filmmaker, and as a writer, in my research. She proposes three ways of writing 'against culture':

(i) Discourse and Practice – relating theory and practice to one another, which is explored through the method of writing as practice that I do in Chapter One, and my subsequent expansion of that practice in the filmmaking and editing.

(ii) Connections – defining the relationship between the researcher and the people she is studying, which I explore in this chapter, when I describe my

positionality in relation to Gort, my identifications and their limits, within the community in which I place myself. Abu-Lughod's recommendation, for writing against (a homogenous general idea of) culture, is to write about the connections between the anthropologist and the community being studied. She describes this as a political project, not an existential one (1991, p472). By political, she means that one should analyse the historical processes by which she is enabled to be there, where she is. In my case, I can be there, because I have the privilege of a passport that allows me to travel freely, and a modest camper van that I can travel with and stay in cheaply. I am also there because of a history of colonialism which impels me to explore the freedom of movement of people(s), and to see myself as one of those subjects, because of the forces of globalisation that allow me to work in one place and another simultaneously; in this case London and Gort, and access to the financial means to travel due to my scholarship income, and my freedom from family or other commitments that might inhibit that freedom. I am there because I am Irish, I speak English, and I have some understanding of the wider culture and history, as well as a drive to understand more deeply and share my research in my wider (national) community.

(iii) Ethnography of the particular – even though Abu-Lughod critiques *Writing Culture* for getting lost in the poetic and the general (1991, p473), she acknowledges the importance of that work, in highlighting the fact that the main method used to represent and analyse cultures is writing; her challenge to ethnographers is to 'write about lives so as to constitute others as less other' (1991, p473). By positioning myself inside the writing of the text in the third person, and by constructing myself as an other amongst others in the film, I endeavour to meet this challenge.

Abu-Lughod writes that one must accept Geertz's insight (1973, p8) that all anthropological writings are fictions, but are not fictitious. Anthropological writings are always, and can only be, interpretive, but that does not mean that they are incorrect or false; to be fictitious would mean to be untrue. As my research project is from the point of view of filmmaking, rather than from ethnography or anthropology, I then rephrase these statements as: 'all films (even those called documentaries), are fictions but are not fictitious' and '**are there ways to film lives so as to constitute others as less other**'? This is the question that is central to my film-as-research and writing-as-practice project.

Abu-Lughod insists that writing an ethnography of the particular 'is not to be mistaken for arguments for privileging micro over macro processes' (1991, p474). Similarly, Geertz (1973, p11) writes:

'The notion that one can find the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up and simplified in so-called "typical" small towns and villages is palpable nonsense. What one finds in small towns and villages is (alas) small-town or village life.'

Both Abu-Lughod and Geertz criticise the example, or the synecdochal, as a way to understand bigger structures. In my film and in my writing practice, I treat Gort in its particularities, and not as somewhere typical of any small town.

As much as I approach my research and filmmaking in Gort as an 'ethnography of the particular', I also acknowledge that it is not an insular, sealed-off, monocultural community. Gort is not a microcosm of Ireland, but of course some of the national migration and other trends are echoed here.

Indeed, some are even more pronounced. It is Gort *in relation* to the larger nation state, and Gort the local, in relation to the wider global forces from which I write and film. Gort has its own particularities. It is not meant to be an example of any small town, anywhere in the world – it is connected to the global, and to the local, but it is not a reductive example of a local place that can stand in for another globalised place nor as a miniature of the state. As T says, when she is interviewed on the radio in the film: ‘I like Gort because I’m from a small town but it’s not my small town’. Global interactions in the present make writing from particular communities as isolated units almost impossible.

So, it is not a microcosm, but it is also not an island. Gort is connected to the nation state and to the city and to the countryside, as well as being a small town. It exists in relation to these forces. Gort is inextricably related to many places and forces not contained within the town itself. So, when I write from the place of Gort, there is a subconscious in the writing; a sense of what is not said, or made explicit, but is somehow there. I believe that there is an subconscious in the particular that is suggested by the particularity of the writing. In this case, the subconscious, or the subtext, of *A Stranger Comes to Town* and *Town of Strangers* the film, evokes the refugee crisis, Ireland’s Centenary celebrations of its Rising, the EU closing of the borders, Gort’s relationship with Galway, Dublin, Belfast, Vila Fabril, Sao Paulo, Athens, Lesbos, Sicily, Tangiers and Kabul. And the reader/viewer may detect more - they may interpret the writing and the film texts like a psychoanalyst interprets a dream.

2.2 Anthropology At Home

My relationship to the place of Gort is one of insider and outsider. I recognise Gort from far away in the general sense – a small town in the West of Ireland, it is *like* where I am from, but it is also not like it. I was born in Dublin, and reared in the countryside, four miles outside of the town of Killarney. Killarney is bigger, more touristic and more affluent in comparison with Gort, but it is still a small town. In the time period when I grew up there, it was ethnically homogenous. Gort is a smaller, quieter place; it is a more traditional town, in some senses, but that is something I recognise, not only from the experience of living in my town, but from other towns and villages in the county I'm from, and other places I've lived in Ireland. Close-up, it surprises. I do not recognise it in all its singularities.

My own identity as a migrant/migrating subject is not through violent displacement from my homeland. However, it has caused me to reflect on my identity as that of a decolonised subject, and as a voluntary migrant, moving between the former colony and the former colonising nation. During the research and filming of *Town of Strangers*, I took on another kind of hybrid identity as a returning, but non-committal, émigré⁴. Hamid Naficy describes several kinds of interstitial identities. He writes: 'It is possible to go into exile voluntarily and return yet still not fully arrive' which is an apt description of my insider/outsider position in Gort, and inversely, 'it is possible to be in internal exile and yet be at home' (1999, p3).

Naficy's description evokes feelings I remembered as a (pre)queer teenager growing up in a conservative traditional small town in the southwest of Ireland, and I wonder if this is one of the reasons why I tend to identify with

outsider-ness in others. I remember thinking of myself in the third person, as a way to imagine myself as a hero in a novel, rather than in the daily reality I lived. I relate to many of the characters in *Town of Strangers* in these ways. For example, in the case of Chloe, the teenage Traveller, I identify with what I perceive to be a sense of insider/outsider-ness, or exile at home, as an identity. Born in Gort, Chloe has barely left the boundaries of the county, but as a Traveller girl, she is in internal exile from the mainstream culture, and exiled within her own culture, torn between her desire for travel and to fit in with her community. Interstitial, or hybrid identity, could also denote someone living between a subculture and the mainstream, as I see it in the case of Dido. Her own exile from her upper middle class naval family came about when she reinvented herself as a hippy in the West of Ireland; yet, arriving during the Troubles, she might have been seen as an English neo-colonial settler. Or, in my own case: a bisexual/queer woman moving back and forth between rural Ireland and urban London. With hybrid identities, there is a sense of straddling multiple 'cultures', and also of not fitting in anywhere.

The riddle, as Strathern puts it, is 'how one *knows* when one is at home'? (Strathern, 1987, p16, cited by Gallinat & Collins, 2010, p9-10). I did not feel 'at home' in the particularity of Gort. I was drawn to Gort, as a place that I felt was both familiar and strange to me. I know Gort and I don't know Gort. There is the Gort of my imagination, and the Gort that I am discovering. The latter did not come to replace the former; rather the two Gorts encounter one another. The film's meeting of fantasy with the documental echoes this relationship that I have to the place, which is one perhaps everyone has to place, that of the self encountering the real through the imagination. This idea of how we experience reality is one I am aware of when making

documentary films. And when watching documentary films - and fiction – we encounter the real through our own subjective imaginations.

As the research developed, the themes of home, belonging and the stranger emerged as central to the film project *because of my shifting positions in relation to Gort and its inhabitants*. The practice of seeing the familiar as unfamiliar is one that I actively must practice, if and when I identify as an anthropologist 'at home', because 'the analyst writing at home has no need to learn much of what the natives know; the problem is in part the result of already knowing it' (Pease Chock, 1986, p87). These positions are those of distance and proximity, which are geographical and are also psychological.

Clifford Geertz develops his reflection on ethnography at home, departing from psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut's concepts of 'experience-near' and 'experience-distant' (1983, p57). If you are too inside a culture, then you cannot see beyond its immediacies, while if you are too outside, then you are in danger of becoming too abstract. For Geertz, both positions are a type of confinement. Geertz is against interpretations of culture from the native's perspective, which he likens to 'an ethnography of witchcraft as written by a witch', and he also decries the distant 'ethnography of witchcraft as written by a geometer' (1983, p57). Remembering to keep a fresh perspective, to switch between my positions of witch and geometer, and vice versa, especially over time, is key to my process. Hence, writing myself in the third person as the stranger in Chapter One, became a way for me to express my diaristic research in a voice that stayed aware of my dual, or hybrid, positions.

2.3 Scriptwriting as Method

I arrived in Gort in late 2014, with a short fictional script called *The Miracle of Colonel Sanders Tears* (referred to as *The Miracle* hereafter). The story was a coming of age of two eighteen-year-old women, working in a meat factory; one, Luiza, is an undocumented migrant; the other, Boo, born locally, lives at home and cares for her deaf father, and is saving up money to open up a bloodstain removal business. Boo has a crisis pregnancy, and an unlikely friendship flourishes when she meets Luiza at a statue of Colonel Sanders⁵, who is crying tears of blood.

The Gort in this story was mostly a place of my imagination, as I did not know much about the veridical Gort, having visited only briefly in the past on the way through from Limerick to Galway. I had originally written the story set in a Mexican/American border town, a few years previously when travelling in Mexico and Central America, and had since adapted its setting to Gort. I knew that many Brazilians had moved to Gort in order to work in the meat factories; it made more sense to write about an Irish town rather than an imagined Mexican/American town in the south of Texas.

Similar to this fictional border town I had invented, Gort is also a hybrid space. Coco Fusco (1991) conceptualises hybrid space as 'a shelter between cultures and a place to chart new beginnings'. This idea of Gort as a shelter could also be a way to reflect on the town of Gort as a place of shelter for the many hybrid identities, stories and beginnings made there by its inhabitants. The film *Town of Strangers* also occupies a hybrid space in terms of how it may be perceived as national cinema: it could be seen as a national (Irish) film and also as an intercultural diasporic film, or perhaps better, a shelter for

all the multiplicities that have been explored in the film.

The script I had written facilitated a certain kind of development of the project. This fictional script was, unwittingly, a method of bringing me into contact with Gort in a way that was different to how a conventional ethnographer, or a documentary-maker, might approach a place. As a dramatic fiction film writer/director, I was not looking for facts. I was smelling out stories, looking for characters, faces on the streets, which could emote or evoke something. Although the methods I was using had much in common with anthropological practices of emplaced and sensory ethnography, (discussed in the next section), the script was a work of fiction, created mostly from my imagination, and not from my fieldwork. I made a treatment, a plot outline, and scene summaries, with some of the scenes written up with dialogue and others in summary form. Writing the script was a form of constructing the place and people of Gort, sculpting that imaginary Gort that had brought me here. The process gave me the freedom to 'imagine' Gort, in a way that I otherwise might not have, had I been approaching the place and people as a traditional anthropologist or documentary-maker.

My self-assigned role as screenwriter of a fictional script informed my interactions, and my relationships in a way that differs from an ethical ethnographer committed to a certain kind of truth. The craft and fabulation involved in fictional scriptwriting, meant that I cultivated the place of Gort as a fantastical place, only loosely based on its reality, rather than nurturing a commitment to a more observational, ethnographic mode of encounter.

As well as being a scriptwriter, I was also assuming the role of a casting director, when I met people. This process generated encounters that also

differed from how an ethnographer might have interacted with people. For example, I approached a local schoolteacher, Margaret, and asked if she knew of any of her students who might fit the descriptions of the fictional characters I had invented of Boo and Luiza. Margaret spoke to the parents of Chloe and Josie, who then came to the auditions, and we started to work together improvising scenes from the script in the abandoned house. In this way, the relationship was configured differently from the beginning.

My process of scriptwriting and casting, by getting to know people in the town, led to the invention of the audition, as a way to cast new people and to hear stories, that might become incorporated into the script. An ethnographer, or a documentary filmmaker might have conducted interviews but, as I imagined my role as that of a fiction director, I called instead for auditions. The auditions, however, irrevocably changed the course of the film, due to the particularity of the encounters that occurred. The project suddenly became dialogical, open, hybrid in a way that made the script seem too linear and closed, as a way of working.

Yet, I needed to think of myself as a conventional scriptwriter and casting director in order to call for the auditions; it was, somehow, a necessary, if circuitous, method of working. The peregrinations that have defined my process (of fabulation and generative making-of as the production of reality) began to form, even if unwittingly. In this way, the script-imagining I was doing facilitated my emplacement in Gort and vice versa. I needed to spend time believing in and developing my fictional script in order to make the kind of hybrid-documentary that I eventually made.

That phantasmagorical relationship I had with Gort imbued the eventual film in many ways; from how I presented the funeral scene at the beginning of the film, to my use of music to evoke the dreamlike states and inner worlds of the characters, to how I constructed myself in the film. The fiction script was de-emphasised and eventually abandoned, as the auditions inspired and generated new ideas about how to make the film. Nevertheless, ghosts of that fiction haunt the resulting film, *Town of Strangers*, without serving the narrative function for which they were originally intended. This can be seen, for example, in the scenes with Chloe and Josie in the abandoned house, that arose from improvisations based on that script. There was a scene I had written where Boo's father sends her to see a local healer, but Boo does not want to tell the healer that she is pregnant. I shot this scene with Gerry as the local folk healer and Chloe as the teenage character of Boo. This scene eventually made its way into *Town of Strangers* in the mysterious tableau where Chloe visits the healer, but out of its original context completely. I scripted this scene as a situation, without writing dialogue – Boo visits a local healer, on the behest of her father. When directing Chloe and Gerry, I asked them to improvise the dialogue in the first two takes, and, on the third take, to be silent.

The scene is used outside of its original intention but, somehow, it succeeds in having the feeling of observational documentary even though it is improvised acting based on a script. This is because the people in it are playing themselves. I did not direct Chloe to be shy and awkward, but due to the situation she is in, she is shy and awkward. Her reactions are her own, and not acted. Gerry does these healing rituals in that same spot, in his sitting-room, by the window, every Wednesday; his gestures, and concern, are all his own. This scene, and also the scene of Chloe and Josie in the

abandoned house (discussed in Chapter Four), are leftovers from experimental improvisations arising from the script. They have made their way into the film, in a re-appropriation of the material, as mysterious haunting presences.

That fictional script which unravelled itself became a way of thinking about, and engaging with, the place and people of Gort. I now began to think of the script as a process, seed, or catalyst for a potential film that would be improvised and generated from it, as a raw material, rather than as a blueprint to be followed. The making-of film as a generative form that accounts for its performativity began to create itself from the ashes of the script.

2.4 Thick Description and Sensorial Ethnography

Concurrently with my fiction scriptwriting practice, I kept a reflective diary of my research and filmmaking process, especially focused on my fieldwork visits, and extended periods of living in Gort, prior to filming. It includes character descriptions, stories and memories that people told me, gossip, notes I made about historical records, newspapers, books, documentaries, and theatre projects that others had made concerning Gort. I transcribed conversations and pieces of dialogue I heard, descriptions of places, interactions, and reflexive writing on my own position. Sometimes, I wrote down complete stories, as they were told to me. This journal was originally envisioned to be a research archive of material to be used to develop the fiction film content, but very little of it made it into the script, as the Gort of my fantasies and imagination took over in that writing process. However,

these journal entries became the raw material that I used to develop a different kind of writing practice, which can be read in Chapter One of this thesis. This is written as a literary ethnofiction, that later informed my filmmaking practice.

I decided to use some of these diary entries, written in the first person, as research notes to inform a thick description of the interlocking behaviours, social practices, and affects that constitute Gort as a matrix of various places and communities for its inhabitants. Using ethnofiction as a method of writing is consistent with my idea of places being at once in the imagination and physical, and always relational. Clifford Geertz' term 'thick description' (1973, p2) is a way of writing that he expands from Gilbert Ryle. Using the example of the different symbolic meanings of a wink, Geertz calls for a more interpretive analysis of culture rather than observation only, against scientific fact. My thick description was aimed at creating a textured, vivid, sensorially strong, concretely written yet theoretically reflective description of Gort. I wanted the writing to bring the reader 'into touch with the lives of strangers' (Geertz, 1973, p8). I exercised a reflexivity in the writing that analysed my growing relationship to Gort, my position as a stranger, but not a foreigner in it, and how I imagined that others saw me in the town.

Informing my thick description were ethnographic practices, which included spending time with people, accompanying them and sharing their activities, and keeping a diary of the process. I wrote about smell and touch, as well as what I saw and heard, for example 'The stranger ordered bacon and cabbage; the taste of it reminded her of childhood visits to her aunt's farm.' (from Chapter One). Sarah Pink's definition of sensory ethnography (2009) is one that recognises the limits of watching and listening in traditional

ethnography, and engages with theories of emplacement by anthropologist David Howes (2003), and phenomenological anthropology as theorised by Tim Ingold (2000), as the interconnected senses, sensory perception and sensory categories. Pink's description of sensory ethnography moves "'beyond text" to the tacit, unspoken, non-verbal ... from writing, to documentary film and photography to new engagements with arts practice' (Pink, 2010). Visual ethnography practitioners self-consciously using and expanding the uses of these methods, include Lucien Caisting Taylor, Stephanie Spray and Pecho Valez, through their film work and research at the Sensory Ethnography Lab in Harvard University (HSEL)⁶.



Still from *Town of Strangers*

Using these methods of sensory ethnography in Gort, I built relationships and gained a richer understanding of memory, gossip, and beliefs of the region through embedding myself in an emplaced engagement in the town for an extended period, while getting to know potential film participants. This meant investing time into embodied activities such as eating together, walking together, mushroom-hunting, bat-counting, and generally spending

time hanging out together, in order to have a more sensory experience that goes beyond visual observation, interview or other forms of research. I rented a room from Ana, I made food with Hamid and we went on long hikes; I went kayaking and swimming with Yvonne; I donned a protective bee-suit and participated in bee-keeping with Babs and Carol⁷. Making and eating food played a significant part in building relationships, especially with Hamid and Elham, who, on several occasions, prepared a traditional meal for me, and often, I helped to prepare the food over several hours, as well as to eat it. Those encounters of eating together were a way to talk about home, longing and family. We became closer through sharing food on these occasions, especially with Elham, as we had less language in common.

The sensorial, as a research method, also found expression cinematically in terms of how I filmed with the eventual subject-participants. These included methods of filming that tried to embody the senses, such as the sense of the camera 'touching' Hamid's face, when he is driving; the sound of the electrical devices and lights in Hamid's pizzeria evoking his loneliness; Hamid's breathing and running; how he runs, how he walks; Ralf's hand gestures, warm tone of voice, accent; 'flying' as sensorially embodied; Chloe's 'fragility' embodied in the mirror scene where she touches herself putting on make-up; and the contrast with her angry power, when she shouts at her sister to 'get out'; the haptic sensorial in the abandoned house, as they touch objects of cultural memory; the scenes of the healer touching animals, and 'sensing' them with his divining rod; the children picking mushrooms, evoking the dank smell of the forest; the filmmaker touching Ana, showing intimacy by fixing her mascara; Rosa running her hands through her hair, pointing out her tattoos as an expression of her sensuality through her tactility, T in the van eating chickpeas out of a pot ...



Elham drinks coffee, Still from *Town of Strangers*

Laura Marks (2000: xvi) describes these kinds of sensorial embodiments in film, as a way to 'represent the "unrepresentable" senses such as touch, smell and taste', in what is essentially an audio-visual medium. This sensorial embodiment was an important method in the filmmaking as a way to evoke the memories and lived experiences of the protagonists; such as Elham brewing coffee as a portal into her memory of, and longing for, her mother. In my writing practice, I wrote about the sounds and smells of Gort, as well as from my own particularity of my emotional reactions and sensations in response to the places and people I encountered.

In an experimental and impulsive moment, as I was editing and weaving these journals together for the first chapter, I made a crucial intervention into my text, which propelled it (and me) into new territory. I had been writing about my own reflections in the first person, based on my diary entries, when it occurred to me to include myself as one of the characters of Gort, and I started to write about myself in the third person. I wanted to make of myself an other, but I could not speak from their point of view. So I chose this

method as a way to 'speak nearby' (Chen & Minh-ha, 1992), rather than write 'about' the people I encountered. This invention of putting us all in the third person, transpired to become the salient characteristic of the text and, subsequently, the film.

2.5 Writing Ethnofiction

Ethnofiction is known, in cinematic terms, as the blending of documentary and fiction film in visual ethnography, but, it has precedence and parallels in literature. In this thesis, I discuss both traditions, as they pertain to my methods. In this chapter, I focus on the literary tradition of ethnofiction, and on the methods that I used to extend it into a cinematic practice of autofiction in the third person. In Chapter Four, I discuss cinematic ethnofiction in the Rouchian tradition of working with subjects to perform themselves.

Ethnofiction, as a literary method, emerged as a conscious method of writing before the cinematic form. The term is related to, but has a different meaning in literature than, the Rouchian filmmaking method. Literary ethnofiction is a blending of the field notes, interviews and collected data told through a fictional method with the inclusion of detail to round out the tale. Significant events should not be invented by the researcher, but developed directly from the observed events. 'New characters do not emerge from the miasma of a writer's mind, but evolve from one's fieldnotes' (VanSlyke-Briggs, Kjersti, 2009, p341).

Kirin Narayan (1999, p136) traces ethnofiction's origins in anthropology to Adolph Bandelier's *The Delight Makers* (1890). Writers and scholars who have since developed the form include Zora Neale Thurston, a student of Franz Boas, who wrote about the experiences of Haitians gleaned from her anthropological work in the novel *And Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Julie Cruikshank (1990 and 1998) has recognised the blending of fiction and ethnography in folk stories in her anthropological collection of oral stories from the Yukon community of Northern Canada. More recently, Mark Augé's ethnofictional work self-consciously acknowledges the blurring of the genres of the novella with scholarly ethnography by using academic research to underpin and footnote his *No Fixed Abode: Ethnofiction* (2013) described as 'blending together both ethnographic research and fictional narrative' (Leorke, 2014).

Kirin Narayan, in her book *Alive in the Writing* (2012), inspired by Geertz, as well as Chekhov, writes in detail on methods of thick ethnographic writing, and gives several examples as well as practical exercises on writing 'creative non-fiction'. I applied some of her writing methodology on 'place' and 'person' to my method of writing in Chapter One: *A Stranger Came to Town*, especially in my sensorial descriptions of places such as the abandoned meat factory, and in my description of persons as characters. As well as her writing on creative non-fiction, Narayan has also written novels and ethnographies. She insists on maintaining a distinction between the forms, although she admits to, and celebrates, crossing 'the border' all the time. She argues that 'to do away with a border and altogether blur ethnography and fiction would entail a loss for both sorts of writing' (1999, p134). I anchor my writing as practice in Chapter One in the field of ethnofiction, as described by Narayan, where the border is still there, but crossings are made, rather than as a fixed

set of rules as per VanSlyke-Briggs. Some of the writing is gossipy, some is fantastical, yet it is all grounded in my fieldnotes from the time, and no characters or stories emerge from the 'miasma' of my mind, unlike my scriptwriting practice, which was mainly miasmic.

I use the method of ethnofiction writing neither to collide, nor to blend, fact and fiction. I invited some of the protagonists to write about their first impressions of 'the stranger', and also included some of those in the text. This was a way to draw attention to the many voices that I channelled in the text, even if it is, overall, authored by me. 'The ethnofiction is honest in that it is multi-vocal and recognises that to claim to be anything else would be false' (VanSlyke-Briggs, 2009, p343). I used it as a way to acknowledge the impossibility of objective ethnographic documentation and to place myself subjectively and also in the third person as one of several others as a gesture towards making the lives of others less other.

Writing about my research period in Gort as an ethnofictional piece of writing is a way to reflect on how the place of Gort has impacted on my imagination, in a wholly different way than the fictional scriptwriting did. The experience of being emplaced sensorially in Gort generated this piece of writing in a way that writing a fiction script from my imagination never could. The discipline of writing from the particular, and sticking to my field notes as an indexical reality, meant that a very different kind of ethnofiction emerged than my fictional script could ever have been.

All of the details in this written account are documentation of experiences and events that happened and have a direct relationship with the representation of veridical reality. The writing practice is not fiction, but it is

a method that explores place and people in a way that points towards the construction of narrative – and acknowledges that I am authoring the story as I am meeting the ‘reality’ – in the same manner as I approach it in my filmmaking. I came to Gort initially because I had a story that I had set there, but I wanted the town’s stories to come to me. I was receptive. And I received. I became both the storyteller and a character within the story.

My use of ethnofiction, in its literary form, is an experimental way to write a practice-based doctoral dissertation, and have the writing be the practice, and it is also a way to acknowledge the impossibility of ‘true’, ethnographic documentation. The ruse of writing about myself in the third person is a conceit. This decentring of my own self in the writing from I to she, along with verbatim excerpts of other voices, and the inclusion of the reflections of subject-participants who contributed to this story, troubles the alleged position of the anthropologist/researcher/documentary-maker as the bearer of truth or objectivity. Writing of myself in the third person, rather than in the first person, allowed me to bring in thoughts and reflections that are conjectures of how people saw me and of why they decided to engage, or not engage, with me, for example:

‘She wondered if she had the courage to cut off pieces of her soul to make a film in this town. Was she daring enough to be the kind of stranger that people would offer themselves to be in her film? Would she be the kind of stranger that would protect them as she wove her story into theirs?’

These conjectures reveal, more than anything else, how I feel about myself in relation to Gort. The writing becomes a description of my own experience of

the townspeople's reactions towards me, the feelings these reactions have engendered in me, and the meaning I constructed in response to these reactions. The writing anticipated the kinds of performative construction of self that subsequently arose in the filmmaking. In this way, the writing created at the beginning of the research process eventually found expression cinematically at the end of the filmmaking practice. It reveals more of my projections of what I think the locals think of me, than what I think of them, inasmuch as it is also a thick description of place and culture, which acknowledges the impossibility of objective fact, but nevertheless produces its own subjective reality through its performance.

2.6 Autofiction: Auto-Ethnography Mixes with Ethnofiction

Town of Strangers, the film, begins (after a prelude) with an image of the filmmaker, whom we shall call 'T' in order to differentiate her from the author of the film and of this thesis. T is driving through town in a red van announcing the auditions. T does not speak to camera, address the audience directly, nor does she use voiceover narration, as many films featuring the filmmaker do.

Directors have long appeared in their own films, in documentary and in fiction. In documentary, it is usually seen as a reflexive gesture, or as an ethical or political choice, and it has become a genre in its own right. Michael Renov (2008) discusses the subjectivity of the filmmaker in first person cinema, and Alisa Lebow (2013) explores subjectivity and performance of self in documentary, through various lenses, including the diasporic. However, while both Lebow and Renov concentrate on an

autobiographical self in the first person, this is *not* what the self in *Town of Strangers*, is doing or trying to do.

Kevin Corbett (2016) has identified what he calls a subgenre of documentary called the auto-fiction, which he sees as distinct to the first person documentary. He identifies *Tarnation* (Jonathan Caouette, 2003), *Waltz with Bashir* (Ari Folman, 2008), *My Winnipeg* (Guy Maddin, 2007) and *A Complete History of my Sexual Failures* (Chris Waite, 2008), as films that exemplify this new 'post-modern' form (Corbett, 2016, p52-3). His definition of auto-fiction more closely aligns to the performance of self that I constructed in *Town of Strangers*, something that he sees, in the films mentioned, as a 'tendency, among some filmmakers to put themselves into their films, to construct narratives about themselves and even fictionalize those narratives' (Corbett, 2016, p51). He refers to 'docu-fantasia' in which the 'line between reality and representation is fluid' (2016, p55). Certainly, when I fictionalised myself as 'T' into the cinematic landscape of *Town of Strangers*, it was a step further than my written practice in Chapter One, where The Stranger first appeared as a character.

In the film, my approach was to construct the filmmaker as a reflexive character, one representative of my experiences but not with an author's self-reflexive voiceover. Throughout my filmmaking process, and in the rough cuts of the edit, the filmmaker was present in many scenes of the pro-filmic event, in a similar way to many first person reflexive documentary films: in the 'behind-the-scenes' production shots; heard off-screen in dialogue with the those in front of the camera in the auditions; and heard off-screen in other scenes, such as in Chloe's bedroom scene. It was not until towards the end of the editing process, two years after the auditions, and over a year into

editing the film, that I decided to write myself into the film as an ethnofictional character. This involved constructing myself as a character onscreen, and acting in the film, performing as myself. First, I wrote a voiceover similar in style to Chapter One, in the third person. I reflected on my struggles and conflicts over the three years I spent making the film: she is looking for a place to live, she stays in her van meanwhile, she is not sure how to direct the film, she called for auditions and was moved by the people she encountered; she set the script aside and let the film generate itself as a making-of film; she is becoming emotionally involved with the people in the film....

I wrote several voiceovers – in the third, and in the first person, and attempted to weave them through the film. In the voiceover scripts, I tried to relate myself to the others in the film. For example, here is an excerpt from a voiceover I wrote that would be laid over the final scenes of the film:

[VO over Burren as camera recedes from Hamid on the rock:]

I was beginning to feel that the people in my film are not real people, even though rationally I know that they are. We are all running from something. Losing and finding ourselves over and over. We think we encounter characters, when we watch films, but ultimately we encounter ourselves.

Was each person that I was filming somehow playing a different part of myself? Had I been drawn to each person not because I needed to meet them, but because I needed to meet myself in them?

[VO over Faces in audition, closing sequence:]

I am Ana when I am lonely, I am Elham when I miss my mother, I am Ralf when I am feeling reckless, I am Chloe trying to fit in and ready to run away, I am Dido making my home in a chair, I am Rosa when I am strong and I am Rowan when I am vulnerable, I am Hamid running in the Afghan hills of the Irish Burren.

I was the stranger who came to town and went on a journey once I arrived.⁸

I re-wrote this voiceover narration in the third person, but I found that the voiceover, as a method, was too didactic towards the audience. The voiceover scripts had the effect that the audience relied too much on the author for guidance and interpretation. Through a process of writing, I devised scenes and a narrative through-line for a character I called T, who is akin to The Stranger in my written practice in Chapter One. Presenting myself in the film in the third person, as T, I was able to embody the feelings of sympathetic symbiosis that I experienced through the encounter with each person, and place myself horizontally amongst them.

What I discovered through this method, was that it gave me a voice through which I could express myself as an author and, simultaneously, be a strategy to make T (me) an other amongst others, rather than perform a direct address of 'I to you', as is usual in first person filmmaking. The relationship between the audience and me shifted from 'you' to 'she', second to third person. By scripting scenes such as the radio show and living-in-the-van set pieces, the character of T became an intrinsic part of the film's world of Gort, rather than a layer of authorial reflection super-imposed over the film.

Many documentary filmmakers have a self-reflexive practice, and sometimes

appear in their films as themselves, constructing and performing their roles in the narrative of their documentaries; the method is too prevalent, and the filmmakers too numerous, to go into here. However, what makes the construction of the character of T in *Town of Strangers* unlike most first person and self-reflexive documentaries is that I do not narrate the film. My staging of the self, as an autofictional gesture in *Town Of Strangers*, uses neither first person direct address nor voiceover. The audience observes T in the third person, similar to how The Stranger is constructed in Chapter One of this thesis. I perform 'being observed' in my van, on the radio, even though I am the one writing and directing those scenes. Through this process, I created situations that I then acted in and improvised scenes. Therefore, this process became another form of scriptwriting, coming full circle from the scriptwriting with which I had started this process, but now the scriptwriting and the ethnofiction writing practices came together. Reflecting on it now, it is ironic that I thought that I would make an ethnofiction with non-actors, but it was I who became the only actor in a documentary hybrid film whose main ethnofictional element was that of the director's role. My method of constructing myself as the character T, in the film, blends the ethnographic and the fictional, via the invention of a staged self.

In *Our Beloved Month of August* (2008), director Miguel Gomes interweaves an ethnographic documentary with a fictional drama with a meta-film structure and a musical. Gomes appears in the film as a character within the world of the film, rather than as another layer, such as a voiceover, nor does he appear as the interviewer, as the director more usually appears in reflexive documentaries. Unlike the films mentioned by Corbett, Gomes never addresses the audience directly. The first scene, in which we see the director on screen, is when he is building a set made of dominoes with the crew; the

producers walk in and spoil it all. In the closing credit sequence, Gomes interacts with the sound recordist, who insists that he is hearing sounds that are not being picked up on the mic. Similarly to how I arrived in Gort, Gomes has come to this village, armed with a script to make a fiction film – apparently a horror film about Red Riding Hood - that will be cast with local non-actors. There is a scene depicting Gomes and the film producer discussing this script, with the producer becoming impatient with the lack of progress on casting. However, this staged scene itself may be part of the deadpan comedy (Bradshaw, 2010) of the hybrid fiction-doc-making-of film that is *Our Beloved Month of August*. *Town of Strangers* makes no allusion to *The Miracle* script with which I had arrived in Gort, in its final incarnation (although I did experiment with including it, as part of the meta-story, in various voiceovers I had written for the film). As Gomes and his crew are also characters in the film, and the supposed characters of the film seem more like non-actors than actors, Gomes' ruse of placing himself within the film 'collapses any distinctions' (Hale, 2010) between the layers of the film, the layers being anthropological observation, musical, drama, documentary and making-of.

Gomes' scene with his producer partly inspired the radio show scene that I created in *Town Of Strangers*. The dialogue in this scene is loosely adapted from a conglomerate of conversations I had with my producer and editor about the direction of the film, when they asked me "where is the 'glue'?" and "what is the narrative?" The producer worried that it was "self-indulgent", or in danger of becoming "like an art-installation" (which, for her, is a negative criticism). Writing this radio scene into the film liberated me – and I hope the audience – from the tyranny of an imposed plot. It provides a key to unlocking the film for the audience; a way of looking at it that

acknowledges the film as performative, generative and improvised without being literal. Once the radio show scene has happened, the audience can more easily accept the juxtapositions and rhizomic jumps that they might not usually expect of a documentary film.



The Radio Show scene, Still from *Town of Strangers*

The scenes of T on the radio, driving around Gort announcing the auditions, and living in the van, are all scripted, and were shot out of sequence with a crew over a couple of days at the end of the editing process. This notion of docu-fantasia as the fluid line between representation and reality (Corbett, 2016, p67), is more akin to how I wrote and performed as myself in *Town of Strangers*. My construction of self, such as doing yoga in a carpark, eating out of the pot, sleeping in the van at the laundromat, are artificially constructed and invented explicitly for the camera. I had placeholders ready for them in the rough-cut edit. However, these scenes were arrived at through a process of writing, reflecting on my experiences of living in and out of Gort over the period of making the film. I then wove these reflections into scenes, that, through performance, became an ethnofiction of the self on,

and for the, camera. For example, I had once been interviewed on a local radio station at the beginning of my research visits to Gort in 2015; the radio show scene, which I invented especially for the film, had its genesis in that experience. For the radio scene, I made a script that was inspired by real conversations that had happened, and, through improvising the situation at my kitchen table with the radio DJ in the days beforehand, we wrote down points to hit. We had a script with us on the day, but only as back-up to improvise from if we were stuck. We did several (eight) takes, where we mainly improvised the conversation between T and the DJ, also a non-actor, whom I am directing, but one who does in fact present a radio show on community radio in the region, so I encouraged him to adlib and improvise, using his own experience and interviewing style.



Still from filmed rehearsal for Radio Show scene

The creation and expression of T is closest to Gomes' performance of self in *Our Beloved Month of August*, because it is in the third person that the filmmaker is encountered by the viewer, rather than through a direct address. However, my role serves a different function than Gomes's character of

himself, whose appearance in *Our Beloved Month of August* is more of a clever game of auteur tricks. It was my conscious intention to find filmmaking methods that would try to make the lives of others less other. In *Town of Strangers*, my role as the filmmaker is invented as one of empathy and association with the audience and with the subjects. My role is one of a conduit, a go-between, and a proxy for the audience. The author as a fictional narrator who does not narrate (through voiceover) becomes a filmed subject, with whom the audience can relate through the film – a trope that does, in the end, fulfill the role of ‘glue’ that the producer was looking for.

Collins & Gallinat (2010, p4), drawing on Jay Ruby (1982), write of the ethnographic self as a resource, and posit that ‘at the centre of every ethnography lies the self of the anthropologist’. I position myself visibly at the centre of this research, and construct myself within the written and film practice, as a deliberate and ethically motivated strategy. The construction of T or The Stranger, in both the written practice and in its expression as cinema, is an ethnofictional character based on, or like, myself, that I perform into reality. It creates a screen upon which I can imagine, construct, project and reflect upon myself, and upon my relationships with the people in the film. It is a reflexive ruse, through which I can make visible and analyse how I imagine myself in Gort, as a filmmaker, as a human being, as a researcher. The relationship between the people I am ‘studying’ and me is written and performed as a social relation, explored through this reflexive writing and filmmaking in the third person.

2.7 The Filmmaker as Another Performative Other

When I was coming and going from Gort, I sometimes stayed in my van and, later, I rented various rooms, moving eleven times in two years, living in seven different places around the Gort area, and also other places in London, Greece and in my family home in Kerry. I wrote a voiceover, during the edit of the film, which described my various living situations and attempts to find home. Distilling that experience of precarity and restlessness into the image of T living in the van is, therefore, not a lie; rather, it is the production of my reality, a performed version of my lived experiences. The character of self that I have created is a constructed representation of the truth of my experience while making the film in Gort. It is a way to create the truth of my representation through story-telling or fabulation (see Chapter Four) without using voiceover narration. I understand myself differently due to this process. Through reflecting on, scripting, acting, filming, editing and watching myself as T in *Town of Strangers*, I discovered how my position shifted the perceptions of others in the film. I did not reflect on this and then implement it – it was through the process of creating these intuitive performative actions that the understanding came.

The character and story of T is improvised, through the scriptwriting and performance, and can be read as a Deleuzian power of the false.

The power of the false offers a way to think about how truth is produced, not found. Deleuze explores this idea in cinema, based on the philosophy of Nietzsche and his idea of truth itself as a fiction (Deleuze, 1985/1997, p149). Deleuze refers to Nietzsche's concept of the will to power, that is 'no longer subjugated to a model of truth' (Hongisto, 2018, footnote 1, p198). The power of the false, according to Deleuze, is that truth cannot be found or

described; the artist must create it (1985/1997p.146-7). But it must also be shown to be created. This act of showing its own creation is how the making-of is manifested in the film, such as Ralf's interaction when I am trying to make him fly, or when my voice appears from behind the camera when I ask him "is it ok to have cider in the shot?". What is revealed in this question is the process of creating that scene, and the relationship between Ralf and the filmmaker as something being negotiated in the present moment. This interaction, which includes the encounter between the filmmaker and the subject as they invent a scene, is part of the film's story and meaning.



Still from *Town of Strangers*

The constructed scenes following T's story in the van and on the radio, are raised to the power of the false in the film, as they show themselves as a creation. They are fabulated elements that create their reality through the filmmaking and the filmmaker's relation to her own filmmaking process. It is both a reflexive gesture and an ethnofiction, or autofiction, of myself.

I realise that I run the risk of being called narcissistic for including myself in the film in this way, but for me, it is the opposite of narcissism. Although I am using a distancing effect, via an invented reflexivity in the third person rather than the usual first, its aim is to bring the audience closer. It is a strategy that aims to answer Abu-Lughod's question of what happens when the 'other' that the anthropologist is studying 'is simultaneously constructed as, at least partially, a self?' (1991, p472). The invention of The Stranger, and of T, are methods aimed at bringing the author and the subject-participants of the film closer to one another and, by implication, the audience too. The effect of the invention of T is that it creates the reality of my vulnerability as a filmmaker. In the opening scene, T is shown as less than competent when she taps the microphone and gets feedback; in the audition room, she shows her hesitation when she is not sure where to sit; she is ready to poke fun at herself with the yoga in the carpark joke, and she shows herself sleeping in a precarious place.

Preceding the scene of the radio show, T is shown driving around Gort listening to a punk song *Not Broody* on the radio; the lyrics of the song are a reflexive jab about her own worries of living up to social expectations. On the radio show itself, she has trouble articulating her vision with clarity or confidence. In the climax of the film, T is seen visually repeating another's action: Hamid does his laundry; T does her laundry. Through the action of doing laundry, it is inferred that she is thinking about him, and that they are connected. By presenting myself as T in these ways, I surrender some of my authority as a filmmaker that is invisible and in control, and acknowledge my own inner conflicts and vulnerabilities. I am on a journey 'nearby'⁹ the people in the film. By sharing the cinematic space of the third person, rather than addressing the audience using the first person 'I' or the 'voice-of-god

narrator', T becomes another stranger/other amongst the strangers/others in Gort struggling with their lives as migrants and hybrid human beings.



T does her laundry, Still from *Town of Strangers*

I stage myself within the film *in relation* to the other protagonists. By staging myself as another character in the film, and deliberately drawing attention to that as a staging, the effect is that of an 'unreliable narrator'.¹⁰ This draws attention to the unreliability of any stable meaning of truth or reality in the film as a whole. I am drawing attention to the performativity of the film, to the instability of a fixed meaning, or a mono-truth. Through constructing and inventing T and The Stranger, the author and her alter-egos performatively come into being as others amongst the others represented in both the writing and in the film. The intended effect on an audience, of staging myself in this way, is to expose myself as a vulnerable human being. And thus, I acknowledge the vulnerability of the other characters in the film as one of shared humanity, and subjective experience rather than through an othering, or supposedly objective, lens.

This conceit of staging myself (or selves) is a way to respond to my adapted version of Lila Abu-Lughod's challenge: are there ways to *film* lives so as to constitute others as less other? The construction of T is a type of reflexive first person filmmaking, but in the third person; what is discovered by this method is the inclusion of the author within the film's world as a strategy to make her an other amongst others. The twin strategies of writing the self, in the third person in the text, and, in the film, explore possible ways of responding to Abu-Lughod's questions: What happens when the 'other' that the anthropologist is studying is simultaneously constructed as, at least partially, a self? (1991, p468); and to extend her challenge to 'write about lives so as to constitute others as less other' (1991, p473) and apply it to a filmmaking process.



T asleep in her van, Still from *Town of Strangers*

NOTES

¹ The apocryphal nature of the quote enhances its performance as myth in the JL Austin sense, and anticipates the exploration of the construction of myself as a stranger, in my writing and in my film practice.

² Halfies is a term Abu-Lughod borrowed from Kirin Narayan via 'personal communication' which Abu-Lughod defines as 'people whose national or cultural identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage', Abu-Lughod, 1991, p466

³ 'It has been and continues to be primarily the study of the non-Western other by the Western self, even if in its new guise it seeks explicitly to give voice to the Other or to present a dialogue between the self and other, either textually or through an explication of the fieldwork encounter', Abu-Lughod, 1991, p467

⁴ Various words such as migrant, emigrant, refugee, blow-in, even ex-pat all have their cultural meaning and signifying values of privilege. I use émigré here a little ironically, in that it is, for me, the more romantic of the terms.

⁵ Colonel Sanders is the founder of KF (Kentucky Fried Chicken) fast-food chain. His image is used as part of their brand identity. There is a statue of him in San José, Costa Rica, which originally inspired the script I was writing. There is no KFC or statue of Colonel Sanders in the veridical Gort, but there is one in the Gort of my imagination.

⁶ This thesis does not have the scope to go into more detail on a contextual review of sensorial filmmaking. I wish to name it here as a method but it is not something that I claim to be particularly expanding as a contribution to knowledge.

⁷ Babs, Carol and Yvonne were all potential participants of Town of Strangers; I filmed with each of them, but they did not make it to the final cut for various reasons

⁸ Excerpt from 'Voiceover Narration' written 5 Sept 2017, during the editing process

⁹ Reference to Trinh T Minha's concept of the anthropological filmmaker as one who 'speaks nearby' rather than about; Chen & Minh-ha 1992.

¹⁰ Term coined by Wayne C Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 1961, p158-9

Chapter Three

MAKING-OF:

ENCOUNTER & THE PRODUCTION OF REALITY

Introduction

This research project set out to make a film in which the process usually known as 'making-of' would become the method by which the film would be made. These processes are not present in films about filmmaking, but in films that create themselves by the very process of their own documentation.

I review the literature context for what I call the primary making-of film through reflexive and performative documentary and cinema theory as well as through films as primary texts themselves. In re-interpreting the making-of genre as a primary form, I focus on certain unique films in which the making-of documentary form is the generating factor of the film, and not a secondary film that is referent on another primary one. I describe what I perceive to be the main features of the performative making-of film as form and method, through examples of several films that I have identified as belonging to the making-of genre, and I also discuss the subgenre of the audition film.

This chapter then explores the particular methodology of auditioning as a method of producing reality in terms of how I made the film *Town of Strangers*.

3.1 Making-of Film as A Primary Independent Form

The making-of as a film genre is usually associated with a type of film that documents the production processes of a feature film, and is usually regarded as a derivative form, i.e., a secondary film that is premised on the existence of a primary or main film.

These making-ofs usually involve a primary film (usually fiction) and a secondary documentary-type film about the process of how the primary one was made. The making-of in these cases is usually seen as secondary, even inferior, or as an extra to the main film, which must always be referent to another and thus, necessarily dependent on it. However, another kind of making-of film exists: it is independent; it uses many of the same elements and tropes of the secondary making-of film genre such as behind-the-scenes, off the set scenes, directors' commentary, actors and crew interacting with one another and speaking directly to camera. However, these making-of films have a different – often more overtly political and ethical – intention. They are aware of their performative nature and welcome improvisation. The making-of films that I wish to focus on here are not dependent on another film for their referent existence. They are self-sufficient, standalone features. This chapter is a re-interpretation of the making-of film as a primary cinematic form in its own right.

On rare occasions, the secondary making-of film has gained equal status with the fiction film it 'documents', for example *Burden of Dreams* (dir. Les Blank, 1982) a documentary film about the making-of *Fitzcarraldo* (dir. Werner Herzog, 1982). In at least one case, it has even eclipsed the fiction film it was documenting, as in the case of *Lost in La Mancha* (dir. Keith Fulton and Louis

Pepe, 2002), where the making-of documentary (documenting the failure of Terry Gilliam's film *The Man Who Killed Don Quixote* to ever get made), got a theatrical release. Similarly, *Hooters!* (dir. Anna Margarita Labelo, 2010) is a making-of based on the film *The Owls* (dir. Cheryl Dunye, 2010) that is arguably more interesting than its 'source'. In *Hooters!*, Labelo conducts interviews with the cast and crew of *The Owls*, and highlights the methods involved in the filmmaking which were a collective process, in which the actors were given the opportunity to change anything within the film.

Modernist reflexivity has destabilised notions of 'truth' in documentary film and has also attempted to create a language of ethical responsibility. My interpretation of the primary making-of film has strong reflexive and meta-narrative elements that build on these movements. But, it is performative reflexivity that I am mainly concerned with, when identifying making-of as both a primary and generative method of filmmaking, and which I will discuss in this chapter.

3.2 Making-of Film as Performative Reflexivity

The notion of the performative film is defined in different ways in documentary studies. It has been used as a term to describe documentaries that are concerned with non-realist modes of representation and as a form to explore the identity of the filmmakers themselves, e.g. what Carolyn Anderson (2006, p69) calls the autodocumentary, or Alisa Lebow (2012) calls the 'cinema of me'. Bill Nichols describes seven modes of documentary, with one of them being the performative mode. In his 1995 *Blurred Boundaries*, he describes the performative mode as one that 'stress[es] subjective aspects

of a classically objective discourse' (p94). In his 2010 edition, Nichols draws a distinction between his performative mode and that of Bruzzi's definition (p203). Nichols states that 'performative documentaries address us emotionally or expressively rather than factually' (2010, p204). However, Nichols creates a false binary system of thinking about documentary, when he divides types of films into those that are factual and those that are 'expressive'. Stella Bruzzi also finds Nichols' modes reductive, and proposes that he misinterprets the performative (2006, p3-6). For Bruzzi, 'a documentary is deemed performative if it formally illustrates the notion that a documentary is an unpredictable act' (2000, p214). This is getting closer to the definition of the making-of as performative. For Nichols, the more a documentary 'draws attention to itself', the further it moves away from 'what it represents' (1994, p97). However, I posit that a documentary that is drawing attention to itself is drawing attention to what it represents, and not away from it, as what it represents is its own encounter. Drawing attention to itself as a representation of reality moves it further away from the illusion that it is documenting something objective. Bruzzi writes of the performative documentary that it is the 'enactment of the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is performed ... the film itself is necessarily performative, because it is given meaning by the interaction between performance and reality' (2013, p49). Thus, one cannot separate the performative documentary as a formal option, as just one of seven modes as Nichols has done; all documentaries, whether they are journalistically-driven or docudramas, are performative insofar as they perform their own encounter with reality.

Nichols' definition of the performative mode (1994, p95) also neglects to mention, or make use of, Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Nichols

revised his performative mode in 2010 to include films where the director performs herself; a mode where, Nichols says, the filmmaker embodies knowledge, with meaning being a 'subjective, affect-laden phenomenon' (p201). However, this still does not go far enough. For Nichols, knowledge can be concrete or embodied, but he fails to recognise that documentary is where this knowledge is produced rather than where it is observed. The films he discusses are more in tune with auto-ethnography (2010, p206), which are also performative, but the performative documentary is more expansive. It does not need to draw direct attention to its author with a first person address in order to be deemed performative. The documentary itself is performative in that it invents itself as it utters its pronouncements.

Bruzzi traces the problematisation of the real in contemporary documentary theory to Judith Butler's theory of performativity (2006, p4). Butler's theory of performativity, as elaborated on in *Gender Trouble* (1990) is premised upon Foucauldian ideas of knowledge production and on linguistic ideas developed by J.L. Austin (1962), leading Butler to see (gender) identity not as a pre-found phenomenon but as a performative act. That is, identity, through the rituals of speech and acts, is generated into being by its enactment. Through the repetition of certain rituals, it is brought into being. Thus, it creates itself. Butler's theory of performativity is helpful to understand the performative nature of film. A film is necessarily performative, in that it generates its own identity through its acts, and/or its filmic utterances. Through its own iterative, creative and reflexive gestures, a film generates its own constructed truth.

Bruzzi's ideas of truth and realism are expressed as phenomena that are produced at the moment of encounter between a switched on camera and a

subject in the real world. 'Documentaries are performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming' (2006, p10). I would extend this moment well beyond the moment of shooting. Shooting, editing, and even public screenings of finished films are performative acts of filmmaking and produce their own realities. So are the (academic and other media) texts that are produced around them. The only claims to truth a documentary film can make are those claims or truths produced by the encounter between audience, subject (the documentary film) and author (filmmaker). The realism it may claim to represent is agreed – and thus created - implicitly by those creating it and those watching it. Documentaries have the potential to produce meaning, not observe it, or represent it.

Edgar Morin (in De lorio, 2013) described the genesis of the film project *Chronicle of A Summer* (Edgar Morin & Jean Rouch, 1960) as a generative process: 'I thought we would start from a basis of truth and that an even greater truth would develop. Now I realise that if we achieved anything, it was to present the problem of truth.' This problem of truth in *Chronicle of A Summer* is the problem of truth in all documentaries. The term cinéma-vérité was first used to describe *Chronicle of a Summer* (Barsam, 1992, footnote 8, p412). It was coined as a term by Georges Sadoul who translated Dziga Vertov's idea of Kino-pravda into French, known as cinema-truth in English, but usually referred to as cinéma-vérité due to the French movement. It is often mixed up with the contemporaneous movement of direct cinema, mainly based in the USA, which claimed neutrality and an observable truth that was not reflexive towards its own truth-making (Bruni, 2002). The primary making-of film is indebted to cinéma-vérité films as they are highly performative in mode, and claim that there is only the truth of themselves. Stella Bruzzi's definition of the performative mode as 'the notion that a

documentary only comes into being as it is performed' (2013, p49) could also be a description of cinéma-vérité.

Bruzzi asserts that 'documentaries are inevitably the result of the intrusion of the filmmaker onto the situation, that they are performative because they acknowledge the construction and artificiality of even the non-fiction film and propose, as the underpinning truth, the truth that emerges through the encounter between filmmakers, subjects and spectators' (2006, p11). This definition of encounter comes closer to the idea of truth that I perceive in documentary-making. This idea of encounter is key to my method of filmmaking in *Town of Strangers*, and the truth that emerges through the relationships and processes of filmmaking rather than any truths that are observed 'out there' and captured 'in here'.

Filmmaker Joao Moreira Salles (2009) uses the term 'encounter' when he observes a turn in recent years towards a style of documentary-making that aims to make explicit the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject. Salles perceives these films as 'attempting to discover narrative strategies that reveal right from the beginning the nature of this relationship' (2009, p233). This ethical horizontalising of the subject-object relationship is a key factor of the making-of film. As much as the filmmaker or the film might be performative, the ethics of representing subjective persons who live in the world and agree to be filmed for your documentary still comes with a responsibility for the person(s) who represent(s) them. What Bruzzi adds (through her reading of documentary filmmaking as a performative act) is that the relationship between documentary address, the audience, and the identity of the film itself, is not fixed (2006, p11). She acknowledges that the performative documentary itself is a reflexive mode, in that the performative

techniques used are forms of distancing and removal, which draw attention to the construction of reality (2006, p187).

Bruzzi cites Nicholas Barker's *Unmade Beds* (1997) as an example of performative documentary and explores his heightened realism as a strategy for an ethical encounter with the person as character. Barker used a method of scripting based on interviews he conducted; then, he asked subject-participants to perform their own selves. Thus, their performances are 'constructed' (2006, p190-1). Bruzzi identifies three elements in *Unmade Beds* that make it performative – and as a consequence, create a distance, or 'alienation' through its stylistic methods: 'the formalised use of the camera, framing and self-conscious performances by all the four protagonists' (2006, p192). Crucially, she recognises that these methods interfere with intimacy between audience and subject. However, I think they stylistically question the voyeurism, or the 'visual pleasure' (Mulvey, 1975), of the audience, and although revealing much about the characters, the methods of distancing offer the opportunity to the subject to be an agent in one's representation. Through stylised performance of the self, the subject is enabled to be self-aware of the moment of being filmed when performing; this offers a certain protection to the subjects from a voyeuristic gaze. Distanciation is thus a form of protection against voyeurism and exploitation. Instead, what is offered to the viewer is an empathetic gaze that is not exploitative. These methods of distanciation protect the subjects from the camera 'catching them unawares' (Ellis, 2012).

When I made a casting call that would be filmed (and would become the generative seed of *Town of Strangers*), I envisaged it as a distancing technique, that would protect the participants, and this was the agency of

self-representation I offered. Many of the auditionees used that agency to create a more intimate encounter than I had anticipated, but it was within their control to do so. Via the audition scenario, I created a situation where I could only catch people at their most-self aware. As well as the auditioning set-up in *Town of Strangers*, I used several other techniques of distancing and of calling attention to the interaction between performance and reality. For me, these were strategies to draw attention to the representation of the people and places that were in my film. By hosting a casting call in a theatrical set-up, and seeing who would turn up, I was working against the intimacy of a conventional interview situation with already established relationships.



Liam and Ariadna, Still from *The Blow-in*

In *The Blow-in* (Treasa O'Brien, 2016)¹, when I filmed pairs conversing with one another, I called attention to the situation as set-ups through the formal compositional style of the long take and the two-shot tableau, eschewing shot/countershot. The ruse of shooting Véronique looking in the windows

was a Brechtian method of distancing. These are performative reflexive gestures that are different to Nichols' performative mode or his reflexive mode. They also differ from most of the first-person reflexive examples that Bruzzi proposes (Molly Dineen, Nick Broomfield and Michael Moore), as it is not about having an expository reflexive mise-en-scene such as having the director in shot; it is more subtle in its assertion of the camera presence as an act of performative representation, and not one of observation.

I propose that Barker's methods of distancing, and my methods in the audition, serve to give the subject-participant more agency in their own representation, in that there is the opportunity to co-create one's own representation as an encounter. The chance for the subjects to rehearse, repeat and perform themselves for the camera makes it clear that the act of filming them is an artifice. John Ellis describes the 'ambivalent feelings about photography and recording' (2012, p108-121) that we have in contemporary society as a symptom of filming in this age of camera ubiquity and surveillance. He traces 'the fear of being caught unawares' or as Molly Dineen puts it 'the modern trend for trying to catch people with their trousers down' (Dineen, 1995, p10, cited in Bruzzi, 2006, p201) to the advent of Kodak cameras and detective cameras of the early Twentieth Century, and later on with *Candid Camera*, a TV series which secretly filmed people and sought permission after the hoax.

'Both Candid Camera and the Kodakers' panic reveal a deep-seated anxiety about being caught unawares by a camera, about what might be revealed about ourselves, our bodies or our behaviours, when we are not actively arranging them for the camera's view.' (Ellis, 2012)

In today's age of reality TV shows, surveillance, camera ubiquity via camera-phones, YouTube videos and social media, people are more and more aware of the camera's power and potential to catch them unawares, leading to "our civic culture becom[ing] increasingly less tolerant and inclusive, increasingly less capable of trust" (Garland, 2001, p195, cited in Ellis, p118). We have become more self-conscious and more controlling about our image. Rather than being afraid of being caught unawares, perhaps it is the unarticulated knowledge that we will be caught in a moment that is unknown to us, and not yet created, brought about by our own performativity, that we truly fear.

3.3 Making-Of Films:

Key Factors of Making-Of Explored Through Textual Readings of Making-of Films

The making-of film as a primary form acknowledges that it only represents itself – the representation of reality is produced at the moment of the filmmaking itself. A making-of film tells the story of the story being told, but goes further in that it is a form that creates potential for the viewer to participate in making meaning. I identify the making-of film as one with the potential to be reflexively performative.

Primary making-of films, which I will henceforth refer to as making-ofs, are genre expanding and hybrid in form. Whereas secondary making-of films are usually documentary in form, primary making-ofs may employ some documentary methods but may also employ improvised fiction, high degrees of self-reflexivity and self-conscious performativity as their methods. All

documentaries can be read as performative, but the 'making-of' is more specific as a method or genre. The making-of is improvised and generative in its nature; it may employ a ruse or conceit that creates a meaning beyond factual or observational material; it invites participation from the subjects it (re)presents; it is concerned with ethics and the distribution of power, and it is reflexive in its audience address.

I will expand on these facets by discussing several films that I have identified as making-of films and/or films with significantly high degrees of making-of methodology. I have chosen to focus on single films rather than on a filmmaker's oeuvre as an auteur, taking a deconstructive approach to authorship and reading the films more as texts. These films employ the form of a making-of as the primary driver of the content and narrative. I weave through examples of films that have very high degrees of performativity and/or self-reflexivity but have never before been written about as making-ofs, in and of themselves. The films that I have chosen to discuss in more detail exemplify the making-of form, and include the shared ethnography documentary *Chronicle of a Summer / Chronique d'un Été* (dir. Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch, France, 1960); a film made entirely of auditions *Salaam Cinema* (dir. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Iran, 2000); an audition film that observes its protagonists inside and outside of the audition space *The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear* (Tinatin Gurchiani, Georgia, 2012); a film about the casting of a fiction film based on 'real' events *Casting JonBenet* (Kitty Green, USA, 2017); and a film within a film within a film that is *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One* (dir. William Greaves, USA, 1968). This section is divided into five subsections: 3.3.1 Improvisation, 3.3.2 Audience Address / Self-reflexivity, 3.3.3 Participant Agency, Ethics and Power Distribution, 3.3.4 The Conceit and 3.3.5 The Audition Film, a subgenre of

the making-of film. I also weave through shorter examples of other films as well as those mentioned above.

3.3.1 Improvisation

The making-of is improvisatory and generative in nature. It is mischievous in how it plays with form. *Chronicle of a Summer* (dir. Jean Rouch & Edgar Morin, France, 1960) is exemplary of a generative and performatively reflexive making-of film. The premise of *Chronicle of a Summer* was to make a film involving the filmmakers' network of friends and to see what would happen. Already, this was a self-conscious call for a film to come into being performatively, to create or to generate itself through its own propulsion. The film was influenced by Brechtian distancing as well as Rouch and Morin's idea of shared ethnography (Rouch, 2003). However, what I am concerned with here is how the film generated itself by its premise. Rouch said of *Chronique d'un Été* that it proved that 'you can film anything anywhere' (Rouch, 2003, p167). *Chronicle of a Summer* does not document a reality; it creates a reality – in this way it is generative in the sense of the performative as Butler has described it.

Symbiopsychotaxiplasm Take One (dir. William Greaves, USA, 1968) is, at one level, a farce and, at another, an experiment in how a captain might encourage mutiny. The film seems to be a secondary making-of documentary about a primary drama film. It follows William Greaves as he directs (or misdirects) a melodrama in Central Park. It is not an audition film per se, but uses rehearsal, spontaneity, chance and improvisation. It begins with the idea of making a film about a film, but the crew and the cast

eventually intervene and question his directing methods, which, in turn, influence the next part of the film. The crew meet in secret to discuss if Greaves is a lazy arrogant director or a misunderstood genius. As the 'original' film falls apart, a new one is constructed from its chrysalis. Indeed, the whole film is an experiment in self-generating content.

This film was made at a time when film experimentation - and cinéma-vérité - expressed themselves as the cultural counterpart of the revolutionary and idealistic socio-political climate. It was made in 1968, during the decade of the USA civil rights movement, hippie and anti-Vietnam protests; it was the year of the Paris communes. The making-of that is *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* is also a social experiment, and a deeply political film, while masquerading as whimsy.

'It is a free fall in space. We simply don't know where we will land with this creative undertaking. It is a study of the creative process in action. Also the film is Jazz! It is improvisation. It is an exploration into the future of cinema art.' (underlining and capitalisation by Greaves, 2006/1995).

In one of the opening scenes he tells a cop in Central Park: 'We're making a feature-length I-don't-know. We'll find out when we develop the film.' There is a camera crew filming the action of the two actors, and a second camera crew filming the crew as they shoot. This second camera, in traditional terms, would be the secondary 'making-of' film (that is, the making-of documentary of the fiction film *Over the Cliff* that is displayed as part of the film's logic). A third camera floats about filming whatever takes its fancy, and Greaves himself shoots with a fourth camera from time to time. Greaves is introduced as a charismatic gonzo director: sexist, whimsical and

arrogant, directing the cameraperson to "film the woman with the tits". A crew member is heard saying,

"Bill, you're a dirty old man"

to which Bill answers

"Don't take me seriously".

Bill's 'role' as director in *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm Take One* is performative: he constructs his identity as the director along with the film as it unfolds. As a trained actor, he is improvising his role, trying out different ways to play the director. His identity as the director grows with the film and is constructed through the ritual of performance and not as a scripted role. It can be understood as an example of Butler's identity performativity, achieved through utterance. It is, of course, later reflected upon and reconstructed in the edit to create the author's version of truth.

'There is no one directing it. No god-like auteur on the set "playing the fool" in order to get other people to complete His idea. I'm not saying Bill WAS a fool. I am just saying he wasn't a god. The "playing the fool" bit is Bill's retrospective revision (or the writer's revision), his attempt after the fact of creation to construct some fake narrative that restores the illusion that Bill knew what he was doing all the time' (Koresky, 2008).

This is an insight by a crew member into how Greaves tells (himself) a story of how he directed the film that way on purpose. However, I would argue that Greaves did not play the part of the fool; the film performatively created him as a fool. Because the film makes itself (figuratively), the director is performatively produced by the film, rather than it is he who is producing it.

Greaves starts to understand this process during the filmmaking. We see his self-awareness growing in the scene towards the end of the film in a discussion between himself and his crew:

'Bill: This sort of palace revolt which is taking place is not dissimilar to the revolution that is taking place in America today, in the sense that I represent the establishment. I've been trying to get you to do certain things with which you've become, in a sense, disenchanted. Now your problem is to come up with creative suggestions, which will make this into a better production than we now have.

Bob: I don't understand that at all.

Bill: It doesn't matter whether or not you understand it. The important thing is that we surface from this production experience with something that is entirely more creative as a result of our collective efforts. ... '2

This last phrase, about creating something from the experience, is crucial to the concept of the making-of film, not as a closed 'Russian doll' type meta-film, but making-of as open and full of creative possibility to construct itself. The performative making-of film does not observe something pre-existing or alongside itself, but through its own creative being, it brings something else into existence. Greaves' riddle is, therefore, not to catch the crew unawares, but to invent a situation that has the capacity to create its own truth - through a performative process.

3.3.2 Audience Address / Self-reflexivity

The making-of film is almost always presented as a document of its own making. It does not claim to be observing an objective reality; instead, it is aware of the film as a catalyst that generates the reality that is happening due to - or with - the filmmaking process. Every creative (or constructed) act is performative, but the making-of film is also self-conscious about, and experiments with, its own performativity.

Agarrando Pueblo (dir. Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo, Colombia, 1978) is a self-reflexive 'mockumentary', challenging the stereotypes of 'poverty porn'. The conceit here is that the filmmakers are making a documentary about poverty in Colombia for a German TV channel. The filmmakers ask people to perform themselves as what they see as typically 'othered' documentary subjects. In *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* and *Chronicle of A Summer*, the audience may intellectually reflect on the effect of the invention as it unfolds the narrative. In *Agarrando Pueblo*, the audience is not 'in on the joke' until later on in the film when it is revealed that the documentary they are making is actually a ruse to expose the power relations of exploitative filmmaking / sensationalist TV.

Garnet C. Butchart (2013), in an essay on documentary and semiotics, warns about the dangers of trying to be so ethical as to be beyond judgment. According to Butchart, documentary 'raises the question of ethics because what is at stake in this relationship is nothing less than the power to define, and thereby to stage, reality'. One of the defining characteristics he sees, in what he calls political reflexivity, is 'to tell a story of the story told' (2013, p5). For Butchart, this kind of reflexivity is a method of unconcealing, and even a

remembering. 'To unconceal the visual mode of address of documentary (that is, to comment on the telling of a story) is to explore two properly ethical questions: *'What can images do? What can a medium do?'* (2013, p5)

In the last scene of *Agarrando Pueblo*, one of the participant actors discusses how his role made him feel while he was playing it. By including this scene, the film reflects on its own performativity, while also opening itself out as a performative encounter between viewer, subject and filmmaker. Performed enactment featured as a method in my previous films, for example, in *Spirit of Shuhada Street* (dir. Treasa O'Brien, 2010), where the group imagined a future aspiration – that they had won what they are currently struggling for. We performatively improvised a scene with this imagined future event, as a ritual of desire. The 'actors' played an imagined projection of themselves at some future time. I also included a sequence, at the end of the film, in which the protagonists reflected on their improvised performance³. This scene, within the film, is performative in the sense of Butler's performativity as a ritual that brings identity into being. By saying and doing this action, we enact it into the possible. If we did not think it or act it out, it could not become possible.

The performative making-of film is a primary form, and one needs to allow the reflexive and generative methodology to emerge in order to create the meaning of the film. That is to say, it can only claim to observe or represent its own making. Or as Jean-Luc Godard (*Youngblood*, 1968) put it: 'the movie is not a thing which is taken by the camera; the movie is the reality of the movie moving from reality to the camera.' It is the process of its own making that generates the content. So, the form makes the content or *is* the content.

A key feature of the making-of film is that it is reflexive, in a way that is more than a Brechtian nod, or an ethical tick box, but rather that the whole film could be described as a story of the story being told. Furthermore, the reflexivity in a making-of film is both self-critical and self-conscious of what it is doing as it is doing it.

3.3.3 Participant Agency, Ethics and Power Distribution

The making-of films I discuss are not mere exercises in form. They are inherently political in that they are concerned with how power is distributed and with the politics of participation, authorship and viewership.

'You are both the subject and the actors of this film so I'd like to welcome you to your own film.'⁴

So said Mohsen Makhmalbaf via a loudspeaker addressing the crowd of people who came to audition for his film, *Salaam Cinema* (dir. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1995). Makhmalbaf makes a casting call for a new fiction film to celebrate 100 years of cinema. The resulting auditions become the film, with Mohsen playing himself, in the role of the director. This kind of performative and self-reflexive gesture is one of the essential components of the making-of film. In fact, it was the making-of crew⁵ who filmed the opening scenes of what was to become *Salaam Cinema*. However, when Makhmalbaf saw that thousands of people had turned up for the film, and had literally broken a door down in order to get in, he spontaneously decided to make a film concerned with the auditions themselves.

The making-of, as a form or as a method, often makes room for less control by the author and for more agency by subject-participants. There is an element of risk and a relinquishing of (some) control on behalf of the director in order to allow for improvisation. In *Chronicle of A Summer*, the directors invited participation from the film's protagonists. They invited Marceline to go on the street to talk with people about how they are feeling; they created situations where people converse with them at a table, often with food, rather than an interview situation; and included themselves within the film as the drivers and participants, making *with* the film and *with* the people in the film. The subjects in *Chronicle of a Summer*, are also participants, and are produced – by the viewer – as an effect of the discourse of the film.

In *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*, the crew's intervention into the film changes the trajectory of the film. This exchange of agency upsets the usual balance of power between director and participant. This is not an accidental feature of the performative making-of, but often a desire, on the director's behalf, to explore the ethics of representation. In *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* and *Salaam Cinema*, the directors were explicitly interested in the distribution of power between the crew and the cast. In the second half of *Salaam Cinema*, the action focuses on two teenagers, and the power play between auditionee and director is contested, in a performative manner. The teenagers, upon getting the 'part' of playing the director who auditions people, imitate the ritual of the day before, that of Makhmalbaf asking people to cry on cue, even though they had contested it when he had asked them to do it the previous day. "How could you be as cruel as I was?"⁶ asks Makhmalbaf.

A moral tale is produced by Makhmalbaf from a week of filming auditions, a cautionary tale of how humans imitate what we know, even if we have railed against it while being under its power; the oppressed sit into the seats of the oppressor in an ever continuing cycle. This is not an objective reality that Makhmalbaf set out to observe. It is produced by the performativity of the film and has been carefully crafted in the edit. What is also interesting in *Salaam Cinema*, is how the film grows into something, due to the repetition and ritual of Makhmalbaf himself as he performs the powerful director; he can point his finger like it's a gun and make everyone fall down; he can decide who cries, who stays, who comes closer, who leaves. This performance is ritualised in a way that makes him the powerful leader that the girls then copy, and yet he still blames them. As a making-of film, it is the performativity of the film itself that seems to propel it, in an improvisatory manner, into the truth it eventually encounters - or constructs.

The audience is also a participant in the performative making-of film. The mode of reflexive address is used as a method to invite critical engagement with the apparatus of the filmmaking, and what it purports to represent as it presents itself. Making-ofs are more subjective and participative in that the dialectical relationship between the director/crew, the subject/participant and the audience becomes part of the subject of the documentary.

3.3.4 The Conceit

Making-ofs may employ a conceit or a red herring as the McGuffin⁷ or invention of the film. A McGuffin is something that the film declares to be about, but it transpires that it is used in order to make something else

happen. The filmmakers may or may not be aware of this at the time of making. The film may employ a conceit or an invention to deflect attention away from a story that is being created by the use of the conceit, or alongside it – which is often the story of the making-of itself. This method of employing a conceit, as a reflexive mode, generates the content of the film, flipping the subtext to become the main story of the narrative. In this way, the story of the story being told becomes the main story.

In *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm*, the fiction that it purports to be making within the film is a generative conceit. The second conceit is that it is a documentary about a fiction film. The third conceit is that it is a making-of documentary about a documentary about a fiction film. This film is the ultimate 'meta film', a documentary of a documentary of a documentary. In its moments of rupture and openness, the film produces reality – when the crew discuss the film's intentions, it does not matter so much whether they discover the truth of what Greaves is trying to do; it is the act of mutiny itself as an intervention – or invention – in the film that is being produced by the situation of the film. The non-direction of Greaves has given rise to the performative opportunity. The crew are part of the improvisation.

The Watermelon Woman (dir. Cheryl Dunye, USA, 1996) uses the conceit of being a film that is researching the life of a black actress, who was never named in the credits of the films she had parts in. By using the ruse of fictionalising the life of the actress, Faye Dunaway, Dunye performatively documents *the lack* of history known, or written, about black actresses. The film is a performative making-of itself, in that it invents itself as a reflexive documentary about its own making. Dunye's own character as 'the filmmaker' is also performative in how she brings her own life – as a queer

black woman in America - into visibility at the same time as she brings the fictional actress performatively into existence. When the conceit is revealed at the end of the film, it is, by this time, too late – Faye Dunaway has already been created.

Visibility Moderate (dir. Vivienne Dick, Ireland, 1982) uses the conceit of being a 'tourist film' in order to explore the author's own identity as a returned émigré. The film is an improvised journey starting in the Empire State Building, and landing in the middle of Ireland through a cut matched with the sound of a scream – one that seems to be of both joy and pain. The filmmaker does not appear directly in the film, but The Tourist character comes to be her proxy, somehow, as she sees Ireland through her eyes. This ruse is a method of performatively bringing Dick's identity crisis into being, creating a dialectical cinematic space, where the production of truth is generated from the mix of idealised imagery of The Tourist at various landmark sites, e.g., kissing the Blarney stone, or posing with a horse and cart by the lakes of Killarney, juxtaposed with the themes of contemporary Ireland's Northern Troubles, protests, burgeoning globalisation and underground music scene.

In the film *Olmo and the Seagull* (dir. Petra Costa & Lea Glob, Brazil, 2015), the film's protagonists are actors who play themselves in their own lives during a 9-month pregnancy. The director, Costa, appears in an expository manner only once, through her voice, when she asks a direct question of her subjects. This subtle intervention colours the audience's interpretation of the whole film and reveals the relationship and encounter between the filmmaker and protagonists. Crucially, it also created a sense of trust and intimacy in me, as a viewer. Because this scene revealed to me that they were actors

involved in a collaboration in their representation, I felt I could trust them and the director, and that they were in charge of how far they would push their emotional territory; they would not be 'caught unawares'. This method of performance and distancing brought me closer in empathy rather than the empathy of voyeurism. This act created a space for greater agency of the film's subject-participants in their representations.

The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn & Anonymous, 2012) is a film that performs itself as a documentary of its own process. The fiction that the film purports to be making is an elaborate ruse that brings about a transformation in the character via the process of making the fiction. In this way, the fiction unravels into a documentary of itself as a making-of film. The film's process investigates the power of documentary film as an event itself to produce cinema-truth. The director(s) worked with the subjects to invent cinematic scenes based on their own memories, fantasies, nightmares and dreams; what Oppenheimer has described as a 'documentary of the imagination' (2013). The methods include shared ethnography, story-telling, re-enactments, improvisations and other 'shared' practices such as: subjects playing themselves as characters; acting in and improvising scenes that are based on their own experiences *like* a fiction film; and playing back the material to the subject.

In *The Act of Killing*, these methods are used as a reflexive tool for the audience to see the workings of the relationship between the filmmaker and subject, and as a method aimed at bringing about some change in the protagonists that the audience might witness. The director(s) created a situation where the subjects were exposed to the horror of what they had done and the filming situation was created in order to bring about some kind

of revelation or transformation in the dominant narrative, that the men and wider society tell about what happened and who they are. This is the reality it aims to produce via the act of filming.

The fictional film that Oppenheimer and the co-directors are making with Anwar and his friends is exposed, as a ruse to invent a situation in which they can perform themselves, and thus, reveal aspects of their psyche and inner lives that could not otherwise be revealed. Lucia Nagib, writes of *The Act of Killing*: 'fictional representation is systematically turned into presentation of the real in this film' (Nagib, 2014, p2). Thus, the fiction that they are trying to create becomes a documentary of how they are making it. In this way, the making-of film can also be seen as a process of unravelling. As the ruse of the fiction unravels, it creates a documentary of the imagined identities and of the process of imagining that the subjects do. The ruse enables it to become the story of the story being told.

3.3.5 The Audition Film

The audition film is a subgenre of the making-of film and one I will dwell on here, as my own film *Town of Strangers* uses the situation of an audition as the performative space and ruse of the film.

The McGuffin in *Casting JonBenet* (Kitty Green, USA, 2017), which was made while I was making *Town of Strangers*, is that of a fiction film that will be made about the unsolved murder of a 6-year-old beauty queen. The film casts local actors from the small American town where it happened twenty years previously. However, the real plot of the film, or theme, is not a

whodunit crime mystery, but an exploration of how the murder event is mediated in culture and in the popular imagination. Director, Kitty Green, uses the ruse of the audition as a performative space to draw attention to, and to generate how, the event produces a cultural reality in the public imagination. *Casting JonBenet* uses a 'performative triptych' as a device to explicate the performed aspect of actor/character/person (Francis and Hussein, 2017, p35) by calling for auditions for a prospective film to be made, to cast the roles of the key protagonists and suspects involved in the media event of the murder.

Green cast within the town itself, and includes actors, first time actors, and 'wannabe' actors (Kaleem, 2017) who were told that the auditions would also form part of the film. She focuses on people and moments that have a link to the case and its details, such as with a neighbour of the family, and with a former beauty queen (Kaleem, 2017). She focuses on the people who have an emotional link, somehow, such as the actor who reveals that he regrets not having children, or the actors who 'tear up and whisper to show activation of an imagined maternal memory' (Francis & Hussein, 2017, p36) when auditioning for the role of the child's mother, Patsy.

The distancing method of the film prompts us to think: is this maternal memory real? Are they accessing their own internal memories and experiences? Is her emotion real? What is the film's effect producing? Green casts her characters/actors/persons mainly for their affective presence, in their particularities, and for their propensity to express how they have internalised a private event that was in the public domain into their own private lives and made connections with it. Green says "'so they are coming up with their own narratives to make sense of something that will probably

never make sense to them.”” (Kaleem 2017). This seemingly simple statement reveals Green’s awareness of her process as one that produces its own truth through the process of auditioning.

In a review in *The Independent*, Kaleem (2017) writes that ‘Green is the latest director to use re-enactment as a way of getting to a greater truth, than that which may be achieved by simply asking someone to tell their story straight to camera.’ However, the film does not use re-enactment of the character/actor/person’s own stories; they act a role and it is through the acting process that performativity itself becomes the subject of the documentary.

The film has been criticised for being gossipy and exploitative⁸, but Francis and Hussein defend it, claiming that *Casting Jonbenet* documents the ‘psychic and affective lives of a public still affected by the indelible event’ and explores ‘the meaning that high profile crimes produce in the public imagination through individuated forms of internalization [sic], reflection, critique, uncertainty, disavowal etc’ (2017, p33). However, it is not that the crimes produce meaning in the public imagination, but how they produce the public imagination itself, that makes *Casting JonBenet* a serious film. Using gossip itself as a primary source (Francis and Hussein, 2017, p37) is part of the film’s technique, along with Brechtian techniques of distancing. Francis and Hussein (2017, p37) ask: ‘Do these performative moments seek to disrupt spectatorial absorption, in alignment with other forms of Brechtian self-reflexivity that long sought to frustrate audience passivity by jolting them awake?’

Actually, I think the opposite happens – these performances, of self-as-other

and self-as-self, draw us closer as an audience into the affective spell, implicating us as part of the 'intimate public' that 'foregrounds affective and emotional attachments located in the fantasies of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness' (Francis and Hussein, 2017, p37).

Green's films use 'performative documentary techniques ... to defamiliarize [sic] the constructs of celebrity and gender for their audiences' (Francis and Hussein, 2017, p33). In *Town Of Strangers*, I used performative techniques of the audition and the set-up of the kitchen-as-theatre to defamiliarise the presumed identity of the documentary subject as something real and truthful, and to reconstruct and draw attention to reality as a film performance.

The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear (dir. Tinatin Gurchiani, Georgia, 2012) used the auditioning process to make a film about life in contemporary Georgia. The director uses the screen tests of her auditionees, including her own questions from behind the camera, and continues to film some of her auditionees, at their homes or workplaces, as the generating material of the film. However, Gurchiani does not cast herself as a visibly charismatic director in the way that Makhmalbaf does in *Salaam Cinema*. She stays behind the camera, and her interjections are disembodied. Her power as director in this film is not challenged in the same way. Some of the same tropes are used, but the attention she draws to her own role is more subtle than Makhmalbaf's method. The film is a performative making-of – not because of Gurchiani's presence or non-presence – but because it sets in motion a situation where the protagonists invent themselves in front of the camera, in the auditions, due to the creative improvisation required to respond to Gurchiani's questions.

In the seemingly observational scenes where she 'follows' them in their real lives, there is also a making-of process, because these scenes are not observed, but improvised. In the simplest case, there is the scene of the boy asking his mother about his birthday, with his sister whispering prompts; the presence of the camera and the director creates this scene as one bound up with consciousness of the camera, that becomes part of the scene's charm. More extremely, in the scenes with Tako, the young woman whose mother abandoned her, the drama is set in motion from the semi-fictional scene where she tells the story of Cinderella in the audition. It sets in motion the subsequent scenes, where she tells her family of her wish to see her mother and the scene of the meeting with the mother is also created, due to the truth that has been constructed in the previous scenes. The documentary subject, Tako, uses the documentary film to act out her fantasy, possibly even to give her the courage to do so and to be witnessed. Of course, the presence of the camera affects the scene and so the truth of her meeting with her mother can only be produced in that moment; a moment in which the film director (and possibly another crew member) are also present for this deeply intimate encounter. Gurchiani does not openly acknowledge this, and could have done more within the film to be explicitly reflexive about her own role in the film's performativity, but it is implicit from the set-up that there is a relationship between her and the subject-participant, that has been set in motion from the moment of the audition.

As a making-of film, *Machine* generates itself in somewhat the same manner as *Chronicle of a Summer*, but with a more subtle approach. Just as *Salaam Cinema* somehow acted as a metaphor for Iranian society at that time, so too *Machine* creates its own truth – the truth of life, not just for those that come to the auditions, but, for a whole generation in Georgia at this time. As a

making-of audition film, it functions in a similar way to *Casting JonBenet* although the latter has much more controlled production values and exposition, and operates less like an experiment and more like a director's plan unfolding. Both films, although focusing on the particularities of certain persons/actors/characters, are, ultimately, producing the reality of a social relationship, and of our shared imagination of who we are.

In *Salaam Cinema*, there is no film or enactment outside of the audition space. The director uses the ruse of auditioning for a new film to turn the auditions themselves into a film. Thus the film was improvised due to the fact that so many people showed up, taking the author in a new direction, and changing radically from his original authorial intention. He plays with the auditions as a performative space. Not only do the subjects perform, but also the interactions between them and the director are brought into being due to the nature of the situation – that of being auditioned on camera. It is this very situation that Makhmalbaf pushes as much as he can, to see what will happen. It is an experiment, one in which he himself improvises and stays spontaneous.

Screen Tests (Andy Warhol, USA, 1964-66) used the conceit of a casting or audition process to reveal something deeper than it purported to ask for. The 'tests' do not observe a performance, but rather they performatively generate a discomfort over time to create a different kind of portrait, one that is brought about due to the presence of the camera and to the amount of time the person sits in front of it. The apparatus of the camera situation performatively enacts the emotional truth of each person. That is to say, it is not that the person is performing but that the gaze of the filmmaker - and

implicitly you, the audience - performatively reveals and creates a truth from the moment.

In the film *Waiting* (Rashif Masharawi, Palestine, 2005), the situation of the audition is used as a metaphor for the situation of Palestinians under occupation. Auditionees in refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, are asked to play the part of a waiting man. This semi-fictional use of the audition is also used in *8½* (Federico Fellini, Italy, 1963), and in *Through the Olive Trees* (Abbas Kiarostami, Iran, 1994), and in artists' films such as *The Casting* (Omer Fast, Israel/USA, 2007). These meta-uses of the audition as a conceit are not those that might be found in a performative making-of film because they are not using a conceit to generate and improvise one's way through a film and allow it to come into being. The author must take the risk of relinquishing control, in order to follow a freer style of filmmaking that generates the film into being rather than slavishly following a script.

3.4 The Audition as a Making-of Method in *Town of Strangers*

I deliberately set out to make a film that would be a making-of film of itself. I was interested in the audition as a performative space; a space where I could create a situation in which the reality that would happen in that space would be improvised. All films are performative and all are a document of their own making. I was interested in pushing this idea more self-consciously, mainly as a way of working towards a more ethical/collaborative relationship between the director and the subject-participant(s), and as a way of drawing attention to the performativity of the 'other', for the audience, in order to make the lives of others less other.



Audition Set, Still from *Town of Strangers*

Marshall McLuhan said 'We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us' (McLuhan, 1964, cited by Taylor, 2012, p2). The tools that I used to shape this film have almost disappeared from the final cut. The process has been generative and improvisatory; the script with which I began originally, is now completely gone from the film (although it retains a ghostly presence), as the making-of as method has shaped a film I could not have scripted, and taken it in an entirely new direction. However, the film needed the scriptwriting process and the impetus of the making-of method, to set it in motion.

I made a casting call in the town of Gort, which I filmed as part of the film, with '*Town of Strangers*', a nickname for Gort, as my working title. The posters were produced in English and in Portuguese and described the film as a mix of documentary and fiction. I envisaged the casting call / audition as a conceit for my making-of film. The text read:

'TOWN OF STRANGERS is an independent film that will combine fiction and documentary scenes set in the Gort area. No acting experience necessary. All Welcome – we are looking for locals of all ages, genders and nationalities. Different languages and non-verbal expression encouraged. Tell us a story, a memory, a lie, a piece of gossip or a dream ...'

When people arrived on the day, I made it clear that the auditions themselves might form part of the film, and asked them to sign a release form. I asked people to tell me stories, dreams, lies, gossip and memories, and told them that they would potentially be incorporated into the script. I had been working on a script already and wanted to develop it further with the collaboration of locals. The people who came to the auditions would potentially 'act' as themselves in a future film to be made.

This method of filming people as a casting call for a film, rather than using interviews or observational methods, meant that the encounter held a certain dynamic – everyone who came had their own reasons for responding to that poster and wanted something – consciously or not – from that experience. By virtue of answering the poster-call, the desire to be in a film is already assumed and consent, plus the willingness to improvise, is already implicitly granted. I wanted to hear stories, lies, memories and dreams as they are neither fact nor fiction, and I was interested in finding ways to reveal the lived experience of people's lives. The audition was both a making-of ruse, and a research method, at the same time. The encounters that happened that day continued to influence and generate the rest of the film's trajectory.

I set up two cameras at the auditions. Camera 1 (a c300 operated by cinematographer Gina Ferrer) recorded a wide shot of the full body of the participant-subject, and a close-up of their face in the second part. I filmed in a theatre and used old props to set up a fictional kitchen, or 'home' space. This was unplanned; I improvised in the morning on arrival at the theatre space, inspired by the props that were left lying around – it has now become an important construct in the film but it was brought into being performatively, due to the suggestion of the props themselves, combined with the theme of 'home' in the film. At the time, my intention was to later shoot a scene with people based on the stories that they would tell me. However, though that did happen, in its own way, there is also another type of observational filming in the film that is neither fantasy nor audition, and a fourth camera eye, filming the action as it is being filmed, representing the fourth wall.



Ana, filmed from Camera 2, Still from *Town of Strangers*

That fourth camera-eye took the form of a second camera, or more traditional 'making-of' camera. On the day of the auditions, Camera 2 (a

Canon 7D operated by Camera Assistant James Allen) recorded an extremely wide shot that exposed the 'reality', or better to say the 'artifice', of the situation: the camera operator, the sound recordist, and the director (myself) could be seen in the room along with the film 'set' of camera, microphones, lights and reflectors amongst the mess of the theatre props outside of the frame that Camera 1 was filming. Camera 2 also filmed the exterior of the building, the waiting room and some footage of me in the previous days: the director putting up posters promoting the casting call in the town of Gort, in which I discuss the idea with locals and invite them to come along.



Chloe at the audition, Still from *Town of Strangers*

I auditioned seventeen people that day, including Ann, an older woman I had met in a shop when I was putting up the poster; Ana, an undocumented Brazilian migrant worker; Ralf, a raconteur who feels most at home in the local pub; Tony, who began by blessing the set and the production; Chloe, a settled Traveller who has never left Gort; and Hamid, a refugee from Afghanistan who has lived in Ireland for ten years, and had just moved to Gort to start his own catering business. The structure of each audition

session was as follows: welcome, make efforts to put nervous people at ease, ask if they would like to sit or stand. As they told their 'story', we filmed a wide shot; then during a very close-up shot, I asked them to answer two questions: 'What is home?' and 'what is a stranger?' I used these questions as ways to begin conversations about belonging and identity, which I had identified as themes in my research. However, looking now at the final cut of the film, I reflect that it is the theme of longing that was performatively produced as the truth of the film, rather than belonging. With some, I asked them to speak in their native language, if English was not their first language.



Hamid at the audition, Still from *Town of Strangers*

Sometimes we deviated from that structure if someone said something particularly interesting, and then I followed that thread instinctually – for example, when Tony said that he and his wife 'departed on fornication', it had to be followed up with an enquiry. More seriously, in the case of Hamid, I let the 'audition' continue well over the time allotted, and broke out of my role, as a listening director, to respond to his plea for help. When he

expressed suicidal feelings, I interjected 'Don't do that'. These moments of utterance were moments where I had to improvise my role as director, and at times I felt more like a confidante, or even a counsellor.

My own performativity became apparent, through the process, as convivial and sympathetic, and a little awkward at times – unlike Makhmalbaf, for example, who performs as a dictator-type director, or Gurchiani who can be heard from behind the camera giving dry non-emotional instructions, or Kitty Green who has erased her own visual or aural representation from the film. My questions were not about if they could act or not; I wanted to know what life was like for them here, their lived experience of Gort, in a way that was different to Makhmalbaf's more directive and at times interrogatory approach. What is filmed is a relationship, and an encounter between people.



Tony at the audition, Still from *Town of Strangers*

I was moved by the auditionees' openness to the project, to me and to themselves in the situation. I was interested in the psychological situation of

the filmed audition, and how the camera apparatus itself affects the performativity of selfhood or identity. The making-of method helped me to explore this. What I learned from doing the auditions, and by watching over them again, is that the presence of the camera had different effects. By the presence of the camera, I mean it as a synecdoche for the full apparatus and situation of the camera, the audition space in a theatre, and the presence of a sound recordist, two camera operators and a director. I would roughly divide these effects into two, almost oppositional, relationship dynamics. For some, my presence and the camera presence made them more self-conscious, closed and less penetrable as subjects, such as with Yvonne, who when I asked her about her gender identity, clammed up and said she didn't think it was something to make a film about and asked me not to pursue it. Prior to the audition, I had spent hours with Yvonne, sea-kayaking and hiking, when we had discussed and shared our thoughts and feelings about our gender, sexuality and other personal topics and she had been very open with me. It was the 'public' camera that made her 'shy'.

For other people, the presence of the camera, and me, seemed to create an intimacy that would not be possible in an encounter with a stranger without a camera. The second effect surprised me more than the first. The atmosphere was public, in that there were four crew members in the room, all concentrating, listening and watching intently, and the auditionee knew that the recording would be made public beyond that room. Though most withheld their vulnerabilities because of that, for some, I think it was precisely because of, not in spite of, the public nature of the situation that made them open up and show their vulnerability. It was as though they used it as a space to be seen, to be witnessed, steering the conversation to what they wanted to tell me, rather than answering the questions that I asked. In

Hamid's session, the truth of himself that he wanted to portray was that of the loneliness, fear and racism, which he experienced in Gort. In the case of Ann, she wanted to present herself as an enlightened and transformed person, but the truth of Ann's performance, for me, is that she came across as someone carrying regret for her shyness, and that moved me. In this way, the auditions worked as an invention that brought about a performative encounter between me and the auditionee, where we became an 'intimate public' (Berlant, 2008, p10 cited by Francis & Hussein p37). Both effects came about due to the situation of the auditions and so the ritual was performed into a kind of language for the film, which was improvised and enacted as we went along.



Hamid at the audition, Still from *Town of Strangers*

These moments were all on Camera 1, and carry an emotional intensity and intimacy, especially with the mix of wide shots that shows the full body alone in the kitchen, and the close-ups that have their own affect. The close-up evokes a sense of intimacy, but also of claustrophobia. There is nowhere to

go. Deleuze (2005, p90), writing on the affection image of the close-up, discusses the face as one who 'stares at us and looks at us ... there is no close-up of the face, the face is in itself close-up, the close-up is, by itself, face and both are affect, affection-image.' In this way, the face in close-up has an affective presence before anything happens, which is why, in the auditions, an intimacy of the face is produced by the choice of shot as a reality of the subjects. The wide shot distances us from the subjects and gives them a certain privacy that the close-up does not. In this way, the choice of shots produces the reality of the performance as much as the person acting does.

When the image of Camera 2 reveals the set-up of the event, an emotional distance is created, but an intellectual closeness replaces it. For example, the 'meta' shot of Rowan looking around the fake set after talking about her relationship with her parents is more emotionally affective than the close-up, as it underlines her aloneness with herself, and also gives her a dignity that we cannot intrude upon. This is the making-of as truth produced at the moment of filmmaking vis-à-vis the encounter, as explored via Bruzzi and Nagib earlier in this chapter. The auditions that began as an intellectual ruse surprised me in their embodiment. They were a series of encounters between 'strangers' and me, and it was these encounters that formed the backbone of the film and generated the subsequent methods and scenes of the *Town of Strangers* film. The encounter itself is produced by the documentary filmmaking situation and techniques.

What I did in the auditions was similar to what Bruzzi identifies as key to what Barker did in *Unmade Beds*, when he had people self-consciously enact themselves; in the auditions I was interested in 'the formalised used of the

camera, framing and self-conscious performances' (Bruzzi, 2006, p192), as a way of protecting the subjects from any intrusive filmmaking. In the encounter, the space was set up as a film set of a kitchen, and so the artifice of the pro-filmic event of the person 'at home' was emphasised. The artifice of the situation, and the physical distance between me and them, made it clear to the person, and to the viewer, that they were definitely not at home, that this was a public forum.

Key to my methodology of performance and distance with subject-participants is an ethical consideration; the audition space produced a place of protection from being observed 'unawares' (Ellis, 2012), a place where the subject could share agency of their own performance and participate in the creation of their representation with me. I am seeking a way to work with the 'other' that acknowledges it but also deconstructs it and gives some of my 'power' as director away. I realise now that I was searching for a way to define my positionality and acknowledge it. This ruse of the audition, as a method of filmmaking, allowed for greater agency for the participants to improvise their representations in a performative manner. The set-up of the audition made us all very self-aware of being filmed.

Before Bruzzi and Carroll theorised the performative mode, Jay Ruby (1980, p155) wrote: 'We create order. We don't discover it. We organize a reality that is meaningful for us. It is around these organizations of reality that filmmakers construct films'. This idea of documentary as a construction of reality rather than as a discoverer or observer of a pre-existing reality is key to the making-of as a performative method. Not only are the processes of filming and the social relations performative, but also the edit itself, most especially in documentary with its large ratio of footage to edit minutes, is

where the film really gets made, and its reality is produced. The editing stage of a film's process is largely neglected in film studies. The focus of Bruzzi and Nagib, for example, is on the moment of shooting as the moment of when the reality of the film is produced. In my own experience as a filmmaker, it is in directing the edit, as much as in directing the shoot, that decisions on representation are made, and the author's construction of events, via her direction, is performatively brought into being as the film's cinema-truth.

My making-of method aims to make a film that invites, and attempts to create, conditions for participation, intimacy and consultation. However, I also recognise that it is ultimately the filmmaker who has the most power over the creation of a person's/people's/place's representation – not just in the filming, but also in the editing. The relationship, as such, can never be equal; as it is ultimately managed by the filmmaker, in how it is cut. The filmmaker's responsibility for what she produces, in terms of representation, is one that has ethical considerations. Nichols tries to sum up an ethical code for documentary-makers thus: 'Do nothing that would violate the humanity of your subject and nothing that would compromise the trust of your audience' (Nichols, 2006). Salles questions the assumption that documentary has an impact socially and politically, and that by thinking so, it implies that one might choose to show images to serve the greater good, or one's own agenda, rather than to conceive of ethics as the relationship the filmmaker has to the person who becomes, through reduction, and through the rhetoric of film narrative, a character. Documentary ethics for Salles 'is not what can be done with the world, but what cannot be done with the character' (Salles, 2009, p234). As much as the film generates itself through improvisation and performative utterances, it is important to note, and take

responsibility for, how much power the director has over the relationship between the audience and the subject-participant.

In *Town of Strangers*, the importance of the agency of the subject is understood by the conceit of the audition. Some of these visible making-of reflexive elements have receded in the editing process, the more the film foregrounds the intimacy of the encounter between filmmaker, protagonist and audience. The truth of that encounter can only be produced as a performative action, as whole hours of the day are not presented. Thus, the edit is also a performative encounter, where reality is produced, just as much as it is at the moment of the profilmic encounter.

The performative / generative / making-of documentary film does not claim to observe or represent subjects; it creates the subject *and* gives them the opportunity to create themselves, as an effect of the documentary as discourse. In this way, the audience too is a participant in the making of meaning. The performative making-of documentary film is a film that is self-conscious of its own production of reality.

NOTES

¹ *The Blow-in* (dir. Treasa O'Brien, Ireland/Spain/Germany, 8mins, 2016) is a precursor to *Town of Strangers*. It was shot in Gort in September 2015, the same week as I shot the auditions for *Town of Strangers*, edited in Oct and Nov 2015, and released in Jan 2016. This short film was made as a commission for the Goethe Institute as part of a project called 'Europoly – Films and Performances Exploring Europe in times of crisis'. As part of this project, I collaborated with Spanish filmmakers Neus Ballus, Aitor Echeverria and Gina Ferrer, and we contributed to an online 'blog' called the [lab](#)¹, where we shared written reflections and images that followed the work as it progressed. The entries follow my process of developing the ideas and style of the film. See Appendix 1 for link to the film.

² Transcribed by the author from the film *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm Take One*, dir. William Greaves, USA, 1968

³ I write more on *Spirit of Shuhada Street* as a performative production of reality, and my methods, in the Introduction of this thesis. See Appendix 1 for a link to an excerpt from the film.

⁴ Mohsen Makhmalbaf on a loudspeaker to the crowds of people who turned up to audition for his film, transcribed from *Salaam Cinema*, dir. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Iran, 1995

⁵ This crew were filming for a secondary making-of about the auditioning process of what they thought would be the film *A Moment of Innocence*

⁶ Mohsen Makhmalbaf in *Salaam Cinema*, 1995

⁷ In Hollywood fiction cinema, the ruse known as a McGuffin, a red herring plot that allows another one comes into being.

⁸ Abele, Robert, LA Times, 2017; Sims, David, Atlantic 2017 & Dargis, Manohla, NY Times, 2017, all cited by Francis and Hussein, Film Quarterly, 2017

Chapter Four

MAKING-OF & LUCID DREAMING IN *TOWN OF STRANGERS*

Introduction

I have explored how the making-of film genre is a story of its own making that generates itself into a production of reality, because of the film being made. When I was making *Town of Strangers*, a major element of my method came from the desire to document people performing in and from their own imaginative space. This chapter explores the discoveries I made, when working with people to perform themselves through fabulation, psychodrama, dreaming, memory and fantasy enactment.

I discuss the methodology I used when making *Town of Strangers*, as a form of lucid dreaming, its relation to cinematic reflexivity, and how it works as a process of filmmaking. I draw on Deleuze's idea of story-telling as fabulation, and how it is related to the storytelling of the protagonists, and my methods of cinematic ethnofiction in the film. The method especially focuses on the process of telling the dream, rather than on the content of the dream itself.

This leads into a reflection on the methods of creating the dream scenes with the subject-participants, as a making-with process. I reflect on the process as one of lucid dreaming in the filming situation, and also in the editing. I explore the lines of flight in the film when protagonists intervened in their representation and how my methods nurtured these ruptures.

4.1 Lucid Dreaming

‘Cinema is a language I started to learn in my sleep and I never intend to practice it in a binary way. I just want to get more lucid.’

(Har’el in O’Falt, 2016)

This reference to sleep - in this case, meaning dreaming - could also be read as a reference to the cinematic potential of the performative film as a lucid space. Throughout the process of making *Town of Strangers*, I have been developing methods and aesthetics of filming the reality of the flights into fantasy, dreams and memories of protagonists, as an expression of the lived experiences of the people I filmed.

I use the term ‘dream scenes’ as a placeholder term for all of the poetic leaps made in the film with the protagonists, even though only some of them could be strictly called dream scenes. These are scenes I made in discussion with the protagonists such as with Hamid, and his enactment of his dream as a thwarted psychodrama; with Elham, performing memory as improvisation, when story-telling to her child; and with Ralf, when we try to simulate his flying dream. Others are interpretations of dreams and memories that I dreamt into scenes when editing the material. In the case of Chloe, Rowan and Rosa, there is no imaginative ‘reenactment’ of a dream made collaboratively with them, but there are explorations that I have fabulated in my act of editing, as an encounter with their story-telling.

Chloe’s ‘dream’ in the abandoned house with her new friend Josie, was not consciously told to me by Chloe, leading me to wonder if Chloe’s dream is mine, and not hers. I invented a dream scene that could be associated with

Rowan, but it is left open-ended for the audience to interpret. I placed the scene of the children playing in the forest directly after Rowan's audition, as my poetic interpretation of Rowan's inner imagination, but it is not one on which we actively collaborated. I associate this scene with Rowan through the inference of the editing montage. The scene could be interpreted as the idyllic childhood Rowan never had, or the childhood that she seems unable to give to her own children. It is also a fairytale and a dream-like space, with the music giving it a drama that I associate with Rowan's subconscious voice; if that voice were to sing now, this is how I imagine it would sound. In these ways, I dreamt with them in the editing room, listening to what they told me, and how they embodied their stories and characters in the audition. I interpreted the material that I filmed in Gort as it encountered my own imagination.

Perhaps lucid dreaming would be a more apt description of the process of making *Town of Strangers*, during the filming with people, and when I was story-telling in the edit. During lucid dreaming, the dreamer may become aware that they are dreaming, and direct their dream somewhat, although they are not fully in control. As a metaphor for my filmmaking process of the performative making-of film, the lucid dream denotes a self-consciousness where I have an element of direction or control. At the same time, I am also following the imaginative spaces of the subconscious of the material when I am editing, as well as when I am present with the subjects devising and improvising for the camera. Lucid dreaming and the making-of method are connected, through their reflexive methods and their awareness of their reality as generative improvisation. Lucid dreaming is an encounter between the dreamer and the dream, and my process was an encounter between my embodied direction, and the stories and people that presented themselves.

One could go so far as to say that the whole film is a fabulation of my dreaming with the people with whom I made relationships, rather than being a production of their dreams.

4.2 Story-telling as Fabulation

A major element of my method is story-telling. In the research period prior to the first shoot in 2015, I listened to, and collected, stories in the town. I gathered some of these stories into my writing as practice in Chapter One, such as the joke about the bank robbery in Gort that also appears in the barbershop scene in the film. This story is not true or false. What is true is that someone is repeating and performing this joke for the camera, because I am making this film. What is interesting is what we learn by who tells this story – in this case an eighteen-year-old white man – and how they tell the story. We are observing people in the process of storytelling. This action is related to Butler's theory of performativity; that is, in each telling, something is invented and ritualised. Through the telling of the stories, the film is performatively generated as a web of stories that weave themselves into being.

I asked people to tell me stories in the audition, and I then asked them if they would enact some of those stories, be they memories, dreams or other kinds of stories. I was interested in how they told the stories, and what would be revealed in the process of telling and inventing. When editing the film, I fabricated stories based on the stories I had heard and filmed. All of these methods of storytelling are acts of imagination, and fabulation, in that when we tell stories we are inventing, and when we tell them again, we change

them and re-invent them. This is not falsifying; rather, I am interested in what truths are made visible in the process of the telling itself as a creative act.

One of my methods in *Town of Strangers* involved asking people, in the original auditions, to tell me 'stories, dreams, lies, memories and gossip'. I used these terms as they have particular potential for fabulating; they are neither true nor false, but they are speech-acts (Austin, 1962), that become stories as we perform them. These stories reveal something of the storyteller, how they experience life, and how they interpret the world from their subjective perspectives. In *Town of Strangers*, the audition space is set up, with its theatre set of a traditional country kitchen, as a situation to encourage fabulation. My desire to experience people telling stories in front of the camera, was to see what reality might be produced with the protagonists when 'making fiction' without being fiction.

What I discovered through the encounter of asking for, and listening to, these stories, is that what is 'real' is the process of telling itself. The telling tells us more about the person themselves, than it does about the content of their story. Through their gestures - such as Rosa's sweetness mixed with her embodied anxiety (furrowed brow, sighing and massaging her shoulders); Rowan's complex subtext of herself via her facial expressions; Ana's relaxed and composed demeanour – they tell us more about them than the content of their stories does. Sensory and affective story-telling is part of the fabulation of people's invention of themselves as characters. In *Town of Strangers*, this can be seen in the expression of how Hamid carries himself as he runs; in Ralf's hand gestures when he tells stories and his gestures of flying; in Josie's dance in the Evangelist church when she is thrown to the ground repeatedly. The performance of self is celebrated as something

actualised by the act of filming through these embodied movements, in which the protagonists express and invent their realities through their embodied expressions and movements, as much as through their speech.



Josie's Dance, Still from *Town of Strangers*

Deleuze, building on Bergson's concept of myth-making (Bergson, 1954, p108, cited by Hongisto, 2011, p9), adapted the term fabulation to describe the method of making fiction in cinéma-vérité as a cinema-truth or truth of cinema. The translation of fabulation in the English edition of Cinema II is 'story-telling' (Deleuze, 1985/1997, p.xvii), pertaining to how one fabricates and invents as one tells a story. By speaking, by telling, we are making our identities. One performs one's self into being, when telling stories in front of a camera, and thus, the production of reality happens. For Deleuze, fabulation is already occurring when people speak on camera, in the way that they invent as they tell stories based on their memories, perceptions, hopes and dreams, and in the way that the person and their story 'intertwine with one another' (Hongisto, 2018, p192). When the protagonists in *Town Of*

Strangers engage in the speech-act of telling their memories and dreams, they begin to 'make fiction' but they are not 'fictional' (Deleuze 1989, 150).

According to Ilona Hongisto, 'making fiction is the creative story-telling act that has an immediate impact on the lives of the filmed subjects' (2018, p192). These stories originate in our subconscious mind, and are neither factual nor fictional, but they tell us something about the lived experiences of the storyteller. They are stories that we tell about our lives, individually and collectively, stories that reveal something of our character and of our desires as people. But, most importantly, we invent ourselves as performative beings as we tell the stories, and this is how reality is produced during the filmic situation at the auditions.

4.3 Cinematic Ethnofiction

I used methods of auto-ethnography and autofiction, adapted from my own literary form of ethnofictional writing, to construct myself as another subject in the film, as I discussed in Chapter Two. As well as that extension of literary ethnofiction as applied to the treatment of myself in the film, I also used cinematic ethnofictional methods when dreaming with the subject-participants to improvise their performances of self. Ethnofiction, also known as ciné-ethnography, as practiced and written about by Jean Rouch, is a method of filmmaking in which subject-participants act out their own lives using improvisation. Rouch came from a background of anthropological /ethnographic studies, and pioneered ciné-ethnography as a reflexive cinema methodology that included participative strategies. These are evident in his African films *Moi, Un Noir* (1958), *Jaguar* (1968) and *Coco Rico Monsieur*

Poulet (1974), and in his French films *La Pyramide Humaine* (1959) and *Chronique d'un Été / Chronicle of A Summer* (1960).

Whereas, in ethnofiction literature, it is the author who does the improvising, in cinematic ethnofiction film, the director collaborates with the participant-subjects to improvise stories based on their own lived experiences, and the subjects become actors in their own stories, based on their own lives or the lives of their peers. By having the protagonists invent characters loosely based on themselves, or on their peers, the cinematic apparatus gave rise to subjects reflecting on themselves (De Groof, p114). Rouch called this collaborative process 'anthropologie partagée' or shared anthropology. Shared anthropology includes methods of collaborating and showing the film-in-progress to the participants and taking on feedback, and the filmmaker demonstrating a reflexivity around their position and process and how it affected the situation (Rouch in Feld, 2003, p18-20). The process of making ethnofiction is generative, and explores methods of shared authorship, re-enactment and 'ethnodialogue', to include the participants in the process of the storytelling and performance.

Rouch's methods of improvisation of the self with the protagonists of the films he made, aimed 'to document not only a culture but to illuminate the interior lives of the people who make up that culture' (White, 2003, p101-12). Witnessing, as film viewers, the interior life of a subject / character in action enables an audience to relate to them, thereby Rouch's method could also be understood as a method towards making the lives of others less other. It is through the protagonists' storytelling and role-playing that the audience understands their reality as subjective. In *Town of Strangers*, it is through the storytelling of the auditionees, as well as through their subsequent scenes of

role-play and self-improvisation, that an audience may share in how they see the world, rather than the audience being the world that sees them.

Rouch's process involved spending time with his protagonists, without filming, or filming by himself without a crew, which he described as 'the art of patience, and the art of time' (Rouch and Fulchignoni 2003, p151). He was open to 'accidents' (McIntosh, 1978), as part of the improvisation method, and as an effect produced from the time he spent embedded with his subjects, not planning but filming spontaneously. In *Town of Strangers*, many of my planned shoots failed in their original intentions, and I salvaged moments from around them to invent scenes in the edit that caught a certain energy and became the reality of the making-of process of the film, its cinema-truth.

These 'accidents' included the scene with Chloe and her friends in the van, the sound recordist and his dog interrupting Dido's audition, Dido's dream scene in the abandoned psychiatric hospital, and in the dancing scenes with Chloe and Josie. This accidental filming, arising from the methodology of cinematic ethnofiction, is pertinent to the improvisatory and generative nature of my ethnofiction method. My filmmaking methodology is informed by, but extends from, cinematic ethnofiction methods of shared ethnography, participant improvisation, spending time together, and being open to accidents. What I have discovered is the potential to use methods of shared ethnography as a way to make visible some of the making-of process as part of the ethnofiction method, rather than as a behind-the-scenes look. The process itself is what is revealed as the place where cinema-truth is being made.

Town of Strangers is influenced by Jean Rouch's ciné-ethnography or ethnofiction cinema, not just in its formal mixing of genres, but also in its methods of working with protagonists to express their interior experiences through the performance of self. Rouch came to the conclusion that 'fiction is the only way to penetrate reality' (Eaton, 1979, p8). In films such as *Moi, Un Noir* (1958), *Jaguar* (1968) and *Cocorico Monsieur Poulet* (1974), Rouch created characters and stories in collaboration with his participant-actors, who improvised from their own selves and lives. His method of ciné-ethnography included improvisation, and shared ethnography in the sense of collaboration and playing back the material and discussing it with the people he filmed. In *Chronicle of a Summer*, (discussed in Chapter Three as a performative making-of film), the whole film is an improvised event that produces its own reality through the making-of of itself. It is through these performative situations that identity is constructed as reality because of, and for, the film.

The Blow-in (Treasa O'Brien, 2016), the short ethnofiction film¹ I made in Gort before making the feature-length film *Town of Strangers*, uses ethnofiction methods. Through forming a friendship with Véronique, we worked on developing a performed documentary based on her memories of being a child and how they were related to being given to her grandparents for the first two years of her life. In telling the story, she told me that, as a child, she used to look through the windows of people's houses, and 'wonder what a real home was like'. Véronique self-consciously acted out this act of looking-in-windows in the town of Gort, with my direction. In each window, there was a different pair of 'blow-ins' who played their selves and improvised a conversation. I did not ask them to act, but I did do multiple takes and sometimes directed the conversation, such as asking them to repeat, or

discuss further, something they had said in an earlier take. In this way, I was drawing attention to the performativity of all documentary performances. Véronique's voiceover monologue was taken from the audition I did with her, but within this audition she repeated her story three times, twice in English and once in French. I used shared ethnography methods such as Veronique choosing the location of the tree as her 'home'. At the tree, I had her tell the story to the tree while I hid inside it; in eight different takes in English and in French; on one occasion she sang it.



Chloe and Josie at the audition, Still from *Town of Strangers*

When Chloe and Josie came to the auditions for *Town of Strangers*, I asked them to interview one another. When they were stuck or tongue-tied, I suggested things that they could ask one another, but mainly they made it up themselves. This was a way for me to get to know what mattered to them, what they wanted to talk about, and also a way of observing them as they related to one another rather than addressing the camera or me directly, as people being auditioned alone tend to do. It also gave me an opportunity to feel the dynamic between them, as I had in mind, at that time, that they

might play the characters of Boo and Luiza in *The Miracle*. Due to the existence of a script and the ruse of the audition, my gaze upon them was one of a casting director as well as being anthropological-sociological. The girls had got dressed up for the event, each one reflecting her own culture and personality, as well as socialised gender roles, in how she was dressed and made up. The way that Chloe made such an effort for the audition carries its own information or truth within it, as to how much she cared and invested in the event.



Improvisation at the abandoned house, Still from cut material, *Town of Strangers*

I asked Chloe and Josie to improvise scenes from my fiction script *The Miracle*². I also told them that I was interested in their own lives and stories and that we could incorporate them. I had discovered an abandoned house that summer, and I decided, even though it was not in my script, to take the girls there. The location had caught my imagination and I intuitively wanted to do something there, as I felt its potential as a performative space. When we arrived at the location, I told them there was a cinematographer in the

house, and I asked them to enter the house and explore the downstairs room together in the spirit of play. I directed them not to engage directly or look at the camera. I directed the cinematographer to follow their actions. Chloe and Josie entered the house and explored the objects and the interior. They looked at a picture on the wall of a house and Chloe said 'is that this house?'; they picked up an old camera and played with it, pretending to take pictures of one another and took a 'selfie'. They rummaged through the dresser and knocked over a set of playing cards, which Josie picked up. Chloe opened an old newspaper with JFK on it, whom neither of them recognised, and said 'Is that your boyfriend?' and giggled. Josie took teacups from the dresser and they pretended to have a tea party. In the kitchen, they discussed a picture of the Virgin Mary, Chloe asking Josie if she believed in her. None of this was directed by me at that moment, nor was it in the script I had written, but I took notes on what was working that might become part of the next take.



Gina Ferrer, DoP of *Town of Strangers* on set in the abandoned house, Production shot

After this first look around, I then asked the girls to re-enter the house, and to repeat some of their actions, with me now directing them based on the actions they had already made. It is difficult to say if this is documentary or fiction and whether that is even a useful way to describe the process. Improvisation is probably a better way to describe it, or reverse ethnofiction, where we began with a script and unraveled it, like I described Oppenheimer's process, rather than began with the participants and improvised until we developed a script, as Rouch did. I set up a situation, the girls responded to that situation and created their own actions and dialogues. In turn, inspired by what they had created, I directed their actions in more detail, but allowed them to keep improvising and responding as themselves. So each of us was responsive and intuitive to the moment. The scenes were performed by unraveling the script, and building layers of performance upon the improvised actions that emerged, through re-staging and re-enactment in the next moment.

While the crew was setting up for another scene, Chloe and Josie were waiting around, and the weather turned cold. Spontaneously, Chloe started to teach Josie some Irish dancing to keep them warm. I interrupted the crew's preparations and directed the cinematographer to film them, and from this scene the girls improvised the next part, initiated by Josie who said, 'Ok now I show you samba'. The two young people themselves devised this scene; even though they were in a situation that was, overall, directed by me, it was their impetus to dance like this and to teach each other the steps from their respective dancing traditions. In ethnofiction terms, I would call this a Rouchian accident. The improvising and script fell away as the film progressed and almost all of those dramatic scenes – in the old house, and later scenes I shot with them in Josie's bedroom - were cut from the film, as

the performative documentary aspects grew. In retrospect, I now see those improvised scenes I did with them, not as failed fictional filmmaking, but as a way of working with Chloe and building a relationship, one that eventually led to the scene in her bedroom mirror with her, that could not have happened without all those attempts at ethnofictional filmmaking first. Trust, between Chloe and me, grew through the ethnofictional filmmaking process, and the time spent together improvising scenes where she did not have to 'act' as herself.



Chloe and Josie dancing, Still from *Town of Strangers*

Deleuze viewed the work of Jean Rouch as that which consciously produced a reality through fabulation. In Rouch's films, Deleuze recognises that it is through the subject's invention of himself as a character, that he becomes real (1985/97, p150). When the subjects act as characters, it is not important whether they are acting or not acting, or whether it is documentary or fiction; it is the borders in between and beyond these states that are releasing their potential to create something new, through the method of invention itself. In

Rouch's *Moi, un Noir* (France, 1958), Nigerian migrant workers living in the Ivory Coast perform as themselves through improvising scenarios from their lives and from how they dream their lives could be. The central subject, Oumarou Ganda, added a voiceover two years later that is not in sync with the film. His voiceover is a jazz-like narration of the film, where he not only plays himself as himself, but also invents himself as the Hollywood actor Edward G. Robinson. He gives personas to his friends including Dorothy Lamour, Lemmy Caution / Eddie Constantine and Tarzan. The subjects invent their personas and stories on screen *because* Rouch and his camera are filming them. So, it is the situation of the film itself that is providing the impetus to fabulate.

In Tinatin Gurchiani's *The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear* (2013), which I discussed as a making-of film in Chapter Three, the auditionees create their identities as real, as they tell stories about themselves. In Tako's story especially, she fabulates her story of estrangement from her mother as a fairytale. As she tells the fairytale it becomes apparent that she is telling her own story, and the act of telling it is a creative one, where she invents herself as a character within the story as she is speaking. She produces it into reality via storytelling, and then it becomes created as the truth of her reality in subsequent scenes, in which she uses the situation of the film to reunite with her mother - and importantly, for her, to negotiate her other family relationships through the mediation of the camera. Gurchiani is not observing the daily life of Tako. The intervention of the filmic situation itself gives rise, and makes possible, Tako's performance. Her fabulation is a production of reality not a reflection of it.

4.4 The Making-of Dream Scenes as a Making-with Process

Using ethnofiction as a method of improvising the dream/memory scenes with subject-participants was a framework for producing the meaning of the scene. What was being documented was the process of the making-of the dream scenes, simultaneously to the storytelling itself. Using ethnofiction, in a reflexive way, helped me to understand how the making-of as a method could become a way to produce reality and to understand the process itself as one that is making meaning.



Elham, Habiba and Adel, Still from *Town of Strangers*

When Elham and Adel tell the story of their sea crossing to their daughter Habiba, in *Town of Strangers*, the storytelling became possible because of the filmic situation. The filming encounter provided a situation for them to be witnessed as they worked through their memories. They later told us that the process for them was honouring and cathartic³, and that they valued the chance to share their story. They fabulate the story as they tell it. It is shot in the theatre where we had held the auditions, not in their home or bathroom.

It is a set that is obviously provisional and not meant to be realistic, similar to the kitchen set in the audition scenes. This bathroom, that is not quite a bathroom, like the kitchen in the auditions, is a method of drawing the audience's attention to the production of reality in the scene. Places, and objects, too, perform. The props perform domesticity but we catch them in the act. They are performing as props at the same time as they are making the fiction of being a domestic setting.

In *Town of Strangers*, the notion of the real as something that is inventing itself through the role-playing and storytelling is influenced by Rouch's ethnofiction as a production of reality. This scene was generated through the fabulation of storytelling, and through repetition and improvisation of the telling of a memory. Like Rouch's ethnofictions, we are watching the performances of the characters. The process of devising and improvising their story, through workshops, is an expansion of Rouch's shared ethnography methods. My intention here is not to create a dramatic reenactment or representation of a family at home, nor of the family at sea at another moment; it is self-consciously the (re)presentation of Elham and Adel becoming actors in their own story on a film set, *in the present moment*. In this sense, the method generated a situation in which Elham and Adel performed themselves, interacting and responding to the actuality of Habiba's embodied self in relation to them. Together we produced the reality of their story-telling to her.

Memory is here revealed as a process of telling. To remember is to fabulate. The stories we tell ourselves about our own lives have the power of being our own personal folk tales and family myths. They are here made public, ritualised and exorcised through the act of filming as a cathartic process.

The process of filming makes visible that which was not there to be observed. In a subsequent scene, by staging Elham making coffee and talking to her parents *for the film*, it gives rise to her authentic graceful weeping after the call. Elham is not being observed in a private moment. One of the reasons she is weeping is because she is making her grief public, and is moved by her own actions, through the awareness of them because we are filming it. The filmmaking process made visible Elham's discrete longing.



Elham, Still from *Town of Strangers*

I asked Dido if she would like to enact her dream as a cinematic scene, and she said it would be 'difficult, but nothing is impossible'. A few days after the audition, Dido called me and said she would like to make a film of her own⁴. She asked if I would come on a recce with her to an old psychiatric hospital in a nearby town. Dido asked me to take photographs of the corridors and locations, which I did, but I soon started to film her walking through the spaces, without directing her. As I watched Dido exploring the ex-hospital's

peeling wallpaper and smashed windows, I started to think of Dido's recurring dream, and how it seemed to be manifesting itself. I saw her unravelling the wool, which she had brought so as not to get lost in the labyrinthine building, and I asked her to repeat the action while I filmed. I then started to direct more actively, asking Dido to walk through spaces as I filmed, where I could ask her to re-do it and get the right focus and aperture.



Dido's Dream, Still from *Town of Strangers*

I followed Dido around the building as though I was in a lucid dream myself, partly following her, partly directing her. Of all the scenes I did for *Town Of Strangers*, I would say this was the most 'equally' co-directed. Even though it was unplanned, we improvised from the situation together. The relationship we had nurtured, for over a year prior to the encounter, was key to the intuitive and trusting way we were able to improvise together in the moment. This method of working is collaborative and is a co-dreaming with Dido. Authorship becomes blurred and boundaries are transgressed. Am I the DoP on Dido's film, or is she the lead actor of mine? This methodology could be

understood as an expansion of first person filmmaking and as an extension of shared ethnography.

I filmed a dream scene with Hamid that was planned in advance with him. Hamid and I met regularly without filming, and I listened to Hamid's stories many times, in the two-year interim between his audition, and filming his dream scene, though I did not record these conversations. We cooked together, and went for hikes in the nearby hills and forests. On one of our walks, Hamid told me about a recurring dream he has in which his father reprimands him. Listening to Hamid, I could hear that the voice of his father was still something very strong in his judgment of himself as a success or failure as a person.

I asked Hamid to enact his dream, but with someone he chose himself rather than with an actor I would choose, to play his father, and for Hamid to play the role of himself. I had expected Hamid to bring along an older Afghan friend he had mentioned as suitable, so I was surprised on the day, when he introduced the white Irishman, John, as the actor who would play his father. John was empathetic, if a little melodramatic in his improvisation which is not what I wanted, but I am learning that I always get better than what I wanted, whenever I think something is failing – part of sharing ethnography, for me, is not to control everything and, instead, to allow space for the subject to invent, disagree and intervene. The space became a psychodramatic space for Hamid to work through his experience of self-judgment, through coming into contact with his father in the guise of John. I can only imagine that if it had been an Afghan man playing his father, Hamid might have acted very differently, so this particular actor in this situation affects how the scene plays out.



Hamid and John, Still from *Town of Strangers*

The filming situation is created in order to make possible - through the performative witnessing power of the camera – a revelation or transformation in the life of Hamid. In Hamid's dream scene, I put him in a situation where he could confront something and challenge his own story, in an environment that he could direct. I wanted to create the potential for a change in consciousness for Hamid, through inventing a situation in which he could choose to deal with the spectre of his dead father, who still appears and judges him in his subconscious mind. He chooses the situation, he chooses how to play himself, he chooses who will act as his father, he chooses where to place the furniture and the actors in the scene. I encouraged Hamid to direct the scene, but he still looked to me for validation many times. I asked him between takes if it was like his dream and, if not, how he would change it. Hamid had described his father as 'very angry', and he directed John to 'be angry' but John was not convincing enough, in my estimation, so I encouraged him to be even angrier. On the third take, Hamid said it was how his father was. I didn't believe him but as it was his scene to direct, I

interpreted this as a polite way for Hamid to say that he wanted to stop, and, so, I did not push it further.

The 'acting' in this scene is awkward; John is overstatedly theatrical, and Hamid is understated, shy. And yet we are witnessing Hamid making fiction in the Deleuzian sense. He is inventing himself in this moment. Hamid is rehearsing his own dream and memory, and it is through watching him, in the process of this performing and directing, that we understand the potential for Hamid to self-actualise and to confront his father. But he chooses not to. Hamid denies the audience (and himself) the pleasure of catharsis or resolution that is expected from narrative cinema.



Hamid's Dream, Still from *Town of Strangers*

There is a moment of the process when Hamid is watching John, and it is as though he is both an observer and an actor in the scene. We are watching the border space between Hamid's observation of himself, and Hamid's performance of himself. The reality being produced is the filmic mediation of his perception of the memory of his father's judgment of him. It is the space

between Hamid's observation of himself and his acting that is revealed as the scene's reality.

The dream situation itself is a ruse to produce the reality of Hamid's relationship, and cathexis, with the material we are working with; in this case, his dream of his father, which is also a memory. They are not professional actors and so their 'bad' acting is 'good', because it is authentic, and we empathise with them. When we can see 'bad' acting and empathise then we are seeing a documentary of the person self-consciously trying to act as themselves, like Hamid and John do in Hamid's dream scene. We see the border between the person acting, and the role they are playing, and it is this border, or gap, that is most revealing. We are watching the truth of the person trying to act. Through their sometimes stilted, or overly melodramatic acting, we learn certain documentary or anthropological truths about the people acting.

Authentic acting of one's self in documentary is when people are able to re-live their own moments, such as when Elham and Adel are telling the story to Habiba in the bath scene. We empathise with them here because we can see that they are not actors, but that they are reliving their own moment. This makes their performance, though obviously enacted for the camera, also authentic. 'Hammy' acting also has its own charms and poetic truth, such as when Hamid and John try to enact Hamid's dream. John cannot get angry enough, and Hamid is ambivalent. John's acting, or unwillingness to act more angrily towards Hamid, reveals his tenderness towards Hamid and his unwillingness to hurt him. Hamid's acting reveals how his politeness and his denial get in the way of the potential of the scene for catharsis. Is the potential action too traumatic at this moment for Hamid? I did not push it.

Hamid's ambivalence about surrendering to the action becomes part of the truth of the performance.

The enactment of memory as method holds the potential to challenge the inner conflicts of the psyche, and can be seen especially in the scenes of enactment of Hamid with his 'father', and the scene with Elham and her family. The ethnofictional methods I used, such as acting out one's memories or dreams, illuminated the revelation of self through performance. These methods draw on Rouch's cinematic ethnofiction as performative ritual, in which the person both performs and observes himself, such as when Hamid confronts his friend John as though he was his son. Through the imaginative and embodied story-telling of the people in *Town of Strangers*, their imagination produces a reality that is the becoming of their creative acts of fabulation on film.

4.5 Dreaming-with: Editing as a Performative Act

When I engage in editing the scenes, I begin to fabulate through my process of lucid dreaming; I begin to make fiction, but it is not fictional. The material footage has its own potential for the performative. Representing images filmed in the past, they actualise in the moment of montage, changing constantly as I improvise with them in different formulations. Depending on how it is placed, it performs a different dynamic. Editing is an activity where story-telling fabulation happens again.

When I am editing, I experience the rushes as I am watching them, almost as though I am dreaming them. Like dreams, they seem to be loosely based on

events as I remember them, but they are also different. I know them and yet, they are foreign to me simultaneously. Staying close to the footage in the edit, and listening to it, generated sequences that made me go deeper into the sensorial world of the film as a lucid dream. These methods of following the material while I am also directing it, make visible things that were previously invisible, such as Hamid's loneliness, Chloe's sense of being trapped, and Elham's longing. I tune in, listen, and then nurture and construct in the editing of the material. Sometimes I am directing the footage and sometimes, the footage 'takes' me, such as when I edited Rowan's 'dream' in the forest, or the funeral scene at the beginning of the film, where the duration of the shot takes on a meaning because of the time I allow it to run. The attention drifts and focuses again. This also happens in the scene of Josie and her friends dancing. The editing process is also a performative and generative process⁵. The film makes itself into something through a dynamic between control and surrender, like the lucid dreaming I describe.

Following on from the co-dreaming method of filming with Dido, I started to play with the footage, and with her recorded voice from the audition and psychotherapy session, that I had filmed in the audition room. Dido's dream scene seemed to make itself in the cut, as I followed a sensory and non-linear pattern of association along with her voice-dream speech act. The scene evokes Dido's issues with home, belonging and identity, without being literal or showing the analysis of the dream with the psychotherapist. It is evoked cinematically and sensorially, so that while she tells the dream, it is as though she fabulates it into visual reality. The scene also functions to set up the other 'dream scenes' yet to come in the film, as this one is the most

straightforward dream sequence. After this, there is a licence to deviate from the dream scene form, as soon as it is established.

The scene with Chloe and her friends in the back of my van was produced via an encounter with the material in the editing room. On the evening of the shoot, I was trying to film a scene between Chloe and her friend Helen discussing their Debs⁶, but our plans were thwarted by rain, locked houses and Chloe constantly opening the van door to let more of her friends in. Their energy was infectious, and I directed Gina, the DoP, to start filming, although we only had camera sound.



Chloe and her friend Helen, Still from *Town of Strangers*

In the edit, I surrendered to the material I had shot around the scene rather than lamenting what I had hoped to shoot. The scene I did eventually shoot⁷, in the playground, was cut from the film but the accidental footage and b-roll became a major scene. At the time, I thought the whole shoot had been a waste of time but a few months later, looking through the footage, I realised that there was an energy in those moments, and in that footage, I

could see how Chloe was different to her friends, how she stood apart from them. I followed the material as though I were lucid dreaming – I invented as I edited the material, but it also worked through me in a performative manner. Through this scene, and the material shot in the playground that same evening, I found, in the footage, a way to express the reality of what I perceived to be Chloe's concurrent senses of belonging and alienation within her friendships and family group. On reflection, I see this b-roll and 'accidental' footage as the subconscious of the scene that I had been looking for all along. Chloe did not articulate verbally what I perceived to be her conflict between belonging and longing for 'something else', but she embodies it in this scene.



Chloe in the van, Still from *Town of Strangers*

This is not a dream sequence that I planned and co-authored with Chloe. It is a poetic leap of my authorship, an accident I later lucidly dreamed into a scene when I was editing. This van scene is an example of how the film generated its own spirit and scenes through the situations that happened because of the making-of method itself, rather than through external events

that could be observed. My method, therefore, is not only to try and collaborate with the protagonists to create a scene with them, but to trust the 'accidents' and 'failures' and find (what I believe to be) the subconscious emotion in the material afterwards. My task is to make this visible, by responding to the embodied performance I perceive in the footage, and to what I know of the person and our encounter beyond the filmed material, and to keep it authentic to both of our experiences. In this way, it is through improvising in the performative editing ritual, that reality is constructed from the material.



Reaction shot of T in the van scene, Still from *Town of Strangers*

In the edit of Chloe's van scene, I inserted a reaction shot of T (me) into the montage as a scripted act of recreated 'actuality'. I had been there when we filmed, and I had been driving, but I was not filmed on camera at the time. It was later in the editing stage that I re-enacted that moment. I acted it for the camera, without anyone present in the back of the van, but I vividly recalled the moment and how I felt, and re-enacted that giddy energy of that past moment. This is a conceit used to construct my memory of the truth of that

moment. Through my presence in the pro-filmic, the audience experiences that scene through my embodied experience of being there, as well as through Chloe's embodied presence in the van, as the main protagonist of the scene. By inserting an image of T, via a reaction shot, I reveal the relationship between the others and me and, thus, I make myself a subject too. 'We' are in the van, not 'them'. There are several moments in the film where I do something like this, such as when I do my laundry in a shot carefully placed next to a shot of Hamid doing his laundry. In these ways, T performs herself as part of the collective dreamscape of *Town of Strangers*.

The editing process was a kind of lucid dreaming in the way that I encountered the footage with a degree of control and awareness but it also seemed to 'happen' to me. What was revealed from this encounter was how much the dynamic between directing, improvising and surrendering to the moment, informed the process. The filming process, and the editing process, were both lucid dreaming processes; during both, I lucidly followed the situation, and, later, the material, as it came to me. This was a method that helped me to discover and reveal, rather than control, a way of encountering the filming and editing as a cinematic reflexivity, which honoured the generative nature of the filmmaking process. Editing, too, is a performative act where I construct reality.

4.6 Lines of Flight in the Making-of Film

The making-of as method may allow for a greater agency, and even resistance, from the characters that challenges the director's control of their representation. I try to make room for these interruptions as part of the

process of filming as encounter, and in the edit. These ruptures are emblematic of the dynamic process created between my authorship and the unraveling of my directorial intentions.

I had ambivalent feelings about including Rowan's audition in the cut of *Town Of Strangers*, due to her vulnerability. However, she had come to the audition voluntarily, and she had offered her story, without suggestion or coercion. She begins with a framing of her memory/dream/gossip/lie (we do not know which) as a story: 'My story? Well, I was at the bus-stop...'

Rowan's story is rambling and convoluted; I edited it down for brevity in the cut. However, her real story is produced in the gaps and subtext of the apparent story she is telling. Ostensibly, it's a story about a man who has various identities, but the story that is communicated beyond the words is the mystery of why Rowan is so fragile and why her children have been taken from her, which she mentions only in passing. Her demeanour and performed incredulity at this man, as a character who lies and invents within her story, belies the subtext of her story as a horrific tale of sexual harassment and betrayal. As she builds her story of the lying man, she unravels and reveals a story about herself, creating a different truth than the one she seems to be telling.

Deleuze cites Shirley Clarke's *Portrait of Jason* (USA, 1967) as a film that creates its own truth (1985/1997, p154). Actor Jason Holliday performatively improvises his character via the camera's presence throughout the night, and through his story-telling and roleplaying, he 'invents himself' while performing (Hongisto, 2011, p12). Hongisto sees, in *Portrait of Jason*, how 'fabulation as a story-telling function provides resistance to the present social orders' (2011, p13), because ironically, the film gives Holliday the platform

and fame that he had been longing for. In *Town of Strangers*, a moment where such a resistance to the social order opens up, is in Rowan's audition. Rowan is something of an outcast in Gort, and many people judge her as a 'bad mother' who abandoned her children, and either pity, judge, or ignore her. In the audition, we travel to the place of the other through performance (Hachero, 2016, p167), when Rowan takes control of her image by 'looking back'. When Rowan's audition is drawing to a close, Rowan embarks on a 'line of flight' that is made possible by the situation of filming, in the moment when she says 'It's for the record anyway, it's there – that's my story'; she looks around the room, moved by her own story perhaps, and then looks straight into the camera.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) theorised a line of flight as a 'movement of deterritorialization and destratification', which challenges the status quo and shifts the power dynamic in a situation. Hongisto (2011, p11 citing Smith, 1998, xi–liii) draws on Daniel Smith's reading of Deleuzian fabulation as 'resistance ... that creates a line of flight on which a minority discourse and a people can be constituted'. This line of flight is a rupture in the film that challenges the audience's voyeurism and the pleasure of looking. They cannot look at Rowan in the same way that they looked at her a second ago; Rowan has shifted the structure of the gaze.

Hachero (2016, p166) observes that as camera subjects we make choices about our self-portrayal. He quotes Jean-Louis Comolli (2002, p135): "'With an unconscious but certain knowledge, the subject knows that being filmed means exposing oneself to the other'". In this moment, I believe Rowan is conscious of the risk she has taken in exposing herself, and that her look both acknowledges that exposition and challenges it. Comolli (2002, p136, cited

by Hachero, 2016, p166) posits that people have a 'charge' when they return our gaze on camera and that we, as an audience, are altered by them. Rowan's look is charged, and she has chosen, at that moment to take control of how she is portrayed. Rowan seemingly meets the viewer's gaze and creates a moment of discomfort and connection simultaneously. Eric Hynes writes of a moment in Joshua Oppenheimer's *Look of Silence* (2014), when the lead character Adi looks into the camera, as a moment when 'he sees us' and 'he sees himself being seen' (Hynes, 2015). Rowan sees us, and sees herself being seen, in this moment in *Town of Strangers*. Rowan came to the auditions in order to be witnessed, and to see herself. I included this moment – a moment of self-consciousness of the gaze of the audience - in the cut deliberately, as a strategy towards making her otherness less other.



Rowan at the audition, Still from *Town of Strangers*

Rowan disrupts the visual pleasure for the audience, who have been suspending their disbelief⁸, that is, suspending their knowledge of 'real' time unfolding to enjoy 'losing' themselves in an alternative cinematic time and space. The suspension of disbelief relies upon surrendering one's critical

faculties, and believing momentarily, something usually unbelievable for the sake of enjoyment. In a fiction film (or a performative documentary that borrows a fictional cinematic grammar), the audience knows that this is an actor, that monster is a special effect, and so on, and at the same time they choose to immerse themselves in the fictional world within the film. Norman Taylor (2012, p66) posits that immersion or suspension of disbelief and actual disbelief can co-exist. This dual immersion and disbelief is also crucial to engaging with the reflexive and performative making-of documentary film that is making itself real as it undoes reality.



Chloe in her bedroom, Still from *Town of Strangers*

In the scene where I am heard speaking with Chloe as she looks in the mirror, Chloe performs herself as shy and subdued, but when her little sister tries to come in, a fiery side of her character, something she did not show on the camera, but that I had often witnessed off-screen, was revealed, created due to the situation of filming. In this line of flight with Chloe, the audience's passive observation, of Chloe's gaze on herself via the mirror, is disrupted by the reminding realisation of the film as a performative gesture. These

moments are unplanned; they are failures or Rouchian accidents that I am open to in the moment, and actively looking for when editing. It has become a conscious part of my ethnofiction method, learned from experience, to stay open and welcoming to such accidents, and actively seek to use them in the editing process, in order to construct meaning. Similarly, looks to camera become part of the *mise-en-scène* of the performative making-of film, as a production of its own reality.

These moments in the film - such as the looks to camera, Chloe's sudden outburst of anger towards her sister between takes, Hamid's observation of himself as he directs his own dream scene - cross a threshold, deterritorialising the hermetic world of the documentary for a moment of resistant rupture into the otherwise sealed world of the film. Once these happen, nothing is the same. They change the energy of what comes next. These moments are those where the making-of film as a performative production of reality are most active. Immersion and disbelief are simultaneously possible, as an audience shares in the reality of the filmmaking situation itself, as their encounter with the real. The performative making-of as method reveals that it is the process of telling the dreams and memories that creates meaning, not the presentation of the content of the dream itself. It is in this process of telling – or fabulating – that the subject is produced.

My methods seek a balance between this suspension of disbelief and the self-awareness of the making-of film simultaneously. Lucid dreaming is a way to think of this dynamic cinematic reflexivity in the film, and as a method of the making-of performative film. Related to my method of working with the protagonists, I unravel as much as I build when I am editing.



Hamid running in the Burren, Still from *Town of Strangers*

NOTES

¹ See Appendix 1 Film Links for the link to the full eight-minute film *The Blow-in*.

² See Appendix 2 Extra Material for link to a longer cut of the improvisations made with Chloe and Josie called *Gort Dreams – the Miracle – Chloe and Josie*

³ Elham and Adel told me how they felt, interpreted by the translator, Hanan Dirya, when we went to visit them the next day.

⁴ Dido had been a singer and filmmaker in her twenties. She told me she had made a cult experimental film, but had destroyed it as a symbol of the ego in her attempts to not have attachments to identity. I was very happy that through her relationship with me, she was again thinking of creating art.

⁵ I was not the sole editor of the film. I worked with two editors, Julian Triandafyllou and Mirjam Strugalla. Julian's process of editing was more in line with my lucid dreaming. Mirjam took a more narrative approach and the resulting film has come into being through our collaboration, through the dynamic of our methods of relating to the material.

⁶ Debs is short for debutante ball, like the American 'prom', a gendered coming of age ritual dinner and dance for teenagers as they leave secondary (high) school.

⁷ See Appendix 2 *Chloe & Helen Discuss the Debs Ball (rough edit)* to see a rough edit of that shoot including the improvised conversation I shot with Chloe and her friend Helen

⁸ The 'willing suspension of disbelief' or 'poetic faith' was coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Biographia literaria or biographical sketches of my literary life and opinions*, Fenner 1817

Conclusions

FILMMAKING AS ENCOUNTER

The building of fiction, and the unravelling of it, is a performative making-of method of working with people's imaginations that I discovered through the ritual processes of making and unmaking the film *Town of Strangers* over a three-year period. When I invited some of the people I selected from the auditions to create scenes with me based on the stories, 'dreams, lies, memories and gossip' that they told me in that situation, I did not know what might happen, but I knew that I wanted them to be collaborative agents in their own representations and inventions. I searched for methods that were suitable to this task, that were open and liberatory. These are not re-enactments, but rather performative enactments in a fantastical space, that is also a safe space to improvise and imagine one's dreams and memories, such as I created with Elham, Hamid and Ralf.

I wanted to explore ways of documenting the stories that people tell about themselves, the fantasies and the memories that they held in their subconscious mind. What I discovered was not a method to make the subconscious conscious, but that these dreams and memories were not pre-existing realities waiting for me to find ways to film them. They are performative, in that they invent themselves through the act of fabulation, and through the act of filming itself. Through telling, improvising and enacting these stories, we perform them into being. By inviting the participants to enact their dreams or memories, we are documenting the process of imagining, rather than the content of the story itself.

Through the metaphor of lucid dreaming as method, the processes of surrender and control are engaged with, in the dynamic between making-with and making-of. When one is lucid dreaming, one is experiencing the dream in the first person and in the third person simultaneously. This dynamic between controlled directing and surrendering to whatever arises, when working with people and allowing the space for that process with them, is a method I have been developing in this film. Lucid dreaming is thus a metaphor or poetic description I use to define a way of working with the rushes material, and editing as a self-reflexive and improvisatory process.

Reflecting on these methods, I am struck by my own filmmaking as a performative act of storytelling and fabulation. Although I may have put the emphasis on the subjects in the film, and the various methods in which we shared the process, and related to one another, it is the author who is the most fabulous of the fabulators. As the film unravels, T is seen and heard as the person who holds the auditions, and also she is seen in situations such as eating and sleeping in her van, doing yoga in a carpark, appearing on local radio and doing her laundry. The invention of The Stranger in Chapter One: *A Stranger Came to Town*, and the invention of T in the film *Town of Strangers*, is simultaneously a fabulated self and a documentary self – it is a self-conscious construction of a character that arises through the act of telling a story based on real events, rather than observing a preconceived reality. In the practice of writing the character of The Stranger, the effect is performative, in that I invented her as I was writing, and through the performative action of that writing, I performed her into the film in an embodied manner.

The Stranger in the written practice, and T in the film, could be read as Deleuze's 'forger', whom he describes as 'an unlimited figure which permeates the whole film' with an 'indiscernibility of the real and the imaginary' (1985/1997, p132), when writing of Orson Welles' performance of self in *F is for Fake* (France, 1973). T in *Town of Strangers* occupies this liminal space between narrator/guide and as figure, or character, to be observed as another amongst the others.

Deleuze writes of how the subject becomes another when she tells stories without ever being fictional (1985/1997, p150). The filmmaker too becomes another when the others in the film replace her stories with their own and vice versa; together we contribute to an 'invention of a people' (1985/1997, p150) that includes me as both author and as subject. The filmmaker's encounter with the other includes herself. I practice an emplaced position within the film and within the editing process. This is a form of first person filmmaking that shares its ethnography as a process of co-dreaming. This process of placing myself within the film in the third person transforms it into a singular plural, a 'speaking with' others to make a 'cinema of we' (Lebow, 2012, p2, drawing on Nancy, 2000). Together, we create a sensorial embodiment of our lived experiences, through acts of imagination.

Defining my method as lucid dreaming is a way of acknowledging how I partially relinquish control in my collaborations with participants. How people responded to my invitation, to fabulate together with me, revealed my own desire to invent and fabulate with them, and to invent scenes arising from their stories. By telling and enacting stories, dreams and memories, they invent their own personas and identities *because* the camera is there to be encountered. Thus, through my fabulation of their storytelling, a cinema

truth is created. Making, or approaching, fiction in order to unravel it as documentary could be called an inverse fabulation, where the action we are witnessing is the story-telling of the protagonists *in relation* to the fiction they are inventing, thus creating a documentary of the process of imagining. What the film offers, is the acknowledgment of the performative crossings on their behalf, ones that I also make through my fabulation in the editing of these stories.

It is this active fabulating that is a major part of my method, one that does not deny, but embraces the collaborative agency and power of the shared process and experience with the subjects (and crew). Often, I planned one thing, and something else happened that I followed instead, and in the edit especially, I have compared my process to lucid dreaming as an encounter with the material. My own fabulating, as an author, inventing and improvising in the moment, deviating easily from plans, and generating scenes from the subconscious of the material in the edit, is thus a method of lucid dreaming that produces reality via the performative making-of documentary.

This research project of a film, and a written thesis, aims to situate the primary making-of film within wider film theory, as well as contributing to documentary studies by re-defining a set of film practices as the genre of making-of film. The hypothesis here is that the making-of as method is one that is generative, creating meaning that arises from its reflexivity. The research contributes to ethnographic and philosophical theory of the other, through practices of relating, writing and filmmaking, using methods of auto-ethnography and shared ethnography.

This project developed as an exploration of identity, encounter and stranger-ness that has produced itself through social relations rather than a description or observation of pre-existing reality. Encounter is at the heart of this project: the encounter between the filmmaker and the subjects in the film; the encounter between the filmmaker and the material when editing; the encounter between the audience and the finished film; the encounter between what was originally planned and what has been produced instead.

Sara Ahmed's notion of identity, as constructed through encounter with the other (2000, p7) in a social relation, informs the methodological approach around encounters between the people in Gort and me, and amongst people in Gort between one another, as a collectivity. For Ahmed, the collectivity is not about what we have in common or what we do not have in common. 'Collectivities are formed through the very work that we need to do in order to get closer to others ... which accepts the distance and puts it to work' (2000, p180). This can be a useful way to think about the relationships between me as filmmaker, researcher and human being working with the particular and us - singular persons and multiplicities of Gort – not as a generalised migrant culture, not as a generalised Irish town, but as a collectivity comprised of singularities engaged in working together to make a film.

The people I responded to most at the auditions were people who are living in the margins between cultures. By playing out and enacting the dreams and memories they told me in the auditions, performing something internal as a public story, the film created a situation where people could potentially work through feelings of loss, longing and belonging, related to their experiences of living in between cultures. Through play, imagination and

fabulating, we improvised scenes together that, through the performative ritual, had the potential to bring about change through the enactment itself.

These inventions are the poetic leaps, dream scenes, memory scenes, improvised fictions, psychodramas and fabulations that we made together as well as those I made while editing. Some were arrived at through careful planning and research, and others were arrived at through ethnofictional methods of improvisation, intuition, accident and failure. The methods were determined, to a large extent, by the relationship I had with each protagonist.

My methods are experiments in how to come closer to subject-participants while also claiming my responsibility for their representation via my authorship. These are methods of speaking with (Nancy, 2000) and speaking nearby (Chen & Minh-ha, 1992). The strategies I have used to come closer to the subjects within the world of the film, are to invite and to make space (and time) for collaboration - and resistance - from the subject-participants, and to include myself as one other amongst others, in the written practice and in the film itself, by the representation and performance of myself. The film, and the research, propose that the making-of genre itself is a fabulation of sorts, a story of its own making, that generates itself into a production of reality, because of the film being made.

Through my methods of working with subjects to perform themselves, I am trying to develop a language of cinema that is not based on binary notions of fiction and documentary, or of true and false, but to produce a cinema as the production of reality through performance itself.

-FIN-

Potential for Further Research

A note on where the research might be further expanded

I made a decision to adhere to a methodological explication in relation to the filmmaking in this practice-based thesis. The research limits its scope to the making-of as the production of reality and the methods of fabulation, collaboration and singular plural filmmaking, and there is plenty to explore in those areas. There is scope for this research, if continued, by myself, or by others, to inform the current hybrid turn in cinema, and to go further in its contribution towards an update of ethnofiction and cinéma-vérité in the digital age. Erica Balsom's recent article (2017), critiquing the blurring of fact and fiction in an age of 'post-truth', would also be a politically rich area in which to examine documentary's relationship to reality and facticity in the frame of a new wave of cinéma-vérité. There is also scope to explore the film and research within a postcolonial framework, or to position it towards a representation of hybridised identities and/or the migrant image (Naficy, Cusco, Marks, TJ Demos and others). I presented part of my research at the Birkbeck conference Crossing Borders¹ under the latter rubric. It might be explored as essay film or as a counter to the empathetic trend in documentary, a context in which I presented the research at another conference, Beyond Empathy². It also offers potential to be explored as a counter to the hegemony of the one-hero/dramatic closure trend in documentary. Each of these avenues would be rich seams for further exploration and investigation, building on the research I have done here.

NOTES

¹ O'Brien, Treasa [2017]. 'Filming Fast and Slow: Agency and Representation when Filming with Migrants and Refugees' (presentation). In *Crossing Borders: Negotiation, Provocation, and Transgression*. Birkbeck Institute Graduate Conference, 5-6 May 2017

² Treasa O'Brien [2017]. 'Making-of as Primary Form – a Generative Reflexive Rhizomic Film Genre' (presentation). *Poetics and Politics of Documentary: Beyond Empathy* (conference). Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts, University of Sussex, Brighton, 2-4 June 2017

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8½. Federico Fellini [1963] Italy. 138'

A Complete History of my Sexual Failures. Chris Waitt [2008] UK. 90'

Agarrando Pueblo. Luis Ospina and Carlos Mayolo [1978] Colombia. 28'

A Little Gort Story. Treasa O'Brien [2017] Ireland/UK. 13'

Bombay Beach. Alma Har'el [2011] USA. 80'

Brasileiros em Gort [2011]. *Small Worlds* [television programme]. RTE1, 2 Dec. Available from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZuOS3Ei5l8> [Accessed 10 Feb 2016]

Burden of Dreams. Les Blank [1982] USA. 95'

Casting JonBenet. Kitty Green [2017] USA. 80'

Chronique d'un été /Chronicle of a Summer. Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch [1961] France. 90'

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Coco Rico Monsieur Poulet. Jean Rouch [1974] France. 93'

F is for Fake. Orson Welles [1975] France. 88'

Fitzcarraldo. Werner Herzog [1982] West Germany. 157'

Jaguar. Jean Rouch [1968] France. 110'

Haunted Houses. Apichatpong Weerasethakul [2001] Thailand. 60'

Hooters! Anna Margarita Labelo [2010] USA. 90'

La Pyramide Humaine. Jean Rouch [1961] France. 90'

Le Petit Soldat. Jean-Luc Godard [1963] France. 88'

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Lost in La Mancha. Keith Fulton & Louis Pepe, 2002] UK. 133'

LoveTrue. Alma Har'el [2016] USA/UK. 82'

Portrait of Jason. Shirley Clarke [1967] USA. 105'

Moi, Un Noir. Jean Rouch [1958], 70'

My Winnipeg. Guy Maddin [2008] UK. 80'

Olmo and the Seagull. Petra Costa & Lea Glob [2015] Brazil. 82'

Our Beloved Month of August. Miguel Gomes [2008] Portugal. 147'

Salaam Cinema. Mohsen Makhmalbaf [1995] Iran. 75'

Screen Tests. Andy Warhol [1964-66] USA. Various durations of approximately 500 tests

Spirit of Shuhada Street. Treasa O'Brien [2010] Palestine/UK. 70'

Symbiopsychotaxiplasm: Take One. William Greaves [1968] USA. 75'

Tarnation. Jonathan Caouette [2003] USA. 88'

The Act of Killing. Joshua Oppenheimer, Christine Cynn & Anonymous [2012]
Norway/Denmark/UK. 159' [director's cut]

The Blow-in. Treasa O'Brien [2016] Ireland/Germany/Spain. 8'

The Casting. Omer Fast [2007] Israel/USA. 14'

The Look of Silence. Joshua Oppenheimer [2014] Denmark/ Finland/ France/ Germany/
Indonesia /Israel /Netherlands/Norway/ Taiwan /United Kingdom/ United States.103'

The Machine Which Makes Everything Disappear. Tinatin Gurchiani [2012] Georgia. 97'

The Owls. Cheryl Dunye, 2010. USA. 66'

The Watermelon Woman. Cheryl Dunye [1996] USA. 90'

Through the Olive Trees. Abbas Kiarostami [1994] Iran. 103'

Unmade Beds. Nicholas Barker [1997] USA. 95'

Visibility Moderate. Vivienne Dick [1982] Ireland. 38'

Waiting. Rashif Masharawi [2005] Palestine/France. 90'

Waltz with Bashir. Ari Folman [2008] Israel/Germany/France. 90'

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: FILM LINKS

Spirit of Shuhada Street. Treasa O'Brien [2011] Ireland/Palestine/UK. 70'
10min excerpt of the improvised street opening scene referred to in the introduction of this thesis here:

Link: <https://vimeo.com/28949131>

Turnip Story. Treasa O'Brien [2010] Ireland. 10'

Link: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/28273037>

The Blow-in. Treasa O'Brien [2016] Ireland/Spain/Germany. 8'

Link: <https://treasaobrien.wordpress.com/films/the-blow-in/>

A Little Gort Story. Treasa O'Brien [2017] Ireland. 14'

Link: <https://vimeo.com/185022142>

Password: exquisitecorpse

APPENDIX 2: EXTRA MATERIAL

Other material cut from the film, mentioned in the thesis:

Chloe & Helen Discuss the Debs Ball, 22'

Link: <https://vimeo.com/205253411>

Password: chloe

Gort dreams - The Miracle - Chloe and Josie, 10'

Rough edit of material of Chloe and Josie improvising scenes from my script.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/177490454>

Password: miracle

That's a wrap.....



Production shot, *Town of Strangers*

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