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13) The Ethnofiction in Theory and Practice: Part II

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This is the second and concluding article in a sequel about the ethnofiction, an experimental ethnographic film genre created by the anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch during the 1950s'. In films such as *Jaguar* (1957-67), *Moi, un Noir* (1958), *La Pyramide Humaine* (1959), and to a certain degree *Chronique d'un été* (1960), Rouch asked the informants of his fieldwork to act out their cultural experiences in improvisations in front of the camera. Rouch compared his approach to psychodrama and hoped that his work would show aspects of the ethnographic research that would be hard to represent with conventional academic approaches.

During 2005 and 2006 I spent a total of fifteen months among different groups of Brazilian travestis and transsexuals¹ living in São Paulo to explore the ethnofiction, and to examine if a complex cultural understanding of Brazilian transgendered culture could be created and mediated, by combining ethnographic research methods with the processes of dramatic work. The fieldwork resulted in the production of one ethnographic documentary and one ethnofiction about transgendered Brazilians and their relation to various aspects of identity and discrimination.

The fieldwork and the films form a part of a practice-based PhD in Drama at the University of Manchester, UK. The work is interdisciplinary, and I have been drawing on knowledge

¹ "Transsexuals are men or women that are born with a biological sex they can not accept. My research on transsexual culture was only directed at male to female transsexuals. Brazilian travestis are also born as men and identify as women, but in contrast to transsexuals, they have good acceptance of their biological sex." Sjöberg (2006) Though I will use the term 'transgender' to describe transsexuals as well as travestis in this text, Brazilian transsexuals and travestis have generally not accepted 'transgender' as an umbrella term, instead they use the term to embrace all transgendered that can not be described as transsexuals or travestis.

from the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology, as well as the centres for Applied Theatre Research and Screen Studies at the University of Manchester to examine if the ethnofiction offers a means of integrating a hybrid study within drama and ethnography.

Part one of this series of articles focused on the production of an ethnographic documentary, presented as an introduction to my research. I filmed the life of Fabia Mirassos, Savannah 'Bibi' Meireles and Phedra D. Córdoba, three transsexual Brazilian actresses, working and studying at an underground theatre in central São Paulo. The documentary juxtaposed their everyday life with their work on stage, comparing their perception of themselves with their performances.

The documentary helped me to establish myself in the field as an ethnographic researcher and filmmaker. It became the vehicle that served to introduce me to the research and help me understand transgendered culture better. At the end of the project, the documentary would work as a point of reference in relation to the ethnofiction; by comparing the two genres I hoped to explore what the ethnofiction would reveal, that the documentary could not.

This article will focus entirely on the process of making the ethnofiction. I began my last article by identifying the four main principles that I believe constitute the ethnofiction: shared anthropology, improvised acting, improvisational cinema and methods of ethnographic filmmaking. These four principles are based on my own interpretation of Rouch's approach to the ethnofiction, as well as similar film styles adopted by directors such as Robert Flaherty and the Italian Neorealists, together with the modern filmmakers that they have inspired. These principles guided me through the fieldwork process and the production of the ethnofiction, as they hopefully will guide you through this text.

Shared Anthropology

Rouch worked together with the same group of people in the majority of his films made in West Africa from the 40s' onwards. Some of his informants had become his best friends. Partly out of pleasure, and partly as research, they would create the cine-fiction together, and these films became, what a French film critic later called, 'ethnofictions'. (Stoller 1992; 143) This collaboration made Rouch introduce shared anthropology, twenty years before other social anthropologists would discover the concept (notably that fieldwork relationships are based on inter-subjectivity and dialogue). At the time, social anthropologists were still conducting fieldwork in a positivist tradition, maintaining the view of the field as a laboratory and representing themselves as detached objective observers in their texts. Instead, Jean Rouch emerged himself fully and openly in the fieldwork, not basing his fieldwork on traditional forms of researcher-informant relationship, but letting much of his research grow out of friendship.

Early on in my PhD, I understood that I would never be able to fully explore the ethnofiction without finding a similar group of people to work with as Rouch did. The participants of the ethnofiction would need to be representative of travesti and transsexual culture and ready to enter into a friendship based on mutual trust. I would have to ask them to improvise scenes based on experiences that they would rather forget, and to

actively participate in the filmmaking by providing honest feedback and critique, without being paid.

Rodolfo, director of the theatre 'Os Satyros' in central São Paulo, introduced me to Savannah 'Bibi' Meireles and Fabia Mirassos. Bibi lived and worked as a prostitute in the same area as the theatre and had expressed an early interest in their work, and so Rodolfo had known Bibi for a long period of time and had followed her realisation as a transsexual and her development as an actress.

When I first met Bibi she was still working as a prostitute but had become increasingly involved in the theatre, working in the ticket booth and on stage as an actress. Bibi described her own transsexual development almost in evolutionist terms: going from gay to travesti, and then from travesti to transsexual. Bibi had not only transported herself between different genders, she was constantly on the move, in her imaginary world as well as in her physical environment. During my time at 'Os Satyros' I saw Bibi grow into a skilled actress and reveal a rich imaginary world that she made use of on stage as well as in the real world where it seemed to protect and comfort her. Bibi also moved between different communities and institutions, her social life bridged art, politics and prostitution, and, tapping in to her life, I was introduced to several people and institutions that would become crucial to my research.

Though Bibi was never ashamed of working as a prostitute (or as a 'relaxadora sexual' as she preferred to call her profession) it became increasingly clear, during the beginning of my stay in São Paulo, that she was trying to leave prostitution and was putting more effort into her acting career. When I left one year later Bibi had become discontent with not getting enough money to survive from the theatre. Instead she managed to move to a cheaper apartment where she started to work more with prostitution.

While Bibi was in her late thirties, Fabia represented a younger generation travestis and transsexuals. I met Fabia when she studied acting at 'Os Satyros'. She regarded her participation as a hobby, since she was working full time as a hairdresser in her home in Cotia, a suburb of São Paulo. Fabia had learned to be very conscious of her human rights and by the time I met her she was ready to take a stand against anybody asking her to 'please leave the ladies room'. Defying any gender definition, she told me that she was born as a boy but identified as a girl since the age of ten, but that she had no desire to have a vagina. She could not care less if she was called travesti or a transsexual, and while I settled for transsexual many of her friends called her travesti. She simply called herself Fabia Mirassos - woman. Fabia barely had any contact with travesti or transsexual communities outside 'Os Satyros'. She lived together with her husband in the house where she also had her hairdressing saloon. Fabia presented herself as a free and strong woman but through our work together I came to understand that she had gained her integrity through a very conscious struggle for self-realisation.

Fabia and Bibi had been the main protagonists in my ethnographic documentary, together with Phedra D. Córdoba, a 68-year-old transsexual actress that had emigrated from Cuba many years ago. Since I had put so much effort into filming Bibi and Fabia during the first part of my research, I was concerned whether they would stay with me throughout the remainder of the project, to participate in the ethnofiction. As I had only conducted a

couple of interviews with Phedra for the documentary, I was not as eager to have Phedra participating in the ethnofiction. Phedra is a very kind person with amazing life and personality, but other people were already making documentary films about her. Of the three protagonists Phedra was the only full-time professional actress and I realised that it would be harder to negotiate the filmmaking with her, which is why I finally decided to not ask her to continue.

I had started to film the documentary at the beginning of October 2005 and when I shot my last rushes for the documentary during the carnival at the end of February 2006, I realised that I had to ask Bibi and Fabia if they were prepared to enter the production of the ethnofiction with me. This meant that I would have to ask them to give up more of their precious time for me even if I could not pay them any salary. My only offer was to give them a chance to express their own view on transgendered identity and discrimination in São Paulo and maybe a chance of visibility; if the films would gain attention in the future, Fabia and Bibi would as well. Beside that, I could only offer them the fun and pleasure of acting - a meagre compensation in a poor city like São Paulo.

Worried about the future of my project, I finally brought up the issue in March 2006 while filming the last shots for the documentary. I asked Bibi as she gave a massage to her friend Marta, and I asked Fabia whilst I filmed her talking about her close relationship to her puppy dog.

Voices had warned me that no transsexual or travesti would ever accept work without payment, and their continued participation was crucial for my research. This notation turned out to show more about the prejudice surrounding travestis and transsexuals, rather than the culture itself. Fabia and Bibi both accepted unconditionally. Bibi would enter the ethnofiction as Zilda, a very non-Brazilian name fitting her rich imaginary world, while Fabia would name her character after her puppy, Meg.

I also wanted to contact other groups of travestis and transsexuals, with other backgrounds and without any acting experience. By the beginning of 2006 I didn't know any other transsexuals other than Phedra, Fabia, Bibi and her friends. Though my work in relation to 'Os Satyros' had showed me popular images of transsexuals and travestis and how they responded to these images as stage artists, none of the transsexual actresses at the theatre could be said to be representative of transgendered life in São Paulo. Most travestis and transsexuals work in the streets of São Paulo as prostitutes, enduring poverty, discrimination and the consequences of venereal disease as well as plastic surgery. During my work with the ethnographic documentary I had realised that the image of travestis and transsexuals either was focusing on the more glamorous sides of transgendered life, or the dark and dangerous sides. Transgendered Brazilians were either compared to the beautiful and highly successful transsexual photo model Roberta Close, or to the tragicomically framed image of the dangerous and criminal silicon freaks, working as prostitutes and suffering from HIV. As a result of recent political attention surrounding human rights in relation to gender identity, transgendered prostitutes were sometimes presented as people to pity instead of to fear, but for the very same reasons.

I hoped that the ethnofiction would show a more complex understanding of transsexual and travesti life in São Paulo, and in order to move beyond popular images I needed to

learn to know and to represent various aspects of travesti and transsexual culture. In January 2006, I made my first contact with Fernanda Moraes Santos, a rising transsexual political activist. Fernanda was born as a hermaphrodite, and had a daughter before she realised that she was a woman and not a man. Fernanda left her family in Manaus and moved to São Paulo where she worked as a prostitute for some years. Fernanda was a Christian evangelic which set her apart from any other travesti or transsexual that I had met during my research. Most of the travestis and transsexuals I knew were either atheist or believed in Macumba, Candomblé, Xangô, and Umbanda, blends of Christian beliefs with rites imported from Africa. Her Christian faith alienated her from some of the people she was working with, since the Christian evangelic churches generally are hostile of travestis and transsexuals. The Church accepted Fernanda since she was a hermaphrodite. As she was born with two sexes her Christian church acknowledged her right to choose her gender. After I filmed a meeting that she had organised to promote visibility for transsexuals and travestis in São Paulo, she asked me if we could work together. We embarked on a cooperation that lasted until I left, at the beginning of October 2006. While I filmed some interviews for Fernanda and gave her the opportunity to use my office, she introduced me to the political movement, and travestis and transsexuals working as prostitutes. As a consequence of our meeting I also discovered that I lived next door to one of the major public health clinics for transgendered sex professionals, which added a group of transgendered health informers to my research. From that moment I would try to share my research and filmmaking between these different groups trying to convey a complex image of travesti and transsexual life in São Paulo, Brazil.

At the beginning of April 2006, nine months after I first arrived to São Paulo, I felt that I had enough knowledge and contacts, and spoke Portuguese well enough to start the production of the ethnofiction. Informed by their own lives, as well as other travestis and transsexuals, Fabia and Bibi started to improvise scenes on identification and discrimination in São Paulo Brazil.

At this point in time I had learned to know shared anthropology as the careful balance between a professional fieldwork relationship and friendship, where trust is essential. Shared anthropology means that the ethnographer has to risk losing control and be ready to go wherever his collaborators might take him. This is why the notion of shared anthropology is closely linked to the approach of improvisational cinema. The ethnographic researcher/filmmaker has to lose control, and to share it with the participants of the project. By succeeding in partly letting go of his power, the filmmaker prevents the alienation of the participants and encourages them to come up with their own ideas. The engaged participation of the informants is secured, and the cooperation becomes the breeding ground for unexpected research initiatives and feedback.

Improvised Acting

When starting to improvise the ethnofiction I had hoped to see Fabia and Bibi open up in front of the camera in the same way Marceline did in *Chronique d'un été* when she talked about the return to Paris after her deportation to a concentration camp after WWII. Or like Oumarou Ganda did telling the bitter story of how he fought for the French in Indochina in *Moi, un Noir*. I had also hoped to see Fabia and Bibi re-enact travesti and transsexual

culture in the same effortless way as Damouré Zika, Illo Goudel'ze and Lam Ibrahim re-enacted seasonal migration in *Jaguar*.

Instead Bibi applied her theatre acting in the ethnofiction. She put on a wig and hid her personality behind the role, and drowned all dramatic moments in a cascade of words. Inspired by her favourite Brazilian 'novelas' (soaps), Fabia would improvise scenes in a melodramatic style with deep sighs and stylistic poses. Where were the projective improvisations, the psychodrama and the role-playing I had read so much about?

The only thing I could recognize from the interviews with Rouch about the acting in his films, was that the people he filmed seemed to be overly self-conscious at first, trying to make a good impression in front of the camera and that as a result their expressions seemed 'hammy' in the beginning of the filmmaking, as Rouch describes it in 'Conversation with James Blue' (Blue 1967; 85).

After a trip to a forum theatre festival, presented in Rio de Janeiro by 'Theatre of the Oppressed', I was reminded of the fact that other directors working with improvising amateurs have to face the same problem. We accept Augusto Boal's Forum Theatre since the contract with the audience is different from any other theatre style. As an audience, we forgive the hammy acting, as we know that these are real people displaying authentic and painful life experiences. We do not necessarily expect to be moved and entertained, the protagonists enter stage to discuss a problem after being exposed to oppression, and we are there to interact.

Even though I could never expect a future audience to interact with the protagonists of the ethnofiction, I could help establish a similar contract with the spectators. This led me to start filming Fabia and Bibi discussing their scenes with their co-actors before the scene. Bibi would for example discuss the details of prostitution with the actor plying her client before starting the improvisation. Fabia would tell the young actors playing her tormenters, about how painful it was when a group of kids threw paper balls at her because of her gender identity. By placing the scenes in this reflexive context I hoped to integrate the shared anthropology into the actual filmmaking, similar to how Rouch integrated reflexive moments in many of his ethnofictions by recording the participants as they improvised a narrative over the rushes, or by filming invited protagonists as they watched the scenes where they had participated and expressed critique.

These interviews also seemed to release something within Fabia and Bibi since their acting improved. As Rouch had done previous to me, I noticed that as we went along the actors started to think sincerely about their situation and begun to express what they had within themselves. (Blue 1967; 84) The interviews came to play a crucial part in creating a relaxed atmosphere around the set.

As Fabia turned into 'Meg' and Bibi became 'Zilda', I suggested that they should not try to create any complicated roles, but rather take on symbolic roles to reach a state of being someone else, like the FBI agent Edward G. Robinson in *Moi, un Noir*. I had hoped that these characters would give Bibi and Fabia the safety and comfort to express themselves more freely behind the masks. Their privacy would be guaranteed whenever they wanted.

They would act in a fiction where no audience would be able to tell if their improvised stories were their own or not.

After the first month of work, Fabia and Bibi started to realise what I had tried to tell them for several months; that I was not interested in creating a classical narrative film, but an ethnofiction. The coherence of the characters and their stories was not crucial to the project, since the ethnographic research was the first priority. I wanted Bibi and Fabia to show themselves through their acting.

Bibi and Fabia reacted in very different ways to this realisation, while Bibi insisted on creating a real character with costume, wig and make-up, Fabia reacted in the opposite way making no effort at all to enter her role since she suddenly regarded the entire project as a fake. For a moment I lost their trust, and for a while I was alone desperately sharing the anthropology with nobody else but myself.

I gave up of my expectations of what I thought an ethnofiction should be and let Bibi and Fabia chose their own way. Bibi developed Zilda's role-playing and Fabia became more like herself behind the mask of Meg.

Being more vulnerable in relation to her past Bibi successfully learned to re-enact the structure of events very professionally, avoiding any painful associations to real life. Fabia embraced the psychodrama, sincerely complaining about all the pain I was putting her through but also being grateful for receiving another chance to talk about her experiences.

Bibi's and Fabia's different approaches to improvised acting would create a synthesis of what I had learned from *Jaguar* and *Moi un Noir*. While the acting in *Jaguar* was used to re-enact seasonal migration, it was applied to reach within the mind of Oumarou Ganda in *Moi, un Noir*. But in both cases the ethnographic endeavour came first and the acting last. The acting was there to express aspects of the culture that would have been hard to show in any other way.

Translating the acting in Jean Rouch's ethnofictions to western concepts, the actor borrows Stanislavskij's 'emotional memories' and then leaves him far behind by accomplishing a Brechtian 'aesthetic distance'. But since the acting never primarily was there to entertain or to move an audience, the actor abandons the theatre as an artistic project, and enters the realms of applied theatre where he connects with Boal's forum theatre and Moreno's psychodrama and other more modern forms of participatory theatre. But the ethnofiction was not created to help the participants. Instead, the purpose was always to find new means of researching and representing culture. The actor is a storyteller in the service of ethnographic research. For me, this is the context of what Rouch and Morin have compared to the use of socio- and psychodrama (Blue 1967;85, Morin 1985;5), and Loizos (1993; 50) described as projective improvisation and Fulchignoni found similar to *commedia dell'arte*. (Rouch 2003; 164)

The informant-actor of the ethnofiction uses his own lust for playing games to effortlessly move between fact and fiction. In the film Fabia plays Meg 'as if' she would like Zilda to inject silicon and 'as if' she really desires to have bigger breasts. The ethnofiction lends it's authenticity from the documentary format, but the audience are informed that it is only a

game not very different from two kids playing doctor and patient. A game directed to reveal cultural aspects hard to find in any purely factual representation.

Improvisational Cinema

Inspired by the surrealist movements of the 20's Rouch called his approach to filmmaking: 'Pour quoi pas?' like the arctic explorer with the same name, a ship where Rouch's father worked as a naval meteorologist while he grew up, the film could go anywhere - 'Why Not?' (Stoller 1992; 24) The only structure a film needed was a beginning, middle and an end. When filming, Rouch entered a cine-trance where he did not separate between himself, the camera and his environment any longer, a state of mind reminding very much of the West African possession rituals he was studying.

After a month of filming the ethnofiction, the only state of mind I had been able to enter with success was the 'cine-frustration'. According to Rouch he mostly did not plan or set anything up before filming the ethnofiction, he just met up with his protagonists and started to improvise. In the beginning I tried to do the same. As a practitioner I started to doubt Rouch's claims of not planning any of his filmmaking. Four men travelling in a Land rover and filming improvised scenes as when making *Jaguar*, at least need food, accommodation and sufficient film stock, and some kind of agreement to manage to work together during an extended period of time. An important amount of my time in Brazil was spent on coordinating the participants and then waiting for them since they did not answer their phones or didn't show up as agreed, or on nervous negotiations when asking people to offer me their time without any compensation.

Beside the actual production, the approach of improvised cinema exposed us to a discomfort of a more aesthetic nature; the approach made me, and the participants, feel insecure. This is how a conversation could go:

Bibi: *"-So what should we do today?"*

Johannes: *"I don't know. We shouldn't plan anything, just improvise as we go along, do you have any ideas?"*

Bibi: *"-Yes, we could go to the cafeteria 'A Barca' and I could play a waitress there."*

Johannes: *"-Well... the light is not sufficient, the place is too crowded and it wouldn't have much to do with the theme of the ethnofiction. Do you have any other suggestions?"*

Bibi: *"-Hmm. No."*

Johannes: *"-Ok..."*

But... if the director succeeds to let go of his urge to be in control of the situation, he will enable the participants to let their own imagination roam freely and to interact with their environment in the moment. Maybe the insecurity is the most challenging aspect of improvisational cinema. Well conducted improvisational cinema lets the participants'

imagination free and gives access to what Rouch called the 'inner' or the 'hidden truth' of the culture. Informed by surrealism, kinopravda and Songhay religion, among other things, Rouch used the word 'truth' in a wide and poetic sense. His notion of 'truth' is central to his filmmaking and he returns to it in many different contexts. Until this day I can not really concretise what the poet and surrealist Jean Rouch actually meant the 'hidden truths' to be, but there have been moments when the 'Pour quoi pas?' filmmaking truly has surprised me and given me a hint of what he might have meant.

After Bibi's and my conversation we decided to grab the camera and just go out in the night surrounding Praça Roosevelt to start to improvise. During the shooting of the documentary film Bibi had avoided to speak about her childhood, but this time she would open up. I tried to mimic Rouch's work with Marceline in *Chronique d'un été* and I asked Bibi to walk around the square with a radio microphone while I stayed with the camera on a distance. Suddenly her character Zilda started to speak about Bibi's childhood very freely and relaxed while she was strolling around the square. I was so surprised that I forgot to turn on the camera for the first five minutes.

Maybe it was because Bibi could relax when she felt left alone with the radio microphone, without the physical abuse of the camera lens, or maybe it was because the role of Zilda lent her anonymity and gave her the freedom to express herself. My guess is that Rouch's 'inner' or 'hidden truth' is personal. I believe that the pursuit of the 'hidden truth' is the combination of shared anthropology, improvised cinema and acting, creating a space of trust, freedom and pleasure which allows the protagonist to express her most intimate stories and thoughts. If I am right about these moments of 'hidden truth', they are not unique to the ethnofiction, we can find them in most forms of artistic expression. It is just the methods to find the 'hidden truth' and the use of them that are unique for the ethnofiction.

Ethnographic Filmmaking

Ethnographic films have traditionally been produced by small camera teams during an extended period of time to facilitate ethnographic research. Though the technical quality might suffer, the possibility to reach a higher degree of intimacy with the informants increases, and the cost decreases.

Filming alone and sometimes assisted by a soundman, I have been able to move freely between different communities of travestis and transsexuals. I have filmed several political activist meetings, shows performed by travestis and transsexuals, and travestis providing information to prostitutes informing about the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as the transgendered prostitutes themselves working in the streets of São Paulo. The ethnographic film approach has opened doors for me that I believe would have been hard to enter for any filmmaker with a strictly limited time to make a television documentary, however large his camera team might be.

Fieldwork relationships are based on trust that is built during an extended period of time. There is no doubt that we often have to break into what is most private for our protagonists in our pursuit of the 'hidden truth', no matter if we are directors of documentaries or

ethnofictions, or any other reality based genre of filmmaking. But there are different ways of achieving this.

The story of *The Three Little Pigs* tells us about the Big Bad Wolf who tries to blow down the houses of the Three Little Pigs. Many short-term journalistic documentary film approaches are based on this 'huff and puff' technique to destroy the house of Little Pig's home so he can be eaten. Many directors of television don't have more than three weeks of actual filming. The production team suffers under a huge economic pressure to produce fast, cheap films and achieve high audience ratings. From this point of view it is understandable that television directors often go for the little pig with the house made out of straw, and not out of bricks. It simply comes down much faster and easier.

Ethnographic filmmakers are not innocent of hurting people in order to produce good and interesting films. We are all big bad wolves, but the difference is that the ethnographic filmmaker has the time to sit and wait for the little piggy to come out whenever he feels like it which allows us to produce another kind of film, where the intimacy of everyday life situations form the centre of attention rather than the dazzling and the spectacular.

I had no doubt about my role as a big bad wolf in my pursuit of visual examples of discrimination and identity among Brazilian travestis and transsexuals in São Paulo, but I had deliberately turned my attention away from the more spectacular aspects of travesti and transsexual life, such as the negative consequences of prostitution and silicon often displayed in media. I would of course have to touch on these subjects in the ethnofiction, but I wanted the focus to remain on the rich diversity of transsexual and travesti life, and on the problems of everyday life situations that the audience would be able to recognise in spite of their various backgrounds. In regards of the subject of discrimination this meant that I would avoid focusing on police brutality directed towards travesti prostitutes, or on injections of industrial silicon with catastrophic consequences. I was interested in the invisible wall that separated the travestis and transsexuals from the Brazilian mainstream society, the vicious circle that would make it hard for a travesti to find any other profession than as a prostitute, if she would like to. It is likely that a Brazilian travesti or a transsexual realising her gender identity on an early stage in life would be harassed in school and leave her education to work with prostitution. It is also likely that a travesti showing her gender identity at home would be thrown out in the street and be denied anywhere to live outside the frames of prostitution. Neither is a person with a female appearance and a male identity card likely to get an employment, especially if she lacks education. Even though most of the transsexuals and travestis I met emphasised the positive aspects of prostitution, there is no doubt that they would all have preferred a less limited freedom of choice.

This is why I would ask Bibi to re-enact situations where she tried to get employment or rent an apartment, and ask Fabia to tell me about how she was kicked out of school at the age of fourteen when she broke the nose of a classmate that had been harassing her for her female appearance for over a year.

These situations were not easy to speak about, or to re-enact. Bibi avoided speaking of her most painful situations, which I respected, while Fabia was more open to talk about her difficult past. Comparing to the suffering of Bibi during her time as prostitute at Praça

Roosevelt, Fabia's background in the suburbs didn't seem very hard. But these experiences had been painful for Fabia and they had forged her integrity.

During her early twenties Fabia was sitting on the bus on her way from São Paulo to her home in the suburbs, when a group of school children identified her as a travesti and started to throw paper balls at her. This comparably insignificant situation would change Fabia's life. Maybe it was the shame of being harassed by children or the feeling of not being able to do any thing or to go anywhere else, but something changed within Fabia. She told me that it was an important moment in her life since it made her realise that it would be hard to change people's attitudes towards her. Instead she would change her own attitude towards them, to not let their intolerance affect her.

It was the profane nature of the problem that attracted me to re-enact the scene. Any audience once exposed to the evil acts of school children, or youth, would identify with Fabia's situation. It would take me almost ten months after I first met Fabia to ask her to improvise the scene. I brought three young actors to her home where she explained her situation and background to them. Afterwards we went out to improvise a scene based on her experience. Afterwards Fabia wrote the following text in her internet blog:

"Today I had to return, return seven years back, when they throw paper balls at me sitting squashed in that bus.

Yesterday, I kept thinking of how I would do to not hurt myself too much with all of this. Today was the big day, I was a bit scared when I opened the door and met up with them, I thought: So these are the boys that are going to throw paper at me...

We sat down, had a cup of coffee, and after that I started to tell them of how it was since they needed to know who I am and what had happened that day. We spoke and after one hour we were ready to poke around even more in that wound.

There is nothing like time, sometimes it heals more than we think, when I finished speaking about the subject - it was time to film.

Scared again.

We arrived to the street and received instructions about what to do, and I did it.

Mission complete, and do you know something?

After making my legs hurt by running several kilometres I just felt an immense relief to have gotten rid of yet another weight from my shoulders, after all, this had pursued me since 1999.

What Nonsense!!!!

This is why we should resolve our problems right away and not create additional problems, because of something that already happened...

*But I just learned this right now.*²

The camera had become a catalyst similar to what Rouch called cine-provocation; the presence of the camera makes people reveal aspects of their life otherwise not spoken of. It would not have been possible to reach this complicity without an ethnographic approach. It is all about trust.

Conclusion

Approaching Christmas 2006, I am back at the University of Manchester, busy editing the ethnographic documentary and the ethnofiction, and writing up the thesis. Fabia is investing more time and money in her hairdressing saloon in Cotia, which she just has refurbished. Bibi keeps on her work as a prostitute in São Paulo but has also had the opportunity to act in a couple of Brazilian films. Fernanda Moraes Santos managed to mobilise the travesti and transsexual community in São Paulo, and together they decided to hold the first national meeting of travestis and transsexuals ever held in São Paulo, in 2007.

By giving a short review of my two last years of research I hope to have given an example of how practice can be applied as research to explore the nature and the use of the ethnofiction. By identifying and explaining the four basic principles of the ethnofiction I suggest a basic model for the ethnofiction, but we have to remember to be careful when dealing with art from an academic point of view, or as Rouch expressed it himself through Yakir in 1978 (p 10): *If you start making theories about my films you are losing. You should just follow the movement. If there is a theory, there are no longer improvisation and creativity.*

Would Rouch have changed his mind if he had been more acquainted with modern approaches to applied theatre and participatory video? Theatre and film practitioners have shown that it is possible to tame art with theory and method to make it benefit individuals and communities - without killing the creativity. Could the ethnofiction benefit ethnographic research in a similar way?

It is my hope that my research, as well as similar and future research, will develop these questions further and provoke a dialogue reaching across the borders separating the academic disciplines, as well as those separating the social sciences and the arts. The acceptance of practice-based and interdisciplinary research provides the means to apply film and theatre within different academic contexts. We might not be able to give any definite answers in a narrow future, even though I am sure we will create new questions.

² Fabia Mirassos internet blog posted 19 July 2006.

Further Information

If you would like to read more about our work and download video samples, please visit my website at www.faktafiktion.se

Any opinions or questions about the articles and the project would be more than welcome. Please write to johannes@faktafiktion.se

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