

HISTORY, MEMORY, TRUTH, FICTION

CONTEMPORARY DOCUMENTARY PRACTICES

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LESSON – WEEK 4

HOSPITALITY AND DOCUMENTARY LABOR: TOWARD A “HOSPITABLE DOCUMENTARY(?)”

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OVERVIEW [Slide 2]

- * Focus for today: the *ethics* of documentary as function of (presumably) unique relationship between *apparatus* (makers of documentary images) and *social actor* (objects of documentary images) that constitutes the *Documentary Situation*
- * Two (related) critical frameworks: (1) *Labor* (who is the *employer*? who is the *worker*? what constitutes “work” *on screen* vs. *for the screen*?); and (2) *Hospitality* (who is the *host*? who is the *guest*?)
- * *No quarto da Vanda* and *Tierra Roja*: our laboratories. History of their gestation/production; the concepts and questions each generates about the Doc. Situation, hospitality, and labor

PRELIMINARY EXERCISE:

- * Before turning to films... *Ich möchte am Anfang ihnen hier begrüßen in meine Klasse. Sie sind alle herzliche willkommen...*
(with a few): *Wie heisst du denn. Was ist ihre Name?*
- * **[Ask]** So... who, in this classroom, is the *host*... and who are the *guests*? How? Why?
- * How might Derrida describe the *conditions of hospitality* that govern our relationship in this space?
 - Questions of *language* of host/guest (I am *both* guest *and* host...)
 - Questions of *space* of host/guest (by switching to English, I *become* host, *construct* space of host, *render* you all “guests” in my “home”)
- * We could (and should) ask similar questions about the “*employer*” and the “*workers*” in this room. What constitutes “*labor*” here? In context of this seminar generally? Who “*performs*” that labor? Who has the ultimate “*right*” to its “*product*”?
 - And what if I were to tell you all that today (and in general), **I consider myself a student as much as all of you**? What do I mean by this?
 - While I have watched, researched, and taught both films numerous times before this class, **this will be the first time that I discuss them in terms of labor and hospitality.**
 - In effect, I will be **working with you** today to understand them in these terms. I have no real “*expertise*” in this area (yet)...

* These are the kinds of questions we will seek to ask of the films for this week... and the questions *the films will ask of us*. (We're not "applying" Panse/Derrida to films, but thinking with films about Derrida and Panse)

I. FROM DOCUMENTARY LABOR TO DOCUMENTARY HOSPITALITY

* DISTILLING PANSE: DOCUMENTARY LABOR AND RIGHTS OF DOCUMENTARY "WORKER"

- [Slide 3] To Begin: a series of images of "work" in *No quarto da Vanda* and *Tierra Roja*...

- **Ask:** What kind of work is being "performed" in these shots? By and for whom? How is this work constructed *formally* (i.e. *audio-visually*) in frame?

◇ (Apparently) *recognizable* forms of labor, either manual/remunerated, or domestic

- **Ask:** How might Silke Panse characterize the **work** in these moments of each film?

◇ In all cases, these would be classic examples of forms of labor cited by Panse:

Either "actual work" performed for someone else, hence images to which doc. protag. has no right...

Or "common/everyday tasks" (usually performed in *private space*), hence images to which doc. protag. has no right

- **Ask:** What is Panse's argument about Doc. Labor, in a nutshell?

- Even when doc. protagonist is *portrayed* performing labor for someone else, the "work" she does for documentarians is not recognized as labor
- This due in part to "codes" of documentary ethics, which hold that doc. protags. *cannot* be paid, lest they become "professional" actors, hence no longer "social actors" of doc. "reality"...

... but also has to do with *nature* of "documentary labor" itself:

◇ On one hand, it is "immaterial" in that it is *affective* and hence, *indiscernible* (doc. protag. is ostensibly just "being herself"... the very condition for status as "social actor" rather than "professional actor")

◇ On other hand, it must (by ethics/codes of doc.) be distinguished from whatever "material" work the doc. protag. might be doing on camera (i.e. in his "actual job").

Thus, an paradoxical distinction between work performed "before" the camera (remunerated by *employer* but *cannot* be by documentarian) and work performed "for" the camera (i.e. for the documentary... which is not—cannot be—considered "labor" of any kind).

- Marxist/post-marxist theories of "immaterial labor" also contribute to problematic status of doc. protagonist: "social acting" is not "manual labor" that produces "tangible" good for "owner" of "means of prod'n"...

... And filmmaker, as "owner of image" (to which doc. protag. has no rights)—not viewed as "employer" of doc. protag., since latter cannot "work" for pay in doc. film

- Finally, legal frameworks of freedom of expression, private/public property, and copyright squarely favor "image-takers" over "image-bodies"

◊ According to Panse, neither Hardt/Negri's affirmation of "immaterial production [as] 'common and shared' in 'our common social image bank,'" nor ideas borrowed from gender theory about subversive dimensions of *performativity* in doc. film, sufficiently address the "problem" of documentary labor...

> **Ask:** In light of Panse, how might we now *refine* our (visual) analysis of foregoing images of labor in in *No quarto da Vanda* and *Tierra Roja*?

- **But...** armed with Panse's analysis, and still *strictly* on basis of our *audio-visual observations* about films (i.e. without yet accounting for history of their production)...

- **[Slide 4] Does anything appear to complicate the Marxist critique of "labor" in Costa's film?**

◊ Top left: the "hidden worker" subordinated to *beauty/harmony of composition* (a value apart from "doc. labor" rendered by social actors

> Reminds us that *no* doc. image—*qua* image—can be reduced to human subjects alone... there is ***always*** the visual/sonic dimension of image as *aesthetic value*

◊ Top middle: the work of the scavenger. A form of "material" labor that defies both capitalist *division* of labor and—perhaps—paradoxes of *documentary* labor:

> The scavenger "produces" a product that does not render profit for capitalist; the "product" of labor is also denied the documentarian (only its *image* can remain)

◊ Top right: idle machines...

◊ Bottom left: impromptu/improvised/spontaneous capitalism

◊ Bottom middle: "domestic work" that *redefines/reinscribes* public space as simultaneously private

◊ Bottom right: *concrete/discrete* division of *material* and *immaterial* labor here

> "material" labor is "beyond frame" (off screen), indicated only by *sound* of machines, and by Nhurro's *gaze* toward screen right (which could nonetheless be a *blank stare*)

> "immaterial/affective" labor of Nhurro is here the *only* visible labor *on screen*: work performed expressly *for the camera* rather than *before* the camera

- **Ask:** What about *Tierra roja*? Does Ramírez's film either reinforce, or further complicate, any of the questions posed by either Panse or *Vanda* about doc. labor?

◊ **[Slide 5]** Framing and *mise-en-scène* that obstructs/distances/separates us from "material labor"... **Ask: Why? (i.e. to what ends/effects)**

◇ [Slide 6]

Top row: (1) extreme close-ups of “bodies (fragments) at work”: images that “exceed normal observation” (MacDougall). **Ask: Possible significance?**

Top row: (2) **Ask:** what kind of work is portrayed here? In case of wood carver: patently *material* labor... but is there any “capitalist” implied here?

Bottom row: direct address of “workers” into camera: (1) child labor is “exteriorized” in these images and *interrogates* the spectator; (2) child pupil as laborer? **Ask: what questions/critiques does film seem to raise in these images?**

* RESPONDING TO PANSE BY WAY OF HOSPITALITY...

- Like our own preliminary assessment of labor in these films, Panse’s view of doc. labor is ultimately very **bleak**... I.e., it leaves little room for vindicating documentary situation on ethical grounds (documentary as *inherently unethical*)
- But, if “Hospitality” is “the whole of ethics” according to Derrida, then perhaps labor is wrong place to look for an “ethics of documentary.
- Question becomes: can concept of *hospitality* can afford some way to reframe ethics of “Documentary Situation”, i.e. articulation between *apparatus* and *doc. protagonist*?
 - In other words: Can questions of *host* and *guest*, of *host language* and who *speaks it*, threshold between space of host/guest, inform our analysis of “documentary *labor*” in films like *Vanda* and *Tierra roja*...?
 - By asking, “who are “workers” in each film?” and “what kinds of “work” they “perform” (or what kinds of “performance” constitute work)?”, we must also account for how each film distinguishes between *work* and *liesure*, and between *workplace* and *home*...

II. TOWARDS THE “HOSPITABLE DOCUMENTARY”?

* FROM DOCUMENTARY LABOR TO DOCUMENTARY HOSPITALITY: DISTILLING DERRIDA

- [Slide 7] To Begin: an image from *No quarto da Vanda*

- **Ask:** Who is the host in this shot? Who the guest? Where is the threshold between the space proper to each? What about the image tells us so?

DEFINITIONS

- The Stranger/Foreigner [**Ask:** what is it/how does D. define it?]
 - One who does not speak the language of the host... but must somehow *identify* (defend) himself in that language... or otherwise “be welcome” in that language
 - Note, that the “host language” can also be “specialized” language of particular “knowledge” (juridical, scientific, institutional)

◇ Hence, the “stranger” must “defend herself” (get by; *desenrolar*) in the language of the host...

... mainly by “imitating” it to the best of her ability...

◇ Herein lies **mimetic** dimension of hospitality—condition of foreigner is *essentially* mimetic...

- The “Right to Hospitality” for the Stranger/Foreigner:

- Even as he must “defend himself” in language of host, stranger has (implicit?) right to speak in his own *dialect/idiolect*...

...i.e. use turns of phrase foreign to institution to which he is “welcome”

◇ It is a *right* to hospitality, precisely b/c host “would naturally excuse” or “tolerate” foreigner’s “strange rhetoric” (which is but another *mimetic* mode, i.e. another form of representation)

◇ A *condition* of hospitality: as host, one cannot *expect* the foreigner/stranger to speak in tongue of host

- Aporias of Hospitality: public vs. private space, the threshold between the two

- The “law of hospitality” relies on concepts of “home” (where the “host” is “master”, is “sovereign”) and all that is *beyond threshold*, outside the home: *space of stranger*...
- But the State also extends the notion of “threshold” and “home” to that *other space* (space of State), and thus encompasses much *public* space as “homeland”/home of State (where the “laws of the State” can both welcome foreigner and must be observed by him)

- Herein lies first aporia-- “pervertibility”--of “law(s) of hospitality”:

“The perversion and pervertibility of this law (which is also a law of hospitality) is that one can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect or claim to protect one’s own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one’s own hospitality” (Derrida 53).

“the effacement of the limit between private and public, the secret and the phenomenal, the home (which makes hospitality possible) and the violation or impossibility of home” (Derrida 65).

◇ I.e. Host, in private space, invokes “right of hospitality” at threshold to his private home...

...but this “privacy” is “granted” by State that cannot, in fact, guarantee privacy b/c the State itself dictates where the threshold lies, i.e. *where* private space begins/ends

- Second aporia: hospitality depends on “mutual honesty” of host and guest—Kant’s “subjective morality” of *truth* at all costs...

...yet the interdiction of "right to lie" ("the right to dissimulate and keep something to oneself") obliterates very right to personal sovereignty (i.e. over one's home) that makes (conditional) hospitality possible

- Third aporia: the host, in her *reciprocal* (if) *asymmetrical* relationship to stranger, is also a stranger to the guest... and in a way, a potential "hostage"—in her own home (her *ipseity*)—to the stranger, who upon "taking place in the place of the host" becomes, by this reciprocity, also a **host to the host: i.e. stranger to his language!**

◊ An aporia fully realized in what D. calls **absolute (unconditional) hospitality**

- "Conditional Hospitality" vs. "Absolute (Unconditional) Hospitality"

- All of foregoing descriptions refer only to a *certain, limited* form of hospitality:
"hospitality by right"
 - ◊ Hospitality applied to foreigner/stranger as foreign, i.e. *recognized in*, identified by/for her foreignness:
 - > Condition of *being from/of another place* with its own *proper names*, its own *patrimony*, and its own *language*: i.e. a function of *genealogical status*:
 - ◊ A **conditional** hospitality because *contingent* upon hosts recognition and tolerance of the *identifiable, nameable* foreignness of the stranger.
 - ~ Recall Kant (*Perpetual Peace*): "this foreigner, then, is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name; you enjoin him to state and to guarantee his identity, as you would a witness before a court" (Derrida 27).
 - > Also part of *reciprocal nature* of conditional hospitality: "guest" is tolerated in his social status as guest... but is also susceptible to laws of host, is "responsible before the law"
- This *conditional hospitality* must be distinguished from **absolute hospitality**
 - ◊ Hospitality that is *absolute, unconditional*, extended *without contingencies* to the absolutely unknown, anonymous other
 - ◊ A *radical* form of hospitality existing *not in opposition* to conditional hosp., but rather wholly separate from it (radically *other* to it)
 - > *Absolute* hospitality is granted to an Other "without name or social status"; I "give place" to the Other—let her "take place in the place I offer her"—**without requiring or expecting her to identify herself, defend herself, attempt to speak in language of host**
 - > The absolute, anonymous Other take his place in the place offered to him by hospitality, **without any reciprocal expectation to "represent" himself in any way**
 - ~ **Key**: this is obviously a Law of hospitality *beyond* the many conditional laws of hospitality... upon which this Absolute Law *nonetheless relies for its existence*.

~Absolute hospitality implies "the suspension of language": don't ask questions, of the guest, don't speak or ask him to speak...

... yet this suspension is always conscious of "conditions" and "laws" that threaten to "limit" one's hospitality...

~ Hence, it is also *horizon* of hospitality—an *ideal*, and perhaps an *impossibility*: it requires the *absolute absence of mimesis, of representation*...

... and there are no imaginable situations in which social relations can exist without representation...

* THE ETHICS OF "DOCUMENTARY SITUATION": THROUGH THE PRISM OF *HOSPITALITY*

Now, armed with Derrida's concept of hospitality, let's return to each film to ask: **who is guest/stranger? who the host? where is the threshold? how is it crossed/protected /transgressed**

- *No quarto da Vanda*:

Some context:

- Opera prima: *O sangue* (1989) an "art film" in mold of French New Wave: made in "professional" way, with large crew, etc
- Early 1990s, Portugal integrated into European Union, neoliberalization of country, end of state subsidies for national cinema
- Costa goes to Cape Verde with modest private funds to film *Casa de Lava* (1994): also a work of "art house" cinema—a kind of "fairy tale" that also allegorizes Portuguese postcolonialism—made with a professional film crew
- Upon return to Lisbon, Costa delivers postcards and gifts to relatives of Cape Verdeans living mainly in slum of Fontainhas... where he is impressed by the place and its inhabitants (strong, direct, dignified)
- Decides to question his own aesthetics and film in this neighborhood, to "affirm the existence of the dispossessed" (according to Akiva Gottlieb)... first by attempting to *adapt* his style community of Fontainhas
- Begins with *Ossos* (1997), first film of the trilogy (*Vanda; Juventude em marcha*); marked by an insistently *static* camera, employment of residents as (non-professional actors, among them, Vanda Duarte...

But: it is still a "professional film," with massive amounts of equipment, lights, all the complicated machinery of large-scale production... and Costa at the end of production is exhausted and disillusioned with his own status as "imposter" in the community...

- At which point, Vanda herself *invites* Costa to "cut the bullshit" and truly immerse himself in the reality of Fontainhas...

... And from that moment, Costa begins filming *No cuarto de Vanda*: alone, with a digital camera (SD!), daily, for six months...

- This minimalist approach represents "liberation" for Costa... (and serves to place him—and **us**—in extreme proximity/intimacy with Fontainhas's bodies and spaces)...
 - ◊ **Ask:** In light of this *production history*, how can we characterize way film either *actively* or *subconsciously constructs* a particular kind of relationship between *host* and *guest*?
 - ◊ **[Slide 8] Ask:** In these images, is the "place" of either host or guest **formally inscribed** in any way? I.e. is Costa's *presence in Vanda's room* indicated by any formal element in particular? Which/how?
 - > First, preponderance of *claroscuros*: many interpret this (simplistically) as metaphor of "darkness" of lives portrayed...
 - ... But might it also point to **threshold** between filmmaker/doc. protagonist? Reciprocity of host/guest?
 - > Second: extreme close-ups; motif of *doubling* in mise-en-scene; direct address: **all** signal presence of apparatus... but also intimate to **threshold/limit** between guest/host; inside/outside; proper/strange
 - > Third: gazes off-screen: also may serve to *inscribe an outside* to the "space of the host"...
 - > **[Slide 9]** And sometimes, the "performance of hospitality" is depicted or invoked (almost) explicitly on the screen
 - ~ Note first image in particular: "Thank you" for hospitality rendered, and *no response from "host" of that act...*

- Tierra roja

Some conext:

- Gómez's first feature: official selection in numerous festivals, award winner at X International Festival "Cine de Las Américas" (USA) and Mar del Plata Int'l Film Fest
- Produced under auspices of NGO, Helvetas Paraguay (Asociación Suiza para la Cooperación y el Desarrollo)
- Helvetas: int'l NGO working in econ/social development, active in Paraguay since 1972, i.e. during "El Stronato," Lat. Am.'s longest dictatorship (Alfredo Stroessner, 1954-1989)
- During 1990s, Helvetas engages in extensive "re-narrativization" of its activities in Paraguay, its relat'p to dictatorship, its engagement in re-democratization process
 - ◊ Stroessner: American ally in Cold War; vehemently anti-agrarian reform (according to NYT: "Today, Paraguay remains the country with the most uneven distribution of land and wealth on the planet, followed by Brazil.")

- Important to consider role of Helvetas in Gómez's portrayal of rural communities in Paraguay: part of their "reticence" may be due to long-internalized patterns of fear/repression
- The "red" of Paraguay's "Red earth": a product as much of *blood spilt* throughout its violent history as of *communal identity* (blood lines) of its rural communities
 - ◊ **Ask:** Again, considering prod'n background, how do *formal strategies* of film serve to *construct* host/guest relationship? **Consider following:**
 - > **[Slide 10]** Extensive use of *internal frames* that "radically exclude" apparatus (and spectator) from private space of doc. protags.
 - > **[Slide 11]** Recollections of death of son of one of doc. protags. **Ask:** Is status of host/guest in this scene intimated, inscribed at *level of form*?

- Run clip, then discuss -

- ◊ Note how Ramírez's film also allows us to reframe question in terms of *language*: which is language of *host*? which is language of *guest*?
 - > Guaraní must be translated... not clear whether director speaks that language; but we realize that (many) doc protogs. in film speak *both* language of host *and* guest...
 - > **[Slide 12]** This may even extend beyond *spoken* language to moments in which certain "inscrutable" elements of *mise-en-scène* appear without context/explanation...
 - ... Many possible meanings (some perhaps culturally specific), but we are not "privileged" to receive "explanation"...
 - ~ Markers of "specialized language of cinema? Of *barriers* to language of host? Of a deliberate *withholding* or *barring of entrance*?
 - Or perhaps a signaling towards horizon of hospitality: towards the "other", "radical" form of hospitality, that does not require that one "be named"?

* (PROVISIONAL) CONCLUSIONS

- **[Ask]** What, if anything, do these films illuminate about *nature* and *ethics* of documentary situation? About concepts of *labor* and *hospitality*?
 - What governs/determines status of "host language" in each film, and who *speaks* that language? *Is this a stable category*?
 - ◊ There is, on one hand, the language *spoken* by crew and social actors...
 - ... but there is also the "visual language" of cinema... much of which is "articulated" in post-production, i.e. once *doc. situation* has been terminated...
 - What governs statuses of **host/guest** and **employer/worker** in each film?
 - ◊ Note how *unstable* these terms are in relation to each film:

- > Pedro Costa: the *employer* of Vanda et al? Or does he not “work” for residents of Fontainhas, who “employ” him as “public” to their “performances” of addiction and destitution?
- > Ramiro Gómez: continually documenting the “labor” of villagers... but this labor is only “performed” for Gómez, while it is “owned” by others (including themselves)
- ◊ To considerable degree in both films, “crew” (in *Vanda*, a crew of one) is very much the “guest” entering “place” of social actors, in role of *hosts*...
 - ... as much as they are “hosts” in “place” of cinema, to which they “welcome” their social actors as “guests”
- ◊ In *Tierra roja*, to perhaps even greater degree than *Vanda*, spoken *language* of social actors (hosts) seems to render this situation more “stable” throughout film...
 - > **[Ask]** Yet, does *process of production itself*—i.e. the *act/fact* of filming—alter this host/guest relationship in any way? How or how not?
- **[Ask]** What can each film tell us about nature of **spaces of work, liesure, and dwelling**?
 - ◊ Each film, in its way, suggests profoundly *ambiguous/nebulous* boundaries among such spaces. How?
- **[Ask]** Finally, is it possible to imagine a “radically hospitable” documentary situation (i.e. one in which *unconditional hospitality* governs apparatus-social actor relationship)?
 - ◊ In a word: **NO**. Why?

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON HOSPITALITY AND THE DOC. SITUATION

* The "social actor" and mimesis: in certain sense, doc. protagonist is, like Socrates before the courts, "playing" the role of guest before the documentarian's camera...

...i.e. playing one unversed in both the "rhetoric" of cinema and the "rules" of the doc. situation that govern relation'p betw. apparatus and social actor

- Distinction w/ prof. actor in this regard: latter *is* versed in "language" of cinematic *institution*; is not foreign to it, but rather forms a part of that institution and is thus operating in same language as apparatus

* If conceived as *host*, the documentarian (the apparatus) not only "tolerates" the "strange rhetoric" of the social actor-as-stranger, but also *requires it* in order to make the documentary:

- The "hospitality of documentary" consists, in this sense, in the orchestration of "strangeness/foreign-ness" of social actors to be documented

... A kind of suspension of the conditions of translation that would be necessary to "make the stranger feel at home"

- This "state of foreignness/strangeness" must be maintained ("tolerated") in the necessary "state of ignorance of the host language" (the language of the institution of cinema) long enough to adequately "document" with images and sounds what is inherently *strange* about the social actor(s), for that strangeness is the entire purpose/object of the documentary project

* Possible to imagine a "just" or "radically hospitable" documentary situation?

- The absolute other is invited to "take his place" in the place offered him by the documentary situation with no expectation of *identity* or *representation*...

... Obviously an *impossibility*: once "welcomed" into the place of documentary—once ascribed a place and placed on screen—the Other is thus *named, identified*, associated to that "other place" of origin which renders his foreignness visible (and is made visible in the documentary image)

- By same token, the *language* of documentary is here summoned to *speak for* the Other with its images and sounds... and ultimately requires that the Other "defend herself" in that language (through representation and mimesis, through *performance of Self*)

• Perhaps the most we can expect from the documentary situation, however radical its *intentions*, is a limited, conditional form of hospitality that cannot but *name* what it documents (b/c the doc. image is, in essence, a mode of naming, indicating that which is foreign to the system, the language of the documentarian, for at least as long as it takes to render that foreignness in images and sounds)