

Text on Practice

To get lost in translation all the time

Pelle Nijburg

Dutch is my native language. I can speak and write English better than a year ago. I know a bit of German and French is something I speak when I'm on a trip in France and I want to be nice. The language I'd love most would be the visual language.

I often discover new words and meanings in my own, native language. So, if that's the case, what exactly does it mean when you like to write in another language than your native language? What will get lost in an attempt to translate? And: what's it like to write or speak in your own language in a foreign country? All these questions appear while studying Lens-based Media at Piet Zwart in Rotterdam (The Netherlands). *Especially the course Reading and Writing, Research Methodologies* is bringing me to the writing table and is forcing me to write English. You could easily get stuck and lose the fun if you have to pay attention to your grammar all the time. You could even get depressed. Maybe we can turn our so-called handicap into something else? Maybe there appear strange combinations between words, not grammarily 'correct' but *revealing* in a way. Let's try not to use Google translate too much before we get homesick.

'Nostalgia for a time you've never known,' There is an actual word for this phenomenon and is called: 'anemoia'. Anemoia originates from nostalgia and nostalgia originates from homesickness. For an emotion and feeling that's there for ages already, anemoia is a relatively 'new' word. Not insignificant: till now it only exists in the English dictionary; you can find it in 'The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows' by John Koenig. It would be fun to tell you a bit more about these phenomena and how they developed over decades. But I'm not a philosopher and this time has to be a text about my work, so we're going to make a quick jump.

'Anemoia' is also the title of a short film I made. It's an essayistic film about 'Anna' who's in her twenties and struggles with a mental conditions that seems to have a name and is a reaction to the Global West developing faster than ever: 'anemoia'. We never see the main character Anna physically, but we see places and hear sounds through her eyes and ears. We travel through different times as we see these black and whites images of a family picnic in a park. We meet her grandmother, who's getting nostalgia herself, and Anna wouldn't even let her finish her sentence because she's in a hurry finding answer. Suddenly we move to the present so it seems; there's a Shinrin Yoku workshop where people will do forest bathing. Sometimes we don't even know when or where we are because the pictures

seem old, but show too many modern signs to be placed in the past. This is when Anna discovers the word 'Faux-nostalgia' which means: 'Faking old things in order to recapture the past.' From here Anna seems to lose the grip on what is real or and what is not, and dives further into her mind.



Filmstill *Anemoia* (2019) – Pelle Nijburg

From a young mind, to an older, of can we say: much more 'wiser' mind? My most recent work is a documentary 'My Sweet Failure' about filmmaker Sacha Burraud, the main character who lives in the Netherlands. Sacha tells us about his biggest artistic 'failure': a feature film he made in 1989, and never finished... The feature is about a flying carpet that gets stolen from the original owner: a guru who travels in time and is actually a reincarnation of Billy the Kid. In the documentary Sacha looks back to the rushes and wonders: *'Is this film really that bad?'*. 'Yes' he says. *'But then again: it has good parts.'* On one point Sacha, who's actually almost retired, even considers a re-edit. When do you consider something failed? How do you speak about your failures to others and insignificant: yourself? Sacha himself, born in France, didn't speak the Dutch language when he first came here. He told me he would therefore always say: *'Ik weet het niet, maar ik denkt dat je gelijk hebt.'* Translated: *'I don't know, but I think I agree.'* This particular sentence helped him to integrate socially. *'Can I order you a beer?'* *'I don't know, but I think I agree.'* While listening to the conversation with a beer in one hand, he would slowly get more grip on this odd language of the Dutch.

In Dutch we say: *'Kukeleku!'* if we want to imitate a hen. The Germans would speak of: *'Kiririki!'*. While English men say it like: *'Cock a doodle doo!'* And the French mimic the hen like: *Cocorico!* This makes me think: Why are animal sounds named differently in almost

every country around the world? A hen or a chicken in Germany might make the same sound as a chicken in The Netherlands. By the way: why do we say: 'Tweet, tweet' referring to birdsongs when their sound range is actually much more diverse than ours? Or do birds mimic us and thus in fact speak or mimic the language of the country there are in? This could help to explain why all the hens in all the countries on earth have their own native language. These specific questions about the languages of animals is not something I'm going to make a film about, but I do want to be more aware of these facts and how to play around with these things in film. The coming year(s) I hope to discover more about common language of the animals and human kind.