

# The Congruence of Observational Writing and Distinct Cinematography

Practice based report on the development of Daan  
Bunnik's graduation project

Daan Bunnik

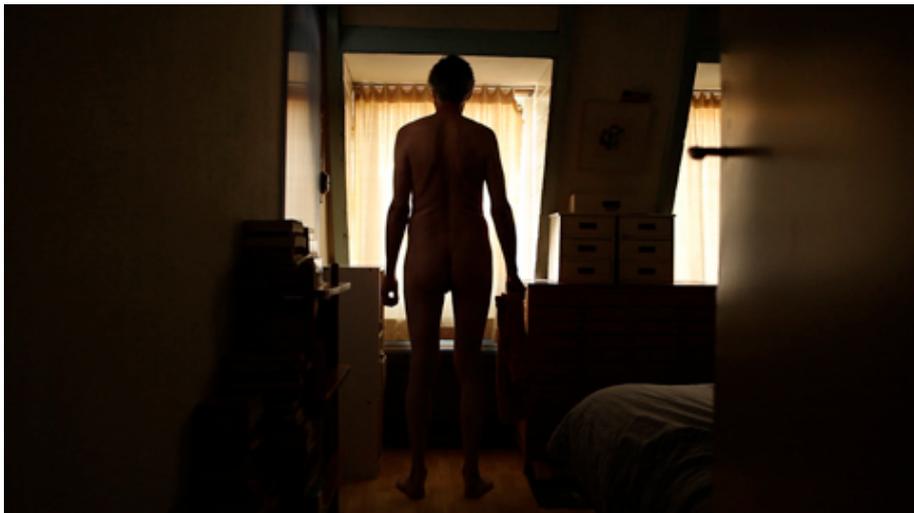
0841507

Graduate Research Seminar

Steve Rushton

Second reader: Barend Onneweer

Thesis submitted as writing component to the Master Media  
Design Programme, Piet Zwart Institute,  
Willem de Kooning Academy, 2012



## Abstract

This thesis analyses the development I went through to graduate with three observational films. It examines how previously disparate elements, observational writing and spatial and emotional evocative cinematography, became congruent in my piece 'De Huid Voelt' (Skin Feels) that lead to a triptych observational video portrait. In this portrait I address the changed perception I have of my family and the changed relationship I have with them. These short films depict my struggles with observing the aging bodies of my parents, the fear of entering my old neighbourhood park at night and the altered relation between my oldest brother and me. In this project I want to express the difficulties concerning letting go of and simultaneously holding on to the environment one grows up in.

## Contents

Introduction	4
1 Log of process	5
1.1 Screenplay	5
1.2 Schiermonnikoog	7
1.3 Dance video	10
1.4 Observational films	14
1.4a The congruence of observational writing and distinct cinematography	15
2 Working methodology	19
2.1 Depersonalisation	19
2.2 The Role of light	23
2.3 Object	23
2.4 Distant observer	25
2.5 Conclusion	26
2.6 Connection with previous practice	27
3 Motivations and ambitions	29
3.1 Previous work	29
3.2 From frustration to vulnerability	32
4. Conclusion	35
5. Annotation; relation to the project	36
5.1 <i>Solaris</i> and <i>Stalker</i>	36
5.2 Steven Soderberghs <i>Solaris</i>	37
5.3 <i>Impro</i>	38
5.4 <i>The Catcher in the Rye</i>	39

5.5 <i>The Thing from Inner Space</i>	40
6. Bibliography	42

## Introduction

When I started this master my plan was to graduate with a short feature film, a distinguished short piece that would be my entry into the world of art-house cinema. My aim was to write and direct the film and lay a foundation for future projects where I could maintain this double role. This thesis presents a breakdown from how I struggled with and why I eventually moved away from screenplay writing and started to focus on image making. It further elaborates on how I then started to create an abstract, experimental film with no clear narrative. It concludes with an explanation of why I eventually moved back to writing that I used as a basis for my short observational films.

## Log of process

The log of process presents an insight in the project development throughout the year. The chapter is divided into four subchapters: Screenplay, Schiermonnikoog, Dance video and Observational film. Throughout the year I changed between different projects. This chapter is devoted to these projects and will expand on their evolvement.

### **Screenplay**

In the previous year I started my first two trimester projects without a screenplay. My working methodology consisted of finding interesting spaces to shoot and afterwards creating a narrative out of these shots in the editing process. In the third trimester I wrote a screenplay beforehand and then shot the film. Although this set up worked well, the screenplay did not profoundly explore the personal motivations of the characters for their actions. My plan this year was therefore to advance on writing skills and use the same set up as in the third trimester.

In the summer I started writing a short story in the form of a novel. My plan was to adopt this short in a screenplay to make a short narrative film out of it and a photography series that would support the narrative of the film. The photographs would entail one aspect of the film's narrative, but they would

examine the subject in more depth than the film. The film and photography series together would form a widely balanced view of the impact that leaving one's hometown and settling in a new town has on an adolescent.

The narrative of this screenplay describes a guy who lives by himself in Rotterdam. He feels isolated, alienated and is not able to settle down. To change this he goes out for a night of drinking in the city. During this night out where he is not able to make contact with anyone, he starts to believe that the disharmonic character of the city causes the indifference between citizens of Rotterdam and causes him to feel singled out from his environment.

The critique on this project entailed that the motivations of my characters were not clear enough. I read two screenplay books (Field, S. *The Screenwriter's Workbook* and Beukenkamp, G. *Schrijven voor film, toneel en televisie (Writing for film, theatre and television)*) to gain a better understanding of character motivation and the essential elements required for a narrative. Subsequent to reading both books, I made several changes in the screenplay. A girl was introduced, because I hoped meeting another adolescent who feels less alone and abandoned in this city would shine a different light on his opinions about the disharmonic character of the city. The situation of the main character was changed from a starting student to a child of divorced parents and a high school drop

out. These changes made his reason for settling in Rotterdam differ. After an argument with his mother he leaves his home and has no place to go besides his father in Rotterdam, whom he has not seen in years. This created the basis for his negative view on the city and it added more drama to the story.

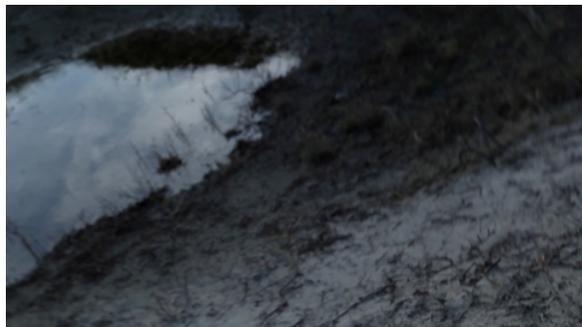
### **Why change?**

After struggling for a few months with screenplay writing, I still was not able to write a screenplay that incorporated characters with clear motivations and a clear directors view on the story. This year I did not see it progress into a screenplay that would be good enough to be turned into a film. Therefore, I decided to move away from story writing and move back to the image making process.

### **Schiermonnikoog**

In the course of writing the screenplay I made several photos in Rotterdam. The photos shared similarities even when the subject changed. In the winter break I decided to take a step back from my work and to be able to analyse my own photography, therefore I went for a week to Schiermonnikoog, an island in front of the north coast of Holland. In this week I made a thorough analysis of the working methodology I use for photography (see next chapter). Although the week was

meant as a week of rest, I shot several clips that together could be formed into a short film. Afterwards I realised that the working methodology I use for photography is similar as my working methodology for cinematography. Back at school I started editing and from the edit derived a ghost story of two lovers hunting each other. The guy was literally hunting the girl (shots of the camera in hand when the guy runs, Image 1) and the girl was hunting him in his mind (shots of the girl on the back were it is not clear if she is really there or if he is imagining her, Image 2). The hunting ends when they meet on the beach, the guy sees the girl standing at the shoreline, he runs towards her and stops next to her. They stand silent beside each other, without even looking at each other.



1



2

When a teacher pointed out the similarities the narrative shared with Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1972), I watched the film as well as Sodenberghs remake, *Solaris* (Steven Sodenbergh, 2002). I enjoyed watching both films and understood the similarities. In both films (Tarkovsky and mine) there is a feeling of passive desire between the two main characters. Tarkovsky's book *Sculpting in Time* provided me with several interesting insights into his motivations and working methodology. Not only on art and film but also on the philosophy behind his film. He has a very clear idea of what the function of art is and his reasons for making his films. This immediately points out the qualitative differences between my short film and *Solaris*. Whereas his films are based on his own strong body of thought that enable him to create a narrative that makes his message come across, I did not have such a clear belief behind my film and this made the narrative unclear and mediocre.

### **Why change?**

When the Schiermonnikoog piece started to come together into a small narrative I immediately saw this as a pilot for a similar narrative, but then based in a city environment with a stronger and clearer developed narrative. The feeling of desire, which is present in the Schiermonnikoog piece, would be even stronger if the background was not an island, but an industrial, deserted cityscape. With these surroundings where

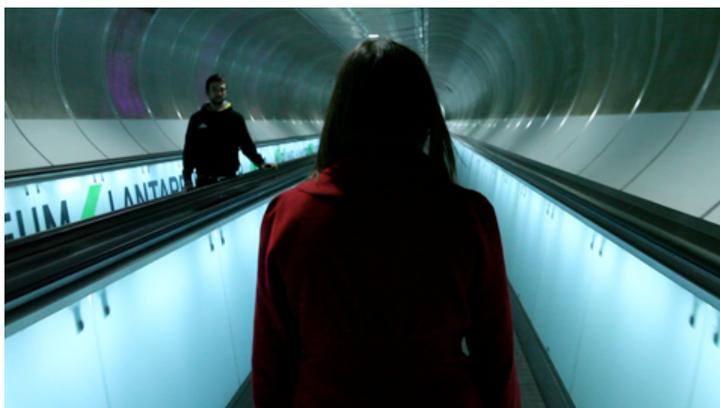
people are living but are not depicted the two characters seem to be cut off from society. Moreover my cinematographic style has always been characterised by evocative spaces within city spaces.

### **Dance video**

I re-shot the basic narrative of the Schiermonnikoog film in the city environment of Rotterdam, with the same working methodology as used in on Schiermonnikoog, however now I worked with dancers as actors. There is no speech in the film, the story had to be conveyed through body language, therefore I chose to work with dancers. In collaboration with the dancers I sought to expand the narrative and hoped to receive their input for more direct interaction between the main characters. This makes me realise that this hope on them to help on interaction displays the struggles /I faced while dealing with their interaction myself. The change of scenery from an island to the city of Rotterdam alienated the two main characters; the city décor emphasised the fact that they only have each other in a seemingly less empty cityscape (Image 3 & 4). It also created an atmosphere of questionable realities; it is not clear if her presence he is confronted with is a reflection of his own imagination, or if she is a new version of herself, or if this is his new reality.

I worked with a story that was based on Tarkosvky's *Solaris*. The boy sees the back of a girl who looks like his passed away girlfriend (who committed suicide) in a city environment with no other people present. First he struggles to understand the situation. When he accepts that it is her, he is delighted to see her and wants to make contact with her. She will not acknowledge him and keeps showing him her back, because she feels everybody is angry with her. He seeks to attract her attention with a dance, he succeeds and she acknowledges his presence. There is a moment of reconciliation, but this fades away because their interaction makes him aware how much pain she caused him by committing suicide. This causes him to move away from her, from this ghost figure who tricks his mind into letting him think him she was real. They let each other go, because they both realise that their past situation will not be re-established.





4

### **Why change?**

In collaboration with two dancers I adopted the above written story into a film. The shots were good, but I was not able to create a cohesive story out of them - again the motivations of the characters were a problem for the viewer to relate to them. My plan was to make another film where the girl would be a robot and he would awaken her so she would turn into a human being again by pulling her hair. She would become angry with him for awakening her and leave him immediately. Then she would pity this decision and go back to find him. She would find him turned into a robot.

Before starting to work out this new version I made the short observational film, *De Huid Voelt (Skin Feels)*. I saw the film merely as a side project. The positive critique *De Huid Voelt* received and analysing my positive view on the film and its process made me question in which direction my project should go. I analysed the process of making the video and found out this process was the easiest process so far and yet the best

film I made so far. If I compare the process of my dance video with the film of my parents, they occur to be very different. My motivation for the dance video came out of a vague thought; I was never able to clearly formulate my motivation. This made it difficult for my dancers to perform, because the reasons and the motivation for the film were not clear to them. In the film of my parents, writing the text in the beginning already clearly outlined my aim for the film, thus this gave me a lot of confidence towards the shoot with my parents. It was a new experience for me to start a shoot with knowing what I want to shoot prior to the shooting and with knowing what it should look like. My previous working methodology allowed me to discover interesting non-staged shots on an unknown location, in this project I had a clear idea of what I needed. Combining the voice over of the text and the images in the edit worked well. In two weeks I was able to combine every asset acquired before and create a short film with a clear narrative.

Comparing this project to my Schiermonnikoog and Dance video pieces, I realise that in these pieces I never had a specific position to the subject. As I was not personally involved with the subject matter, I was not able to judge my work, let alone improve it. There was no gut conviction in me when creating the work, thus I could not evaluate or value my own work. In the piece on my parents I knew exactly what story I wanted to convey; I had an internal conviction of what should be in the

piece and what not. Therefore I decided to make a drastic change to move away from the dance video/Schiermonnikoog project and to continue to make observational films.

### **Observational film**

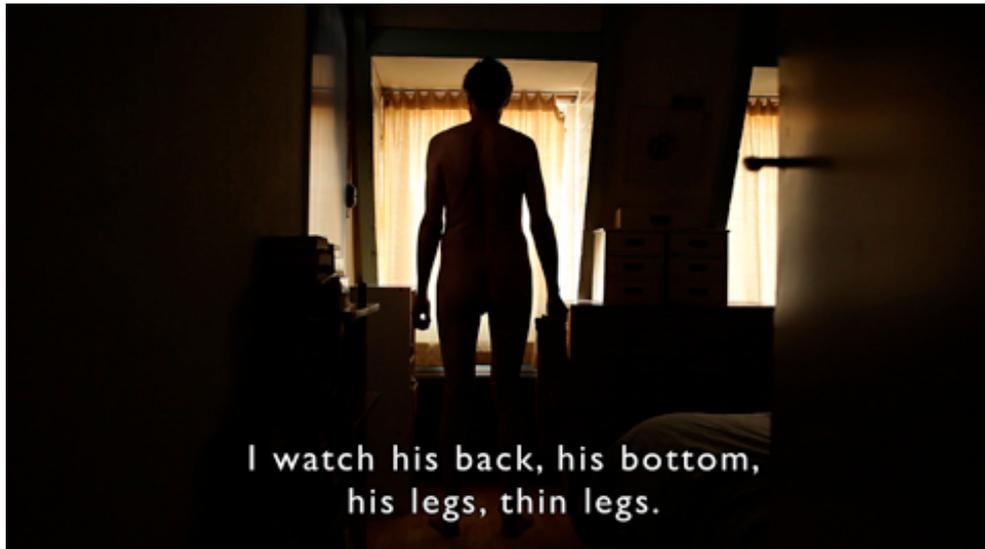
A month ago I stayed the night at my parents house. When I opened the door of my bedroom, my father opened the door of the bathroom. I saw him naked, which I had not seen for a long time. He walked into his bedroom and the sunlight from outside revealed his body showing a vulnerable man, which undermined the image I had of my father as a strong man. I kept that image in my head the next couple of days and decided to write a small text about it. I usually write a small text after I undergo an observation I find interesting, however normally I limit it to text, because I want to make a book out of these texts. This time I found the observation from a filmmaker's perspective so interesting that I decided to visualise the story. I further developed the story and went back to my parents' house to film both of them (my mother was also incorporated in the story). After my shoot, I recorded my own voice as voice over and started editing. In the edit it stood out that almost half of the text I wrote down was conveyed via images, therefore I reduced the text, which improved the piece. The piece shows the naked bodies of my parents while my

own voice in voice over speaks about my observation of their ageing bodies and what it does to me to seeing them ageing.

### **The congruence of observational writing and distinct cinematography**

It was a very pleasant experience to see distinct expressions of my interest come together in the piece 'De Huid Voelt'. My working methodology regarding cinematography, see next chapter 'Working Methodology', was similar to my previous work.

However now I was able to congruence this methodology with an element I did not use before in my filmmaking; observational writing. The last year I have started to write short observations with the notion in my head of forming a book out of these observations. But somehow with this observation I knew these had to be adapted to be screened. When I made this decision I felt that the combination of these elements in my work could form a strong piece together. Because I feel that this film finally reaches the mode of address to convey my message in my work. I have always wanted to make emotional work, work that moves me when I am writing and shooting it. The choice of subject, the ageing bodies of my parents, and my relation to the subject enables me to find this right mode of address (Image 5).



5.

Observational writing and distinct cinematography coming together.

In addition to the film of my parents I wrote two more short observations and started to film them as well. Here a new problem derived which had everything to do with my position in the film. I planned to film a narrative about the bus ride from my parental home to the central station. I compared my hometown, Utrecht, as the hug of a fat lady. When I arrive on central station in Utrecht I smell her, she wraps her warm, safe arms around me and my worries disappear. However after a few days spent in the city, I feel her hug transforms into suffocation. I feel she wants to turn me into everyone else who stayed in this city and I need to leave as soon as possible. A guest tutor pointed out that with that piece, I would go back into the mode of address of my old work. My position to the subject would not be the same as in the piece

of my parents, therefore these two films would not operate on the same level of emotion. I am aware now that I need this strong connection with my subject to be able to evaluate if what I write or film contributes to the story I want to convey.

The other text I wrote did bear this personal relation to the subject. It is about a night four years ago when my brother and I went out to make photographs of the moon. Out of nowhere we heard a man's voice: 'Give me that camera!' He pointed his arm towards us but not being able to see if he had a gun in his hand. My brother picked up the camera and walked backwards. He walked after my brother, I walked after him. We walked in a circle. I thought to myself, should I kick him or jump on his back? But I was paralysed; I could only walk behind him. When he realised my brother was not giving up his camera he slowly backed off, still pointing his arm towards us. We ran away, and when we felt safe enough we stopped and I started laughing. My brother did not understand why I laughed and looked bewildered. At that time I thought I laughed, because nothing really happened and it was unnecessary to become so afraid. Now I realise why I laughed, partly because of the fear and relieve, but mainly, because if he had a gun and would have shot my brother, I would not have stopped him, therefore I laughed out of shame coming from impotence. In the text I deal with this realisation and also write how this

incident might be one of the incidents that turned my brother into a pessimist, that he sees little joy in the world. This was hard to write and it disseminated a profound analysis of the impact the incident had, without sparing my brother or me. The guest tutor advised me that if I want to make a triptych, all the works should contain the same level of profoundness and to reach this I need the same degree of personal relation to each subject. I decided to make the third film about my oldest brother and my view on our changed relationship, from him being a natural role model that I looked up to, to us both dealing with me surpassing him in certain aspects, that presents us both with an intrinsic, unnatural feeling.

## Working methodology

To gain a better insight in my own motivations, I started to analyse my own work. After analysing a selection of 127 of my own photos I found the following facets as a lead pattern in my photography work:

### **Depersonalisation**

In the majority of the photos that depict people, they are depersonalised. In most photos people are framed in such a way that they are singled out from their environment, which makes the subject look alienated. Another important aspect of the photos is that, for the viewer, there is almost no facial recognition. I distinguish three forms where there is hardly any facial recognition possible at all: The people in the photos stand with their back towards the lens, or they are too far away from the lens for the viewer to see their faces or their faces are out of focus. This creates an image that feels more like a reference of a human being than as a portrait of a person. This depersonalised facet of the people photographed, make them become unreachable. The photographer, I, can only observe them from a distance, but is not able to make contact with them.

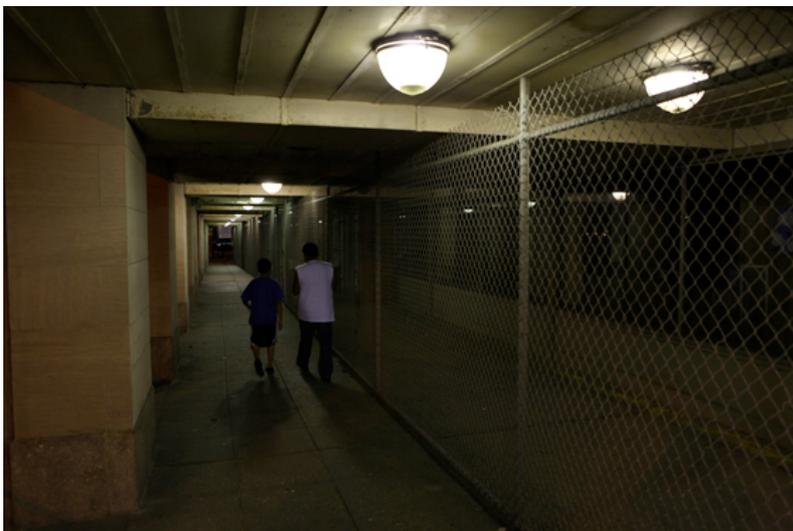
There are situations when there are two people singled out of their environment. Although it is clear that they are in contact with each other, they still appear as depersonalised figures. In the 127 photos, six obvious couples can be distinguished. In the six photos the viewer sees four of the couples on the back (Image 6-9), one couple on the side (Image 10) and one couple from the front (Image 11). Even in the photo of the couple seen from the front, the viewer cannot see their faces. This is because the sun behind the duo casts a shadow over the identity of the photographed persons. As in this photo, the role of light and the position of the source of light is important in all my photographs. In five out of six couple photos, the source of light is behind the couples and in the one where there is also a source of light between the couple and the lens, the source of light behind the couple is the most important for the photo. Depersonalised couples interrupt light travelling to the lens of my camera. Even if they form a clear entity together, the light turns them into impersonal shadows.



6



7



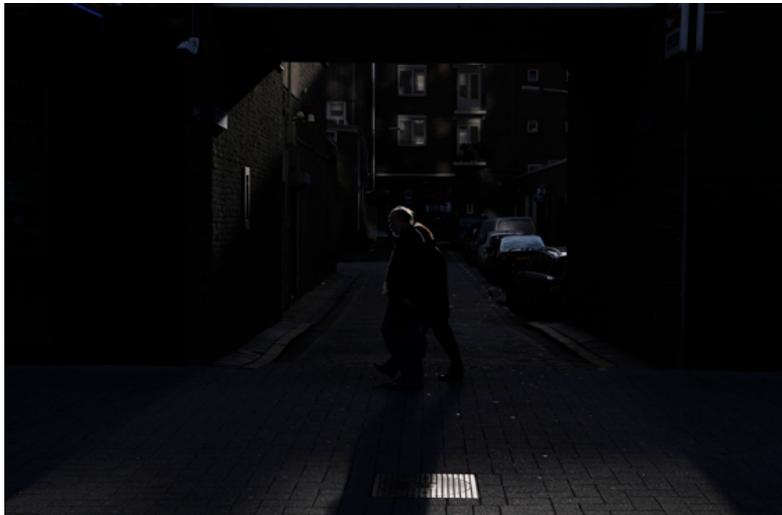
8



9



10



22

## **The role of light**

I am incredibly interested in the journey of light from its source towards my lens. When there is no strong source of light, for instance on a cloudy day, I hardly make any photographs at all. When there is a strong source of light I nearly always shoot directly towards the source of light. However, there always has to be a person or an object breaking the journey of the light towards my lens, because this makes the journey worthwhile. The light behind the object creates a stage for the object, but the object also creates a stage for the light. This is evident with people photographed on the back. Because the source of light is almost always behind the people photographed, the people photographed on the back immediately obtain an aura of self-determinism. In my interpretation, walking away from the camera gives them a strong character, because it feels as if they do not need the platform, they are independent. The photos of people who walk towards or who look in the direction of the camera obtain a dependent aura, as if they need me to exist.

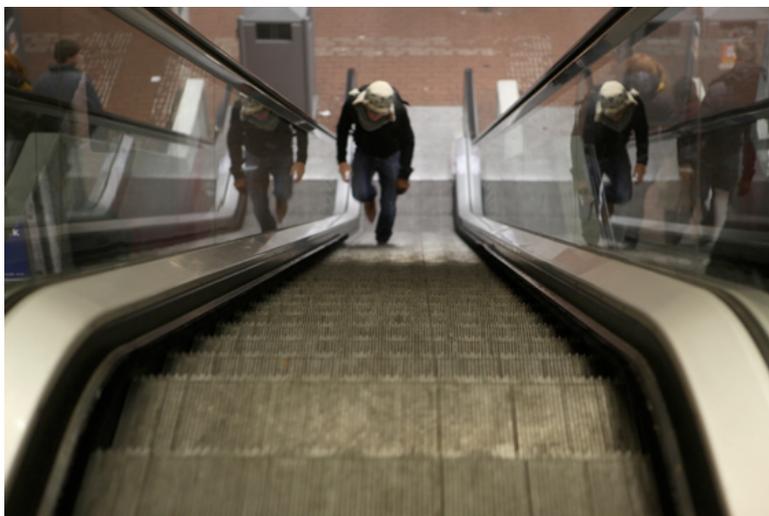
## **Objects**

Besides people being singled out there is also an amount of singled out objects in many of my photos. Often, this object

is a lamppost. In these photos the lens is pointed from the bottom of the lamppost upwards directly towards the light of the lamppost. In the background we see the sky or a tree behind the lamppost, no other lampposts or other sources of light can be discerned. This gives the objects shot a strong form of autonomy and simultaneously a feeling of alienation. They are strong enough to survive on their own, yet they are not part of the rest of the world. When I make a photo where there is both a singled out object and a depersonalised person in the frame, the person becomes as autonomic and as alienated as the object. The photos on the escalators are a good example of this. One is shot in the subway of NY (Image 12), the other in Utrecht Central Station (Image 13). Both photos are approximately framed in the same way; shot from the top of the escalator the lens pointing downwards and shot from the centre, which makes the space symmetrical. The way of framing turns both spaces into a closed space, only available to the object, the person and the photographer. It is like the person is been captivated for a moment by me in that space. The one in NY, we see him on the back, the one in Utrecht we see him from the front, yet we cannot see his face. They are impersonal bodies, trapped in a closed space that is just as autonomic and alienated as they are.



12 NY



13 Utrecht

### **Distant observer**

I have a great desire to become a part of the moments I photograph. However I can only function as a distant observant, instead of as a participant. I am conscious of this and therefore I hardly come close enough to capture an image of a sharp face, and if I do come close enough I make sure there is a strong source of light behind the person which

makes his/her face ambiguous. The distance of the photographer from the subject enables the viewer to observe a moment that someone else experiences without intruding. That is why in so many photos people are seen on the back; the photographer can only capture their moment, walk behind them in their road towards the future and can never become an active participant. The light behind the people creates a special atmosphere around the moment, as if it amplifies the importance of the moment. The framing and the source of light create something extra, as if the photographer is present at a turning point that his subject experiences without interrupting.

## **Conclusion**

The light that shines from the sun or lamppost can be seen as a spotlight for the people or object to make their moment seen by the world, yet the people or object are also a stage for the source of light, because they break the journey towards the lens. My use of light changes the person or object from an unseen person to a reference of a human being captured in, which could be interpreted as in an imported moment in their life; the light creates depersonalised figures or shadows in an alienated space out of them. However the role of light is ambivalent; although light presents the people a stage to be seen by the world, light also makes them depersonalised. The photographer of these images, I, can only

be a distant observer of people whom I have no facial recognition of, I can never become an active participant in the world of my subject. I can only capture them as a depersonalised subject in a closed alienated space.

### **Connection with previous practice**

When I made this analysis of my own work, it was at the end of my week vacation on Schiermonnikoog. The first two days my girlfriend was accompanying me and we shot the short film, with ourselves as the only actors in the film. After writing the analysis, I realised that all the elements present in my photography, are present in this film. Most of the shots made of my girlfriend are of her back (see Image 1), and in the ones that are taken from the front, I use light in a way that you cannot see her face clearly. The role of light is again very important, it makes the main character depersonalised and unclear to the audience, the light is most of the time behind the actor and the lens points directly towards it (Image 14). The framing creates an autonomic, alienated person out of the main character. When I changed my project towards observational films, the above mentioned facets remained valid. Even when I filmed my father, I used light to create a shadow out of his body. This transformed his body into a vulnerable shadow image of someone I regard as untouchable in a way. My mother is also depersonalised; either there is a

wired glass window between her and the camera or she is filmed on her back. Again my role is limited to a distant observer who can only portray the ageing bodies of his parents from a certain distance, without facial recognition. I cannot play an active role in their ageing I can only notice it and capture it, as my way to preserve it. Thus changing to observational filmmaking seems as a logic decision, because it incorporates all elements present in my working methodology.



## Motivation and ambition

This chapter aims to analyse the underlying motivations for creating the work I produced throughout the year. By bringing this into perspective I seek to gain a better insight into why one project succeeded better than another.

### **Previous work**

I believe that in my previous work I wanted to portray an element of the way I saw the dichotomous nature in public space. I tried to show this by making dichotomous shots of our infrastructure, buildings and the human interaction with this public space. When I look at my work prior to my observational pieces, I see within each shot or within the combination of different shots a nature of contradiction arising. I want to portray this with a few examples of stills from shots in which I feel the show double emotions simultaneously.



Vulnerable & powerful



Distant, cold & warm



Cold, hard, but beautiful

In his book *Sculpture in time* Tarkovsky speaks about Leonardo da Vinci's painting *portrait of Ginevra Benci*, that he used as an example for one of his characters in his film *The Mirror* (Tarkovsky, 1986, p. 108-109).



'The picture affects us simultaneously in two opposite ways. [...] It is not possible to say what impression the portrait finally makes on us. It is not even possible to say whether we like the woman or not, whether she is appealing or unpleasant. She is at once attractive and repellent. [...] It is possible for us to see any number of things in the portrait, and as we try to grasp its essence we shall wander through unending labyrinth and never find the way out. We shall derive deep pleasure from the realisation that we cannot exhaust it, or to see the end of it. A true artistic image gives the beholder a simultaneous experience of the most complex, contradictory, sometimes even mutually exclusive feelings.' (Tarkovsky, 1986, p. 108-109).

I think this merging of opposing emotions when analysing the portrait of Benci that Tarkovsky speaks of in the quote is in a way present in my cinematography of public space. This element makes the actual shots strong, but the shot itself is only an observation of the dichotomous nature that I see in public space, they do not convey a clear story together, therefore the value of these dichotomous shots decrease.

### **From frustration to vulnerability**

'*Mirror* was not an attempt to talk about myself, not at all. It was about my feelings towards people dear to me; about my relationship with them; my perpetual pity for them and my own inadequacy-my feeling of duty left unfulfilled.' (Tarkovsky, 1986, p. 134).

As Tarkovsky writes in his book he was criticised because *Mirror* was too much of a self-portrait. I think the quote serves as an appropriate comparison for the process I went through this year. At the beginning of this year my aim was to make a piece that reflected my personal issues. I had difficulties with the atmosphere and ambience of the city of Rotterdam, problems with simultaneously letting go of and holding on to the environment I grew up in and my problems with the shallowness of public interaction. I wanted to tailor these problems into an eloquent, artistic comment. Looking back I think that the inspirations stemming from negative

feelings were not always the best motivations for writing my script. I wanted the main character to become an alias for my frustrations, however, in my screenplay this character became a person that walks frustrated through a city he dislikes without encountering any real problems. The film would have merely portrayed a passive, frustrated guy walking through an alienating environment instead of examining where these frustrations came from and without seriously reflecting on these frustrations. The motivation for this project was based on frustrations without presenting an alternative or a goal to achieve to overcome these frustrations. With my screenwriting qualities at that time, the project became an uninteresting portrait of a frustrated character.

In the next project the connection to my work was limited to fascination. I had no clear idea what the story was about, but I started with shooting images, because in the way I framed them they fascinated me. The feeling of alienation was still very present in this work, but it did not originate from a frustration, it was stemmed from a desire to shoot these images in this perfect framing. The motivations therefore never became closer than a deep urge to make these images and to create a story of desire out of them. The feeling of desire emerged from editing images of several alienating public spaces. Because my motivation never developed further than a fascination, I was not able to create an interesting narrative

out of it. Subsequently, I sought to examine the reason why in my observational films the tone is very personal, while the narrative it expresses is universal. I came to realise that this question relates to my choice of subject. Choosing my personal frustrations as starting point or the changing perception I have of my parents gives the project an entirely different view. Now my position was not me against the world, but a very fragile perception of the ageing bodies of my parents. The ageing bodies of my parents is a subject that is so personal and important to me, that I felt the only possible way of speaking on this subject would be to be as honest as possible. I revealed my heart and soul, without any façade. I expressed all the emotions that I felt when seeing my parents naked. It hurt to write this honest on the subject, because I place myself and my subject in a very vulnerable position. Precisely because the subject is so close to me it makes it extremely hard to write this sincere about our changing relationship. When I emailed the text to my parents I was nervous, but I knew that they were going to like it, because the sincerity would make them accept the (at times) painful observation. I hope that my future works will have the same honesty and the same degree of expressing myself openly and honestly.

## Conclusion

In this thesis I described the development of my project during the tenure of this graduation year. It commenced with writing a screenplay that was based on frustrations, my main character serving as an alias for my frustration and therefore creating an uninteresting, passive, frustrated character, and concluded with a profound emotional triptych about my relation to my family. In the triptych I have been able to employ a level of sincerity and emotion that I wanted to create when I started this master. My position in these films and my relation to the subject are crucial. My relation to the subject enabled me to write and film with a voice that communicated my deepest thoughts and fears on the subject and on my changing relation to the subject, without compromise. This relation serves as an internal compass for me to be able to feel if what I write or film contributes to the story I want to tell. Building on these features, I was able to reach congruence in my film between disparate elements, including observational writing and a distinct style of cinematography. Eventually, this project did not only lead to my graduation film, but it also revealed an entirely new and valuable way of image making to me; observational filmmaking.

## Annotation; relation to project

### ***Solaris & Stalker***

Tarkovsky's *Solaris* and *Stalker* (Andrei Tarkovsky, 1979) are an important inspiration for this project. What I find intriguing about these films is their intensity, his films are not easy to watch it, because his work is extreme. When I watch it, especially *Stalker*, I feel as if he slowly eats my insides with a teaspoon. It is so sincere, so vulnerable, that you feel he really put in everything he got. He expresses his deepest and most difficult thoughts to the audience. This is the same method I sought to use in my observational films. When I wrote it, it was very hard and hurtful to write this sincere, but as a result of this, it became the best work I made so far.

When comparing the relationship of the main character in my Schiermonnikoog video and *Solaris*, I find it intriguing that in *Solaris* there is a calmness in the relationship between Kelvin and Hari. There seems not to be any urgency in their acts. Kelvin seems unable to become upset about seeing his wife again who killed herself because he left her, maybe because he suffered so much that he is unable to feel any emotions. However, deep down as a viewer you sense the awareness within Kevin that he has to make a decision if he is

going to erase her from his memory for good. As an example, there is one conversation that stands out for me. Hari asks Kelvin when they speak about her suicide: 'Did you think about me?' He replies: 'Yeah, but not always.' I find this particularly fascinating because normally when people ask someone who mourns over a loved one, they want him to stop thinking about him/her all the time. But when one is directly confronted with the person one mourns over one would be eager to say that you thought about him/her all the time. Thus I find this nuance in Kelvin's sentence interesting.

I argue that the scenery in Tarkovsky's *Solaris* works better to create a sense of alienation than the scenery in Sodenberghs *Solaris*. Whereas the form of the spaceship is round in *Solaris*, in Sodenberghs it has a stretched out shape.. This circle form creates a sense of repetition and stagnation. It appears as if they do not progress at all on this ship. This enforces the feeling of being captivated in a repetitive relationship without offering a solution.

### **Steven Sodenberghs *Solaris***

Steven Sodenberghs *Solaris* is interesting in the depth experience of the interaction between Kelvin and Rheya. Their relationship is much more intense, Kelvin seems to fall in love with her again, while in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*, Kelvin

seems to immediately understand that erasing her is inevitable. By falling in love with Rheya again, Kelvin allows his own earthly rationale to be replaced by a new Solaris rationale. This was extremely interesting for my dance video, as the main character had to be convinced that the woman he changes is real and not imaginary. We also see scenes from the past of how their relationship on earth was. This gives a better image of how their relationship evolved, yet it also makes it a bit too explanatory, which I do not find completely necessary. The relationship of my characters in the Schiermonnikoog film is similar to that of the relationship of Kelvin and Hari. The woman in the red jacket has committed suicide, and the boy is confronted with her in a different reality.

### ***Impro***

The book *Impro* by Keith Johnstone has been an eye-opener. The book focuses mainly on improvisational theatre, but the content spreads across wider areas as social behaviour science, education and anthropology. He discusses four topics: statuses, spontaneity, narrative skills and masks and trance. In all four chapters he presents a new perspective on these subjects. He is convinced that our educational system suppresses our fantasy and creativity. He also believes that everybody is able to come up with a story; he tells about

tests that he did with people and they all could tell a story as long as they were convinced they were not responsible for it. He sees the world as a constant display of status power. He believes that actors only have to know their status as a way to create theatre. This was very helpful to me, because in the book he describes how different statuses and status changes are all we need for drama. This is exactly what I do in my observational films; I describe and visualise the changing relations between my family and me. The book has presented me with a different perspective on how to create drama, in working with actors, but also in working with narrative.

### ***The Catcher in the Rye***

*The Catcher in the Rye* is an important book to me. The endless stroll through New York of main character Holden is very recognisable to me. He distances himself from his direct surrounding and has problems to relate to anyone, besides to people who are far away (his sister Phoebe who is at his parents' house, which he cannot visit). By distancing himself from his direct surroundings he alienates himself in big city. New York becomes the personification of all his problems: The phoniness of the people around him, their concerns with their status and their way of acting. I sought to portray a similar form of alienation in a big city in my film. Except in my film

they are alienated by the way of framing and by the fact no other recognisable figures will appear on screen. Rotterdam would serve the same function as New York in *The Catcher in the Rye*. Cold, disharmonic, desolated and filled with emptiness.

### ***The Thing from Inner Space***

In his essay *The Thing from Inner Space*, Žižek analysis several Tarkovsky's films, among others *Solaris*. There is one passage I find particularly interesting:

'One is even tempted here to formulate this Tarkovskian logic of the meaningless sacrifice in the terms of a Heideggerian inversion: the ultimate Meaning of sacrifice is the sacrifice of Meaning itself. The crucial point here is that the object sacrificed (burned) at the end of *Solaris* is the ultimate object of Tarkovskian fantasmatic space, the wooden dacha standing for the safety and the authentic rural roots of the Home [...] Does this mean that we encounter here nonetheless a kind of Tarkovskian "traversing of the fantasy", the renunciation to the central element whose magic appearance in the midst of the strange countryside at the end of *Solaris* and *Nostalgia* provided the very formula of the final fantasmatic unity? No, because this renunciation is functionalized in the service of the big Other, as the redemptive act destined to restore spiritual Meaning to Life.'

As I understand the above written quote is that Tarkovsky's main characters end up sacrificing their most treasured Object; the Object that serves as a base for security, love and harmony. By sacrificing this Object to the big Other, this sacrifice becomes the ultimate sacrifice to the big Other enabling the big Other to allow everyone else to keep their most treasured Objects, in a way to allow the world to keep spinning. I find this analysis from Zizek very interesting because when I analyse my Schiermonnikoog film, there is no sacrifice for the boy. He finally finds her and is allowed to be with her again without losing her again. If their meeting would have happened earlier in the film, there would be room for him losing her again and there would be room for him to make a resolute decision of forgetting her/letting her go (sacrifice, as happens in Tarkovsky's *Solaris*) or to pursue in a new reality to stay together (as happens in Sodenberghs *Solaris*).

## Bibliography

### Literature

- Johnstone, K. (1979) *Impro. Improvisation and the Theatre*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Salinger, J.D. (1951) *The Catcher in the Rye*. New York City: Little, Brown and Company.
- Tarkovsky, A. (1986) *Sculpting in time*. Berlin: Ullstein Verlag.

### Internet

- Zizek, S. (1991) *The Thing from Inner Space*.  
<http://www.lacan.com/zizekthing.htm>

### Film

- Sodenbergh, S. *Solaris*, 2002.
- Tarkovsky, A. *Solaris*, 1972.
- Tarkovsky, A. *Stalker*, 1979.