ELSEWHERE, EVERYWHERE

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a film by ISABELLE INGOLD and VIVIANNE PERELMUTER

A young man in a room somewhere in England. On a computer screen, images from all over the world. One click is all it takes to cross borders.
But it's the tale of another journey that we witness unfolding in bits and pieces, through text messages, chats, phone conversations, and an interview at the immigration office, that of Shahin, a 20-year-old Iranian man who fled his homeland alone.

INTERVIEW WITH
ISABELLE INGOLD and VIVIANNE PERELMUTER

Isabelle Ingold and Vivianne Perelmuter, you once met a young Iranian refugee in Greece. His name was Shahin. You celebrated his 20th birthday with him on the beach. You then kept in touch with him by email and through chatting, but also occasionally by phone, for many months, and you followed his journey from Greece to England.

At what point did the idea of making a film out of this encounter come up, considering that you hadn't filmed Shahin at any time?

Vivianne Perelmuter: We actually filmed him on the day when we met him. But the need for this film arose when we saw him again in England and he had radically changed. He was no longer the radiant young man we had met in Greece. At the time, he had just been released from prison, he was living in a camp, and had gone through hard times, but he was joyful, "confident in the future" in his own words, curious about everything: discovering new horizons, new ways of life, meeting new people. But when we met him again in England a year later, he seemed both extinct and angry. He had become suspicious of everything, to the point of wanting to avoid any new encounters. As if it was bound to be a bad meeting. So, he stayed pent up in his room, spent his nights watching the world through the Internet and slept during the day. He had become a different person altogether. This is how the need for this film arose, the need to make a film in order to understand,

to understand what had happened to him, from the inside.

How was this sound and written material created, and why did you decide to play on such different types of narration?

V.I: The importance of the sound material, of the narrative sound threads, is first of all the choice of the off-screen. There's a gap between what we learn from the character and what we see on the screen. We don't see the person or persons who speak or tell, we don't see what they are talking about but only what the young man is looking at or could be looking at on the internet. Focusing on the net, and leaving the rest, the essentials out of the picture, is linked to Shahin's concrete situation in England, but it was also in line with our desire to place the viewer outside of his usual processes of recognition. We wanted the spectator to be disoriented at times, to feel about in the dark somehow. It is all about the sensitive, and it

can resonate with the spectators' experiences and thus engage them in another relationship with the images, with Shahin's story. Just in the same way as Shahin's story can resonate with silhouettes, other lives which are just glimpsed passingly on the surveillance cameras.

Isabelle Ingold: From that point on, the elements of the different narrative threads imposed themselves. The conversations with his mother, to whom Shahin is very close, the extracts from the Immigration Office questionnaire, which are also a way of documenting precisely. Not words to be believed, but documents. What questions are asked? What questions are not asked? Shahin reads the questions and his answers. It was important to us, even though his voice is fragile, that he too could revisit what he has been through. There was something performative for him. The different narrative threads have different tones, they intermingle, complement each other but also contradict each other. Like the life of a being. The

film's narrative framework is neither linear nor smooth, it's a puzzle. But the asylum procedure requires that migrants should transform their lives into a specific narrative. Literature does that too, except that in the asylum procedure, the rules are very rigid. The narrative has to be logical, clear, unambiguous, monolithic and verifiable. But life is not like that. We wanted to propose another narrative, a «counter narrative», to make people feel that there is in fact nothing linear in a person's life, that life is nebulous, contradictory, filled with grey areas.

How did you collect all these images and was this collection work carried out in parallel with the editing and elaboration of the various sound and written data or, on the contrary, was it done on the basis of a preliminary structure? Indeed, at a great many moments, one notices subtle links between text and images.

I.I: It was really done in parallel with the editing for almost a year. First, we started by looking for images, and then there was a constant back and forth movement between editing and searching on the internet. We had an idea for a sequence, we went on the net, and then chance, something we weren't looking for, gave us another idea, gave a different direction to the editing, sometimes branching it off. It was practically a permanent «shooting» and editing process. Strangely enough, we had the feeling that we were shooting, filming, even if it wasn't us holding the camera. In fact, nobody was holding the camera. Most of the footage was live webcams, we were watching them in real time. We were doing a real job of location scouting, comparable to the classic documentary approach. We came back to the same places, at different times of the day, under different lights or during different seasons. And then the unforeseen would come up, because the unforeseen always comes up. We felt like we were travelling through the Internet. We lived in different time zones. We would set our alarm clock to be there, to be in Siberia or Asia or

wherever. And then there was the waiting... getting used to waiting.

V.P: Yes, watching for a long time what is not meant to be really watched, which is rather just a flow somehow. Starting from Shahin's concrete situation as he observed the world through the internet, we invested it freely. We went there. But what can we see there? The internet, do these cameras reveal something of the world? It was a question of dealing with these images, which are either surveillance images or images promoting tourist places, but it was also necessary to do something about them, that is to say to extract them from their initial function (surveillance or consumption), to extract not the crime, the explosion, the accident, the spectacular, but the «almost nothing», the infinitesimal. To act against them in order to release a presence in the real world. Of course, there is the harshness of the world, its worrying state, but not only that, there is also wonder. Dealing with these images was above all not to be content with restoring

a violence that one purports to denounce.

Except that you take a very particular type of images, obviously, which has nothing to do with what he's looking at. Was the idea of surveillance cameras there at the outset?

V.I: Yes, it was linked to Shahin's situation, not only when he was glued to his computer in his room, but his whole journey in a world that is both so open and so partitioned, controlled, with its flows and its non-flows. And then there's the fact that one day Shahin showed us a video that came from a surveillance camera with an explosion at a gas station. This struck us of course, and above all made us want to open up a wider reflection on the profusion of images, on a world where the demarcation between far and near becomes blurred, with a new dimension of exchanges and solitude. We said to ourselves: we will not seek the explosion but its opposite, «the infra-

ordinary» as Perec says.

Was the idea of this evolution imagined at the outset or did it impose itself in the mixed trajectory of the film and the character during the editing process?

V.P: The idea was there at the beginning, but it built up as the editing progressed. We didn't want viewers to be challenged solely on the level of their understanding, their intelligence. It had to be a physical experience. There had to be, physically, something of Shahin's journey. The point was to accompany his sensations, his transformation. The first images are grainy and dark. They are roads, no man's lands, and little by little all the states emerge one after the other, all the strata through which Shahin passed: the wonder of a new world, the world of cities with their lights at night. Then the first silhouettes appear and finally the first faces. It is a slow approach, like discovering a new place, or a new person.

You don't know right away, it's progressive. There can be reversals, snags, surprises or disappointments.

By Yvan Flasse Brussels January 2020

FILMOGRAPHY

ISABELLE INGOLD

HIGHWAY REST STOP (2016 - doc - 55') **A SMALL HOUSE IN THE GHETTO** (2009 - doc - 52') **IN THE NAME OF THE MAYOR** (2004 - doc - 58') **A PLACE ON EARTH** (2001 - doc - 54') **NORTH BY MEMORY** (1996 - doc - 30')

VIVIANNE PERELMUTER

BREATHS (2017/2018 - art video at the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature - Paris) **IN SITU/ON LINE** (2016 - webdoc) **UNCOMMON GROUND** (2015 - doc - 30' - installation art in Lorraine & Los Angeles) **UNCERTAIN TIMES** (2014 - feature film - 114') **BEAR** (2006 - doc - 52') **DESCRIPTION OF A STRUGGLE** (2004 - doc - 25') **A PLACE ON EARTH** (2001 - doc - 54') **NORTH BY MEMORY** (1996 - doc - 30')

TECHNICAL DETAILS

2020 - 63'- Belgium - Colour/B&W - VOSTENG

DIRECTORS Isabelle Ingold I Vivianne Perelmuter
EDITING Isabelle Ingold I Vivianne Perelmuter
SOUND EDITING Clément Claude I Nathalie Vidal I Mikaël Barre
MIXING Benoit Biral
PRODUCER Julie Freres
PRODUCTION MANAGER Vincent Terlinchamp

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