

From the Creation: Texts by Camila José Donoso, Fernando Lavandero and Tiziana Panizza



Figure 1: Frame of the film Casa Roshell. Mexico. 2017

Transfictions¹ or for a new trans-feminist methodology in cinema

Camila José Donoso

Note: What you are about to read are notes taken at different times that contain some thoughts and the early work of a theoretical perspective around the idea of “trans-fiction”. This is an introduction to a more extensive analysis. Later, the second part of the article, I include a mini-history of how I made my second film, Casa Roshell..

The idea of *Trans-fiction* began after filming *Naomi Campbell*, *Casa Roshell* and *Nona, si me mojan, yo los quemo*, films that have certain methodologies in common and “feelings” in terms of the limits between the documentary and fiction. The search of *Transfiction* is to consider how limits are blurred

between the categories of cinema, and how a film can transit throughout multiple forms of representation. The contrary of considering this new concept would be to reduce it to a new category of cinema, like cinema labels “hybrid”, or “nonfiction” have done, or the very worst, “docu-fiction”. New terms that create new subcategories. *Transfiction* is not a genre at all, but rather a methodology, a way of questioning the ethics that dominate cinema.

Part of the questions are related to the work of Pasolini and that specifically cinematographic, from his essay “Semiology of reality”, where he creates new concepts for re-thinking narrative units of ci-

nema. For example, Pasolini theorizes the images and the sounds, from the graphemes and the phonemes, as well as of cinemas and axioms, in addition to the verbs of the cinema in an attempt to right away abandon the inheritance of literature, thinking of what is the actual cinematographic². At the same time, the ideas of a “shamanic” cinema by Raúl Ruiz, help understand that cinema is much more than a weapon to be used by reality, and that on the contrary, it should be an art that helps us to comprehend the most disjointed and imaginary sides of life.

The three movies that I made, work closely with characters that are normally considered marginalized or outsiders. These are terms that I do not agree with, and I am reminded of the words of the recently deceased Agnès Varda, when she would get angry every time they spoke about the marginality of her characters and how outside society they were. She would always say “*Outside what society? Maybe they are marginalized for you*”³ (to the journalist). An answer to building a new perspective with cinema made by women, is also changing the eye and the place from where one speaks (what in Brazil they refer to as “*el lugar de fala*”). For this reason, it seems important to me to analyze the relation and theorize in regards to the methodology of *trans-fictitious* work, above all because it comes from outside the hegemonic production of art.

This idea proposes an ethic between the work of the director and “*his subject of investigation*”, questioning the distant and utilitarian relationship that often appears in certain documentary practices. In *transfiction*, the creative process is centered on the friendly relationship made between author and characters. What Jean Rouch called “*The anthropology of friendship*”, and that from my vision of the *queer* and feminist theory, identifying with the affective link that allows us to think and configure cinema, in a communal act.

Breaking with the vertically organized structure of filmmaking teams, seeking to go into greater depth in affective relationships that create a film. Various questions arise when dealing with a biographical work without searching for a lineal or easy to understand narrative. First, when is the real being filmed? Does a true audiovisual document really exist? What happens to self-representation? When do you act in front of the camera and when do you

tell the truth? What is a documentary record and what is a fiction? What difference is there when working with real people and actors? How can cinema generate links to what’s happening politically?

In some way this theorization of the practice of the cinematographic job is directly related to education and the transforming ability of cinema. When I released my films *Naomi Campbell* and *Casa Roshell*, one of my greatest satisfactions with the audience was the empathy and identification with transsexual women and transvestites. There was an educational and democratizing power in the showing of the films, where the lives of these women were understood without cliché and from somewhere outside the stereotype that had never been seen before. Many people, from different social classes and latitudes, told me that for the first time they could finally understand what it was like to be trans, and could see those bodies in a different light, those bodies that were always surrounded by violence and then victimization. We carried out a peripheral circuit in different cultural centers in low-middle class neighborhoods both in the capital cities of Chile and Mexico, as well as in smaller towns where supposedly people do not see “more artistic cinema”. I proved through experience and taking my films where no one else goes, that this is false. People without a “supposed education as a spectator” have a higher sensitivity than experienced film festivals audiences. The analyses I received in these shows corroborated the meaning that brought about my following investigation regarding “*Transfronterismos, cine, política y educación*”, with references such as the book by Alain Bergala, *Hipótesis del cine: pequeño tratado sobre la transmisión de cine*.

I decided to take a break from mainstream cinema, I decided to go to the border of a city that no one cares about, like the abandoned city of Arica, where the desert still hides mine fields from the time Chile took over part of southern Peru and Bolivia’s access to the ocean. A certain white supremacy is present among Chileans, and they feel economically superior to their peers. The security of capitalism is “fictionized” with new shopping malls and public buildings on the road to the border, where the architecture is the same as the city. This military city is full of struggles, history, that cinema is able to critically question. That was the main idea

of the Transfrontera project. It was to bring to art what had been undone, our cultural ties to the Andean community.

Trans-fronterisms, cinema, politics and education

In 2016, I began to carry out an event dedicated to cinema on the border seeking to bring together filmmakers and people interested in learning about audiovisual arts, from places all over Chile, Peru and Bolivia. The first two events take place in Arica and the third in Tacna. The invitation put emphasis on finding people who didn't have access to art education, much less film school. In these three countries, schools of any artistic discipline are located in the capital cities. A syncretistic group was formed from the Amazon jungle, the Peruvian mountain region, the Bolivian desert highlands, and the north of Chile. There were activists, anthropologists, communication majors, musicians, actors, farmers, and housewives. The *trans* concept applied to each one of the school's activities, considering it was transdisciplinary, transgenerational, transterritorial, transcultural and we could go on and on inventing words to describe the participants. The words transgress and transfeminism also appeared. And above all was the idea of a transborder, a place where struggles and patriotism meet and are very present. Especially in the Chilean part, in which racism and white supremacy dominate a city like Arica, where the majority of the population is military personnel.

The objective is analyzing this transfrontier practice, together with the theoretical ideas of a "non-teaching" with cinema, that we share with Ignacio Agüero, important Chilean documentary filmmaker that participates in the event and is looking at education via his project "Cinema is school", together with the pioneer Alicia Vega, who held cinema workshops for boys and girls from the military dictatorship. The workshop was filmed by Ignacio in the film *Cien niños esperando un tren* and that later would film 30 years later the last workshop of Alicia as part of his other documentary, *Cómo me da la gana 2*. For the last 4 years, Ignacio, via "Cero en conducta" in collaboration with the Universidad de Chile, has held cinema workshops in public schools for boys and girls in Santiago and

other regions. This investigation is greatly influenced by the work of Brazilian Cezar Migliorin (who released his book *Pedagogía del ló, Cine, educación y política*) where he also looks as his experience as a teacher in an educational project he carried out in over 240 schools, throughout 26 states in Brazil.

When we began Transfrontera, rather than feeling like an authority in wanting to be "experts", we proposed "non-teaching" as an educative practice and inspired in the thoughts of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Related to this is the following quote taken from the prologue of the book on Migliorin written by Agüero, which makes a lot of sense in this thesis:

That a young person could believe in himself as someone capable of creating, not necessarily becoming a filmmaker or artist, but rather a person with a creative autonomy that he could practice in (and against) a system that has kept him from believing it

Notes

1 I purposefully use the prefix *Trans* in the majority of the things that I do (for the time being). This prefix allows me to disassemble concepts that are so structured and political such as the border, or fiction.

2 This question by Pasolini can be tied to the film by Ignacio Agüero "Como me da la gana 2" where they ask different directors in Chile that are filming in 2015, What is the cinematographic?.

3 In the Nueva York Film Festival edition, Susan Sontag presented her ópera prima, *Duet for Cannibals*, and Agnès Varda, *Lions Love (. . . and Lies)*. A misogynist journalist and critic, Jack Kroll, interviewed them in an interrupted conversation that shows how difficult it was to even speak about your own films in those years, being woman and director. Their patience is admirable in terms of smoking and being interrupted by a critic full of prejudices and clichés that these two great minds completely mend.

Fiction - documentary

Fernando Lavanderos

Sometime after finishing *Y las Vacas Vuelan*, some producers offered to make a remake of the film, but this time being completely fiction. In other words, I would recreate the entire film in a more professional format with a staging built to achieve the same effect. I told them that it was impossible, given that the film had captured one-of-a-kind moments that were unrepeatable. They argued that it was absolutely possible.

Since I began to make films, I have thought about the value of these spontaneously recorded images. Do they have a special value? Does it matter if the projected image was completely staged or if it was recorded of an event without much intervention?

For a long time now, the documentary has discussed intervention. Classic documentary filmmakers argued about whether a documentary could contain a truth and how much intervention had been made in the process of filming it. The discussion of Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin as to how real were the characters at the end of *Crónica de un verano* is iconic and representative of the very themes of the documentary or the recurring topic as to the interventions of Flaherty in *Nanook of the North*, also represent this endless discussion. It is well known that all interventions in that film, despite no one doubting the documentary value out of the footage, but if the level of intervention had been much less, would its documentary value increase? I tend to think so because let's imagine with the incredible advance of technology in the near future, we could make a fiction that could exactly remake *Nanook of the North*, even with different versions, but the original will always be the original and it is here where the documentary value lies: in being a unique document.

Let think about the well-known photograph of *The Kiss* by Robert Doisneau: Years after it was printed, the photographer confessed it was a staged act and that the couple were hired models. Does the impression change if we know that it was staged? I would say that this change is undeniable. We see it, understand it, and interpret it in a different

way when we know that they are acting and it is not the spontaneous record of a kiss between two people in the street. Doisneau himself hated that photograph, saying it was a superficial, commercial image, a perverted image and he was from the Cartier – Bresson school. He was looking for that unique photograph, the capturing of a spontaneous moment.

Depending on the level of the intervention of the photograph, it could have very different interpretations. For example, if we knew that it was all staged, the couple is acting, the people passing by, including the background could be created in photoshop, then it would be an interpretation based on that staging construct. But the interpretation changes upon knowing what really happened in the photo, in other words, that the couple is acting, but the other people walking on the street are not. In other words, it is a fiction within a real scenario, which is totally different. Even so, if everything had been spontaneous, if Doisneau walking with his camera on the streets of Paris would have run into the couple, he would have taken out his camera and taken the picture without the couple having noticed. It is another interpretation and I am not speaking in qualitative terms. In other words, it is not better or worse, just different works that are interpreted differently.

It is clear that every fictional piece of work has also an irreplaceable character. The interpretation of an actor or actress during a take, or the communion of people aligned in their roles, creates a unique cinematographic moment, but more controlled. Reality has an infinite complexity and the profile made of a fictional character will never reach the complexity level in terms of the immeasurable background, characteristics, experiences, traumas, etc., that each person has.

Today, based on the usual practice of mixing documentary and fiction (something that has always been done by others, since the films of the Lumiere brothers until today), in some spheres, it has been established that it does not matter whether it is fic-

tion or documentary: films are films. Regardless of how the work is done, what is important is that it reaches the audience. It seems to me that classifying everything together as “films” is ignoring the documentary value, given that in effect everything could be fiction under the same term.

We are very interested in the combination between the documentary and fiction. I have experimented with hybrid films and I think there is a lot to explore for in the crossroads of these two genres. Therefore, it seems that everything is possible, like, for example, occupying the documentary format to portray fiction, like in mockumentaries.

Nevertheless, the basis of a fake documentary is making fiction look like a documentary. In its own very intention is the declaration of value of that documented as a level of representation that has unique attributes.

I think the experience is different when the hybrid format is addressed from different angles. Each one sees a fiction film, there is a tacit agreement between the spectator and the filmmakers that the first will submit himself to the fantasy proposed by the film, making the necessary credibility concessions, given that the spectator wants to detach himself and be able to “experience the film”. On the other hand, when one is exposed to a documentary, there is a constant questioning as to the representation that is being done of reality. Topics like the spontaneity of characters, the intervention of the filmmakers, and the point of view are reoccurring in the documentary spectator, questioning that certainly is well used by the great documentaries in order to make a larger reflection on the layers of representation and to assume their intervention.

The spectator sees a fictional film or documentary in a different way. Therefore, I believe that the analysis of the work is more successful if it is proven that it is based on fiction or on the documentary. It is different to base it on fiction; in other words establishing the tacit agreement that it is based on the very questioning of the documentary. In literature, this is very clear upon separating fiction from nonfiction.

For example, when I made *Y las vacas vuelan* and *Sin Norte*, I wanted to establish that they were *fiction – documentary films* and not docufiction or docudrama, nor mockumentaries. Not that I have

something against these formats, but rather because it seemed important to establish that the basis was fiction, an invented story with an invented character that is found in real circumstances and interacts with real people, producing the character–person interaction. These films rely on the tacit agreement with the spectator from the beginning, telling him that what he is going to see is fiction, he can relax and play the game. From here, one can arrive at moments that are authentic and his reality experience grows more complex. I believe this is fundamental if one wants that the fiction characters exist, given that it gives them a world and an atmosphere that is only possible in the tacit agreement. The people portrayed do not need this, since they already exist, their credibility in terms of existence is already established.

It seems to me that these films would be very different if they were based on the documentary, because it would not allow fiction characters to exist, they would stand out in the documentary atmosphere. For this reason, I make the distinction and coin the term *fiction – documentary*.

Non-fiction has a unique, particular charm that is unmanageable and unrepeatably. For this reason, people always want to know if something is fiction or non-fiction and would probably change their opinion if it were the other scenario. How the film reaches the spectator is not only the result, many things complement the work.

Human beings look for what’s authentic and want to differentiate it from the “fake”. An original by Van Gogh will always be that. It will cost a fortune and although there is an identical, exact replica, it will have almost no value compared to the original.

In that zone of definitions between the documentary and fiction, what distinguishes it from one or the other is the level of intervention. From one perspective, all the films are fiction and from another, all films are documentaries, but intervention by the author on reality is where the difference lies. Clearly, the limit is vague, but the nuances will always be relevant, like for example, being able to establish a basis, between fiction and the documentary.

Could we make a new *Y las Vacas Vuelan* that is completely fiction? Of course, but it would not be *Y las Vacas Vuelan*.

Conversations with Tiziana Panizza¹*

What does it really mean to fictionalize something? What is understood as fiction portrayed from a documentary format? I like the difference between the direct North American cinema French *cinéma vérité*. The first said that they filmed like a fly on the wall, thousands of eyes looking at everything, but without intervening, as if they were invisible. Meanwhile, the French said that they were a fly in the soup, with no intentions of being invisible, because you always alter what you are filming. I'm interested in the filmmaker as a builder of reality, a detonator for the things that occur based on a situation that this causes.

Robert Bresson saw himself as a *fateur* that created the conditions so that 'a certain real' would appear. A control that he later releases, so that a certain outcome would occur in front of the camera. This succession of events he defined as 'the cinematographic'. In this context, a fiction device that allows a type of fissure by which the real occurs, the filmable, what distinguishes cinema from other arts.

In this sense, *El Astuto mono Pinochet* by Perut+Osnovikoff, something interesting happens, that is based on situations that are pre-determined, there is an outcome for things that occur and that reveal a world that would not be possible to visualize without having first conditioned it based on a fiction device.

It is interesting to think in the use of archive material as fiction. The *found footage* is the appropriation of archive images in which its original meaning is undone in order to build another discourse. There is no concern for its origin, or if it exists, it is to transform it in the search for new meanings. In that sense, even domestic material can be redi-

rected, maybe not with the nostalgic sense of the memory, or used as historical proof. In general, the use of the image as historic illustration finds its credibility in the adequate contextualization. In the found footage, the contrary happens. The context is eliminated and therefore it passes into the territory of fiction. Sometimes, to warn or underline how that image was produced or to build a new reality based on it.

In *Tierra Sola*, there is a voiceover of a character that is expressed via text that appears on screen. It is an investigator that writes a letter to a colleague, telling him about his work; a compilation of ethnographic films recorded on Easter Island. Based on this finding, the archive material opens up other possible relations with the present on the island, making one look at it from the other side.

It is remarkable how Sandor, the character voiceover in *Sans Soleil* by Chris Marker, opened a new portal in which the combinations of fiction in the documentary are infinite. Marker builds this character, whose story articulates a series of images that relate in unexpected ways, although there is no apparent connection between them. That operation gave him freedom in the staging, without following a timeline, where there is no narration in the classic sense, due to cause-effect, but rather a series of associations shaped by the free writing of that voiceover. I believe that *Tierra Sola* comes from that genealogy.

Today, the type of fiction that most compels me is that which dislocates time, not just classic *racconto* of narration, but rather, as a present where past spectrums living in the present hide. In this sense, there are texts that interest me, like the speculative realism of Graham Harman and the lost futures of those which Mark Fischer speaks of in "Los Espectros de mi vida". I arrived at these interpretations by *Realismo*, by the dramatist Manuela Infante, whose work is an important reference, too.

There is an important element of fiction in the dystopias, especially that of 'the future is no longer

* This text comes from the answers given by director Tiziana Panizza during an interview carried out by the editors of the monographic of issue No. 39 of the *Comunicación y Medios Journal*, Valeria de los Ríos and Catalina Donoso.

what it used to be'. There are lost futures, those that were going to materialize without a doubt, but that finally didn't. Those futures are not erased, but rather live in the present and the challenge is how to touch on that via cinema, with tools that range from the recording and use of certain biographic devices, that are also a construction. In that crossroads, the free use of the archive footage can be a useful material. Asking oneself perhaps about the materiality of the image in the future, will it continue being a digital support? This speculative exercise, leads to thinking that perhaps in the near future, post-energy crisis, when we can no longer plug anything in, manual image processing practices in a dark room may return. Maybe the future of cinema will return to the celluloid, picture developing by hand with organic alchemy. Perhaps the future is analogue.

During the filming process I avoid using the computer, because daily life is very shaped by it. I prefer paper and pencil, because I predispose myself differently to work and with a higher level of concentration. I give the scenes names and I circle them, draw sketches and that helps me see how the sequences may have connections or possible digressions. The outcomes the materials allow are key in terms of the system of associations that the film may construct.

In this process, the theory of conjuntos helped me greatly, because although the scenes may be very different from others, there are almost always areas that intersect. If there are situations or scenes which are apparently unrelated, I work to find confluences, or possible combinations, that help to visualize a type of idea, that without that visual operation, would be impossible. I trust that that connection can occur in the staging, avoiding predictable roads or without narrative risk. I believe that this process expands cinema as a language and carries it into the territory of visual thought.

The documentary script is a literary tool in which elements of fiction encourage a more fluid writing, interpreting investigative aspects, to fill in what we don't know is going to happen because it depends on chance. The script has to allow generation of images based on a visual description, of few concepts. Neither should it be so technical, because that also affects the interpretation that must establish visions, "seeing the film" from the text,

making it imaginable for the person reading. For example, if I write: `a stranded whale on a deserted beach in Tierra del Fuego`, you can visualize that image.

We are probably not going to be envisioning the exact same image, light, frame, or the relation with the scene that comes before and after. The script is a general consensus of what will be seen, but my film, the one I want to film, that particularity that makes every film different according to who conceives it, challenges conformity. This is where cinema comes in.

