

**SELF-REFLEXIVE ONLINE  
DOCUMENTATION IN THE FILMS *CATFISH*,  
*FOUR-EYED MONSTERS* and *WE LIVE IN  
PUBLIC***



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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Film  
(Drama and Theatre Studies) at the University of Stellenbosch.

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March 2016

## **Declaration**

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## **Abstract**

It is widely held that the documentary mode of filmmaking is a subjective endeavor. Bill Nichols identifies an unspoken contract between the viewer and the filmmaker, that what is seen is to be believed. Often, when it comes to documentary films, viewers neglect to acknowledge how the filmmaker goes about in selectively interpreting “reality” for an audience. Bertolt Brecht believed that it is the encoder’s responsibility to make the viewer aware of construction processes in a given representation. In this way a critical involvement with the material is ignited and consequently the viewer distances herself emotionally from the representation. Self-reflexive modes of filmmaking foreground the subjective nature of film by highlighting the process of construction. The viewer is thus prevented from suspending her disbelief, and prompted to decode the material actively. These signifiers of reflexivity can be indicated by the overt involvement of the filmmaker and the inclusion of filmic equipment. The presence of the camera is often obvious in reflexive representations, and the viewer becomes acutely aware of how it might influence authentic behavior of the subject filmed. The viewer is therefore not always able to see how a subject might react in her natural environment. The camera essentially represents the presence of an observing other.

The documentaries to be discussed in this thesis all investigate subjects against a backdrop of social and interactive media. On these online platforms individuals are faced with the presence of gazing others who might interact or just voyeuristically observe. Here the subject internalizes the gaze and acts according to how she imagines the desire of the gazing other. The various social networking platforms documented in these films provide the individual with an environment in which she can construct and re-construct an image of self until she attains what she imagines is considered as ideal. A flexible form of narration is thus born due to the technical features characteristic of such online environments. The self might always go back and adapt and further manage/manipulate her image of self as she feels persistently surveyed by a community of gazing equals. Here there exists no gazing hierarchy: everyone is visible to everyone all the time, making selective self-fashioning and subsequent self-documentation challenging. The film and computer screens in which the self sees a reflection of her constructed self becomes something of a mirror: when the self witnesses her own reflection in this screen/mirror, she is faced with

psychological processes of self-contextualizing. She must attempt to live up to that which she believes is desired by her societal Other. The self, forever aware of the ubiquitous gazing others in these environments, is always adjusting her concept of self accordingly. Her constant re-adjustment of her mediated self in such environments serves as a form of self-documentation also orientated towards the imagined perception of an other. My thesis surveys the representational politics of the process of producing a filmic documentation of these processes of online self-documentation.

## Opsomming

Die dokumentêre film medium word dikwels aanskou as 'n subjektiewe genre. Bill Nichols glo dat daar 'n spesiale verhouding tussen die skepper van 'n film en die kyker bestaan: die kyker aanvaar dikwels bloot die inhoud wat vir haar voorgestel en namens haar geïnterpreteer word sonder om die skeppingsproses daaragter te bevraagteken. Volgens Bertolt Brecht is dit die skepper se verantwoordelikheid om 'n kritiese betrokkenheid by die gehoor te ontloot en emosionele verbintenis met die materiaal te verbreek. Die self-refleksiewe voorstellingsmodus maak die kyker bewus van die subjektiewe aard van film deur dat dit konstruksie prosesse blootstel wat op sy beurt die kyker aanmoedig om die materiaal intellektueel te aanskou. Sulke refleksiewe elemente kan aangedui word deur die blatante gebruik van die teenwoordige filmmaker en filmiese toerusting. Die soms duidelike teenwoordigheid van die kamera in self-refleksiewe dokumentêre voorstellings skep 'n bewusse in onder die kyker dat die subjek se optrede voor die kamera dikwels minder outentiek is as wat dit sou wees in die subjek se natuurlike omgewing. Basies, dui die kamera daarop dat 'n kykende ander bestaan.

Die dokumentêre wat ek gaan bespreek in hierdie tesis speel almal af teen 'n milieu van sosiale interaktiewe media. In sulke virtuele omgewings word die individu gekonfronteer met ander teenwoordige interaktiewe lidmate of selfs voyeuristiese toeskouers. Die subjek kan beïnvloed word in sulke omgewings deur die teenwoordigheid van 'n ander. Sy internaliseer die blik van 'n kykende ander en tree op volgens hoe sy haar voorstel die ander begeer. Die verskeie sosiale netwerk platvorms wat ondersoek word in hierdie dokumentêre skep 'n omgewing vir die individu waar sy 'n idee van die self kan vorm en weer hervorm. Hierdie proses kan voortgesit word totdat sy die beeld bereik van wat sy haar verbeel ideaal is. Die tegniese implementeering aan sulke virtuele omgewings skep die potensiaal vir buigsame narratiewe prosesse. Die self is daartoe instaat om keer op keer haar eie geskepte beeld van die self te manipuleer en aan te pas soos wat sy konstant dopgehou word in 'n omgewing waar gemeenskaplike waarneming die norm is. In dié omgewing bestaan daar nie 'n hiërargie onder die verskeie kykers nie: almal is daartoe instaat om na almal te kyk. Dit kompliseer selektiewe self-skepping en gevolglike self-dokumentasie aangesien die self voel sy word konstant dopgehou. Die rekenaar/filmiese skerm waarin die self haar eie refleksie gewaar dien as 'n tipe spieël: wanneer die self haar eie refleksie gewaar in

hierdie skerm/spieël, word sy gekonfronteer met psigologiese prosesse van self-konteksualisering. Die self, alwig bewus van die alomteenwoordige kykende ander in hierdie omgewings, moet probeer om te voldoen aan wat sy haar verbeelding is volgens 'n ander. Die individu se konstante aanpassing van haar virtuele self in sulke omgewings dien as self-dokumentasie wat gerig is op die voorgestelde persepsie van 'n ander. My tesis aanskou die filmiese voorstelling van verskeie dokumentêre wat handel oor aanlyn self-dokumentasie.

## **Acknowledgements**

Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation to the University of Stellenbosch for providing me with financial assistance towards the completion of this study.

I am also indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Annel Pieterse. Annel, thank you for your continuous encouragement and boundless patience with me during this time.

I would like to thank my parents for their confidence in my abilities to finish this project.

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# INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the self-reflexive methods of documenting the self as represented by the various documentary films, *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), *We Live in Public* (2009) and *Catfish* (2010). I specifically investigate how the self<sup>1</sup> as authoring agent of her own mediated image employs methods which contribute to the construction of self-representations. These films represent their subjects against a backdrop of social and interactive online environments. It is in this light that I explore how the self perceives of herself in relation to the (sometimes virtual) Other<sup>2</sup> and manages her mediated impression accordingly. Documenting on subjects who attempt to document the self online these filmmakers borrow from various documentary methods often resulting in hybrid forms of representation. While self-reflexive representational methods are dominant there is often an overlap between different modes: elements reminiscent of observational and participatory<sup>3</sup> modes of representation are evident. I look at how the chosen modes of documentary representations often mirror the process of subjects' self-documentation online as seen in the content of the films. By investigating the formal elements of the films in

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<sup>1</sup>The concept of 'the self' is used throughout this thesis as it underlines the construction processes that enable the individual to create her imagined and desired idea of herself into being. I often also refer to the "online self" or the "mediated self" – this refers to how the individual constructs and represents the impression of herself on any mediated platform.

<sup>2</sup>"Other" is used throughout this thesis in different ways. In chapter one I explain Jaques Lacan's theories on the mirror gazing self in which this term is further explored. In this thesis "the other" or "an other" (with a lowercase-o) refers to the opposite of the self. I use the term to refer to the public: an individual's online performance, for example, is directed at an other (the public who perceives the performance). I also refer to the self as "other" – when the self recognizes her image in the mirror she sees herself as a separate other. Other with a capital-O refers to Lacan's "Big Other". The Big Other speaks to the individual's imaginary ideas of an anonymous authoritative power. It is through the imagined eyes of this Other that the individual often conducts a performance of the self in accordance with how she imagines the Other might desire to perceive her.

<sup>3</sup> Bill Nichols refers to the observational and participatory modes of representation in order to clarify the classic documentary film movements, cinema vérité and direct cinema – two similar film methods which both champion realism (Nichols 2001:109-124). These movements are often confused with one another due to their stylistic similarity that maintain long takes and hand-held camera footage which ensure an "authentic" look. Direct cinema (which Nichols refers to as the observational mode) evolved in America during the 1960's and dictated that the story unfolds organically as the camera rolled. The documentarian was an objective and passive observer as opposed to a director who would participate - a significant aspect that sets the genre apart from the European cinema vérité movement (participatory mode) (Nichols 1991:165-167). Cinema vérité, which developed during the same era, required natural dialogue and authenticity of action. But unlike the direct cinema, this technique required that the filmmaker actively participates in the film as a subjective observer, combining observational and participatory filming. Basically, there is an awareness of the present filmmaker and her camera.

question, I examine the relationship between documentary film conventions and the conventions of online self-documentation.

Throughout cinematic history filmmakers like Michael Powell (*Peeping Tom* 1960) and Michelangelo Antonioni (*Blow-Up* 1966) enjoyed making use of such metaphors which criticize the constructed nature of cinema both in its content and in its form – making a film about someone who is making a film is rather obviously a critique on the cinema as a construct. Also many self-reflexive documentary films such as, *The Thin Blue Line* (1988), *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) have followed suit, allowing for film-making processes to be illuminated in an attempt to acknowledge the filmmaker's subjectivity and allow the viewer a position of active and critical decoding. In approaching a discussion on the documentation of the self on various internet platforms, as represented by an often self-reflexive documentary mode, it is important to acknowledge the subjective influence the filmmaker has in such a scenario.

Typical representational conventions characteristic to mainstream modes of filmmaking intend to allow the viewer to suspend her disbelief, which automatically leads to a less active assessment and critical engagement of the material seen, according to Liani Maasdorp (2011:208). This in turn can lead to the basic assumption that “what they see is ‘true’”, according to Bill Nichols (2001:125). A self-reflexive process of documentation employs an opposite philosophy. This leads to what Paul Ward refers to as the central debate concerned with the relationship between “reality and artifice” (2012:6). The self-reflexive filmmaker actively seeks to explicate the editing and filming processes for the viewer. This can be done through the filmmaker's acknowledgement of her presence through text, through visibility and through editing (Maasdorp 2012:33). These self-reflexive practices are reminiscent of Brechtian defamiliarization techniques, which allow the audience a distanced position of critical observation.

Many theorists believe that objectivity is an idealistic trait to strive for when attempting to represent a narrative by use of the documentary format (Katz & Katz 1988; Maasdorp 2011; Nichols 1991 & 2001; Ruby 1988). Katz and Katz assert: “the camera, not the viewer, determines what we see” and the filmmaker is the one who is responsible as they “determine not only what we will focus upon, but the angle, depth, and sharpness of focus, camera movement, and/or zooms” (1988:199). Perhaps the most fitting definition of the documentary mode would

be John Grierson's seminal statement that ultimately the documentary is "a creative treatment of actuality" (1966:6-8). The word "treatment" is often interchanged with "dramatization", which mirrors the documentarian's "desire and willingness to use actuality material to create a dramatic narrative", argues Winston (2008:107). Through this statement we see the filmmaker positioned as the one who attempts to represent actuality through means of subjective expression. Maasdorp agrees that subjectivity is absolutely inherent to the film-making process (2011:208). While self-reflexive methods acknowledge the filmmaker as authoring agent, these strategies also draw attention to the often complex relationship between the filmmaker and her subject.

In the three films under discussion the subject documented becomes involved (to varying degrees) in the filmmaking process, thus exercising agency in how she is to be documented and represented. In *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), filmmakers Arin Crumley and Susan Buice embark on a self-reflexive journey by re-telling the personal tale of their courtship through the filmic mode of documentation. Crumley and Buice, play "themselves" in this self-reflexive auto-documentary. Ondi Timoner, director of the documentary film *We Live in Public* (2009), chooses a "straightforward" or "un-obtrusive" mode of representation with subtle hints of self-reflexivity in her documentation of the social experiments of Internet pioneer, Josh Harris. Harris is documented as he produces a personal webcam surveillance experiment. His intention with this experiment is to document and archive the self via socially interactive online media. *Catfish* (2010), which documents the virtual relationship between two Facebook acquaintances, has its subject, Yaniv Schulman, self-reflexively becoming part of the construction of the documentary as he eventually steps into the role of investigative documentarian.

The producers of these films are not simply "filmmakers" or "documentarians". Instead, the compound noun "subject-filmmaker" more accurately reflects their position, since, to varying degrees, they occupy both roles in the production processes of the films under discussion. In assessing the dynamic of such a relationship in the construction process of a documentary film, certain questions come to mind as to the "authenticity" of the representation. Essentially the subject, who is also the producer, selects how the self will be represented and therefore placing the question of authenticity and subjectivity as central to this discussion.

It is important to understand that the online social networking platforms (SNSs) in which these subjects manage an impression of the self can serve as a mirror through which the individual can

recognize a constructed image of the ideal self. The act of looking at the self in a mirror is one-directional: the self reflexively gazes towards a reflection of herself that stares back at the material body situated in front of this mirror. Staring at my SNS profile picture or profile page<sup>4</sup> framed by the computer screen, I find a likeness to that of the mirror-gazing self. Sherry Turkle was the first to recognize the similarity between the socially networked self as framed by the computer screen and the mirror-gazing self, calling it the “mirror of the screen” (1999:643). The notion of the mirror raises a further point: platforms that enable the individual to gaze at the self in a self-reflexive manner provide the individual with an opportunity to embark on psychological processes of “selfing” or self-narration. In other words, these platforms facilitate the act of constructing a self and construing meaning through the re-cognition of the reflection of the self in the mirror or screen (Ochs & Capps 1996; Robertson 2007; Roberts 2011).

With the advent of social media and significant technical features, these “looking individuals” are provided with the opportunity to be actively involved in the representation of their image, representing and re-presenting the image of self as often and as excessively as they desire with the use of editing devices. When preparing a certain desired identity in front of the mirror, the individual might rely on make-up and styling choices for a particular effect. Online, this type of identity construction is sustained by manipulating image and text. In this thesis I also explore how in an online social milieu the self is no longer the sole observer faced with her own image. Rather, a participatory society is born where observers are multiple and gazing is mutual: all participating individuals simultaneously produce and consume content produced by the self and others that resultantly have an effect on how the self performs her online identity.

For me, it is exciting to note that the notion of the subject-filmmaker and the mirror-gazing self has relevance in terms of an arising global culture of individuals who have agency in how the image of the self is represented to the world. Social online theorist, Clay Shirky, insists that there currently exists a global culture that no longer purely consumes online material (2010:11). Rather, individuals are acting as “prosumers” of their own material, according to Nathan Jurgenson (2010:377). This term implies that the self acts as both producer and consumer of her

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<sup>4</sup>Opening an account on a majority of SNSs requires that the user create a visible profile in which basic (true) information about the user is stated: name, gender, date of birth, country, home town, email address, job description, religious views, personal interests and of course a profile picture (boyd & Hargittai 2010).

own content (and naturally of content shared by others online). Since its inception in 2004 the SNS, Facebook, has grown exponentially, inspiring an eruption within the virtual realm of social interaction. Resultantly, an array of social networking platforms such as *Twitter*, *Instagram*, *Snap-Chat*, *You-Tube* and *Pinterst* expanded swiftly. These networking platforms all seem to serve the self's seemingly insatiable desire to share and gaze at their constructed, ideal image of the self, and to be gazed at by a collective audience. Facebook is said to be the most popular SNS worldwide, boasting with over 1,440,000,000 active monthly users, 968 million of which go online every single day. In a South African context alone, Facebook counts more than 11.8-million active users. We are surrounded by mirrors in the form of screens: Ipads, cellphone screens, computer screens – all of which provide us with immediate access to social media. We are constantly forced through social media to gaze at the mediated self in the mirror of the screen. Amid this eruption of social interactive media that advocates complex surveillance mechanics, filmmakers such as Susan Buice and Arin Crumley, Ondi Timoner and finally Henry Joost and Yaniv and Ariel Schulman, are able to recognize this strange participatory community and comment on it in their own self-reflexive ways, continuing the debate on mirror gazing selves. The films I selected occupy different positions on the documentary spectrum and they therefore constitute a good selection from which to draw conclusions about self-representation in documentary films.

Chapter one in this thesis focuses on a theoretical framework whereby to elucidate complex notions of gazing-hierarchies, self-narration and subsequent self-documentation via social mediation online as documented by (sometimes) subject-filmmakers with the use of various documentary modes of representation. Drawing on Bill Nichols's theory on documentary modes, I specifically investigate self-reflexivity as a filmic mode of representation that foregrounds subjective construction processes. I then focus on Jacques Lacan's concept of the mirror-gazing self and the Big Other as these theories provide me with a framework to better understand participative gazing societies within social media platforms where selves are made visible to look at while looking (at the visible image of the self and at images made visible of others by others). Considering then that these mutual gazing societies are often at the centre of the self-reflexive (sometimes) auto-documentaries I will discuss, another layer is added: subject-filmmakers now not only participate in complex gazing societies online, but they are faced with portraying the double role of both producer and consumer of their own constructed filmic image

of self. Finally, I examine gazing hierarchies as framed by panoptic and omnioptic (mutual) surveillance models in order to gain a better understanding of how the visibility of the self functions in social online environments where the omnipresent other is always watching. Here, I investigate panoptic surveillance structures and consider how these models have evolved into mutual surveillance escapades online, which force the online user to construct and manage a desired impression of the self in collaboration with imagined others.

Chapter two considers the hybrid auto-documentary *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) in which subject-filmmakers, Arin Crumley (a videographer) and Susan Buice (an art school graduate) employ a mixture of re-enactments, real footage and animation in order to re-tell a personal history. The couple meet on an online dating site, engage in a tumultuous relationship and decide to make a film about their experience. Calling upon memory, the couple utilizes various modes of representation that blend together autobiographical documentary, actual footage and re-staged drama in order to produce a hybrid genre of filmmaking that re-tells their story. There does not seem to be a consensus on how to classify this film on movie sites such as IMDB, Rottentomatoes and Metacritic. It is variously called Comedy/Drama/Fantasy, Drama/Art-house and Fantasy/Comedy/Romance. The nature of the film is rather experimental and therefore the classifying process is complex: elements of all the above mentioned genres are certainly recognizable in the film but no one movie site seems to acknowledge the fact that the filmmakers clearly address to the viewer their intention of re-telling a personal narrative through audio-visual documentation. Not to mention the obviously back-stage footage incorporated in the film which signify a type of vérité filmmaking. True to the vérité form, the filmmakers self-reflexively acknowledge their own presence as authoring agents while emulating the aesthetic style of this 1960's representational methods, complete with grainy, spontaneously captured footage. On the other hand, the blatantly re-staged scenes evoke a dramatic element which means that the film might be better suited to the drama category. I would like to acknowledge this blatant element of documentation involved as part of the film's representation as well as acknowledge its dramatic effects. From here on I will refer to this hybrid genre as a re-enacted autobiographical docu-drama. As the couple's romance evolves it becomes clear that they both yearn to be creatively expressive. They therefore decide to approach the relationship as if it were an art project. Avoiding verbal communication, they interact via written text, emails and silent video footage that they take of each other. When they are not in each other's physical

presence, they will often communicate via video-diary in which they are able to express themselves verbally. As soon as they are in each other's immediate environments, all talking ceases and interaction is limited to filming each other or communicating via written text. In other words, their personal interaction is always mediated. To re-emphasize: calling this film a documentary brings about interesting questions as to what exactly is constituted as a documentary film, seeing as these filmmakers explore various forms of representation which oscillate between modes of fiction and non-fiction. While Crumley and Buice attempt to represent a personal historical tale, the viewer is constantly reminded of their re-interpretation of their own story via creative re-enactments and self-reflexive methods.

In chapter three I will discuss the 2009 documentary *We Live in Public* by Ondi Timoner, which records the life of Josh Harris, internet pioneer of the 1990's. He conceives of two controversial social experiments, which he films and often streams live over the internet with the opportunity for interactive commentary from viewers. The experiments investigate what happens to human behaviour and identity as tested under extreme circumstances in which surveillance media and technology serve as a dominant and omnipresent force, influencing the regular activities of the human being as she is always feeling watched. The first experiment called, "Quiet: We Live in Public", is Harris' attempt at creating a physical representation of what he imagines the internet will look like in a few years. Note that this experiment took place in 1999. In this experiment a group of people go to live in an underground "bunker" for 30 days which comes to resemble a human terrarium. The bunker consists of tiny capsule hotels or "pod" hotels, resembling concentration camps with bunk beds stacked on each other. Each "pod" is equipped with live video cameras and television screens which allow occupants to monitor every other pod. At any given time, they are able to change the "channel" to observe the real-time action taking place in any pod of their choice. They can even tune in on the channel of themselves and observe how they are seen by others through the eyes of the camera. When they are not in a pod being captured by a webcam, they are being followed around by camera operators. The footage taken by these cameras is also available for viewing on the television sets in the pods. Note that although Harris himself was documenting all the various actions of the citizens of "Quiet: We Live in Public", the filmmaker Ondi Timoner was also present, capturing footage for the documentary on Harris now known as *We Live in Public* (2009). For the second social experiment, Harris decides to step in front of the camera and initiates an experiment where he is



both pseudo-documentarian and the subject of the surveillance experiment. The name of the second experiment, “We Live in Public”, not to be confused with Timoner’s documentary of the same name, comes to represent two people who do as the title suggests: they live in public. Harris and his girlfriend, Tanya Corrin, place several webcams and microphones all over their loft apartment in an attempt to film their everyday mundane activities and stream it live over the internet with the opportunity for viewers to interact via text. As viewers follow the couple in this Big Brother-like<sup>5</sup> endeavour it becomes apparent that the roles of the interactive members on the site, along with the many electronic eyes of the various cameras that follow the couple around, represent a collective audience. These ever present eyes have a crucial influence on the couple’s supposedly authentic performance of their “selves”.

Formally, Timoner engages the viewer on a self-reflexive level: she often signals her position as authoring agent which thematically demonstrates how Harris himself comes to portray the role of pseudo-documentarian in his self-reflexive representation of his (mediated) self. Harris’ grainy surveillance footage incorporated throughout the film stylistically straddles the divide between fly-on-the-wall documentary and constructed performance. It is in this grain that Timoner mirrors the feel of the surveillance footage with grainy, observational images. Stylistically there is a constant oscillation between these observational images and expository modes of representation. As this thesis is concerned with the documentary film representation of various forms of self-documentation online, I will mainly be focussing on the second experiment, “We Live in Public”, as it is concerned with online activity. However, I will be referring to “Quiet: We Live in Public” (from now on referred to as “Quiet”), throughout as it informs and inspires the actions of the second experiment, “We Live in Public”. In this chapter I explain that virtual others can serve as an audience to an individual’s constructed self-presentation online and influence the authenticity of an individual’s behaviour, as she constantly feels observed. Harris

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<sup>5</sup>*Big Brother* is a reality television game show popularised in the 1990’s and loosely based on George Orwell’s *1984* (Coudry 2002:283-284) where the leader, Big Brother, rules a society by keeping them under severe surveillance. The game show functions on the basis that the contestants, usually referred to as “housemates”, live together in a large house rigged with ubiquitous cameras. During the period they spend in the house they are completely cut off from the outside world, only monitored by surveillance cameras. In order to win the final cash prize, the contestants must survive weekly evictions until only one houseguest is left.

and his girlfriend literally inhabit a constructed borderland<sup>6</sup> in which the online and offline are fused together, and private and public boundaries are crossed. In this chapter I will also be focussing on gazing hierarchies as theorised by Foucault's panopticon and Jurgenson's omnipticon, analysing how Harris' seemingly liberating act of visibility, which defies conventional laws of privacy, does not necessarily place him in a democratic gazing scenario. On the contrary, using Lacan's concept of the Big Other, I argue that Harris consciously engages himself within a virtual box, where he is forever dependent on the gaze of the Big Other in order to survive.

In chapter four I discuss the 2010 documentary film, *Catfish*. This film documents the online relationship between subject, Yaniv Schulman<sup>7</sup> and his online romantic interest, Megan Faccio. Throughout their virtual relationship, Yaniv Schulman, a New York photographer, increasingly befriends members of Faccio's family via the SNS, Facebook, including her very attractive mother, Angela Wesselman-Pierce. Not to mention an extensive connection of acquaintances that he meets via his online friendships with what he calls the "Facebook Family". As the virtual relationship between the online couple evolves, filmmakers, Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost continue to document their blossoming courtship. Over the course of eight months the couple share intimate correspondence via Facebook in the form of photographs and messages. The beautiful Faccio leaves a remarkable impression on Yaniv Schulman, even recording and mailing

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<sup>6</sup>Jenny Sundén introduces the term "borderland" – a concept that highlights the tension between the material and the virtual (2003:3-4). Kelly Ladd, who uses Sundén's term to demonstrate how SNSs function as borderlands, explains that the idea of a border implies the presence of a physical barrier: the line that separates two spaces. To distinguish between what is material and what is virtual, is to create an imaginary map, for example, which helps us differentiate between online behaviour as opposed to more "real", offline behaviour (Ladd 2009:11). A borderland exists between online and offline. Many scholars have attempted to define this territory, recognizing that there is a "land" where the material and the virtual meet, influencing online life. Beth Coleman refers to "X-Reality" – the reality that exists in between the material and the virtual (2011:8-11). Zhao *et al.* refer to a "nonymous space", implying the opposite of "anonymous" (2008:1818). Nonymous social networking spaces provide the opportunity for virtual online interaction between users who are already connected offline. Because of the offline-based online relation between users the assumption exists that in a nonymous space the individual will not be able to make exaggerated identity claims due to the offline familiarity between users (Zhao *et al.* 2008:1818). For Anders Albrechtslund (2008: sp) the term "mixed world" suffices to underscore the relation between online and offline (2008:sp). Similarly, Hille Koskela, who investigates personal online webcam surveillance, asserts that the mediated online self exists in a space "suspended between the real and the virtual" (2004:200).

<sup>7</sup>Throughout this thesis I refer to theorists, filmmakers and their subjects by their surname. Subject of the film *Catfish* (2005), Yaniv Schulman, is related to the filmmaker of the same film, Ariel Schulman. To avoid confusion throughout this discussion I will be referring to the filmmaker by his surname, Schulman, and to the subject by his full name, Yaniv Schulman.

him songs at request which she claims to be singing herself. Yaniv Schulman soon discovers that this is all pretence as he clearly recognises the songs are covers. This discovery ignites suspicion in Yaniv Schulman and the filmmakers initiate an investigative journey into the many mediated claims from Wesselman-Pierce and Faccio. The film crew finally pay the Facebook Family a visit in their home town, Ishpeming, Michigan. Soon it is revealed that the entire eight month virtual correspondence was a hoax: an elaborate fantasy performed by the mother, Wesselman-Pierce, who appears to be the exact opposite of what she had claimed to be on her Facebook profile page<sup>8</sup>. While Wesselman-Pierce's Facebook profile page brags with an image of a strikingly attractive woman, the filmmakers now discover an unremarkable looking 40 year old housewife who is fully responsible for the care of her husband's two cognitively impaired sons from a previous marriage. What is more, it is discovered that Wesselman-Pierce pretended to be the various members of the online "Facebook Family", having created profile pages for each of them separately. Yaniv Schulman's romantic involvement with "Megan Faccio" was maintained online by the Wesselman-Pierce, who looks nothing like the girl from the pictures on "Faccio's"<sup>9</sup> alleged Facebook Profile page. The film has a striking opening scene in which the filmmakers place the mode of self-reflexivity as central to the representation of the film. Shots are often grainy and have a unsteady quality to it and the presence of the filmmakers is quite pertinent, resulting in a style reminiscent of the participatory or *vérité* mode of filmmaking. Throughout the film Schulman and Joost thematically mirror the notion of constructing a mediated representation of the self by paying close attention to Yaniv Schulman's personal self-reflexive online impression management. They do this by constantly signalling to the viewer their own presence as authoring agents. While the film often makes use of straightforward montage sequences, the visual quality of the film becomes increasingly "hand-held", especially in the final act of the film when Yaniv Schulman becomes a fellow filmmaker. The filmmakers perhaps make this stylistic choice in order to signal an urgency with which they want to recover the truth, emphasizing the

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<sup>8</sup>Opening an account on a majority of SNSs requires that the user create a visible profile in which basic (true) information about the user is stated: name, gender, date of birth, country, home town, email address, job description, religious views, personal interests and of course a profile picture (boyd & Hargittai 2010).

<sup>9</sup>The architecture of the social networking environment in which most of Wesselman-Pierce and Yaniv Schulman's correspondence takes place allows its users to perform multiple virtual roles at once while constructing an online narrative of the (perhaps desired) self. While Yaniv Schulman thought he was talking to Megan Faccio, he was in fact talking to Wesselman-Pierce. From here on I will therefore be referring to "Faccio" with inverted commas to indicate that she was not real in the sense Yaniv Schulman imagined her to be.

investigative quality the film often tends to produce. Although Yaniv Schulman and “Faccio’s” communication extended beyond the bounds of Facebook and included text messages, phone calls, emails and even at one point a postcard, I will be focussing on the couple’s virtual correspondence via Facebook as this thesis is concerned with the mediated narration and documentation of the self on social networking platforms.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **THEORETICAL CONCEPTUALIZATION**

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical foil for the self-reflexive processes of documenting the self through various mediated forms visible in the films *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), *We Live in Public* (2009) and *Catfish* (2010). I investigate self-reflexive documentary methods and look at how these methods aid the filmmakers in commenting on the self-reflexive construction of the online self. I also explore Jaques Lacan's theories on the mirror-gazing self and the Big Other, in an attempt to demonstrate how the subjects in the films rarely self-document in isolation but rather always in accordance with what they imagine their public desires. Finally I examine various gazing hierarchies significant to online spaces as theorized by Hille Koskela and Nathan Jurgenson. This helps me to ask whether the subject-filmmaker who bears the ultimate gaze is able to document material authentically and without bias.

### **1.1: SELF-REFLEXIVITY**

The self-reflexive mode of representation, characteristic of some documentary formats, is a filmmaking strategy chosen by filmmakers to foreground the very presence of the filmmaker, and the process behind the making of the film. The self-reflexive mode emphasises the film's subjective influence, thus challenging the viewer to actively participate in a critical decoding of the content documented. Maasdorp asserts that mainstream modes of filmmaking conventionally and purposefully employ continuity editing in such a way as to render it "invisible" to the viewer, and therefore resulting in a less active critical decoding of the text (2011:208-209). Film academic, Bill Nichols, proclaims in his book *Introduction to Documentary*, that self-reflexive documentaries, on the other hand, might be seen as something rather Brechtian<sup>10</sup>, in that it can

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<sup>10</sup>BertoltBrecht, a theatre practitioner and scholar, articulated that a theatre event could be structured in such a way to create an awareness of its construction processes for the audience, rather than to allow for an "uncritical emotional engagement" and "identification" with the content (Maasdorp 2011:209). Some film scholars believe that this notion of alienation or *Verfremdung* could effectively be applied to self-reflexive documentary modes of

alienate its viewers from the content and remind us of the format used to present the content (2001:128). Typically, a mainstream documentary can give the impression that it is showing reality when actually the filmmakers are constructing the way in which this apparent reality is being shown to its viewer (Nichols 125-128). Mainstream documentarians often opt for continuity editing in order to make editing invisible and “facilitate unimpeded transfer of story and emotion from the text to the audience” (Maasdorp 2011:217). Nichols argues that, by contrast, self-reflexive documentaries “ask us to see documentary for what it is: a construct or representation” (2001:125). Referring to a theatre context, Brecht’s “elements of unnaturalness” is a strategy employed whereby to signal to the viewer the formal elements involved in the creation of a product (Maasdorp 2011:217). Applying Brecht’s principle to a filmic context, “conspicuous” editing methods, for example, might create an awareness of the construction of the film, argues Maasdorp (2011:217). An “unobtrusive” or “observational” mode of representation, mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, that “shows what happens in front of the cameras without overt intervention” could result in the viewer being vulnerable to the “bias” of the filmmaker (Nichols 2001:109). A self-reflexive film, in turn, will typically employ noticeable devices to remind the viewers that they are watching a film, a representation and construction of the filmmaker’s subjective take on the specific content. The self-reflexive filmmaker therefore does not merely “show” the chosen events filmed but reveals how it is filmed through text, dialogue, editing and visibility, thus encouraging intellectual engagement with the film form.

Jay Ruby, following Johannes Fabian, argues that self-reflexive documentaries expose to the viewer the process of producing a product: in a reflexive non-fiction film we recognize the involvement of the producer and elements are utilized which draw the viewer’s attention to the construction process (1988:35). Of course, the viewer also enjoys the final product. Typically, other documentary modes will exclude self-reflexive signals, only leaving the viewer with the product (Ruby 1988:35). Often such a film will seamlessly combine visuals and sound in a flowing and unobtrusive way. This type of continuity editing aspires to suspend disbelief and has the ability to engage an audience on an emotional level (Maasdorp 2011:208). Nichols maintains

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filmmaking as it encourages the viewer to engage intellectually with the material and subsequently maintain a critical distance (Austin & Jong 2008:163; Maasdorp 2011:208-209).

that commonly the documentary relies on the viewer's "neglect of his or her actual situation [...] interpreting a film, in favour of imaginary access to the events shown [...] as if it is only these events that require interpretation, not the film" (2001:125). Nichols concludes that often we assume that what is shown to us is the truth and forget that what we see has selectively been chosen for us to see (2001:125).

Self-reflexive methods can be signalled firstly, through text: the filmmaker can acknowledge her presence by often addressing the film's own creative conception. In chapter four I discuss the film, *Catfish* (2010). This film opens with a scene in which the subject of the documentary and the filmmaker engage in a conversation on film ethics, clearly foregrounding the filmmaking process. In this way the filmmaker verbally draws the viewer's attention towards formal elements of the film. Secondly, visibility aims at allowing the viewer to see "behind the scenes", allowing her to witness technical processes and devices present in the documentation of something. Here the director will often be seen in front of the camera, sometimes talking to the subjects (although this is not an absolute requirement), perhaps addressing the viewers. Occasionally camera operators are seen or even filmed filming their subjects. Perhaps the earliest example of this kind of self-reflexivity is Dziga Vertov's seminal *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) in which the cameraman is seen filming his subjects, as the obvious self-reflexivity of the title predicts (Nichols 2001:126). Paul Rotha, a British documentary filmmaker who partook in the construction process of the film, amusingly remembers this process as "one camera photographing another camera photographing another camera" (Winston 2008:168). Such reflexivity is also apparent in *We Live in Public* (2009), a documentary I will be discussing in chapter three. In this film, the documentarian documents her subject as he in turn documents himself via the use of various media. Thirdly, by drawing attention to editing practises, filmmakers can prompt the viewer to critically assess the representation with which they are presented. For example, by juxtaposing two scenes, Vertov demonstrates what a specific scene (containing a camera operator who is filming his subjects) looks like in the editing room, where the same scene is shown being assembled from strips of film (Nichols 2001:126-127). The subject-filmmakers of *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) regularly employ similar editing strategies, drawing the viewer's focus to the formal elements used to construct the film. Here we already start seeing the filmmaker's creative and subjective impact: the filmmaker chooses how to assemble material for "meaningful impact" (Nichols 2001:127). According to Nichols, such self-

reflexive methods deconstruct the “impression of unimpeded access to reality” and place the viewer in a position where she can “reflect on the process by which this impression is itself constructed through editing” (2001:127).

The filmmakers all incorporate (to varying degrees) self-reflexive methods which lay bare this construction process. Their often blatant involvement not only as authoring agents but as subjects of the representation places the notion of subjectivity as key to understanding the subject-filmmaker relationship in the films under discussion. If a filmmaker is to engage in the filmic documentation of a personal narrative, then it is difficult to divide the subject from her own subjectivity in the construction process of the given representation. But, Jay Ruby warns that one must be careful of confusing various terms often associated with reflexivity formats, such as “autobiography”, “self-reference” or “self-consciousness” (1988:35). As I demonstrate throughout, these elements often do appear in a self-reflexive work. However, a film that is autobiographical, self-referential or self-conscious is not necessarily self-reflexive: to comment on film as construct, the filmmaker must consciously do so. One of the main focuses of this discussion is the fact that in all three films, the subject at some stage and in some or other form becomes the filmmaker of her own narrative. One may therefore find these features functioning in various ways, and a self-reflexive narrative does not have to have these elements as part of its construction.

An autobiographical film is typically defined by its subject matter, which is usually focussed on the filmmaker’s life, according to Carolyn Anderson (Anderson 2006:67-68). The 1986 film, *Portrait Werner Herzog*, directed by Werner Herzog himself, is an example of an auto-documentary. In this film, Herzog is the director as well as the subject who, among other things, investigates the processes of making films in an utterly obvious, self-reflexive way, often proclaiming via dialogue the hardships of producing a film. Jay Ruby stresses that in an autobiographical work, even though the producer is “at the centre of the work” she is not necessarily automatically reflexive (1988:35). Naturally, in an autobiographical work, the producer, who is the self, is “self aware” but as Ruby proclaims, in order to be reflexive, one has to be “sufficiently self-aware” (1988:35-36). The filmmaker must know precisely which “aspects of self are necessary to reveal” so that the audience might comprehend not only the “process employed” but also the “resultant product” (Ruby 1988:35). The viewer must know that these



processes employed are “purposeful, intentional, and not merely narcissistic or accidentally revealing” (Ruby 1988:35-36).

Self-reference, on the other hand, is not autobiographical or reflexive. It is rather “the allegorical or metaphorical use of self” (Ruby 1988:35-36). In a self-referential representation aspects of the self are used symbolically. In a way, it can be argued that all filmmakers are self-referential, drawing on personal experiences to create their products (Ruby 1988:36-38). *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), which I will discuss in chapter two, makes use of self-referential techniques. However, although the filmmakers extract from their own personal narrative in order to tell their story, the film is not only purely referential and should not be confused with self-reflexivity either. Rather, this film employs both methods in various forms to re-present the narrative. Being “self-conscious in terms of being reflective” is not necessarily being self-reflexive either – only if the producer were to intentionally make her own “self-consciousness popular to the audience” could the film be considered self-reflexive, according to Ruby (1988:35-37). To re-emphasize: a work has to adequately indicate that the producer’s intention is for his film to be regarded as reflexive, otherwise “the audience will be uncertain as to whether they are reading into the product more or other than what was meant” (Ruby 1988:35-37).

## **1.2: NARRATION OF THE SELF**

Psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan introduced the concept of the “Mirror Phase”, to describe the process by which an infant recognizes herself as separate from her reflection in the mirror – that is, to understand her reflection as a separate other. At this moment, the individual enters into what Lacan refers to as the “Symbolic Order” (Dashtipour 2009:322; Fink 2004:117). It is within the Symbolic Order that we make use of social tools such as language, learned symbols, codes and cues which assist us in the narration process of “who we are”, to create, define and express our identities or imagined ideal selves (Lacan 1977; Miller 1988). Considering the content of the films I am currently discussing, as well as the form through which they are represented to the viewer, the idea of narration serves as a forum where these symbolic tools like discursive and visual text can be used in a coherent manner to communicate the story of the self. Elinor Ochs

and Lisa Capps believe that we are always in the process of narrating ourselves: we tell stories about ourselves to ourselves and others, in an attempt to make sense of past and present events and to plan future ones, to situate ourselves within specific contexts and to make sense of ourselves as situated within those contexts (1996:20-23). And we do this through the use of tools that belong to what Lacan dubs the Symbolic (Lacan 1977; Miller 1988). But it must be remembered that symbols are constructed, mediated ways of getting a “certain idea about an event or self” across, and therefore the narration is itself a construct and often selective (Dashtipour 2009:323).

The concept of narration is also more than just the process of utilizing the tools of the Symbolic Order in order to express and “define” ourselves. For Ochs and Capps, narration gives the self the opportunity to “create continuity between past, present and imagined worlds” and this can be done through the use of various techniques or modes of representation (1996:19). Consequently, there is a sense that the process of narration is a necessary component that individuals depend upon in order to produce not only the meaning and definition of self, but also to essentially produce proof of the existence of that self. Textual or visual narration in the form of photographs, home videos, diaries, letters or memoirs are all methods employed by the individual through which she can contextualise her experiences and gain perspective on how those experiences have shaped her into a specific identity (Ochs & Capps 1996:19-21). Essentially, narration serves as a means whereby we can say: “I was here”. Personal narratives are thus naturally subjective, as they are “embodiments of one or more points of view”, instead of “objective, omniscient accounts” (Ochs & Capps 1996:19-21). It is in this light that I approach the subject-filmmaker binary. As discussed in the beginning of this chapter a filmmaker who is involved in the documentation process of the self has difficulty separating herself from her own subjectivity in the construction process of the film.

The subjective nature of narratives of self raises another important issue, namely the question of memory and selective construction. Ochs and Capps refer to the “fragility of memory and the relativity of point of view” in order to illustrate this point (1996:21). In the film, *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), for example, we witness the very subjective re-invention and re-telling of a personal narrative told through methods of re-enactment and the utilization of recording devices. Ochs and Capps state that memory can never capture an “authentic experience” but rather a

present moment is “immediately transform[ed] [...] into its abstraction” (1996:21). Thus the very act of telling a story already presupposes its constructed and mediated nature. In *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) the filmmakers do not only attempt to re-remember an event, but they obviously re-invent it through creative endeavours employed through means of editing, animation and compositions that emphasize self-reflexivity. This re-emphasizes the notion that subjectivity is intrinsic to self-documentation processes.

Throughout this thesis I often shift my attention to how the subjects construct the online self and perform that self through making use of the process of narration. Note that an SNS serves as a platform where individuals can present and document their desired selves. Fortunately an SNS provides a platform where individuals can also create and re-create re-edit and re-shape the desired identity of the self who stares back at them from within the computer screen.

In the films I discuss, several components determine how the self is narrated. First, the space within which the self chooses to narrate about herself will influence the narration process, as various habitats have various “rules” and landscapes with their own set of tools, social constraints and features. An SNS for example, is a virtual habitat in which the individual is reliant on the technical features the site provides, which will assist a user in the construction of her narrative about herself. Second, it is important to remember that the mode within which these stories are told is used in order to highlight the construction processes present when attempting to document the self through mediated forms. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I am interested in how an other might influence the process of online self-documentation and subsequent impression management and how that is represented to me through means of the filmic non-fiction genre. In the following section, I theorise this question by exploring Jacques Lacan’s ideas on the relationship between the self and the Big Other and how the two collaboratively construct visual concepts of selves via imaginary processes. The audience becomes the Big Other and influences the way in which the self will narrate herself “into being”.

### **1.3: THE MIRROR-GAZING SELF**

In evoking a psychoanalytical discourse through the use of Jaques Lacan's theories on the Mirror Stage and the Big Other, I would like to demonstrate how an online identity is self-reflexively constructed and managed with the assistance of the one(s) to whom the identity is being presented. This analysis, however, is not restricted to online platforms where self-documentation is a ubiquitous practise, since I also explore self-reflexive ways of documenting the self via filmic modes of representation. For me there is a strong correlation between the construction and subsequent conduct of the self as shaped through the eyes of the observer. Shortly, I will demonstrate how the role of the one who gazes is multifaceted and highly influential for the individual being observed. The individuals who observe the self on whichever chosen platform – SNSs or self-reflexive filmic modes of representation – come to constitute an audience. This audience is made up of two components: the traditional, (sometimes anonymous) viewer who either passively observes or interacts, and the original self who creates and conducts the performance of that self through whichever form of mediation. The logic here is simple: if the self embarks on a process of self-documentation within a public platform, then that same self comes to be an observer of her own constructed image while being observed by others. Lacan's "Mirror Stage" is concerned with the psychological implications of the infant's first encounter with the reflected image. Recognizing the self in the mirror, the infant identifies her body as a unified self. Lacan explains this as experiencing the image of the body in the "form of its totality" (1977:2-4). Through this process of recognition an identity is subsequently produced through imaginary and symbolic processes.

Significant to this thesis is the fact that Lacanian identity processes are always viewed in "relation to someone else" (Dashtipour 2009:322). In the films the documentarians comment on this notion by demonstrating how this relational process becomes obvious in an interactive social networking sphere, where it can be argued that identity is often comparatively formed through the eyes of others. On an SNS there is a sense of democratic collaboration when considering the processes of self-documentation. Clay Shirky's hypothesis – referred to in the introduction to this thesis - concludes that online forms of social mediation provide individuals with the opportunity

to actively participate in the creation of the product of self instead of passively consuming it (2010:8). Nathan Jurgenson again refers to this process as “prosumption” – producing and consuming a product simultaneously (2010:377). Practises of self-documentation dictate that the product is the self. And within online platforms, the self is placed in a shaky position: she is often reliant on the presence of another virtual entity consuming her online existence as product.

Lacan’s theories are well known for the three orders of subjectivity (or inter-subjectivity) that he defines: the imaginary, the symbolic and the Real. The imaginary is focused on the process of (mis)recognition of self. Through the imaginary, an ego is substantiated (Dashtipour 2009:323). From this point forward, the individual will mainly use language as part of what Lacan refers to as the symbolic order to form identity. Certainly, the symbolic is concerned with the processes of discourse, language and socially-codified laws and traditions which further assist in defining “the self” (Dashtipour 2009:323). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the image which is “sustained by the symbolic” is the foundation of identity (Miller 1988:37; Dashtipour 2009:323). The Real is defined as the “extra-discursive realm which includes those intense libidinal affects that escape the domestication of language” (Dashtipour 2009:323-324).

To make clear: the infant, during the “Mirror Stage”, simultaneously has a self recognition as well as mis-recognition of the self. The infant will see the image of the self in the mirror and recognize herself as “I”. This, however, is mis-recognition because the infant cannot see its whole self but simply a reflection of herself. Therefore recognizing its own reflection as “I” is similar to recognizing itself as other. Suddenly the child is forced into the imaginary. The self sees the reflection of itself as “I” and she is connected to the material (her corporeal body) but also connected to what she thinks she sees (her imaginary). The body she sees is not her body – it is simply a reflection of her body. What Lacan refers to as the “ideal” is the reflected version of self in the mirror that the ego is trying to imitate (Dashtipour 2009:323; Miller 1988; Žižek 2002).

It is important to understand that in Lacanian theory the self can never view herself fully. She becomes visible only as constituted through the imagined and desired gaze of an other. This point is crucial to my argument: social media and SNSs provide individuals with a platform to create an online self for gazing others. They may then look at what they have created, as one

might look into a mirror and see not only the reflection of the physical self but also external facets which belong to the symbolic mode of defining the self. This dynamic process of constituting the (idea of) self through the perceived gaze of *the* Other will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

A construction of self online can be said to be for an other. But who is this other? Is it the public that represent our interactive audience on an SNS? Lacan's Big Other represents societal ideals and constraints which the self attempts to live up to. For me, the other is also the reflection of the self. The "I" in front of the mirror can recognize herself as other – but it is also that other that the "I" will attempt to reconstruct through imaginary and symbolic methods in order to achieve what might constitute the "Ideal-I".

If, as Lacan argues, identity processes are always viewed in relation to someone else – identification with others or an ideal image (Dashtipour 2009; Žižek 2002) – then the "I" is always created purposefully for an other. The image is fundamental to how we view, explain and define ourselves and in Lacan's theorization of subjectivity, the self takes on an external image: either the "reflected image of their own body" or "images/gestalts of like others", imagining the ideal self (Dashtipour 2009:323). Lacan dictates that the ideal image can be of "role models, loved ones or icons" (Lacan 1977:2) – indeed, any other who serves as a "mirror" to the self (Lacan 1986; Dashtipour 2009). Perhaps here it would be fruitful to refer to Cooley's "looking-glass-self", as a means to better demonstrate notions of "collaborative" and "imagined" identity construction and management. The "looking-glass-self" implies a dynamic process of self-construction where the "I" creates the "me" through the imagined eyes of the Big Other (Cooley 1902:17; Robinson 2007:95). There is a similarity in this dynamic to that of the "Mirror Phase" in which the self is kept "in check" by the imagined judgement of an other (Lacan 1977:4). In my investigation, identity development and imaginary self-fashioning is always discussed in relation to how the individual imagines the desire of the Big Other. The self imagines how an other might scrutinize her and therefore maintains and manages her mediated online self according to imagined constraints.

The concept of Lacan's Big Other might be applied to a modern-day SNS where "social structures and societal values" are automatically embedded within these social environments.

The social nature of these sites requires the necessary presence of an other and the individual user therefore feels persistently observed and acts accordingly. The Big Other can consequently be viewed as the “Other of language, of certain ideals, norms and ideology of a particular society” (Dashtipour 2009:323-324). Thus, it is this Other “which constrains the option of images available in the process of re-evaluation of social categories” (Dashtipour 2009:323). It is important to note that the self cannot select just any set of “attributes” or “images” in order to complete an ideal image of the self: it is as if the Big Other places limits on who we can be by judging the social identity with which we choose to represent ourselves (Dashtipour 2009:324). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the imagined ideal image of self (ego-ideal) is what is required in order to be accepted by the Big Other (or by the Big Other’s imagined desired gaze) – the subject “judges” themselves and their image (ideal ego) according to how they imagine the Big Other desires to perceive them (Dashtipour 2009:324-325). In my examples, subjects are often looking at themselves in simulated mirrors-screens. The ideally constructed self staring back at the original creator from inside the “mirror” also becomes an other. In this way, the original self becomes an onlooker of her own constructed image, judging her image as she imagines the Big Other might.

The other in Lacanian terms can also be the one who looks back at the “me” in the reflection of the mirror. Online environments offer multiple incarnations of the other: the other as reflection of the “I”, the other as the audience to whom I present my own imagined other, as well as the Big Other, representing the societal ideals according to which I construct my imagined self. The original I, who looks at her reflected other, is always aware that there is a (second) Big Other, also looking into the mirror (due to the public nature of modern SNSs).

Lacan’s Mirror Phase can illuminate the process and action of self-reflexively constructing and subsequently documenting the mediated self - which is often superbly mirrored within the chosen forms of representation of these documentaries. Hence, what interests me is how the influence of the Big Other functions in how subjects choose to represent themselves.

## **1.4: SELF-SURVEILLANCE**

The presence of an (imagined) Other, always “looking”, seems to be most prevalent in an online environment where selves are made visible to be looked at. The sociality of SNSs might create an acute awareness of these “watching eyes” (even if imagined) and subsequently dictate the presentation of the online self. Through Lacan’s formations on the idea of the “Mirror Stage” we learn that one often looks at oneself through the eyes of an imagined Other, as constructed in the imaginary. The somewhat heightened awareness of other(s) watching in online spaces, such as SNSs, automatically influences the way in which the individual presents herself. I argue that there is a strong correlation between the action of looking and being looked at in an online sphere, and the concept of surveillance. Traditionally the idea of surveillance in critical theory is often based on a conception of a hierarchical society, which involves the practise of someone who watches and someone who is being watched – often an exercise initiated for disciplinary purposes. This dynamic of watching over a subject through surveillance is often referred to as the panoptic gaze. The Panopticon, which was initially used as an architectural design for a prison conceptualized by philosopher Jeremy Bentham, was further explored by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1975), in which he uses the Panopticon as a metaphor for modern disciplinary practises that can involve scrupulous surveillance and observation. Foucault explored the psychological implications of human behaviour in light of the extent to which surveillance is incorporated into everyday life in an attempt to “keep in check” a society that consequently internalizes control due to feeling constantly watched. Foucault’s Panopticon is now a popular theory often used by contemporary social critics as a means to discuss notions of visibility through the use of surveillance practices.

The basic principle of Bentham’s Panopticon was that prisoners could be observed any time, night or day, without them necessarily knowing whether or not they were indeed being observed (Lyon 2007). The architectural structure of the Panopticon consisted of circular rows of prison cells. In the middle of the circular structure was an observation tower, which was tall enough for the observer in the tower to be able to see the interior of each cell. The windows of the tower were masked so that it was not possible for prisoners to know whether or not someone was actually in the tower (Lyon 2007). Therefore the psychological effect of the Panopticon was that



the prisoners would never be certain whether or not they were being observed but would always feel as if they were. Consequently prisoners would have to assume a compliant position and internalize the gaze with which the disciplinary authority would watch, a process that made it easier to control the prisoners. I find the similarity between the psychology of feeling watched due to a surveillance institution and feeling observed by the Big Other as imagined by the self in front of the mirror of the screen, appropriate for this discussion on self-reflexive auto-documentation through various forms of mediation. It is important to note, however, that the surveillance gaze as framed by the theoretical conception of the Panopticon must in no way be equated with the Lacanian gaze, although there are distant similarities between Foucault's idea of the panoptic gaze and the Lacanian gaze. For Anders Albrechtslund online social networking is indeed anchored in surveillance practices and he insists that taking on this approach might present us with the opportunity to challenge conventional understandings of surveillance (2008:sp).

Internalizing of both the Panoptic gaze and the Lacanian gaze (through the eyes of the Big Other as constituted by the imaginary) impacts the way in which the individual conducts herself and manages the constructed impression of self that she presents to the world. This sense of always being watched, and the extent to which this shapes the representation of self, is central to this study, particularly in my discussion on Ondi Timoner's film *We Live in Public* (2009). Subject, Josh Harris, raises key questions about the structure of power relations in online forums due to his interesting surveillance documentations. Surveillance theorist Hille Koskela argues that when surveillance practises cease to conform to the traditional construct of a hierarchical system where the observer watches over the observed, and instead the one who is usually observed now also becomes the observer to her own and other's visibility, the individual feels empowered (2004 & 2006). But in chapter three, I suggest that this empowerment might be premature for the subjects of the documentary, *We Live in Public*. It must be made clear that the specific kinds of surveillance that will be discussed within the various chapters differ slightly: the case studies discussed represent various online networking forums, some dated, some modern and some even fictional, which in turn influence the visibility and management of the image of the self slightly differently with each film. The concept of the panoptic gaze as it relates to the Lacanian gaze is helpful for each film as they are all concerned with practises that include various degrees of visibility and gazing online.

### **1.4.1: PERSONAL WEBCAM SURVEILLANCE**

Applying concepts of surveillance theory to personal visibility practises through the use of the webcam is challenging. Hille Koskela insists that, “webcams challenge the very basics of surveillance theory” (2006:175). Using Foucault’s panopticon as a springboard to understand normative conceptions of “up-down-monitoring” (the watcher watches over the watched) Koskela is adamant that although the implementation of personal webcam surveillance relates to surveillance studies, it goes “beyond the panopticon” (2006:175). By examining the four modes of thinking that Koskela identifies as essential to the Panoptic model, it becomes apparent that the changing conditions from traditional Panoptic surveillance to self imposed webcam surveillance (and other interactive social media visibility practices) has evolved into an exercise that challenges the traditional understandings of the panoptic surveillance model (2006:176).

First, she states that webcams challenge the panoptic dynamic of “visibility and power”: a panoptic gaze traditionally situates the one who is looking as more in control/powerful than the one being looked at, who is not able to look back (2006:175). By willingly making the self visible through means of webcam surveillance, an individual might challenge conventional power structures as understood by traditional surveillance theory. I, however, will soon demonstrate how a platform is then re-created which makes the visible subject newly submissive. I argue that this new submissiveness is due to a reliance on the gaze of the audience. Second, according to Koskela, the “webcam phenomenon” excludes the internalization of control: individuals who choose to make their private lives visible online “refuse to internalize the rules of hiding and concealing [...] these rules conventionally relate to the private realm and by doing so, ensure submissiveness”. By revealing the private online, the self might feel empowered in that she challenges conventional constrictions of “up-down-monitoring” which controls the extent to which she makes the personal visible (Koskela 2004 & 2006). Although I agree with Koskela, I would further like to explore this aspect. Online visibility or even online “exhibitionism”, as Koskela refers to it, might empower the individual in that she feels (or performs the feeling of) “no shame” in her revealing of the personal (2004:206-207). But at the same time, she again experiences a reliance on the viewer to whom she exposes what is

seemingly “private”. This apparently “empowering” act of extreme visibility initiates a new form of submissiveness: reliance on the audience. Third, Koskela states that webcams are not devices that inherently aim to normalize or “cure” through disciplinary psychologies. Indeed, the utilization of surveillance is normally connected with other disciplinary establishments such as police or security. Even the original concept of the Panopticon was for the sake of disciplining prisoners. This is not the case with the personal webcam surveillance. Rather, personal webcam exploits serve in assisting the subject with the documentation of her personal and ‘real’ online self. Finally, Koskela recognizes that the practices of personal webcam surveillance indicate that power and control should not be seen as equal (2006:175). By “empowering” the self through taking control over the extent to which what content is made visible and how, the self does not necessarily have control over how her visible self will be received and how her performance of self will be interpreted on the other end. As previously established, with personal webcam surveillance the subjects remain reliant on the very existence of their viewers; otherwise there would be no point to making the self so intimately and publicly visible.

#### **1.4.2: PARTICIPATORY SURVEILLANCE**

Theories on surveillance studies with specific reference to the panopticon serve to assist in better understanding relationships between looking and being looked at online, while bearing in mind the ever-present Lacanian Big Other, who lives mainly as constituted by the imagination of the self conducting her own performance of the self. On most SNSs, however, the practice of feeling watched and therefore acting accordingly becomes complex in terms of the mutual visibility exercises involved. Online, the “I” is able to watch, and is probably being watched at the same time, and is aware of possibly being watched. Note, though, that there does not necessarily have to be someone present, watching, in order for the “I” to imagine someone is watching. According to the Lacanian conception of the Big Other previously discussed, the presence of an other as constituted through imagination is often very influential and can dictate how the “I” will present and conduct herself. Whether there is an actual interactive other present or whether the “I” is acting according to and for the imagined presence of the Big Other, the psychology of feeling under surveillance and acting as if being observed still applies.

But what happens when the surveillance gaze as we traditionally understand it evolves into a mutual practise within the online forum? Here, Albrechtslund introduces a term called “participatory surveillance”, which suggests the mutual involvement of watching and being watched (2008:sp). Like Koskela, he also introduces the idea that through surveillance practises online there is a power shift: individuals watching and individuals being watched, reach apparent equilibrium as they both take on the same position and are both equally involved in the practise of observing and being observed. Thus, there is an aspect of mutuality in terms of a collection of people who watch and who are being watched, often doing both at the same time and often viewing not only others but also internalising the gaze, viewing themselves as others.

In an SNSs environment the typical “up-down-monitoring” ceases to exist and instead monitoring and surveillance becomes a mutual practise of reciprocated and simultaneous surveillance where both observer and observed partake in the endeavours of looking and being looked at. We now move away from the traditional hierarchical surveillance model, associated with unequal power systems of gazing and towards a network of observers. Although it might seem as if the self is symbolically released from the prison of the hierarchical gaze, I would argue that, ironically, the “I” might still be metaphorically ensnared by the network of her imagined Other always present, always observing and always an entity to whom the imagined desired image of the self must be presented. In participatory surveillance the “I” makes herself visible and is therefore able to survey another while being observed herself. It can be argued that the “I” is aware of this and therefore the content of the self made visible can be done so selectively. But now the question becomes: what exactly does the “I” make visible and how? And how does this further the process of moving away from traditional conceptions of a hierarchical surveillance system?

Considering the enormous influence of the observing Big Other, it is useful to mention the concept of the synopticon and the omnipticon. The idea of the synopticon, originally introduced by Thomas Mathiesen, evolved out of Foucauldian panopticon as surveillance was becoming increasingly available to the everyman and individuals started “taking control into their own hands” through the use of personal webcam surveillance (1997:215-234). The Internet and social media do provide a “channel of extensive surveillance and control of the individuals and moves ‘surveillance integration’ to a new level”, according to Lyon (2007:8). The synopticon typically

refers to the idea that mass media has enabled an environment where “the many see the few”, instead of the “few seeing the many” (Mitrou *et al.* 2013). But, elaborating on the synoptic, it is Jurgenson’s concept of the omnioptic gaze that is of particular use for the films to be discussed within this thesis. The omniopticon typically refers to a “democratization of the gaze” where “the many see the many” – essentially, the idea of participatory surveillance mentioned earlier. This kind of mutual gazing has become the standard custom with the ever-increasing popularity of interactive social media sites (Jurgenson 2010:377)

Let’s consider the “democratization of the gaze” once more. For me, this notion implies two separate strands of thought: first, the concept indicates a participatory society that engages in the social practises of mutual gazing, usually as made possible by social networking sites, and thereby challenging traditional conceptions of hierarchical surveillance models. Second, these traditional structures of looking are challenged when considering that the individual, who looks and is being looked at, is also in control of her own visibility. It is the latter notion that poses a problem, if we are to dub these omnioptic processes of looking as democratic: to be in control of one’s own visibility, is to have the opportunity to be selective about what is made visible and what not.

Koskela states that we increasingly “seek to play an active role in the production of images [...] reclaiming the copyright of our lives” (2006:199). Individuals are indeed increasingly involved in the construction process and impression management of the self online. Clay Shirky asserts that we are no longer pure consumers (2010:6-8). Instead, we have become the producers of our own content, what Jurgenson would refer to as a “prosumer” – someone who is both a consumer and producer of a product (2010:377). It is imperative to understand, though, that online the self who produces and consumes simultaneously, is often also the very product produced and consumed by self and others. To be able to control my own visibility is also to “constantly participate in my own surveillance” (Jurgenson 2010:377). If we are to say that “I am the producer of my own visible content”, then our attention is simultaneously drawn to the selective production processes. Koskela states that “there is some voyeuristic fascination in looking but reciprocally some exhibitionistic fascination in being seen” (2006:199). This idea will be explored in more detail in chapter three, when I discuss self-surveillance by means of online media. But by implying that the one who makes herself visible is exhibitionistic, is to state that

there is an acute awareness of an other watching (even if imaginary). Koskela states that, “surveillance is a chance to display oneself under the gaze of the camera” (2006:204). Omnioptic forms of gazing provide the subject with a democratic practise of mutual gazing while giving her the platform to have active agency in how the self is presented.

This thesis essentially aims to investigate documentary representations of online self-documentation. The various ways, in which subjects are able to contribute to the filmic representations of their “selves”, makes for a fascinating look into the subject-filmmaker relationship. This dynamic of both producing content and being content produced is a practise that is characteristic of modern social networking platforms, in which gazing is mutual and the fashioning of an ideal self a collaborative process. The intention to construct a narrative of the self via mediated means is severely influenced by the imagined presence of a gazing, scrutinizing other. Consequently the self performs her mediated self according to how she imagines the Big Other desires to see her. The self-reflexive strategies with which filmmakers attempt to document these various forms of self-documentation are often mirrored in the construction processes of online identity building. While the films are predominantly self-reflexive, filmmakers subtly play around with various representational strategies that serve to highlight the complicated negotiation between selves and gazing others. Chapter two considers the subject-filmmaker relationship amid an auto-documentation of subjects who communicate only via mediated means. Chapter three investigates the strange borderspace a subject inhabits, living suspended between the “real” and the “virtual”, while under severe self-surveillance. Finally, chapter four inspects how the influence of the Big Other can lead to intense self-construction and collaborative fantasy building.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **HYBRID FORMS OF SELF-REFLEXIVE AUTO-DOCUMENTATION IN FICTIONAL MEDIATED WORLDS**

*Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), presents itself within the form of a hybrid mode of documentary: in a semi re-enacted autobiographical manner the filmmakers, who are both subjects of the film as well as its producers, attempt to selectively and creatively represent a personal narrative. In the introduction to this thesis I have reviewed how the mixing of different representational strategies, both significant to the documentary and the non-fiction realm, result in what I refer to as a re-enacted autobiographical docu-drama.

The subject-filmmakers of the film initially present themselves to each other through an online dating site (which is fictional in the film but represents the standard form of a modern online social dating site). They then move from the virtual arena to meeting face to face in an offline space while still making use of conventional forms of textual communication by corresponding via written word or through filming each other. Finally the filmmakers, Arin Crumley and Susan Buice decide to make a documentary about their experience. Selected scenarios are re-enacted, filmed and edited – often splicing in ‘real’ footage with re-enacted ones. Through adding blatant self-reflexive devices the subject-filmmakers highlight the representational nature of a film, fictional or documentary, in order to comment on the problematic of the form itself and how we interpret it. Re-enactment is often employed in the film where the subjects perform the role of both filmmaker and subject. Certainly, the self-reflexive methods and re-enacted modes of representation allow the viewer to be aware of processes of construction and performance. This representational form is mirrored in the content of the film, where subjects self-reflexively construct online selves. A narrative which might have discursively been acted out on an SNS is now re-enacted and mediated through a camera lens.

By looking at the unconcealed presence of the filmmakers in the film, dialogue and editing devices employed, I note how the couple cleverly comment on their complicated role as subjective subject-filmmakers who in an autobiographical manner attempt to self-document,

inevitably becoming performers who represent an idealized version of the self (Ochs and Capps 1996). I also explore how the self-reflexive form of the film is reflected in the content, as Crumley and Buice demonstrate themes of impression management via online social means, video-diary and even surveillance-based experiments. I also glance at elements from various documentary subgenres visible in the film and examine how they contribute to this hybrid genre of filmmaking.

In the film the subjects do communicate via various textually mediated forms such as instant messaging, email or hand written text. But I will be focussing on the visual forms of communication. Photographs and video footage are forms of self-presentation with which the film is preoccupied at both the level of content and the level of form. It is in this light that I also investigate the complex dynamics of the gaze that arise in a film where subjects who view each other as subjects are also filmmakers – bearers of the ultimate gaze.

## **2.1: RE-ENACTED AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DOCU-DRAMA**

*Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) is represented within a format of something which certainly seems self-reflexive, and also particularly subjective in that it conveys strong elements of autobiography – often represented through means of highly performative re-enactments and poetic as well as inventive montage editing and even video-diary. What makes for an even more thought provoking dynamic between what Jay Ruby refers to as the “filmmaker’s position”, the “process” of constructing the film and the “final product”, is the fact that, similar to both *Catfish* (2010) and, to some extent, *We Live in Public* (2009), the filmmakers become their own subjects (1988:35). I must stress the significance of this dualistic relationship where subject and filmmaker are one and the same. The knowledge of such a relationship immediately flings the viewer into a position of critical examination and decoding as she is acutely aware of the subjectivity involved in the construction of the representation (Maasdorp 2011:208). The self-reflexive quality of this film evokes fascinating questions about its hybrid form of representation, and its strong autobiographical influence invites critical assessment of the processes of self-documentation. In addition to introducing a myriad of self-reflexive methods, the subject-filmmakers predominantly make use of re-enactment to convey their subjective personal



experience. Joseph Jon Lanthier (2011:sp) reminds us that while documentaries are essentially “creative treatments of actuality”, as Grierson claims, the filmmaker is also faced with the challenge and responsibility of facing an audience that will “assume authenticity, unless told otherwise” (2011:sp; 1966:15). I have already established that representing actuality via filmic means is to employ a selective process of interpreting for the audience the ‘reality’ captured. Naturally, the latter part of Lanthier’s statement refers to the choice a filmmaker faces when deciding how to represent her subjective interpretation of the subject matter. The employment of self-reflexive methods typically has the ability to jolt the otherwise ‘gullible’ audience into a position of critical examination and produce an intellectual distance from the subjective representation. This question on subjectivity places the convention of re-enactments in non-fiction film in an extraordinary position. For Lanthier the notion of re-enactments “subtly patrol the [...] border between documentary and fiction-film” (2011:sp).

These subject-filmmakers employ varied self-reflexive methods emphasizing their subjective experiences while simultaneously co-opting the elements of the “poetic mode” of representation in order to demonstrate the “artistic” reinterpretation of past events (Nichols 2001:102-104). The poetic filmmaker is usually more concerned with representing “a world of the artists imagining” rather than representing “the historical world”, often making use of “abstract patterns of form or colour or animated figures”, re-emphasizing the subject or filmmaker’s subjective experience innovatively (Nichols 2001:103). Crumley and Buice re-imagine a certain historical reality and creatively reinterpret it for the viewer and for themselves as viewers of their own constructed content (Ochs & Capps 1996:20; Nichols 2001:103). It is in this light that the dilemma of authentic autobiography is foregrounded. Firstly the couple attempt to re-present history. But they do it creatively, employing innovative methods reminiscent of poetic modes of representation. These creative choices along with re-enactments result in a near non-fiction rather than accurate documentation. The self-reflexive methods on the other hand serve in creating awareness. Naturally, the camera does indeed record “selectively”, as Katz and Katz insist, and logically, the camera is an inanimate object with the ability to only record what its physical and technical limitations will allow it to see (1988:119). Therefore it is rather the filmmaker behind the camera who chooses where to point the camera and how to represent a story – often her own story as is the case of *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005).

The presence of subjectivity in this documentary is prevalent. By looking at the inclusion of filmmakers, dialogue and editing devices employed in the film, I note how these producers cleverly comment on their own complicated role as subjective subject-filmmakers. I then discuss the film's autobiographical quality which illuminates the notion of subjectivity present in the representation.

In chapter one I addressed processes of self-narration and focussed on the notion that a re-telling is subjective as it is based on memory, resulting in what one could call selective re-inventions of a specific (personal) history. What Ochs and Capps refer to as “the fragility of memory” and the “relativity of point of view” stresses the notion that memory can never fully capture “authentic experiences” but rather, an event is immediately rendered into its “abstraction” (1996:21). When embarking on a process of self-narration, the subject attempts to contextualise the self, making sense of the world that surrounds her (Ochs & Capps 1996:19). But narration is ultimately a very subjective account of “one or more points of view” rather than “objective omniscient accounts” (Ochs & Capps 1996:21). Although this film has an autobiographical quality to it sustained by the many re-enacted scenes spliced together with what appears to be spontaneously captured behind-the-scenes footage, one cannot help but to question the level of authenticity in the filmic re-telling of their story. I have already pointed out that the concept of re-enactment in a documentary film becomes somewhat superfluous – on the one hand a documentarian is challenged to represent actuality responsibly and on the other a documentary can be considered to be a filmmaker's innovative perception of reality (Winston 2008:15). I have also contested that any attempt at narration through documentation can only ever be subjective (Nichols 2001; Katz & Katz 1988, Ruby 1988; Maasdorp 2011). In addition, if a narrative is told with the aid of self-reflexive methods, then the impact of subjectivity in the re-telling is acknowledged. The very statement that documentary is a “creative treatment of actuality”, is implicitly acknowledged through the filmmakers' intentional presence and their creative methods of narration (Grierson 1966:13). They use re-enactments in this film for various reasons and the performative quality of the re-enactments blurs “boundaries between fiction and non-fiction”, according to Anderson (2006:68). Non-realist techniques such as animation, stylized performance and theatrical set design, which are often found in self-referential auto-documentaries, all feature in this film as a way of sketching the internal lives of the subjects (Anderson 2006:68). Thus the performative nature of the re-enactment is employed. Bear in

mind that through the self-reflexive quality of the film, the autobiographical nature of this documentary allows the filmmakers to introduce highly dramatized moments as a means to highlight subjectivity.

In an autobiographical documentary or an “auto-documentary”, as Anderson refers to it, the subject of the film is the filmmaker, her life central to the unfolding of the narrative (2006:68-70). She states that typically the auto-documentary combines “observational footage with interviews [and] archival materials to create life stories situated historically [...] usually with a voice-over narration by the filmmaker” (Anderson 2006:69). *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) starts out as self-reflexive (that is, aware of its own construction processes) and soon becomes reflective (self-conscious) in the way in which it incorporates various autobiographical elements (Ruby 1988:36; Anderson 2006:67-69). In this film the viewer is “brought into the world of the storyteller”, as Patricia Aufderheide puts it, through video confessionals, first-person narration and what seems to be archival material (2007:sp). But the acute awareness of the re-enactment aspect of the film leads to more contrived modes of representation. It is also autobiographical in that the filmmakers tell us it is. In the introduction to the film Crumley and Buice address the viewers, stating that they are the producers of what the audience is about to see. Soon the viewer comes face to face with their personal tale: it is important to understand that here the camera doesn't capture ‘real’ events in an observational style - historical events are rather re-enacted for the camera. Even though I previously demonstrated the purposefully self-reflexive methods present in this film, it is important to note that just because an autobiographical documentary is reflective it does not necessarily have to be focussed on its own construction process.

### **2.1.1: SELF-REFLEXIVE METHODS:**

#### **VISIBILITY, DIALOGUE and EDITING**

An assumption exists that the documentary filmmaker is faced with an ethical responsibility to represent reality authentically, (Maasdorp 2011:208-210). But the awareness of this responsibility and the challenge of objectivity within such a representation lead to the development of reflexive modes of representation, which triggers an awareness of film as

subjective construct for the viewer (Maasdorp 2011:208). Typically self-reflexive methods are established in a non-fiction film in order to make evident the methods of construction of the film. While all documentaries are subjective to some extent, in *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) the self-reflexive style serves as a means to support an exceptionally subjective account of the subjects, who are also the filmmakers. This notion seems even more multifaceted when it becomes clear that the subjects (who are obviously portraying “themselves”) are documented, documenting themselves and each other. Subjects are often seen holding up video recorders filming each other and themselves, making filmic vignettes within the film. In the following section I look at how reflexive elements are present through visibility, through dialogue and with the employment of editing devices in the film.

The most common form of self-reflexivity in non-fiction films, as previously mentioned, is to show the filmmaker (director or camera operator ) and the filming equipment (Nichols 2001:125; Maasdorp 2011:209). In *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) the filmmakers appear on screen consistently, as subjects initially and then finally as filmmakers who address the fact that they have been playing the “roles” of the subjects in this personal autobiographical narrative. Self-reflexivity appears briefly but blatantly as the film begins in the form of an introduction addressed to the audience by the filmmakers themselves, stating that they hope the viewers will enjoy the product. Cameras, filming equipment and editing rooms are visible throughout the film. However, to be purposefully self-reflexive is not the same as witnessing the subject of a non-fiction film, who is documented as being a videographer; hold up a camera to film something (Ruby 1988:35). For example, the inclusion of filmic equipment in a shot would seem to be inevitable during a documentary like *No Subtitles Necessary* (2008), a film which investigates the relationship between two Hungarian cinematographers Lazlo Kovacs and Vilmos Zsigmond. Another example would be the behind-the-scenes documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* (1991) which chronicles the filmmaking process of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979). The visibility of filmic equipment and filmic jargon seems to be inevitably included in these projects seeing as the filmmaking process is at the centre or at least a main theme in these non-fiction films. Naturally the inclusion of these signifiers automatically does comment on the filmic process, whether intended or not. But, to be

purposefully reflexive, as Jay Ruby (1988:35) states, is to employ methods which clearly tell the viewer that this representation is a subjective endeavour and that the filmmaker employs self-reflexive methods in order to encourage intellectual engagement with the material. In *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) the filmmakers do not hide the fact that they have reconstructed their tale within a reflexive mode of representation, as we see through the introduction: here, the filmmakers address the audience, asking them to enjoy the film. And sure enough, any questions or confusion about motives behind this specific reflexive mode of representation, seem to be resolved in the final act of the film: the viewer finally realises just how reflexive this endeavour really was as the couple overtly and creatively confess to the viewer that the entire re-enacted non-fiction was an indulgent and almost therapeutic means whereby to explore the tendencies of their tumultuous relationship. A multitude of self-reflexive methods are used here in order to emphasize the couple's preoccupation and method with (re)telling 'their story': where previously we saw Crumley and Buice filming each other as subjects, a venture which formed part of the narrative, we now see shots of them (which seems to be 'behind the scenes' footage) showing how they have been filming each other as filmmakers, not subjects.

There is also a formal shift in this scene. Suddenly, what seems to be "real" footage is intercut with re-enacted scenes. Crumley and Buice clearly kept the cameras rolling throughout the process, capturing back-stage drama in guerrilla-like<sup>11</sup> style. But the mixture of behind the scenes footage intercut with re-enacted scenes, places the viewer in a particularly remarkable position of critical examination. The viewer cannot know for certain what to interpret as "real" footage and is therefore rather critical of the authenticity of all footage seen. However, the uncertainty introduced through this technique of intercutting re-enactments with live footage further emphasises the constructed nature of film. In this way, the filmmakers succeed in commenting on the frivolity of the often popular assumption that a documentary necessarily tells the truth (Lanthier 2011: sp, Maasdorp 2011:208-209, Nichols 2001:125).

The filmmakers shift from working behind the camera to in front of it, as both subjects and filmmakers, and the visibility of camera equipment and filmmaking processes develops the

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<sup>11</sup>With the advent of digital cameras, guerrilla filmmaking became an accessible means of independent filmmaking often characterised by low budgets and small crews and resulting in a 'handheld quality' and often grainy aesthetic.

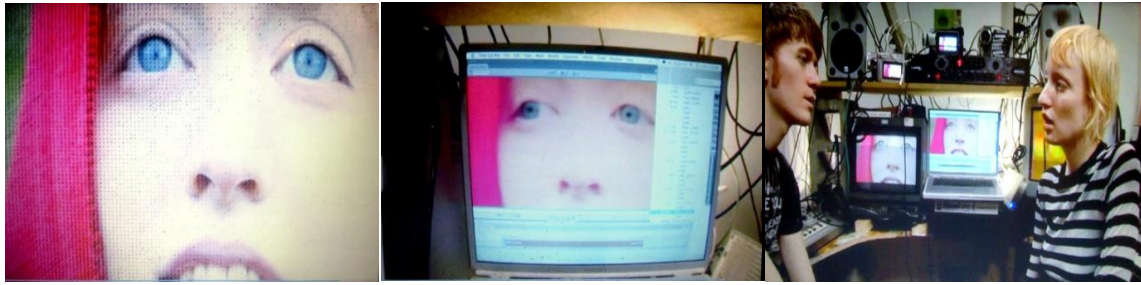
notion of film as construct for the viewer allowing her an intellectual distance of critical interpretation (Maasdorp 2011:209-211). As previously mentioned the work is autobiographical and so if Crumley is a filmmaker/videographer in 'real life', he is shown as such in the film. Often seen with a camera or in his editing room, Crumley as filmmaker and writer of his own story implicitly acknowledges the fact that he is the creator of this re-enacted non-fiction by showing himself as incessantly filming. Crumley goes a step further and not only makes himself visible but shows the audience how he has made himself visible by implicitly referring to filmmaking devices and processes of filming: he films himself filming himself, Crumley as subject describes an editing program at one point, and he even plays around with adjusting settings in order to acknowledge his own involvement in the construction process of the representation seen. In one scene, Crumley makes a video-diary in which he explains to Susan (and to his audience) how a film editing program works – here he is out of focus at first but soon adjusts the settings making the viewer aware of his position as technician/filmmaker. Liani Maasdorp (2011:218) often refers to “conspicuous” devices or strategies employed which signify the filmmaker’s overt involvement within the technical representation of the film. In a blatantly obvious reflexive moment, Crumley explains to Buice via a video-message how a certain editing program functions with helpful notes that he has jotted down onto a piece of legal paper. He encourages her to pursue her interest in filming as he believes it will help her in expressing herself creatively. Crumley is speaking directly into the camera as if through it with (an imagined) Susan. The setting that surrounds him, reminds the viewer of the technologies involved in the filmmaking process, as we see wires, screen, mikes and earphones – all visual indicators that signifies an editor’s space. On the legal pad we see directions of how to run a film editing program. By foregrounding these methods by which a film is produced the filmmakers remind the audience of the process involved in the construction of the representation thus triggering a critical engagement with the material. I find this scene slightly ‘tongue in the cheek’. It has already been established that Crumley is the filmmaker who documents himself documenting himself – by overtly speaking towards the camera, speaking with (the imagined) Susan, it is also as if he is looking at his audience, implicitly explaining to them the process he himself employed in order to produce what we now see. Also in this scene, Crumley blatantly adjusts the focus at one point. According to Maasdorp, technical adjustments are “aesthetically displeasing changes to focus, exposure and composition” which are usually made by the camera

operator as a means to “improve the overall quality of the [...] shot [or to] compensate for changes in lighting and subject position that have occurred while filming” (2011:218). Conventionally, these kinds of adjustments will not be included in films that make use of continuity editing, as they overtly remind the viewer of the filmmaking process involved in the representation of what is seen. But Buice does this in order to acknowledge his own presence as filmmaker and then addresses it via dialogue. Although I mention self-reflexivity as an intrinsic part of this representation, these self-reflexive methods not only comment on the film’s own format, but also assist in the development of narrative and subjects.

In the final act of the film, the subjects address the constructed nature of the process of filmmaking: voiceovers address the dilemma of making such an autobiographical filmic representation, while we see moving images of the couple building sets, working in an editing room and constructing a narrative in front of a storyboard. We hear Crumley stating: “We’ve got all the writings and the drawings and the video [...] to make this into something” and “I am not interested in arriving anywhere [...] I am interested in the process”. By overtly drawing the viewers’ attention to the creative process the viewer is faced with the filmmakers’ blatant acknowledgement of film as construct. These verbal statements refer to the material and footage which the filmmakers already own which they will come to incorporate into the film by either re-staging or re-appropriating it. While simultaneously addressing the filmmaking process we hear them arguing, and phrases like, “the difficulty of executing this project”, are emphasized, again drawing the viewers’ attention to the filmmaking process as opposed to seamless, flowing narratives which allow viewers to suspend their disbelief instead of getting critically involved with the material.

While the viewer is bombarded with the verbal references to filmmaking processes she witnesses a constructed composition which again draws her attention toward the self-reflexive structure of the film. Crumley and Buice are seen in the editing room and in front of the story board. In the editing room we see Buice’s face in the monitor. Initially, we see a close-up of the face. Then the camera starts zooming out, to reveal her face framed by a computer screen, then we see Buice and Crumley working in the editing studio, and finally we witness a camera operator, filming this composition. The shot of the computer screen is reminiscent of Lacan’s mirror: Buice is showing us how she is selectively constructing a narrative of the self (see figures 1, 2 and 3).





Figures 1, 2 and 3

Buice's face in close-up, her face framed by the screen, the couple in the editing studio engaged in the filmmaking process of editing.

At the end of this sequence, the viewer is finally left at the beginning. The couple are seen in the same studio where the introduction of the film took place in which they charmingly tell their viewers to enjoy the film. We witness Arin directing Susan, telling her to “be natural, be present” and to “lean in”. Susan's defiance in this scene annoys Arin and the viewer senses a tension here - but at this point the viewer has also been exposed to enough self-reflexive and re-enacted elements to know that this tension might simply be dramatised in order to demonstrate the difficulty these subjects seemed to encounter in creating the film. Through the use of dramatic music and voiceovers overlapping in frenzy, it becomes clear that the filmmakers' intention here was to create drama and illuminate the strenuous process of having constructed the re-telling of the subjects' personal narrative.

The filmmakers also draw our attention to the constructed nature of the narrative by using what Maasdorp calls “conspicuous editing” (2011:217-221). This refers to the self-reflexive use of editing devices in order to comment on the film as construction. In a rather “poetic” scene Susan initially shows us how she can create intimate moments via the camera – we view parts of her body, an eye, an ear and her mouth, in close-up, each shot intercut with a shot of her filming these different parts of her body herself. The soundtrack adds a romantic tone to what we are seeing. Through this scene we are being made used to the convention of experiencing intimate, poetic compositions in a tender tone, while consistently being reminded through the visibility of the camera, the running time in the corner of the screen and the shots of Susan filming herself, that what we see is a construction. In the next scene, a sex scene, we are again reminded of the construction of the filmic process through montage editing. Dynamic shots of fingers tracing



across bare skin in close-up are intercut with shots of doves lifting off and a sunrise through the clouds, perhaps implying a sexual awakening of sorts. Montage is a film editing technique involving the juxtaposition of images within a film to create symbolic meaning (Eisenstein 1999:21-22). Here, it serves in creating new meaning by drawing comparison or parallels between two contradictory or disassociated images (Eisenstein 1999:21-22). While the viewer is swept up in the romantic compositions accompanied by a dreamy soundtrack, every time we see the fingers tracing across the skin, we also see the running time in the corner of the screen and we are reminded of the previous scene in which Buice showed us how she came to construct intimate close-ups of herself.

The presence of the camera here, demonstrates to the viewer the intrinsic role it plays in self-reflexive construction processes and it simultaneously makes the viewer ask what the position of the camera is within such an intimate scene between subjects. Would the conventional documentarian who is observing and not intimately involved with the subjects being filmed, be able to enter into such a private space with her recording devices? Susan sends a text message via her phone to Arin the following day. The message states: “it was fun not talking to you” re-emphasizing the notion that an intimate moment was experienced through means of mediation. Crumley and Buice persistently and self-reflexively re-enact scenarios which situate them within a narrative that strongly relies on the presence of these recording devices and thematically we are reminded that the presence of the camera plays an intrinsic role not only in the relationship but its visibility also serves as a self-reflexive signal to the audience. It is a means through which the couple narrate, communicate and record their connection. It becomes evident in the final act of the film that both Crumley and Buice not only embarked on this filmic process with the intention to re-tell “their story” but also in order to archive it. They also make clear in their introduction to the film that the viewer is welcome to visit their website, [foureyedmonsters.com](http://foureyedmonsters.com). This site not only further promotes the film but features a thirteen part web series in which the couple continue to document the construction process of the film. The episodes favour guerrilla style ‘behind-the-scenes’ footage (not featured in the film) which covers the trials and tribulations of the couple’s relationship during the production process. In this way the couple uses a mediated platform in order to preserve their experience - albeit publicly. For Brian Roberts the camera as recording device can serve as a means of “delaying or eradicating mortality as well as keeping a memory alive” (2011:sp). What documentary cannot do however, even though the perception

might exist that this is the documentary's purpose, is to "provide an unbiased objective account of the truth". This is the case of *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005). A personal tale is subjectively retold via creative strategies that not only comment on film as construct but also simultaneously reconstructs a personal history to whichever extent the authors' desire. Therefore the traditional assumption that a documentary is an authentic representation of reality is once again challenged here.

## **2.2: PRODUCING THE VISUAL SELF INTO BEING**

The subject-filmmaker dynamic inherent to the film *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) places filmmakers, Crumely and Buice in a peculiar position: the couple are able to simultaneously look at the content they have constructed while being looked at by viewers of the film as well as by themselves as filmmakers. By referring to three scenarios in the film, Arin filming himself in front of the mirror, Susan filming herself and Arin filming Susan, I would like to unpack the idea of the self as both subject and creator of the documented narrative which is *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) and in so doing develop the theory, by referring to Lacan's Mirror Phase, that the self collaboratively constructs and performs the self with and for her audience. The variously mediated gazes that we perceive in the film serve to demonstrate the complexity of looking and being looked at by the Big Other, the self, as well as the self as other. This process produces a self-reflexive filmic genre that is both re-enacted documentary, fictional narrative and fantasized "art" work. It is necessary to note throughout that the filmmakers are actively involved in how they are (re)presented as subjects through the mediated lens; formally they are consistently demonstrating how they have come to re-construct a personal narrative through self-reflexive methods, as discussed in the previous subsection of this chapter.

### **2.2.1: CRUMLEY FILMS CRUMLEY (FILMS CRUMLEY)**

Below, we see the process of Crumley constructing the image that will represent his online self. This process becomes reminiscent of the self-reflexive methods employed by Crumley and Buice in the scenarios discussed earlier in this chapter.



Figure 4, 5 and 6

Crumley prepares for his virtual date.

In the images above (figures 4, 5 and 6) we find a brilliant example of how Crumley performs the double role of both filmmaker and subject. In this scene (which will henceforth be referred to as Crumley’s “mirror scene”) the subject is simultaneously filming and being filmed while preparing for a virtual date. The subject-filmmaker is seen standing in front of a mirror, filming himself. He looks at himself (as other) not only as framed by the mirror, but he also composes an image of himself as seen through the lens of the camera he is holding up to the mirror. Crumley “sees” the self three times: as filmmaker who composes the image for the viewer of the film; as subject looking at the self in the mirror; and finally as self seen through the eyes of the camera lens in the mirror. Note also that Crumley is preparing for a virtual date with a, currently anonymous, virtual other, so by extension, he is also seeing himself as he imagines the Big Other will see him. The many layers and mediated ways of looking finally result in Crumley capturing the image of self in a black and white snapshot which will become the profile picture (see figure 7 below) of his online dating profile, an image which can be argued was produced through Crumley’s imagination to translate a certain desired identity to his public. We soon realize that

the “mirror scene” is Crumley’s preparation for something. Crumley shows the viewer a ritual: he dresses attractively, cuts his hair, strikes a pose and finally takes a picture of himself. Once he uploads the picture onto a dating site in the following scene and constructs new descriptors of himself that accompany the image, after which he messages random anonymous women, the viewer realizes he was getting ready for a potential (virtual) date. It can be argued that Crumley thus composes an image which will allow him to see himself the way he hopes others (potential dates) will see him and constructs his online visual identity accordingly. Media theorist, Andra Siibak, is of the opinion that online profile pictures serve as important symbol for the subject: they are the “first impression” of the subject, giving an “overview of a person’s self-concept and physical characteristics”, although these photos are often “staged performances” and therefore the mediated self becomes less authentic (2009:sp).



Figure 7

Arin’s profile picture implicitly portrays him as artistic photographer, while simultaneously commenting on his own self-reflexivity due to the visibility of the camera.

From a Lacanian perspective this is a way of “producing” the online image of the self as an ideal, desired self to be looked at: the manufactured photograph of the self becomes a means of ideal self-presentation. The profile picture characteristic of modern SNSs is an example of the process by which the self creates her own desired image of self, according to how she imagines the Big Other is perceiving her. Brian Roberts believes that virtual self-portraiture is being created constantly by individuals to visually communicate certain constructed narratives about the self (2011:sp). I argue that, the profile picture is a modern-day refashioning of a mirror, into which the individual might look, seeing her constructed version of her own fantasized “ideal-I”. Roberts, who also draws a through line between re-cognizing the self-image and the process of re-cognizing the reflection of the self in the mirror (within whichever form, photograph or film

screen), states that the experience of catching our reflection in “any medium which can produce an image of the self”, results in “existential thought processes” asking, “who is that?” (2011:sp). This is essentially significant of Lacan’s Mirror Phase in which an identity (or concept of self) is formed through the imaginary processes when recognizing (re-cognizing) the reflection of the self in the mirror (1977:4).

This moment of composing an image in the film serves in illuminating the notion that not only filmic representations can be methods for construction, but so can photographic processes. Roberts acknowledges that there is a common assumption that the photographic record is an image which “mirrors reality” and that it is a “faithful” record (2011:sp). Although Roberts implies that the photographic image might in some instances reflect the image of the self in the way a mirror might, as the photograph does “take a moment from reality and reproduces it as a recognizable image” he also affirms that “we tend to forget how the camera sees what it sees” and the various technical devices and choices concerning composition and lighting that are often involved in the producing of a self-portrait to the likes of Crumley’s mirror-picture (2011:sp). Chalfen states that to “fully appreciate the potential power of photographs to act as a form of self-presentation; we must remember [...] such images remain but one rendition of reality” (2002:142-143).

In 2004 MySpace appropriately popularized what was then called “the mirror pic” (a picture taken of oneself in the mirror, requiring the camera to be captured in the mirror). Naturally, when the “mirror-pic” originated, camera phones were not yet the custom. The result was that big, almost invasive, cameras were visible in these pictures. Crumley’s picture is clearly taken in the mirror as the camera reveals, as was the tendency of the time, which adds an utterly self-reflexive element to the composition. Again, Crumley is indicating to his viewer that even online, he is commenting on himself as filmmaker and photographer. The overt visibility of the camera draws attention back to the important role that the camera plays in Buice and Crumley’s relationship. In the context of the film, the mirror picture not only gives insight into Crumley as subject but serves as a self-reflexive moment. This mirror image draws a thematic link to self-reflexive modes inherent to the film – Crumley the filmmaker is often documented as filming himself as subject. With the mirror portrait Crumley as subject photographs himself and purposefully selects the resultant constructed image in order to present an imagined (ideal) image

of his online self. On Crumley's webpage, which advertises him as videographer, he is also defined by his camera which is present in the photograph. It seems that the camera or the photograph or any kind of lens through which the mediated image of Crumley comes to be presented accompanies him whenever the viewer sees him, and becomes not only a prop with which to comment on self-reflexive methods of representation but also an extension of Crumley as subject, defining him as creator of mediated images.

Crumley's mirror-picture is a kind of modern day self-portraiture providing the individual with the opportunity to look back at the constructed self, and applaud that creation. The need to present and document the self in a mediated and constructed manner is not an utterly new concept. People have been documenting ideal versions of themselves throughout the ages – both Lacan and Goffman quite clearly profess the need of the self to consistently construct and perform the self with the other in mind (1986 & 1959). Chalfen and Strano, insist that often we assume a photograph is a real record; a form of visual documentation which captures and preserves history but we forget the shooting and editing practices involved which shapes the photograph into an ideal image (2002:141-149, 2001:sp). The photo Crumley does take of himself by himself does connote a certain poetic or even artistic image and indicates the need to be summarized by the visual indicators in the photo. He is seen with his camera in one hand, which self-reflexively informs the onlooker that the camera plays a significant role in Crumley's demeanour, and by extension presents his virtual desired self that wishes to be seen as "creative" and "artistic". He looks away from the lens (which he is clearly holding), adding a layer of "mystique" to the image: perhaps Crumley wants to imply that he is "deep" or "mysterious", a popular tendency in profile pictures, according to Zhao *et al.* (2008:1825). And to add a final layer, he chooses to present the photo in black and white, creating a slight feeling of nostalgia and again signifying his "alternative" or "artistic" and "deep" desired characteristics. All these elements contribute to the very obvious idealized version of the self that Crumley constructs: he wants to be perceived as creative, artistic, poetic or even mysterious. This self-reflexive process of creating, narrating and performing the self by the self by means of photography, assist Crumley and Buice in creating a hybrid genre of storytelling which in turn support them in the contrivance and portrayal of certain ideal selves. In figures 4, 5, 6 and 7 at the beginning of this subsection, we see the process of Crumley constructing the image that will represent his online self. This process becomes reminiscent of the self-reflexive methods employed by Crumley and

Buice when they persistently comment on their presence in the construction of their auto-documentary. Ultimately, this entire scene is a double commentary on the reflexivity and subjectivity with which Crumley and Buice chose to represent their images of self, as well as their personal narratives.

### **2.2.2: BUICE FILMS BUICE (FILMS BUICE)**

In committing to communicating only through creative means of expression, both Buice and Crumley invest in an inventive process of narrating about the self to each other through the use of various forms of media. At a stage, Buice is documented as going on an art retreat and Crumley suggests communicating via video-diary for the duration of her stay. Here, Buice the filmmaker performs the role of subject as filmmaker, capturing the self in a specifically fantasized and constructed way. Her videos, the contents of which are addressed to Crumley, seem to portray her as artistic. It might be argued that she performs the role of someone who is artistic, often talking about her art, citing poems, and finding quirky ways of portraying messages by including mixed media drawings with montage-like editing in her messages. Buice's intent is to send these messages to Crumley, as the subject engaging in the filming of herself. She also engages in a self-reflexive performance of a desired identity. Essentially, Buice becomes an audience member to her own, sometimes rather existential, digital performance: her virtually mediated body becomes the vehicle through which she constructs a desired idea of the self. Here, Crumley is constituted as an other – her lover to whom she performs and expresses a certain desired identity. She also reflects on existential subject matter in the video messages and ponders whether or not she can live up to how Crumley as other conceives of a good artist, all the while expressing her need to be seen as an artist (her desired identity). While she is filming she also becomes her an other looking back at her creation of the self. Buice is seen holding the camera up to her face, the numbers in the corner of the screen reminding the viewer that we are watching a constructed scene by not only the subject but also by Buice the filmmaker who is ultimately in control of the composition of how she as subject within her personal re-constructed story is portrayed. For Buice this soon seems to become a therapeutic session in which she performs the tortured artist not able to “express from her core” as she herself states, resulting in



expressive ways of communicating, as she uses her body to illuminate a narrative. This recording of the self while expressing the need to be creative, could at times seem indulgent to the viewer: Buice's desired self clearly attempts to portray herself as artist and in the figures below (figures 8, 9 and 10), Buice uses an image of her body as a canvas to re-create a personal narrative in an inventive way while simultaneously producing a certain desired perspective of the self. Buice is seen as double filmmaker. She is ultimately documenting the self and by extension a narrative of the self that has come before – an artistic re-invention of her personal history.



Figures 8, 9 and 10

Buice uses her body as canvas to construct and perform a mediated narrative of the self.

### **2.2.3: CRUMLEY FILMS BUICE or “STALKING SUSAN”**

In this self-reflexive autobiographical docu-drama the couple meet online and Buice suggests they meet up – she invites Crumley to visit her at work where she is a waitress. Although Crumley eventually musters up the courage to go, he does not make his presence known once he is there. Rather, he waits until Buice's shift finishes and starts following her, without her knowing, recording footage of her with his video camera recorder. He finally follows her all the way home, Buice still unaware. Crumley decides to send an email to Buice, and attaches photo stills from the footage he took of her, making it evident that he had been following her around unobtrusively. The email is fittingly titled, “Stalking Susan”. Buice responds to the photos stating that it had “excited” her to know that at “anytime, anywhere”, someone could be watching her. Crumley's fascination with filming Buice (without her initial consent) makes for an entertaining and suspenseful scene, but Crumley's motivation behind doing so dominantly



serves in highlighting elements of self-reflexive filmmaking for the viewer. Rather, what makes for complex power dynamics of gazing in this scene is Buice's response to the scenario that implies a compliance with the situation. Approaching this scene from a surveillance perspective, an interesting dynamic evolves which, although reminiscent of both panoptic as well as omnioptic gazing practises, isn't really one or the other. While panoptic looking entails the observer in a position of power (the observed not in control of her own visibility), omnioptic gazing provides the observed with the platform to choose when and how she will be made visible. Omnioptic forms of gazing entail a democratic element as explained chapter one - instead of feeling shame at her own visibility over which she has no control, the observed is liberated by willingly and purposefully making the self visible. In this scene, Crumley bears the gaze and selects how he will show her the way she is seen through his camera lens which represents an other. Buice in turn has no control over how her mediated self will come to look and look back at her from within the mirror of the screen. And yet, through her response, Buice indicates that she is thrilled by the situation. There seems to be a desire here to be looked at – to be produced through the gaze of another in the Lacanian sense of the word. In chapter three, I briefly refer to Žižek who, also within the Lacanian framework, explores personal surveillance websites that for him serve as the perfectly created platform in which the self demonstrates her reliance on the gaze from an other (2002:225). Žižek also notes in this instance a kind of reversal of the traditional panoptic surveillance model in which the subject is forever observed and has “no place to hide from the omnipresent gaze of the Power” (2002:225). With these surveillance websites, however, Žižek recognizes the development of a kind of “anxiety” from what he calls the “prospect of not being exposed to the Other's gaze all the time” (2002:224). I believe that concept applies here. I have investigated the role the camera plays in the relationship between Crumley and Buice, both as prop through which to communicate and tool with which to document their story. There is clearly reliance to communicate through the camera with each other rather than talking face to face. For Žižek the gaze of the camera (and by default what it represents, namely, the Big Other) serves as an “ontological guarantee of his/her being” (2002:225). The couple portray various positions of power in this scene: fundamentally one looks and one is being looked at. But it is not plainly hierarchical and subservient: while Crumley is the dominant observer, Buice's simultaneous compliance and self-confessed “excitement” establishes an almost erotic tone in this scene – she wants to be looked at. Perhaps

Crumley's gaze serves also as the "ontological guarantee" of Buice's being. Žižek contests that the self exists in that she imagines she is perceived through the gaze of an Other (2005:225). It will be useful to unpack the different gazes in this scenario – where they come from and who they are directed at has a powerful impact on psychological processes of self-imagining. I would first like to look at Crumley's role as observer and then at Buice's role as the observed.

Crumley's stalking act has a voyeuristic quality to it. Simply put voyeurism is the "act of viewing the activities of other people unbeknown to them" (Hayward 2001:446). Often the term has "illicit connotations" as voyeurism also points towards the act of deriving pleasure from this anonymous viewing, often referred to as scopophilia. Crumley and his camera adopt the role of voyeur, and due to Buice's obliviousness to their presence he adopts a position of power and hierarchical control over Buice's visibility (at least for the moment). According to Hayward voyeurism might be a strategy adopted by the male to "counter his fear of sexual difference" (2001:447-448). In acting as voyeur he "fixes the woman with his gaze, voyeuristically investigat[ing] her body, and therefore sexuality – she is the object of his investigation and in that way he safely contains her" (2001:447-448). The fact that Buice cannot return the gaze in this instance reiterates that he is in a position of power – he is the one who has agency over her visibility and subsequently over her. Crumley's camera becomes like a forbidden window, with Crumley as Peeping Tom, voyeuristically lurking outside of it and gazing through it, unbeknown to the object of the gaze. Buice's statement, however, suggests that she opens the blinds for her voyeur, who at this stage is anonymous, inviting his gaze into her home. Through her statement, Susan essentially performs the role of the female who is subservient, not able to look back, fixing herself as object of his gaze and subsequently he remains in a position of power. Even if she liberates herself by inviting the gaze back in, she still cannot look back. But does she want to look? The basis of Lacan's argument on the Big Other is that this other is fundamentally constituted through the imagination. It is through the imagined gaze of the Other that the self conducts and constrains the idea of her "self" according to an imagined judgement. Contrary to a typical voyeuristic scenario, with its definite hierarchical power structures in which the subject is not in control of her own visibility, something nearly liberating and even slightly omnioptic happens here: Buice welcomes the gaze. She wants to be looked at and it is clear that she does not feel the need to look back. What is significant about this situation is that Crumley doesn't remain anonymous: he brags about his position as voyeur by proving to her via email that he had

watched her. Perhaps Buice welcomes it in the hope to receive more images of herself. Two things become clear here: Buice's desire to be perceived through the gaze of the Other is evident, and secondly, it seems like she wants to be in a position to gaze at the image of herself.

When discussing Buice's role in this scenario it is important to understand that her gaze oscillates between her gaze as subject and her gaze as filmmaker. By signaling to her stalker that she enjoyed being watched, she invites him to do so again, fixing herself as the object of his gaze. Traditional surveillance conditions are challenged in that she willingly invites the gaze in, but at this point she cannot look back. Although this scene might seem as if it fails in terms of hierarchical surveillance models, I do not think this was the intent – as online social media is at the foreground of this film, I believe rather that it attempts to demonstrate the complex looking dynamics involved in a space (online) where the image of the self is consistently scrutinized by the self as other as well as by the self's imagined Big Other, reliant on their judgement. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the imagined ideal image of self (ego-ideal) is what is required in order to be accepted by the Other's imagined desired gaze – the subject “judges” herself and her image (ideal ego) according to how she imagines the Other desires to perceive her (Dashtipour 2009:323-324). But, what weighs stronger for me here is Buice's interest in looking at herself through the footage Arin sends her of herself. Although it must be noted that in turn, and within the content of the film, Buice is not able to choose which parts of herself will be shown to her, this scenario illuminates the Lacanian idea of the desire of the self to be given life through means of another's (an other's) gaze. Through her statement, Buice not only fixes herself as the object of Crumley's gaze but his need to show her the way she is seen through his eyes obviously speaks to Buice's narcissistic desires to see herself through Crumley's (imagined) eyes. It is important to note the necessary presence of Crumley as facilitator to Buice's imagined self: the actual footage Crumley is taking of her shows her the way she is seen by him as he looks at her through his camera and how she is possibly perceived by others around her. At this stage, and for the sake of the narrative, Crumley's identity is of little importance – he is an anonymous other who serves her narcissistic desires of seeing herself the way she imagines others see her and in this way she becomes a second audience member of her own documented self. Crumley almost becomes an object, fulfilling Buice's desire to look at herself in the way that others look at her. This scenario might serve as an affirmation for Buice that an other is looking. The proof of Crumley's gaze via email is perhaps flattering to Buice: her image served back at her is an

affirmation that someone desires to “look”. While the content of this film might document ways of self-fashioning on SNSs, the filmic representation follows reflexive methods which allow the viewer to understand that the filmic mode of representation might just be another platform or means of mediation through which these subject-filmmakers are able to re-present the image and narrative of their (possibly ideal and imagined) selves.

It is vital to remember, however, that ultimately Buice is portraying two roles: that of subject and that of filmmaker. If I am to consider this scenario from a self-reflexive point of view, it must be remembered that Buice is also a filmmaker, who essentially chooses how she will be seen, and is able to “look” at how she is seen, not only by Crumley within the content of the film but also as filmmaker who bears the ultimate gaze. This means that she is ultimately greatly involved in the construction of her mediated image and very much in control of the way in which she will be seen by her audience even if she performs the role of subject complying with a hierarchical gaze towards her. The couple reaches a democratic equilibrium of gazing at themselves: they are both the ultimate observers and selectors of their own mediated images.

### **2.3: CONCLUSION**

*Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) presents its viewer with various complicated questions which serve to highlight the dualistic role of the subject-filmmaker. As prosumers of their own content Crumley and Buice succeed in telling a story via a hybrid mode of filmmaking which manages to comment on film as construct and reveal the issues around the treatment of actuality. This idea simultaneously sheds light on the complexities of subjectivity within the documentary filmic genre, while exploring the concept of the self produced through various forms of social media. By adding obvious self-reflexive devices, the subject-filmmakers highlight the representational manner of making and presenting a film – fictional or documentary – in order to comment on the problematic of the form itself and how the viewer interprets it. As subjects and as filmmakers, Crumley and Buice act as voyeurs of each others’ visually mediated selves. Set against the background of a fictional online dating site, the filmmakers comment on their position as victim

of the imagined judgement of others and demonstrate how they manage their online impressions accordingly. Crumley and Buice both become each others' Big Other, maintaining a relationship where interaction is always mediated and therefore also constructed. Often the camera becomes the mediator through which this couple communicates. However, the camera is also a prop with which they capture, present and define their visual identities. It is as if the video camera becomes a third member of Arin and Susan's relationship, signifying their role as filmmakers that bear the ultimate gaze, deciding how to present what and representing the imagined eye of the Big Other.

By including self-reflexive representational strategies, the filmmakers comment on the very complex role of the subjective subject-filmmaker and in turn illuminate the autobiographical dynamic which allows them to further emphasize subjective self-documentation. By creating interesting scenes that document how subjects manage their mediated image of self with collaborative assistance from (imagined) others, the filmmakers demonstrate mirror-gazing processes. While constantly reminding his viewers of his self-reflexive role as filmmaker, Crumley, as subject, gazes through many lenses, attempting to either extract from it some sort of coherent narrative about his desired self or undertaking to fulfil the symbolic role of Other who gazes at his fellow subject. His fellow subject, Buice, is however also his fellow filmmaker and while the documented gazing practises between the two subjects aim at highlighting certain power dynamics in looking, the filmmakers cleverly remind the viewer that as filmmaker, Buice bears the ultimate (hierarchical) gaze: forcing the viewer to see what she wants them to see.

In the following chapters, I will explore this dualistic relationship of the subject-filmmaker further and demonstrate how the self never performs her desired idea of self in isolation, but always in collaboration with the imagined Other. Chapter three investigates the notion of personal webcam surveillance online. I explore how the subject of *We Live in Public* (2009) becomes a pseudo-documentarian of his own mediated image: claiming control over the distribution of his mediated image, while maintaining a subservient position of observed, rather than observer of his own image. While I explore the subjects' personal identity construction practices online, I systematically look at how filmmaker, Ondi Timoner, mirror these notions in her representational methods which, although at times seems straightforward have strong self-reflexive tendencies.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **SELF-REFLEXIVE SURVEILLANCE AND DOCUMENTATION IN PAN/OMNI-OPTIC BORDERLANDS**

Ondi Timoner employs various elements from different representational modes to present the content of this film. Editing is predominantly seamless and the mode of representation fairly conventional: she uses methods reminiscent of observational and expository representational strategies, including a mixture of interviews with chyrons<sup>12</sup>, observational footage, photographs, voice-overs and text. She however dominantly employs self-reflexive methods of composition and juxtaposition, inviting the viewer to partake in a critical decoding of the content while simultaneously stressing Josh Harris' own self-reflexive involvement in the production of his mediated and subsequently documented self.

The voice-over narration traditionally found in expository documentaries<sup>13</sup> is used in this film in order to contextualize the narrative (Nichols 2001:105). Timoner often makes use of this convention in order to create context for the viewer and provide the viewer with personal opinions. However, she soon confesses via voice-over her role as documentarian and observer of Harris' activities, a claim to authorship which clearly adds a self-reflexive element to the film. The knowledge that her presence as filmmaker is pertinent in Harris' experiments also raises questions about the authenticity of his behaviour in front of her cameras. In order to demonstrate this point Timoner employs not only a mixing of self-reflexive and expository modes but the documentary but sometimes relies on observational methods which, although seemingly unobtrusive, can have the potential to influence subjects filmed. The methods Timoner employs

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<sup>12</sup>A chyron is the text which is typically superimposed over shots of interviewees in the lower third of the screen, stating the interviewee's name and field of expertise (Maasdorp 2011:223).

<sup>13</sup>Voice-over commentary, significant to expository modes of representation, where the "speaker is heard but never seen", addresses the viewer "directly" with "titles or voices that propose a perspective, advance an argument, or recount history" (Nichols 2001:105). Timoner not only makes use of this representational method in order to propose a certain perspective but through it she also introduces her own self-reflexive position as subjective filmmaker.

in order to introduce Harris within the first few minutes of the film, set up a convention for the viewer which allows her to understand the complicated dynamics of who the authoring agent is in the telling of this story: the viewer is faced head on with the puzzling relationship we come to face in *We Live in Public* (2009) between the two very present documentarians.

As *We Live in Public* (2009) begins the viewer hears a voice, which she will later come to recognize as belonging to Josh Harris. In this voice-over he states: “I’m about to be eaten”. Such a statement conjures up images of human prey or even cannibalism, and soon enough the viewer will come to understand the often animalistic tendencies of the self when captured under the gaze of severe surveillance in Harris’ experiments. This statement is then immediately followed by the first visual image of Harris as he is making a personal video recording in which he addresses his dying mother, saying goodbye to her. The viewer sees the running time in the corners of the screen, characteristic of any conventional home recording device, indicating that Harris is filming himself. By opening the film with this remarkably powerful scene, Timoner demonstrates two vital themes of the film: first Harris as creator and documentarian of his own mediated image, and second Harris’ reliance on technical media when expressing emotion.

Harris’ message to his mother comes across as rather cold. But if his statement alone does not provide the viewer with enough proof of his detachment towards this touching subject of his dying mother, Timoner strategically inserts a quick comment from his brother, stating: “It was hard...just getting a message from him...a cold message”. The oscillation between Harris’ seemingly “cold” message and his brother’s affirmation that it was indeed a “cold” message is an editing strategy employed by Timoner in order to emphasize this point. The editing produces a flowing nature of the argument but before the viewer can completely suspend her disbelief, Timoner very clearly draws the viewer’s attention back to the technicalities involved in the construction processes of the video message by emphasizing Harris’ own involvement with how he is presenting his mediated message. These self-reflexive methods encourage intellectual engagement with the content viewed. Timoner continually plays around with these various methods of representation— expository and (later in the film) observational while simultaneously making use of self-reflexive strategies – in order to demonstrate the delicateness of film as subjective construction. Both Maasdorp and Nichols state that most self-reflexive films do not adhere to the “rules” of only one particular type of subgenre (2011:217 & 2001:100). As the film



continues, this becomes a theme as we see Harris struggling with how he attempts to present and subsequently document himself.

Unlike Susan Buice and Arin Crumely who self-reflexively perform the roles of filmmaker-subject in *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), and distinct from Nev who becomes the facilitator of his own narrative towards the final act of *Catfish* (2010), Harris' participation in the construction of how he is portrayed lies within his projects. Instead of the story of the filmmaker and the story of the subject colliding as with the other films, we find here two-part documentation: first, Ondi Timoner's documentation of Josh Harris, and second, Josh's experiments as documented by Harris. Timoner's formal techniques, although they might often seem "straightforward", re-iterate the self-reflexivity with which Harris attempts to document his story.

In the previous chapter I have highlighted the ways in which a mediated self can come to gaze at herself within the mirror of the screen as other. When this self portrays the role of subject-filmmaker or "prosumer", she is able to re-construct the idea of the self via editing methods, according to how she imagines the Big Other perceives of her. In order to understand the way in which visibility and the psychology behind being seen function in the "We Live in Public" terrain that Harris and his girlfriend, Tanya, constructed, I must first highlight some vital factors which I believe influenced the couple's behaviour, and the way in which they documented themselves. The visibility and demeanour of their supposedly authentic selves online is reliant on the environment in which they choose to "live in public". A mediated territory manifests and the couple is represented as simultaneously "real" and "virtual" – never really being one or the other. "Real" footage is captured of them, but immediately their bodies are turned into mediated entities to be streamed live over the internet. Despite the utilization of the technical features and devices (social media and webcams) which assist in the construction of their online presence and which provide them with the platform to present themselves within this specifically mediated (though apparently "authentic") manner, the space that this couple inhabits that allows them to move seamlessly between the real (albeit constructed) and the virtual come to function as a borderland. This borderland in turn comes to embody a space where "rules" are challenged and normative understandings of private vs. public, and power vs. control, as well as power vs. submissiveness (in terms of surveillance theory) are re-defined.



Another vital factor to take into consideration in this scenario is the role of the Big Other. Timoner herself never bothers with exclusively highlighting the couples' motivations behind the implementation of such an experiment and so rather than asking *why* the couple made themselves visible in such a way, I would like to ask for *whom* do they do this? I have addressed the theory behind Lacan's Big Other and must refer to Žižek, who emphasises that an anxiety has arisen in modern socially mediated cultures out of the idea of "not being seen" (2002:225). The argument here is that only in so far as the self is looked at can she feel validated. Harris himself continually states during interviews that being seen on television and other media gave purpose to his existence.

Harris uses surveillance as a means to perform the role of pseudo-documentarian in order to construct and subsequently document his own narrative. He uses what might seem like a "fly-on-the-wall"<sup>14</sup> approach through intrusive personal webcam surveillance which consequently documents him and his girlfriend in the most mundane as well as explicit ways. The space in which he chooses to carry out this happening<sup>15</sup> has a severe effect on the relationship between the couple and their viewers, who, it can be argued, assist them in the construction of their daily "authentic" routines. The couple come to inhabit what might seem like a border-space, living in-between the 'real' and the virtual, never purely being in one space at one time but always having one foot in each world. This brings about a myriad of complexities which underline their intimate relationships with their viewers. I use the word intimate here as it indicates the strange

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<sup>14</sup>Fly-on-the-wall filmmaking is a strategy employed by filmmakers in an attempt to "simply capture" footage as it plays out in front of the camera without overt intervention or direction, seeing events as a fly on the wall might (Winston 2008:210). This term is often synonymous with direct cinema or what Nichols refers to as the observational mode of representation referred to in the introduction to the thesis (Nichols 2001:109).

<sup>15</sup>A "Happening" has been considered to be a type of performance art or (often spontaneous) theatrical event originally inspired by artists such as Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg and the Dadaist movement. The event is usually multi-disciplinary and favours a nonlinear-narrative. Peter Brook addresses the notion of a "happening" in his book, *The Empty Space* (1968:155), stating that it can take place "anywhere, any time, of any duration: nothing is required, nothing is taboo... [a happening] may be spontaneous, it may be formal, it may be anarchistic..." Josh's documentary endeavour which is part surveillance experiment, part performance art, evokes a type of "happening": a spontaneous event where anything goes. Participants are both performers and audience members partaking in an improvised documented art-event.

explicitness with which this couple share their most private activities online, challenging the very conventions of what is constituted as private and/or public.

The collaborative impact that the viewers have on Harris and Corrin's everyday actions, emphasizes the vital role that the audience – who function as the Lacanian Big Other – plays in the demeanour of the mediated self. A collective audience is invited to look in, with their subjects unable to reciprocate the gaze, therefore leaving Josh and Tanya in a submissive role reliant on the presence of others watching in order to validate the existence of their mediated narrative.

*We Live in Public* (2009) offers a powerful example of how traditional power systems associated with surveillance theory come to be challenged through the implementation of personal webcam surveillance. I also explore the vital role that space plays in this self-documented endeavour, demonstrating how the perfect arena is created for challenging normative understandings of the private/public binary. The omnipresent onlooker/audience member(s), and the presence of the Big Other, have a significant influence on the demeanour of the subject who perceives herself as under surveillance. I therefore draw on the concepts of the Lacanian Ideal-I and Big Other in order to understand this personal surveillance webcam documentary that both subject and documentarian attempt to represent.

### **3.1: PERSONAL WEBCAM SURVEILLANCE: BEYOND THE PANOPTICON**

*“In ‘Quiet’ I was in control of the rats in my laboratory and in ‘We Live in Public’, I was the rat.”*

Josh Harris (*We Live in Public* 2009).

Harris's statement serves to highlight the various power struggles associated with different forms of gazing established in the personal surveillance experiments, “Quiet” and “We Live in Public”. In this statement, Josh believes that he was “in control” – implying he was in a power position

(of looking) during the surveillance experiment, “Quiet”. This experiment, which employed omnioptic ways of surveying, provided individuals with a platform for democratic gazing. I have mentioned Jurgenson’s concept of the omniopticon which designates participatory surveillance practises associated with modern SNSs, where individuals who gaze are simultaneously gazed at by virtual others, therefore making this specific gazing endeavour “democratic” as opposed to hierarchical gazing characteristic of panoptic surveillance models (2010:378). Democratic gazing is, however, a problematic surveillance structure. Individuals are liberated by modern day SNSs where a participatory virtual society exists and mutual gazing is the norm. But, as previously emphasized, to be in control of one’s own visibility is to be in control of how one is perceived through that which is made visible and that which is not. Modern SNSs that encourage social surveillance provide individuals with the optimal platform for selective (re)presentations of the self, and necessitate active impression management in order to maintain that idea of self (boyd 2007; Goffman 1959). However, I would like to call up the image of Big Brother – a term which commonly connotes the image of an omnipresent eye, always watching – to argue that social surveillance between peers within a participatory surveillance society is fundamentally structured in a way similar to what Harris anticipated with his capsule hotel of the “Quiet” habitat (Žižek 2002:225). In this subsection I take a look at Harris as pseudo-documentarian while referring to Timoner as authoring agent of the representation of Harris.

The inhabitants of the “Quiet” experiment partake in mutual gazing within a state of utter exposedness, while Harris (Big Brother), who initiated the event, is always present, always watching but not always visible. His dominant transparency is juxtaposed by Timoner’s presence. Her voice-overs continually remind the viewer that she is present, observing with her camera. Harris bears the ultimate gaze in the experiment which cannot be reciprocated, even if his subjects are able to gaze at each other. Harris sets the optimal stage for the practise of mutual gazing, and yet he, and by extension his multitude cameras, still exemplify the Panoptic tradition so completely. Traditionally Jeremy Bentham’s panoptic surveillance model dictates that there is an individual in control of the “look” towards another, while the individual who looks is herself never visible. With “Quiet” the image of Bentham’s panoptic prison structure, described in chapter on, evolves: suddenly the walls of the various cells arranged in a circular row, are made out of glass, enabling the inhabitants to see each other. But the ultimate “eye in the sky” still remains invisible. Inhabitants of such an environment might briefly forget about Big Brother,

being occupied with the mutual gazing between each other. Nevertheless, the presence of the one who is observing but who cannot be observed prevails. An inhabitant of “Quiet” states in an interview that the ultimate question to ask within such a state of severe surveillance is: “Who is behind all of this?” Fittingly she calls Harris, Mr. Oz, referring to L. Frank Baum’s “The Wonderful Wizard of Oz” (1900). Here, a fairy tale enigma is brought back to life, painting Harris as the ultimate puppet master, a wizard who uses magic and props in order to sustain a myth that he is great and powerful. In the fairy tale it is finally discovered that the wizard is but a mere human being, manipulating his people. An interesting image to call to mind: while Harris performs the role of invisible observer in the tower, it is only partially so. Alluding to the fact that he is a puppet master or a wizard is to assume that he is actively participating in this surveillance endeavour, using “tricks” to manipulate the inhabitants of “Quiet” into thinking that he is “in control”, as he himself declares in his statement at the beginning of this subsection. Calling him “Oz”, fundamentally suggests that this interviewee is aware of his ultimate powerlessness. It is vital to note that this comment is made by the interviewee many years after the actual experiment. The viewer never actually hears the inhabitants of “Quiet” referring to him as “Oz” during the part of the documentary that follows that specific experiment. This interviewee might in fact in retrospect have noticed that Harris was fundamentally powerless and was therefore able to make the metaphorical connection. In the film, Harris is “in control” in so far as he sets the stage, points the cameras and calls “action!” After that he is seen as unobtrusively observing.

Although Harris adopts the role of observer, it is not to say that he does not have an effect on what is happening in front of the cameras. As Bill Nichols argues, the observational mode of documentation implies that the filmmaker apparently unobtrusively points the camera and observes the “real action” playing out in front of it, but the mere presence of the camera influences the authenticity of the documented individual’s demeanour (2001:109-111). Nichols raises the question: “Do people conduct themselves in ways that will colour our perception of them [...] to satisfy a filmmaker who does not say what he wants?” (2001:111). Harris appears to take on the role of a pseudo observational documentarian. But ironically his apparent non-intrusiveness makes itself known within the form of the omnipresent camera lens which inevitably influences the authenticity of his subjects’ demeanour. Timoner briefly shows Harris as being overtly present during this experiment only twice. In the first example, Harris physically

enters the experiment and he observes, along with numerous inhabitants, a near-savage moment in the glass shower. The shower, shaped in the form of a fat cylinder and standing in the centre of a room, serves as a playground which soon turns into a battlefield for two inhabitants of “Quiet”, a male and a female, who engage in a playful chase sequence. The female dangles from a pole right outside the shower, tempting a naked male who stands in the shower. Here, Harris is seen giving direction for the first time. He simply looks toward the male, and states, “Go for it.” The scene between the couple develops into an almost savage ritual: the inhabitants and camera operators gather round chanting and encouraging the male to perform his strength while chasing the skinny female who tries to get away but keeps slipping on the wet floor. Harris looks at the nearest camera and states: “I’m sitting here...looking at two people, basically naked...with thirty people watching, and it’s like, yeah, okay, that’s the future”. I find this statement striking. The first part of the statement implies Harris’ apparent lack of concern, which although seemingly apathetic, must not be falsely understood as “non-intrusion” (Nichols 2001:111). His very presence and the presence of the cameras, the omnipresent eye(s) watching, facilitate the spectacle of this scene. The latter part of Harris’ statement, “that’s the future”, refers to the idea of a space that welcomes mutual gazing, where normative understandings of what is constituted as private or public are challenged.

A second instance, in which Timoner shows Harris in a position of “power”, sees him delivering a sermon in the “chapel room”. He states: “We must constantly tell the universe man was here. Man was here”. This scene, with its cult-like feel, complete with modern architecture that mimics a church, exemplifies Harris’ intent obsession with documentation as a form of archiving. It is important to remember that this footage captured of the inhabitants was intended to be stored. These were not meant to be fleeting images that disappear the moment they are seen. Harris refers to the “Quiet” experiment, stating: “Everything is free, except the video we capture of you...that we own.” Harris created a habitat which would provide individuals with the opportunity to be utterly visible in their most private and everyday habits while partaking in the practise of gazing while being gazed at by “real” as well as electronic eyes that have the ability to archive the material it records.

I would like to return to the idea of Harris as “unobtrusive observer”. It is interesting that Timoner’s representation of Harris plays with notions of surveyor, who has no apparent

influence on the action taking place in front of him but whose prominent presence in the minds of the subjects filmed, seem to be prevalent. While Timoner paints Harris in such a light one must perhaps wonder about Timoner's own position as observer of Harris' enterprises. Although Timoner is present during Harris' escapades, filming them, her own presence as documentarian seems to be forgotten by the viewer. Subtly, she will from time to time pull our attention back to her, the filmmaker, through her own visibility or first person voice-over narration. But instead of a mysterious "knowing" voice, however, Timoner defies the conventional formula of expository voice-over narration, by allowing the viewer to be aware that she, as filmmaker is the one narrating and constructing the way in which Harris is presented to us. In the very beginning of the film she briefly, through voice-over narration, tells the story of how she and Harris met, which led to him inviting her to become a rather present filmmaker in and of his life. By using expository methods Timoner both provides context and proposes a specific perspective. Timoner uses the voice-over tradition and thus she implicitly introduces herself to the audience resulting in a self-reflexive gesture that makes the viewer aware of the fact that she is the one in control of Harris's visibility. Although I find Timoner's presence as filmmaker pertinent, she will often allow the viewer's focus to dwell on Harris as pseudo-documentarian of his mediated self. In such instances, Timoner herself becomes un-obtrusive and simply observant. The juxtaposition of certain shots and compositions during interviews rather frames Harris as documentarian and surveyor of his own endeavours while simultaneously subtly hinting at Timoner's self-reflexive position as filmmaker. In a sit-down interview with Harris the viewer is made acutely aware of contrived representational strategies. Timoner places Harris in a room filled with screens in which the recorded footage of the interview she is presently having with him is captured in real-time. Some of the screens are angled in such a way that it seems as if the talking heads are looking right at the corporeal Harris, surveying him. Timoner includes many shots during the film in which Harris is staring into the screen of the [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com) interface, gazing at his mediated self in the same way other anonymous online users might. The blatant use of visible technical equipment in the scene again signals to the viewer that Timoner is ultimately in control of how Harris is represented to the viewer of the film. Timoner's role as documentarian often oscillates between observational to expository to self-reflexive allowing her to become like the electronic eyes of "Quiet" and "We Live in Public" – somehow always present to "capture" Harris.

It is the notion of documentation of the self that drives Harris towards his second experiment, “We Live in Public”. Here, Harris decides to turn the cameras on himself and, as he notes, where he suddenly becomes “the rat”. This statement implies that initially he was in control, but that he lost or gave up that control. This suggests two things: first, that this surveillance experiment is intricately linked to hierarchical dynamics of looking and being looked at, and second, the statement generates the feeling that the experiment might not have gone as planned. That is also how Timoner sketches it – she provides the viewer with a bleak look at what happens when the self is placed under severe surveillance (Jurgenson 2010:376). Timoner uses titles and voice-over narration to pose questions about the dynamics of watching and being watched asking in which ways we are “freer or more constrained” (Jurgenson 2010:376). Her perspective supports the theme that omnioptic looking poses a problem, for the mutuality of the gaze always makes the individual aware that she is watched – even though she is allowed to look back.

The concept of personal (webcam) surveillance is challenging in terms of traditional understandings of the panoptic surveillance model. Hille Koskela states, although there are far-reaching similarities between traditional understandings of the panoptic surveillance model and personal webcam surveillance, the latter has indeed gone “beyond the panoptic” (2006:175). Mathiesen and Jurgenson also demonstrate with concepts such as the synopticon and the omniopticon that modern interactive social media conditions allow the subjects who have never been in control of their own visibility, to step into various roles where they are able to gaze in, at others and at their own idealized construction of their visibility (1997 & 2010). The synopticon serves as a direct counterpart to the panopticon and refers to mass media technology which enables “the many to see the few” rather than the “few seeing the many” (Mathiesen 1997). The omnioptic gaze conversely refers to a “democratization of the gaze” that has become the norm with the ever-increasing popularity of interactive social media sites (Jurgenson 2010:377).

In chapter one I refer to Koskela’s four modes that relate to the traditional understanding of panoptic gazing, and she demonstrates how personal webcam surveillance challenges certain elements traditionally associated with this type of gazing (2006:175-204). These elements are: the observer as omnipotent, self-imposed visibility as empowering, and power and control as functioning on very different levels. A fourth component she refers to is that of surveillance as disciplinary tool – this aspect will not be focussed on in this discussion as the personal webcam



practise is more concerned with documentation of selves through surveillance practises, rather than disciplining the self (2006:175-204). Although I agree with Koskela that personal webcam surveillance and documentation do challenge the very basic understandings of the panopticon, I also find that often in the case of Harris' social surveillance experiments, attempts at challenging these surveillance conventions are unsuccessful. This prevalence of conventional surveillance dynamics is particularly visible in Harris' second surveillance experiment, "We Live in Public", in which he turns the camera on himself and becomes the "rat" in the experiment. I now investigate Koskela's modes in more detail and look at how they relate to Harris' surveillance experiments. I simultaneously look at how Timoner emulates this dynamic through her documentary representation of Harris.

### **3.1.1: TOP-DOWN-MONITORING CHALLENGED**

In chapter one I discussed how the panoptic surveillance model entails an observer who is in a more powerful position than the observed, because she is able to watch over the subject, the subject in turn not in control of her own visibility. Koskela insists that personal webcam surveillance challenges this traditional hierarchy associated with panoptic surveillance (2006:175). I would like to uncover the process that Harris embarks upon when simultaneously stepping into both the role of the observer (who is normally in the power position) as well as the subject (who is usually submissive and who doesn't have control over the extent to which she is made visible). Harris willingly makes himself the object of the gaze, thereby re-defining this conception of power as framed by traditional surveillance theory. The result as Koskela contends is that normative understandings of the hierarchical structure of the panopticon are tested. The traditional surveillance model is challenged due to the subject agreeing to be made visible and due to the fact that this subject seems to have control over what is made visible and what not.

Elements of the omnipticon are prevalent when considering mutual visibility and gazing practices on SNSs where there is a general involvement in participatory surveillance. On SNSs, the practise of watching and being watched becomes part of a joint commitment of participatory surveillance and mutual gazing where I share because I know the other will also share. I make



myself visible because I am able to be both subject who is looked at and observer who may look at what the other shares.

Harris willingly participates in his own visibility in the most intimate as well as mundane ways, which might seem like an empowering and liberating action. However, Koskela argues that just because the hierarchical structure is challenged, this does not mean there is no power (2004:206). Building on Koskela's insight, I would like to posit that even though it might seem as if these subjects who partake in the personal webcam surveillance experiment have agency and control over their own visibility, there is no mutual gazing involved here. In the "We Live in Public" experiment the gaze can be invited in but can never be reciprocated. Harris and his girlfriend, Tanya Corrin, place themselves under surveillance, the footage then streamed live on their [weliveinpublic.com](http://weliveinpublic.com) website. Participants on the site are invited to look in but the couple can never look out. The only way in which they can communicate is through written text or by looking into the nearest camera in an attempt to communicate through it with their viewers, but even then they are only met with their own gaze looking back at them through the computer screen.

The surveillance gazing in the "We Live in Public" experiment, present a new (and yet old) power structure since the gazing is one-sided. Agreeing to be visible and making the self visible could seem like an exercise that challenges the traditional hierarchy associated with "up-down-monitoring", and yet a new kind of submissiveness is created where the couple is reliant on their viewers watching and on their viewers commenting. Josh and Tanya are completely (and willingly) exposed while their viewers make their presence known through discursive text. Also note that the viewers do not necessarily have to comment and make their presence known via text, they can also simply "look in", "passively" voyeuristic.

Clearly, Josh makes it difficult for himself to fully empower and emancipate himself from the hierarchical gaze by submitting himself to a state of over-exposure, not really able to escape the omnipresent surveillance cameras, which allow observers a position of one-sided gazing. In the following sections I will unpack the fact that Harris and Corrin can view themselves more or less the same way their viewers can, which introduces a slanted way of gazing within this specific surveillance experiment and has severe Lacanian implications for the imaginary of the subjects viewed.

### **3.1.2: VISIBILITY AS EMPOWERING: INTERNALIZATION OF THE GAZE**

Along with the idea that there has been a power shift in the traditional understandings of surveillance when applying the concept to online forums, Albrechtslund also insists that ideas concerned with what is normatively constituted as private or public are challenged, as intrusive surveillance practises are ever-increasing online (2008:sp). Using Foucault's panopticon as a springboard to discuss the psychology associated with surveillance online, Albrechtslund further claims that often there is a negative association with the idea of surveillance online: words such as "snooping, spying and privacy invasion" are prevalent in the associations individuals might have with surveillance (2008:sp). At the same time there is something "exhibitionistic" about personal webcam surveillance (Koskela 2004:206). Through the popularity of social media, it has become a normal exercise to engage in the practise of making the self (idea of the self) visible. To what extent the self is made visible and how, might however come to challenge normative conceptions of what ought to be shared and made visible and what not. Harris's second social experiment, "We Live in Public" raises questions about what constitutes the private and the public spheres. The couple eagerly expose their intimate lives on camera, exposing everything from cooking to urinating, from brushing their teeth to getting dressed and from talking on the phone to having intercourse.

For Koskela there is an empowerment that comes with this kind of exhibitionism. She states that by "revealing their private intimate lives individuals refuse to take part in [...] two regimes" (2004:208). These are the "regime of order" and the "regime of shame", both referring to the hierarchical and traditional understanding of surveillance where there is an observer in control watching over a submissive observed. Through "showing it all" Harris and his girlfriend emancipate themselves in the sense that they challenge normative conventions concerning privacies. Ironically they make themselves subject to be viewed under the scrutiny their viewers. In a Lacanian sense they are performing to an anonymous audience who come to represent the Big Other – a faceless collective that stands for normative conventions and societal constraints and judgements. By producing a spectacle of the "real" and completely exposed self through

webcam surveillance, it is as if the subject performs the role of someone having no shame – blurring the lines between public and private.

### **3.1.3: POWER vs. CONTROL**

In challenging these conventions (i.e.: what is constituted as acceptable behaviour in terms of how we normatively perceive privacy) Harris steps into a position of “power” where he takes over the role of the filmmaker who directs his actors (himself) to bare all. He is now both observer and subject (performer). But as Koskela states, power should not necessarily be seen as similar to control (2004:209). Even though he is making visible the intimate and the private, which seems like an empowering and liberating act, he still does not necessarily have control over how the intimately exposed spectacle of himself will be received by the viewer, and is therefore, it can be argued, actually forever dependant on an Other watching and judging in order for him to validate what he is to someone through his visibility of self.

In an interview with Timoner, Harris states that the viewers would reprimand him via discursive text for not washing his hands after using the bathroom. States Harris: “It is a very definite reminder that they are watching you do your most intimate deeds.” But, Harris is the one who turned himself into subject for this very purpose: to live publicly under the surveillance of a collective Other watching. This apparently brave and controversial way of living is at once empowering for the subject and turns the subject into a compliant product, to be viewed under the scrutiny of a one-sided gaze. I develop this theory in more detail in the following subsection in which I classify the “We Live in Public” terrain as a borderland and look at how the conventional private/public binary is challenged.

### **3.2: THE GLASS BEDROOM: A PHYSICAL MANIFESTATION OF A BORDERLAND**

In Harris' "We Live in Public" surveillance based experiment, the glass shower from "Quiet" is replaced by what Erika Pearson refers to as a "glass bedroom". The image of the glass bedroom suggests a space conventionally reserved for privacies, with walls which are made out of glass, implying that any passerby can look in (Pearson 2009:sp). This visual metaphor has severe implications when considering the "We Live in Public" social experiment that fundamentally challenges conventionally conceptualized ideas of the public/private binary. Furthermore, if the mediated territory that the "We Live in Public" couple inhabit resembles the metaphorical image of Pearson's glass bedroom, then new questions arise regarding Harris's role: he is simultaneously the subject locked in the glass bedroom, as well as the documentarian of his own visibility, both from within the room, and from outside the walls of the glass bedroom, looking in. This visual metaphor highlights the important role the space plays in these specific forms of self-reflexive online visibility practises that Harris explores with his social experiment.

Pearson draws on Erving Goffman (1959:17) who adopts a dramaturgical analogy of everyday life to be a theatrical performance, insisting the individual is an actor who gives a social performance. Extrapolating from this theatrical model, Pearson uses the Goffmanian conception of what he calls the front-stage and back-stage metaphor to reveal how, in online environments, private and public lives can often be blurred. The front stage refers to an "observational space", a setting in which "explicit performances are constructed and displayed, where individuals 'play their parts'" (Goffman1959:17). Back-stage refers to a more private setting, where "intimacy and familiarity see a relaxing of the strictures of performance" (Pearson 2009:sp). Goffman uses this concept of a back stage in order to emphasize the difference in our social selves and our private selves. For Pearson, online, sociality of the self is often suspended between private and public. With "We Live in Public" front and back stage are revealed simultaneously. This social experiment is reminiscent of Allan King's 1969 *A Married Couple* in which the director would move into a couple's home for months filming their every move, like a real-life fly on the wall (Winston 2008:157). This method of direct cinema aims to observe the action in front of the camera without "overt intervention" (Nichols 2001:109-110). But, as previously established, the

spontaneity of the subjects filmed might be sacrificed amid the significant presence of the camera (Nichols 2001:110). With “We Live in Public”, the director is replaced by the artificial eyes of the rigged cameras all over the loft, and Harris (the producer) decides to step in front of these electronic “flies”, placing himself within a position where he must move back and forth between producer and (authentic) subject, private and public, control and subversion. But Harris created a scenario where there was no back-stage and the “relaxing of strictures” (Pearson 2009: sp) could consequently never take place: by declaring a private space public, Harris’ back-stage revolved into yet another front-stage. Timoner mirrors this dilemma Harris faces in her own representation of him. While she oscillates between semi-observational and self-reflexive documentarian, the viewer is faced with complex questions about the authentic or inauthentic behaviour of Harris in front of his self-rigged cameras and we are reminded of the “authoring agent” of the representation we see. Timoner makes use of juxtapositions in order to comment on the strange environment Harris and Corrin inhabit that merges the front- and back-stage. In one instance she directly juxtapositions shots that range from the inside of the fridge, to the cat-box and to Josh sitting on the bathroom toilette. Then we see Josh getting dressed, Josh urinating and getting into bed. The oscillation between images that range from the explicit and private (back-stage) such as a naked Josh using the bathroom, to the mundane images (normally reserved for the front-stage) such as the shot that shows us the contents of their fridge, emphasize the notion that in this space front- and back-stage were one and the same. Maasdorp asserts that the utilization of juxtaposition of shots in documentary film can clearly be used as a self-reflexive strategy which allows the viewer to “consciously compare” two or more differing shots with each other, creating awareness of the representation as construction (2011:219).

Koskela also explores the front-stage back-stage conundrum when discussing personal online webcam surveillance, stating that such an environment isn’t really private or public but exists in a space suspended in between these two extremes (2006:177). The camera placed inside of the toilet in “We Live in Public”, is a rather apt example of just how readily available the private and most intimate is for the viewing of the public (in public). To demonstrate this Timoner includes a shot of Harris who indicates to his viewers the position of the surveillance camera situated inside the toilet. He points, quite literally, towards the object (and to us through the screen) which is used to invade most intimate acts, inviting our gaze into the toilet bowl.

Besides the merging of private and public space this arena also takes on the challenge to connect the ‘real’ with the virtual. The “We Live in Public” environment is not an entirely public space, as the only means to reach in is through mediated text from the viewers or audio-visual real time cues from the subjects viewed (see figure 1 and 2). Personal webcam surveillance spaces are also very different from purely virtual, as virtual spaces are usually “defined as something beyond bodily presence” (Koskela 2006:177-178). Through the use of the camera, bodies that move and act in “real time” can be seen as such via the mediated form of live streaming. It is as if the viewer is accompanying the couple in the present, even though a physical barrier exists: the computer screen which keeps them from being able to touch physically. Therefore a space exists that manifests between the material and the virtual, a space reminiscent of Jenny Sundén’s concept of a borderland, discussed in the introduction and chapter one. The implementation of webcam surveillance does indeed distort different perceptions of reality (Bernard 2000; Koskela 2006). The “We Live in Public” experiment brings into being exactly such a territory – a space where actions as framed in various mediated forms seem to oscillate between what is considered virtual and what is seen as real, never really being either one or the other.

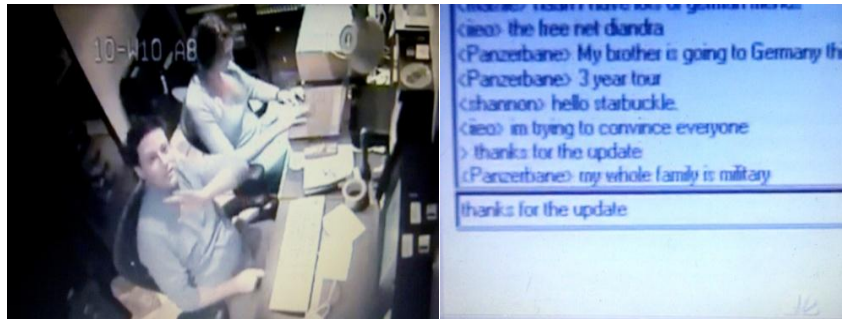


Figure 1 and 2

Josh is seen talking to his viewers by looking into the nearest surveillance camera in a response to a comment he had just read on the [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com)<sup>16</sup> page.

To demonstrate the complex “in-betweenness” this space comes to represent, I want to turn my attention to the various modes of communication utilized in this physical manifestation of a

<sup>16</sup>In the film the web interface that Harris uses for his experiment is registered under [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com), which Harris refers to in a voice-over at one point. As soon as Josh finally quit the experiment he also took the site down. Because the reason for the site was to display real-time footage of Harris and Corrin it served no purpose anymore once they had given up the experiment.

borderland. Often, when they are being filmed, Harris and Corrin are seen sitting in front of their computers while on the [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com) website, interacting and reacting to the commentary from anonymous viewers (see figure 1 and 2 above). They are being filmed in real time by the surveillance cameras and webcams when doing this and the footage of them is being streamed live over the [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com) website. In other words, an interactive community of viewers will observe the couple, framed by their computer screens and they can then interact via text. That text can then be replied to by Harris and Corrin either textually or by looking into the nearest camera lens and verbally expressing (though mediated) to the viewer their response. The conversation between these “real” (yet mediated) live bodies being streamed over the internet and the disembodied anonymous bodies that take on textual form exists through various forms of mediation: text, real-time audio-visual streaming surveillance footage or verbal interaction.

Timoner uses a standard interview set-up when she speaks to an interactive member of the [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com) website, Deandra, who states: “It’s not some sort of staged or scripted performance...it’s interactive. We’re reaching out to them; they’re reaching out to us.” Note the choice of words: the image suggests that the viewer is able to “reach” through a screen and into the “private” realms of this couple’s existence. Yet this is only possible in a virtual and mediated manner. The interactive communication that plays a key role in this surveillance experiment also highlights the collaborative construction of the virtual “show” the couple is putting up for their audience. It certainly has to be argued that the inhabitants of this glass bedroom cannot be unaware of the fact that their walls are transparent and therefore a performance certainly needs to be extended into the private/back-stage area for it is now plainly visible. In the case of “We Live in Public” it is the subjects of the self-documented experiment who construct the glass walls of their home with the intention to invite the gaze in. Here, it also becomes vital to understand that the one who gazes is an integral part of the experiment. If she did not look in, the glass walls would in fact be superfluous.

Even when the subjects look out by looking into the camera in an attempt to reach their audience more personally perhaps, all they are met with is an image of themselves looking back at themselves framed by the window on the [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com) interface. Referring to online social interaction, Pearson argues that in such a situation some “exchanges” between subjects are created with an “awareness of the users beyond the glass walls” with the subjects and playing to



this audience, the collective Big Other (2009:sp). Harris and Corrin are certainly not able to look out in the same way that their viewers are able to look in. The mediated text which appears via the [welineinpublic.com](http://welineinpublic.com) website serves as symbolic proof of their viewers' existence, and therefore gives purpose to the "We Live in Public" spectacle.

### **3.3: THE LACANIAN DOCUMENTARIAN: THE POWER OF THE ELECTRONIC GAZE**

In this subsection, I will highlight Harris' intent reliance on the Big Other, as a means to validate his own image of the self (2009:323). Harris' online surveillance escapades are produced and simultaneously constrained by how he imagines the interactive online viewers will perceive him. Harris structures the event in such a way that he is able to also view himself (as other) as captured by the surveillance cameras. This provides the viewer with complicated subject-documentarian strategies: Harris is both subject and producer of his own mediated image.

I have established that Harris becomes something of a pseudo-documentarian of his own surveillance experiments, performing the role of both subject and producer who is able to gaze at the mediated image of the self while being gazed at by an anonymous collective (the Big Other). Harris is not involved in the film in the way Susan Buice and Arin Crumely chose to overtly and self-reflexively portray the roles of subject-filmmaker in *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005). Nor does he become a fellow filmmaker and facilitator of his own narrative as Yaniv Schulman does in *Catfish* (2010). Rather, Harris' involvement in the construction of how he is portrayed lies within his projects – experiments which serve to tell the story of "a moment in time", captured in Big Brother-esquestyle through surveillance processes, and providing Harris with an electronic mirror in which he could see himself the way he imagined others to see him. There is a two part documentation here: instead of a merging between the narrative of filmmaker and the narrative of subject, it is important to remember that with *We Live in Public* (2009), there is firstly Ondi Timoner's documentation about Josh Harris, and secondly, Harris' experiments as documented by Harris. In turn, the footage of Harris captured of his self by himself, is selectively organized, juxtaposed and contextualized by Timoner. Harris provides the viewer with fascinating subject-



documentarian dynamics during his surveillance experiments, while Timoner's formal techniques often mirror the self-reflexivity with which Harris documents his own story.

These images were made viewable to the masses, but one must wonder; who were the masses? Who was looking? I would like to remind the reader of Žižek's conviction, discussed in chapter two, that "-cam" websites are born out of an anxiety of *not* being the subject of someone's gaze "all the time" (2002:225), in contrast to panoptic surveillance systems that entail the omnipresent gaze of power from which the individual has no place to hide. Žižek draws on Lacan in order to demonstrate that it is this anxiety that brings forth the implementation of the omnipresent electronic gaze situated within the everyday, for it is now the "camera's gaze which serves as [...] ontological guarantee of his/her being" (2002:225-226). The logic here is: "I exist only in so far I am looked at all the time" (*ibid*). As previously expressed, the utilization of recording devices, photographic, filmic and even textual, can assist in the documentation of the self and is created in order for the "I" to contextualize herself within the narrative of the "me" (Cooley 1902:17; Ochs & Capps 1996:19-21). This statement, however, implies the necessary presence of a third party, an other. The "looking-glass-self" metaphor referred to in chapter one highlights the vital role an other plays within this scenario. The "looking-glass-self" functions on the basis that the "I" conceives of a concept of "self", usually through social interaction, by how she imagines an other to perceive her (Cooley 1902:17; Robinson 2007:95). The emphasis here should be on the employment of imagination. Lacan frames this best: we perceive of our selves "from the imagined position from which we are being seen" (Fink 2004:117-118). But Lacan's Big Other places limits on our identity through judging the social identity with which we choose to represent ourselves. According to Dashtipour, Lacan's concept of the Big Other could be interpreted as the "omnipresence of social mediation [...] social structures and societal values embedded within social media."

In relation to the influential role the Big Other plays, I would like to ask, what happens to the relationship between the one who watches and the one who is being watched? Or rather, what happens to the relationship between the one filming and the one being filmed? If we are to consider the subject-filmmaker binary once more, these questions serve to demonstrate the intricate and complicated nature of the process of filming oneself as subject, a process that turns

the “I” into an “other”. This is Lacan’s point, however: the mirror-gazing self, faced with her own reflection is met with a gaze from the self as other (Žižek 2002:225-226).

In the surveillance theory subsection, I have already demonstrated how there is a power struggle between the viewer and the subject that is being viewed. Harris is both observer as well as subject viewed by other anonymous observers and by Harris himself (as an other) in his surveillance experiment, “We Live in Public”. So the question becomes; who is really surveying who and what influence does that have on the supposedly authentic, visible self? Traditional understandings of surveillance are challenged when the one who is usually being watched, steps into the position of observer while at the same time being observed. Although the practise of mutual gazing so significant to modern day SNS’s is not present in the “We Live in Public” experiment, there is a democratic element noticeable in the various gazing practises involved.

I have mentioned how the surveillance model present in the “Quiet” experiment entailed both panoptic and omnioptic ways of gazing. The inhabitants were able to gaze mutually at each other, while Josh (“Oz”) held the ultimate gaze, seemingly unobtrusively observing, yet his mere presence (and by extension the presence of the cameras) proved to be influential for the inhabitants, as they were always feeling watched. With “We Live in Public” there is a reverse of this. Panoptic gazing is typically referred to as the “few watching the many”, while omnioptic gazing is seen as “the many viewing the many” (Jurgenson 2010:377). With Josh’s “We Live in Public” experiment, the couple willingly become the subjects to be viewed by a collective and anonymous public, and suddenly “the many” are watching “the few”. This surveillance structure is reminiscent of Mathieson’s (1997) “synopticon”, which evolved out of the Foucauldian panopticon and is typically referred to within the social media environment. The concept developed as surveillance was becoming increasingly available to the everyman and progressively more individuals were taking control into their own hands by means of personal webcam surveillance (Mitrou *et al.* 2013).

The concept of “others” can also be interpreted as omnipresent voyeurs, constituted by Harris’ imagination. Either way, Harris still has to perform his identity for those who “watch” in an attempt to observe what the “Ideal-I” might look like. Lacanian theory dictates that the ego, or rather the “ideal ego”, comes to be manifested within the imaginary of the self (Dashtipour 2009:323-324). It is imperative to note that in Lacanian theory the self can never view herself

fully: the (idea of) self becomes visible as constituted by the imagined/desired gaze of an other (Žižek 2002:224-225). In this documentary the viewer is confronted with theoretical implications of a Lacanian nature which illuminate the complex dynamics of looking and being looked at – a process which eventually leads to a mental breakdown of sorts suffered by Josh, as he incessantly keeps “performing” the self for virtual others (who might mainly exist in his imagination).

Harris, in essence, reflexively becomes his own audience member, sitting in front of the mirror of the screen only ever able to really look back at himself and see the way he is seen by others (figures 3 and 4).

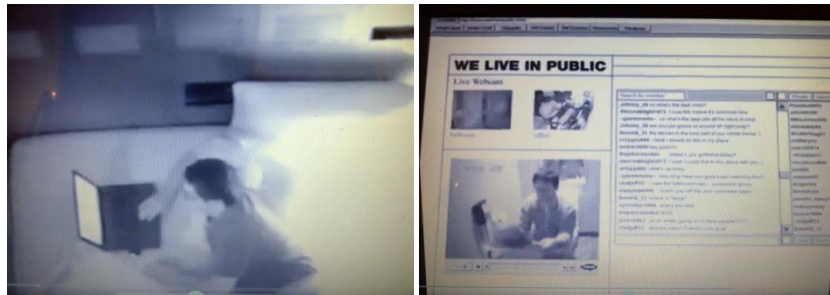


Figure 3 and 4

The [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com) interface. Footage recorded by the surveillance cameras is streamed live over the internet and viewable to all interactive others on the site. Lacanian theory dictates that the self looks at her own reflection (in the mirror of the screen) as other. In the “Mirror Stage” a child discovers the separate “I” and other; in other words, the child can finally recognize a sense of separateness between the self and other (Žižek 2002:224-227).

In an interview that Timoner conducts with surveillance artist, Leo Fernekes, the notion of the power of the “electronic gaze” (Jurgenson 2010:375) is unpacked. Fernekes states that if he were to walk up to a person and say “take off your pants”; chances are unlikely that the individual would do so. However, if the same question is asked to the same person while holding up a camera, the individual would obey because, states Fernekes: “the eyeballs which perceive that moment, give it power”. The “eyeballs” he is referring to is of course the camera lens, and by extension the other who is looking through the lens towards the subject. This Other is also the Other who dictates “certain ideals, norms and ideology” and it is the Other’s omnipresence that is forever prevalent in the mind of the self which makes the self act accordingly (Dashtipour

2009:323). Through Timoner's documentation of Josh, it seems that his primary motivation in initiating the "We Live in Public" experiment was, as the title suggests, to indeed be "living in public". In my opinion, however, it quickly turned into surveillance based exploitation in which the subjects started living *for* the public, in public. The existence of an omnipresent gaze (which cannot always be reciprocated) places the visible self in a panoptic situation where the self is forever aware of the ubiquitous eyes, the Big Other observing. She is thus always adjusting her concept of self accordingly. Timoner emphasizes this point by highlighting the couple's acute awareness of watching eyes as she allows us to witness a most private argument.

Something fascinating happens in this scene in terms of reflexivity and the notion of the very present Big Other. For the first time Timoner does not cut between frames captured by Harris' personal surveillance equipment, deciding which images to juxtapose and within which context. Rather, Timoner allows a somewhat long argument between the couple to play out in order for the viewer to see how interactive members of the [welineinpublic.com](http://welineinpublic.com) site would witness this specific occurrence. Early on in the documentary Harris is heard saying that a myriad highly sensitive cameras with motion detectors attached were placed all over the loft, making sure that the cameras would follow whoever was moving around. As a result, images often jump from Harris to Corrin who are arguing to images of an empty home, the cat box or a laundry room, as the housecat moves around and is subsequently detected by the cameras. Timoner cleverly lets Harris talk about this technical device, an idea which he himself conceived of during the rigging of the cameras in the loft, in order to acknowledge Harris' personal engagement with how the image of him would be captured for his interactive online audience, and to reflexively draw the viewers' attention to the inclusion of technical devices in the overall representation. We become accustomed to the convention of the motion detectors early on, as Timoner includes several scenes where Harris and Corrin are playfully attempting to see who can make the most movement from within separate rooms in order to get the camera away from each other and subsequently get more "screen time". During the argument scene the images jump as the movement of their bodies is detected by the camera. This jumping is signalled by a clicking sound as the images move from one frame to the next – a convention the viewer recognizes by this time as indicating movement in another room which makes the camera move. This sound, along with the obvious and ever-present numbers in the upper left-hand corner of the screen (specifying which camera is being used at that moment), triggers awareness for the onlooker of

the technical features involved in the presentation of these mediated bodies. In a Brechtian way, the sound functions as a call from the camera stating its presence and reminding the onlooker that just as we are aware of the technicalities involved in this endeavour, so also the couple is aware of not only the cameras but of what they represent, namely, the Other. Here, Timoner allows Harris' equipment to do the editing for her, emphasizing the fact that Harris himself is an active participant in the construction of his surveillance documentation. This unintentional jumping between empty spaces and a dramatic scene in the living room creates an accidental tension and juxtaposition between images, metaphorically signifying the difficulty of intimacy in public. Timoner frames this well in the build-up before the scene: we hear Corrin in voice-over as she discusses the irony of living in a space where she felt like she had an incredibly "deep connection" with the virtual viewers and yet no connection with Harris. This statement is accompanied by images which reiterate the distance between the subjects: Timoner strategically fast forwards footage of Harris and Corrin as captured by the surveillance cameras while they occupy separate spaces in the house – generating a feeling of distance and alluding to Harris and Corrin's alienation from each other while creating a sense that time has passed. This kind of time-lapse photography – quickening the pace by fast forwarding footage – is a method of editing often used in conventional filmmaking in order to indicate that time has passed. Timoner does this in order to prepare the viewer for the argument scene: no longer are Harris and Corrin giddy and excited about their experiment, playing around with equipment. The (perhaps unintentional) self-reflexive elements significant to the "We Live in Public" arena are often mirrored within Timoner's own representation of Harris, acknowledging formal elements used whereby to construct this film.

When the viewer finally witnesses the rather melodramatic argument between the couple, we become sensitive to the severe influence of the couple's gazing public. When talking about this incident in an interview with Timoner, Harris states that Corrin had insisted he sleep on the couch after the disagreement because the "group" (viewers) had "put her up to it". In other words, the focus here is on the influence the collective online other has on Corrin's actions, manipulating her to act according to how she imagines they might desire to be pleased. Both Harris and Corrin state in different interviews that "fighting in public" was about "egos" and who was "winning", demonstrating the performative nature of their intimate conversations. As soon as an argument was over, states Harris, the subjects would rush to their computer stations to

see how the disagreement was perceived by their public – a very definite reminder of how powerful the influence of others was in this experiment in how they collaborated in the plot of the subjects’ public show. Timoner cleverly pairs these statements with images of Harris and Corrin being apart: a shot of Tanya alone in the bed or doing chores, while we see different shots of Harris, each time accompanied by a mirror. The first image is of him in front of an actual mirror, standing alone, looking at himself. The second and third is of him, alone, in front of the computer screen. By juxtaposing these images Timoner implies that while Corrin recoils from interaction with Harris, he searches for interaction with others – looking at his own image as other in front of the mirror and in front of the mirror of the screen. Timoner ends off this section with an interview from Nacho Platas, who states that Harris had finally crawled into the Television set without the control in his hand. The implication of this statement reminds me of Harris’ rat analogy where he himself had claimed that he had lost control of his experiment. In fact, in contrast to “Quiet” he now was the experiment.

The “Quiet” and “We Live in Public” experiments both function on various levels of looking: selves are clearly observed by others but are also looked at by the self through the eyes of the self as other. To demonstrate this, Timoner adequately juxtaposes several images which serve in better understanding the complexities of looking while being filmed in these environments (see figures 5, 6 and 7).



Figures 5, 6 and 7

Mutual gazing by self and others in “Quiet”.

In the illustrations above, an inhabitant of “Quiet” is seen filming himself and we are introduced to the various stages of gazing. First we see him as filmed by what I assume is Timoner’s camera, looking at himself in the mirror of the television screen. Next we see how he sees



himself framed by the screen. In this image, there is a camera behind the subject, which films him seeing himself while he sees himself filmed by others. The last stage involves the point of view of the other inhabitants of “Quiet”, who are faced with a selection of channels, each of which is dedicated to one person being filmed in real time. As the inhabitant above demonstrates, the self mediated ad infinitum, has the opportunity to view himself through the eyes of others as well as through the eyes of himself as other.

In the second experiment, it becomes even more layered: the self cannot reciprocate the gaze in the omnioptic way the inhabitants of “Quiet” were able to do. When Harris and Corrin look into the camera in an attempt to reach through it and communicate with their audience, they are bound by the medium, which limits them from touching physically and from gazing into an other’s private realm. Instead they are met with their own image on the [welveinpublic.com](http://welveinpublic.com) site which stares back at them. Note that the footage of the subjects’ bodies, as recorded by the multitude of cameras in the loft, was constantly being streamed live on this website. Viewer participation was limited to looking and publicly commenting on what they were seeing. However, when occupying the role of viewers, the couple were seeing a reflection of their own image as seen through the imagined eyes the Big Other.

In the beginning of the documentary Harris is heard saying that soon we will come to live in “constrained virtual boxes”. I find this wording interesting seeing as it is Harris who will enclose himself within a “virtual box”, capturing footage of himself within a screen in self-imposed surveillance exercises. It is at this point that Timoner demonstrates Harris’ belief by making use of superimpositions and placing a talking Harris within an animated constrained virtual box. This box resembles a modern-day socially interactive networking platform (see figure 8). A superimposition is traditionally “the layering of two visual elements over each other” (Maasdorp 2012:106). Maasdorp argues that superimpositions can be used as self-reflexive devices in non-fiction films to signal to the viewer the presence of an “authoring agent”, who selectively combines two images in order to create “connotative meaning” (2012:106). In this instance, the viewer sees a talking head (belonging to Harris) in the midst of an interview – a convention of traditional forms of documentary. Timoner decides to make use of a gradual zoom out which overlaps with a superimposed, animated frame resembling what is now recognizable as a YouTube window. The further she zooms out, the more you-tube windows we see, each containing a

talking Harris in the midst of some or other interview. The windows, along with Harris' statements on the audio, overlap until finally a collection of windows come to resemble a cage of sorts (see figure 8). The self-reflexivity here comes from the obviously fabricated image, manipulated with the use of superimposition (Maasdorp 2012:107). Timoner quickly zooms in again as we see Harris' mouth in close-up, stating that "years ago the lions and tigers were kings of the jungle and then they wound up in zoo's...I suspect we're on the same track". Timoner uses an effect of stripping away in order to focus on what is important: now Harris is the animal captured in the (virtual) zoo.



Figure 8

The superimposed virtual boxes Timoner uses in order to "engage" Harris with his own words.

Timoner selects interesting compositions as a means to highlight the self-reflexive form this film often adopts and inspire an intellectual engagement with the content seen. It is a convention of contemporary mainstream documentaries to often make use of the "sit-down" interview that is usually "carefully composed" and "well lit" (Maasdorp 2011:217). Timoner makes use of this convention throughout the film and uses it as an opportunity to comment on the notion of self-reflexivity.

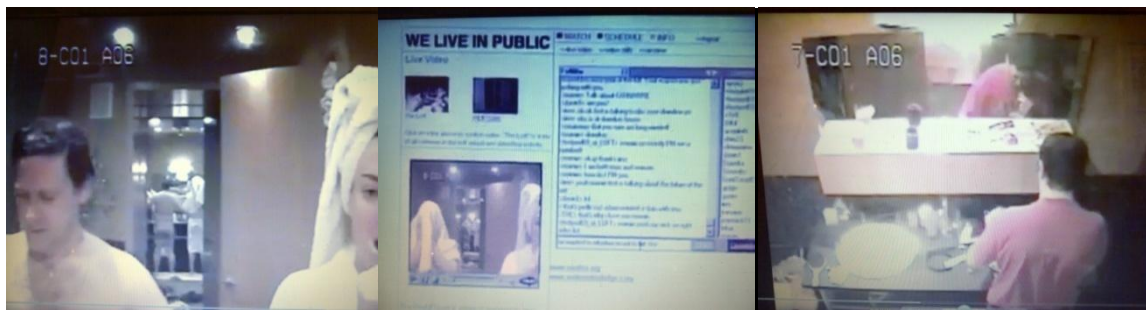


Figure 9, 10 and 11



Harris and Corrin in front of the bathroom mirror and then again framed in the webcam window on the weliveinpublic.com interface. Then, Harris alone, facing himself in front of the mirror while simultaneously viewed by anonymous audience.

“Capturing” or “documenting” the image of the self made visible for others, is a common practise in the surveillance experiments documented in this film. With “We Live in Public” the couple is consistently faced with their own image as captured by the surveillance cameras and streamed live over the weliveinpublic.com interface (see figures 9, 10 and 11). In this scenario the image of their mediated bodies is made visible for others as well as for themselves as other. I must call to mind the contrived interview set-up discussed in subsection three once more. Timoner composes an image during the sit-down interview with Harris which reminds the viewer of the contrived construction processes often prevalent in self-reflexive documentaries, as well as the many mediated gazes with which Harris chose to surround himself with in his experiments. Here we are met with a double Harris: the interview set-up comprises of a talking Harris with a screen behind him, capturing the footage of the interview in real time. Timoner not only comments on her own presence as filmmaker but draws a thematic link to Harris, himself a creator of personal reflexive and mediated experiments. Just as the composition produces a double Harris, so also the viewer comes to see two versions of him throughout the film. On the one hand Harris is subject of Timoner’s documentary as well as his own surveillance experiments. On the other hand, he also plays the role of documentarian and surveillance artist, creating and then capturing an image of self in public. In this set-up, one Harris looks at the other Harris, as if recognizing the reflection of himself as other in front of the mirror. This is in fact the case with the second experiment: Harris is faced with his own captured image, staring at his mediated self as framed by the mirror of the screen and left to imagine how the Big Other interprets this image of him. I recall an image at the beginning of the film where Harris is framed by the many superimposed boxes that resemble virtual windows. Timoner clearly reiterates that visual image here; metaphorically reminding the viewer that although Harris liberates himself from the constraints of certain normative understandings of privacy and visibility, he only finds himself captured and stuck within yet another (virtual) frame.

### **3.4: CONCLUSION**

In chapter two I discussed the film *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) where I considered the nature of the subject-filmmaker binary. In this chapter I have also dissected the relationship between the two very present documentarians in *We Live in Public* (2009). Harris creates a platform for two social experiments in which he is both subject and documentarian and he documents independently using film equipment and surveillance webcams, but in turn Harris is the subject of filmmaker Timoner's documentary. Harris provides the viewer with an interesting look at the subject-filmmaker dilemma as he himself willingly steps in front of his own cameras, becoming both subject and observer in a real-time surveillance based documentation. Timoner on the other hand, portrays the role of unobtrusive yet subtly self-reflexive documentarian who bears the ultimate gaze: she is the authoring agent who definitively decides how to construe meaning from the recorded footage Josh took of himself. And by making use of self-reflexive methods she not only illuminates her role as authoring agent but she comments on Harris' own surveillance endeavours as self-reflexive. Harris' role as pseudo-documentarian of his own reflexive image is thought-provoking: as both observer and observed he is forced to oscillate constantly between various binaries, portraying the role of producer and (authentic) subject, revealing the private in public and demonstrating changing positions of control and subversion under the ever-present (imagined) gaze of the Big Other. Note that within this mediated platform the self often also acts as his own observing other, judging the self the way in which it is imagined the Big Other judges.

With reference to Lacan's theories on the mirror gazing self and the visual metaphor of Cooley's "looking-glass-self", I have demonstrated how the process of observing oneself as subject effectively turns the "I" into an "other". In other words, the observer or "mirror-gazing self", faced with her own reflection in the mirror of the screen is met with a gaze from herself as other (Cooley 1902:17; Robinson 2007:95; Žižek 2002:125-126). This dualistic relationship between subject and filmmaker-observer further sheds light on the difficulty with which the online self must often act as "prosumer" – modern SNSs dictate that an individual must construct and consume an identity of the self as captured by the mirror of the screen, both as the self and as other. On this mediated platform one observes one's own image as well as the images of other

selves who in turn consume their own online images of selves as other. The logic here is puzzling: the mirror of the machine provides the individual with the opportunity to gaze reflexively at the created image of the self while perceiving that image from the imagined position from which she is being seen: from the imagined gaze of the Big Other (Fink 2004:117). Harris willingly inhabits a territory stocked with electronic eyes that come to represent an observing Big Other. The awareness of viewers (even if imagined) not only places pressure on Harris by influencing his performance of the self in front of the cameras but provide him with “ontological” proof of his being, validating his existence (Žižek 2002:225). The focus here is that the “I” as subject of her own created and eventually monitored mediated self watches herself as she imagines an other might. Josh is both subject of surveillance documentation and the documentarian of his own mediated image. On the other hand the viewer of the documentary, *We Live in Public* (2010), observes Harris through filmmaker Ondi Timoner’s eyes. She subtly utilizes formal techniques which allow the viewer to engage intellectually with the content seen. And her often self-reflexive representation asks us to consider Harris’ own subject-documentarian dilemma.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FANTASY NARRATIVES**

In this chapter I aim to inspect how filmmakers, Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman break down barriers between representational strategies and how that in turn affects the role of the filmed subject who himself becomes a filmmaker of sorts by the end of the documentary. As with my discussions on *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) and *We Live in Public* (2009) I am essentially investigating the documentary representation of documenting-selves online. First, I examine the representational strategies with which Schulman and Joost document their subject's tale and I explore how these modes relate to self-reflexive online documentation of the self. I then demonstrate how the self-reflexivity with which we are introduced to subject, Yaniv Schulman<sup>17</sup>, as narrator of his online self further sheds light on the very present role the Big Other plays in the documentation process of the self. Yaniv Schulman also makes use of self-reflexive methods when he himself is acting as documentarian. In that way I relate Yaniv Schulman's online construction of his identity to Lacanian theory on the mirror-gazing self. Angela Wesselman-Pierce's role as mediator between Yaniv Schulman and his constructed online fantasies further contributes to the idea that the online self never manages her virtual impression in isolation but rather in collaboration with the imagined other. This self-reflexive documentary makes effective use of different elements from varied representational methods – ranging from observational to participatory - which provide the viewer with insight into the complex relationship between the subject and her filmmaker.

As soon as the film, *Catfish* (2010) begins, credits are projected against a backdrop of what seems to be the silhouette of a torso, neck and head (a generic profile picture body)<sup>18</sup> and then

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<sup>17</sup> In order to avoid confusion I would like to remind the reader that the subject of this film will be referred to by his full name, Yaniv Schulman, while his brother, the filmmaker, will be referred to by his surname, Schulman.

<sup>18</sup> If a Facebook profile owner does not select a personalized photo as her profile picture, a generic body will automatically appear in the place reserved for the profile photo (Strano 2008: sp).

something which vaguely resembles a woman's face<sup>19</sup>. The image is projected in extreme close-up, resembling a pointillist-like painting; only dots and pixels visible. These creative choices by filmmakers, Schulman and Joost, foreshadow two major themes of the film. Firstly, the generic profile picture body made popular by the SNS, Facebook, indicates that online media will sit at the centre of this film's content. Secondly, it presents the idea that up close things might not be what they seemed to be from afar. The latter view is a most prevalent theme in this self-reflexive documentary which explores the notion of constructed narratives and imagined illusions characteristic of online social networking practices. The creative choice to project credits against the backdrop of what seems to be a woman's face in extreme close-up reminds me of Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966). In this film the protagonist, who is also a photographer like Yaniv Schulman, blows up a picture in order to get closer to a truth: the character might have accidentally witnessed a murder while innocently taking pictures in a park which in turn initiates a personal crime investigation. The protagonist cannot be certain though. Consequently, in an attempt to get behind the truth he blows up the picture more and more. In this provocative scene the viewer realizes that the more the photo is blown up, the less one is able to make out anything of the original picture – in other words, the closer the protagonist attempts to get to the truth, the farther away from it he actually is.

In *Catfish* (2010), we find this same investigative process, in which the subject<sup>20</sup> attempts to “get behind the truth”. In this documentary the subject engages in an interactive virtual relationship

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<sup>19</sup>Perhaps only upon viewing this sequence several times, will the viewer come to notice that it resembles what might be the profile picture of “Faccio” (Wesselman-Pierce), one of the subjects in the film.

<sup>20</sup>It is vital to note that referring to Yaniv Schulman as subject is somewhat complicated. Overtly, the filmmakers do tell him that he is the subject of the film but ultimately their documentary investigation leads to Angela Wesselman-Pierce. Yaniv Schulman's role in the film might at times seem passive. Wesselman-Pierce initiates contact with him. Wesselman-Pierce (pretending to be “Megan Faccio”) ignites the virtual romance with him. Finally, even filmmakers, Schulman and Joost tell him what to do: something which he overtly addresses, stating that he doesn't want to be the subject of the film. Yaniv Schulman then almost rebelliously performs the role of investigative filmmaker perhaps in an attempt to move away from the (pseudo) subject role which Schulman and Joost seem to force upon him. But even as filmmaker, Yaniv schulman is often told what to do by the filmmakers. In many ways Yaniv Schulman becomes a type of pawn: a means through which the filmmakers are able to reach actual subject, Wesselman-Pierce. Through Yaniv Schulman the viewer is able to witness the self-reflexive construction processes of the online mediated self. By the end of the film we learn that Wesselman-Pierce has faked her myriad online characters and we can surmise how she must have gone about it technically, only because we've been exposed to digital narrative practises via Yaniv Schulman. He therefore becomes an almost-subject: a vessel through which Schulman and Joost are able to access Wesselman-Pierce, the subject whose online escapades are being documented in relation to Yaniv Schulman. My focus in this chapter is however on Yaniv

with a woman (Wesselman-Pierce/ “Megan Faccio”) who, it turns out, seems to be the opposite of what she claimed to be online. Yaniv Schulman’s investigative actions which aim at getting to the bottom of Wesselman-Pierces’s virtual charade, brings an interesting element to the subject-filmmaker dilemma I have been discussing throughout this thesis. Yaniv Schulman heroically performs the role of fellow filmmaker towards the end of the film, self-reflexively pointing the camera at his subjects, inspecting the situation as a journalist might. I will explore this occurrence throughout this chapter while maintaining the position that filmmakers, Schulman and Joost, construct a film that formally and thematically comments on their own subjectivity as filmmakers.

#### **4.1: THE FILMMAKERS**

The opening shot of *Catfish* (2010) positions Yaniv Schulman at the centre of the frame. The subject, obviously upset, is talking to the individual behind the camera, heatedly accusing him of awful filmmaking skills and subject handling. A bodiless voice is heard as the camera operator answers back (a convention throughout the film), willingly partaking in an argument on filmmaking ethics. The film thus foregrounds the relationship between subject and filmmaker and the question of filmmaking ethics from the outset. The mise-en-scène underscores the concepts of double selves: on the wall behind the subject, a fragmented mirror distorts the image reflected in it. We shortly learn that the camera operator is the subject’s brother, the filmmaker Ariel Schulman, engaging in a disagreement with his subject about what constitutes as good filmmaking principles. Due to the filmmaker’s blatant presence in this scene, the onlooker is immediately faced with a self-reflexive representation. The subject states in this first interview that the filmmaker, Schulman, is “doing a bad job” because he is catching his brother when he is not in the mood to “talk about it”. The viewer is not quite certain at this point what “it” is. Yaniv

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Schulman in order to maintain the interesting subject-filmmaker dilemma. And although he is an almost-subject, I will refer to him as “subject” for the sake of continuity. Arin Crumley and Susan Buice are auto-documentarians, involved completely as both subjects and filmmakers in *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005). Josh Harris is both producer and consumer of his own constructed virtual image of self in his personal surveillance documentation in *We Live in Public* (2009). But Yaniv Schulman oscillates between (accidental) subject and aspiring investigative filmmaker.

Schulman's reaction would suggest that the filmmaker is intruding on a Goffmanian "backstage" area of sorts where the actor is preparing and has not quite yet put on his mask (desired social identity) for the cameras. He suggests "setting-up" an interview and "talking about it then". The consequence is that as opposed to spontaneous fly-on-the-wall or observational filmmaking the subject would prefer a more rehearsed or controlled environment for the interview to take place. Ultimately, the filmmaker asks his brother whether he wants to be the subject to the documentary to which he replies; "no". This is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it implies that the subject is caught off guard, setting up the filmmaker as spontaneous. During the conversation Yaniv Schulman evidently indicates that he would prefer the filmmaker to take on a traditional form of representation, with 'set-up' interviews<sup>21</sup>. The subject's surprise and annoyance with his filmmaker who catches him off guard might suggest a tendency for the filmmaker to have been observational up until this point, gazing with his camera. But on the other hand the filmmaker's obvious engagement with his subject on matters of filmmaking, immediately introduces a strong self-reflexive element. It therefore becomes clear that filmmakers, Joost and Schulman continually shuttle between different representational methods. Secondly, Yaniv Schulman's negative response to whether he desires to be the subject of this documentary further sheds light on his own journey from subject to participatory documentarian<sup>22</sup> which in turn provides the viewer insight into the various subject-filmmakers dynamics present in documentary filmmaking.

In chapters two and three I investigated how self-reflexive strategies can illuminate the role of the filmmaker as "authoring agent" who selectively and purposefully attempts to comment on the "means of representation", utilizing techniques that persuade the audience to "question the very idea of documentary" (Maasdorp 2011:208; Nichols 1991:58). In the figures below (1, 2 and 3) the viewer observes the clear integration of such elements so as to trigger awareness of construction practises involved in the documentation process. In one scene, we see Yaniv Schulman speaking on the telephone while being filmed by his brother, Ariel Schulman, with a handheld camera. We can therefore deduce that the second filmmaker, Joost, is filming them

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<sup>21</sup>The "set-up" interview typically refers to the documentary tradition of selecting a space with proper lighting in which individuals who are experts in their fields or have been the subject of the film partakes in a conversation with an interviewer. Such a situation has an organized quality to it rather than a spontaneity with which the observational filmmaker might impulsively present her subjects with questions she has not had time to prepare for.

<sup>22</sup>The participatory filmmaker will typically engage with her subjects, as opposed to capturing footage spontaneously as an observational or 'fly-on-the-wall' director might.



with a second camera. In the next shot, the filmmakers cut to a close-up of their subject on the telephone, from Schulman's point of view, obviously taken with the handheld camera seen in the previous shot.



Figures 1, 2 and 3

Joost is seen handling his film equipment. In figure two, Yaniv Schulman engages with one of the filmmakers behind the camera. He is listening to music that “Faccio” has sent him. She proclaims that her musician brother wrote and sings this song. Yaniv Schulman proposes, to the present filmmaker, that this band’s music should be used as the soundtrack for the documentary. In the third figure, we see Ariel Schulman’s camera equipment as Joost is filming him while a wire from Joost’s camera obscures the frame.

Besides explicitly exploiting self-reflexive strategies these filmmakers also teeter somewhere on the edge between the observational and the participatory. Contrary to observational modes of filmmaking, where the documentarian assumes the position of a “fly-on-the-wall”, participatory filmmaking necessitates “a sense of bodily presence”, rather than absence, which locates the filmmaker “on the scene” (Nichols 2001:116). While the blatant inclusion of the filmmakers in the film informs the viewer of their subjective directorial position, as Liani Maasdorp would put it, they also seem to be engaging with their subject on a participatory level while embracing a hand-held aesthetic style often reminiscent the observational mode of representation (2011:209). In certain instances the viewer specifically notices deliberate interaction from the filmmakers with their subject. In one scene Joost is capturing footage from within a car, trying to be unobserved. The result is a shot where subjects are out of sight, concealed by objects that block Joost’s view. Similarly filmmaker, Schulman, captures footage of subjects Angela Wesselman-Pierse and Yaniv Schulman’s first encounter. This scene is captured from a low angle, implying that filmmaker, Schulman, attempts not to be blatant with his camera.



It is useful to take note of Jay Ruby's conviction that to be self-reflexive is to sufficiently demonstrate the filmmaker's presence as purposeful in commenting on the process of filmmaking: accidental visibility of a filmmaker is not always done with a sense of purposeful commentary (1988:35). Joost and Schulman's role as participating and self-reflexive filmmakers in this documentary is multifaceted. It becomes obvious early on in the film that they both have private relationships with their subject outside of the film, separately as brother and as friend. The knowledge of this makes the viewer understand why they engage so familiarly with their subject but it also causes the viewer to question authentic representations. In an interview with Ryan Gilbey, filmmaker, Schulman, reveals his concern about his brother during filming and his disgust with Wesselman-Pierce hoaxing him, stating that "He'd been heartbroken" (2010:sp). If the filmmakers have their friend and brother's best interest at heart, would that not motivate them to represent his story compassionately? And would that not have an effect on objective documentation? One must consider the filmmakers are very well aware of the dilemma their familial relationship with their subject causes. Therefore, they rather resourcefully integrate deliberately self-reflexive methods in order for the viewer to engage critically with the obviously subjective material.

In a scene halfway through the film, filmmaker, Schulman, performs the role of both unobtrusive observer and engaged participant. After discovering Wesselman-Pierce's virtual charade, the film crew arrives at her house in Ishpeming, Michigan, in order to get to the bottom of what is going on. Schulman accompanies his brother, the subject, Yaniv Schulman, onto the front porch and eventually into the Wesselman-Pierce home. Joost is waiting in the car, observing from afar with his camera. In the build up before this scene it is clear that all parties are rather nervous about what the possible outcome might be, making statements such as: "I'm gonna keep the car running...and leave the doors open...and the windows...it might be that kind of an escape". Armed with his camera, Schulman captures the footage of his brother and Wesselman-Pierce's first encounter in a purely observational form – resulting in shaky and obscure footage from a low angle, predominantly cutting subjects out of the frame. One gets the idea that the camera is supposed to be out of Wesselman-Pierce's sight and the viewer might deduce that he is attempting to not be too obvious about filming a potentially risky situation.

Initially filmmaker, Schulman, conducts himself as only an observer, allowing his brother to engage verbally. Gradually, the viewer becomes aware that he becomes more confident with his camera as he starts filming footage of subjects that are better framed; from angles which can only be pertained from a visible camera held at a certain visible height. Eventually, Schulman is subtly directing Wesselman-Pierce, telling her to keep still as he is trying to capture the “wind in her hair” when she is standing on her porch. This foreshadows a scene at the end of the film in which Schulman is fully engaged in directing her, asking her to strike certain positions and talk to the filmmakers in the different voices of the characters she had performed over the eight month long virtual relationship with Yaniv Schulman. In this scenario the filmmaker conveniently oscillates between the roles of observational filmmaker to being completely engaged. This complex dynamic is mirrored by the filmmaker’s self-reflexive methods that illuminate that as observer “in the field” his role is all but passive: his active presence is made known self-reflexively throughout the film and it is clear that he is not always purely observant as he clearly engages with the given scene from time to time.

On a different occasion we witness similar complex representational methods. In a hotel room, Yaniv Schulman is corresponding with “Faccio” via Facebook in real-time. On occasion she has told him that she is a singer who writes and records original songs. At the request of Yaniv Schulman, “Faccio” now instantly mails him a cover song that she claims to have recorded on the spot. This ignites a revelation in Yaniv Schulman and his fellow filmmakers: they instantly recognize the song to be an original and in fact not a cover sung by “Faccio”. While this suspicious occurrence finally instigates an elaborate investigation to discover the truth, Yaniv Schulman initially desires to quit the entire documentation project. This leads to an argument between the two Schulman brothers, subject and filmmaker. During this argument representational strategies merge. Essentially, Schulman is verbally directing his brother, who in turn self-reflexively engages in an argument on filmmaking. The result is that self-reflexive methods become obvious to the viewer: Yaniv Schulman states that he does not “feel like being directed” by his brother, Ariel Schulman. This focuses the viewer’s attention on Schulman as filmmaker and authoring agent of the documentary. Schulman equally confirms his position, stating that “making a movie” is “not easy” and “I’m directing you in a film.” Filmmaker, Joost, is unobtrusively observing: while the brothers are engaging in a self-reflexive conversation, Joost captures often obscure and grainy footage as he observes the spontaneous interaction like a “fly-

on-the-wall”. In the following subsections I explore Yaniv Schulman’s role as self-reflexive narrator of his online self as well as eventual participatory filmmaker; all of which highlights the very present role the Big Other plays in the documentation process of the self.

## **4.2: THE SUBJECT AS FILMMAKER**

In chapters two and three, I examined the intricate relationship between the subject and her filmmaker; observing that in some cases they can be one and the same. The shared role of subject and filmmaker makes for interesting narrative representations. In *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) the viewer’s awareness of the subjects’ double roles encourages a critical engagement with the material and initiates questions about the authenticity of a re-staged history. *We Live in Public* (2009) further sheds light on how an individual can become an audience member of her own online performance of which she is both the producer and subject. Yaniv Schulman plays varying roles in *Catfish* (2010) which emphasise the rather complicated dynamics of producing content and being the content produced, looking while being looked at and filming while being filmed. As subject, Yaniv Schulman is portrayed by the filmmakers as a narrator of his own online self. He is often filmed while communicating with members of Wesselman-Pierce’s virtual family via Facebook and the viewer becomes privy to how he goes about in digitally managing his online impression of the self. He also easily performs the role of fellow filmmaker and even implements investigative techniques in order to assist in the documentation process, all the while adhering to self-reflexive methods just as the filmmakers who filmed him were doing up until this point. Additionally, these self-reflexive methods further the argument that the very present imaginary Big Other plays an influential role in the documentation process of the mediated self. During the self-reflexive moments the viewer notices in the subject’s demeanour an acute awareness of a gazing entity; his actions sometimes blatantly directed towards the imagined Other.

When Yaniv Schulman, who had been portrayed as subject up until that point, becomes a fellow filmmaker he performs the role of a participative documentarian, engaging with subjects and reflecting with his viewers (audience) on his experience. When he suspects “Faccio” to have lied

about her identity, the film takes a turn and his role takes on a new element: he now seems to be on an investigative quest to “get to the bottom” of the lie. As he becomes involved in the production of the film he is suddenly seen working cameras, handling microphones and even wearing a hidden wire. The filmmakers meticulously go about in documenting the process in which he places a hidden microphone under his shirt: a kind of ritualistic process, filmed step by step, in order to indicate Yaniv Schulman’s promotion from subject into fellow filmmaker.

In a luring scene in which he interrogates “Faccio’s” alleged younger sister and her friend he portrays something of an investigator. He asks them several questions about “Faccio” but they are not able to answer many of them. In fact, it becomes clear that the giggling sister seems a little foggy about who Yaniv Schulman is. With this information the viewer assumes that Wesselman-Pierce must have also performed the role of “Faccio’s” younger half-sister, Abby Wesselman-Pierce, in her and Yaniv Schulman’s online communications. Finally, Yaniv Schulman walks away, turns the camera on himself and states: “Well, there’s the confession. Pretty clearly... she [Abby Wesselman-Pierce] has never seen Megan [“Faccio”] before, doesn’t know where she lives, doesn’t get to talk to her...”<sup>23</sup> An intertitle at the end of the film informs the viewer that the Megan Faccio we have come to know through Yaniv Schulman never existed. The visual images Wesselman-Pierce used to manifest “Faccio” were stolen from a complete stranger’s Facebook profile page<sup>24</sup>. This scene is specifically poignant for me: not only does Yaniv Schulman get the information he is after, exposing Wesselman-Pierce as a liar, he also does not forget his (at that point imagined) future audience as he confirms the recently revealed information with his viewers. This reminds the viewer that amid the investigation, there still exists a performative element and the imagined presence of the Other plays a big part – after all, what would the purpose be of catching the truth on film if there is no witness to confirm it.

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<sup>23</sup> At the very end of the film, Wesselman-Pierce confesses that although many of her virtual characters were completely false, she did indeed have an estranged daughter called Megan Faccio. It is then made clear that Yaniv Schulman never corresponded with the real Megan Faccio. He only ever communicated with Wesselman-Pierce who pretended to be her own daughter.

<sup>24</sup> In one instance Yaniv Schulman questions Wesselman-Pierce about the girl in the photos (who was used as a physical manifestation of Wesselman-Pierce’s imaginary “Faccio”). Wesselman-Pierce states that she is a family friend. The intertitles at the end of the film tell us that this is not true: the girl in the photos is not acquainted with Wesselman-Pierce in any way. Wesselman-Pierce’s confession about who “Faccio” really is, is yet another lie. This scene supports the idea that, just like Yaniv Schulman, also Wesselman-Pierce’s inventions drive her farther and farther away from the truth.

### **4.3:NARRATOR OF THE ONLINE SELF**

The self-reflexive elements, characteristic of this documentary mode are mirrored in the online gazing processes documented. The omnipresent camera significant to the self-reflexive mode of documentation relates to omnioptic forms of gazing online which allow the individual a psychological position from which she feels watched. The ever present camera becomes an extension of the ever present other in omnioptic social environments. In the following section, I look at the narration process characteristic to the construction and subsequent gazing practice of the online visual self. This process can itself be rather self-reflexive as I will demonstrate.

Yaniv Schulman's role as narrator in this documentary film is twofold: first he is the narrator of his own (desired) online image of the self; and second he journeys from protagonist to participative documentarian, no longer purely a subject, but an assistant filmmaker. In this section, I would like to discuss Yaniv Schulman's online impression management and the subsequent narration of his mediated self. I will do this by referring to a visual example as visual online communication – specifically in the form of the photograph – is a highly common practice on the SNS, Facebook. I argue that visual digitized narration in the form of the photo can serve as a tool for the online self to easily obtain her desired online identity.

#### **4.3.1: THE DIGITALLY ALTERED PHOTO**

The SNS, Facebook, as documented in *Catfish* (2010), encapsulates Nathan Jurgenson's theory on omnioptic environments (2010:377-278). The mutuality of gazing and the liberating act of being in control of one's own visibility present in this specific social online environment necessitates not only selective, but also collaborative narration and documentation of the self. I use the term "selective", because in this environment the online individual is being watched by others and herself as other, resulting in an internalization of the gaze which causes the self to act according to imagined constraints (Dashtipour 2009: 323-324; Miller 1988:166-167). In addition, narratives of the self are developed collaboratively because the sociality of the site necessitates

interaction: every action online has the potential to be reacted to publicly, adding to or altering originally intended perceptions. This practise inspires collaborative narrative construction and subsequent documentation to exceed beyond the limits of Facebook to other online forums. I shift my focus now to the effect this can have on how the self constructs her desired visual online narrative in the form of the photographic image.

Chalfen, suggests that there exists an assumption that the photograph represents a “real” moment captured (2002:141-149). In his opinion the onlooker of the photograph does not necessarily pay attention to the “shooting and editing practices” responsible for that preserved moment in the form of a photographic image (Chalfen 2002:141-142). The inception of digital photography has opened many avenues for the amateur photographer – virtually anyone with a digital camera has access to editing processes. This idea moves us away from the concept of “taking pictures” and brings us closer to the process of “making pictures” (Chalfen 2002:141). According to Brian Roberts digital photography provides its user with various possibilities for self-fashioning: technology enables us to “produce, store and retrieve” images effortlessly for “re-viewing” (2011:sp). As discussed in chapter two, re-viewing of the self as captured by the photographic image can become something of a ritual. Roberts insists that in such moments there is a process of “recognition” of the self in the photo as well as a moment of “re-cognition” (2011: sp). The latter refers to the narrative processes embedded in such a situation – reviewing the image of the self gives the individual the opportunity to “create continuity between past, present and imagined worlds” and to selectively initiate a process of narration which tells us “who we are” and to create, define and express our identities or “imagined ideal selves” (Ochs and Capps 1996:19). Technical features inherent to modern SNSs and computer programs allow the individual to take it a step further and manipulate these images as desired in order to re-produce it (Roberts 2011: sp).

Numerous theorists believe that we are constantly in the midst of narrating ourselves: we tell stories about ourselves, to ourselves and others in an attempt to situate ourselves within specific contexts and to make sense of ourselves situated in those contexts (boyd 2008 & 2010; Ochs & Capps 1996). According to Ochs and Capps narration becomes a means whereby to “apprehend experiences” and “navigate relationships with others” (1996:21). There is a sense that the process of narration is a necessary component that selves depend upon in order to produce not only

meaning and definition but also to essentially produce proof of the existence of that self – textual or visual narration in the form of photographs, home videos, diaries, letters, memoirs are all methods employed by the individual through which she can contextualize her experiences and gain perspective on how those experiences have shaped her specific identity (Ochs & Capps 1996:21).

We come here to another equally important aspect; if we are to believe that narration is firstly, a way for the self to shape and contextualize herself, and secondly, an utterly subjective account of a reality past, then surely it has the potential to also sometimes be a fictional invention of an imagined future. By looking at the following scenario, I dissect how certain imagined and eventually constructed illusions are virtually produced because of the technical features inherent to digitized cameras, computer programs and modern SNSs and how that can eventually contribute to the narration and subsequent documentation of the desired online self.

In a photo that Yaniv Schulman drastically manipulates (or rather creates) the filmmakers illustrate the result of collaborative narration and subsequent documentation via imaginary processes. Throughout the film the viewer is privy to intimate correspondence between Yaniv Schulman and “Faccio”. A montage sequence is introduced in the beginning of the film in order to observe the escalation of their cyber courtship. The communication between Yaniv Schulman and “Faccio” gradually becomes more flirtatious and the content of their correspondence more sexual, culminating in the ultimate virtual, simulated fantasy: a digitally altered photo. I have established that the Lacanian perspective on the mirror-gazing self informs us that the ego (“ideal ego”) manifests itself within the imaginary of the self (Dashtipour 2009:323-324). It is crucial to comprehend that the self will never be able to “view herself fully”: the concept of self can only be made visible as constituted by the imagined gaze of the Other (Lacan 1986; Žižek 2002). As demonstrated throughout this thesis this dynamic implies the essential presence of an other. I have referred to Cooley’s the “looking-glass-self” analogy that, similarly to Lacanian theory, functions on the basis that the “I” conceives of a concept of “self” by how she imagines an other to perceive her (Robinson 2007:95). Yaniv Schulman’s visual documentation of the self online is created in order for the “I” to contextualize itself within the narrative of the “me”(Cooley 1902:17; Ochs & Capps 1996:19-21).



In the previous section, I addressed the assumption that the photograph must be a “faithful record” of what the photographer sees through her lens; that the captured image “mirrors” reality (Roberts 2011: sp). Just as it is dangerous to assume authenticity when viewing the events unfolding in a documentary, neglecting to acknowledge the authoring agent of the film, just so it is vital to view the digitally altered photograph with critical assessment (Nichols 2011:100). In a virtual context where it is custom to take control of one’s own visibility, Yaniv Schulman’s creative actions are in accord with Chalfen’s conviction that we have turned to “making” rather than “taking” photos (2002:142-144). Yaniv Schulman shows us how he goes about in this process. Throughout the documentary the filmmakers self-reflexively set Yaniv Schulman up as a creator: at the beginning of the film a chyron explains his professional position as photographer and the viewer often sees him with his camera equipment or in action, taking photos. Perhaps in this way the filmmakers are foreshadowing his journey towards self-reflexive filmmaker.

In this scenario Yaniv Schulman attempts to create an image of him and “Faccio”. Naturally, geographical constraints prevent the couple from literally ‘being in the same room’. But, that doesn’t seem to stop him. The filmmakers show us how their subject goes about in creating a photo in which both he and “Faccio” are present. Subject, Yaniv Schulman, has access to “Faccio’s” photos via Facebook<sup>25</sup> and being a photographer the viewer can assume that he would have some sort of photo editing program on his computer. The filmmakers show us how he goes about in selecting a photo of “Faccio”. He then crops<sup>26</sup>, copies and pastes the photo onto an older photo of his. In this instance the filmmakers choose to focus the viewer’s attention on the presence of the cursor with which he does his editing as it suggests a blatantly self-reflexive element. The result is seen in figure 6: Yaniv Schulman and “Faccio” in simulated reality.

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<sup>25</sup>This is important: a user has access to her fellow Facebook acquaintances’ public photos. Not only might she view them, she is able to download them for her own personal usage.

<sup>26</sup>Regular photo editing programs provide the user with an option to “crop” a photo, meaning to trim the edges. I use the word here in order to indicate the cutting out of certain objects in a photo in order to be inserted in a different visual context.





Figure 6

The digitally altered photo of Yaniv Schulman and Megan Faccio.

Revisiting Roberts' idea of the photograph as "mirror", this cropped photo offers an interesting Lacanian occurrence (2011:sp). There are two semi-naked bodies next to each other in this photograph. Both subjects look at the camera lens. The amount of bare skin offers a suggestive touch to the image and while this visually created moment makes for what might have intended to be an intimate moment among the "couple", a distance appears between the two mediated bodies forced, by technology, into the same space. The couple are essentially looking at "us", their audience and not at each other. In this case, the audience initially consists of Yaniv Schulman and eventually "Faccio", the other for whom he intends to exhibit this "artwork". As the mediated couple stare out of the photo towards their maker, Yaniv Schulman, he is turned into other who looks back and must approve of his simulated creation. While the ideal intimacy the couple fantasize about is so far out of reach at that given moment, the mediated bodies become a perverted means whereby to access that fantasy, even if ironically virtual. Yaniv Schulman fittingly labels the email in which he sends "Faccio" the image, "Here's looking at you, kid", referencing the 1942 film, *Casablanca*. The need to "look" becomes an important mechanism in this situation. Žižek's conviction is that "looking" verifies and proves existence (2002:225). He continues, stating that the appeal of the "fantasy" is not necessarily the fantasy itself but the presence of an observer to the fantasy (Žižek 2002:225-226). In other words, being the "object" of someone's fantasy is far more flattering than the actual fantasy. It is through the knowledge of someone watching that our existence is guaranteed; by gazing someone is "documenting" our existence. The logic is: "I exist insofar as I am looked at all the time" (Žižek 2002:226). This digitally altered photo provides Yaniv Schulman with a "tangible" means whereby to realize an idealized fantasy-future where he is in a relationship with "Faccio". This future event has been contextualised through previous virtual narration and in a desperate (or is it

narcissistic?) attempt to bring the idealized moment already written in the imaginary into being; a fake moment has to be created with the utilization of digital technology. Ironically, a moment captured in a photograph which has never existed and might never exist (as the viewer later finds out) is used as a mediator in order to get closer to a (imagined) reality. Here, the analogy with Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966) is powerfully illustrated: as the protagonist in this film attempts to get to the truth by blowing up his photograph, the farther away he actually is from it and the more fragmented and distorted his "reality" becomes. Similarly, Yaniv Sculman engineers an artificial moment which provides him with a readily accessible image that allows him to get closer to a fantasized truth. But the fantasy is in essence contrived and ultimately impossible. Therefore, the more Yaniv Schulman attempts to reach this imagined reality – which can only be reached by means of digital manipulation – the more he is perpetuating the virtual fantasy and the farther away he is from the truth. In this instance we are left with a moment hanging suspended in between the real and the virtual, mediated bodies sharing the same space, preserved by a photo that was never taken but created.

Buying into the simulated illusion, Yaniv Schulman's imagined other, ("Faccio"), applauds his creation, stating; "Wow, we look good together". This statement once again emphasizes the consequence of constructed visual narration and documentation. By stating that they "look" good together, "Faccio" inadvertently lays bare the methods behind creating desired visual impressions of the online fantasised self. The signs in this photo tell us that the couple are in an obviously intimate relationship, given the proximity of their bare bodies, and yet, the viewer of the film knows that they have never been in the same corporeal space. "Looking" good together seems to undermine whether they "are" good together in the sense of being a good couple. "Looking" good, informs the viewer of the fantasy, while being good together would refer to actual corporeal proximity. Her statement disregards whether they even "are" together, in the sense of ever having been in the same physical space. The visual, yet simulated, proof of Yaniv Schulman and "Faccio" making an ideal looking couple is far more significant as it feeds into the imagined fantasy which has been built on virtual intimacy up to this point.

#### **4.4: CONCLUSION**

In this chapter I explored how filmmakers, Ariel Schulman and Henry Joost, illustrate the result of collaborative documentation and narration via imaginary processes. They allow the viewer a glance into Yaniv Schulman's imagination which he comes to realize within a simulated form. While documenting this, the filmmakers often engage self-reflexively with their subject: in turn laying bare the construction processes behind developing an identity for Yaniv Schulman as subject of the documentary as well as of his online self. The ubiquitous presence of observing others follows Yaniv Schulman's beyond the virtual environment (in which he selectively constructs an online self) and into the constraints of the mediated filmic self. Even as fellow documentarian he performs as he imagines he must according to the desire of the Big Other.

Yaniv Schulman manipulates a photographic image of himself which receives complimentary reactions from his audience, "Faccio" (Wesselman-Pierce), which in turn feeds into his imagined concept of his desired self. But he also becomes an audience member of his own mediated performance and therefore critically engages with his own shared content. I have demonstrated how these images feed into what I believe these subjects imagine the Big Other desires. In this chapter I therefore specifically challenged the notion that the online photograph is a "real" representation and looked at how editing processes that are accessible to the masses with access to digital cameras and online editing programmes can construct virtual illusions and subsequent fantasized documentation of the desired online self.

It is fitting that filmmakers, Schulman and Joost, should employ self-reflexive devices in a documentary that not only comments on film as construct but illuminates the self-reflexive construction processes of the mediated online self. The filmmakers additionally employ a mixture of representational strategies, from observational to participatory (while fundamentally adhering to self-reflexivity), that champion an often grainy, hand-held aesthetic quality. This merging of representational methods allows the filmmakers to comment on the notion of film as subjective construction which in turn thematically mirror Yaniv Schulman's own creative online endeavours. It also lays the foundation for the filmmakers' subject to engage, as a filmmaker might, with the construction processes involved in the representation of the film.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSION**

Throughout this thesis I have focused on the processes of self-documentation as represented in the documentary films, *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005), *We Live in Public* (2009) and *Catfish* (2005). In the three case studies I examined, subjects were projected against a backdrop of social and interactive, online environments, which encourage self-narration and subsequent auto-documentation. The subjects' involvement in the filmmaking process provided the reader with a glance into the complex subject-filmmaker relationship. The dynamic of such a relationship, present in the construction process of a documentary film, raises questions about the authenticity of the representation. The filmmakers therefore utilize self-reflexive representational strategies in order to provide the viewer with a critical understanding of film as construct. These self-reflexive signals shed light on the content documented in the films, and underscore the influence of subjectivity in the various mediated representations of the self. Drawing on theories of documentary form, I explored the idea that the subjects cannot be represented objectively, and can therefore not be viewed as separate from the filmmaking process, since they are so intimately engaged it.

In addition I observed a preference for observational and participatory modes of representation and I argued that the presence of the filmmaker with her camera influences the authenticity of the filmed subject's behaviour. A clear correlation could be traced between the content documented in the various documentary films and the chosen forms of representation. The mainly self-reflexive strategies not only draw the viewer's attention to filmic constructs, but also lay bare the contrived set-up of the mediated self within online environments.

The documentary films are concerned with the interaction on SNSs between mediated bodies that produce content, but are also the content produced. The modern SNSs documented in the different films, such as Facebook, (fictional) online dating sites and personal surveillance

webcam sites, provide a milieu where democratic and mutual gazing and subsequent collaborative impression management is the convention. This kind of environment presupposes sociality and therefore the presence of virtual others is assumed. Awareness of this gazing, potentially interactive other, places great pressure on the self to construct and produce an online identity according to the Lacanian imagined desires of the Other. In the films, the viewer is able to witness the self-reflexive identity construction processes of the subjects, which assist them in producing and documenting a desired mediated self. By referring to Hille Koskela and Nathan Jurgenson I examined gazing hierarchies as framed by panoptic and omnioptic surveillance models. These surveillance theories allowed for a better understanding of the manner in which the visibility of the self functions in social online environments, where the omnipresent other is always lurking and gazing. I considered how hierarchical panoptic surveillance structures have developed into mutual surveillance structures online. Although the modern social surveillance model liberates the mediated self in that she is in control of her own visibility, in contrast to one-sided hierarchical gazing, I argue that the self is forced to be very conscious of how she shares content about the self. This leads the mediated self to consciously manage an impression of her mediated self, aware always that there exists an other who observes.

Elucidating the complicated dynamics of gazing-hierarchies, self-narration and subsequent self-documentation via social mediation online (as documented by subject-filmmakers) I provided a theoretical framework that exposes the dual role of producer-consumer, or the “prosumer”. Online, the (desired mediated image of) the self can be both the content produced and consumed by others and the self as other. I evoked Jaques Lacan’s concept of the mirror-gazing self and the Big Other, in order to explain this very dynamic. Participative gazing societies within social mediated platforms where selves are made visible to look at while looking (at the visible image of self and at images made visible of others by others) presents the self with a mirror-screen into which she can gaze. This gazing practise can initiate imaginary processes of self re-cognition and subsequent re-editing of the image of the self until it matches her ideal as she imagines her audience desires to perceives her.

Socially mediated mutual gazing societies are at the centre of these self-reflexive documentaries, which again explicates the multifaceted role of the subject-filmmaker who does not merely

participate in complex gazing societies online, but is also challenged to portray the double role of both producer and consumer of her own constructed filmic image of self.

Chapter two considered the hybrid representational methods the filmmakers use in *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) permitting them to elucidate their roles as not only authoring agents but as self-reflexive subjects, actively partaking in the construction of their mediated images. Arin Crumley and Susan Buice include re-enactments, as well as what appears to be “real” behind the scenes footage, in their filmic representation of a personal history. The filmmakers employ a mixture of representational methods that blend together autobiographical documentary, re-enactments, animation, montage sequences, re-staged drama with a self-reflexive undertone spliced together with what seems to be real ‘behind-the-scenes footage’. The aesthetic style remains grainy and hand-held, reminiscent of the cinema vérité movements. Here the viewer becomes very critical, as she is made aware from the outset that the filmmakers are not only performing the roles of the subjects but are in fact re-telling a personal tale via filmic means. This knowledge serves in highlighting the dilemma of authenticity that the subject-filmmaker faces during auto-documentation. This film attempts to document how individual users utilize online media in order to fashion desired virtual selves. Within the confines of the fictional online dating site, the filmmakers set themselves up as objects of the gaze of an other, and manage their online identities accordingly. Buice and Crumley are fundamentally turned into each others’ Lacanian Big Other as they gaze at one another through various lenses, screens and mirrors. These subjects “look” at one another (and at the image of their mediated self) both as subjects and as filmmakers. In other words, the subject-filmmaker binary relationship permits the viewer to understand that in this specific case the subject of the film actually bears the ultimate gaze and constructs the way in which she (as subject) is represented. In order to emphasize their role as authoring agents, Buice and Crumley allow their camera to become an integral part of the reflexive production process, constantly signalling to the viewer that they, as subjects and as filmmakers, are essentially aware of what the camera represents, namely the Other. The presence of the camera also signifies their role as filmmakers. They use the camera provocatively, documenting their relationship and corresponding only through overtly mediated forms, which allow them to portray constructed versions of their imagined selves. In an exaggerated sense, these subjects are only ever seen the way they imagine the Other sees them, and we view them as

they are engaged in collaborative self-construction processes. Essentially this film draws the viewer's attention towards the subjective nature of narrative.

In chapter three I explored the film *We Live in Public* (2009) and the advent of personal webcam surveillance, which can challenge traditional hierarchical gazing practises and allow the viewer to consider notions of omnioptic visibility. The subject of the film, Josh Harris, challenges traditional hierarchical gazing models in that he willingly makes his mediated self visible and viewable to the masses (others). But unfortunately gazing is not democratic in this environment, for although Harris liberates himself from the constraints of what is conventionally considered to be private, he is not able to gaze at his collective audience the way they gaze at him. On the contrary, he is rather only able to see himself the way online others look at him, becoming an audience member of his own mediated performance of the self. Harris is severely influenced by the presence of his audience and although they are able to interact via online text with him it is important to note that they do not have to do this. In fact, they might merely silently observe as a voyeur does. In this instance, Harris is truly faced with himself as other in front of the mirror of the screen, isolated and in a Lacanian sense dependent on how he imagines the Other is seeing him. Filmmaker Ondi Timoner subtly makes use of self-reflexive techniques in order to emphasize Harris' own involvement with his personal documentation of the self, which turns him into a pseudo surveillance documentarian. While *Four Eyed Monsters* (2005) considers the relationship of subjects who are also filmmakers, in this film there exists a different connection between the subject and the filmmaker who observes him. Timoner predominantly remains an observer. The self-reflexive moments assist her in her portrayal of Harris as an observer of his own mediated image. While the documentation we see of Harris is produced by Timoner, who states her role as an authoring agent from the outset with the aid of expository representational modes, Harris himself presides in his own constructed world of cameras. Here he is both the content produced and the one producing the content (of himself). Timoner's presence as documentarian and her self-reflexive representational methods raise awareness of her representation as constructed, and provide commentary on Harris's own self-reflexive surveillance endeavours. Harris is both the observed and the observer of his own mediated image. He is faced with a challenge: he must oscillate between the roles of authoring producer, and subject (mediated image) produced. And while he seems to be in control of his own



visibility, he does not have control over the perception (even if imagined) of the ever-present gazing other.

In chapter four, I examined the film, *Catfish* (2010), in which I demonstrated how the mediated self often engages in mutual visibility practises with others online. In online environments, the self is made visible to be looked at, while simultaneously looking back. *Catfish* (2005) documents the subject, Yaniv Schulman, who becomes romantically involved with an online other on the SNS, Facebook. This SNS provides its user with the opportunity to create an ever-evolving narrative, going back and forth, editing and re-editing information about the self. This process supports the theme of the film which attempts to highlight self-reflexive processes of self-documentation. The online self is acutely aware of the very present other online, affecting the creation of that self according to imaginary constraints. In this film, Wesselman-Pierce pretends to be Megan Faccio, and thus becomes Yaniv Schulman's romantic (virtual) other. Wesselman-Pierce shapes her online characters according to how she imagines Yaniv Schulman's desires. Similarly, I argued that Yaniv Schulman is also caught amid the virtual charade and follows suit in his own constructed way: at one point even manipulating a photograph to adhere to what he and "Faccio" have imagined their virtual courtship to be. By referring to the notion of visual identity construction I made the analogy that the screen becomes a mirror. The self faces her reflection in this mirror and observes both the self and herself as other. She is both "object" and "subject" (Roberts 2011). For me, the mediated (carefully selected) photographic online image "reflects" as a mirror might. But here, the individual is able to maintain a desired identity through accessible editing processes. While the self creates with the omnipresent Big Other in mind, it is vital to note that she also portrays the role of audience to her own performance.

The presence of others follows Yaniv Schulman beyond the confines of the virtual and into the filmic realm, where he has progressed from subject to filmmaker. Here, too, he invites the imagined Other to partake in the documentation of his experience and witness his performed, mediated existence. As a self-reflexive filmmaker he documents Wesselman-Pierce's family, the same way Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman had been documenting him up until that point. Joost and Schulman tend to oscillate between methods reminiscent of the participative and observational modes – often disappearing from the action in front of the camera as a 'fly-on-the-wall' might. Indeed, the aesthetic quality of the film often reminds the viewer of the direct

cinema and cinema vérité – two different film movements that maintained similar stylistic choices with long takes and hand-held camera movements. But I would argue that the film is more participatory due to its strong self-reflexive tendencies. This in turn signals not only the filmmakers’ roles as authoring documentarians but sheds light on Yaniv Schulman and “Faccio’s” online expedition of self-construction.

In the diverse online environments documented in the three films discussed, the subjects portray a variety of roles, ranging from mediated performer to auto-documentarian and online narrator. My discussion was concerned with two main focus points. First, I investigated the construction and subsequent documentation of the mediated online self. Second, I reminded the reader that ultimately I was faced with the filmic documentary representation of documented online selves. I believe that this notion is ultimately core to our understanding of these documentaries and makes me reconsider the audience contract once more. As I demonstrated in chapter one, viewers often assume that a given representation is authentic, neglecting to recognize that the filmmaker is an authoring agent who selectively interprets for her audience what is “real”. The viewer of these films is often blatantly exposed to self-reflexive methods, and compelled to recognize how technical features are utilized by subjects to achieve a certain ideal image of the self online. Thematically, this kind of self-reflexivity is mirrored in the filmic representation, making the viewer so much more aware of the constructed nature of the documentary form. I concluded that the documented individuals took on the (often complicated) role of subject-filmmaker, as their involvement in the filmmaking process grew to varying degrees. The dual role of subject-filmmaker entailed that the filmic representations necessarily included self-reflexive indicators in order to demonstrate the position of an authoring agent who bears the ultimate gaze.

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