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Guto and Graça

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Introduction

- 1 Michael Jackson's seminal book, *The Politics of Storytelling* (2013), introduces a particularly useful anthropological insight into the influential work of Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958). His reassessment of Arendt inspired me to return to her original work in order to question whether we can think about the potential of ethnographic films as storytelling. The setting for this experiment is a short exploratory film I made while doing research on an incipient process of gentrification of Vidigal, a favela located in Rio de Janeiro's wealthy South Zone (Brazil). *Guto and Graça* is one of six shorts I produced for the audiovisual research *Views of Vidigal*. I advance the motion that ethnographic films help those involved in the production and in the audience to access the political dimension of life through intersubjective storytelling, while they also work as practices and products of storytelling.
- 2 Jackson mobilises Arendt's notion of storytelling as an intersubjective praxis that bridges the personal and the political, as a means to advance an existential anthropology of human agency and transformation. In Arendt, the process by which storytelling transforms the personal into the social reveals who people are to themselves and to others, in a mutually constituting gesture of recognition (1958: 178). Therefore, for Arendt, the interactive act of storytelling, the space across the personal and the collective or what she calls the intersubjective in-between, is constitutive of human beings as social beings. Jackson takes this further to show that this process is transformative and often emancipatory. Exploring narratives across various social terrains that share similar experiences of hardship, trauma, violence, and physical and spiritual displacement, Jackson argues that stories are not simply accounts of life that communicate knowledge about the world. Storytelling, he contends, is a strategy of living in the world with others that provide a 'techné' by which people change their understanding of their own experience, hence the meaning of their lives, in face of forces they cannot control (2013:

14). Both authors acknowledge that the understanding storytelling affords is always partial because intrinsic to the flux of telling and listening in interaction is the flux of lives lived with others. Whereas this seems to be a limitation of storytelling in Jackson's view, as the imprint of personal experience is fractioned and partially lost when it makes its way into the public realities of social relationships; what seems to be crucial for Arendt is the fact that storytelling throws people together in a paradoxical assemblage or very unique beings (Arendt 1958: 176). This paradox of a plurality of specificities, and the ethical dilemmas it presents, accounts for the public and political realm of human relationships. It is in this paradoxical dilemma and in the in-between spaces of intersubjective encounters that the telling of personal stories gains collective recognition and political relevance, independently of whether or not this will provide a way to personal transformation.

- 3 Although I subscribe to Jackson's concern with the empowering and transformative potential of storytelling, my main interest here is in comparing Arendt's image of the paradoxical intersubjective dilemma of storytelling with the kinds of composite stories afforded in the production of ethnographic films. The focus is on ethnographic films that have an exploratory nature, which excludes those based on a priori findings to convey or on pre-boarded stories to tell. As such, I define the ethnographic filmmaking endeavour, analogous with ethnographic research, as practices that happen within fields of interaction and highlight what comes about from a shared commitment with an ethics of exchange of knowledge and life experiences. Jackson's reading of Arendt has certainly inspired me, but I do not highlight the possibility of personal transformation through storytelling. Rather, I turn my attention to the incongruities between plurality (in the multiple compound of stories) and the idiosyncrasies of particular persons (in their bodies, gestures, faces, voices) who come together intentionally or not to share their views, claims, wishes about their world. Their intersubjective storytelling does not necessarily transform them, but it reveals them to each other, in mutual acknowledgement and recognition that imparts political relevance to their lives. The form of storytelling I propose to enlist has additional particularity, the camera and the film. They are both objects and means of exploring, provoking, and showing stories.

"Whose Story is it?"

- 4 Irrespective of the cinematographic style assumed by or ascribed to ethnographic films – observational, cinema vérité, essay narratives, vertovian montage, collaborative, etc – exploratory projects that precede and are part of shooting and editing usually end up in unexpected places and with stories that overflow the film itself.¹ Therefore, while focusing on the "spaces between ourselves and others" (Jackson 2013:18), on encounters that unfold in the shooting and editing stages, particular stories often put into question issues of authorship. The preoccupation many visual anthropologists have expressed in regards to hierarchical relationships of image production and authorship and the ethics of positionality (Ginsburg 2010; Kuehnast 1992; McDougall 2006) becomes evident and, in fact, inevitable. Storytelling in exploratory ethnographic filmmaking compels filmmakers to adjust their interests to the interests of others, and to engage with other intersubjective ways of seeing and showing the world. In other words, storytelling in ethnographic filmmaking is not merely a function of the technology, even when new technologies impel us to rethink the meaning of images (Favero 2013), or of discovering a

particular kind of agency of the visual (Mitchell 1996), but more a result of open-ended encounters that enable people to co-create interactive multi-layered audio-visual stories.

- 5 But authorship is only one among a few constant themes that appear in much of the debate regarding the place and the contributions of visual anthropology to the greater subject of anthropology. The relationship between images and written texts is at the core of discussions on the different kinds of knowledge sound and visual production can achieve (Cox et al 2016; Crawford and Turton 1992; Grimshaw 2001; MacDougall 1998, 2006) through an attention to the sensorial dimension of existence and the embodied nuances that often escape written words; much ink has also been used in discussions on the politics of representation and power inequalities in the production of images (Grinsburg 2010; Ruby 2000; Turner 1992), or what Kuehnast (1992) has called a process of visual imperialism; lastly, visual anthropologists have debated the potential of collaborative, participatory practices that in earlier years Rouch identified as shared anthropology (Henley 2010), and more interventionist projects that later the contributors in Pink's (2007) edited volume described as applied visual anthropology.
- 6 This latter debate would ultimately acknowledge that the power imbalance between those who controlled the means of image production and those who were being filmed had to be addressed and remediated, a process that eventually advanced the development of indigenous media production across the world (Asch et al 1991; Ginsburg 1991, 1995; MacDougall 1987; Turner 1991, 1992; Worth and Adair 1997), which today has reached a global scale (Salazar and Córdova 2008; Wilson and Stewart 2008). Indigenous media has become a "robust form of contemporary cultural production" (Ginsburg 2016: 582) among people in different countries who have taken control over their own representation exercised through their own practices of image production that Ginsburg defines as media sovereignty (Ginsburg 2016: 583).
- 7 In this context, references to stories and storytelling (or story-showing) have been adjacent to the examination of narratives in ethnographic films, but more in the sense MacDougall identified almost thirty years ago with the still pertinent question "Whose story is it?" (1991), than with cinematographic narrative strategies. The latter is often, in ethnographic films, at the service of the former. The aim here is not to rehearse these debates again, but to bring to the fore a concept of storytelling that takes us away from the focus on narrative, representation and the quest of visibility (Cox and Wright 2012). In doing so, I am not belittling the important role politics of representation plays in the project of visual anthropology. Quite the contrary, I wish to emphasise the political power of the stories ethnographic filmmakers create often in partnership with people whose stories are at the periphery of against mainstream and official - often national - narratives about them.
- 8 My use of storytelling brings together what MacDougall (2006) has described as compound work in which films not only reveal something about a place or a group of people, but become part of people's stories through the different layers of interactions that go with the making of films. Hence, I am referring here to a specific kind of story that is not simply a narrative product.² Rather, it is part of a larger process of interaction between the people involved and the media as an object in-between, which in turn becomes a product created out of that same interaction. In this sense, I want to bring ethnographic filmmaking close to the idea of storytelling in Arendt's *The Human Condition*, which is one that corresponds to the relationship between her notions of work and action.

Storytelling and the Subjective In-between

- 9 Stories are everywhere. Gottschall (2012) and Boyd (2009) claim that humans are not only creatures of story, but that storytelling is part of what makes us human. We are never the sole authors of our own life stories (Jackson 2013), nor are we the lone architects of the stories we show or tell, be them autobiographical or completely fictional, for we live our lives in respect to others and our words or images are dependent on the actions of those who co-act in them and on the imagination of those who watch, listen, or interact with them. It is this intersubjective space of storytelling that is significant to our quest not only in ethnographic films but in our anthropological practice in general.
- 10 In contrast with the then prevalent philosophical focus on abstract and conceptual concerns with what it means to be human, or with what she called the *vita comtemplativa*, Hannah Arendt (1958) claimed she was interested in exploring the flux of life lived in a world shared with others. Arendt divided *vita activa* into three fundamental human activities hierarchically arranged. Labour, or the activities related to the sustenance of the biological human body; work, defined by the making of the world of objects, the fabrication of things that become part of the world as independent entities; and action, the most important activity in Arendt's perception because it is contingent on the interaction between people and equivalent to the public realm. Action, as well as speech, is determined by and reinforces the human condition of plurality. Plurality conveys the fact that we are all unique beings who need to make ourselves understood to one another, and yet are also equally human and therefore have the capacity to understand each other. This plurality is the essence of political life: "A life without speech and without action ... is literarily dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men" (1958: 176). This is the same to say that a life without others is akin to death. It is the acting together and listening to each other that bring what is particular of each man, subjective and intimate, to the social realm. Storytelling for Arendt is a form of action that draws on our subjective beings and is intersubjectively enacted with others.
- 11 Jackson (2013) observes that Arendt was not concerned with the content of stories, whether it was real or not, but with the political force of the intersubjective action of telling and listening. As we tell and show our stories to each other, as we listen and watch, we acknowledge our equality and consent to our distinctiveness in a constant gesture of reorganising the social world. In this sense, Jackson continues, storytelling is also a mode of reaction to and reconciliation with the forces that impose themselves on us. Reaction, recognition, restitution and conciliation are all important aspects of storytelling as an interactive action in a world constituted of enduring objects built by our own collective work. As Jackson explains, for Arendt, action, and storytelling as a form of action
 "...always involves more than a singular subject; it occurs within fields of interaction that she calls the 'subjective in-between.'" (2013: 18, emphasis in the original)
- 12 Ethnographic films, and cinema in general, are certainly but not only action. They are also artworks and equivalent to Arendt's conception of art. They are both an intersubjective action that bridges the particular and the political and a product of work, fabricated by man for a purpose. Ethnographic films are constituted in multiple layers of

interaction, between filmmakers and protagonists, between protagonists themselves and between those people and viewers. For Arendt, storytelling is not work (and stories not products) because nobody can be the sole author or producer of their own life stories even if we are agents in them. This is because stories happen between people and require the intersubjective in-between to come into being as stories. However, ethnographic films have an intangible quality and cannot be defined only as reification of stories, as Arendt describes artworks. Neither are they akin to an Aristotelian notion of drama as an imitation of acting that transposes human life into art. Ethnographic films do not imitate; they are an act of storytelling made up of segments of other acts of storytelling; they are compound stories. However, by claiming that they are also products of work, pieces of art, I want to emphasize both their nature as objects, products of making, and their process of making with.³ Thus, as storytelling acts, ethnographic films are lived and relived through constant interactions. As products of work, as art, they have a certain materiality and authorship that go beyond Arendt's description of storytelling.

- 13 Ethnographic cinema works as double storytelling (action) and stories (work/product). It is the process of making stories of stories that have been inter-subjectively lived in the flux of ethnographic encounters and are then placed as objects in the middle of other relationships. As stories, they are man-made artefacts of certain durability that gain their own places in the world of things. However, here again, the process of work that fabricates ethnographic films encompasses and exceeds Arendt's activity of work. For her, the process of making is determined by the categories of means and end. That is, the process comes to an end as "it is only a means to produce this end" (1958: 143). Because it is an intersubjective action, there is, instead, a necessary engagement with materials in a way that reinforces their impetus in the crafting of something, which can, in turn, lead to unexpected ends. Therefore, the work also implies a levelled interaction between people, people and objects, people and technologies that are as crucial to life as the end they seek to achieve.
- 14 Ultimately, our intention as anthropologists using cameras is simply to instigate and bring to life the conceptual understandings afforded by this particular action. We slice stories and relationships, juxtapose their fragments, and re-place them in a composite or linear narrative that becomes stories of ethnographic encounters guided by making, action and speech, and also by abstract concepts. With that, finally, ethnographic cinema brings together the *vita activa* with the *vita contemplativa*. It evokes life as lived by others and invites viewers to feel and think while they watch their fellow human beings. In Arendt's sense of storytelling, ethnographic films bridge the personal and the political, given that their nature is to be watched by others, made publishable, and public, partaken in the process of human mutual recognition and transformation.
- 15 It is making with others, or Arendt's subject in-between, of the short ethnographic films I produced with people who live in a gentrifying favela in Rio de Janeiro that I am interested in exploring as fractions of storytelling. In what follows, I focus in one of these exploratory shorts; a 9-minute film that bears the name of its main protagonists, *Guto and Graça*. However, this exploration will be more accessible after a brief presentation of the place and situation where the films were made. Before I discuss *Guto and Graça*, I shall present a brief account of the incipient process of gentrification in Vidigal.

Vidigal, a Gentrifying Favela

- 16 Located in the hill between two of the wealthiest neighbourhoods of Rio de Janeiro, with breathtaking city and ocean views, the favela of Vidigal has been the target of a recent and unprecedented wave of gentrification. In anticipation of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games, Rio de Janeiro's government launched a securitisation policy to dismantle drug-trade control from favelas and reclaim state sovereignty over the territories in order to increase overall security and 'integrate' favelas into the city. The policy received the military epithet 'pacification' (pacificação) and since its inception in 2008, 38 Pacifying Police Units (UPP) were installed, covering 233 out of one thousand favelas throughout Rio's South, West and North zones.
- 17 In confluence with other economic and political factors, pacification increased safety in areas of the city that were important touristic or logistic points for the sporting mega-events. Security within favelas varied, however. Beyond the general characteristics favelas in Rio have in common (affordable self-built scarcely regulated housing areas with deficient public infrastructure), their development and current composition is highly diverse. Each favela experienced the presence of the UPP in different ways. Many of those located in the South Zone saw a significant decline in ostensive drug-trade activities and in incidence of violence, which improved the safety for residents and stimulated the influx of people from outside favelas. Although residents expected pacification would lead to an upsurge of the internal real estate market, many had not anticipated it would spark the interest of middle-class outsiders. Pacified South Zone favelas began attracting young middle-class foreigners, mostly from Europe and the US, who wanted to stay as tourists, buy houses to live, and invest in favelas located in Rio's coastal neighbourhoods. This sparked a small but pronounced economy of hostels, bars and restaurants, many of which owned by foreigners themselves, to cater for this new group. A few wealthy Brazilian entrepreneurs also invested in the new tourist market, although they would not, for the most part, move to favelas. While moving to a favela would mean utter downward mobility to middle-class Cariocas, young foreigners saw it as an opportunity to experience a place that had been previously inaccessible.⁴ The national and international press caught up with Rio's favela trend and promptly identified it with gentrification.
- 18 Considering the historical development of favelas (Gay 1994; Perlman 2010; Valladares 2005), my intention when I first arrived in Vidigal in 2014 was to understand whether favelas in the South Zone of Rio were following the pattern of gentrification described in the urban regeneration literature (Lees et al. 2010; Slater 2012). Since Ruth Glass first coined the term in 1964, gentrification has drawn the attention of urban specialists to the academy and public sector, and percolated into the Western vernacular. Now, considered a visible spatial component of a global strategy of neoliberal urbanism (Smith 2002), gentrification is still described, on the ground, as a process of reinvestment in depreciated urban areas, instigated or not by public policies, accompanied by a real estate speculation that eventually dismantles local community institutions and displaces the pre-existing low-income population. There is a strong social class component to this model of gentrification which the term emphasizes. People in Vidigal used the term to characterise not a full process of gentrification as identified in the literature, but to describe the unprecedented presence of those two different groups of outsiders: a diverse group of middle-class foreigners who valued the favela for what it had to offer and a

smaller group of wealthy Brazilians who hoped that the favela would become a ‘Greek village, with all houses painted white and no poor people around’ as a long-term Vidigal resident once put. (Ascensão 2015).

- 19 Vidigal is one of the favelas foreign migrants and wealthy Brazilians most favour in Rio. It hosts a large number of guesthouses, hostels and even a three-star hotel. Some of these establishments organise ticketed DJ parties catered chiefly to foreigners and a middle-class clientele who live in the neighbourhoods below. Like other favelas, Vidigal has always had a bohemian reputation amongst Carioca artists who patronised one of its music clubs before the disputes between different drug-trade factions became too violent in the 1990s. It is also the home of Nós do Morro (Us from Up the Hill), an avant-garde not-for-profit theatre school started by a prominent Brazilian actor in the 1970s, which has trained at least two generations of actors from Vidigal, a few of whom have gained notoriety and moved up to act in the main TV station’s widely watched soap operas. With pacification, this reputation quickly achieved another standing; one that the epithet favela chique (chic slum) commonly used in the press ironically summarizes.
- 20 Slum gentrification seems to be a new global phenomenon of yet another form of displacement of poor urban populations (Cummings 2015; Lees et al. 2015, 2016). In Vidigal, it provoked different responses and reactions. At opposite ends of the spectrum, there were those who, in agreement with the mainstream press, saw gentrification as a natural process of economic development and an inevitable effect of urban regeneration, while others were extremely critical and believed it would be detrimental to long-term residents. The majority of people who I encountered in Vidigal, however, fell somewhere in between these two views. Acutely aware of their vulnerable position as favela residents in a highly unequal city, most were trying to see whether they could turn the incipient process of gentrification into a new resource to improve their own lot in life. The majority of residents I met saw the changes that were taking place in Vidigal as a window of opportunity on which they had to jump quickly before the securitization policy began to fail. The films I made are an attempt to tap into the different claims people were making of their place and position in Vidigal. The short film *Guto and Graça*, which I will explore below, creates a story from the partial stories people tried to tell each other about their point of reference within gentrifying Vidigal. It is built on what Arendt called the plurality of human condition (1958), and as such, it complicates any single claim to that contentious space.

Exploring with *Guto and Graça*

- 21 The 9-minute film *Guto and Graça* is part of a series of six short films I made with different people I met when I lived in Vidigal in 2014. All films revolve around the changes taking place in the ‘pacified’ favela. I chose to write about *Guto and Graça* because the interactions between the protagonists evoke the complexity of experiences, hopes and desires people had at the time regarding their place in Vidigal. *Guto and Graça* offers a good example of the multi-layered storytelling ethnographic films can engage with and create, which shows the polarity of specific voices at play in any given social situation.
- 22 The way I filmed the material for the short stories was influenced by the technology I had available. I carried with me a compact, fully manual digital photo/video camera with sharp lenses and barely adequate in-build microphone. The size of my camera made possible an impromptu kind of filming that would have been difficult with a conspicuous

semi-professional equipment kit. What it lacked in sound technology, it fully compensated in facilitating interaction with people I met and in giving me the freedom of movement. It was a camera that facilitated movement, extemporaneous interaction and exploration. Therefore, it complemented my research interest and my quest to understand how the multiple claims of Vidigal juxtaposed with each other, creating a situation much more complex than what recent works on slum gentrification have depicted (Ascensão 2015; Cummings 2015; Lees et al. 2015, 2016).

23 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://journals.openedition.org/anthrovision/3697>

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24 *Guto and Graça* features a couple who walks with me through the favela alleyways in search for signs of gentrification. Guto was in his early thirties and had been living in Vidigal for two years. He grew up in a low-income neighbourhood in another part of the city and his decision to live in Vidigal was influenced by his friend from university and his business partner who, in turn, had moved there with his Swedish girlfriend. Absorbed by social problems from an early age, Guto wanted to put his university degree in architecture at the service of the favela community and became actively engaged in different social projects in collaboration with Vidigal's Housing Association. Graça, his partner and a long-term resident of Vidigal, also grew up in another area in Rio. She had the same concern with social issues in the favela, but her focus was on health and nutrition. After one of many occasions when we discussed how the changes taking place in Vidigal were affecting favela residents, we decided to do a short project together.

Walking Up

25 We spent a day in July 2014 walking and filming around the upper part of Vidigal, which was the main targeted area for gentrification, to see who and what we would encounter. The idea of walking was to try merging Guto and Graça's combined vision of Vidigal, which came from their experience as residents and their expertise as professionals, with an exploratory venture through the favela alleyways that could lead us in different directions. Our main intent was to use the walk together with the camera as an explorative method without any specific end in mind, except to engage with the environment and the people and gather audio-visual materials that we could use also for indeterminate ends. Both Guto and Graça believed that their perspectives on the changes were important and were willing to share them with me on camera. They were also interested in learning more from the perspectives of different residents.

26 Guto, Graça and I left the main road that goes up Vidigal to enter one of many sideway alleyways that crisscross the hill. We only stopped once to look at the view where I asked Guto about himself. Part of that conversation made it to the final short, but it was the walking through Vidigal with them that provided the main interest in the initial part of our tour. It showed Vidigal from the inside: the stairs, the proximity of the houses, the colours residents used to paint them, the decorations referencing the 2014 World Cup that had just started, the architecture making use of every space possible. It showed a consolidated favela of high population density.

- 27 Images, especially moving images, have a strong capacity to conjure up the impression of place. Seeing the three-dimensionality of space, colours and light, and hearing the local sounds, can evoke a strong sense of place. But film also appeals to other senses beyond vision and hearing such as touch, smell, and taste, without in fact representing them. This is something Laura Marks (2000) has described as haptic visuality. Fiction cinema has been engaging with haptic visuality since we created the technology, and many film theorists have pointed out the alluring sensorial qualities of films (Marks 2000, 2002; Sobchack 2004; Swalwell 2002).

Guto and Graça walking up Vidigal



Screenshot of *Guto and Graça*, by Angela Torresan

- 28 Ethnographic films have taken advantage of cinema's sensorial capacity but most have done so with the mediation of their protagonists. A good example of this is a cheese-making scene in David MacDougall's *Tempus de Baristas* (1993), a film he made about the impact of social and economic changes on a family of shepherds in Sardinia. MacDougall filmed and edited the scene in a way that poignantly conveys the physical experience of making cheese, which in turn alludes to more abstract ideas about the overwhelming forces that were impinging on the cheese maker's livelihood. With the sensoriality of that scene, MacDougall succeeded in crossing between a singular personal experience and the structural frame that made it part of a collective enterprise beyond the shepherd's immediate control. However, ambience, aesthetics, camera position, framing, focus, that is, MacDougall's techniques for evoking the senses, have always been at the service of the people within the films he made. MacDougall uses the medium of film to create a highly sensorial layer of storytelling with cinematographic images void of words that is of his own authorship through the body/space relationship of his protagonist. In contrast, more recent hyper-observational films have moved the focus to objects and to non-humans. The idea shifts from an evocation of other people's perspectives of the world to the creation of a new sensorial experience in the audience.
- 29 This digression from the *Guto and Graça* project was to say that I followed on the footsteps of visual anthropologists who are interested in attending to human inter-subjectivity. We had no particular intention to specifically elicit the sensoriality of any activity, place, or

object. Therefore, the shots were direct and the framing very much from the point of view and the positioning of my eyes. Although *Guto and Graça* does not have a reflexive tone, it makes it clear that there is someone behind the camera fully engaging in the interactions. Hence, I counted with the intrinsic capacity of images to play with physicality without using any cinematographic technique to spawn the engagement of particular senses. It is difficult to judge whether or not the results have achieved a sensorial grasp of place given that the images transport me immediately to the Vidigal I experienced. It conjures up the main aesthetics by means of light, color, and sound rather than close ups, shallow depth of fields, or long observational sequences. Guto and Graça are in most of the shots, as I filmed Vidigal through the interconnections between the landscape and us.

- 30 Guto and Graça took me to a rooftop (*laje*) that belonged to a friend of theirs. The house is located in Jaqueira, a northern area of Vidigal stretching along one of the Dois Irmãos rocks that shelter the favela. From the rooftop, with a 180° view of Vidigal, Guto gave me his critical point of view on gentrification. Intending to offer this speech to a wider audience, Guto turned around and gestured towards the favela that surrounded the rooftop landscape. By telling the recent story of Vidigal in his terms, Guto imparted the political claim others shared with him. The focus was on him. The view worked as an illustrative map and as part of the story we were compounding together. This and the preceding scene show very clearly the idea of storytelling I am advancing here. Guto's concern with the 'de-characterisation' of Vidigal by way of gentrification was directly connected with his own personal involvement and interest in the favela. Our filming, his generous gift of sharing his views, and the juxtaposition of these moments in the edit suite have enabled the emergence of a story-in-between that bridges the personal and the political. Not simply because his view on gentrification is politicized but because it is related to his subjective experience with the place. A parcel of his life in this place merges with my focus on his story and the landscape in the creation of an action that also becomes an object. His *vita contemplativa* on Vidigal with our *vita activa*.
- 31 We made our way towards an area of Vidigal called *Vinte Cinco*, where, before pacification, had been a stronghold of the drug faction that operated in the favela. The alleys were increasingly narrowed and the density of houses was greater, making it harder for those who do not know the physical layout to find their way, which provided good cover for the drug business.⁵ When we arrived at the 'yellow house,' Guto asked me to go up a pile of rubble to frame it from a privileged angle. The house, in his and Graça's view, was the worst effect of pacification and a first step to gentrification. The quality of the building, with its straight lines and iron stairs, was a contrast to the houses surrounding it.

The yellow house in *Vinte Cinco*



Screenshot of *Guto and Graça*, by Angela Torresan

- 32 We met other people around the yellow house whose opinions about it, and indirectly about gentrification, differed from the common critical view that Guto had just portrayed. Seu Bidu, who had been talking to Graça while Guto and I filmed up the rubble, found the yellow house useful as a point of reference to explain to people, especially deliverymen, how to get to his own house. This seemed like a banal reason to like a building that was overloaded with a myriad of connotations, but given the historical development of the maize-like alleyways of *Vinte Cinco*, it was also a glimpse of recognition of its place in the urban fabric of Rio de Janeiro. Seu Armando, who lived in a very small studio behind the yellow house, told us ‘they had made a beautiful house’ and he had nothing to complain about. He added, “no one will argue with people who have money.” We learnt a few minutes later that he also wanted to sell his place.

The Subjective-in-Between or Talking to People

- 33 The encounter that followed offers the culminating point of the film and is another example of the kind of interaction in ethnographic research that shows how different private experiences unfold into a story that traverses individuals and becomes part of a sociality, or of what Arendt called the subjective-in-between. After Guto and I talked to Seu Armando, we caught up with Graça who was sitting on a sofa outside Dona Cristina’s house. Dona Cristina lived on the floor above Seu Armando’s. Graça announced to us, with an inflection of surprise and regret that Dona Cristina and Seu Armando also wanted to sell their places. It made sense that they would sell the two properties together given that both were part of the same building. While low-income people who bought properties in favelas were accustomed to the multitude of possible building arrangements, this new wave of outsiders would not buy a unit within a building with other units. The common demand from outsiders was for whole buildings that buyers could transform according to their plans.

- 34 While Seu Armando hoped to return to his birthplace in the Northeast of Brazil with enough cash to start a new life, Dona Cristina and her husband, Seu Luis (nicknamed Seu Nem), wanted to buy another house in a better condition in Vidigal. Cristina and Seu Luis's house was in a bad state of disrepair and they did not have resources to fix it. Understanding their predicament, Guto placed their plan on the good side of gentrification: selling to get something better suited within Vidigal. Graça was not as convinced as she was rather concerned with the negative effects of this post-pacification appropriation and de-characterization of the area, which would eventually drive poor residents away. However, in Cristina's perspective as a house owner, which the majority of Vidigal residents are, real estate speculation offered a chance to improve her life conditions. She saw no reason to stop herself and her family from 'jumping on the bandwagon' of gentrification and profiting from an unprecedented opportunity. This became even clearer when Seu Luis arrived in the middle of our conversation and invited me into their house. He asked me to film their permanent battle with an overloaded sewer system that flooded their bathroom when it rained. He explained how detrimental the problem had been to their health. Cristina then took me to the point where the sewer met their external wall. Fixing the recurrent leakage required repairing the ditch and pipes outside, which would interfere with other houses. It was a major work that they could not afford to undertake by themselves. Both shots of the bathroom and the open sewer convey the hazardous condition of their house, reinforcing their testimony of hardship. It is a clear contrast with the beauty of the view and the light that gleamed over the place highlighting the remarkable colors the winter sunshine brought out.
- 35 The film cuts to Graça and Seu Luis looking at the yellow house. They are at odds with each other in this scene. Inadvertently, Graça's physical positioning in relation to Seu Luis, her gesturing and face expression, seems to convey the indignation of someone who took the high moral ground, condemning the very idea of the yellow house. Seu Luis, on the other hand, saw it as an example of what could be possible for his family. In Graça's view, the yellow house represented a disastrous future that would negatively affect not only the current residents of Vidigal, but low-income Cariocas in general who would run the risk of losing an affordable neighbourhood in the middle of the city if Vidigal truly gentrified. Hers and Guto's were a concern with the shared condition of urban precariousness and poverty in Rio de Janeiro and the wellbeing of Vidigal as a community. For Cristina, Seu Luis and Seu Armando, the yellow house represented a possible way out of their current and very tangible situation of being trapped in poverty. The stories are layered, compounded and mixed, and together they show a much more complex picture of the changes in Vidigal and people's expectations about their places in it than Guto's initial statement about the bad aspects of pacification. Together, each individual point of view, in their differences and multiplicity, brings a crucial political dimension to the film, turning these people's personal quests into social dilemmas on the rights of poor urban people to a good house, to capital, and to dignity as citizens sharing the city.

Graça and Seu Luiz talking about the yellow house



Screenshot of *Guto and Graça*, by Angela Torresan

- 36 We said farewell to Dona Cristina in a manner that is often used in Rio de Janeiro, and which I caught on camera through Graça. Goodbyes dragged out for a while and as she walked away, Graça told Dona Cristina ‘call me if you need anything’, leaving the encounter without closure and always open for reinitiating at any moment, albeit without an agreed commitment. In line with its exploratory nature, the short film ends with the same unresolved tone. The multiple points of view it shows and the story it tells leave the question of gentrification intentionally unresolved.
- 37 I returned to Vidigal for a month in 2016, when the country was entering an economic and political crisis no one could have foreseen (Zimbalist 2017). With the economic downturn, which critically affected Rio de Janeiro, the menace and promise of gentrification had come to a halt. I passed by Dona Cristina and Seu Nem’s house a couple of times but could not find them. Their neighbours advised me to come back later because they were out. They did not manage to ‘jump on the bandwagon’ of gentrification and it did not look like the house had gone through the needed repairs. The sewer still passed next to it, opened.

Conclusion

- 38 Let me return to the idea that ethnographic films perform the double act of storytelling as action and as work/product/art. Storytelling as action in *Guto and Graça* takes multiple forms and it becomes intermingled with the product itself. The subjective in-between of storytelling arises in the filming process with Guto and Graça, Dona Cristina and Seu Luis, which I call exploratory filmmaking. As I mentioned, this is the kind of making with others that does not have a particular end product in sight and has creative value in itself. Our interaction at Dona Cristina and Seu Luis’ house, for instance, raised questions we did not predict, but which addressed the issue of gentrification from a well-rehearsed human conundrum. The scene of their particular predicament touched on the common struggle of trying to find a balance between caring for one’s own life and preserving the

integrity of one's own relationships, while attending to one's moral and material commitment as a member of a collective. There are no answers to this dilemma, but there is the possibility of mutual recognition within a plurality of views, which is where the strength of ethnographic films lay. All involved in the short film agreed on a common understanding: low-income people should have the right to equal access of urban resources. However, what Dona Cristina and Seu Luis were telling us is that to have the right to keep their condition as favelados was not enough. They wanted the right to aspire for personal progress and the chance to change their position from a family trapped under an oppressive system mirrored by an inadequate sewer, to players in the capitalist game.

- 39 It is composite of a plurality of views, multiplicity of stories and experiences co-expressed in a context of interaction, coupled with cinematographic haptic layers of sound, images, and colours that makes up for the kind of storytelling concept and practice I presented in the first section of this article. As a product, a short film crafted out of my editing of the interactions, *Guto and Graça* is a story where the private and particular meet the political act that is essential to our human condition (Arendt, 1958). The bridge between the particular and the political is crossed again as others watch the film, partaking, as I mentioned above, in the process of mutual recognition and transformation ethnographic films can afford. What is even more interesting is that the bridge ethnographic filmmaking storytelling creates between personal specific views and the political realm renders the latter also plural and unsettled, foregrounding the contingency of human interrelationships.

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NOTES

1. My use of the terms 'exploratory' and 'experimental' in ethnographic filmmaking departs from Catherine Russell's definition of films that provide a "challenge to conventional forms of representation" through new media or cinematographic language (1999: 3). Rather, by 'experimental' I mean the act of producing a film out of the kinds of trial and error that come

with attempts of gaining understanding by provocation and exploration of a place, a theme, an idea, a moment, with and through others. The emphasis is on interactions, not on form.

2. Storytelling here is about an interactive form of communication that may or may not assume a linear narrative form and is not necessarily textual. Cinematographic language in fiction and documentary is built on multiple layers of narration, dialogue, sound, picture, and camera motion.

3. Intermaking is not the same as collaborating, even if someone is not collaborating directly, they are making the film with the filmmaker. It's inter because it emphasizes the interaction, not the collaboration, which can or cannot happen.

4. Cariocas are those born in Rio de Janeiro.

5. Although the military occupation of Vidigal had ousted the main drug operation and the subsequent presence of UPP restricted the business's conspicuous conduct, it was still very active. We knew that we were being discretely scrutinized as we walked, but we did not talk about the drug-trade, save as an event located in the past. However, we had to be discreet least we inadvertently paid too much attention to a house or a corner that 'belonged' to the trade. The inconspicuousness of a small camera was particularly beneficial.

ABSTRACTS

It may be tautological to claim that ethnographic films are a form of storytelling; one that combines concomitance and linearity between images and words to show and tell particular stories. However, drawing on *Guto and Graça*, a 9-minute film on the impact of slum gentrification in Rio de Janeiro, I argue that ethnographic films carry the elements of storytelling in Arendt's (1958) and Jackson's (2013) sense. They work as multi-layered forms of 'action' (Arendt, 1958) that bridge the personal and the political during the different phases of production, post-production and dissemination.

Il peut être tautologique de prétendre que les films ethnographiques sont une forme de récit ; une forme qui combine concomitance et linéarité entre images et mots pour montrer et raconter des histoires particulières. Cependant, m'inspirant de Guto et Graça, un film de 9 minutes sur l'impact de la gentrification des bidonvilles à Rio de Janeiro, je soutiens que les films ethnographiques portent les éléments du récit que nous trouvons chez Arendt (1958) et chez Jackson (2013). Ils fonctionnent comme des formes d'"action" à plusieurs niveaux (Arendt, 1958) qui relie le personnel et le politique au cours des différentes phases de production, de post-production et de diffusion.

Podrá ser tautológico afirmar que las películas etnográficas son una forma de contar relatos; una que combina concomitancia y linealidad entre imágenes y palabras para mostrar y contar historias particulares. Sin embargo, partiendo de Guto y Graça, un documental sobre la gentrificación de barriadas en Río de Janeiro, argumento que las películas etnográficas contienen los elementos del relato en el sentido de Arendt (1958) y Jackson (2013). Es decir, funcionan como formas de 'acción' múltiple (Arendt, 1958) que conecta lo personal y lo político durante las diferentes fases de producción, postproducción y diseminación.

INDEX

Palabras claves: cine etnográfico, narrativa, favela, gentrificación

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