

Reflexive Audiovisual Methodology

Pragmatism : minority practices

Pierre M. Stassart, Valérie Mathieu, and Catherine Mougenot

ULg, SEED p.stassart@ulg.ac.be

*How to succeed in “working together”...where phenomena continue...to speak
in many voices; where they refuse to be reinvented as univocal witnesses
(Stengers, 1997)*

Abstract

This paper is a proposal to redefine the way sociology can give an account of the reality of a social group and their (minority) practices. It has two sides: an epistemological/theoretical approach and a methodological one. It is based on a case study or, more accurately stated, on an experiment that concerns a very specific category of farmers.

The specificity of the case gives sense to the approach. Indeed, this specificity lies in the fact that these part-time farmers are not recognized as such and do not seem to call for recognition because of their relations with professional farmers and with agricultural institutions. The problem then becomes how to analyze and represent the practices of this kind of “social” group or category.

This gives sense to the pragmatist approach that treats the social as a process of “public” constitution. Groups are defined by agency and the problem is the emergence of social groups through articulation of what can be said and how it can be said. This approach gives specific meanings to some sociological concepts, and especially to “practice.” The difference between “belonging” and identity is also underlined.

The methodological position logically derives from this position. Participatory filmmaking tries to create, through the interaction between people and researcher, the conditions of this link. Film is treated as a narrative construction.

This paper asks a question of methodology, to wit, “How does one account for a social group’s practices?” The authors reformulated this classic problem in social science by asking how to get a group and its public to emerge, how to bring its practices to the fore. This led them then to examine the contribution that coproducing a film documentary could make. The paper thus is based on a case study or, rather, an experiment conducted with a specific category of farmer, that of part-time livestock farmers.

According to John Dewey, social sciences in general and sociology in particular need not explain the social, turn it into a theory, or divide it into categories. Sociological explanations are of the “what can it allow one to do” kind rather than

accounts of reality. Dewey proposed that sociologists take up a course of action in line with his vision of experimental science by adopting an experimental approach aimed at seeing how a situation could change rather than trying to produce knowledge that transcended the social phenomenon. In social sciences, this work can take the form of a survey aimed first and foremost at participating in the emergence of a group that has gained the ability to identify itself and to spell out its interests in such a way as possibly to turn them into a “public matter” (Stengers, 2006).

Dewey’s challenge is closely linked to the problematic emergence of two new publics, as he himself stated:

At present many consequences are felt rather than perceived, they are suffered, but they cannot be said to be known, for they are not, by those who experience them, referred to their origin. It goes then without saying that agencies are not established which canalise the streams of social action and thereby regulate them. Hence the public are amorphous and unarticulated (Dewey, 1927:131)

For Dewey, the non-perception of what is a public matter is the “uncoupling” or severing of the connection between information from learning. One can understand an eclipse in the literal sense as the vanishing of the light that affords visual perception. It is the source of what makes problems perceptible, in the sense of a perception produced by consequences, that undergoes an eclipse (Stengers, 2006):123).

According to Stengers, Deweyan sociology is closely related to *emergence politics*. The latter makes it possible to reword the question “How to account for a group?” as “How do a group and the public emerge?” At the opposite end of the scale from sociology subjected to a pre-existing political deal, emergence politics entails putting the relevancy of what it learns at risk. This is where Dewey’s notion of “public” comes in: The emergence of a group is considered to be the emergence of an ability to introduce oneself. This emergence politics raises the question of how to speak of and get a group to speak in the case of a group whose established pre-existence, as defined by our institutions, we refuse to acknowledge. How does one get an assembly to stick together when it is not supported by any collective action beforehand and what, then, will the importance of this collected speech be, given that it is not yet collective?

This ability to introduce oneself linked to the emergence of a group and a public interests us to the extent that it may allow the expression of minority practices. The purpose guiding emergence politics is that of changing practices. From this perspective, the (minority) group as a predefined, stable entity that can preserve and reproduce certain (minority) practices is not what interests us and might be the subject of a sociology of minority groups, but rather the minority practices themselves, the explicitation and contribution of which might allow the transformation of an emerging collective composed of the group-public tandem. Our hypothesis is that minority practices exist inside certain groups. These are practices situated with respect to a point of view that are not defined in opposition to majority practices, that is, practices that claim to have general legitimacy, but rather practices that can withstand disqualification from the majority point of view and thus co-exist with majority practices (Stengers, 1994). As sociologists and anthropologists, we ask the following question, “How can we account for this?”

The subject of animal welfare led us to this question. Indeed, the very definition of this question, which, put simply, is the subject of bitter struggles between the denunciations made by animal welfare groups and the claims of transparency made by the agro-food industry, excludes the main players on the field, namely, the farmers. Some farmers, however, are reacting to this debate, which forces transparency and the “nothing to hide” principle on them, by putting forward another principle that they word as “something to show” (Despret and Porcher, 2007). This semantic turnaround from “nothing to hide” to “something to show” gives three indications. First, work must be done to *show* rather than to prove something (Dubois and Rudy, 1997), which means giving up the highly political category of “animal welfare” to look at how the relationship between livestock farmers and their livestock is built. Next, this *something* indicates a limit: Not everything in animal husbandry is showable, and, unlike the “nothing to hide” tack, there is a boundary between what is and is not shown. Finally, and this is what we surmise, this border comes out of work that allows an ability to show something, an ability to introduce oneself, to emerge.

1. Entry point: narrative format and pretext

How might the social scientist contribute to this work on getting minority practices to emerge, assuming the consequences of the work between players and researchers that Stengers urges us to bear in mind, in the wake of Dewey's writings on this subject?

According to Dewey, the sociological survey was supposed to stem from a difficulty that the investigator turned into an obstacle to overcome or a problem to solve. Consequently, the investigator is not an objective, neutral, empirical observer, but rather a learner who tries to determine how [things] "stick together"...who creates knowledge that designates not an object or an event, but a learning pathway fed by his/her own attempted modifications. (Stengers, 2006).

Stengers proposes a survey or learning method fed by her own attempted modifications. These remarks underline the intersubjectivity and iterativeness of a social experiment that renounces the pre-existence of a social group beforehand. In that case, however, how are the data collected? In what format?

Our theme of animal husbandry practices led us to choose the filmed narrative as our methodological entry point. This technique belongs to the family of narrative approaches that use stories to collect data (Mougenot, 2009). A narrative or story is usually defined as a choice of sequences that contains a beginning, middle, and end. It differs from other forms of discourse by the idea of a specific sequence of actions occurring within a given time frame that leads to an ending, a closure. The idea of closure refers to the consequences of the story, a moral, or a solution, the meaning of which stems from its position in the story (Cronon, 1992):1367).

A narrative or story is a way of organizing reality that has importance for those who tell the tale and those who read or listen to it. This way of telling and receiving the story is thus situated. Stories are ways of constructing experiences and connecting them in patterns of existence. Making sense out of what they experience enables people to act in a certain way and thus not in another way (Law, 1994). The identities that stories develop are not fixed identities but constructs related to the world(s) on which they hinge. The very possibilities of these stories, and thus the possibilities of constructing social environments, re-connecting them, or transforming them are thus limited by their existences.

Narrative identities are constituted by a person's temporally and spatially variable place in culturally constructed stories composed of (breakable) rules, (variable) practices, binding (and unbinding) institutions, and the multiple plots of family, nation, or economic life. Most importantly, however, narratives are not incorporated into the self in any direct way; rather, they are mediated through the enormous spectrum of social and political institutions and practices that constitute our social world (Somers 1994:635)

While the story makes use of many resources – projections, expectations, and memories – , the list is ultimately limited. However, the subjectivity and limits of stories can also be considered from a twofold standpoint, *i.e.*, the problems of boundaries and narrative deficiencies. Cronon describes how the same set of observations about “how the West was won” can be told in two very different ways: destruction of a people and the wilderness or, on the contrary, the taming of the wilderness by a people. The narrator’s problem is to choose the right version of the story, the one that will reveal his/her preferences, hesitations, projections, and so on. These choices are what leads one to talk about the subjective boundaries of the story (Bland and Bell, 2007). However, the narrator’s choices are not dictated solely by his/her preferences and what makes sense to him/her. The narrator must also deal with the limits of his/her metaphorical and logical resources: links, sequences, and possibilities of integration that are not infinite. These narrative deficiencies or “lock-ins” can lead one to renounce relating a part of one’s reality, to overcome this problem by taking detours, even to twist reality or give up telling the story altogether (Stassart and Jamar, 2008).

The film as a narrative format that enables one to relive or re-examine one’s practices can, through this specific form of reflexivity, enable the storyteller to overcome this double limitation in part. By capturing sensations and memory, the film can then generate the explicitation of certain elements. This is the perspective chosen by a certain number of investigations aimed at elucidating craftsmen’s practices, thanks to the reliving of experience that the film allows (Thrift, 2003).

It thus remained for us to find an area or, rather, a pretext that would enable us to get livestock farmers interested in the audiovisual approach that we wanted to

produce together. Etymologically, a pretext – *prae-textus* – is an action of putting forward. What was important here was to engage the farmers in the construction of a way of “putting things forward.” The singularity of the chosen case, that of part-time livestock farmers in Gaume, would give meaning to this approach. Its singularity is due to the fact that these part-time farmers are not recognized as such but at the same time they do not seem to claim such recognition, given the types of relationship that they have with professional farmers and agricultural institutions. What is more, these part-time farmers are particularly well represented in Gaume, which is a small border region in the southern tip of Belgium (770 km² with a population of 50,000) with a marked cultural identity and more extensive cattle farming practices. Their status (multiple occupations), origins (Gaume), and type of cattle farming (extensive) were all indices of a pretext that the farmers could accept, a pretext that could gradually produce a group (“we”) to “*show something*” that, we surmised, would concern minority cattle farming practices in Belgium.

The combination of the format (the narrative) and the pretext (the practices of Gaume’s part-time farmers) is precisely what got eight of the ten part-time farmers who were contacted over the “grapevine” during a preliminary survey interested in the film project. These farmers worked with five different cattle breeds. This amazing diversity of practices in a national landscape dominated by the Belgian Blue (85% of the country’s cattle) reassured us as to the success of the methodological wager that we were making, *i.e.*, embarking on the coproduction of a film without having written the script first.

A few words about the final output: the film « Eleveur Autrement ©<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6zqB4OSTUA> » (“Alternative stockfarming”) is a 44-minute documentary that describes who these farmers are, *i.e.*, people who, in deciding to take up another trade as roofers, postmen, factory workers, or youth workers, become farmers “after hours” or “part-time farmers.” The film is divided into six chapters: 1. From one job to the other: multiple occupations; 2. Daily organization: a day in the life of a postman and farmer; 3. From stable to pasture: the dawn of spring; 4. Waiting for good weather: the

seasonal link; 5. From breed to recognition: livestock competitions; and 6. Passion first and foremost: motivations.

We shall analyze this film experiment in three parts: the filming, the plot, and the cut sequences. These three parts enable us to descend gradually into the depths of the filmmaking work as the process of a group and a public's emergence. The first part analyses the iterativeness of the method, which alternates collective and individual work. It asks the question of how the sequences are generated. The second part covers the final editing. It asks the question of how the film is expressed, by one or several narratives. The third part analyses the process of choosing some sequences and dropping others. It raises the question of the significance of the cut sequences and what these sequences enable us to say about the farmers' practices.

2. The filming: a learning pathway

The concept of the joint filmmaking project was based on a prior assumption, that of trying to create a group without defining what was outside it beforehand. The audience for which the film was made could be professional farmers, family and friends, neighbors, nature-lovers, consumers, and so on. This issue went beyond the simplistic consideration of a target audience because it referred to the possibility of the emergence of a situated ability to introduce oneself to or target a predefined public. In practice, this was reflected by the absence of a predefined script.

The issue of the public thus was not closed. On the contrary, in interacting with the farmers the researchers took care to stoke this question with the active resistance that they put up to the temptation to forget that the answers that their hybrid collective had related to the questions that they were able to ask, which also involved their conscious resistance to all those who could gain from the collective's forgetting, *i.e.*, institutions, the profession, and environmentalists (*Stengers, 1994:150*). This ability to resist would be bolstered by the researchers and

farmers' attempts to make changes in the joint production of the farmers' presentation.

We consider joint filmmaking to be the establishment of a relationship between researchers and players in a certain field where the researchers step out of their empirical observers' function to become learners through the attempted changes that they trigger. These attempts can be described through an iterative feedback principle that is based on three pillars, namely, the cumulative build-up of sequences, collective linkage, and methodological transformations, as follows:

1. The process of the gradual build-up of sequences builds the film: There was no initial script, but a process of accumulation of short sequences. The anthropologist (who was also a filmmaker) did the work of organizing and selecting the material to go from the rushes to the sequences and then from the sequences to their assembly (the editing step).
2. The collective linkage was done in conjunction with the viewing of the edited sequences, in which the commentaries, guided by the researchers, gave rise to collective questions. The latter constituted the link between the end of one loop, that of the film editing, and the beginning of the next loop, that of shooting more scenes.
3. This link set the pace of the transformation process, that is, the assessment of a cut opened up new avenues to explore. As the answers depended on the researchers' ability to ask their questions, the data collection method changed. It generated in turn outcomes in terms of practices and relationships with the collective project.

The following table describes the changes in the pathway that this shuttling between the collective and the camera lens generated in the course of three successive filming and editing loops.

Table 1: Iterative filming loop

Loop 1, scouting: The first question was that of scouting for issues and locations: Starting with a blank page, it was necessary to organize a format around a pretext. Whether its members were skeptical, attentive, or enthusiastic, the hybrid collective of farmers and researchers were united by their curiosity: “What was going to happen, and how?” The anthropologist’s methodological concern was to distance herself from the interview technique in order to facilitate explicitation. She used the presence and weakening of the face-to-face relationship with the movie camera. The farmers were the ones who did, showed, and commented, without suspending the attention. “No control” over what might happen was the rule (Vermersch, 1998). When the first cut (sequences 1 through 19) came back from the editing bench, the farmers’ interest was aroused. The researchers, on the other hand, had mixed feelings. They effectively felt trapped

LOOP	Questions	Method Explicitation	Editing of Sequences	Results	Relationships with the project	
					Farmers	Researchers
1	Scouting?	Face to face of direct filming	1-19 10hr -32’	1 st edit It’s possible	From “nothing to hide” to “something to show”	Kissing what the format cannot support good-bye
2	Singular aspects of holding down several jobs in the world of livestock farmers?	rereading and reliving practice by viewing the sequences	20 6’	2 nd edit It’s good!	Liberation from the weight of the outside world’s gaze	They are crazy!
3	What keeps the part-time farmer going?	Spatio- temporal suspension	21-31 29’	3 rd edit It can’t be explained	Oscillation between “their project” and “our project”	Wrap up, define a public

at this stage, for the farmers took the film sequences for reality. The filming of the unexpected birth of a stillborn lamb shattered, by chance, this benign transparency for, as this sequence showed, certain facets of reality were less showable than others. However, the researchers also had to let go of certain things. For example, the Gaume identity could not be captured on film. At the end of the day, these mutual renunciations pointed the collective more in the direction of what might be the most important issue to take up, namely, what singled out the part-time farmers and gave them a specific identity.

Loop 2, singularities. To go from the scouting stage to the singularities, the collective chose to home in on the daily alternation between work on and off the farm. From the methodological standpoint, explicitation thus involved having each farmer look at the footage of his activities again and commenting it in detail. The aim was to enable the farmer to access his life by reliving his experiences. This reliving made it possible both to focus on the singular and to verbalize within the framework of a particular mental activity that refers to the image, namely, evocation (Vermersch, 1999). “That’s good,” the farmers said approvingly after watching this second cut (Sequence 20). There effectively was something to show in it: a complex organization, very long workdays during which work on and off the farm alternated, etc. Aided by the familiarity that had grown up between the farmer and filmmaker, the farmer shook off the weight of the outsider’s gaze: “Don’t film that!”¹ burst out a number of times. The possibility that this methodology offered of objecting drew the farmers into a particular disposition, that of increasing the receivability of the researchers’ questions. Indeed, when the second cut was shown, the researchers were slightly dizzy. They effectively wondered about the huge workload that these double occupations involved and what kept these farmers going: “How can they keep putting in such long days? They are slightly crazy!” So, what wound these part-time farmers up day after day?

¹ Concerning above all animal welfare scenes, hitting the stock, get upset with the animals, or showing a place that was not clean (p 33)

Loop 3, “the why?”: Farming circles are not in the habit of spelling out the unexplainable. While part-time farmers are not crazy, this question was too sensitive to be able to treat it collectively. The methodological question then became how to greet this silence, this apparent vacuum, where things are experienced more easily in the intimacy of private life, in a “non-loquacious manner.” Going from well-thought-out activity to thinking activity calls upon this vacuum, for this effectively makes it possible to turn to what one is not yet consciously aware of: “It’s like going to confession” is how one farmer put it (Vermersh, 1999). By moving the camera to the other place of work, one creates a new attempt at reflecting distancing. This spatio-temporal suspension of livestock farming gives the farmer the opportunity to search for what drives him, what is important, his “wellsprings,” behind the camera. The third cut (Sequences 21-31), revealed that the farmers were driven by passion well before reason: “We were born into it, it’s in our blood...it’s simply something we want to do.”

The difficulty of how to say things and what to say and not say created a movement of retreat among the livestock farmers. Some of them asserted, “We made this film to please you!” This assertion was then taken up by others. Actually, their position was more complex. Their movement oscillated between fear of “having problems afterwards” with the professional farmers with whom they had ties, notably through the land and agricultural machinery, and fear of showing nothing and then having their activity reduced to a *hobby*. The participants’ wives collectively entered the joint filmmaking process in the middle of this hesitation waltz by redynamizing the idea of a carefully chosen public: Everyone started to envision the film’s projection; there would be a première “for us,” along with the family and close friends. There just remained the problem of editing the script to wrap up the film. The question then became that of choosing the sequences, how to organize them, and what the conclusions would be.

Before tackling the film’s finalization, let’s look back a second at the effects of this method. The cumulative nature of the iterative work created a learning experience that was based on establishing a relationship between researchers and livestock farmers on the one hand and a second relationship between this hybrid

collective and an emerging public on the other hand. Through their intersections, the pathway that these three loops blazed invited the farmers to take the method into their own hands. The attempts at transforming the method that were triggered by the variations of the explicitation method made it possible to explore the question of what mattered to the farmers. This was done within the context of co-existence of practices rather than that of opposition to the dominant practices of modern agriculture, for this difficulty of getting different – minority? – practices to co-exist was indeed at the heart of their hesitations about their film project (the emerging public) and their practices (the emerging group). They neither wanted to nor were able to present themselves without turning to the agricultural professionals, whereas they were both stakeholders in this group yet different from it. We must keep this key question of their hesitation in mind as we turn to the third part of the project.

3. Wrapping up: a single plot?

The final editing required arranging the sequences in a certain way to produce a plot that would give the script a backbone. The plot is the key driving force of a story. “Creating a plot” means getting a heterogeneous set of elements to “stick together,” it involves creating the possibility of mixing very different players (in this case, people, animals, machines, techniques, and so on). The plot lets you mix and compose time, space, the familiar, the unknown, etc. The plot thus composes and creates stories, twists, and incidents. It gives the spectator a “grip” on reality by mediating what it structures and builds, *i.e.*, the script; it makes the film active (Mougenot, 2008). Gare hypothesizes that there are two ways of giving such a grip, two major ways of organizing stories: as monologic stories and as polyphonic stories (Gare, 2001). The former defend a unitary or heroic perspective in which the narration concerns various obstacles that thwart the accomplishment of this perspective and culminate in a happy or dramatic ending. The monologic reasoning is unable to hear other narratives or awarenesses than its own. Polyphonic stories, as the adjective indicates, provide room for a diversity of narratives. As such, they contribute to a less black-and-white and more active exploration of reality than monologic stories. Would the farmers, in their way of

presenting themselves, build a single story around the plot, or would they produce a polyphonic film?

2.1 Monophony: the pluri-activities plot

The first question for building the plot was that of the status of the “shots” making up the various sequences of the film. The “c” sequences were “commissioned” and planned by the collective of farmers and researchers during their meetings, whereas the “o” sequences were shot randomly, as opportunities for meeting the camera cropped up, without being “commissioned” beforehand.

We hypothesized that the commissioned sequences (“c”) of the film would spell out how the farmers constructed themselves collectively. These sequences became more numerous as the filming progressed, to crystallize around the question of “what drives these passionate nuts?” (Loop 3). They ultimately accounted for twelve of the seventeen sequences in the final cut and constituted the plot’s backbone.

Initially, this construction rested on a resistance, namely, the refusal to be boxed in by the ambiguous adjective “*pluriactifs*” (which one could translate as “having multiple occupations or several jobs”) that the researchers used. The emergence of a flurry of other descriptives, e.g., “*à titre accessoire – hobby - complémentaire - après journée*” (“on the side,” “hobby,” “supplemental,” and “after hours”) attested to both a difference and the difficulty of grasping it. Let us see now how this difference took shape as the “commissioned” sequences were filmed.

These part-time farmers asserted the specificity of their practices, namely, the variation of their work under the alternating rhythms of their days, as of the second loop of filming. The sequence dubbed “the siesta” (S20) ended up being staged with the complicity of one farmer’s wife. Let’s describe how this scene was made: The woman knew how important her husband’s nap was; it embodied the transition from postman to farmer. However, in the presence of the film

camera, the farmer would have skipped his nap if his wife had not suggested that he relax in a quiet corner while she took the filmmaker for a walk. What the farmer did not know was that the latter tiptoed back some twenty minutes later to film him while he slumbered peacefully. This sequence, which the farmers applauded to a man, made reference to the pleasure of the ritual passage between a necessary job and a chosen one, as well as to the pleasure of variation in one's work.

This variation then connected with the sequences shot in the next loop, "letting the animals out (S23)" and "acrobats (S25)," concerning the change of season. After a long winter of confinement in the barn, the herd was to be let out to pasture in a springtime explosion: turbulent departure of the cows from the barn, loading followed by a disorderly unloading from the cattle truck, and then snorting and gallivanting in this new light-filled environment. The herd was reborn, the newborn calves joined the "old hands," and spring burst out. In letting his stock out onto the range, the farmer freed himself from his backbreaking daily winter chores. Alternation on a daily basis, which was the part-time farmer's lot, alluded to the alternation of seasons, an alternation that this time was shared with professional livestock farmers.

The next two sequences (S26-S27) express the autonomy that creates the attractiveness and difference of their lives. This job is possible because there are limits to the income that they can expect to earn, the size of the operation, the time involved, and mechanization. "It's because we limit ourselves. Otherwise, the animals would crowd out everything else." This limitation is made possible by the other job, due to its income and social security. However, the limits that they set themselves do not prevent them from being real livestock farmers. Despite the tight schedule, a fourth and last loop of sequences was shot, one that would tie the plot around two sequences that made it possible to recognize these real livestock farmers once and for all. The "competition" sequence (S33) made it possible to end the film in a blaze of glory, as two of the eight part-time farmers snatched victory out of the hands of the "professionals" at the national competitions for young heifers in two breeds, Charolaise and Blonde d'Aquitaine. The haying

sequence (S22) took up the rural and nourishing aspects of their function (the harvest) and deriving pleasure from the hard work of harvesting.

And so the plot “but these part-time farmers are crazy!” was resolved: You could take a nap and still come out with best of breed! The unfolding of the script created a teleological arrow that pushed us towards results and enabled (or forced) us to draw conclusions that were already encapsulated in its premises (even though many incidents and heterogeneous events occurred in the interval) according to a monologic mode: different, specific practices, but real livestock farmers before everything else! At the film’s public screening some professional breeders commented laconically, “That? That’s the true work of the livestock farmer!” The plot constructed in this way made it possible to tell the story of the co-existence of different specific practices and those of “real” cattle breeders. That is how the part-time farmers like to present themselves. Yet is it for all that the only, unique story?

2.2 Polyphony: permanence

Did the film say anything else? A series of six other sequences kept in the film had not been commissioned. Their “o” status (“o” for “opportunity”) indicates that they came about in the course of the filming (Loops 1 and 3), with chance meetings and the passing of the seasons.

Table 2. Sequence status: “c” = “commissioned” sequences, o = “opportunity” sequences

Loop/	The "Pluriactivity Plot"				Permanence			
	S		c	o	S		c	o
I	1	two jobs	1		6	child with the pitchfork		1
	9	calving	1		10	rope		1
	12	workday joel	1		11	small bales	1	
	17	change of breed	1		13	fountain		1
	18	music		1				
	II	20	one day two jobs	1				
III					21	easter ritual		1
					22	swing		1
	23	acrobats	1					
	24	fences	1					
	25	letting the animals out	1					
	26	interview at work - gerard	1					
	27	interview at work - Joel	1					
IV	32	harvest	1					
	33	national breeds competition	1					
Total S	13		12	1	6		1	5

These sequences share one property, that of permanence. They participate in a sort of metastory, in parallel with the plot about the pluricativity farmer’s passion for his work, that talks to us about the permanence of the peasant’s work, which has come down to us through the ages and unfurls its many and immutable time frames. The time of the seasons that marks the “sowing” sequence (S22); the time of the generations embodied in the “child with the pitchfork” sequence (S6), which refers us to the gnawing question of the farm’s being taken over by the next generation; the time of the village community, which the “public fountain” sequence (S13) shows to be a last reflection of a time that is crumbling; the long time of traditions, where pagan and Christian rites criss-cross during the Easter festivities: The historical significance that they claim is possible because there is resistance to modernity, and especially to a certain technical development. The “rope making” sequence (S10) alludes to the wastefulness of technology and the consumer society. A second narrative gives a glimpse of the historical meaning of these farmers’ practices in their own eyes and for the outside world. It intertwines with the monologic narrative about multiple occupations. So, there are two

intertwined stories, one assembled under the logic of the plot (c) and the other around the pointillist hidden thread (o). Certain sequences are channels between these two stories in the polyphonic narrative. The “small bales” sequence (S11) presents a set of techniques for storing forage – bales that are handled by means of pitchforks – that is disappearing. It is both critical of the limits of mechanization as a process of creating distance and a form of resistance against the unraveling of social ties, for making small bales requires a lot of manpower and solidarity with one’s peers, neighbors, and friends. The “small bales” sequence comes under both the plot and permanence. This story of permanence, which is inferred from what is NOT said, as it is a hard-to-express thread that runs through a criticism of modernization and the agricultural profession, is part of the pathways of all eight farmers. One takes over the family farm or land, the other the love of animal husbandry. Two stories intertwine between this line of permanence and the multiple occupations plot. They are the plot of multiple occupations and the permanence of family farms, of the “peasant” who lives off the land. The narrative is thus polyphonic: a “prohibited” story creates the polyphony by occurring almost undetectably below the surface.

And so, the filmed story of our eight farmers winds up for the audience, the public. But what about the farmers? For them, there was something more important that resisted being presented publicly, that resisted the urgency of being put into pictures, that they could not put before the layperson’s eyes without running the risk of endangering their identities, their ties to the group.

3. Dissonance: the cut scenes

Let us come back a second to the end of the filming. To produce the script of the plot that we described, the researchers proposed writing two alternative scripts based on the sequences in the three loops. The instructions were to “select ten sequences to place in a narrative order according to two possible scripts for the film, which would be two different ways of presenting oneself to the public” (Mathieu, 2007). This double script-writing exercise proved too complex, but nevertheless made it possible to sort through the thirty-one sequences that had

been produced and to reject almost half of them. The decisions to cut these sequences out of the film were taken collectively based on rankings that the farmers gave individually. Each of the thirty-for sequences was effectively scored on a scale of three values: + (keep), +- (don't know), and - (cut).

Table 3: Sequences' scores for the final edit

Pluriactive Intrigue				Permanence				Hésitation - Bifurcation						
séq		A	H	R	séq		A	H	R	séq		A	H	R
1	deux métiers	5	1							2	Ecornage H	2	2	2
										3	Cours de récré H	3	3	
										4	Insémination H	2	3	1
										5	marchand de vache Df	2	3	1
					6	L'enfant à la fourche	6							
										7	soins quotidiens vaches Dc	2	2	1
										culture	1	2	2	
9	vêlage	4		1										
					10	Corde	4	2						
					11	Petits balots	5	1						
12	journée travail joel	4	2											
					13	Fontaine (5)	4	1						
										14	faire têter le veau H	2	3	
										15	signe du vellage Df	2	3	1
17	Changement de race	4	2							16	tonte a la rentrée étable H	3	2	
18	la musique	2	2	1										
										19	ageneau mort Dc	1	1	4
20	une journée deux métiers	5	1											
					21	Pâques des crécelles	4		2					
					22	Semis	4	2	2					
23	Les acrobates	5	1											
24	Les clotures	3	2	1										
25	Lacher des bêtes	4	1	1										
26	Itvw au travail Gérard	5	1											
27	intvw au travail Joël	4	2											
										28	éleveur à titre principal Dc	1	2	3
										29	La Gaume B	4		2
										30	En prairie et chgt races Df	2	3	1
										31	césarienne Dc	2	1	3
32	moisson													
33	concours national race									34	Papier B			
	Moyenne	4.5	1	.7		Moyenne	4	2	2		Moyenne	2	2	2

Combining the eight farmers' scores yielded a three-part score. The nap sequence (S20), for example, got a score of 5-1-0. Five approved of it, one hesitated, and no one rejected it. Next, mean scores could be calculated for all of the sequences belonging to a story (see the table). The mean scores of the sequences kept in the film were 4.5-1-0.7 for the plot and 4.2.2 for permanence². The rating may not have been unanimous, but the farmers stood by each other on the choice of these twenty sequences: They had something to show about the plot and permanence.

² The eight farmers' scores did not add up to eight because one farmer did not answer and another one was ready to show everything (and his scores were thus dropped as "outliers").

3.1 Hesitations

The scores of the sequences that were cut tilted into hesitation and slid towards rejection: The mean score was 2-2-2, with ranges of 2-3-1 and 1-1-4. A first series of six sequences clustered around hesitation, a second series around bifurcation, and then finally three sequences were dropped for reasons of form rather than substance, but we lack space to talk about this here. So, when it came to “dehorning” (S2): Some farmers dehorn their livestock because it allows them to handle safely animals that are confined to stalls. Others refuse this practice because it is not worth it, given the bloodiness of the operation and the loss of herd hierarchy regulation that follows the removal of the animals’ horns. Similarly, while some farmers felt that the “insemination” sequence (S4) opened the door to better genetic performance from “outside semen,” others preferred natural siring, claiming that it yielded sturdier calves and that artificial insemination weakened the breed. These cut sequences reflected the divergence of practices among the farmers.

Stengers develops her notion of divergence by indicating that a group of practitioners is a set of people who share ways of doing things that are not of equal value. The essential point is obviously the “that are not of equal value,” for sociologists would have no problem accepting the rest of the definition. So, practice defined in this way is not defined sociologically by norms, standards, conventions, habits, and traditions, in a word, by all that makes it stable or normal, but, on the contrary, by that which makes it unstable and open to discussion among practitioners (Mormont, 2006).

These divergences could be ascribed to the heterogeneity of the farmers (*i.e.*, their breeds) and the associated points of view. However, they also exist in each farmer’s heart. We could indeed see them vacillating deep down. The work on the sequences concerning the Belgian Blue calf with macroglossia³ that was

³ Macroglossia: hypertrophy occurs in the hyoglossus just as in the other muscles. The adverse consequences of the swollen tongue usually diminish or disappear as the animals grow older. Yet

nevertheless “learning to suckle” (S14) illustrated this vacillation. In Loop 2, the farmer watched the scene that had been shot in his absence, in which his wife was patiently but stubbornly teaching the calf to suckle. The farmer was spread-eagled between two sentiments that the very tone of his comments betrayed. He admired greatly what he was discovering for the first time through the magic of film, *i.e.*, the long and obstinate creative work of his wife, who was not a farm girl by birth: She tried to get the calf to suckle, stimulated the teat by milking the cow, gave the calf a taste of the milk in a bottle, directed the stream of milk from the udder towards the calf’s muzzle, put the calf’s muzzle on the udder, etc., without being kicked by the cow or butted by the calf. At the same time, the sequence’s length and succession of these different phases created a heaviness and a degrading feeling, that of having to compensate for the failure of a natural function. This feeling could be construed as challenging the direction and limits of selection in the Belgian Blue, the artifices of which lead to frequent anomalies of this type but with which the farmers, driven by their passion, have learned to cope.

I myself, as a researcher, came out of the room transformed by the screening of this sequence. In the course of my ten years of research, the Belgian Blue was successively the archetype of productivism that had to be fought {Stassart, 2003 #1221}, then, as time passed and I gained in focus and distance, a beautiful subject of socio-technical study, and finally a highly irreversible development pathway (Stassart and Jamar, 2008). The intensity of the farmer’s hesitation about his wife’s work and the hesitation of the entire group of farmers that was triggered by this sequence brought us to the heart of the Belgian Blue breeders’ passion, enabled us to know and recognize it. All of a sudden it became impossible to set oneself up as a censor of something that I should not have hesitated to call a technological monstrosity in the past. Finally, this sequence was shortened, a few

a swollen tongue causes suckling difficulties for the calf, which may even lead to death, and in some cases the mouth may be deformed Lips, D., J. De Tavernier, et al. (2001). Ethical Objections to Cesareans: Implication on the future of the Belgian White Blue. EurSafe 2001, Food Safety, Food Quality, Food Ethics, Florence, EURSAFE..

scenes were cut from it, and the weightiness of the silence lightened by the breeders' commentary.

This experience around the suckling calf sequence brings us to the distinction that Stengers and Deleuze make between belonging and identity. For Stengers and Deleuze, the idiots are those who resist public urgency, who have something much more important or out of the ordinary (in this case, talking about the calf and its macroglossia). What matters to them and causes them to diverge does not box them in. It belongs to speculation about what is possible. Neither prey nor predator, they do not want to choose their camp; they are "idiot" practitioners as Deleuze sees it. For Deleuze, the idiot slows down where others, mobilized by an urgency that is expressed in consensual terms, rush forward. That is why these practices (teaching the calf to suckle, but also dehorning, artificial insemination, and even the "shearing" sequence (S16) before the return to the barn or the "recreation" sequence (S11)), demand as strict a division as possible between their world of hesitation and an external reality, that of the public. This necessary division may be explained by the metaphor of the sleepwalker. Like the sleepwalker balancing on the ridge of his roof, these farmers cannot and do not want to come to a decision, for if they woke up and reported to the public on what they were doing, they would hesitate, feel dizzy, and fall (Stengers, 2006:240). They refuse to be threatened and diminished by a public's "artificializing" interpretation (regarding insemination and dehorning). However, among themselves, hesitation is allowed.

3.2 Slides and bifurcations

The six other sequences that were cut are of another type. In their case, the farmers rejected them due to the risk of bifurcation that they carried. Deleuze speaks of lines of escape or nomad lines. The main characteristics of these lines are hesitations, bifurcations, uncontrolled skids, endings that are impossible to foresee at the outset, and so on. The sequences that they rejected were more "stories on hold," for these nomad stories might lead them where they did not want to go {Deleuze, 1996 #530}.

The main mechanism of these narrative sequences was the “password” (Schapp, 1992), that is, the word, concept, or image that enables the story to fork, turn sharply, or skid away without any transition. A minor element in the story (which might have been in the background or foreground of the picture) suddenly becomes a core element, the story changes course or changes in such a way that the second preceding this change is relegated, in the best of cases, to the status of “pre-story.” The “daily care” (S7), “little note” (S34) and “C-section” (S31) sequences illustrate these mechanisms, caught between bifurcation and uncontrolled slide.

So, the “daily care” sequence was dropped because a view of a cow’s hind end covered in dung could be seen in the background. This password opened the door to another story that the farmers knew all too well: that of the mix-up between animal welfare and human welfare that resulted in our modernist society’s condemning a model in which peasants and livestock in the past lived in close quarters, sometimes under rather unhygienic conditions (Despret and Porcher, 2007). The sequence called “the little note” showed a woman bent over a small piece of paper (the password) on which her farmer husband had jotted down instructions for what had to be done while he was away. This artifice, the piece of paper, was the password that opened up the issue of the legitimacy of these farmers who relied on practices and people that/who were clearly not from the world of livestock farming. Could a livestock operation, seen usually as a family tradition, rely on “outsiders” in the case of such part-time farmers?

The last illustration, and by no means the least eloquent, is that of the cesarean section sequence. This began with preparations for the operation: The cow’s flank was carefully disinfected and then shaved. Then, in a fraction of a second, a quick and accurate, almost invisible, cut of the scalpel opened the womb, the source of life. Password between life and death, which in this sequence seemed to hinge on the angle of the blade that sliced into life. These images of the play of life and death, of the transmission of life and simultaneously the coldness and absurdity of this mechanical opening of the womb, that were filmed directly and

without a pause, raised the far-reaching question of how we see life: What do we think about this calving machine, which opens and closes, like a zipper, to deliver the products of the Belgian Blue's genetic performance? Here, the turn-off was very close to an uncontrolled skid: Between the transparency of industries that keep consumers in the dark, unaware of this systematic practice, and denunciations by those who present themselves as the animals' protectors, the farmers had no other choice than to keep this question to themselves, especially as the profession as a whole probably does not have the ability to debate it collectively. Safe from the double prohibition of the profession and society, these sleepwalking farmers, some of whom use C-sections systematically and others natural calving out in the field, and who raise different breeds, diverge. And this made them hesitate at a private screening of the sequences of one calf learning how to suckle and another calf being delivered by a cesarean section.

Following Deleuze's lead, we are interested in the nomad lines of the filming: Some lines indicate that a third kind of line exists, lines of escape or nomad lines. The main characteristics of these lines are hesitations, bifurcations, uncontrolled skids, endings that are impossible to foresee at the outset, and so on. The sequences were more "stories on hold," stopping here to be resumed later on, at another moment. Some of them matter because they talk about the frontiers of the boundaries of the space that the farmers' practices explore. Hesitation, bifurcation, uncontrolled skids all ended up in the editing bench's profits and losses account. Fifteen of the thirty-four sequences were rejected. What tales did they tell, and to whom?

Epilogue

We researchers built our reflexivity by recurrently putting the question "Who owns the film?" to our hybrid collective of eight farmers, one anthropologist who was also a filmmaker, and a sociologist with a degree in agriculture. This question is usually raised in the context of property and the right to make use of or modify a final product (a negative, film for distribution, or DVD). However, as you will have understood by now, the important question was that of the uncertain

contours plotted by the film project's path, the question of ownership of the uncertainties that were revealed. Stated more radically, the question became, "Who owns the fifteen cut sequences?" "Burn them," one farmer volunteered. "Why burn them," the anthropologist retorted with interest. The alchemist's response came from the same farmer; it was lifted straight out of the film use chart: "The cut sequences are like a body donated to science. We give them to you. Take care of them according to this precept." The sleepwalking farmers stood fast against public urgency but hesitated over with whom to share their passion!

Final comments

This project was situated in a context of emergence politics. It was subject to lengthy hesitation: Did it concern the emergence of a group or a minority practice? The answer lies in the following paradox: The film's plot came to a head around the fact that the farmers were indeed real cattle breeders, but to express the particularities of their practices and their differences, first as they were constructing them, and then in their hesitation, they needed to come together as a group.

The emergence of a hybrid collective (of farmers and researchers) enabled the farmers to present themselves. This presentation through a tangible medium, a filmed narrative, was polyphonic. A monologic story told how they, as "part-time farmers," built themselves as being different from yet co-existing with professional livestock farmers. Then, in the absence of any orders, a second story arose in veiled terms, one that gave some historical meaning to their practices, a little against the professionals and modernization. The heterogeneity of the narrative format and its polyphony together enabled them to state these differences without jeopardizing their co-existence within a broader occupational group. However, the film does not tell all.

The cut sequences told us that the farmers resisted public urgency; they neither wanted nor were able to come to a decision about certain practices, and it is in

these terms that we can speak of minority practices. In particular, they refused the threat of being diminished by the artificialization of breeding practices. We can thus wonder if these divergences (about the C-section, etc.) were not what would cause the group to emerge, if they were subjected to debate (as practices that were not of equal merit), rather than cause for splitting it asunder. One can thus understand why this question is particularly important from the standpoint of social change.

Finally, from a methodological point of view, using a reflexive film tool enabled us precisely to document what the group had in common and where they diverged. This method, to use Dewey's words, made use of an initial difficulty created by the researchers, namely, a pretext and a format for handling it, *i.e.*, the film project. However, the investigation itself was stoked by the hybrid collective's attempted modifications.

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