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THE PLACE OF THE SELF
Auto-ethnographic filmic writings and space

J’écris pour me parcourir.

(G. Perec)

I. THE RESEARCH AND ITS METHOD

«The only way I can explain things is through my personal experiences, I’m confessing my own contradictions, so I have to throw myself in»¹. This is how director Kidlat Tahmik describes his attitude to filmmaking. And it is also an extraordinary synthesis of the ‘new autobiography’ as Michael Renov conceives it². Mostly expressed with the essay-form, it is to be considered as «a writing practice that couples a documentary impulse […] with an equally forceful reflex of self-interrogation»³. Such a kind of filmic production, that basically supports the documentary instance as something subjective rather than exclusively objective, has been influenced by a certain redefinition of ethnography tout court as well. Settling visuality at its focus, such a shift promoted the idea of a subjective element as essential subtext of the ethnographic discourse⁴. Nowadays, this general trend is almost permeating the contemporary cultural scenario by means of heterogeneous media and new media practices, which express a real urge of reflecting about identity and the self.

This is precisely the most typical trait characterizing a number of recent audiovisual works, mainly documentary films and artworks, consecrated to self-reflexivity. Therefore, my aim is to move in this territory, taking into account the production of international young visual artists and filmmakers. In this sense, I will develop here a compared analysis of a restricted number of case studies, selected because of their functionality to test the methodological approach of a wider research project⁵. In particular, authors who are born in the five-year period between 1978 and 1982 represent my sample. My

³ Ibi, p. 105.
⁴ On this issue, please see R. Chow, Film as Ethnography; or, Translation between Cultures in the Post-Colonial World, in Id., Primitive Passions, Columbia University Press, New York 1995.
⁵ My essay is part of a wider project coordinated by Alice Cati and Glenda Franchin, with whom I do share the methodological frame of the research. I will deepen the spatial aspect in my text, while the full project is presented in the editors’ essay included in this volume.
attention has been drawn towards these years, because this new generation of artists seems to be particularly interesting, for it is the first to really relaunch the idea of a ‘new autobiography’ from the very beginning of the artistic research of its members in terms of representation and aesthetical strategies. As far as the former are concerned, their work features a clear and direct involvement of the author in the text, who seems not even to attempt to create an objective, impartial documentary, as it happened in the past. Rather, these filmmakers make it explicit their own position, and consider their view as the filter through which reality is offered to the viewer. As regards to the latter, a significant element characterizing these productions is a proliferating contamination among different media and techniques, as if this media-mix would be particularly suitable in rendering the multifaceted aspects of identity. My choice went thus to the artistic production by Zoé Chantre and Gautam Kansara, two authors belonging to the selected sample (born 1981 and 1979), whose most recent works will be taken here into account as emblematic pieces of autobiographical – intending with it an activity of self-inscription.

Method wise, the analysis is structured into two moments: a first step consists in a semiotic examination of the works, while a second one is represented by a field phase. On the one hand I assumed the perspective of the most recent experiential approach to semiotics in order to understand the position of the author as enunciator who is at the same time the subject of an ‘indirect’ (narrative) and of a ‘direct’ (perceptive) universe. On the other hand, I parallely conducted an in-depth interview to the authors with the aim of exploring under a multifaceted light their auto-ethnographical attitude. After a preliminary definition of my research texts corpus, the interview has been articulated according to some major points. The structure of the interview highlighted the connections between the very inspiration of the films/artworks and the writing of the self, by means of a creative process based on the release and the elaboration of moving images. In this perspective, the whole construction procedure emphasized an interesting pattern of resonances between life and text, defining the filming as signifying practice. The experiential and the artistic dimensions seem in fact to converge in a complex discourse, placing the self inside both the fictional and the real world.

This concept of placing – and thus the spatial element – represents the idea on which my analysis intends to shed a light. I believe it plays indeed a central role in the dynamics of self-inscription, which works as the very basis of auto-ethnography. This is true both on a metadiscursive and on a fictional level: if the concept of auto-ethnography is a representational form tightly linked to that of autobiography, since they share «the essential ingredients […] a self, a life, and a writing practice», then the author has to be entailed by this writing as fictional center, that is to say as main character, and at the same time he has to be the one carrying out the action of telling the story, that ends

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7 I refer here to the ‘adjective shift’ suggested by Reno, The Subject in History: The New Autobiography in Film and Video, p. 106.
8 These categories are presented in R. Eugeni, Semiotica dei media. Le forme dell’esperienza, Carocci, Roma 2010.
9 The main points composing the interview structure have been studied and shared with Alice Cati and Glenda Franchin, and they have subsequently been optimized for my case studies.
10 The correspondence between author and enunciator, and the intermingling ensemble of fictional and real element finally set the question raised by Hal Foster in his The Artist as Ethnographer? right. In his reflection, Foster underscored the risk of exercising a sort of ‘ideological patronage’ by the artist as he activates an ethnographic research. For the full argument, please refer to H. Foster, The Artist as Ethnographer?, in. Id., The Return of the Real. Art and Theory at the End of the Century, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1996.
11 Reno, The Subject of Documentary, p. XII.
up being his own. In this sense it becomes essential to trace the coordinates defining this self-inscription, as an auto-reflexive location, *a placing of the self*. Auto-ethnography is thus to be seen as the attempt of gaining a space able to harbor the subject. Such a quest leads to the construction of a place\(^{12}\) that runs hand in hand with that of identity. This path might include different kinds of space, which significantly echo one another under a symbolic light: the filmic creation process is the first important space, where the author has the opportunity to express himself freely, and to build a representational world after his manner of visualizing the others and the environment, his obsessions, his taste, his priorities and values – in other words, after his own shape. Along this creative journey, a constellation of physical spaces marks the development of the narration and the unveiling of the most intimate sides of the subject through his own voice.

Hence, the question is about finding a place for the self in the process of filmic creation. The fact that many auto-ethnographical filmic works often assume a video-diary form shows how the underlying narration strategy puts forward an action of writing of the self. Such an action basically reveals a superimposition among diverse writing levels: the traditional graphic diary writing is here replaced by a filmic writing, which weaves throughout the narration a space devoted to the subject. In this sense, the author carves a personal niche in the fictional and documentary materials. This is a space whose edges are preserved even when the story is told, and when the narration opens to the public the symbolic universe constituted by the text up. Such a sharing of the private sphere with the spectator represents sometimes a sort of confession, a way to lay bare before the eyes of the Other, and consequently entails the action of taking a stand. In structural terms, auto-ethnography implies therefore a disposition of the subject in the story, and thus in History. Just for these reasons, it can be intended as *spatialization of the self*, as artistic-filmic practice enabling the inscription of the subject in the ‘spaces of life’, enhancing self-awareness by means of a re-flection\(^{13}\), and promoting the construction of an identity open to otherness, which features a vivid historical embodied element too.

Moreover, the link between self and spatial dimension underscores the chance to think over the construction of identity by means of the articulation of space, showing how a place can become a true eversion of the self. Both Chantre and Kansara are meaningful authors in this sense, because their works poetically and technically suggest «how inseparable we become from the spaces we inhabit, which through a lifetime function as an extension of our bodies and ourselves»\(^{14}\).


Dealing with auto-ethnography, the selection of texts considered in my analysis has not been exclusively defined according to my choice, but by mutual consent of the authors. Although they both pointed out a constant presence of a certain self-reflexive attitude throughout their whole production, the attention has been focused on Zoë Chantre’s

\(^{12}\) The terms *space* and *place* are intended here according the formulation proposed in M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Verlag Günther Neske, Pfullingen 1954.


first full-length film, *Tiens moi droite*\(^{15}\) (2011), and on a corpus of video installations by British artist Gautam Kansara, encompassing *Rangpur Therapy* (2006), *Last Christmas* (2007), *Don’t Hurry, Don’t Worry* (2010), to which the author himself suggested to add *Health, Wealth, Name and Fame* (2009-2011). According to the artist, this project shares the same themes and figures with the others, and it can be read as the most recent step within the elaboration of a coherent, unique artistic research.

Composed in the form of a recollection of memories, a collection of drawings and images (photographs, newspapers clippings etc.), *Tiens moi droite* is a chronicle of the author’s life, starting as she first came across the early manifestation of her illness. Having an important scoliosis, which altered the line of her spinal column, when she was 23 she found a cerebral angioma on the left side of her brain, causing strong ophthalmic migraines. The documentary thematizes the struggle to get over such a health condition, which is metaphorically rendered in the structure of the film: an elaborated concept is explicitly presented by Chantre’s voice-over illustrating a correspondence between her 13 diaries and her vertebrae. Each diary is named after the name of a vertebra: L3 (lumbar vertebra numberthree), L4, L5, D10 (dorsal vertebra numberten), D11, D12 etc. As in the spinal column the vertebrae are bound together, the vertebra-diaries are also sutured. What succeeds in blending physical and textual elements is the filmic device, which turns into moving image «the change of my thoughts about my own spinal column»\(^{16}\), and actually works as a sort of imaginary spinal column. The power and the ultimate aim of this operation is an exploration, which «face[s] the shadowy and the bright parts of consciousness»\(^{17}\).

A complex self-reflexive storytelling device expresses thus the personal need of the author to tell what she has been through: the images mediate her experience, presenting a visual story of her spinal column and head. The effort of transposing such a bodily, perceptive and intimate situation is operationally rendered by filming the diary pages and animating some of the drawings they feature. A refined editing work inserts such diverse materials in the frame of a cinematic narration, which shows the history of the author’s illness from a contemporary setting in time and place. Chantre reworks and elaborates the images of her own story, filing them into an archive – the film – which is able to enliven her suffering and relief, to record the most meaningful moments of her life in the last years, to pay somehow homage to those people who helped her with their testimonies, closeness and support.

Gautam Kansara’s works are single or multi-channels video installations released in recent years as the author started to conduct a sort of field inquiry about his family in its everyday life. In each piece his presence is also included as voice-over, or as belonging to an embedded/subsequently added image – a fact that turns his ethnographical perspective into an auto-ethnographical one.

The oldest artwork belonging to the corpus is *Rangpur Therapy*, in which Kansara records himself talking to his grandfather’s projected image. From time to time, the author pauses the footage and interjects questions and comments, as if enacting an idealized version of the original conversation. Just nearby the main projection, a monitor placed on the floor plays a simultaneous shot of Kansara’s profile, highlighting that despite the illusion of a face-to-face interaction, we are presented a diachronic performance coupling a double-monologue.

\(^{15}\) The film (France, 2011, 65’) was presented to different festivals; for a complete list of the kermesses, please see http://zoechantre.com/782847 (last accessed 29.08.2012).

\(^{16}\) Film voice-over.

\(^{17}\) Idem.
In *Last Christmas* the full family is gathered around the dinner table, offering a faithful recording of the relational and emotional dynamics bounding the members of the group. The spectator follows the conversation thanks to the soundtrack, which succeeds in conveying the rhythm of the scene. Despite this, he cannot connect the audio material to the visuals, because the image is the result of a procedure that mixes video and long exposure photography, giving birth to a series of ghostly presences. The blurred silhouettes of the family members, including Kansara’s, veil their look, melting them in a shadowy *unicum* resembling the deep emotional impact of the ordinary family life on the artist.

*Don’t Hurry, Don’t Worry* is a video installation conceived both as single and as four-channel version. The attention is here mainly focused on the figure of the author’s grandmother. The images are shot inside different rooms of her flat in London and projected back onto the surface of the very space where they were originally recorded. Therefore, empty rooms are enlivened by the ghostly image of the protagonists that brings back their presence in the kitchen, in the dining room, in the bedroom, and finally, in the living room, where they perform everyday actions. In each and every case the visual material represents a layer covering the domestic environment, which gains a further human and symbolic substance superimposed on the consistency of its mere physicality (fig. 1).

*Health, Wealth, Name and Fame* is a three parts project (*Rangpur*, 2009; *Maheshwari Udyaan*, 2010; *Ban Ganga*, 2011) based on an amalgamation of video installation and stills, encompassing different ‘chapters’ named after a meaningful place in the story of the family, and in particular of the author’s grandparents. The first section couples the Indian village where the family traces back its origins with the English flat in London where the grandparents lived; the second deals with the story of Kansara’s grandmother’s father and his role in the Quit India Movement. Such an activity made him famous, leading to the dedication of a park in Matunga – Maheshwari Udyaan – named after him; the third section owes its title to the water tank where the artist went once his grandparents passed away in order to scatter their ashes.\(^{18}\)

Both the film and the video installations represent a quite clear result of an autoethnographical impulse, underlining a deep connection between self-reflexive observation and a principle of situatedness able to embed and enact the personal in the social. I believe this rootedness of the subject in the sociocultural structure and in history\(^ {19} \) is expressed through a number of narrative and aesthetical choices, which betray a particular conception of self-inscription as regards to space, and implicitly comply with the canons of new autobiography.

The most evident connection between the authors is to be found in the idea of a diaristic poetics rendering the content as a way to detect something about their own identity. Despite the fact that *Tiens moi droite* features a more evident accordance to the genre, Gautam Kansara also defines his production as a sort of journal, as it does not just entail a family representation, but also unveils something more individual: «my goal was to allow the viewer into this private space […] but maybe I was also trying to reveal something about me and figure out who I am»\(^ {20} \). On the one hand we have thus a collective situation, where the first person narration is substituted either by a dialogic structure

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18 I have not the chance to go through the complexity of this fascinating work here; for a detailed description, please visit the artist web site: http://gautamkansara.wordpress.com/category/exhibitions/page/3/ (last accessed 29.08.2012).


20 This aspect came to the surface during the in-depth interview with the artist that I conducted tele-
in which the author’s voice often directs the exchange, or by an inclusive image that involves directly his presence within the frame. In this sense, the relational dimension unfolds a sketch of the Kansara family that triggers a self-representation working as an intimate quest of the subject. On the other hand, as regards to Chantre, the dialogue is almost absent, because even when the director shows herself talking with someone, these figures’ words are collected as personal video-testimonies. Therefore, the first person narration characterizes the whole film, resembling the interior monologue mode typical of flow of thoughts. This self-reflexive attitude is put forth as an attempt to better understand what the author’s body is going through. The way she finds to do it is a metaphorical dissection of the physical envelope of her thoughts – the body. This is studied and observed by means of a multifaceted writing action, that develops itself as calligraphy, drawing and ultimately as filming. At the same time the idea of a dissection suggests a particular use of the filmic device, which not only follows very closely the events as a caméra-stylo\(^{21}\), but works as a sort of scalpel, a tool able to look under the surface of experience and touch its very flesh. This is the result of a long filming activity that entered basically every moment of Chantre’s everyday life\(^{22}\). Consequently, the closest people who also appear in the film learnt to accept the camera, as an attached presence to the artist. A similar attitude is typical of Kansara’s works as well, and it is possibly even more characteristic of his style. He almost exclusively directs the eye of the camera towards his family, which is always taken at home. Here, despite the awareness of being filmed\(^{23}\), the presence of the camera often fades away in the background, and the durational aspect grants a completely natural approach by the family members.

The histories in which the diaries evolve are on the one hand that of the author’s illness, and on the other that of the domestic family life of the artist. In both cases, this implies for them a decision to let the spectator enter their ordinariness: they present him relatives and friends, they show him their environment and open up a world made of places, memories, symbolic objects, desires, bodily perceptions and affections. As in an ideal movement from inside to outside, the moving image touches these intimate aspects handing them over to the spectator, who is thus invited to take part to this private universe. In this sense, «a network of familial, cultural, […] psychic forces converge and find expression in an act of historical self-inscription»\(^{24}\).

Dealing with something very private, the degree of intimacy of the narration is variable, because it does mirror the auto-representative effort triggered by the authors. Not by chance, they both define their work as a documentation of a very personal issue, i.e. illness and family, its members and origins. Therefore, the narration necessarily includes the directors as ‘engine’ of what seems to be a true quest for identity and for a way to represent its different nuances by means of its expression. From a representational point of view, such a variety is reflected in the large choice of languages and techniques adop-

\(^{21}\) The author herself defines her own use of the camera as a very similar practice to that of Alexandre Astruc: «due to my back problems I can carry only a light camera, then the use I made of it was a sort of caméra-stylo style». This point came out during the in-depth interview with the director that I conducted telephonically on 25th July 2011. From now on the references to this exchange will be noted as Zoé Chantre Interview, ZCI (my translation from French).

\(^{22}\) ZCI.

\(^{23}\) GKI.

Yet, this feature testifies also the authors familiarity with a wide range of media, a fact that is due both to their age, and thus their being accustomed to the presence and the use of media in everyday life, and to their artistic background. The specific choice of using a blend of moving images, photographs, drawings, animations, collages, and audio recordings is precisely to be seen as a conscious will to entrust the task of telling about the self to the synthesis of different expressive languages. The contamination produced by these media-mixes becomes therefore a typical mark of the contemporary technology of expression of the self.

An intimate visual quest and an artistic research intermingle, giving birth to a unique complex dimension, where life and art overlap onto the same territory. The act of writing on the self is then performed by that very self, turning the creative process of filming into a subjective, introspective practice.

The thematization of illness offered by Chantre becomes thus a way to understand the clinical events hitting her body. Similarly, her collection of newspaper clippings, images and photographs form a sort of warburgian atlas of the corporal and emotive universe in which her physicality is put at stake. The creativity and aesthetical sensitivity of the author is represented by the use and subsequent animation of self-made illustrations too: «drawing helped me to approach the discourse of the body connected to the whole illness issue»25. The pencil and the frequent images of the author’s hand writing what we actually hear from the voice-over reinforce the idea of the documentary as sketching the shape of the self, as a way to progressively acquire a deeper awareness of the form, the entity, and the expressive possibilities of the subject. In this creative/identitary process the camera plays an important role, because it works as a tool able to promote a substantial eversion of the self (figg. 2-3).

Both the animation of the drawings, released by the continuous erasing and redrawing in sequence distinguishes Chantre’s style, and the constant intervention on the drawn figure, the assemblage of different materials and the delicate, gentle sensibility underscore the artistic predilection of the author to mold together animations, moving and still images, and structuring them after her own image. This shaping represents a ludic aspect, which marks and belongs to her artistic research26. It does not only characterize the director’s sentiment towards her own work, but also plays a role in functional terms. In fact, it psychologically exorcises the idea of danger, illness and ultimately of death. A subtle irony is particularly evident as the narration gets to its turning points and it is often shared with the people who seldom appear to the author’s side. For example, this is especially true in the case of Camille’s story. Collecting her confidences in the form of a video-testimony, the director includes in her film the empathic words of the friend, who actually suffers from an incurable fibrosis disease. Camille tells about the decision to devote herself to clownery – an emblematically ludic activity – as a way to accept reality, react to it, and even find a new motivation in illness, since «what is brilliant about being a clown is the right of imperfection»27.

The correspondence between creative practice and identity articulation is shared by Kansara’s installations as well. In particular, what I previously defined as a contemporary technology of expression of the self consists here at least in a double treatment of the image. The author mixes photographic and moving images rendering them as a sort of tableaux vivants (Rangpur Therapy; Health, Wealth, Name and Fame), or as ghostly presences, which appear either as a series of undefined silhouettes (Last Christmas) or

25 ZCI.
26 ZCI.
27 Camille’s video-testimony.
as transparent figures reanimating the domestic environment (Don’t Hurry, Don’t Worry). In the first case, the amalgamation of techniques is limited to a quite simple visual collage, plus an audio editing. This media-mix characterizes a work in which moving images are set one inside another; the contained one puts forward the action, while the framing one basically features the absence of dialogues and movement. In the second case, i.e. in Last Christmas, the artist uses a combination of video, audio, and long exposure photography (fig. 4). Just because of the duration element, the image shows a series of figures whose shape is blurred: we hear them speaking, but we cannot recognize them clearly, since their bodies and faces are veiled via a time-warping hybrid of still and motion photography. Only the home setting is recognizable, as a mute witness of the family movements, dialogues and arguments, meals and rituals. It is precisely this same environment that appears as the author superimposes a filmic layer onto the physical surface of the homestead. The result is a visual rendering of the family members despite their real absence in that space. In most of these works the image of the author himself is subjected to these same techniques, becoming somehow invisible. This symbolizes the position of Kansara within his family: the self-inscription puts the author in the theatre of the action but gives him a sort of side role. Working as an observer and operator, his presence highlights a deep awareness of the operational aspects of the artwork, expressing at the same time a certain sense of peripherality in relation to the family. Once again, the creative process of filming mirrors a self-perception dynamics connected to identity, which defines the aesthetic representation of the subject\(^\text{28}\).

Therefore, the self-reflexive action triggered by filming as self-inscription betrays a certain self-enactment promoted by the authors. This does not imply a pure exhibitionistic attitude before the camera, even tough they recognize themselves as performing subjects and, at times, the action is deliberately reconstructed for the camera\(^\text{29}\). Rather, it shows their awareness of the creative process, and the potentialities of the filmic device. Just because of this, the creative process itself culminates in the elaboration of the images, including the reprocessing phase. Both Chantre and Kansara agree in considering the editing as an essential passage in the auto-ethnographic dynamics, enabling them to get the right distance from the image of the self and its symbols. It is precisely thanks to this ‘safety distance’ that the observation of the self reaches the mental space of reflection. Due to this metabolization, the artists use their works as «a tool for coupling liberatory public testimony and private therapy»\(^\text{30}\).

2. AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM WRITINGS AND SPACE: THE PLACE OF THE SELF

Starting from their own self-perception, the authors put on screen the result of a self-mirroring. Such a mechanism is connected to the idea of automediacy\(^\text{31}\), a process which I believe is triggered here mainly by means of spatial metaphors. More specifically, body and home are the two main figures able to contextualize the subject in time and space, rendering both the liberatory movement from inside to outside, and the therapeutic increase of self-awareness performed throughout the film/installations. These aspects are

\(^{28}\) GKI.


\(^{30}\) RENOV, The Subject of Documentary, p. XVI.

\(^{31}\) On the concept of automediacy (Automedialität), please refer to J. Donne - C. Moser (eds.), Automedialität: Subjektkonstitution in Schrift, Bild und neuen Medien, Fink, Munich 2008.
thematized in a more or less explicit way in the different works, however they describe the process leading the interior substance towards the exterior.

The body as Chantre represents it is her physical envelope; despite it initially works as individual, corporal extension of the self, it is the object that opens the subject to the relationship with the Other as well. The home, which is the favorite set of Kansara’s shooting, is characterized as ‘family place’, and thus it is the first relational arena of the self. It is something private and intimate, but at the same time it is something open by definition. Both these figures enable therefore the subject to trigger an eversion of the self, favoring a representation of its most inner side, memories, affections, emotions, obsessions, and fears. A sharing and an opening seem to be the very aim of auto-ethnography, an aperture that leads to a higher self-awareness and to an institution/strengthening of identity (fig. 5).

According to both authors there are phases in life, in which such an autobiographical impulse is particularly stimulated. Choc or changes, as the break of an illness or an alteration of the family balance, work in this sense. It was precisely the latter circumstance to inspire Kansara: «Documentation began as I realized my grandparents started to become older and older, and I was entrusted taking a role, as in a kind of getting inverted». The artist becomes «the recipient of generational, as well as cultural, experience», and – I would argue – the domestic environment becomes in turn the relational and spatial ‘container’ symbolizing this reception. Kansara himself describes the homestead as «container of the family» by means of its image. As the filmic image is able to capture and contain the presence of the subject, in the same way the house seems to be the repository of the family. For example in the works showing the grandparents’ flat, «it was worth filming it after they passed away because reprojecting their images on the space they’ve inhabited for so long, their being there is extended. The home somehow contains them. The same thing happens in my mind with memories: their presence is recorded and contained as in a time capsule» – a time capsule, which succeeds in being expressed and visually rendered through its spatialization. In this sense, Kansara produces a double inscription: one concerning the family members, and particularly those who passed away, so that they can inhabit the space of the house again; another one referred to himself, a self-inscription, aiming to process the generational legacy and to define his role within the family thanks to its relocation in the home. These two processes end up in preserving the London flat as the place of the family, legitimating the presence of each member, including the author, and enabling them to dwell. Moreover, they work emblematically as domestic ethnography, intended as «a form of self-portraiture in which the self is bound up with its familial other, [that] takes as its unspoken precept “ethnography begins in the home”». Therefore, the narration brought by the installation not only is set indoor, but visualizes the domestic interior, reflecting an intimate topography. As Giuliana Bruno suggests analyzing Rebecca Horn’s performances, the room has to be considered as internal architecture, a sort of poetic ‘stanza’, able to mirror onto an external physical space one’s inner universe.

33 ZCI.
34 GKI.
36 GKI.
37 GKI.
38 Reno, The Subject of Documentary, p. XIII.
The same process is to be connected to the idea of the body in Chantre’s work, since the film is released after the history of the author’s body. It is designed after its measures and shape, so that the corporal element becomes the code and the main construction tool of the narrative. The filmic device is organized according to a body apparatus (vertebra-diaries, etc.), and the collection of medical files becomes an essential part of the documentary. The eversion affecting the body illustrated by the film is visualized in diverse forms. The most physical, carnal one is represented by the recurrent idea of the elimination of the illness by means of its extirpation and subsequent eating. This is a quite strong image, which is proposed through a loop animation showing a small figure taking his spinal column out of his back with his own hands, and bringing it to his mouth. The deep will of the director to take the matters into her own hands is definitely expressed.

Both the home and the body are represented as a “container element”, thanks to which the dialogue between inside and outside, self and Other is finally allowed. If Kansara works on the relational dimension of the family in order to find his role and his individual position out, Chantre processes her body in an intimate way till she discovers that the acceptance of her physicality as it is, is sustained by the mutual acceptance of the Other. The authors clearly thematize the spatialization of the self as the subject tries to move from inside to outside an environment or his own corporal components. In this sense, body and home are the symbols of the exchange possibility between the public and the private, and meanwhile they stand for the constraint of expanding one’s intimate, emotive, symbolic world – the metaphor of «an outside turned into an inside, but also the projection of an inner world onto the outer geography»

RIASSUNTO

Il saggio si costruisce attorno ai risultati di una ricerca condotta secondo un modello a due fasi, in cui l’autrice si concentra sul concetto di autoetnografia nel quadro delle pratiche filmiche e videoartistiche. L’attenzione si concentra sul contemporaneo e istituisce due casi di studio come exempla che consentono all’argomentazione di ragionare in particolar modo sull’elemento spaziale, proponendo un approccio originale al tema. L’analisi del corpus va così a costituire un percorso che porta alla definizione della scrittura filmic autobiografica come azione di posizionamento del sé nello spazio – essere come esserci. Un ideale movimento di estroflessione dall’interno all’esterno è identificato come carattere peculiare del lavoro svolto dagli autori nella realizzazione delle proprie opere; in questo quadro, le due figure del corpo e della casa sono proposte come matrici interpretative di questo movimento.

SUMMARY

The essay reports the results gathered during a two-step research about the concept of auto-ethnography in film/video-artistic practice, and elaborates an original approach to it, focusing in particular the spatial element. The analysis of a restricted corpus of texts leads to define the autobiographical filmic writing as an action of placing the self, and identifies an ideal movement from the inside to the outside triggered by the authors while working on their films and videos. The two figures of body and home are finally proposed as interpretation matrices of such a movement.

p. 126.

41 Bruno, Public Intimacy, p. 25.
ICONOGRAPHIC APPENDIX

Figure 1 - Gautam Kansara, *Don’t Hurry, Don’t Worry* (2010), four-channel video installation. Courtesy the artist.
Figure 2-3 - Zoé Chantre, *Tiens moi droite* (2011). Images of the ‘vertebrae-diaries’. Courtesy the director.
Figure 4 - Gautam Kansara, *Last Christmas* (2007), two-channel video installation. Courtesy the artist.

Figure 5 - Zoé Chantre, *Tiens moi droite* (2011). Projection of the identity into something external. Courtesy the director.