

ELSEWHERE,
EVERYWHERE



ELSEWHERE, EVERYWHERE

A FILM BY **ISABELLE INGOLD & VIVIANNE PERELMUTER**



En ville!
FESTIVAL DE CINÉMA

FILMFEST
HAMBURG

2020 - 63' - Belgium - Colorr/B&W - VOSTENG
Stills and presskit are downloadable on www.derives.be

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SYNOPSIS

A young man in a room somewhere in England. On a computer screen, images from all over the world. One click is all it takes to cross borders. But it's the tale of another journey that we witness unfolding in bits and pieces, that of Shahin, a 20-year-old Iranian man who fled his homeland alone.



INTERVIEW WITH **ISABELLE INGOLD & VIVIANNE PERELMUTER**

« It's an immersion, a physical experience that compels us to imagine and feel what Shahin has been through, the inner states he's crossed as well as geographic ones. »

You met a young Iranian refugee in Greece. You then followed his journey to England. At what point did the idea of making a film out of this encounter come up? How did this film come about?

Vivianne Perelmuter: In 2016, in Greece, we met a young Iranian refugee named Shahin. He was about to turn 20. We celebrated his birthday together. We went back to see him several times. Then we kept in touch through texting, chat, and occasionally by phone. When we saw him again a year and a half later in England, it was a real shock: Shahin had become a different person altogether. He was no longer the

radiant young man we'd met in Athens where, in spite of the precarious conditions of life in the camp and the immense hardships he'd been through, he was joyful, claimed to be "confident about the future," and was curious about everything – new horizons, new lifestyles, new people. But when we met again in England, he'd become downhearted, even subdued, and at the same time tense, angry. He was distrustful of everything and everyone. So he shut himself up in his room, cut off from the world but watching it online for nights at a time.

What happened to him? We had thought the worst was



behind him. What was it then? Is there a threshold of hardship that if you cross, you're crushed? Or did something specific damage him deep inside? So the film became a necessity, to understand what happened to him and how he changed, from the inside.

The film is filled with fragments of audio and text, excerpts from text messages, chats, phone conversations between Shahin and his mother, his recollection of the questions and answers during his interview with the immigration officer, and here and there a splendid voiceover recalling the different stages of your relationship.

How was the sound and written material put together and why did you decide to play with such different types of narration?

VP: The importance of the sound and written narrative threads stems first from the central role attached to what is off-screen. There's a gap between what we learn about Shahin with the sound track and what we see on the screen. We don't see Shahin or who speaks or what they speak about but only what the young man is looking at or could be looking at on the Internet. We focus on the computer screen, while the story remains out of the picture.

It's a distinctive choice rooted in Shahin's actual situation in England, but it also fits in with our intention to place the

viewer outside of the usual recognition processes. This was one of the stakes of the project: to solicit viewers differently and involve them in a more intimate relationship.

The abundance of images and information, particularly surrounding asylum seekers, puts us on auto-pilot mode. It gives us the impression we already know it all and have seen it all before. In the end, these images act like a screen, simplifying the world and preventing us from actually feeling. The fact that, this time, sound rather than image leads the way, allows the faculty of sight to be disrupted, taking viewers onto foreign ground. Like Shahin, they start out disoriented, groping, and must pay closer attention to signs, letting their sensations guide them, feeling their way at first. It's an immersion, a physical experience that compels us to imagine (because what we see doesn't tell the whole story) and feel what Shahin has been through, the inner states he's crossed as well as geographic ones.

Nothing is presented linearly or in a strictly logical manner. We set aside any discourse, message or judgement. We focus on highly concrete, personal elements – often details from daily life. The material is offered in snippets, in the flow of a personal experience.

Isabelle Ingold: We decided to stick to the small signs, to 'the sensible', and to documents. For instance, the immigration office questionnaire is a source of information.



Which questions get asked? Which are avoided? Shahin's answers also offer a very accurate description of his journey, how much it cost, how long he waited, the smugglers' modus operandi, etc.

This narrative thread blends with the others, such as the phone conversations with his mother. The tones and styles are very different. They complement as well as contradict each other. Like in a person's life. Whereas the asylum procedure asks migrants to turn their lives into a fixed narrative with strict rules. The story must be clear, logical, cut and dried, coherent and ascertainable. But life isn't like that.

We wanted to offer a different story, a "counter-narrative." We wanted to get to the ordinary frequency of life. For migrants, this frequency is often masked by the spectacular – albeit dramatically real – elements of their crossing. It's not a matter of sugar-coating things, but of rendering the hardships from Shahin's point of view and also through other registers of his life, with a broad range of emotions and contradictory thoughts, the complexity of situations.

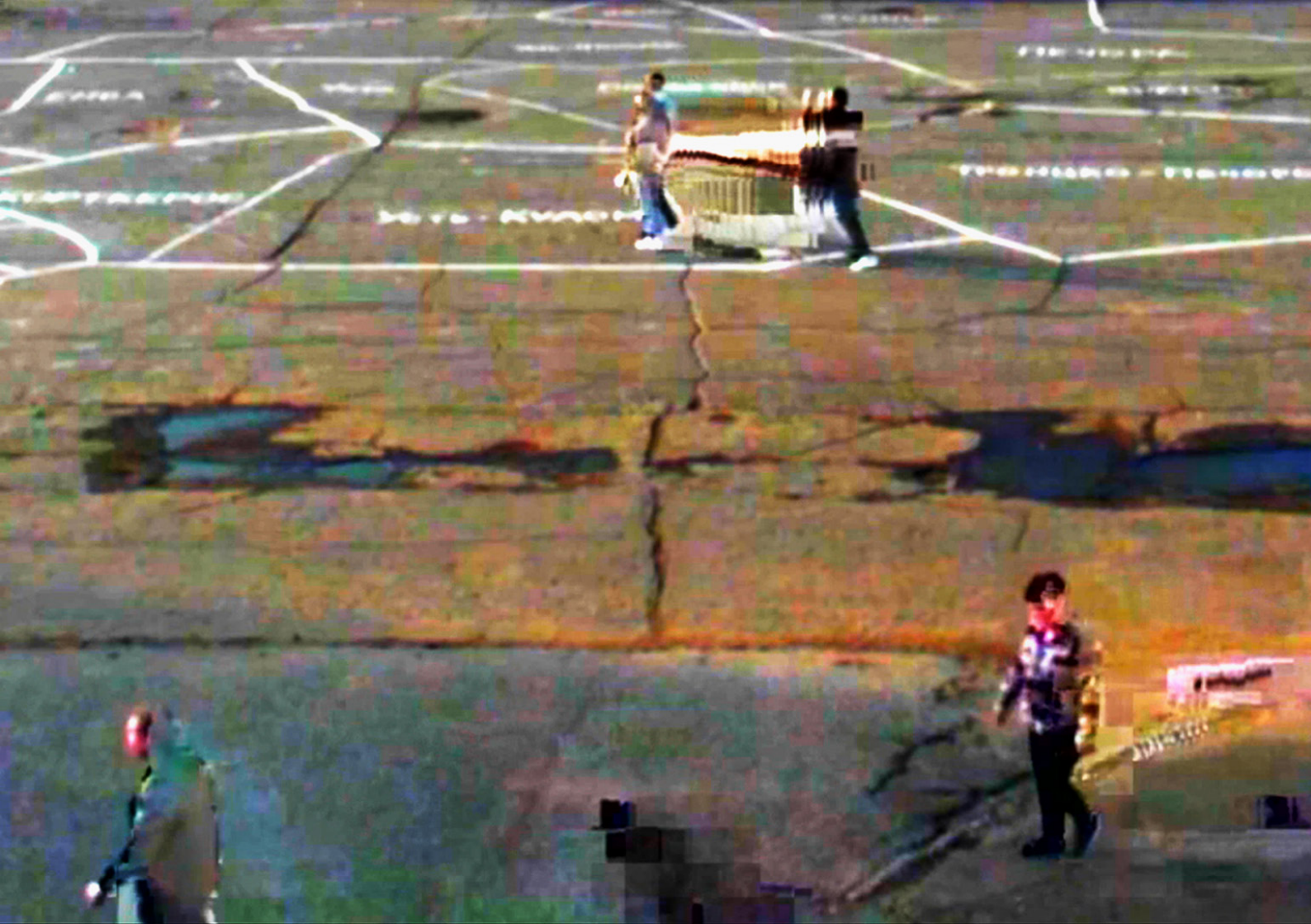
In short, the experience of a young man who flees and hopes, grows and changes.

The fragments of writing and sound are made up of specific, personal elements – between Shahin and you or his mother, transcripts of interrogations he underwent and a first-person voiceover. All this personal material is

structured and composed – like a musical score – along with footage from CCTV collected online. Footage that is, by nature, impersonal and angled downward, as this type of camera systematically films people and places looking down from above. There is no other point of view, no one else but a system of control behind these cameras. And yet, the footage – these 'elsewheres' and 'everywheres' – though at first glance terribly impersonal, are going to give body, density, emotion and reality to this specific story in a way we've rarely seen.

How did you collect all this footage? And was the act of collecting it done in parallel to the editing and elaboration of the various sound and written elements? Or on the contrary, sought out based on a pre-existing structure? Indeed, we often notice subtle connections between text and image.

II: It was done in parallel to the editing for nearly a year. We didn't start out with a structure, but we'd collected a great deal of the sound material, such as the questionnaire and phone conversations with his mother. That provided a good base. From there, we began looking for footage that explored the potential relationships with the sound material. This resulted in a constant back-and-forth between scouring the internet and the editing. We'd have an idea for a sequence, we'd go online looking for something specific, then chance upon something we weren't looking for, which would



generate another idea and take the editing somewhere else, at times even in a new direction. It was basically constant editing and “shooting.”

Strangely, we felt like we were shooting, even if we weren’t holding the camera – nobody was. The vast majority of the footage comes from live webcams. It’s broadcast live on line, and we watched them in real time. But before filming, we’d done a solid job of location scouting, like for a classic documentary. We observed people’s rituals, the times at which places were busy, or when they were deserted. We’d return to the same locations at different times of the day, with different light or in different seasons. We lived in different time zones. We’d set our alarms to be there at a certain time, in Siberia or Asia or elsewhere. And then the unforeseen would happen, as it always does.

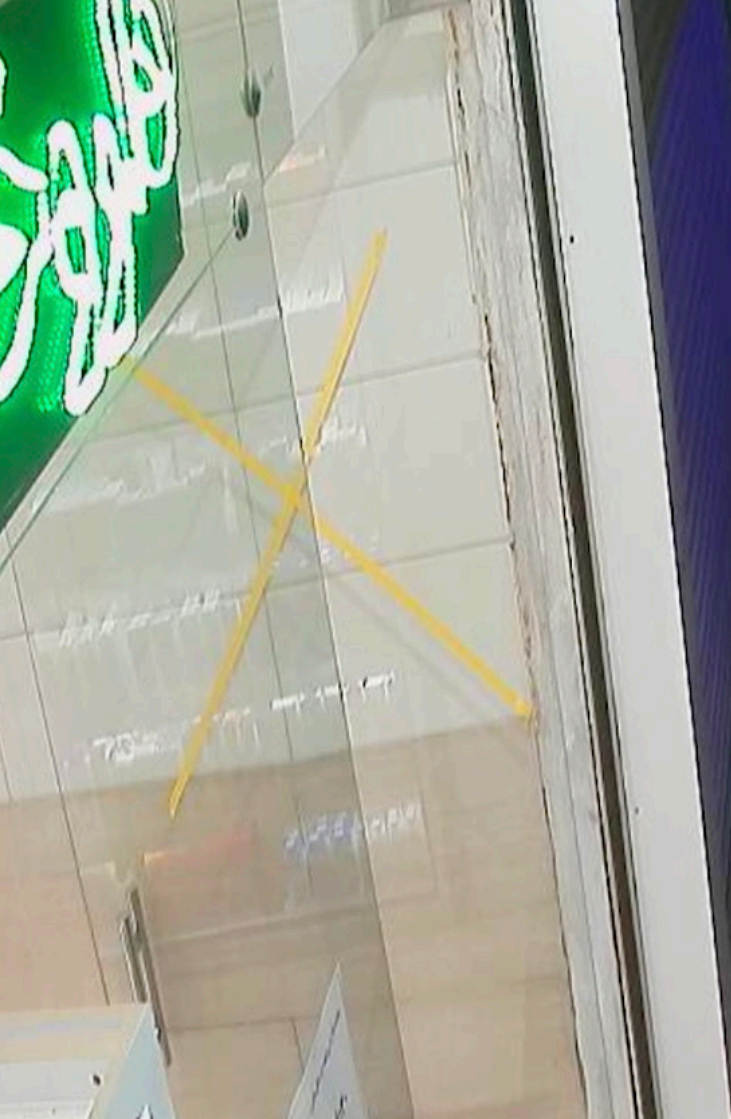
VP: If you spend long periods of time watching a live streaming feed, at one point, someone’s gesture or posture catches your eye, and seems to resonate with what Shahin feels, or on the contrary offers a poignant contrast to it. So that if the gap between the footage and the sound is never absorbed, a dialogue is established between them, allowing an individual line to be connected to collective lines, Shahin’s life to that of the silhouettes glimpsed on the webcam footage, or that of the viewers.

Except that you chose a very particular type of footage, obviously, that has nothing to do with what he sees. Was the idea of security cameras there from the start?

VP: Yes, the idea was congenital to the project. It was linked to Shahin’s experience, not only his connected isolation, but his entire journey through a world that is both so open and yet so partitioned and controlled. Then one day, Shahin showed us a video from a CCTV camera that caught an explosion in a gas station. Why did he watch that sort of footage? What did he see in it? What can we see in it? And to do what?

Imperceptibly, his experience as a young refugee opens up to the more broadly shared experience of a world with an increasing number of screens, a world that connects and separates – a more expansive reflection on the image itself. We started from the reality of Shahin watching the world online, and invested it freely, surfing the internet in turn to explore what it shows of the world – particularly live webcams.

But working with this type of footage – either surveillance images or promotional video for tourism – implied working against them, against their initial function of surveillance or consumption. Rather than highlight exoticism or an infraction, explosion, accident or something spectacular, we



looked for the “almost nothing”, the infinitesimal, the “infra-ordinary” to use Perec’s lovely term. Of course, these images bear witness to an unsettling state of the world, as well as to the wear and tear of being human; but that’s not all. Moments of wonderment are also possible.

Working with these images meant above all not settling for the rendering of a violence we pretend to denounce. We wanted to show the seeds of another possible world, the beauty of people, their grace.

The film offers a gradual evolution, a journey in places, and in the very texture of the image, in the specific plasticity of the electronic image, but also sometimes in the cruelty that is captured, so much do those filmed seem to forget the systems filming them... Was the idea of this evolution thought out beforehand, or did it spring from the blended trajectory of the film and the character during the editing process?

VP: The idea was there from the start, but like an intuition that still had to take shape over the course of editing. From the start, there was the move from dark to light, from abstraction to incarnation. We had to start with grainy dark images with no point of reference. Roads, no man’s land, then cities appear in the distance, we slowly approach, color emerges, we see streets, buildings, then silhouettes and finally faces. It’s a slow approach, like when you discover a new place or person.

We don’t know everything right away, it’s gradual, it’s a process. There might be turnarounds, glitches, surprises and disappointments.

And then purely aesthetic shots: there are shots of rain that are simply beautiful...

VP: The texture of the footage with its pixels and twitches says something about this world: they’re its new consistency, its new tempo. Some black and white pixelized images make us think of the first motion pictures with the grain of the film. It’s as if at times the most highly contemporary met with a much older strata of time. Alongside the dangers, there’s also beauty in that.

Exchanges with Yvan Flass



FILMOGRAPHY

ISABELLE INGOLD

- HIGHWAY REST STOP** 2016 - doc - 55'
- A SMALL HOUSE IN THE GHETTO** 2009 - doc - 52'
- THE NAME OF A MAYOR** 2004 - doc - 58'
- A PLACE ON EARTH** 2001 - doc - 54'
- LINE OF FLIGHT** 2000 - feature film - 43'
- NORTH BY MEMORY** 1996 - doc - 30'

VIVIANNE PERELMUTER

- BREATHES** 2017/2018 - art video at Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature - Paris
- IN SITU/ON LINE** 2016 - webdoc
- UNCOMMON GROUND** 2015 - doc - 30' - installation art en Lorraine & Los Angeles
- UNCERTAIN TIMES** 2014 - doc/fiction - 118'
- BEAR** 2006 - doc - 52'
- DESCRIPTION OF A STRUGGLE** 2004 - doc - 25'
- A PLACE ON EARTH** 2001 - doc - 54'
- LINE OF FLIGHT** 2000 - feature film - 43'
- NORTH BY MEMORY** 1996 - doc - 30'
- SLOW AS WE ARE** 1993 - feature film - 27'

TECHNICAL DETAILS

2020 - 63' - Belgium - Color/B&W - VOSTFR / VOSTENG - DCP - 5.1 - HD - 16/9

WITH Shahin Parsa

DIRECTION Isabelle Ingold et Vivianne Perelmuter

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MIXING Nathalie Vidal | Benoît Biral

COLOR GRADING Miléna Trivier

PRODUCTION Dérives | Julie Freres

CO-PRODUCTION CBA - Centre Audiovisuel à Bruxelles | Javier Packer-Comyn

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