

CHAPTER FOUR

Postproduction – analysing the process

I. Introduction

These processes to research and videotape the material for the project and for other educational and archival purposes were completed as planned. The postproduction phase of putting together the various elements to construct a coherent and engaging narrative became the next priority. Postproduction comprised editing the materials to construct the final narrative, in preparation for screenings to make the documentary video available to viewers who did not participate in the process, but who would be interested in the history and the legacy of the Schwartz medicine bag and the accompanying characters and their livelihoods. During the research and recording periods, the traditions and practices that existed around the bag had generated a substantial number of both written and audiovisual texts. These narrative strands were ready to be woven into a story archive, the reconstruction of the Schwartz family memory bank. The process, as set out in the previous chapters, presented a number of considerations pertaining to the oral accounts the narrative was based on and the impact of these observations on the documentation of the accounts as well as the construction of an audio visual account of that process.

As the editor and I worked on the final phase of the project, I reflected on the process and mulled over various thoughts, worries and ideas on the construction of this new audio-visual ‘text’, the inevitable outcome of our activities. The process had relied

heavily on what McKenzie defines as ‘the sociology of the text’ – an awareness of the ‘human motives and interactions that texts involve at every stage of their production, transmission and consumption’. McKenzie’s interpretation invited me – the reader and the documentary filmmaker – to interrogate my own understanding of what it is to be a member of and a storyteller in the society in which I function. For Barber,¹ to be social relies on a mutually constitutive relationship between what the ‘text’ intends and the frame of expectations that the interpreters brings to it. Barber sees this as a ‘lively interaction’ between extreme interpretations of how and why ‘texts’ are produced.² For the construction of the multi-media text, the interactions and the interpretations depended on the producers who included the family, the filmmaker, the crew, the editor and ultimately the audience. It also became clear that the production of the documentary film had intervened in an emerging set of debates about post-apartheid cultural reclamation and that the filming procedure became additional public spheres in this process.

As mentioned in Chapter One, Jean Mitry describes a film as ‘a world which organises itself in terms of a story’ and as a researcher I was interested in the public spaces that come into being when a filmmaker, the social actors and the crew undertake the journey to produce a film or video. It seemed that the production generated and depended on or drew from a series of public spheres based on these texts and that these public spheres ultimately moulded the elements and determined the content of the recordings that were used to construct the documentary narrative by the inclusion of the selected participants

¹ Barber (9,10)

² For Barber the extremes oscillate between the Althusser and Iser stance that the texts fires blanks at the audience for them to complete and Holland’s stance that the audience makes of the text what it wants.

and the invitation for them to participate. In the multicultural, multiracial South African society, against the backdrop of our recent political past, the selection of participants became an important consideration for the research process. In attempting to understand these interactions, I drew on various theories of the public sphere, particularly those that focus on questions of circulation and how these constitute publics.

Each stage of the documentary production stage, it seemed therefore, involved the formation of a unique, transient and, at times, a portable 'public sphere' (centred around the medicine bag and its content, the texts, the social actors)³ – Letitia; members of her family and selected communities; a creative and technical crew; selected locations or spaces, the editor, (and ultimately, the audience or viewers of the final product) – where 'what would count as a matter of common concern'⁴ would be decided among the participants.

According to Habermas, 'a portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body',⁵ a microcosmic society in 'which free individuals form voluntary associations and establish pluralistic relations based upon affinities and common interests rather than coercion'.⁶ Orsini writes that 'in this space opinions, expressions and actions take on a

³ 'For non-fiction or documentary' according to Bill Nichols '[p]eople are treated as social actors; they continue to conduct their lives more or less as they would have done without the presence of the camera. They remain cultural players rather than theatrical performers'. (Nichols 5)

⁴ Fraser as quoted by Orsini (10)

⁵ Habermas as quoted by Orsini (11)

⁶ Habermas as quoted by Orsini (11)

certain plasticity, existing norms and beliefs can be questioned and become consciously impermanent. The existing world, and one's own identity, takes on a new mobility and flexibility'.⁷ It was within this fluid space that each recording or re-telling acquired a 'performative aura'⁸ produced by the participants and by elements of dislocation through space and time determined by the previously disadvantaged, 'para-literate'⁹ culture in which the medicine bag exists as discussed in Chapter Two.

The public spheres ultimately moulded the elements and determined the content of the recordings that have been used to construct the documentary narrative by the inclusion of the selected participants and the invitation for them to participate. Exclusion from the sphere 'can be grave, leading to people feeling powerless and frustrated',¹⁰ sentiments that can diminish its reach as illustrated by the decision of the woman in Riemvasmaak to refuse us permission to work in her garden as she had not been invited to become a member of the medicine bag 'public'.

These newly constructed public spheres were unique as they could never be replicated; the spaces 'existed by virtue of being addressed' by the production process initiated by the medicine bag; the public spheres were transient as they came 'into being only in relation to the texts and their circulation'¹¹ for the duration of the shoot, and the production sphere was portable as it had to function both in Johannesburg and in the Northern Cape. It also became obvious that the planning process and the task ahead,

⁷ Orsini (11)

⁸ Hofmeyr *Metaphorical Books* (2)

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ Warner (52)

¹¹ Warner (50)

involved the known and the unknown, another requirement for the formation of a public sphere as set out by Warner in *'Publics and Counterpublics'*. In the case of the medicine bag, the unknown included fears of not being able to collect the required material to construct the final narrative and the hopes of transformation (and change) for the participants. The known carried a sense of practical possibility as the preplanning made some aspects of the process feasible.¹²

The production further more involved a process of bringing cultural authority, resources and excitement from the outside. Through this process some of the participants began to see themselves and their pasts differently. They also began to participate actively in the process of creating memory. In a similar way I experienced shifts of perception around my understanding of the impact of apartheid, contemporary cultural debates, oral accounts, issues around identity formation and representation in filmmaking. Although I always understood the unfairness, and to some degree, the horrors of apartheid, the medicine bag experience exposed the full extent of the consequences of a political system that set out to marginalise identity and culture and the extent to which most white South Africans both benefited from but also suffered as a result of forced separateness.

As previous political dispensations in South Africa – including institutional apartness – denied the Namas a recognised public sphere, the documentary video aimed to represent

¹² Warner (64)

an attempt to recreate the identity and voice of the Other¹³ as a subset of a larger set of public spheres in ‘an infinite number of publics within the social totality.’¹⁴

With the conclusion of principal photography, the public sphere constituted around the common purpose, lost its purpose and disbanded. A new phase now came into being, also ‘self-creating and self-organised’,¹⁵ and constructed around the *discursiveness* of a multi-media text or documentary video. These interactions and discussions included the process of working through the recorded material, transcriptions of the interviews and the selection of the best shots and juxtaposition of image, sound and ideas to create the narrative that would represent the story of the medicine bag in the best possible way. Several aspects of these issues were revealed and became relevant during the earlier phases of the process. The post-production process forced the issues to the fore and re-drew attention to many considerations. Some of these aspects will be highlighted in the following section.

II. Post Production

After completion of the shoot the Beta cam SP tapes were all dumped to VHS with burnt-in time code on the visuals. The copies were made for viewing and for transcriptions and the time code allows for identifying sections of the material more easily. Nicky de Beer, the editor, familiarised herself with the materials as the source

¹³ According to the entry on ‘Other’ in *The Dictionary of Critical Theory* (285) the term refers to ‘a non-self that is different or other. According to the authors, ‘for Sartre in particular, the relationship is always conflict-ridden and antagonistic as it is based upon a dialect in which the only possibilities are being dominated by the dominant.’

¹⁴ Warner (51)

¹⁵ Ibid (52)

footage was digitised. I spent time looking at the interviews and reading the transcriptions. It was important to determine the degree of variance between the shooting script and the collected material and to adjust the postproduction strategies accordingly. The changes in the oral accounts as discussed in the previous chapter made this exercise very pertinent. It also became necessary to draw up a final postproduction schedule to allow for the off-line editing,¹⁶ selection of music, the on-line edit,¹⁷ and the final mix¹⁸ to be completed in time and within the budget.

This process required the composition of a new team composed with a different set of participants, a different space to suit the new outcomes and a composite of issues comprising previous and new considerations. The players included a transcriber, the editor, a final mixer, Letitia as a representative of the Schwartz family and myself, with the editor and I driving the process. We spent time together discussing the material and a possible structure for the narrative based on the shooting script and the material that has been collected.

The process required constant interaction and discussion as many factors came into play while the material was divided into smaller segments and inserted into the unfolding structure of the narrative. Some audio and visual technical flaws, previously unnoticed in the large bulk of material, became visible and had to be replaced by other sections of material. These included digital flaws on the tapes, known as drop out, and elements

¹⁶ Off-line edit refers to an initial assembly of material to construct the narrative.

¹⁷ On-line editing completes the visual process when the editor digitises the final selection of shots in the best possible picture quality and colour- corrects the images to match brightness and other aspects for seamless viewing.

¹⁸ Final mix is the term for combining the various sound tracks, for best possible audibility and to create the sound to accompany the on line visual track.

ascribable to human error such as out of focus shots, bumpy or shaky camera work, and uneasy compositions. Sound problems included microphone bumps, wind noise and dialogue recorded off the primary range of the microphone. On a second and even more important level, the discussions involved the construction of the unfolding narrative, our approach to representation of the family and choices of suitable music.

According to Stella Bruzzi, the recording of events ‘cannot reveal the motive or cause for the actions’¹⁹ it represents. The material, ‘though real, is incomplete’.²⁰ The events that were ‘generated’ by the medicine bag and that were recorded did not automatically constitute a constructed narrative. To reveal these actions and to complete the multi-media archive, the collected materials, the oral accounts and all the other bits and pieces had to be ‘texted’ and ‘con-textualised’ – a process that required an intersection of orality and literacy mediated ‘from the agency of a literate intermediary’, which often ‘held some power over the informant be it political or economic’.²¹ This, according to Duncan Brown, necessitated the ‘need to acknowledge the specific strategies and performative energies of oral texts, while locating these texts in the spaces and constrictions of the societies from which they emerge.’²² According to Brown, as discussed in Chapter One, many of the oral texts survive in versions that are dictated by the social, economic and political circumstances of the storytellers. The dilemma that faced me, the co-researcher and documentary filmmaker, existed in the inevitability of this narrative that would be constructed by the uses ‘of a highly mediated and

¹⁹ Bruzzi (21)

²⁰ Brown (2)

²¹ Ibid (10)

²² Brown (2)

artificially²³ stabilising process. The constructed-ness of content where each and every selected event was based on what was observed or thought and where this ‘very act of perception involved an ideology’,²⁴ rests on a set of moral assumptions that informed the decision maker. This construction process requires that ‘relevant and significant facts’²⁵ be selected from a ‘vast multitude of irrelevant details’.²⁶ But what is relevant to one observer might seem incidental to another and the selection of ‘significant’²⁷ details then already becomes a distortion of an actual event. The constructed-ness also includes issues of language and translation as the interviews are transcribed, translated and edited and as observed by Bassnett-McQuire, every translation is in fact ‘a reading’ that involves processes of decoding and recoding’.²⁸

Despite the new insights gleaned and a heightened awareness of the inevitability and the necessity of interventions and translations required by filmmaking, various factors during the edit threatened to compromise some of my considered intentions. In some instances the unfolding of the narrative forced its own path forward. The first issue centred on the amount of recorded footage; there wasn’t enough and a shortage of this material had two serious implications. Firstly as the shooting script focussed on the second version of Oussietjie’s decision and her final decision to leave the bag as a talisman for her daughter Marie, the footage could end up representing her as a doddering old woman who changed her mind continually, a position both Nicky and I did not want to portray in the light of my own shifting experiences and our mutual

²³ Brown (2)

²⁴ Giannetti (341)

²⁵ Giannetti (341)

²⁶ Giannetti (341)

²⁷ Giannetti (341)

²⁸ Bassnett-McGuire (1980; 16) quoted in *Voicing the Text* (12)

discussions. The shift we encountered during the shoot also resulted in a dearth of footage as the shooting was based on the previous decision that the bag would be buried with her. In hindsight it became obvious that I did not comprehend the implications of the new decision at the time of the recordings and that I still grappled with decisions on how to portray the transition from the old bag to the new as discussed in Chapter Three.

The ideal length for documentaries to fit into broadcasting schedules, have been determined as either between twenty four and twenty six minutes or forty eight and fifty two minutes. These durations allow broadcasters to fit the programmes with programme announcements and advertisements into thirty minute or sixty minute slots. Although the first cut presented an entertaining and comprehensive narrative, Nicky did not have enough footage to include Oussiejie's latest wish, the decision to leave the bag to her daughter instead of insisting that the object be buried with her when she died. We were faced with a very unenviable situation. We could include the interviews that could or would represent Oussietjie as an indecisive person or exclude the material and represent only a section of the actual unfolding of the oral accounts, especially as other members of the family viewed her in this light during conversations around the future of the bag. To include more intellectual considerations on post-apartheid cultural debates and identity formation would require a rethink and a large amount of new footage. The end result would be a totally different documentary, a more academic reflection on the cultural implications of identity formation in a democratic South Africa instead of a simple narrative to highlight the heritage of the Schwartz family and the creation of an archive for the family and the indigenous knowledge system in their care.

As Nicky and I worked so closely and intensely with the material for several weeks, we felt that it was time to organise a series of previews and invite knowledgeable friends so that we could garner a sense of how the narrative was received by others. Letitia approved of our approach. As matters turned out, the unfolding narrative of the medicine bag and its keepers enthralled other viewers. The mostly constructive criticism confirmed our suspicions that we should include more footage directly related to the bag and enlarge sections on the massaging techniques. To address these issues and to find additional footage to expand the duration of the documentary we started to trawl through the research material. The initial interviews proved to contain a wealth of usable recordings, but the difference in technical quality between the research footage recorded on a home video machine and the material captured on commercial equipment would present a major stumbling block. After much deliberation we hit on a solution that would at the same time strengthen the narrative and extend the duration of the programme. The solution required an additional shooting day.

I re-assembled a skeleton version of the original crew and we recorded various shots of Letitia at work, viewing and transcribing the research material, replaying the footage on a Sony PD150, a more modern middle-of-the-range technical quality camera. The research footage would now be viewed on the viewfinder of the camera and, identifiable as research footage, the discrepancy in quality would be more acceptable. We also recorded additional interviews with Letitia on selected topics where the original material fell short in linking different sections of the story or where the initial recordings did not include enough information to make processes such as the massaging techniques accessible and interesting to future audiences.

Nicky integrated the new material into the existing narrative very successfully. This stylistic approach also fitted neatly into the methodology as discussed in Chapter Two in revealing some of the aspects of the research process as well as representing Letitia's endeavours as a researcher in a more structured and visual way.

As I was fast running out of time and funding, a few compromises became inevitable. A telephone call from Marie Petersen also put an end to my hopes to revisit Upington to record Oom Hans Schwartz collecting herbs in the veld. She left an urgent message for me to contact her and it was with great sadness that I learnt of Oom Hans' unexpected death. The family travelled to Upington for the funeral and although I really wanted to record the event, I did not have the financial resources. Even if Oom Hans was not a custodian of the bag, he knew where and how to find the indigenous plants required for preparing dried herbs for potions and for healing. And as mentioned in Chapter Three, during the recording period, we did spend an afternoon in the veld with him despite his protestations. He knew that we would find nothing — the rains were late and no leaves, roots or plants could be harvested till after enough moisture to re-vitalise the plants after a dry hot summer. The women from Raaswater also still collect roots and shoots from the veld when they gather firewood and although their reservations about permission from the owner of the land prevented us from recording their collecting trips, this may be the best option should more funding be forthcoming.

Financial considerations also forced us to use mood music²⁹ rather than commission a composer to write special music for the program. We selected tracks that supported and suited the mood of the narrative and the shots from the opening sequence. We combined this music with an audio piece of a recording where Oom Hans spoke Nama, worked particularly well.

The most important decision that I was forced to make related to the dilemma of how to deal with the change of mind that Oussietjie had expressed during the recording process. I agonised for days trying to solve the problem of having insufficient funds to include the latest development into the narrative when I, after reading selected chapters from Marita Sturken's book *Tangled Memories*, finally understood aspects of the relationship between memory, archive and audio-visual texts that would allow me to complete the narrative without including the latest version of the Springbok account, complete the documentary as it was and make it available to interested parties. In her chapter, *Camera Images and Notional Meanings*, Sturken writes that '[m]emory is often embodied in objects' and that early instances of portrait photography demonstrates a desire to 'fix an identity in an image' and the photograph then 'appears to hold memory in place and to offer a means to retrieve an experience of the past'. She also points to the differences between memory and the camera image. Whereas 'the camera image freezes memory [ies] of an event at a particular moment in time, memory is fluid and never remains static through time'.³⁰

²⁹ Mood music refers to a library of especially composed music for use at a far cheaper rate than commercial music or especially composed tracks.

³⁰ Sturken (19 – 21)

A conversation with Letitia, regarding our experiences of recording Oussietjie's memories and decisions about the future of the bag, confirmed the notion that the omission of the last shift from the final audio-visual narrative would not be detrimental to the authenticity of the documentary. This allowed me to let the post-production run to its conclusion, and it became clear that the multi-media archive, including the audio-visual text, generated by the medicine bag during the production process could never be more than a 'frozen' glimpse of how at **this** particular time during which the material was gathered, the Schwartz family memories and the traditional medicine indigenous knowledge system were reflected as represented by all the participants.