Translating Experience

(Re)Presenting the life of Gisèle d'Ailly

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This thesis was written in completion of the

Master's Degree in Comparative Women's Studies in Culture and Politics

Submitted to the Graduate Gender Programme

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Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has been a challenging process. As every creative development it had a logic that could not be predicted. For sure is that I could not have accomplished this thesis without the help and support of many people. Those people I like to thank here.

First of all, I would like to thank the members of Castrum Peregrini: Michael, Frans and Lars, for welcoming me into their house and working space at the Herengracht. I thank them for guiding me throughout my internship during which the primary ideas for this thesis were born. They allowed me the time and space to familiarize myself with conducting archival research and were always available to share thoughts on the matter. Furthermore they introduced me to the three researchers/artists whose contributions were essential to this thesis.

Accordingly, I would like to express my gratitude to Annet, Janina and Amie for offering me their time and trust in sharing their thoughts, their research, the lived experience of their journeys with me. I thank Annet especially for her help in the epistolary research during my internship, Janina for the nice talks we had on the topic besides the interview and Amie for introducing me into the captivating world of visual arts.

A tremendous thank you furthermore goes to my supervisor Kathrin, who has guided me not only through the process of thesis writing, but also during the rest of the MA Gender Studies and my internship. She always found a way to encourage me and take my thoughts further than I thought possible. Next to that, she challenged my analytical capacity and showed me to always think affirmatively. During the writing of the thesis she appeared to have the ability to read between my words, so that her comments, as annoying as they sometimes felt, always seemed in place. My gratitude also goes out to the Gender Studies department for enriching my views in ways that will continue to influence every next (professional) step I will take.

Note on the Transcripts

In this thesis I provide both the original Dutch transcriptions of my interviews and the English translations.

The following conventions are used in the transcripts:

[…]   indicates material that has been omitted from the transcript
[   ]   author's explanatory comments
/   indicates an interruption
…   indicates a short pause

Contents

(Re)Presenting Gisèle

An Introduction

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In 2014 I did an internship at *Castrum Peregrini,* a cultural institution at the Herengracht in Amsterdam, founded by Gisèle d'Ailly van Waterschoot van der Gracht[1] and Wolfgang Frommel in the aftermath of WWII. During this internship I engaged in an extensive epistolary research into the correspondence between Gisèle and Wolfgang. My aim, as a Gender student, was to 'get to know' Gisèle and get insight in her experiences living at Castrum Peregrini. It was after reading for at least a few weeks, that Frans Damman, one of the three current staff members of the foundation, brought me a plastic folder containing some old handwriting. He had found it upstairs, in one of the many rooms in which Gisèle had stored her lifetime of memories. I was told that it was Gisèle herself who had insisted on placing the files in this plastic envelope. No one had succeeded to convince her that the plastic material wasn't really suited to preserve paper, and especially not the ink. She was stubborn. So here it still was. Original drafts and fragments of letters Gisèle once intended to send, but never did. I became aware of a strange feeling that these weren't supposed to exist anymore, after she had passed away. Like the unfinished writings I keep in one of the drawers of my desk, which no one should ever read. The researcher in me decided to continue the investigation and see what was in the folder. Another letter to Wolfgang, dated around 1947, in which Gisèle unlocked her heart. She was heavily suffering from a recently finished relationship: Buri, a common friend of Gisèle and Wolfgang, had left her for another woman. The letter consisted of a few pages. On top of these attached by a paperclip, a small pink note. In a shaky handwriting that revealed that the author had aged, it said: 'So war es, aber es ging

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[1] From now on I will shortly refer to either 'Gisèle d'Ailly' or 'Gisèle'. This is not only for practical reasons, as her name is quite elaborate, but also because in the course of the internship and the epistolary research it became a habit to speak about her with the current members of the foundation on a first name basis as simply 'Gisèle'.

doch gut weiter'[2]. Maybe it was this discovery in the layers of Gisèle's own memory, in her reflections on herself, or simply the little pink paper and the plastic folder that she had touched; but suddenly I experienced a sensation like I was looking through her eyes. For a moment I could feel what the file must have meant to the woman who had preserved it all those years. Then, like with Proust's madeleine, this sensation flew away.

What I consider here as the most insightful discovery I experienced during my epistolary research project, can hardly be defined in research methodical terms. The fleeing, ungraspable character of understanding what it really is about when studying lived experience however intrigues me so much, that I wish to explore what we *can* tell about researching experience. In this thesis I therefore engage with three research projects concerning the life of Gisèle d'Ailly.

Gisèle d'Ailly

Gisèle d'Ailly (1912-2013) was a Dutch painter and glazier. During WWII she helped several young refugees, under which German Jewish students, by letting them hide in her small apartment at the Herengracht in Amsterdam, where she lived and worked until her death in 2013. Friend and spiritual 'father' of the group was Gisèle's friend, the German poet Wolfgang Frommel. He eventually moved in as well. For a long time he was seen as the key figure in the hiding history. He taught the hiders in literature, poetry and philosophy. The group became known as his circle and continued to engage in intellectual activity after the war under the name *Castrum Peregrini,* which means 'Castle of the Pilgrim'. The group remained living at the Herengracht 401 of which Gisèle over the years purchased all floors. Noteworthy is that the group, inspired by the life and work of the German poet Stefan George (1868-1933), was a strict 'Männerbund' (male society): women were formally excluded from participation in readings and lectures. Although Gisèle has spent the mayor part of her life close to the circle, she seems to only play a secondary role in early accounts of Castrum Peregrini's history (see e.g. Bock 2007). Also other women associated with the circle are not elaborately spoken of. As a feminist researcher I longed to learn about Gisèle's motivations and her experience of living at Castrum Peregrini. Throughout the epistolary research however, I kept wondering how to access and understand another person's sphere of experience. First there is the chaotic nature of experience that we might never grasp entirely.

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[2] Transl.:That was how it was, but it turned out to be fine anyway

All we have are fragments. Then, there is the question of how to present what we have found: picking and organizing the fragments.

Researching differently

Feminist scholars Rosemarie Buikema, Gabriele Griffin and Nina Lykke open their editorial introduction to the volume "Theories and Methodologies in postgraduate Feminist Research" with the following words:

> At the heart of much feminist research is a critical urge to challenge conventional ways of doing scientific and scholarly work. Feminist research is often postconventional and unorthodox. This volume gives and introduction to some of the ways in which feminist researchers do things *differently*. (Buikema 2011: 1. Emphasis added)

What is the concern regarding *differently*? Why do feminist methods qualify as postconventional and unorthodox? I would like to answer these questions by an example from my case study. In a documentary about Gisèle,[3] made in 1997, Manuel Goldschmidt, one of the former hiders was interviewed on the hiding history. He accordingly declared that had Gisèle been aware of the danger of helping Jewish refugees, she might never have started the whole enterprise. Wolfgang on the other hand, Goldschmidt emphasizes, knew what the group was doing and how dangerous it was. Goldschmidt presents Gisèle as unaware next to Wolfgang as a competent leader, who knew very well to hide his fears to protect Gisèle and the youngsters. One notices a silence in Goldschmidt's account concerning Gisèle and her contributions to the group. In his story her part is only small. Furthermore, Goldschmidt sums up her participation not as an act well considered, but rather as a coincidence. How are we to understand her participation in an affirmative sense?

Drawing from Simone de Beauvoir's seminal statement that "one is not born a women, but rather, becomes a woman" (De Beauvoir 1973: 301), feminists have insisted on gender as a category of analysis. Feminist historian Joan Scott (1986) explains how research that observes "the social organization of the relationship between the sexes" (1986: 1053) can "explain continuities and discontinuities and account for persisting inequalities as well as radically different social experiences" (ibid.: 1053,1054). To break the silence around Gisèle's contribution to Castrum Peregrini, previously displayed as insignificant, gender

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[3] *Het Steentje van Gisele* is a documentary film, directed byCees van Ede. Production: Maud Keus, NPS, 1997. Accessible through http://castrumperegrini.org/het-steentje-van-gisele. Last accessed 6 October 2014.

analysis provides an alternative. Researching *differently*, along the lines of gendered relationships, aims at a change in representation of women. Following Buikema, representation is here taken to refer to "the act of making present what is absent in reality or in language and culture" (2009: 72). As such, representation operates both on a concrete and on a symbolical level. Whereas the first level is primarily concerned with women's *presence* in historical accounts, the latter critically engages with the question *how* to present. While breaking with conventional patterns of portraying women as passive, inessential, as 'other'[4], Buikema argues, feminist researchers may "develop narratives and images that create new perspectives on the significance of being female, or male for that matter, in a given historical and geo-political context" (2009: 72). Gender sensitive research is concerned with speaking of women and their lives in a non-sexist and non-stereotypical way. Returning to the case study of Gisèle d'Ailly and as a response to Manuel Goldschmidt's account, I'm concerned with the question: how to tell Gisèle's story *differently*?

Breaking the silence

The research question I address in this thesis is: how do feminist researchers account for the knowledge they produce concerning the lived experience of Gisèle d'Ailly? The answer to this question is explored on the basis of the work of three researchers/artists – biography, documentary film and visual art - concerning the life of Gisèle and her heritage. Information on their respective working method(s) was collected in in-depth interviews which I conducted with each of the researchers/artists. In order of appearance in this thesis I now present these researchers/artists:

Annet Mooij (1961) is a non-fiction writer with a background in psychology and the social sciences. As an independent researcher she publishes works on historic-sociological topics. In 2013 she concluded the biography *Branie: Het Leven van Mina Kruseman (1839-1922)* (Mooij 2013) on feminist and author Mina Kruseman. Annet Mooij has been asked by the foundation Castrum Peregrini to research and write a biography of Gisèle d'Ailly's life. This research is currently in progress: Mooij explores written sources and meets former friends of Gisèle.

Janina Pigaht (1982) is a documentary filmmaker, who is interested in topics that serve a social purpose. Pigaht graduated in Film and Gender Studies. Earlier works are *Delfts*

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[4] Woman as 'other' here refers to the following passage from De Beauvoir's introduction to *The Second Sex*: "For him she is sex- absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other." (De Beauvoir 1973: 6)

Blauw meets Hijab (2010), portraying Dutch women who have converted to Islam, and *The Diaries of an Elephant* (2013), about the SS past of her grandfather. Janina Pigaht is currently shooting for a film about the history of Castrum Peregrini, in which she follows the current generation of inhabitants to learn more about the past.[5] She chose this particular moment in time, one year after Gisèle passed away, to follow the changes the current generation is faced with. This entails having to decide which of Gisèle's possessions are to remain at all and/or prominently in the house. Pigaht finds affective relations in this, which she calls 'nostalgia'. Through this powerful affect, Pigaht wishes to call into memory what the place has meant, and still means, for the people who lived its history.

Amie Dicke (1978) is a visual artist, who often works with existing images and spaces in which she looks for traces that intrigue her. She has been working with and in Castrum Peregrini for multiple years and made several installations inspired by the historic interior of the house. Since 2013 Dicke has been working on a project called 'Een huis als muze' (A house as muze), which explores the former studio of Gisèle. Dicke examines the marks and traces Gisèle, sometimes unconsciously, left in her working space. These can be little notes Gisèle has written, marks left by time under a pile of things, or even pieces of paper that have never been used. Dicke calls these 'important souvenirs' and uses them "to tell the story of the unmade" (2015). The souvenirs Dicke points to are published on a website[6] and will eventually appear in book form.

The three researchers/artists work independently from each other, yet all show awareness of the partial connection of all of their work to Gisèle d'Ailly's life. By taking into account the specific potential and limits of each medium – biography, documentary and visual art – I discuss the way in which each researcher/artist comes to an understanding of Gisèle d'Ailly's lived experience. It goes beyond the scope of this thesis to fully elaborate on the medium-specific features that I come across. I therefore focus on the methods as they are employed by different practitioners within the possibilities of the medium they work with. Accordingly I investigate which tools are at their disposal and under which conditions these are applied.

Examining the question how different practitioners in the arts and humanities employ research methods, I intend to break yet another silence. This time it concerns a silence within feminist research, detected by feminist scholar Gabriele Griffin as "a history of silence surrounding the research process in certain arts/humanities disciplines" (2011: 91). Griffin

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[5] http://janinapigaht.com/de-argonauten/. Last accessed 25 February 2014.
[6] http://important-souvnirs.com/. Last accessed 25 February 2015.

claims that although much research in these disciplines has been produced significant results, there is a lack of explanation on how these are exactly achieved (ibid.: 92). In order to reflect on research methods in the arts and humanities, a conventional conception on what constitutes 'good' research (a conception that includes such criteria as verifiability and falsifiability of data) does not provide an adequate framework (ibid.: 97). In this thesis I therefore look into alternative ways to conceptualise working definitions of research methods in the arts and humanities, which I primarily draw from *creative arts research*. This relatively new development on the crossroad of the academic and the artistic field proposes a 'logic of practice' as an analytical tool to conceive of research in the arts (Bolt 2004; Wesseling 2011). I argue that a feminist search for representing differently, stemming from "women's sense of alienation from dominant linguistic and epistemic practices" (Crary 2001: 379), is very much compatible with a move towards practice-led methodology in the arts and humanities.

In the first chapter I outline the key concepts that have been guiding my understanding of researching experience in the feminist arena. Here, I examine significant contributions of feminist standpoint theorists who employed the term 'experience' in the first place as a tool for liberation (see e.g. hooks 2004; Smith 2004). I consequently problematize the use of 'experience' in knowledge production drawing from the seminal articles 'Evidence of Experience' by feminist historian Joan Scott (1991) and 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of partial perspective' by feminist philosopher Donna Haraway (1988). From the influential ideas these scholars have brought into the debate, I extract a working definition for reflecting on the work of the researcher, namely that of *translation.*

In chapter two I elaborate on my own methodological considerations and working method. A close examination of the specificities of *creative arts research,* based on a logic of practice, explains how a focus on the processes that underpin creative research might lead to a better understanding of how products of art come into being and what they aim to bring across. After all, what researchers do to achieve their results is closely related to how they account for their product. I suggest to adopt the approach of creative arts research as an interpretive framework in which to analyse the working methods of the three projects – biography, documentary film and visual art – that form the base of this thesis. Furthermore, I offer an elaborate account of the concrete features of the participatory research that I have conducted with the three practitioners. I explain how I consider the three artists/researchers co-researchers in my project and how through in-depth interviewing I include their points of view in this thesis.

In subsequent chapters I explore more closely the specificities of the research processes underlying the three projects – biography, documentary film and visual art – that concern the life of Gisèle d'Ailly. Each of these projects is explored in a separate chapter. Chapter 3 goes into the way in which biographer Annet Mooij applies critical reflexivity in researching Gisèle's life story. After a brief analysis of the position of writing biography and its critique within the feminist tradition, I then examine more concretely what the researcher encounters in conducting biographical research. I address conducting archival and epistolary research, as well as interviewing. In Chapter 4 the focus shifts to a more 'relational' approach of subjectivity, embedding Gisèle's experience within the network of the community living at Castrum Peregrini. Besides a thorough oral history project concerning the personal memories of those who have been part of Castrum Peregrini, filmmaker Janina Pigaht engages with the material sources of 'the house' Castrum Peregrini. Pigaht shows how the house and the objects that one finds there provide a space for reenactment, in which the past is always present. This engagement with the material objects in Gisèle's house links this chapter to the project of visual artist Amie Dicke, which I address in Chapter 5. Dicke's approach to the spaces and objects that have been created by Gisèle reveals how these are actually active agents in producing knowledge. Drawing from new materialist insights, I argue how Dicke's project provides creative, new understandings of subjectivity and identity.

By comparing how different practitioners within different disciplines go about researching the lived experience of Gisèle d'Ailly, I finally arrive at an analysis which shows both the premises and the variety of creative feminist research.

Chapter 1
Translating Experience
Theoretical Reflections

Experience as a tool

Lived experience has figured as a key term in women's and gender studies since mid-20th century. In 'What to make of Identity and Experience in Twenty-first-century Feminist Research?' political scientist Allaine Cerwonka (2011) maps out how experience is the cornerstone of feminist research approaches such as oral life history, ethnography, standpoint theory, critical race and postcolonial research (2011: 60). These approaches share the idea of using experience as a fundament to knowledge. They ground their knowledge claims on people's accounts of their own experiences and understandings of the world they live in. Experience in these approaches gains a political value, since it is believed to provide an alternative to dominant ideology and discourses. This insight appeared in feminist debates alongside the emergence of consciousness raising groups in the 1960's and 1970's (ibid.: 62). Consciousness raising was based on a belief that identifying and comparing lived experience offered new ways of interpreting one's own life as well as social structures and collective political interests.

Feminist standpoint theorists (Dorothy Smith and Sandra Harding amongst others) have argued for the existence of 'a woman's way of knowing'. Philosopher of science Sandra Harding has pointed out in "The Science Question in Feminism" that what we call knowledge is actually socially situated (Harding 1986; see also Harding 1991). What usually is accepted as 'objective' knowledge and 'truth', she argues, is primarily based on the lives of white, middle to upper class men (Harding 1991: 121) and therefore not simply 'objective'. Accordingly, she argues that "women's different lives have been erroneously devalued and

neglected as starting points for scientific research and as the generators of evidence for or against knowledge claims." (Harding 1991: 121). Harding's critique is backed up by Dorothy Smith's critique of mainstream sociological methods:

> The constitution of an objective sociology is an authoritative version of how things are done from a position and as part of the practices of ruling in our kind of society. It has depended upon class and sex bases which make it possible for sociology to evade the problem that our kind of society is known and experienced rather differently from different positions within it. (Smith, 2004: 30)

Smith's words echo the larger feminist attack on positivist ideas of truth and objectivity. Not surprisingly the first occupation of these feminists was to give voice to the unheard groups in society (i.e. women, people of colour, homosexuals, the poor). According to standpoint theorists women's accounts of their own experiences and understandings of the world they live in provide an alternative to the discourse that is often imposed upon them by the dominant groups (i.e. white, male, wealthy). From bell hook's work on black feminist standpoint we learn how being 'located in the margin' can be empowering for oppressed people. Applying the views from position consciously brings hope for an important political transformation of society:

> I am located in the margin, I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance – as a location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We come to this space through suffering and pain, through struggle. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfills desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical collective space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world. (hooks 2004: 159)

Here hooks addresses the liberatory potential of conducting research from (black) women's standpoints. Along with other feminist standpoint theorists, she argues that oppressed groups are often in a position to offer an alternative reading of power structures such as race or patriarchy (see also Harding 1991; Hill Collins 1991; Mohanty 2003; Hartsock 2004; Smith 2004). The evident argument for using experience and standpoint methodologically is to do right to (marginalized) groups by giving them a voice, instead of doing them wrong by

speaking *for* them. However, for feminist standpoint theorists there is more to employing women's experience in research. Indeed, they argue that from this position one gains a better view on the world. Harding insists on feminist standpoint not merely being "a claim" (1991: 123). Smith affirms:

> Let me make clear that when I speak of 'experience' I do not use the term as a synonym for 'perspective'. Nor in proposing a sociology grounded in the sociologist's actual experience, am I recommending the self-indulgence of inner exploration or any other enterprise with the self as the sole focus and object. (Smith 2004: 29)

Emphasizing that standpoint is not to be reduced to 'claim' or 'perspective', Harding and Smith distance themselves from a purely psychological account of experience. Nonetheless, they insist on positionality as a window on reality that is transparent and truthful. In her critical reading of the use of experience Cerwonka rightfully points to the fact that standpoint approaches don't take identity or experience as part of the dynamic of power relations under scrutiny (2011: 64,65). Identity and experience are considered the end product or consequence of these structures.

Cerwonka contrasts the standpoint approach with post structural theories on identity (2011: 65). According to a post structural analysis the subject is not clearly separated from power structures, but rather produced by them. The paradox is that the very practices which subordinate people shape the consciousness of and possibilities for the self's identity (ibid., 65).[7] When we consider this entangled nature of identity and power, it becomes questionable if 'experience' is not overestimated as a starting point for research projects into marginalized groups. This is the critique that comes forward in the important article on the evidence of experience by the feminist historian Joan Scott.

Deconstructing *Experience*

In 'Experience' Joan Scott carefully deconstructs the term 'experience' (1992). Scott more precisely problematizes the claim to legitimacy on the "authority" of experience (1992: 24).

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[7] Cerwonka here draws from post structural analysis as first put forward by French philosopher Michel Foucault (1990). Foucault teaches us how power and subject formations are intrinsically linked to each other. Through discursive power the subject comes simultaneously into being as an agent and becomes capable of understanding the conditions of its position. Subjectivity, according to Foucault, is thus a dynamic concept that is never finalized. Also Judith Butler explains in her seminal publication *Gender Trouble* (1990) how the same (social) practices that subordinate people, determine what tools they have to articulate their situation.

She argues that what counts as experience neither qualifies as "uncontestable evidence" or as "an originary point of explanation" (ibid.: 24). Although the claims on a particular women's kind of experience has helped to legitimize a critique of the false claims to objectivity of traditional historical accounts (ibid.: 30), she states, feminist research based on a subsumed foundational kind of experience only multiplies stories and subjects. It fails to take into account the workings of the ideological systems that excluded their narratives in the first place. Scott explains:

> When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built. Questions about the constructed nature of experience, about how subjects are constituted as different in the first place, about how one's vision is structured – about language (or discourse) and history – are left aside. (1992: 25)

Here Scott criticizes the practice of studying experience outside of the context in which it is constructed. Experience is not to be considered transparent, but always influenced by the subject's historical and linguistic situation. How we understand our experience is inevitably intertwined with discourse. Scott argues that following this discursive nature of experience the subject and its context cannot be separated. Considering the individual subject as a point of departure "reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems – those that assume that the facts of history speak for themselves" (ibid.: 25). Scott points to the implication of adopting this frame as naturalizing oppositions as man/woman, nature/culture, heterosexual/homosexual. By taking these social categories as for granted, the opposition between 'man' and 'woman' is reaffirmed. The influence this dualism acts out on the individual's experience is however not acknowledged. As such, studies based on a concept of transparent experience lack a critical engagement with the workings of society.

Instead of considering women's experiences as 'authentic' events, Scott proposes to examine the discourse in which they come into being. "Subjects are constituted discursively and experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning" (ibid.: 34). Experience does not take place in a realm of reality outside of discourse, but is always embedded. We only understand our experiences in the framework which is available to us. Scott therefore proposes to question the belief in the natural occurrence of social dualisms and aims to think further. Instead of attributing characteristics that distinguish categories of people from presumed norms (ibid.:

34), as research based on experience tends to do, feminist research ought to engage critically with the dominant epistemological framework. Only when subverting this hegemony, we can allow for differing views on reality. Only avoiding "writing the history of difference, the history, that is, of the designation of 'other'," (ibid.: 22) opens new ways for thinking about change (ibid.: 38). "What counts as experience", Scott states, "is neither self-evident nor straightforward, it is always contested, and always therefore political." (ibid.: 37). According to Scott, researching women's lived experience ought to go hand in hand with studying the discursive nature of experience in "the politics of its construction" (ibid.: 37). In studying (life) history a shift is therefore needed that takes the emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation.

Following Scott's critique on the subsumed transparency of experience, it is surprising that still a lot of research projects draw from a simplified concept of experience (Cerwonka, 2011: 65). Cerwonka points out how methodological use of experience still often "relies upon and reinstates a notion of identity that reproduces humanist notions of the subject" (ibid.: 60). She argues:

> What they [research designs that build from 'experience'] ignore is the fact that identity and experience are unstable, fluid and mainly unconscious products of social negotiations that speak us, rather than things which are easily intelligible to us. All of these factors call into question taking someone's account of their experience as the window onto social reality – rather than reading this account as just one piece of a complex social location." (ibid.: 67)

Cerwonka here explains how personal narratives and accounts of our experience are at best partial understandings and do not offer a full analysis of our social environment (if this last point is even desirable). We cannot assume that anyone can easily explain our subjective experience of life, as we have a limited capacity of consciously observing all factors at work. Although these considerations have now found their way in our theoretical understanding of 'experience', Cerwonka points to a discrepancy between these theories and research practices. She states that much research that builds knowledge from others' 'experience' is in tension with the theories of identity and power that many of the same researchers embrace (ibid.: 71). She concludes:

> If identity is socially produced from power relations, then in addition to accounting for alternative standpoint or identities, qualitative research must also explain the terms on which identities and experience rest, and it should explain how they incorporate, reflect, stand in tension with dominant ideologies or discourses. (ibid.: 71)

Cerwonka here provides a glimpse of what qualitative research which takes into account the critique on the evidence of experience may look like. She hereby hints at what feminist philosopher Donna Haraway has famously named 'Situated Knowledges' (1988). In an affirmative approach to both alternative viewpoints and critical theory on subject formation, Haraway renews our view on science as a whole.

Situated Knowledges

In her seminal article "Situated Knowledges: *The Science Question in Feminism* and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" Donna Haraway powerfully responds to standpoint theorist Sandra Harding's claim of woman's privileged view on the world. In this article Haraway first establishes the foundational myths of traditional objectivity. She subverts the idea of an "immortal" and "omnipotent" (1988: 580) observer who "discovers" (ibid.: 593) the world 'out there'. Haraway denies the existence of a universal truth knowable to the human subject. She objects to the "conquering gaze" of the traditional scientist who claims "the power to see and not to be seen" (ibid.: 581). Haraway calls this practice an illusion, "a god trick: a way of seeing everything from nowhere" (ibid.: 581). However, arguing that the knowledge we produce depends solely on our social position (radical social constructionism / relativism) does not provide a better alternative according to Haraway. In the light of radical constructionism all knowledge is theorized as "power moves, not moves towards truth" (ibid.: 576). Haraway argues that such a relativist approach does a similar kind of work as the traditional totalitarian approach. Whereas universalism claims infinite vision from nowhere, relativism is a way of being nowhere, while "claiming to be everywhere equally" (ibid.: 584). Haraway declares:

> Relativism is the perfect mirror twin of totalization in the ideologies of objectivity; both deny the stakes in location, embodiment, and partial perspective; both make it impossible to see well. Relativism and totalization are both "god tricks" promising vision from everywhere and nowhere equally and fully, common myths in rhetorics surrounding Science. But it is precisely

in the politics and epistemology of partial perspectives that the possibility of sustained, rational, objective inquiry rests. (Ibid.: 584)

Here Haraway argues that totalitarian and relativist approaches make out two sides of the same coin. Both are based on "false vision" promising "transcendence of all limits and responsibility" (ibid.: 582). The detached, omniscient observer is disembodied and as such cannot be hold accountable. Knowledge from such a view is, according to Haraway, irresponsible because it is unable to be called into account (ibid.: 583). Haraway instead argues for a kind of objectivity which allows for responsibility. She continues the visual metaphor of knowledge production insisting on "the particularity and embodiment of all vision" (ibid.: 582). Haraway speaks of embodiment in a sense that is not restricted to organic embodiment, but in a way that shows that vision is always active and therefore particular to the 'eyes that see' (be these organic ones or technological mediations). Haraway's moral reads "only partial perspective promises objective vision" (ibid.: 583). Only when we become answerable for the knowledge we produce, one can construct objectivity. This feminist version of objectivity is not "innocent" (ibid.: 582): it is about "limited location" and "situated knowledge" (ibid.: 583). Not every perspective will do however. Haraway gives into the idea that seeing from "the peripheries and the depths" (ibid.: 583), from the position of the oppressed, so-called 'subjugated standpoints' (i.e. those of women), is preferred since it seems to promise "more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world" (ibid.: 584). Indeed the less powerful have nothing to lose from a critical reading of society. Haraway warns however for the danger of romanticizing the views of the oppressed or appropriating the vision of less powerful groups in society by claiming to see from their standpoint (ibid.: 584). "To see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic, even if 'we' 'naturally' inhabit the great underground terrain of subjugated knowledges" (ibid.: 584). The question regarding objectivity should therefore not be who sees best, but rather *how* to see (from below). Feminist objectivity is not about "unlimited instrumental power" (ibid.: 579) but about "interpretation, *translation*, stuttering and the partly understood." (ibid., 589: my emphasis). This version of objectivity does not claim to be omniscient, but rather critical. Feminist science engages with the world as a complex, contradictory reality. Haraway argues that the world is never, we never are ourselves, immediately present to us (ibid.: 585). Knowledge production is always mediated and science therefore always entails an act of conversion. Haraway opposes this view on science as "a search for translation, convertibility, mobility of meanings, and universality" (ibid.: 580) to a doctrine of "representation or

decoding or discovering" (ibid.: 593). Other than the traditional scientist who deciphers a world formerly unknown, the feminist researcher aims to produce enforceable, reliable knowledge (ibid.: 580). Haraway argues for a doctrine, and a practice, of objectivity that "privileges contestation, deconstruction, passionate construction, webbed connections". (ibid.: 585). Haraway argues for a science that embraces the complex and contradictory nature of reality. This includes that of the scientific knower him/herself, since subjectivity is multidimensional (ibid.: 586). Haraway asserts:

> The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another" (ibid.: 586).

Knowledge produced by this 'split' and 'contradictory' subject allows for multidimensional view, since this subject is open to "mobile positioning" (ibid.: 585). Instead of a simplifying view from above, Haraway proposes to look from the complex structure of a body itself. Differing views then become possible. Disrupting the traditional logic of unified theory and differing views as contradictory, as well as other epistemic oppositions, Haraway generates the following insight:

> "Feminist accountability requires a knowledge tuned to reasonance, not to dichotomy. […] ` Feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning" (ibid.: 588).

Here Haraway confirms material-semiotic fields as a vantage point, which implies that all subjects and objects are material-discursive entities. As such, she also disrupts the dichotomy between the knowing subject and the 'silent' object. Instead, Haraway argues that the object of knowledge be pictured as an "actor and agent" and not as "slave to the master" (ibid.: 592). Situated knowledges as such aim to promote conversation and deny the idea that we are in charge of the world (ibid.: 594). Feminist objectivity, according to Haraway, thus offers "something quite extraordinary, that is, knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination" (ibid.: 585).

Indeed, feminist anthropologist Gloria Wekker (2006) acknowledges in the introduction to her oral history project concerning the life of 'Misi Juliette Cummings', an

eighty-four-year-old Afro-Surinamese working-class woman, the importance of her 'situatedness' as a researcher. The stories that 'Miss Julliette' revealed to Wekker were the result of their personal relationship. It was only through such a relationship in which both the researcher and the research subject are acknowledged as active agents, that Wekker gained access to and 'embodied knowledge' (Haraway 1988: 581) in the stories revealing the complex nature of a person. Instead of hiding behind the role of an invisible and omniscient third person narrator, Wekker got 'real' access to her informant's stories (Wekker 2006: 3). Wekker affirms that through their relationship 'Miss Juliette's' life history "offer[s] a reading of a multiplicitous self; a self that is multilayered, complex, integrating various instantiations of 'I'." (ibid.: 2). This view on subjectivity as a complex and contradictory contrasts with the humanist assumption that we can separate human nature from its environment: undo it of social and psychological organization like we can peel off the layers of an onion, to arrive at a 'core'.[8]

Feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2011) instead offers a figuration of a 'nomadic subject', arguing that "there is a noticeable gap between how we live […] and how we represent to ourselves this lived existence in theoretical terms and discourses" (2011: 4). The figuration of the nomadic subject contrasts with the conventional view of human nature as coherent and is "split, in-process, knotted, rhizomatic, transitional" (ibid.: 3), accounting for "both the external and the internal complexity of subjectivity" (ibid.: 4). Braidotti argues that the figurations of subjects as nomads is a way of critically engaging with these complexities (ibid.: 4). She refers to it as a 'cartographical tool' that maps our situated, i.e. embedded and embodied, social positions (ibid.: 4). Following Haraway (1988), Braidotti argues that nomadic subjectivity is "ethically accountable" and "empowering" (ibid.: 4).

Both Haraway's and Braidotti's standpoints show that there is an important political and intellectual reason to scrutinize our research methodologies. While many feminist scholars have successfully pointed out the fallacy of positivism, there are still challenges to take in producing research methodologies that provide *accountable* knowledges. Haraway urges feminists to develop their epistemological framework further and think beyond claiming that there is not one singular position from which or universal explanation to view the world. Positionality matters, but it is not enough that researchers, as also pointed out by Joan Scott

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[8] This compelling metaphor of human nature as the layers of an onion was first described and criticized by anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), stating that this image was 'an illusion', since humans are so entangled with where and who they are and what they belief that it is inseparable from them (1973: 35).

(1992), multiply stories by advertising different standpoints on a given issue. Both Scott (1992) and Haraway (1988) claim that qualitative research needs to offer arguments and explanations of how and why things have come to be as they are. Researchers all the while have to be conscious of their own partiality as knowing subject. To this end, Haraway argues that we have to return to the fundamental question of *how* a researcher can produce research that draws from other people's experiences and viewpoints.

In this thesis the 'how' question is central to my engagement with the three research projects concerning the life of Gisèle d'Ailly. I am particularly interested how different researchers account for the way in which Gisèle's experiences, identity, views and time are presented in their work. Although the projects under study do differ in various ways, I argue that what these researches have in common is "a search for translation" (Haraway, 1988) of their 'subject matter'. In her own way, every researcher aims to address at least one aspect of Gisèle's life that is convertible into text or image. Before I elaborate on my own methodological reflections of studying these different methods, I conclude this chapter with an explication of the term 'translation' as an umbrella term to describe the feminist researcher's activity. I contrast the concept of translation to the much used term of 'representation'.

The act of translating

A lot of feminist research has been done on the politics of representation in research underlining the difficulty of understanding the complexity of our social realities (see e.g. Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins, 1998; Lykke, 2011).[9] In an effort to avoid speaking *for* others, many researchers have insisted that they can only provide a vehicle for the voices of (marginalized) groups to speak for themselves. However, feminists have pointed out that there is no unproblematic, neutral way to allow others to speak for themselves: to re-present them. The epistemological wanderings I have discussed in the previous sections make me wonder if the very term of 'representation' is an adequate description of the work of the feminist researcher. Following Haraway's critique of the researcher who 'discovers' or 'deciphers' a pre-existing world 'out there' (Haraway, 1988), I question the 're' in representation. Re-

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[9] Here I refer to the notion of *intersectionality* as launched by critical race theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Crenshaw, amongst others, has argued that the experience of black women cannot be understood in a single-axis framework of gender analysis, since these women are discriminated on multiple factors (gender and race). Intersectionality more broadly then refers to a multiple axes analysis of sociocultural categories (i.e. gender, race, sexuality, class, ethnicity) to understand subject formation. An intersectional approach takes into account that the position of the subject can never be reduced to a single isolated axe of analysis and investigates how multiple factors of identification interact with each other.

presentation implies a pre-existing entity, which is known and can be reproduced with all the power structures it comes with. To enable a critical approach to research, I propose to adopt *translation* as an understanding of the work of the researcher.

As a less charged and, in my view, better alternative, the term of *translation* as an analytical tool depicts the relation between the researcher's product and the researched. In 'Translating Encounters' sociologist Jaana Loipponen similarly adopts 'translating' as a key term to define research praxis, since this "involves a process of choices made in relation to the intentions and preferences of the researcher" (2007: 52,53). Translation in this context is understood beyond its use for linguistic and cultural transfers. It entails a process that expresses "the crux of research praxis" (ibid., 53) in which the researcher has to respond to empirical findings. Research praxis, as a locus of power, implies ethical decisions which do not have a static, unchanging foundation (ibid., 54). Knowledges produced in life history research can only be accounted for by transparency on the researcher's position and choices, as argued by Haraway (1988). Feminist sociologist Liz Stanley also refers to the feminist principles of producing accountable knowledges as discussed in the previous section, when stating that the researcher ought to be concerned with "analytic reflexivity" (Stanley, 1990a: 3,4). For Stanley this entails a conscious intellectual commitment to self-reflection in order to account for "how we come to understand what we do" (ibid.: 4). 'Tranlation' serves as an analytical tool to describe this process. More concretely, 'translation' in this sense concerns the act of converting the empirical data received in life history research into text (or image). Other than *representation,* as well as *understanding* and *interpreting,* I believe the concept of translating to more clearly show how information received in life history research is consequently shaped by the researcher. 'Translating' implies that this information is not simply 'objective' and thus takes into account feminist considerations concerning knowledge production. Indeed, Haraway affirms: "Translation is always interpretive, critical, and partial. Here is a ground for conversation, rationality, and objectivity – which is power-sensitive, not pluralist, 'conversation'." (1988: 589). The term translation implies that information is not merely copied or multiplied. It is a critical engagement which entails its own set of ethical choices.

In the famous essay on 'The task of the translator' of 1923 by the literary critic Walter Benjamin, the nature of translation is deconstructed. Benjamin expands on the act of translating, arguing that a translation never is, and should not be, a merely literal representation of what's there in 'the original'. He asserts:

The language of a translation can – in fact, must – let itself go, so that it gives voice to the *intentio* of the original not as reproduction but as harmony, as a supplement to the language in which it expresses itself, as its own kind of *intention*. […] A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully (Benjamin 2000: 3)

Although Benjamin here speaks about language-to-language translations, I underline the similarities in the process of translating a text from one language into another and converting research data into text or image. In every translation, in a linguistic or a larger sense, one finds interaction between the translator/researcher and an 'original'. The translator shapes this original to produce a separate work that is understandable for a certain public. Translating is not equal to copying or reproducing, since it implies a convergence that differentiates the former from the latter. It is the task of the translator to produce a text in harmony with, yet not the same, as the original. Talal Asad affirms how translation is a dynamic process which leaves neither the original nor the receiving language unchanged. He states: "The relevant question therefore is not how tolerant an attitude the translator ought to display toward the original author (an abstract ethical dilemma) but how she can test the tolerance of her own language for assuming unaccustomed forms" (Asad 1993: 189-90). Asad described this phenomenon as "unequal languages". Inequality of languages, he states, is a product of power. Asad alternatively proposes to accept and honour the differences between languages. He explains that translation is thus not about adjustment, but about the presence of the original in the new site (Asad 1993: 199). In order to understand translation as not being an exercise of power, we once again have to embrace difference.

In studying different translating methodologies in this thesis – biography, documentary and visual art – I aim to explore how each researcher in its own medium accounts for her 'translation'. I thereby recognize the differences between these mediums as being different languages. In each project I focus on the work of the researcher, informed by feminist ethical perspectives to provide transparency and show awareness of the translating process. In the next chapter I will elaborate on how I as a researcher account for my understanding of the processes that underpin the research project in this thesis.

Chapter 2
Shared Conversations

Rethinking Methodology

Breaking the silence on research methods in the arts and humanities

Discussing how various researchers, active in the arts and humanities, employ ways to understand the life of Gisèle d'Ailly, connects to the issue raised by feminist scholar Gabriele Griffin in 'Writing about Research Methods in the Arts and Humanities' (2011). In this article Griffin discusses the paucity of research method texts in the arts and humanities. In contrast to the explosion of these kinds of texts in the social sciences, Griffin finds it surprising that there is such a silence on research methods in the arts and humanities (2011: 92). She thinks this silence is in some respects strange, "considering that significant numbers of art/humanities academics in the UK – as in other countries – are active researchers who clearly employ research methods to produce their often stunning and paradigm-shifting results. Yet they have remained surprisingly silent about what it is that they do to achieve these results." (ibid.: 92).[10] Griffin describes the prevailing attitude towards discussing methods in the humanities as reluctant, prompted by views as 'a lot of research methods can't be taught' and 'you pick it up by doing it' (ibid.: 92). Also Allaine Cerwonka (2011) observes in her concluding remarks of 'What to make of identity and experience in twenty-first century feminist research' that although across disciplines feminist researchers are engaged in developing new models, not much is published about it:

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[10] Reflecting on the education I received during my BA in Philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, I have to admit not having been trained in any particular research method other than logics and critical (text) analysis. Neither quantitative research methods nor interviewing or visual methods were explicitly addressed.

[M]uch feminist research and discussion of methods spends a great deal of time discussing the problems of disempowering others through research representations and very little time thinking about what researchers' creative, analytical arguments about various objects of inquiry might look like. (2011: 71)

Both Griffin and Cerwonka clearly urge feminist researchers to engage in writing and publishing about their research methods; "proudly reclaiming those methods and making them more explicitly our own" (Griffin, 2011: 101). Griffin points to the importance for the researcher to be able to articulate what research processes she has undertaken, not in the least as research funders increasingly require the details of method/ologies underpinning one's research (ibid.: 91).[11] Furthermore, Griffin argues, such reclamation will be beneficial since it encourages dialogue and collaboration across disciplines and inspires researchers to think divergently about the kinds of research they might engage in (ibid.: 101).[12] Cerwonka adds that discussing methodology will benefit theory and practice mutually (2011: 72). On the one hand it will "enrich the dialogue between theories of identity (especially theories that challenge humanist assumptions) and methodology" (ibid.: 72), allowing theory to find its way into practice. On the other hand "the rich empirical insights we can gain from qualitative research are potentially very productive for further complicating the theoretical concepts animating a great deal of feminist research" (ibid.: 72). Such dialogue thus provides the possibility of critical questioning the position of both the researcher and the researched that challenge prevailing positivist notions of omniscient research. These are the "shared conversations" (Haraway, 1988) that might change the way we think about the way we conduct science and might lead to the insight that, indeed, we are not in charge of the world.

The difficulty of articulating research methods in the arts and humanities resides precisely in their complexity (Griffin 2011: 95). Griffin divides skills (techniques for handling material, for example library search skills, IT skills, presentational skills) from methods (the way in which the researcher chooses to interpret the subject matter, for example through interviewing, textual or visual analysis) and methodology (the perspective the researcher bears on the analysis, for example a feminist or postcolonial one) to understand different

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[11] Griffin explains 'methodology' as the perspective one brings to bear on one's research and 'method' as how one carries out one's research (2011: 95). In practice the two concepts appear nonetheless closely intertwined.

[12] Interdisciplinarity is a key concept within Women's and Gender Studies, since "[t]he academic study of women and gender typically transgresses disciplinary boudnaries, even where these studies began as course units within disciplinary degrees. This characteristic process of reaching beyond established disciplines is partly a function of the questions asked, which arose initially out of the political concerns of a radical social movement, and not out of the paradigm of any discipline". (Andermahr, Lovell and Wolkowitz 2000: 135-36).

aspects of the research process (ibid.: 95). The choice of the particular methodology and methods of a research have great influence on the research outcomes and selection is thus an important aspect of the research process (ibid.: 95, 96). Such selection implies a narrowing down of the skills, methods and methodologies available to the researcher. However, in practice research requires often more than one research skill or method. For instance, in writing biography, as I will discuss in the next chapter, there is a broad array of possibilities of methods that can be used. One might conduct archival research, textual and document analysis, interviews or even visual methods. Methodological reflections are interdependent with method-related choices. For example in conducting archival research, the nature of the archive and the agenda of the establishment may differ from that of the research and the researcher. The desire to keep particular memories of a person might lead to the preservation of certain material and the destruction of the materials that are not in line with this desire. Understanding the reason why information in the archive is preserved thus helps the researcher to interpret her findings and to search for what might have been 'lost'. The incompleteness of archives consequently might lead to the use of other methods to 'complete' (if this is ever possible) the research.

Not only in biographical research the researcher is faced with the partiality of evidence. It is a common phenomenon in the arts and humanities and it is therefore difficult to decide on what constitutes 'good' research in these disciplines (Griffin 2011: 96). Biographies, to continue my example, are often criticised for being incomplete or lacking the inclusion of certain information. Griffin points out how the criteria usually applied in the (hard/natural) sciences are not fit to evaluate research in the humanities (ibid.: 97). These are criteria such as verifiability of data (can the same outcomes be produced independently), falsifiability (can the outcomes be proven wrong), reliability (can the same results be reproduced), generalisibility (are the results true of all other texts/people in the same category). Considering the nature of much arts/humanities research and a "changing understanding of what research can and cannot do/be" (ibid.: 97), scholars in these disciplines have, for quite some time, questioned the appropriateness of these criteria in their discipline (see e.g. Phillips and Jørgensen 2002: 182-212; M. M. Gergen and K. J. Gergen 2003). Following their critique new criteria such as 'plausibility' and 'reflexivity' have come to gain ground in the arts and humanities (Smith and Deemer 2003). These criteria highlight the partiality of much research in the humanities and accordingly the importance of the position of the researcher accounting for her findings.

As the discussions on what constitutes 'good' research (in the arts/humanities) continues, I would argue that thinking that research methods can't be taught and are something learned along the way are not final answers to the question of what to make of research methods in the arts and humanities. Rather they provide a clue how to go about discussing methodology in these disciplines. If methods can only be learned by practice, then maybe we should focus more precisely on the process of conducting research. Here recent developments in the field of creative arts research might offer some fruitful new perspectives on how to evaluate the (creative) process of research.

The artist as researcher

In *See it Again, Say it Again: the Artist as Researcher* art critic and theorist Janneke Wesseling defines the relatively new branch of 'creative arts research' as "research *in and through art"* (2011: 2). In contradistinction to 'research *into* art', such as art theory and cultural studies, she claims, this kind of arts research aims at bringing theory and practice together (ibid.: 2). Through the prism of artistic practice, she argues, we learn how practical action (the making) and theoretical reflection (the thinking) are inextricably linked (ibid.: 2). Creative arts research as such is conducted from the viewpoint of the (visual) artist instead of from a standpoint 'outside'. It is important to consider this difference, as is argued that the position of the artist as *researcher* has erroneously been ignored for a long time (Wesseling 2011: 2, 3; Visser 2011: 256). Wesseling argues how the romantic image of the artist as a recluse in a studio from which he or she sends messages out into the world, was prevalent until far into the 20th century (2011: 4). The artist-researcher on the contrary distinguishes him/herself from this view in proclaiming a reflexive attitude: by making statements about the production of the work and the thought processes that underpin it (ibid.: 4). In this approach art becomes a 'self-critical practice', rather than being 'the rendering of a totality' or a simple 'representation' (ibid.: 6). The difference is made in the level of self-awareness of works of art, Wesseling explains: Works of art embody a meta-element, a conceptual-moment; the work of art is 'aware' of itself, of its own position. (ibid.: 7) Wesseling states that works of art ought to question and comment on themselves. I argue that here the reflexive nature of the work of art meets Haraway's criterium for the production of accountable knowledges (Haraway 1988): Wesseling's artist-researcher is locatable and as such can be held responsible for his/her production.

Artist Barbara Visser underlines the reflexive aspect of the work of the artist, comparing it to the work of an orchestrator: "Besides making *things,* the artist can also

accomplish something else: bring together different forms of knowledge and insight like an orchestrator. Art ultimately centres around ideas and assuming responsibility for interconnecting them" (2011: 266). The bringing together of different forms of knowledge and insights, Visser here refers to, does answer the question of what the artist attempts to do, but still does not explain *how* the artist produces novel insights. It is the *how* in the work of the artist, Janneke Wesseling argues, that is relevant to understand creative arts research methodology (2011: 8).

Considering that in artistic practice theory and practice go hand in hand, Wesseling argues that the appropriate question to ask is 'how do artists think?'. Here Wesseling draws from Hannah Arendt's *Thinking* (1978), in which Arendt elaborates upon the distinction made by Immanuel Kant between two modes of thinking, *Vernunft* and *Verstand.* Arendt defines *Vernunft* as 'reason' and *Verstand* as 'intellect'. The distinction between reason and intellect, Arendt argues, coincides with the crucial difference between *meaning* and *knowledge.* She writes:

> The great obstacle that reason *(Vernunft)* puts in its own way arises from the side of the intellect *(Verstand)* and the entirely justified criteria it has established for its own purposes, that is, for quenching our thirst, and meeting our need, for knowledge and cognition. […] The need of reason is not inspired by the quest for truth but by the quest for meaning. And truth and meaning are not the same. The basic fallacy, taking precedence over all specific metaphysical fallacies, is to interpret meaning on the model of truth. (1978: 15)

Here Arendt explains how 'reason' has its origins in our need to wonder and our need to ask questions to which we know there is no answer, because there is no verifiable knowledge to answer these kinds of questions. Reason therefore goes beyond the limitations of certainty and proof: that what we call 'knowledge'. 'Knowledge' is determined by our 'intellect', the other mode of thinking. In this mode of thinking the thinking is a means to an end, that is, to attain truth. Our 'intellect' is a drive to understand perceptible reality and explain this reality by the means of natural laws. 'Intellect' is the belief in an authentic world, which is knowable. 'Reason' is the pure activity of thinking that leads to an unceasing "quest for meaning". This quest will never end because of constant doubt.

It is 'reason' that informs the work of art (Wesseling 2011: 11). Arendt therefore calls the work of art a "thought-thing", which "quenches our thirst for meaning" (1971: 62). Wesseling affirms that art provides no solutions and has no objective beyond itself (2011: 11).

She emphasizes that thinking in art is to seek meaning instead of truth: "The verb 'to know' implies knowledge, evidence and is therefore not applicable to art or to what artists do. 'Knowing' harks back to concepts and criteria that belong in the world of exact science and with a mode of thinking that, in essence, is alien to art." (ibid.: 12). It is through the way the thinking takes shape in art, that the work of art is not limited by a quest for ultimate answers. Mostly the thinking process in art is characterized by "intuitive moments" and "flashes of insight", which are rather opposed to actively seeking truth (ibid.: 12). According to Wesseling the artwork itself embodies this transcending mode of thinking (ibid.: 12). She argues:

> The work of art is not the end product of the artist's thinking, or just for a moment at best; it is an intermediate stage, a temporary halting of a never-ending thought process. As soon as the artist has allowed the work as object out into the world, he takes leave of it. His activity with regard to this specific work now belongs to the past, and at this point the beholder, the public, becomes involved in the work. The beholder picks up the train of thought as it is embodied in the work of art. (ibid.: 12)

Wesseling explains how the work of art is actually "the materialization of thinking" (ibid.: 11): thinking rendered visible. The function of the work of art is then to generate meaning and to affect its spectator by giving direction to the quest of meaning. Artist Barbara Visser affirms that the deployment of alternative research methods and the introduction of alternative forms of logic is the most important aspect of the visual arts (2011: 256).

Building knowledge from practice

In this thesis I aim to employ the practice-based approach as described in creative arts research to explore how different 'artist-researchers' - a biographer, a filmmaker and a visual artist - come to an understanding of the lived experience of Gisèle d'Ailly. I adopt Wesseling's term of the 'artist-researcher' to both consider the research projects from an academic as well as an artistic viewpoint. Although the three projects vary in form, I argue that each of them is an artful enterprise and as such seeks meaning rather than simple truth. Each project is based upon a feminist engagement as expressed by standpoint theorists, by giving visibility to the life of Gisèle d'Ailly. The starting point in each project concerning Gisèle is the material and stories Gisèle has left herself, and each project is undertaken by a female artist-researcher. This is not to say that their being woman allows for a 'good'

interpretation. What is most important is that each artist-researcher is aware of the need of critical interpretation in her work. This research therefore considers the three projects not as mere representations, but as self-critical practices that actively engage in 'translating experience'.

By bringing together the voices of artists from different disciplines, this thesis explores what feminist research into lived experience may look like when theoretical reflection and practice come together. The praxis of my research project, as described by the philosopher and art historian Elizabeth Grierson, is "thinking through the materiality of practice to locate sustainable methodologies through which such practice can be systematically investigated" (Grierson 2009: 1). Drawing from the practical knowledge brought in by each researcher/artist from her field, provides insights in creative methodology that could hardly be obtained otherwise. By combining the perspectives taken from different disciplines, this thesis benefits from a maximum of insights into the working field of translating experience. Keeping in mind that every presentation is by definition partial, I do not argue for or against any material form. This thesis rather approaches every art form in an affirmative manner.

With a focus on *how* the three makers I study in this project think, I engage with the process that foregoes the actual result. The aim of this thesis is conform that of creative research "to establish a way of claiming alternatives to the more orthodox social sciences or scientific research paradigms" (Grierson 2009: 5). Through its creative character and its focus on feminist practice this research project avoids to reproduce the biases found for example in earlier accounts on the history of Castrum Peregrini and the role of Gisèle within it.

Conversations with the artist-researchers

Insight in the three projects studied here is gained through a 'participatory research' in which I collaborate with the 'insiders' of creative practice, i.e. the three artist-researchers that are currently working on their projects concerning the life of Gisèle (Hesse-Biber 2014: 147). With each of them I conducted a semi-structured, in-depth interview. Since the aim of my research is to explore the individual understanding of the work of the artist-researcher their viewpoint, I deemed interviewing as the most appropriate research method. In-depth interviewing in particular is believed to be valuable to gain in-depth understanding of the experienced realities of the respondents (Hesse-Biber 2014: 189). These interviews enabled me to gather insight in the "meanings" that each artist-researcher attributes to her working method, not necessarily to make generalisations about these methods (ibid.: 192).

Prior knowledge about each project has been gained through informal conversations during my time as an intern at Castrum Peregrini. Having conducted research into the life of Gisèle prior to this current research has provided a common ground to start the conversations. It granted me a position as an 'insider' (Hesse-Biber: 198): I confronted questions I had been faced with myself as a researcher during my epistolary research on Gisèle. Although one might argue that this position carries with it the risk of facilitating blind spots, I consider my prior experiences as a researcher of Gisèle, including informally bonding with the three artist-researchers before commencing the interviews, as a benefit. The fact that I was already familiar with recurring themes, such as the location of the house at the Herengracht where Gisèle spent most of her life or being familiar with the history of Castrum Peregrini and its present day team, also practically facilitated the dialogues. It made the conversations more fluent, since I didn't need to ask for additional background information on these particular topics. However, I am also aware that my former position as a researcher made it a challenge not to ask questions that were too suggestive. Throughout the interview process I noticed that insights I had gained during my research sometimes directed my thinking and the questions I asked, so that there might have been lost opportunities in following different views provided by the interviewees. Besides the risk of missing out on important clues, my familiarity with the particular research topic also carried in it the challenge not to speak too familiarly about the topic. This means that I had to be attentive on my aim of researching practice from a methodological point of view, and not to only discuss only particular aspects of this research situation.

To optimize transparency on my own position, I applied a "participatory model" throughout the interview process, as advocated by feminist researcher Ann Oakley since 1981 (Oakley cited in Hesse-Biber 2014, 199). I shared on my own experiences as a researcher on Gisèle, which every interviewee seemed to be eager to hear about. I belief this sharing has contributed to valuate my research in the eyes of the artist-researchers. Although my interviewees are professionals in the field of (artistic) research with far more experience than me, they appreciated my insights as a researcher which made it easier for me to talk about research practice and for them to be open about their understandings of research methods.

The semi-structure of the interviews constituted of several open-ended questions and key themes that I had selected beforehand.[13] I employed this guideline however loosely, in favour of the natural flow of the conversation. While I made sure to address the aspects I

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[13] The interview guideline can be found attached in Appendix I

deemed important for my research, the focus remained nonetheless the perspective of the artist-researcher. The conversations therefore comprised space for the telling of anecdotes and memories, which in the end sometimes provided unforeseen new insights.

The interviews lasted between one and one-and-a-half hour each and were conducted in a one-on-one setting. Whereas the first two interviews – with filmmaker Janina Pigaht and biographer Annet Mooij – were conducted in public spaces, the third one – with Amie Dicke – took place in her studio. These different locations have taught me the importance of choosing a space where both the interviewee and the interviewer/I feel comfortable. Whereas I believed public space to provide an informal setting, in which we would feel equally at ease, I discovered that the privacy of a personal environment might be preferable to speak openly.

Translating Conversations

With the consent of each artist-researcher the interviews were audio-recorded. These recordings permitted me to consequently transcribe each interview to be able to comprehend, structure and (re)categorise my findings. I did not only transcribe what was said literally, but also marked silences, moments of hesitation or inspiring tones. This allowed me later on to evaluate the interview not only on a verbal level, but also on the level of 'how' things were articulated. Here this seems particularly important, since it is already a challenge to invent a language in which to communicate with one another about artistic research practice (Wesseling 2011: 4,5). To find the words to express what normally is practiced means that we are already translating. Therewithal in my interpretation of the interviews I was aware of my authority in translating the artist-researchers' voices into this thesis. I therefore choose to quote extensively from the interviews and to use not only the English translations, but to incorporate the original Dutch fragments from the transcripts. I thus try to minimise the risk of thoughts getting lost in translation. In my aim to think *with,* instead of *about* different practitioners, I consider my interviewees as co-researchers and the research outcomes as a "coconstruction" of meaning (Hesse-Biber 2014: 199).

Chapter 3
Fact and Fiction
A Feminist Turn in Writing Biography

An interview with Annet Mooij

An artful enterprise

Biography holds an unclear position in the academic world. Does it belong to Literature or rather to History or Social Sciences? When studying biography and searching for literature in the university library, theoretical works are to be found within Literary Studies, whereas individual biographies are placed as a scientific resource in the department of the field in which the protagonist had been active. The biography of icon Marilyn Monroe for example, is to be found in Film Studies, that of sociologist Marcel Mauss in the Anthropology section and that of writers Virginia Woolf and Oscar Wilde in the English department. This shows that whereas the form of biography is considered a literary subject, content-wise biographies are primarily of interest to the particular field, the Humanities or Social Sciences, the subject has contributed to. Biographies are supposed to provide factual relevant information for a particular field of study. No longer then are they a subject for literary analysis with their own artful character. Something is clearly at stake here between biographies as "artful enterprises" (Stanley 1993: 3) and the "facticity" they lay claim to.

In "Borderlines: Autobiography and Fiction in Postmodern Life Writing", Gunnthórunn Gudmundsdóttir studies both the referentiality and fictionality that life writing is concerned with. As such, she names the practice of auto/biographical[14] writing a "referential

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[14] The term 'auto/biography' is a term I have adopted from Liz Stanley's *The Auto/Biographical I* (1993: 3-4). It refers to all forms of life writing 'that lay claim to facticity, yet are by nature artful enterprises'. Despite the differences between biography and autobiography Stanley argues that they operate from a same analytic

art" (Gudmundsdóttir 2003: 3), including both the factual and the artful aspect. According to Gudmundsdóttir, the work of auto/biography, which is considered primarily referential to factual events, is not opposed to fictionality. 'Fictional' here is used to designate "conventions and practices one associates with creative writing – such as structure, poetic or literary descriptions of people and places, ordering of events to create certain effects" (Gudmundsdóttir 2003: 4). Fictionality as such, Gudmundsdóttir beliefs, is even a necessary part of auto/biography. Rather than considering it something outside the biographical framework, we should aim to think the two – fact and fiction – together in making up the narrative presented in biography (see also Haraway 1989: 3-8).

In line with Gudmundsdóttir's proposal to consider fact and fiction as two sides of the same coin, I will now look more closely into the biographical project concerning Gisèle d'Ailly. Annet Mooij, Gisèle's biographer, underlines the difficulty for the biographer to navigate through the facts and fiction that surround a person's life. Looking at her research in more detail in what follows; her project can be divided roughly between written and oral sources. In subsequent sections I will address both types of sources, which both lead to particular questions concerning life history and representation. This chapter will thus attempt to answer the concrete questions of 1) how does the biography relate to the lived experience of Gisèle, and 2) how can/does Mooij account for the 'knowledge' the work produces? I consider this knowledge in a conceptual framework of a situated knowledge (Haraway 1988) in which fact and fiction are closely entwined. From this point of view the biographer is constantly navigating between the different aspects that represent a certain subjectivity. These questions do not only take into account the question marks concerning representation of a 'unitary self' (Braidotti 2011: 3), but also the practical aspects of conducting biographical research and writing. Before I turn to this more practical side of biographical writing, I will clarify some tensions of the debate surrounding writing auto/biography within feminist debates over the last decades.

I write, therefore I am: Creating a Female Self

Gisèle d'Ailly spent most of her life in close connection to the Castrum circle, an explicitly male dominated intellectual environment. Protagonist of this group was the poet Wolfgang Frommel. Until recently, Gisèle's ambiguous position, being at the same time at the foundation and at the border of the group, was overshadowed by the history and work of the

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apparatus. I will therefore speak about auto/biography unless I explicitly wish to refer to either biography or autobiography.

male members of the group. In accounts on the foundation's history, Gisèle is offered only a small role. Mooij discusses this in relation to her biographical work in detail.

> Zo kun je signaleren dat in de eigen geschiedschrijving van Castrum de rol van Gisèle vaak niet heel groot is. Ook in andere dingen: ….tentoonstellingscatalogi. Als ze over hun eigen geschiedenis schrijven is het Wolfgang voor en Wolfgang na, meestal. Ja, dat heeft een rol en functie. Dus dat zal ik   zeker aan de orde stellen. En niet weglaten. Dat is echt een bevinding.

> One can see that in Castrums own history Gisèle's role is quite often not very large. Also in other aspects: exhibition-catalogues. When writing about their own history it is mostly all about Wolfgang. Sure, that has its part and purpose. Therefore I will definitely raise that issue. Not omitting that. That is actually something.

Breaking the silence in the relative absence of Gisèle in early accounts on the history of Castrum Peregrini, which Mooij addresses here, concerns a representation based on making present (Buikema 2009: 72). Representation is here understood on a concrete level of making visible what was previously overshadowed. Gudmundsdóttir as well as Stanley outlines how early feminist theorists on women's auto/biographies in the eighties focused on the claim of authority that comes with this making visible in auto/biographical writing. Women's biographies were considered to put the female marginalized subject in the center (see e.g. Meyer Spacks 1980; Smith 1987). Sidonie Smith explains:

> The mythologies of gender conflate human and male figures of selfhood, aligning male selfhood with culturally valued stories. Autobiography is itself one of the forms of selfhood constituting the idea of man and in turn promoting that idea. Choosing to write autobiography, therefore, she unmasks her transgressive desire for   cultural   and   literary authority. (Smith, 1987: 50)[15]

Whereas writing here is believed to be a claim on subjectivity, certain feminist theorists have insisted on the different nature of women's auto/biographies versus men's (see e.g. Jelinek 1980, Mason 1980). They claim that women's auto/biographies are more experimental, since women are bound to question the genre more than male auto/biographers. In autobiography especially, Mary Mason has argued, you will find work by female authors less ego-focused, locating the self within a network of others (1980: 209). When describing women's

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[15] About the desire to construct ourselves in stories see also Teresa de Lauretis (1984: 106).

auto/biography these theorist use words such as fragmented, formless, anecdotal, disruptive, subversive (Jelinek: 1980). Women's auto/biographies then propose an alternative to the coherency of a 'unifying self' that marks most male auto/biographies. It is the belief in a distinct women's way of writing that informs the concept of an *écriture féminine* (Cixous 1975: 245; see also Irigaray 1985; Kristeva 1984)[16]. In the pursuit of female subjectivity, this women's way of writing offers the possibility of a female discovery of the self. Cixous claims:

> If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, […], it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, and seize it ; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of. (Cixous, 1975: 257)

In male dominated structures in writing, the authors of *écriture féminine* believe there is no place for a female subject. Through their oppressed position women's experiences are distorted and cannot be articulated by the conventional structures of writing. Women therefore have to invent their own 'language' through which they can express their nature a part from her oppression.

As much as this idea of a women's way of writing appeals to the (female) mind, I argue that its claims are not unproblematic. As is pointed out by other feminist theorists, the claims that women's auto/biographies are fragmented, interrupted, formless, anecdotal and disruptive, do not take into account the number of writings by men that would qualify as such (see e.g. Nussbaum 1988: 153). Also does such reasoning, I would argue, fail to account for women's auto/biographies that are presented as 'total works' offering a coherent interpretation of experience. Indeed, Stanley asks if it is legitimate to speak of such a thing as a distinct 'women's biography' (1990: 59). Both Stanley and Gudmundsdóttir stress the importance of the genre for feminism and how it is a potent tool for women's voices (Gudmundsdóttir 2003: 100). However, instead of focusing on the subject that constitutes the content of biography (male versus female), it would be more to the point to ask if there is something in the structure and form of writing biography that can challenge the received ideas. Is there something that one can call a distinct *feminist* auto/biography? For Stanley,

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[16] The concept of *Écriture Féminine* originated in France in the early 1970's and discerns a strain of feminist literary theory that was concerned with the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text. Its main contributors were theorists Hélène Cixous (1975), Luce Irigaray (1985) and Julia Kristeva (1984).

what would qualify as such, are works that reject the conventions of truth-telling and the emphasis on a unitary self. A feminist account of biography discards narrative structures that are linear, straightforward and 'closed', consisting of a beginning, middle and end, with a moment of crisis that reveals the full and transcendent self (see also Buikema 1995: 20). Such a structure is not conform to our shattered lived reality. Stanley argues:

> only on paper does one person alone occupy a stage; and only on paper is the person in the limelight seen through the views of one commentator alone, one singular commentator who selects the evidence presented, decides what to include and exclude, which of the friends and lovers and enemies and acquaintances are significant and which not. (Stanley, 1990: 61).

According to Stanley, what characterizes biography is what she calls a 'spotlight' approach: an artificial focus on a single life, such as life is never really lived (ibid., 61). We always live alongside others, Stanley argues, who are not mere bystanders. Stanley thus suggests a discrepancy between the biographical product and life. It is however hard to imagine understanding life without narrative, as we learn in hermeneutics, the theory of knowledge and interpretation.

In the article 'Constructing the Self in Narrative: Feminist Research as Auto-Biography' Ronit Lentin (2000) reflects on her experience researching personal narratives of daughters of Shoah survivors. Of particular importance to her study was her double subjectivity of knowing and experiencing subject.[17] Being an Israeli daughter of a diaspora family herself, Lentin claims how the research taught her as much about her own experiences as about her research subjects. Biographical research, she claims, helped her to bring the pieces of her own family history together. Through the narratives she studied, she constructed one for herself. This eventually leads her to the insight that also the narratives she studied were derived from unarticulated experience. The narrative as such has a function: to bridge the gap between experience and understanding. Outlining a feminist hermeneutics, Nancy Theriot suggests that following feminist standpoint theory, narrative has a constructive role. She writes:

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[17] Standpoint theorist Patricia Hill Collins (1986) refers to this position as the 'outsider within'. By making use of one's own marginal standpoint, she argues, the researcher holds a privileged position to conduct 'objective' research, since it provides the optimal combination of remoteness and nearness to 'see' well.

Feminist scholarship goes beyond the standpoint of woman-as-other because it leads to the conclusion that identity itself – one's own subjectivity – is a creation in flux, and that knowledge about the 'nature' of woman' and the 'nature of man' is a political creation that affects/determines one's subjectivity. […] Without adopting poststructuralism as a methodological position, much current feminist scholarship rests on the poststructuralist assumption that neither knowledge nor the identity of the knower is fixed or true – that the act of interpretation, the act of knowing, mutually construct the knower and the known. (1990: 5)

Here Theriot explains how, from a hermeneutic perspective, our understanding ourselves is based upon stories. Not only do narratives determine the interpretation of an event, narratives shape our lives. They do not only construct meaning of events that have passed, but also determine how we understand what happens to us in the present. Our experiences, which are first ambiguous and implicit, are made explicit in the act of interpretation. Hence, our experiences are always embedded in a linguistic context (see also Scott 1992). Narrative is intrinsic to our everyday experience and goes hand in hand with life itself. We cannot think the one without the other. As Theriot points out here, feminist have insisted on the power relations narratives are subject to and imply. It is through these processes that we come to understand who we are – based on our sex, gender, race and class identities, to name but a few. A gender-sensitive interpretation of these processes leads to the conclusion that identity is truly complex and multiple. In biography, when things that are at first vague become 'known': the pre-narrative structure of life is transformed into a narrative structure. Although in biography the narrative is used as a fluid process to construct knowledge as 'truth', it always, in fact, eludes definite truth claims. In the interview on Gisèle biography, Mooij acknowledges that an omniscient universal account of a life is impossible:

/interviewer: Als ik een biografie een combinatie tussen feit en fictie noemen, ben je het daar dan mee eens?/ Een wetenschappelijke biografie, dus die gebasseerd wil zijn op waargebeurde dingen, voor zover mogelijk, is altijd wel een verhaal. Je laat altijd dingen weg. Dus in die zin is het wel een combinatie van feit en fictie, ja… Maar, waarbij het toch wel de bedoeling is dat het vrij controleerbaar is.

/interviewer: If I would call biography a combination between fact and fiction, would you agree with that?/ A scientific biography, so one that wants to be based on true things, as far as possible, is always a story. You always leave things out. So in that sense it is a

combination of fact and fiction, yes… But, one that is meant to be quite falsifiable. I will not quickly write something for which I have no presumptive evidence whatsoever.

Here Mooij emhpasizes both the 'strong objective'[18] aims in writing a referential work as the artful aspect of narrative that is necessarily implied. Narrative, as Donna Haraway points out in her introduction to *Primate Vision,* is the vehicle with which we reason and the tool to express our knowledge (1989: 3-8). Haraway refers to science in this aspect as "story telling practice" that engages both fact and fiction. Facts being those things that "ha[ve] happened" and can be "known by direct experience" are not so different from fiction as "a derivative, fabricated version of the world and experience" (ibid.: 3). Since both fact and fiction stem from human action and experience, the construction of knowledge is itself a combination of fact and fiction (ibid.: 3). Haraway explains how neither fact nor fiction has an exclusive relation to truth: "Both fact and fiction are rooted in an epistemology that appeals to experience" (ibid.: 4) According to Haraway, fact and fiction share an epistemological ground that gives them each a position from which to make claims about the truth. Hence, as is argued before, experience itself is destabilized as a ground for definitive claims to knowledge (Scott 1992; Haraway 1988).

Eluding the possibility of a definitive truth claim concerning experience and the self then, Mooij emphasizes that Gisèle's life was not lived under a single spotlight and that she does not wish to represent it as such.[19] Instead, Mooij argues how there are different angles from which to perceive her life and that in the biography, therefore, she wishes to respect this multiplicity:

> Je hebt verschillende ingangen. Haar jeugd, haar familie is natuurlijk ook heel belangrijk in haar geval. Zeg maar de pré Castrum periode. Ik denk dat je echt verschillende fases in haar leven hebt. Tot de jaren '30, daarna de korte periode met Joep en daarna de hele lange Castrum periode, d'Ailly periode, dan heel lang in Griekenland… Ik denk niet dat er één…het is een heel veelzijdig leven. Ik denk niet dat er één aspect is of een punt wat je het hele boek

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[18] 'Strong objectivity' is a term first used by feminist standpoint theorist Sandra Harding to describe research orientated towards a feminist point of view that considers knowledge as socially located. This kind of objectivity contrasts with a 'weak objectivity' of a so-believed value-neutral research. (Harding 1993).

[19] Interestingly, the current generation of Castrum Peregrini Gisèle has recently defined Gisèle as a 'silent hero', in a European project that is initiated by the foundation to bring together organisations in the field of holocaust memory and adult learning about the Second World War. I find this term significant as it addresses the term 'hero' in an unconventional way. Other than the hero, who is normally defined in active terms, it is here associated with silence and subtlety. As such, the term allows for a different reading of experience, based on a feminist view on Gisèle's reality.

door, het hele boek lang, als een soort rode draad moet nemen. Meer dat dat een beetje schuift, zo nu en dan.

There are different angles. Her youth, her family is in her case of course also very important. The pre-Castrum-era so to say. I think there are actually different phases in her life. Up until the 1930's, a short period with Joep after that and then the incredibly long Castrum period, d'Ailly period, then a long period in Greece… I don't think there is one… it is a very versatile life. I do not think there is one aspect of Giselle or one period in her life that you should take as a 'red thread' for the entire book. It is more that her essence shifts a little, from time to time.

Mooij clearly states that she cannot speak of Gisèle's life in terms of a 'red thread' or 'single theme'. She therefore chooses to present Gisèle as a 'multiplicitous self' (Wekker 2006: 2), integrating various instantiations of the 'I'. Her research then is orientated by a search for 'interpretation' and 'translation' (Haraway 1988: 589) of these different aspects of Gisèle's multilayered life, rather than a discovery of a hidden 'truth'. Mooij here describes an approach to the complexity of the self and life that Rosi Braidotti would call 'cartographic' (2011: 46), i.e. Mooij maps the different positions from which to frame Gisèle's life, which offer different perspectives. Cartography then becomes a tool to take various viewpoints. The result of this "mobile positioning" (Haraway 1988: 586) of the author is a more 'nomadic' (Braidotti 2011) engagement with life that allows for the many faces that Gisèle showed during her life.

Collecting letters and stories

The aim of the biography for Mooij is to portray Gisèle as a 'personality'. What this means to her is that she does not want to recount Gisèle's life from day to day. In this sense, completeness is not the main characteristic of a biography, according to Mooij. Factual information, like her schedule books, does not provide us with information on 'how she was'. It is precisely the information below the surface that matters to develop a certain vision or impression on the life of Gisèle. Questions that need to be asked constantly regarding any kind of information are: 'What does this certain information provide us with?' and 'Why is this important?'. Mooij distinguishes two main categories of sources, which she is now exploring, before she starts the actual writing of the biography.

First, there are the written sources, which entail Gisèle's diaries, catalogues, publications and primarily an enormous amount of personal letters, addressed to and from Gisèle. According to Mooij, these letters provide information on what was of interest to Gisèle and what she shared with others. Apart from factual information on where she was at what moment, personal letters thus function as a source of background information. Mooij explains her readings in detail:

/interviewer: Waar let je dan op bij het lezen van de brieven?/ Dat is heel moeilijk om te zeggen, omdat je die brieven al leest op het moment dat je nog niet een heel erg duidelijk beeld van het boek hebt. Ik let eigenlijk vooral op de passages die ik zelf interessant vind, waarbij ik opveer en ik denk 'hé, dat is belangrijk' of 'leuk gezegd' of misschien kan ik daar nog wel wat eens wat mee. […] …ja…brieven vertellen toch ook wel wat over hoe iemand was. Over wat ze belangrijk vindt, wat ze vertelde, wat voor haar wezenlijk was. Dus het geeft ook een soort van informatie over iemand die je niet zelf gekend heb, hoe diegene was… Wat voor soort persoon.

/interviewer: What is it that you focus on when reading the letters?/ It is really hard to tell what you are focussing on, because you are reading these letters when you do not yet have a very clear picture of the book. I actually focus mostly on passages I myself find interesting, that make me sit up and think 'hé, that is important' or 'well put' or 'maybe I can use that later on'. […] …Well…letters do tell something about a person's character. About what mattered to her, what she told us, things she thought were essential. So it also provides information about someone you haven't known yourself, about what that person was like… What kind of person.

The passages Mooij collects during her research are those that she finds herself intuitively attracted to. In fact, she searches for passages that 'echo' something of a person she has never met. The strategy of interpretation Mooij employs here is a *close reading* of Gisèle's letters that places them in a larger interpretive framework (Lukic and Espinosa 2011: 116). In such a reading, according to Sara Mills, "textual production and reception are considered to be part of context, and not simply the context of production" (1995: 31). Mills here argues how various interrelated categories such as literary conventions, current literary trends, affiliation, socio-historical factors and author, are to be taken into account as the context in which text emerges.

More precisely, Liz Stanley has deconstructed the ambiguous nature of private letters into three features that are to be considered when engaging in epistolary research (2004: 202, 203). First, letters are *dialogical:* rather than producing a first person narration, a correspondence is a communication that refers not only to one's life, but also to a relation between two people. It is precisely in the dialogue that one can find for example the role and position of Gisèle embedded in her social network, which is helpful information for the biographer. Secondly, personal letters are *perspectival*, their content and structure adapts itself to the recipient and to the passing of time; they reflect only a moment. This dimension of letters 'layers' the person that wrote them. Letters, written by Gisèle to her family, to an old lover, an acquaintance or to a close friend, all show a slightly different woman. For the researcher, she thus becomes a woman with many faces. It is indeed this 'fictional' aspect of writing, considered as "an inner truth that gives birth to our actual lives" (Haraway 1989: 3) that informs Mooij on 'how Gisèle was': how she presented herself. The letters are each a version of the world and experience of Gisèle, "as a kind of perverse double of the facts or as an escape through fantasy into a better world than 'that which actually happened'." (ibid.: 3). This also means that the moments in which Gisèle didn't feel like writing or didn't have the opportunity, are not represented in the correspondence. A third and last feature that characterises personal letters, according to Stanley, is that they have *emergent* properties: letters are not structured in their entirety and they have their own conventions and preoccupations. Mooij mentions the detailed descriptions that characterize the letters written by Gisèle. Not all of these passages she thinks are of interest for her reader and therefore she might not select them to be present in the biography.[20] In this concrete example it becomes clear how the biographer 'selects' and 'organizes' her material, so that an objective representation of a life becomes impossible (Buikema 1995: 20).

Mooij's second main category of research material consists of interviews with former colleagues, acquaintances, housemates and friends of Gisèle. Although these sources lack the literary mediation of written sources, they are mediated as well. When people tell stories, they often forget certain aspects or leave out information on purpose in order to create a different truth or add nicer outcomes. Mooij also detects the existence of what she call 'crusted stories':

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[20] Interestingly enough, I recall filmmaker Janina Pigaht close reading Gisèle's letters from the archive, looking precisely for the detailed descriptions as an inspiration for her documentary. This shows how diverse research methodologies can lead to very different insights into the same material (Griffin 2011).

stories that might have been repeated for generations and have lost their reference to reality. As the biographer of Gisèle, Mooij tries to avoid taking these stories for granted.

Even besides the possibility of people deliberately withholding information from the researcher or their faulty memory, oral sources are ambiguous. Considering the discursive nature of experience (Scott 1992), we cannot presume that any of us can easily or competently explain our subjective experience of life. Anthropologist Emily Martin reminds us of the limited capacity of people to fully articulate their situation: "The task is complicated because people cannot be aware of all aspects of their behaviour. A great deal of what people communicate in their words and behavior is inchoate, beyond articulation in words." (Martin 2007: 9) People often do not fully understand those things that are most important to them, since much of what we as humans most deeply feel is beyond our ability to explain. Personal narratives, therefore, are at best partial and usually cannot provide a full analytical portrait of the social world or even ourselves. They might even contradict with what the person narrating wants to tell or told before. I asked Mooij how she dealt with the possible contradictions she encounters in interviewing:

> …Ten eerste door er echt wel naar te vragen. …Nou is het zo dat in de Castrum omgeving het een beetje de gewoonte is om niet over negatieve of moeilijke dingen te praten. Dus die snijden mensen zelf niet snel aan. Daar kun je natuurlijk expliciet naar vragen. Voor een deel kun je daar natuurlijk ook een soort van thema van maken, zo van 'het valt mij op dat men moeilijk praat hier en hierover'. En zo kun je dat aan de orde stellen, zonder dat je daar een oplossing voor hebt.

> …Well first by really asking about it… As it happens, in the circle surrounding Castrum it is kind of a habit not to speak about negative or complicated affaires. So people will not easily start on those topics. Then one can of course ask explicitly. One can of course also make some sort of a theme out of this, something like 'I notice that people find it difficult to talk about this and that.' Thus you can raise the issue, without providing a solution.

Here Mooij introduces a significant tool that the feminist biographer has at her disposal to deal for example with inconsistencies or gaps in the stories she hears. The author can signal issues she deems important without rushing into conclusions. Mooij here employs "analytical reflexivity" (Stanley 1990a: 3,4), which – I argue – is the main tool in the biographer's toolbox.

The biographer's toolbox

Mooij concludes her introduction to the former biography that she has published (Mooij 2013), on the 19th century Dutch feminist and social reformer Mina Kruseman, with an acknowledgement of the research process that underpins her work:

> Archives and libraries provided […] the most important building bricks for this book, next to Krusemans own work. That last source isn't completely unproblematic. […] As with every autobiography, with this publication she herself decided what later generations would know of her and what not. […] That I do however freely use it deserves some justification. […] Undoubtedly *My Life* is a justification of her life until that then, but the book wasn't a pure apologia and not strictly *self serving*. […] Next to that, one of Krusemans pleasant sides is the fact that she doesn't lie. […] What I was able to check and have checked, was actually always true. […]
>
> Next to *Mijn Leven* there's also Krusemans literary work: her novels and plays, […] in which she quite clearly captures her own Indonesian experiences. […] This remark is not a license for an autobiographical reading of her work. At the same time it's clear that she used her books to serve her own opinions and that the characters within are often Kruseman-like creatures, idealised demergers of herself. Much reason to be reticent in making connections between the substance of Krusemans novels and plays and her own life did not seem necessary to me. […]
>
> Even though I have not been picky, in the absence of sources there will always remain a number of hindering white spots. […] A proper perspective on Krusemans background and the years that shaped her, […] is unfortunately missing because of that. (Mooij 2013: 9-11)[21]

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[21] Original Dutch text: "Archieven en bibliotheken leverden […] de belangrijkste bouwstenen voor dit boek, naast Krusemans eigen werk. Die laatste bron is niet geheel probleemloos. […] Zoals bij elke autobiografie het geval is, bepaalde zij [red. Kruseman] met deze publicatie zelf wat latere genereaties van haar zouden weten en wat niet. […] Dat ik er toch vrijuit gebruik van heb gemaakt, verdient daarom enige verantwoording. […] Onmiskenbaar is *Mijn Leven* een rechtvaardiging van haar leven tot dan toe, maar het boek was geen zuivere apologie en niet uisluitend *self serving.* […] Daarbij komt dat het een van Krusemans aangename kanten is dat zij niet liegt. […] [W]at ik kon checken en gecheckt heb, klopte eigenlijk altijd. […] Naast *Mijn Leven* is er ook nog Krusemans literaire werk: haar romans en toneelstukken, […] waarin zij overduidelijk haar eigen Indische ervaringen verwerkt heeft. […] [D]eze opvatting is geen vrijbrief voor een autobiografische lezing van haar werk. Tegelijkertijd is duidelijk dat zij haar boeken ten dienste stelde van haar eigen opvattingen en dat de personages die erin voorkomen vaak Kruseman-achtige verschijningen zijn, geïdealiseerde afsplitsingen van haarzelf. Veel reden om terughoudend te zijn bij het leggen van verbanden tussen de inhoud van Krusemans romans en toneelstukken en haar eigen leven leek mij, kortom, niet aanwezig. […] Ondanks het feit dat ik me dus niet al te kieskeurig heb opgesteld, blijven er bij ontstentenis van bronnen een aantal hinderlijke witte vlekken. […] Een goed zicht op Krusemans achtergrond en vormende jaren, […] ontbreekt daardoor helaas."

Here Mooij describes how she conducted archival research, as well as she employed textual analysis and close reading to portray Kruseman in her biography. This emphasizes the fact that the biographical researcher never employs just one research skill or method, but works with a combination of these (Griffin 2011: 96). Moreover, by describing her doubts and choices regarding the research material, Mooij traces the process of research. By making the traces of her research explicit, Mooij allow for the forming of a so-called 'biographical I' (Stanley 1993). This biographical I, the author, claims responsibility for what she writes in what Stanley refers to as an "intellectual biography" (Stanley 1993: 10), as a qualification for a feminist account on the biographical work. This 'intellectual biography' entails an account on the choices the author has made regarding the informational sources at her disposal. In her intellectual biography, Mooij here accounts for an "embodied objectivity" (Haraway 1988: 581) that situates her claims in her own subjectivity. In this respect, anthropologist Gloria Wekker emphasizes that "both researcher and the people involved are subjects, active agents with their own emotions and agenda's" (2006: 4). This approach contrasts with the "god trick" (Haraway 1988: 581) of a biographer who claims a value-neutral point of view from nowhere. This aim for transparency on her considerations regarding 'lacks' in the research material also echoes in regard to her current research on Gisèle:

> Je kunt wel speculeren, bijvoorbeeld, of zeggen: 'het lijkt mij aannemelijk dat dit en dat'. Maar dan zou ik er wel vrij duidelijk bij zetten dat dit mijn idee is of mijn invulling. Dat je in de formulering wel tot uitdrukking brengt dat het om een eigen   speculatie gaat.

> Than you can for example speculate, or say: 'it looks to me plausible that so and so'. I would however add quite clearly that this was my own opinion or my interpretation.

Here Mooij clearly bears reflexivity on her project: making the 'biographical I' visible. As such, she positions the biography as a possible version amongst hypothetical other ones. She positions herself in a mobile field of competing discourses (Haraway 1988: 586). Personal preferences of the author, Mooij states, determine eventually what the biography will look like. Stanley stresses that these interests in turn are dependent on ones gender, class, age and so on, so that "*any* biographer's view is a socially located and necessarily partial one." (1993: 7). Moreover, contrasting biographical work to 'a laboratory experiment', Mooij acknowledges that this embodied position, i.e. her 'situatedness' (Haraway 1988) is inevitable and perhaps even desirable:

Alles wat ik hoor en eigenlijk ook alles wat ik zie, daaruit ontstaat natuurlijk wel een   zekere indruk. Maar ja, dat is niet te voorkomen. Daar streef ik ook niet naar. Ik bedoel, het is in die zin niet een experiment. Een biografie schrijven is geen laboratorium experiment. Voor een deel is het ook de bedoeling dat je een bepaalde indruk of visie op een persoon   geeft. Dus ja, die moet je ontwikkelen en daar gebruik je allerlei dingen voor.

Everything I hear and actually everything I see as well, creates of course a certain impression. But well, that is something you cannot prevent. That is not something I strife for. I mean, it is in that sense not an experiment. To write a biography is not a laboratory experiment. Part of it is also to create a certain image or provide a vision on a person. So yes, you have to develop that vision and you use all kinds of means for that.

Here Mooij explains that a life story cannot be extracted from its environment to be studied in isolation like a laboratory experiment, in which circumstances can be controlled. To develop an own sense of understanding of the life of Gisèle, the biographer has to navigate through existing discourses, fictions and opinions. In the next chapter in which I engage with the work of filmmaker Janina Pigaht I examine more closely the ethical aspect of researching in a relatively 'closed' environment. In relation to the biographical work Mooij here acknowledges how this navigating demands various skills of the researcher, which fall behind articulation. Not only textual sources therefore provide clues that inform the biography; in Gisèle's case the house in which she lived and the art she produced offer different insights. Emphasizing that there is not one single aspect that connects everything throughout the biography, Mooij expresses her interest in the multiplicity of Gisèle's life:

Ik denk eerder dat het huis een leidraad zal zijn.. en haar kunst natuurlijk. […] Ik wil proberen.. en   dat zal nog heel moeilijk worden, maar om iets van de sfeer van dat huis over te brengen op papier. En hoe je dat moet doen, dat kan ik je eerlijk gezegd nu nog niet één, twee, drie zeggen. Het kan ook best zijn dat ik daarin vastloop en dat het me niet goed lukt. Dat het toch meer een beschrijving blijft, van   wat er gebeurde en wie er woonde. Maar het is wel mijn streven om.. eh… om, om die sfeer zo goed mogelijk weer te geven.

I think the house might be a guideline… and her art of course. […] I want to try… and that is going to be very difficult, to capture a bit of the atmosphere of the house in my writing. How one can accomplish such a thing, I honestly cannot yet tell you this, just like that. It is also

possible that I will not be able to tackle this problem. That it will stay a near pure description of what happened and who lived there. But I do indeed intend to eh… to capture the atmosphere as well as possible.

'The house' is a key-word when speaking about Castrum Peregrini or Gisèle. Anyone who has ever visited Herengracht 401, understands the weight that this word carries with it. 'The house' is a seven stories tall canal building, which houses the original hiding floor, living spaces, Gisèle's studio, library and archive. Most of the spaces are preserved in the original state, as created and decorated by Gisèle. The house as such treasures a rich history of the community that lived there, which one encounters physically when entering. The house and Gisèle's studio, housing numerous objects, form the core of the documentary project by Janina Pigaht and the visual art project by Amie Dicke, on which I elaborate in subsequent chapters. Both artist-researcher engage creatively with the physical objects constituting Gisèle's life in practice-based research methods (Griffin 2011: 93).

Mooij describes the atmosphere in the house as "uncommonly mysterious". She sees it as a challenge to transmit on paper some of the attractive force the house has had on many. Here she signals the limited capacity of language to 'translate' the different aspects that constitute a life. She also expresses this worry regarding Gisèle's artwork as a source in biographical research:

Afgezien van wat ze zelf geschreven heeft, is haar belangrijkste taal de kunst geweest. Ja…zeker…dat lijkt mij heel wezenlijk. Dat ik… Ja je kunt haar daar natuurlijk alleen maar zelf aan het woord laten via afbeeldingen, dus illustraties. Maar goed ook in… op sommige plekken heeft ze natuurlijk ook wel dingen over haar werk gezegd. Maar dat is iets wat je zelf als auteur moet proberen duidelijk te   maken, wat de betekenis van het werk in een bepaalde levensfase is, of… Dat is heel moeilijk rechtstreeks door haar te laten verwoorden.

Apart of what she herself has written, her most important language has been the Arts. Yes… certainly…that seems quite substantial. That I… Yes you can only let her do the talking through her images, meaning her illustrations. Anyway, as well in… in some occasions she of course has also said things about her work. But that is something that you as an author have to try to clarify, the meaning of a certain piece from a certain phase in her life, or… It is incredibly difficult to have her articulate this.

One notices a slight hesitation when Mooij thinks aloud about how to represent the atmosphere of the house or Gisèle's 'language'. This concern might arise from the fact that in certain disciplines in the arts and humanities we tend to "ignore" visual aspects, as is pointed out by Gabriele Griffin (2011: 97). Mooij's uncertainty about how to represent these visual aspects then stems from a lack of critical engagement with visual methods in the humanities in general. Griffin claims that visual material is often treated in a positivistic manner as if their meaning is self-evident and requires no specific engagement (2011: 97). Yet, feminist scholar Gillian Rose (2005) suggests that visual signs are a dominant aspect of our cultural world and as such all art forms produce a rich visual research world (see also Buikema and Zarzycka 2011).[22] Research based on visual methods draws attention to diverse aspects of the visual sign as the detail of the image itself and its context of production and/or reproduction (Griffin 2011: 98). Rose (2005) also importantly claims that visual images do not only accompany texts, but that often the reverse is true: texts accompany visual images (for example as captions to photographs). Rose critiques the hierarchy between sign systems - text and visual - that is frequently implied. Instead of privileging one over another, she argues to question this structure and consider the interplay between systems. Interestingly, Mooij here, although hesitantly, refers to the interplay of different sign systems in Gisèle's life, i.e. she raises the question how Gisèle's artwork relates to her lived experience at a certain moment in her life. Although creative arts still appear as bugbears in biographical research, Mooij hints at the incorporation of these visual signs as an important clue about Gisèle's life.

Towards a feminist biography

Liz Stanley has written extensively on a "feminist biographical method" (1990b: 62). Such a method is characterized by a rejection of the so-called 'spotlight' approach that takes subjectivity and identity for granted (ibid.: 62). It also engages critically with the "textually located ideological practices" (ibid.: 62) of biography that present life always in a mediated, and therefore partial, form. In a classic approach to biography, Stanley (1993) has argued, the task of the biographer is generally "to assemble as far as possible 'the truth about subject X or Y'" (1993: 6). Such a classic approach fails to account for the complex, discursive nature of experience (Scott 1991; Haraway 1991). Mooij also uses words such as "true", "verifiable" and "indication" to describe her research methodology. She thus emphasizes the referential aspect of biography. An analysis of practice in her research process shows nonetheless how

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[22] Different ways in which visual signs might be approached methodologically are addressed in Chapter 4 'Expression of Nostalgia in Film' and in Chapter 5 'Souvenirs and the Unmade' of this thesis.

she consistently navigates between fact and fiction. Mooij eventually accounts for an "embodied objectivity", which situates her findings in the context of her partiality. She shows her concern with the authority that comes with 'shaping' and 'selecting' her research material (Buikema 1995: 20) through a recognition of the importance of the labour process of the biographer as researcher in reaching interpretations and conclusions. In her selection, Mooij aims to respect the multiplicity of Gisèle's person and considers the 'relationality' of her life in the context of other lives (Stanley 1990b: 61), for example how she was located within the intellectual circle of Castrum Peregrini. Mooij thus applies significant feminist tools such as reflexivity and transparency in order to account for the biography she produces.

Chapter 4
Absence and Presence
The Affect of Nostalgia in Film

An interview with Janina Pigaht

A particular moment in time

This chapter engages with the research project on the history of Castrum Peregrini by filmmaker Janina Pigaht. In contrast to the biographical project that entails the entire life of Gisèle, Pigaht focuses on the present as her point of departure. In order to be able to elaborate on Pigaht's project and her motivations more information on Castrum Peregrini's recent past is needed.

In 2013 Gisèle has passed away. She has left her house at the Herengracht 401 to Castrum Peregrini's current generation: Michael Defuster, Frans Damman and Lars Ebert. They are now the directing team of the foundation and continue to live and work in the spirit of friendship, culture and freedom that once were at the origin of the foundation.[23] However, now that Gisèle is gone, the team faces an uncertain period in which change is inevitable. Many decisions have to be made regarding the physical structure of the house, the financial basis and the future of the foundation. Filmmaker Janina Pigaht expresses sensitivity towards the impact these choices have on both the current inhabitants of Castrum Peregrini, as well as those who were once part of the circle. It is Pigaht's awareness of this breaking point in the history of Castrum Peregrini that forms the motivation for her research project. On her website she introduces the project as follows: [24]

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[23] Following from its history as a hiding place, Castrum Peregrini defines friendship, freedom and culture as its core values. Source: http://castrumperegrini.org/about. Last accessed on 25 February 2015.

[24] Original Dutch text: *Nu de oude patrones van het huis op de Herengracht 401 is overleden en het geld bijna op is, is het de taak van de huidige bewoners Michael, Frans en Lars om het huis op te ruimen en het een*

Now that the old patroness of the house on Herengracht 401 has passed away and the money is almost gone, it's the current residents Michael, Frans and Lars's [directing team CP] task to clear up the house and give it new meaning. Decisions need to be made, that not only affect them but also three generations of former residents, that each have their own feelings for and memories about this place that breaths its history. The more Michael, Frans and Lars clear up the house to start a new future, the more of its history pops up. With its pretty and less pretty sides.

In her documentary, Pigaht follows the three current members of the foundation Castrum Peregrini in their quest concerning the material heritage of Gisèle. The visual signs – the building itself and her rooms that are more or less in the same condition as when Gisèle moved in, and the numerous objects that one finds there - are closely connected to the history of the house and therefore provide a rich visual research world (Rose 2005). Each of the spaces and objects in the house reflect something of the seventy years as the living and gathering space for the friends of Castrum Peregrini. Deciding on what has to go, and what not, raises questions that not only concern the current generation, according to Pigaht, but also the former inhabitants of the house. This moment, in which substantial changes have to take place, is strongly connected and therefore complicated by the past. It's this given that intrigues Pigaht. By focusing on the process that the three inhabitants of Castrum Peregrini are now going through, she aims to discover more about the foundation's past.

The way in which Pigaht approaches the physical environment of Castrum Peregrini refers to a critical engagement with its meaning as not self-evident (Griffin 2011: 97). Beyond the visual 'images' Pigaht looks for the stories that constituted them. Feminist scholar Gillian Rose (2005) details three ways in which one might approach such visual 'signs' methodologically, namely via compositional interpretation, semiology and discourse analysis (2005: 67-90). These approaches, she argues, focus on diverse aspects of visual images, including the details of the image itself and its context of production. Following these guidelines, the research project of Pigaht, again, requires more than one research skill and method (Griffin 2011: 96). Pigaht not only employs visual methods, but in addition she conducts archival research and interviews.

In this chapter I will first outline how Pigaht approaches Gisèle within the context of the social environment of the community living at Castrum Peregrini. I explore how she maps this environment based on the different formations of people who have shared her house. I then continue to examine more closely the function of these personal memories. I therefore draw from concepts out of the broad field of *cultural memory.* In a subsequent section I address the physical space and objects that make 'the house' an active agent in constructing knowledge about the life of Gisèle. Here, the objects provide a tool to evoke Gisèle's presence and create an instance of nostalgia. More technically, I analyse this phenomenon from the mediumspecific quality of the filmic image as a 'trace'. I conclude this chapter with a few remarks concerning ethics.

Now we are one family

In Pigaht's documentary, we find the life of Gisèle located in the network of inhabitants of the Herengracht 401. Similarly to the methodology of the biography by Annet Mooij, Pigaht places Gisèle's experience within the social environment of Castrum Peregrini. Yet, Pigaht takes this 'relational' approach (Stanley 1990b: 62) of experience even further in a research project that is primarily focused on the dynamics that present the former and current inhabitants as a group. The network of Castrum Peregrini contains a self-selective group of people, who were all at one time or another connected to the circle Castrum Peregrini. They formed a community, who shared the same values and beliefs. Gisèle's role in this group is ambiguous, as we have discussed earlier. Not only can we observe that her gender places her automatically at the border of the masculine circle, also her work as a visual artist and her long absences play a role in the determination of her position in the group. Pigaht claims that nonetheless, Gisèle's dedication to this network cannot be doubted:

> Het feit dat ze nog na de oorlog en jarenlang daarna dat delen in stand hield, dat iemand zulke normen waarden had waarin de groep voor al het andere gaat.. Waarin de familie altijd voorgaat. En dan het portret van Cees van Ede bijvoorbeeld, die over haar *Het Steentje van Gisèle* maakte. [25] Dat vind ik bijna een gemiste kans.... Er is één zin in die film, waarin zij zegt: "En na de oorlog zei ik gewoon, wij zijn een familie". En dat is het enige wat de maker daar in de film over loslaat. Maar daar zit de essentie. Dat gevoel, hoe je ondanks alles, ondanks ruzies, ondanks breuken, dezelfde normen en waarden blijft delen. En dat is een invloed van Gisèle: ondanks alles, we zijn gewoon één familie, klaar.

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[25] See footnote 3.

The fact that after the war and for many years after that she maintained her sharing, that someone had such norms and values in which the group precedes everything else… In which family always comes first. And then Cees van Ede's portrait for example, who made 'Gisèle's pebble'. I find that almost a lost opportunity… There's one sentence in that movie, in which she says: 'And after the war I just said, now we are a family'. And that's the only thing the director shows on that. But that holds the essence. That feeling, how you, despite of everything, despite the quarrels, despite the break-ups, keep sharing the same norms and values. And that's one of the influences of Gisèle: despite everything, we just are one family, that's it.

For Pigaht, this idea of 'sharing' forms a direct lead for her interest in the character Gisèle and the community of the Herengracht 401. The unconditional adherence to Castrum Peregrini reveals something of Gisèle's most significant experiences, according to Pigaht. The sentence 'Now, we are a family' unfolds her inner motivation for the continuation of the sharing and living together of the group after the war. From a feminist perspective, we could argue that Gisèle's lived experience can only be understood within this social network of friends. The figuration of nomadic subjectivity (Braidotti 2011) explains this position as "split" and "knotted" (2011: 3). This is to say that Gisèle's ambiguous position within the group of Castrum Peregrini cannot be separated from the conditions that shaped it. Such a position is not static, but moves with the dynamics of the group, i.e. Gisèle's experience is necessarily related to other subjectivities. Respecting this 'nomadic' aspect of life then, we have to 'map' her social environment in order to frame her experience.

In her research Pigaht 'maps' the history of Castrum Peregrini by tracing its inhabitants. Her research project entails numerous conversations with people associated with the circle of Castrum Peregrini from as early as the 1950's till now, who are all more or less acquainted with each other. In a 'cartography' of this history that maps the different perspectives of all these people, Pigaht encounters the variety of stories that form the discourse of Castrum Peregrini:

Ik vind het heel belangrijk dat iedereen die in mijn film terechtkomt, vanuit zijn/haar eigen perspectief een verhaal vertelt. Dat maakt het natuurlijk ook zo mooi. Er is gewoon geen waarheid, het is geen zwart-wit verhaal. Het is een heel moeilijk en grijs verhaal.

I think it's very important that everybody that winds up in my movie, tells a story from his/her perspective. That's also what makes it great. There's just no truth, it's not black or white. It's a very complicated and grey story.

What characterizes Pigaht's approach mostly is her search for different points of view. She is not after an objective, all-containing account of Castrum Peregrini's history. Indeed, she claims that such a singular 'truth' does not exist. In the previous chapter where I explored how biographer Annet Mooij approaches her subject matter I outlined how her methodology conforms to a logic of interpretation and translation, rather than with one based on deciphering and discovering (Haraway 1988). Likewise, Pigaht here engages with the stories of her interviewees not in a mode of discovering a 'truth' behind all of it, but rather to portray the variety of perspectives that exist. Pigaht respects the fact that knowledge looks different depending on one's standpoint (Harding 1986; Harding 1991). The knowledges that she is after concerning Castrum Peregrini's history therefore, are *locatable,* embedded and embodied, in the stories of current and former inhabitants. The dynamics between all these subjective understandings of the past is what, according to Pigaht, beautifully illustrates the complexity of this past. She thereby challenges a positivist notion of its history as straightforward and coherent. By allowing each participant to tell his or her own story, Pigaht creates a possibility for "new approaches to our past" (Petö and Waaldijk 2011: 80). Such an approach offers an alternative to the formerly dominant view on the history of Castrum Peregrini as a circle surrounding Wolfgang Frommel *only.* Although, this view might be 'true' for some, Pigaht argues it is not for others:

Het hangt er vanaf met wie je praat wie bijvoorbeeld de centrale figuur van het huis is: dus of het is Gisèle, of het is Wolfgang, of het is Manuel… Dat verschilt per generatie en natuurlijk hoe je in het huis terecht bent gekomen… Dat hangt van heel veel factoren af.

It depends who you're talking to who's the central character of the house: So it's either Gisèle, or it's Wolfgang, or it's Manuel… That differs per generation and of course how you wound up in the house… That depends on many factors.

Here Pigaht claims that the way different persons experience the history of the house depends on various factors. There are multiple axes along which standpoints in the history of Castrum Peregrini can be analysed. Moreover, it are these various factors that produce these

differences in the first place.[26] The timeframe in which one lived at Castrum Peregrini, the professional or informal background through which one was introduced, personal motives – they all play a role in how one perceives this history. Here I suggest gender can be added as a category of analysis (Scott 1986), since - as I outlined in the introduction to this thesis - the intellectual circle of Castrum Peregrini was traditionally male dominated. Exploring the history of Castrum Peregrini from women's points of view could therefore shed light on the suppression of Gisèle's role in Castrum Peregrini in earlier accounts (see e.g. Bock 2007). Making visible the internal dynamics of the group living at Castrum Peregrini shows the context in which this particular experience was shaped. Studying the perspectives from both men's and women's standpoints within the history of Castrum Peregrini then might lead to "a better understanding of the ways in which historical narratives allow some experiences to be remembered and others to be repressed" (Petö 2011: 81) in this particular context.

Waking up memories: the present past

Pigaht's project engages both with the present and the past. Through the use of the personal memories of former inhabitants of the house, we learn more about the past of Castrum Peregrini, which in turn modifies our vision on the present *and* future of the building and the foundation:

> Ik volg de zoektocht van de levende personages in de film. Dus Michael, Frans en Lars zijn de rode lijn. En via hen nemen we uitstapjes naar het verleden. En het verleden zijn de oude bewoners die een verhaal vertellen over het huis. En door de interviews verandert deze rode lijn, zeg maar: je observaties van het huis.

> I follow the quest of the living character in the movie. So Michael , Frans and Lars are the thread. And through them one takes trips to the past. And the past is the old occupants who tell the story about het house. And through the interviews the thread changes: your observation of the house, so to say.

In *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present* cultural theorist Mieke Bal explains how the term *cultural memory* signifies that memory can be understood both as a cultural as well as an individual and social phenomenon (1999: vii). The act of cultural memorization, she defines as "an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and

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[26] See footnote 9 on *intersectionality.*

redescribed even as it continues to shape the future." (ibid.: vii). The activity of remembering thus ties a bond between the past and the present. Bal adds: "Neither remnant, document, nor relic of the past, nor floating in a present cut off from the past, cultural memory, for better or for worse, links the past to the present and future." (ibid.: vii). It is this process of linking that divides *memory* mostly from *history.* The distinction between the two was first made by historian Pierre Nora (1989). He claims that history, an intellectual endeavor, can only present us with one version of the past, whereas memory is multiple and dynamic. Memory takes place in the realm of the magical and is subject to permanent change; history recovers what is no longer; memory takes into account only those facts that suit it (1989: 8). Bal here emphasizes that the discourse of cultural memory can be particularly invoked to "mediate and modify difficult or tabooed moments of the past - moments that nonetheless impinge, sometimes fatally, on the present" (1999: vii). The modifying and constructing quality of memory is precisely what feminists have insisted on as a potent tool to explore new insights in the past, which then provides new possibilities for the future (see also Buikema 2006).

In 'Histories and Memories in Feminist Research' feminist historians Andrea Petö and Berteke Waaldijk (2011) outline the premises for a critical engagement with our past to subvert the stories of mainstream history. They encourage feminist researchers to move away from mainstream history with its often reassuring and comforting logic (2011: 74-75). This logic, they argue, often is a simplification of the past in order to make it understandable. The 'historical continuity', 'simple causal explanations' and 'a story line of gradual improvement' are continuously based on the illusion of simple objectivity (ibid.: 74; see also Haraway 1988: 581). Petö and Waaldijk point out how this very notion of progression offered in such a 'clear' and 'reassuring' understanding of the past has allowed for the exclusion of more complicated parts, such as women's pasts (2011: 75). They argue that therefore a feminist historical approach has to disrupt the progressive, simplistic notion of history and take into account the discomforting experiences of our past. The way the feminist researcher ought to relate to the past, more precisely to mainstream accounts that offer perspectives based on progress and continuity, is "passionate, uncomforting and unaccepting" (ibid.: 75).[27] The feminist credo here is not to take history for granted. In this light, it is interesting how Pigaht expresses an emotion that underlies her research project:

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[27] Here Petö and Waaldijk draw from Walter Benjamin's explanation in 1940 of the figuration of the "Angel of History". The 'Angel of History' is the opposite of reasonable progress viewed as a continuous chain of past events. This angel sees in the past the catastrophes that pile wreckage upon wreckage. Rather than a comfortable place of identification and explanation, the past is a place where the Angel of History would like to stay to awaken the dead, to make whole what has been smashed. (Benjamin in Petö and Waaldijk 2011).

Wat ik persoonlijk …tragisch vind eigenlijk bijna, is dat… Ik hoor heel weinig oude bewoners zeggen, erkennen, hoe weinig er mogelijk was geweest zonder Gisèle. Het gaat allemaal om die vriendenkring en iedereen daarin voelt zich heel belangrijk, als het ware verheven.. Dan denk ik, mijn God, jullie hebben gewoon járen, sommigen wel 20 jaar lang, op kosten van één vrouw geleefd. Waar is de dankbaarheid? Dat is toch bizar. En daarom zeg ik 'zonder haar, niks'. En dat is gewoon letterlijk: zonder haar, was er níks geweest…

What I personally find tragic actually almost, is the fact that… I hear very few former residents say, acknowledge, how little would have been possible without Gisèle. It's all about the friends and everybody in it feels very important, elevated so to say… Then I think, oh my God, you all, some even 20 years, lived on the expense of one woman. Where is your gratitude? That's bizarre, right? And that's why I say 'without her, nothing'. And that's just literally… Without her, there would have been nóthing.

The intensity in Pigaht's argument concerning Gisèle's neglected merits clearly shows how she is moved by her research topic. It shows her as a researcher as an active agent with her own emotions (Wekker 2006: 4), arguing passionately that Gisèle's (financial) contribution to the group deserves to be recognized by more of its members. Yet, it is another question how these feelings are manifested during the research process. Here, Pigaht is clear about her considerations:

Hoe kan ik iemand die ik nooit heb ontmoet... Hoe kan ik haar recht doen? Dat is voor mij heel moeilijk. Maar het punt is, de film gaat niet over Gisèle. De film gaat over het huis. En het deel van haar, net zoals van Wolfgang [Frommel], leeft alleen nog in de herinneringen van mensen die haar kenden. Dus zo doe ik er recht aan. En in elk gesprek zijn er dingen die terugkomen en dat zijn mijn houvasten.

How can I, someone I've never met… How can I do her justice? That for me is really hard. But the point is, the movie is not about Gisèle. The movie is about the house. And that part of her, as from Wolfgang [Frommel], only lives in the memories of people who knew her. So that's how I justify it. And in every conversation there are reoccurring subjects and those are my anchors.

Here Pigaht shows to be conscious of the difficulty of representing the life of Gisèle, especially since she has never met her. She points out that the focus of her project is 'the

house' and that as such Gisèle is present implicitly. While Pigaht chooses not to address Gisèle's neglected contributions explicitly, she nonetheless urges us to look back. Here she introduces the concept of *nostalgia* to refer to the bond that ties us to the past. She explains:

> Mensen vinden nostalgie soms negatief, omdat het klinkt alsof je het verleden niet kunt loslaten. Maar dat is het voor mij niet. Voor mij heeft het veel meer te maken met hoe je het verleden voelt in alles.

> People view nostalgia sometimes as a negative thing, because it sounds as if you can't let go of the past. But that's not it for me. For me it has much more to do with how you feel the past in everything.

The sense in which Pigaht evokes the term *nostalgia* is not to be understood as a longing for the past. Mieke Bal (1999) points out how nostalgia, as a particular coloring of memory, is often criticized for being 'romanticizing' or 'escapist' (1999: xi). It is also often conceived as longing for an idyllic past that never was (ibid.: xi). Bal argues how nonetheless different uses of the term show how it can be 'productive' and 'empowering' (see e.g. Spitzer 1999). Nostalgia can thus take on different values. Eve Sedgwick (1990) remarks on the similar term of 'sentimentality' that "the range of meanings of sentimentality […] identif[ies] it, not as thematic or a particular subject matter, but as a structure of relation, typically one involving the author – or audience – relations to spectacle" (1990: 43-44). Nostalgia, then, is only a structure of relation to the past. This last remark seems to represent the way Pigaht uses the term: nostalgia as a relation, neither false nor inauthentic in essence. Pigaht makes us aware of how the past is still present in 'the house'. She explains how therefore it is important to make the house 'present':

> Het huis werkt heel erg in op je zintuigen. Geluid is ontzettend belangrijk: je hoort het huis de hele tijd; je hoort de trappen, mensen in andere kamers, het kraken. Je hoort de straat buiten. En licht is ook ontzettend belangrijk, zeker als het gaat om vergankelijkheid. Dingen die worden uitgebleekt of benadrukt door licht. Maar ook bijvoorbeeld: je ruikt het huis. Om het huis te laten leven in de film, wordt straks heel belangrijk.

> The house really works on your senses. Sound is very important: You hear the house constantly; you hear the stairs, people in other rooms, creaking. You hear the street outside. And light is also incredibly important, especially on the matter of transience. Things being

bleached or emphasized by light. But also for example: you smell the house. To make the
house a living object in the movie will become very important.

Here Pigaht emphasizes how material space interacts with all our senses. This refers to more
'unconscious' aspects of our experience, that are difficult to articulate. Pigaht therefore
employs a visual method, portraying 'the house', in addition to the stories that are told by the
former inhabitants. The two methods are nonetheless intertwined – as I argue in the next
section.

Retracing the absent body

In the field of *cultural memory* the term *lieux de mémoire* holds a central place. This idea of
memory sites was first introduced by Pierre Nora (1989) to point to another difference
between *memory* and *history*. Nora argues that whereas history is an abstract term with no
references in physical reality, memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images and
objects. Furthermore, Nora emphasizes that there is no such thing as spontaneous memory,
when it comes to culture. This is why the construction and preservation of so-called *lieux de
mémoire* is important: here "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora 1989: 7). As such,
the creation of these places is a powerful tool for authorities to create narratives around those
events they consider significant, for example the numerous memorials referring to World War
II in the Netherlands. Even so, for minorities, the creation of archives, the organization of
celebrations and the maintaining of anniversaries are of essential importance for the
proclaiming of their identity. The *lieux de mémoire* are a trigger for memory to be produced
and reproduced. Here, feminist scholar in the field of memory studies Ann Rigney (2012)
points out that Nora's use of the term has a rather static connotation (2012: 77). More recent
work in memory studies, she states, "has emphasized instead the fact that memory sites only
survive by virtue of the ongoing willingness to reproduce them and, related to this, their
capacity to generate new interpretations" (ibid.: 77). *Lieux de mémoire* in this sense, then,
work as sites only as long as people invest in them. This more dynamic engagement with the
term *lieux de mémoire* allows for a view in which a memory site is a 'generator of meaning'
(ibid.: 77; see also Rigney 2005). In this use of the term the place is 'alive' and as such
provides the possibility to new interpretations of the past.

This relation to actual space is also important for the current project of Pigaht, which
in the main stems from a spatial approach to memory. In a yet familiar formulation she states

that the film is about 'the house'. Pigaht here refers to the house as a memory site. What is of interest to her is not the mere architectural structure of the building at the Herengracht or by whom it was occupied when it was built in the 17th century (topics that might nevertheless be of inspiration to many other researchers). What the term 'the house' implicates for Pigaht is the history of its residents who called it *Castrum Peregrini*. The house here becomes synonymous with the history of the location since the 1940's. The rooms and the objects – most of which are preserved in the condition they were when Gisèle was still alive – are important connections to this past. For Pigaht the place is also inseparable from the life of Gisèle, since the space is tied to her lifelong presence. Rigney refers to this aspect of objects as "[being] still alive in the present, that is, still capable of generating affect, provoking pleasure, and inviting reenactment" (2012: 83). Although Gisèle is not an actual character in the film, her presence is constantly mirrored in the house and in all the objects she has collected at the Herengracht 401. Pigaht explains how through the materiality of the house, the ever presence of the former residents is provoked:

> Ik neem bijvoorbeeld stukjes uit brieven van Gisèle, haar eigen woorden… die laat ik weerspiegelen in beelden. Ze schreef bijvoorbeeld ergens *Sometimes I don't know who is alive and who is dead.* Het idee dat in het huis nog alle tijden door elkaar vloeien… Dat Wolfgang er bijvoorbeeld nog leeft, terwijl hij er niet meer is. Dat Gisèle er nog leeft, terwijl ze er niet meer is. Dat zie je door het huis zelf, door de oude spullen en je vraagt je af: van wie is deze ruimte, van wie is dit boek?

> I take for example pieces of letters from Gisèle, her own words… which I mirror in images. She, for example, wrote somewhere *Sometimes I don't know who is alive and who is dead.* The idea that all era's are still present and mixed inside the house… That Wolfgang for example still lives there, while he's actually gone. That Gisèle still lives there, while she's gone. You see that through the house itself, through the old stuff and you ask yourself: who's space is this, who's book is this?

The objects in the house here function as 'traces' to refer to a past that is gone. With the term 'trace' I here refer to the semiotic concept of 'trace' as *index*.[28] In film studies the term refers to the specific quality of film as having a privileged relation to time and space. When light is

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[28] The semiotic concept of *indexicality* was first introduced by scientist and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1958). For an elaborate, technical discussion of the *index* in film studies see e.g. Doane (2007a); Doane (2007b); Olivieri (2012).

captured by the lens of the camera, the object 'touches' the film, i.e. there is a physical relation between the camera and the sign (the cinematic image). In 'Haunted by Reality' feminist documentary film theorist Domitilla Olivieri stresses however that in documentary this relation is not *only* a physical one (2012: 40). She claims an indexical specificity for documentary films based on the bond between documentary representation and reality: "The point is that it is not language or the sign which constructs reality, but that reality presents itself in the sign. Reality, then, is not just a passive unknown or unknowable, which is why I concur that reality *haunts* the sign." (ibid.: 41) In this framework the *index,* as a way of pointing, is a *trace* that reveals "a previous temporal contact or existential connection with the object" (ibid.: 39). The term 'trace', then, refers to a reality that was there before it was captured by the lens of the camera. In Pigaht's project, the objects she films are providing a narrative that is beyond the articulated narrative of the personal memories told:

> Puur technisch ga ik echt met een camera door het huis heen en maak heel veel tijdshots van heel veel spullen. Dus ja, heel veel dingen die daar nog liggen die allemaal een verhaal hebben. Die allemaal iets vertellen over, meestal over Gisèle, want het zijn haar spullen.

> From a pure technical standpoint I actually move through the house and make many time shots of numerous amounts of items. So yes, many items still lying there that all have a story. That all tell something about, mostly Gisèle, because it are her things.

The time-shots that Pigaht refers to here are not only moments of pause and contemplation, but are there as if they try to detect a hidden clue. [29] The images are traces in search of the body that is no longer there. The artifacts in Gisèle's house are linked to their author through a material and physical connection. We might think of the brushstrokes on her paintings on the wall, which remind of her touch. Also in a less obvious way, the objects in the house bare the gestures of their maker, according to Pigaht:

> Haar werk is voor mij eigenlijk het huis, de meubels, de kleine spullen die overal liggen, dingen die ze gevonden heeft…

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[29] In a panel discussion entitled 'Filming the Absent Mother' (2014), with feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey and literature and film specialist Emma Wilson, Marlene Monteiro discusses how filmic images can strongly evoke the presence of an absent body. The narrative of film, then, resembles that of a detective story where the unknowing spectator finds out more and more about what has happened before the film started. For a discussion on how crime fiction and feminist history writing are both translating signs and clues into narrative, see Petö and Waaldijk (2011); Strout (1994).

Her work is for me actually the house, the furniture, the little things that lie around everywhere, things she found.

Here, Pigaht links Gisèle's experience, her 'work', to the collection of items that she finds in the house. In the next chapter I will show how visual artist Amie Dicke engages even more thoroughly with this material reflection of Gisèle's life. For Pigaht, what makes the objects important is their capability of affecting those who have known Gisèle:

In het opruimen. Daar zit het hem in. Als ik nu alleen maar door het huis loop met een camera en ik film de spullen, dan kan ik wel een voice-over daarover heen leggen, maar ja... Pas als ik Frans bijvoorbeeld aan de slag zie gaan met de kleren van Gisèle dan snap je, dan zit er emotie achter, dan zie je 'het zijn niet zomaar kleren, maar die heeft iemand gedragen,' diegene heeft een verleden en die heeft een betekenis gehad voor Frans. Maar die heeft ook betekenis gehad voor Lars en ook voor Michael, maar heel verschillend. En daardoor laat je zeg maar zien… dat het huis een huis is met heel veel verhalen en herinneringen.

In the clearing up. That's where it's at. If I would only walk through the house with a camera and film the items, I could add a voice-over, but well… It's not until I for instance see Frans go to work on Gisèle's clothes, then there's emotion behind it, then you see 'those are not just clothes, but those were worn by someone,' that person had a history and meaning for Frans. But that person also had significance for Lars and for Michael, but differently. And that's how you sort of show… that the house is a house with many stories and memories.

Pigaht here emphasizes how the interaction between those who have been close to Gisèle and the objects that reflect her presence, build an affective relationship. Through that particular bond Pigaht aims to bring across a sense of what the house means and has meant for its inhabitants. This emotion that is attached to the life of Gisèle and to the house, which represents the history of Castrum Peregrini, also informs Pigaht's ethical approach towards her participants.

Concerning Ethics
Throughout the research process Pigaht is very much aware of the sensitivity that surrounds her project. Like Mooij, Pigaht notices among certain participants in interviews the reluctance to speak openly about Castrum Peregrini's history. She acknowledges that in such a 'closed' community it is difficult to navigate as a researcher:

Het is echt ontzettend moeilijk. Je hebt al die verschillende standpunten en mensen. Je gaat dan een goed gesprek aan met iemand. Je bouwt een band. En dan hoor je vervolgens iets over diegene wat dan toch anders zit. Het is een heel gevoelig proces van vertrouwen, want er zit overal wantrouwen. In iedereen zit wantrouwen, en iedereen weerhoudt informatie van me. […] Het is heel moeilijk omdat je niemand wilt kwetsen.

It is extremely difficult. There are all these different views and people. I then engage in a conversation with someone. We build a connection. Then, I hear something about this person that turns out to be totally different. It's a very sensitive process of trust, because there's distrust everywhere. Everybody is distrusting and withholding information from me. […] It is hard because I do not want to hurt anyone.

Here Pigaht underlines the importance of gaining trust to work with her participants: a process that demands time and effort. At the heart of Pigaht's project is the concern not to offend anyone. The respect for human dignity also forms the core of feminist ethical concerns regarding research practice (Hesse-Biber 2014: 85). Feminist research is often characterised by attention to "the emotional dimension of the conduct of inquiry" (Fonow and Cook 1991: 9). Fonow and Cook, referring to Patricia Hill Collin's assertion that an "ethic of caring" can be identified as central to both Afrocentric and feminist values and that it constitutes a particular epistemological position (Hill Collins 1989), write: "The ethic of caring, used to validate knowledge claims, includes an emphasis on individual uniqueness, the acceptance of the appropriateness of emotions in dialogue, and the cultivation of the capacity for empathy" (Fonow and Cook 1991: 10). Regarding empathy, sociologist Jaana Loipponen concludes her research project on war widows with the following ethical note: "Doing research is about relating to the world through identifying, through meeting with the stranger's gaze, who is no longer a subject of study, no longer a case, not even a stranger" (2007: 60). This methodological approach also characterizes Pigaht's research project. Allowing her participants to tell their own stories from their own perspective, she aims to provide a safe environment in which her participants are able to tell their stories:

Mijn prioriteit was om [naam van de geïnterviewde] te leren kennen en haar vertrouwen te winnen. En niet teveel dingen tegelijkertijd vragen. […] /interviewer: Zijn er dan ook onderwerpen die je vermijdt, iets wat je niet wilt openbreken?/ Nou.... Ik breek het wel open, maar dit wil ik wel op een… eerlijke manier doen. Er is ook een verschil tussen draaien en monteren. Dus als ik draai, gooi ik het allemaal open. Maar ik moet mijn momenten pakken.

Dus als ik de interviews draai, met die oude bewoners, dan is het echt heel erg persoonlijk op een oude bewoner ingespeeld. […] Als dat voor haar heel erg speelt, kan ik dat niet negeren. Dan is dat haar verhaal. En met het interview gaan we kijken hoe we dat een plekje kunnen geven.

My priority was to get to know [name of the participant] and to gain her trust. And not to aks too many question at once. /interviewer: Are there then topics you avoid, things you do not want to lay bare?/ Well… I do lay bare, but I want to do this in a honest way. There also is a difference between shooting and mounting. When I shoot, I aim to lay everything bare. But I have to seize my moments. So when I shoot the interview with the former residents, then it's all very directed on this particular person. […] If this is something important she wants to tell, than I cannot ignore that. It's her story. And with the interviews, then, we'll have to see how that fits into the context.

Here Pigaht addresses the feminist concerns of confidentiality and building a relationship with the interviewee (Hesse-Biber 2014: 185-186). By building a report, Pigaht explores what might be the relevant topics of interest to her participants to uncover topics that might otherwise be overlooked. She exercices a minimum of control over how her participants answer (ibid.: 186). Such an approach offers the input of the participants a central place in the research process. To open up space to get to know a little about her participants, Pigaht asks each participant before the interview to choose something to read to her that relates to Castrum Peregrini. Also the setting of the interview is something that she considers carefully:

/interviewer: Heb je deze interviews ook al opgenomen? Of zijn zij onderdeel van jouw onderzoek dat voorafgaat aan het draaien voor de film?/ Dat is tot nu toe alleen nog maar deel geweest van het onderzoek. En ik neem niets op. Dat zijn alleen nog maar one-on-one gesprekken. Af en toe schrijf ik een keer iets op, maar ik neem niets op, want iemand verhoudt zich dan meteen heel anders .

/interviewer: Did you already record these interviews? Or are they part of your research that precedes the actual shooting of the film?/ Until now, it has just been part of the research process. I don't record anything. It are only one-on-one conversations. From time to time I write something down, but I don't record, because then someone will behave quite differently.

Pigaht's interview strategy is based on her desire to make her participants feel comfortable. In building a relationship of trust with them, she becomes visible as an embodied observer: a

person with real emotions. Instead of playing a "god trick" (Haraway 1988: 581), Pigaht positions herself clearly. This awareness of her role is also reflected in another remark concerning her visibility in the documentary:

> Hoe meer ik ga draaien hoe meer ik merk wat voor rol ik zelf krijg in de film. Mijn idee is natuurlijk om het van een afstand te observeren. Alleen als ik merk dat dit niet gaat, omdat ik toch specifieker iets wil weten, waar ik na moet vragen, dan lukt dat niet.

> The more I shoot, the more I learn what my own part will be in the film. My idea is of course to observe from a distance. However, when I see that this is not going to work, because I want to ask something more specifically, then that's just how it is.

It is the logic of practice that informs the final product. This process foregoing the actual documentary, then, is a dynamic process in which many factors cannot yet be foreseen. Yet, Pigaht shows to critically reflect on each phase in this process. With this "mobile positioning" (Haraway 1988: 586) Pigaht shows that she is considerate with regard to her research subject as well as her participants.

Chapter 4
Souvenirs and the Unmade

Sorting memories in visual art

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An interview with Amie Dicke

In 2009 visual artist Amie Dicke produced her first installation within Castrum Peregrini. The apartment of Claus Victor Bock was cleared out at that time. Bock, one of the people that went into hiding there during the Nazi occupation, had continued living in the house after the war until his death 2008. The environment of his apartment served as a point of departure for Dicke's work. By using transparent plastic and tape to produce an impression of the furniture among which Bock had spent his life, she tried to preserve the atmosphere of his apartment for a little longer. At a certain moment halfway through the preparations for the installation, Gisèle, in her late nineties but still eager to know what went on in her house, walked into the space. She was accompanied by the foundation's director Michael Defuster. "Wonderful!" Gisèle exclaimed as soon as she saw the nearly finished artwork."Look at the light and the spectacle!" she continued joyously. After a moment of contemplation, Defuster said to her, clearly articulating:[30] "Gisèle, this is Amie, the artist who made this work of art." Suddenly a frown appeared on her face. "This is *not* art!" she replied with a loud voice.

I was told this anecdote in the interview with Amie Dicke and I choose to cite it here as it presents and reflects many of the aspects that are at stake when meditating on Dicke's current project at Castrum Peregrini. In this project, Dicke engages in an ongoing exploration of the

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[30] Gisèle was nearly deaf in the last period of her life, which diminished her ability to communicate. She also suffered increasingly from dementia. She had been introduced to Amie Dicke previously, but her memory needed to be refreshed every time they met again.

spaces in which Gisèle has spent the major part of her life. On the website of her project she publishes the photos of quotes and fragments, marks left by light and time, forms and anything else that attracts her attention that will ultimately lead into a book publication.[31] In this chapter I will reflect on Dicke's motivation and approach in the ongoing exploration of Gisèle's material legacy, i.e. her exploration of Gisèle's studio and living spaces. Underlying this approach, as shown by the anecdote, is first of all the 'confrontation' with Gisèle; an assertive and opinionated woman as it appears here. The fact that Dicke has encountered Gisèle in such a way differentiates her project from that of Mooij and Pigaht, who do not explicitly draw from such an experience. For Dicke, the acquaintance with Gisèle has strongly influenced her interest in Gisèle's environment, not to say determined her exploration. I elaborate on this aspect in the first section of this chapter. In a subsequent section I address the specific relation between Dicke and the objects she works with. Drawing largely from the ideas of artist and art theorist Barbara Bolt (2004), I focus on the 'work' in the work of art. Both Bolt's ideas of and insights from new materialism inform my understanding of Dicke's practice in this section. The chapter will be concluded by a further examination of the directions that the exploration of the artist takes us. Inspired by new materialist and sexual difference theory, I argue that Dicke's project challenges our understanding of the relation between identity and thought and proposes an alternative presentation of Gisèle's lived experience.

Interpretation of an encounter

The myth of the detached observer (Haraway: 1988) has lost its dominant position within the social sciences already for a while. Researchers become more and more confident to speak of the different aspects of the bond that connects them with their interviewees, especially in the field of anthropology where long term collaboration between the researcher and its research subjects is common. More than once, "what had started out as fieldwork had gradually developed into friendship", as Swedish anthropologist Don Kulick claims referring to his research on sex, gender and culture among Brazilian transgendered prostitutes (Kulick, 1998: 12). Not only might an affectionate relationship between researcher and informant *follow* from their collaboration, as such it is an intrinsic element of the research project. This is for example been put forward by Dutch anthropologist Gloria Wekker, who in 'The Politics of

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[31] http://important-souvnirs.com/. Eventually the work of art will be published in book form.

Passion" openly speaks about her relationship with Juliette, an Afro-Surinamese woman with whom she had been working in an oral history project for several months (Wekker 2006). This relationship enlarged her understanding of a culture in a way that hardly could have been obtained otherwise. And also anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere explains: "My informants are not just interesting cases. Over the years many have become friends of mine. … I fully recognize this common affinity and use it to understand my informants better, to engage in discourses with them, and, through these dialogues, to develop my own insights into their culture and personality…. I am one with them, yet not one of them." (Obeyesekere 1981: 11). Obeyesekere here emphasizes how friendship and dialogue can improve insight in the subject matter.

'To be one with' is an interesting formulation that touches upon an affectionate bond that also echoes in Dicke's words, when speaking about Gisèle. Although Dicke was particularly impressed by Gisèle's way of seeing the world, she does not experience this in Gisèle's artwork. She opposes Gisèle's paintings, to which she intuitively is not attracted, to her personality:

> /interviewer: Wat verandert het dan precies dat je haar gekend hebt?/ Omdat ik haar als persoon waanzinnig vond. En als mens echt ongelooflijk te gek. Haar karakter, haar energie. Hoe ze met de dingen omging, hoe ze keek naar… en wat ze zag. Met een soort speelsheid en…   nou ja, waanzinnig…

> /interviewer: Wat exactly does 'having known her' change?/ Because I thought she was absolutely fantastic as a person. And, as a human being, really awesome. Her character, her energy. The way she handled things, how she looked at… and what she saw. With a certain playfulness and… well, fantastic…

The affection Dicke experienced towards Gisèle has thus affected her interest in her studio and living space. The marks that Gisèle, sometimes unconsciously, left in her house became for Dicke the topic of her exploration. Little notes, fragments jotted down, words on the back of photographs and marks left by time; for Dicke, Gisèle's urge to collect and preserve all kinds of 'things' makes her house a true playing field. What she finds there at the same time inspires her and reminds her of her own working method:

> Ik denk dat dat bij mij al langer speelde, dat ik op een bepaalde manier… dus ik herken iets. Ik denk dat geïnspireerd voelen vaak raakt aan iets wat al in je kiemt. Vaak moet het nog groeien

en moet je die inspiratie veel meer water geven, om het zo maar te zeggen, en zal dat nog heel onduidelijk zijn. Maar in dit geval had ik meteen iets van 'hallo... dat begrijp ik volgens mij..!' (ze lacht)

I think that, with me, this already played much longer, that I in some way… so I recognize something. I think that feeling inspired often connects with something already germinating inside of you. Often this still has to grow and you need to water that inspiration plenty, so to say, and it will still be very unclear. In this case however I immediately thought 'hello… I think I get this…!'

Whereas Dicke is not particularly fond of the work Gisèle had produced on purpose, e.g. her paintings, she was immediately caught by her vivid, playful way of acting. It was seeing Gisèle in action that determined Dicke's view on her as a creative inspiration. According to Dicke, the paintings were an attempt to express, or 'translate' what she saw, but it was the way of perceiving itself which made Gisèle a remarkable person. Dicke sees this part of Gisèle's character rather reflected in her house and studio, than in her intended artwork.

Ik kon het gewoon niet rijmen met die schilderijen. Ik had zoiets van, hoe kan dit nou toch…? Je bent zo… En ik kon het wel rijmen met heel veel dingen die in het huis liggen. En hoe ze daar naar wijst en hoe ze daar mee speelt. Alleen, zij vond dat geen… kunst.

I just couldn't reconcile it all with those paintings. I was like, how is this possible…? You are so… And I could reconcile this with a lot of the things lying around the house. And how she points at that and how she plays with it. Only, she didn't consider that… art.

It is self-evident that Gisèle's old age did not allow Dicke to ever engage more thoroughly in a discussion on the topic. When Dicke met her, she was already in her nineties and it was a question of respect not to contradict her in this aspect. Had there been the opportunity for a conversation as "equals", Dicke admits, she would have liked to pop the question to discover their differences in point of view. Oral historian Alessandro Portelli points to the importance of thinking through the roles of equality and difference and claims that the two terms are related:

Only equality prepares us to accept difference in terms other than hierarchy and subordination; on the other hand, without difference there is no equality – only sameness, which is a much

less worthwhile ideal. Only equality makes the interview credible, but only difference makes it relevant. Fieldwork is meaningful as the encounter of two subjects who recognize each other as subjects, and therefore separate, and seek to build their equality upon their difference in order to work together. (Portelli, 2001: 43)

Although Portelli here probably refers to differences in race, culture or gender, in the case of Dicke's relation to Gisèle, age and mental health is similarly determining factors, which complicates a relationship build on equality. Their differing views on art might even be a direct result of this age difference. One could also suppose that the fact that Gisèle had an aristocratic background and the friends she surrounded her with later on in her life[32] caused her reaching back to traditional values in the arts. What Portelli's words remind us of is that it is not *despite*, but rather *due to* difference that research is relevant. Difference produces a tension that is worth studying. What interests Dicke is precisely the fact that Gisèle left her marks unintendedly. Moreover, had Gisèle instantly approved of considering her souvenirs as art, they probably would not have been there in the same form. Instead this constellation would be based on the less desirable notion of 'sameness'[33]: Dicke's research would than only be reproductive. Only now there is a material heritage in the form of Gisèle's 'souvenirs', which attracts Dicke's full attention.

> Er valt nu iets te doen voor mij in dat huis, er valt nu iets te redden voor mij. Alles wat daar ligt en waar misschien voorbij aan wordt gegaan en dat mensen alleen maar dadelijk die schilderijen gaan tonen, denk ik 'maar dit, dit, dit is ook onderdeel van Gisèle' en
> dat vind ik het mooiste aan haar. Daar word ik door gedreven, vooral in het begin.

> Now there's something to do for me in that house, there is something to safe. Everything unnoticed, just lying there and that people are only going to show those paintings, with me thinking 'but this, this, this is also part of Gisèle' and this is what I love mostly about her. That's my drive, especially in the beginning.

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[32] The intellectual circle of Castrum Peregrini was strongly inspired by the work of German poet Stefan George (1868-1933). His work contained critique on modern society and drew from ancient Greek ideals of intellectual and spiritual activity.

[33] Portelli's invocation becomes even more pressing from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, which warns us for the danger concerning female subjectivity in a conception of inter-female relationships as unitary. Feminist psychoanalyst Teresa de Lauretis explains that in traditional psychoanalytic discourse this relationship, based on the mother-daughter metaphor, is characterized by a notion of sameness which excludes women from subjectivity. To represent woman as an actor "her body must be seen as a locus of difference and estrangement, instead of the privileged place of unity and fulfillment." (De Lauretis 1994: 163; see also Irigaray 1985a; Irigaray 1985b).

Now that Gisèle has passed away and the house at the Herengracht has to be cleared out, the urge to preserve something of her nature has become pressing. At one point in the interview, Dicke refers to her work as that of an archeologist who scans the site. This scanning functions as a way of digesting Gisèle's material legacy. Although a conversation can no longer take place, the dialogue might continue on a different, non-linguistic level. An alternative manner to communicate was already part of their encounter when Gisèle was alive:

> Wat er wel op een gegeven moment kwam, toen het steeds minder makkelijk werd om te praten en het voor haar ongemakkelijk werd en voor ons ook.. Ze had er ook niet altijd zin in, ze speelde het ook heel vaak, de doofheid. Maar dan ging je spelen. Gewoon, dan legde ze een vork neer en prikte ze er iets aan.. een kurk.. en dan ging ik er weer wat aanprikken en al spelenderwijs was zo'n moment wel heel leuk.

> What did happen, when she was less and less able to talk and things got awkward for all of us. She often acted, being deaf. But then you'd start to play. She would just grab a fork and put something on it… a cork… and then I would put something on it and playfully these moments were very nice.

The game that Dicke describes here is probably as close to a dialogue among equals as possible. Now that communication verbally had become unsettling, they could become equal partners in playing. According to Dicke, playing these kind of 'games' was very much part of Gisèle's character as an artist and she easily admitted people into the game if they wanted to. Her attitude was open and straightforward, like if she was saying:

> "Als je mee wil doen, dan mag je meespelen. Maar als je niet mee wilt doen, dan toch niet. Bekijk het maar. Ik ga gewoon lekker door."

> "You can join me, if you want to. If you don't want to join, I don't really care. I'm playing anyway."

The 'game' seems to continue in Dicke's work with Gisèle's souvenirs. Moreover, in this interaction itself we might find a clue to account for the knowledge Dicke produces. While 'playing', she seems constantly aware of her own partiality. She emphasizes that this is the part of Gisèle that she likes best, allowing others to disagree. She thereby shows a "passionate

detachment" (Haraway 1988: 586), being transparent about her affection towards Gisèle, while able to take her research to other levels, which underlines the emergence of Gisèle's as a separate subject. Gisèle's different view on what qualifies as art is constantly part of her reflections.

You can join me, if you want to

To explore the relation between Dicke's work and Gisèle's life further I now turn to the theoretical work of artist and feminist theorist Barbara Bolt. In her book entitled "Art beyond Representation: the performative power of the image" she offers some insightful thoughts on the relation between imaging and reality in the practice of art. Challenging the dominance of representation as an explanatory concept in visual art, Bolt pleas for a materialist ontology that takes into account the 'logic of practice'.[34] She distinguishes the 'artwork', which is studied in the discipline of art history, and the 'work' of art, which is in need of a theoretical framework that allows for insight in its practical activity. It concerns a logic that can only be discovered *trough* practice, as it goes beyond common understanding of art as representative[35]. Bolt interprets the representative framework as a method of thinking, as having served modern man's "will to fixity and mastery over the world". (2004: 9). Bolt contrasts this notion of control over the world to a view in which subjects are "vulnerable and open" (Bolt 2004: 20) to a world that confronts them. Focusing on visual art, Bolt proposes a conception of a *performative* relation between the image and reality, "a reality of mutual reflection between objects, images and bodies", which yields the possibility "to produce ontological effects." (ibid.: 8).

I would like to draw a parallel here between Bolt's ideas and some thoughts expressed by thinkers who associate themselves with the theory of new materialism. Coined as a "third wave feminist epistemology" (van der Tuin 2009),[36] new materialism operates at the crossroad of epistemology and ontology. As such it traverses many disciplines of knowledge to search for new ways to theorize and challenge the divisions between matter and discourse, nature and culture and other dichotomies. New materialism is not only concerned with

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[34] Bolt draws from philosopher Pierre Bourdieu's framework of the logic of practice. Art is much more than a representational activity, she argues, as "Practice has a logic that is not that of the logician. This has to be acknowledged in order to avoid asking of it more logic than it can give, thereby condemning oneself either to wring coherence out of it or to thrust a forced coherence upon it." (Bourdieu, 1990: 80)

[35] Bolt here targets the notion of representation as presented by philosopher Martin Heidegger in his work on art and technology. He therein explains representation as a model by means of with subjects organize the world in order to set it forth as an object of investigation. (Heidegger, 1977)

[36] Prominent new materialist scholars named by Dolphijn and Van der Tuin are Rosi Braidotti, Manuel DeLanda, Karen Barad and Quentin Meillassoux.

epistemological questions, but also engages with the social and political, examining social phenomena from multidimensional perspectives.

Bolt's idea of the performative image calls to mind an association with Rosi Braidotti's "images without imagination". In this chapter of "Nomadic Subjects" Braidotti takes a stand to visualization practices of the female reproductive body. Without rejecting this technology altogether, she aims at showing how this practice implies a power relation that privileges vision over imagination. Visualization processes are an unchanging factor in Western culture (Fox-Keller 1983). Braidotti stresses how the importance of sight as the qualifier for knowledge (Fox-Keller and Grontowski 1983: 207-224) allows for the separation of subject from object, granting dominance to the former and neglecting the agency of the latter, in this case the female body. "The scopic drive is linked to both knowledge and control or domination," Braidotti writes (2011: 196). Similarly to Bolt, Braidotti argues that there is more to the image than we can *see.* She calls for a "fertile, generous imagination" (2011: 212) that challenges the notion of separation between subject and object.

Returning to art theory with this, I would now like to go into the way the artist cuts through oppositions such as matter and discourse and therefore challenges received notions of subjectivity and art making. Bolt critiques an "instrumentalist understanding" (2004: 10) of the work of the artist. In such an understanding, resulting from the idea that the world is a static pre-existing entity, the work of the artist is seen as one of mastery: to impose order into inchoate matter. This implies that the work of art would be a product well thought out in advance. As an alternative, Bolt proposes to refigure this scheme, by paying close attention to the processes and methodologies of artistic practice. She explains: "In a reversal of the causal chain of means and ends, the relationship between objects, artists, materials and processes, emerges as one of co-responsibility and indebtedness, rather than one of mastery" (Bolt 2004: 10). I would like to illustrate this point with an example from Dicke's work. With Gisèle's *this is not art* still resonating in her head, she scans the studio and souvenirs Gisèle has left.

(Ze citeert uit haar hoofd) *It is the paintings I did not paint that are the most breathtaking. They capture [...] ...visual emotions that make manmade mediums impotent.*
It is the paintings I did not paint that are the most breathtaking… Dat vond ik gewoon al... Nou, ik was shocked dat ze dat had geschreven. Dat was één van de notities…één van de kleine notities die ik vond waarvan ik meteen dacht: Aha! (ze lacht) Omdat ik daar natuurlijk ook mee bezig ben. / ik: Legitimeerde dat voor jou ook dat je er op deze manier mee bezig bent?/ Héél erg… Zij voelde dat ook, voelde dat ook zo. […] Dat hele verhaal van dat steentje

dat ze dat zo omdraaide en daar een schilderij van maakte. Maar alleen al door dat te doen, dat steentje om te draaien, dat is voor mij al genoeg. Daar ligt de kracht, dat is Gisèle.

(She cites from the heart) *It is the paintings I did not paint that are the most breathtaking. They capture […] …visual emotions that make manmade mediums impotent. It is the paintings I did not paint that are the most breathtaking…* I already thought that…Well, I was shocked she'd written that. That was one of the notes… one of the small notes I found that instantly made me think: Aah! (she smiles) Because I was doing the same, of course. /Interviewer: Did this, for you, also legitimize your own approach?/ Very much… She felt the same way. […] That entire story about that small stone that she turned like that and turn into a painting. But already in doing so, turning that small stone, that's enough for me. That's what makes it powerful, that's Gisèle.

In Dicke's research, the souvenirs she finds are not mere representations. They reveal something that Dicke then critically engages with. In a multidimensional perspective she brings them back to live. Interestingly, during the interview Dicke several times refers to Gisèle using the present tense. For example when stating "Ik vind dat Gisèle een hele mooie manier had..*heeft* om met de tijd om te gaan"/ "In my opinion Gisèle had…*has* a beautiful way of dealing with time.) In working with the souvenirs, Dicke continues to engage in a conversation with Gisèle, who is made an active participant through the material that she has left. Art in this way is neither representationalist nor is it mastery. To put it differently: "Each creative event involves a unique encounter of inexhaustible complexity that can neither be known in advance nor predicted." (Bolt 2004: 53). Not only objects that contain a textual referent cause these kinds of effects, as is shown by another example from Dicke's exploration. When discussing the adoption of Gisèle's artifacts to incorporate them in her work, Dicke refers to a moment in which she found a picture frame with Gisèle's handwriting on its back. She explains:

Maar dat was inderdaad het lijstje die mij dat op een gegeven moment vertelde, dat 'this is me' en dat 'Gisèle' kon weg, op het pootje. Het was 'this is me' en ze had op het pootje Gisèle geschreven. This is me, Gisèle, This is me, Gisèle… (ze maakt met haar hand een kantelende beweging) Maar 'me' laat andere mensen toe. Laat toe dat je dat voelt. Vanuit de 'ik' versie.

It was indeed the picture frame that told me this: the 'this is me' and 'Gisèle' could be left out. It was 'this is me' and on the foot she had written 'Gisèle'. This is me, Gisèle, This is me,

Gisèle… (she makes a tilting moving with her hand). But 'me' allows other people in. It allows that you experience it. From out of the 'I' position.

The performative power of the image here becomes explicit: Dicke claims that the picture frame had *told* her something. The image had invited her to join, if she wanted to. The material in this case not only confirms Dicke's presumptions, but influences her thoughts on the matter. In other words, the dynamic productivity between the artist and the object disrupts the dichotomy between matter and discourse. Nonetheless, Dicke feels the need to stress her own partiality in admitting that it concerns her interpretation of the object. For her, at the back of the picture frame, a personality is revealed. This clearly contrasts with the physical picture that is in the frame, which entails a mere representation. The narrative that is thus created through Gisèle's material legacy is one that Dicke feels present in the house and the souvenirs. However, it stands amongst other narratives.

> Het is meer een verhaal wat ik vind in haar huis. Ik denk dat ik het zie. Maar ik kan alleen vanuit mezelf kijken. En ik ben wél iets aan het maken uiteindelijk.

> It's more like a story that I find in her house. I think I can see it. But I can only look through me. And I am making something eventually.

Dicke refers to her working method as 'pointing'. In an interview on a former exhibition by her entitled "Afterimage", she also referred to her method as "manipulating", "correcting", "interferring". All these notions implicate that there is something present already, which Dicke then engages with, mostly by 'removing' elements. What precisely happens here between the object and the artist? In the conversation between the object, Gisèle and Dicke boundaries have become blurred. The division between the two authors is not clear-cut. One no longer can say that it is merely Gisèle's souvenirs, as Dicke replaces them by "pointing". About the extraction of the objects out of their context, Dicke explains:

> Ze worden een beetje ontheemd inderdaad in eerste instantie. Tegelijkertijd krijgen ze de kans om door te gaan. Of ze worden weggegooid…Toch? Dus het is of de prullenbak in, of misschien dat er nog meer mensen plezier aan kunnen beleven. […]   Door dingen uit dat huis te plaatsen en het hier naar mijn atelier te halen, kan ik het veel mee   meer terughalen naar mezelf. Dus het wordt wel weer iets persoonlijker daardoor. Ik kan iets meer mijn eigen verhaal maken.

Yes, they are being displaced at first. At the same time they get a chance to stay alive. Or they're being thrown away… Right? So it's either down the bin, or maybe they can entertain more people. […] By taking things out of the house and bringing it here to my gallery, I can take it much fur… further back to myself. So it does become more personal because of that. It's a bit easier to make it my own story.

Dicke emphasizes the role of physical environment in interpreting the objects. The context of the space in which the souvenirs remain is of great importance on how a narrative is constructed. The story continues when the objects leave the house at the Herengracht. By moving the objects physically, Dicke feels freer to adopt them. Not only can the artifacts continue their lives physically in Dicke's work, they also enlarge the narrative. As such, a narrative is created that includes more people. This is also a process that happened over time and is not pre-determined, she adds. The next part will address this narrative beyond the personal.

The Experienced Lightness of Being

"The story that I wish to tell is not a heavy one," claims Dicke. Indeed, she's not after Gisèle's personal (hi)stories in order to represent her life. She will rather leave this to the domain of biography. Instead, she seeks ways that do not require such private details, in order to make the material accessible for others to actively engage with. By extracting the souvenirs out of the house at the Herengracht, Dicke sees the possibility to undo them from their charged history, as always already and always only being part of Castrum Peregrini. This, however, has been a long process, which is still not concluded:

Ik ben nu op een punt zelfs dat ik niet meer zo bezig ben met het huis. Dat is sinds een half jaar ineens… is er een soort last van me afgevallen. Ik heb het idee dat ik nu echt meer kan spelen. Dus ik wil het ook wel toelaten dat er veel meer dingen in het boek komen die niet eens meer uit het huis komen. Misschien…

I'm now at a point even that I'm not so much thinking about the house. That's how it is all of a sudden since six months… an enormous weight of my back. I really feel that now I'm able to play much more. So I'm willing to allow a lot more things into the book that don't even originate from the house. Maybe…

One notices a slight hesitation as it comes to discussing the idea of undoing the objects of their original environment. On the one hand, replacing them offers new opportunities. Dicke now dares to allow them to take directions of their own. In this phase of the artistic practice one can see how, "[t]he outside world enters the work and the work casts it effects back into the world". (Bolt 2004: 10). Dicke discovers how the souvenirs proliferate (new/more) possibilities. On the other hand, her "passionate detachment" in the Harawayan sense is counterbalanced by what we might interpret as an emotional bond tying herself to Gisèle, the house at the Herengracht and its current directing team. However, the urge to continue in the process seems to prevail. Dicke clarifies:

> En daarom wilde ik gewoon testen 'wat gebeurt er nou als we alle namen..', want ik heb ook quotes van andere mensen gebruikt, en andere gedachten, die ik soms vond in het huis, of vlak nadat ik uit het huis terugkwam, …gewoon een soort gedachtestroom. Fragmenten, fragmentarische flarden… die ik naast elkaar wilde leggen. Om daar nu juist alle namen vanaf te halen. Juist niet zeggen wie het gezegd heeft, maar kijken hoe dat bij elkaar één karakter kan zijn.

> And that's why I wanted to test 'what'll happen when we take all the names…', because I also used quotes of others people, and other thoughts, that I sometimes found in the house, or right after I came back from the house, …some sort of thought stream. Fragments, fragmented tatters that I wanted to lay next to each other. To actually take off all the names. Not saying who said that, but seeing how everything together can become one character.

Dicke tries to invent new ways to apply the material at hand: to make connections outside the framework of Gisèle's house, allowing it to become more than that. It seems as if the material goes on to live a life of its own, proliferating itself in a flux. Her work emerges as a kind of revealing, or, as Bolt elaborates, "[t]he interactive labour through which the work of art comes into being produces its own kind of sight" (2004: 78).

In Dicke's project the matter withdraws itself from its object status and becomes dynamic, allowing us to access the world in an immediate - non-representational and non-instrumental - way. The notion of *flux* is a key-term here, so that a reference to a new materialist view on the world can be made again. Drawing on Deleuze's philosophy of becoming with its emphasis on processes, dynamic interaction and fluid boundaries, feminist philosopher Rosi Braidotti explains how thought can be redefined. Rather than being an expression of the subject's in-depth interiority, thinking is "a way of establishing concrete

material and semiotic connections among subjects that are conceived in terms of a multiplicity of impersonal forces" (2011: 24). Braidotti here argues how 'beyond' or actually 'next to' the discursive nature of identity there is a flow of thought that exist independent from identities. The 'own kind of sight' that is produced in Dicke's work is in this sense then no longer tied to a single subject, or even a definable number of subjects. In its multiplicity it has become a flow that is *impersonal*. In other words, Dicke engages in a process that feminist theorist Karen Barad (2007) in *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* describes with the term *intra-action*. She writes that "in contrast to the usual "interaction," which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies […] emerge through, their intra-action." (2007: 33; see also Barad 2010: 244). Barad here turns around the received hierarchical notion of thought and identity; she claims that identity follows from thought, rather than precedes it. It's precisely this ontological switch that seems to interest also Dicke in her engagement with Gisèle's life: what is left when names are erased? Which relation emerges from thought alone? Her work suggests a world which Haraway characterizes as one in which "[b]eings do not preexist their relatings." (Haraway 2003: 6). When the concept of identity is removed, only an open field of relations is left. Dicke clarifies:

> Ik wil iets maken waarin iedereen toegelaten kan worden. Ik denk dat dat uiteindelijk wel een karakter was wat Gisèle had, ze liet wel mensen toe. En ik probeer van de ego's af te komen, en mythe-vorming. […] Maar je ontkomt er niet aan dat mensen het heerlijk vinden om over 'Gisèle' te lezen of 'van míj' iets te horen. Maar ik vind dat soms afleiden van waar eigenlijk naar gewezen wordt, wat belangrijk is. Dus daarom probeer ik dat er af te halen.

> I want to make something that allows everybody in. I think that that eventually was Gisèle's character, she allowed people in. And I'm trying to get rid of the ego's, and mythmaking. […] But you can't escape the fact that people love to read about 'Gisèle' or hear 'from me'. But I think that's actually distracting from the point, that what's important. That's why I want to take that off.

Dicke's motivation to shift focus from identities to the flow of intensities is that she grants more importance to the latter. The critique that identities distract from studying 'the real' has

first been put forward by Michel Foucault.[37] Accordingly, feminist new materialist scholars have continued to question the humanist notion of the subject. It is argued that this anthropomorphism lies at the base of dualistic thinking, which in turn leads to oppression (of women, of homosexuals, of black people, of nature etc.). A theory that approaches the real as a becoming, as multiple, as *difference,* than changes both our ontological and our ethico-political point of view. In a world in which a notion of difference prevails, hierarchy would be by definition undermined. Sexual difference theorists have pointed out how this differentiation has not taken place yet (see e.g. Grosz 2005; Irigaray 1985a; Irigaray 1985b; Thiele 2014). "What today is actual is sexual opposition or binarism, the defining of the two sexes in terms of the characteristics of one. Sexual difference is that which is virtual; it is the potential of this opposition to function otherwise, to function without negation, to function as full positivity." (Grosz 2005: 164). Until now, woman has been defined in terms of negation of man. To create new understandings, feminists have to seek ways to enter the virtual. Sexual difference theory offers a practical philosophy which, according to Barad "shifts the focus from linguistic representations to discursive practices" (Barad 2003: 807). In its emphasis on practice this philosophy is likely to find answers in the work of art.

Dicke's work shows awareness of the omnipresence of thinking in oppositions. Dicke therefore seeks a perspective which allows for a different understanding of what she thinks is important. This perspective would be described by Haraway as one "which can never be known in advance, that promise something quite extraordinary, that is, knowledge potent for constructing worlds less organized by axes of domination." (Haraway, 1988) From this perspective Dicke hopes to gain a better view on the real:

Ik denk dat het gewoon veel meer het verhaal vertelt. En al dat andere (red. Gisèle's schilderijen) is wat mij betreft 'spielerei'. Ik wil het omdraaien.

I think that tells the story much better. And everything else (ed. Gisèle's paintings) is, if you ask me 'spielerei' (ed. playthings) I want to turn it around.

By undoing her work with Gisèle's souvenirs from the 'heaviness' of the history of Castrum Peregrini, Dicke enters a realm characterized by a "willingness to openness [to Being]" (Bolt

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[37] In *The Order of Things* (1994) Foucault deconstructs the complex history of thought through revealing the underlying epistemological assumptions of discourse. Arguing that our identity is constituted through discourse, he claims that 'man' is only a recent invention.

2004: 107): a willingness to embrace the confusion of possibilities. Whereas in the history of Castrum Peregrini, as we have discussed in previous chapters, Gisèle's presence was often silenced, Dicke's approach allows for an affirmative reading of this presence. Dicke's work of art is characterized by a practice in which "decisions are made, not according to logical thought, but as a direct and felt response to handling elements" (Bolt 2004: 8). Dicke seizes opportunities in the heat of the moment. It might be thanks to this intuitive activity that Gisèle, as an active agent, remains a decisive factor in the process:

> Wat ik hoop is dat bepaalde details en elementen gezien worden en niet overgeslagen worden. Dat ik daar naar wijs. Dat deed zij ook 'kijk eens hoe mooi het licht hier valt naar binnen'. Maar goed, misschien zou zij iets anders kiezen dan waar ik nu naar wijs. Maar ik denk omdat er veel dingen van haar inzitten, dat zij er graag naar zou kijken. Ik weet niet of ze het kunst zou vinden. Dat is gewoon een groot verschil.

> What I hope is that certain details and elements are seen and not skipped. That I point to that. That's what she did 'Look how beautiful the light drops in here'. Anyway, maybe she would choose something else than what I'm pointing to right now. But I think, because there's a lot of her in there, that she'd enjoy watching it. I don't know if she would think of it as art. That's actually a big difference.

Through the ongoing 'conversation', Dicke's project connects with Gisèle's experience at multiple levels. Not only provide Gisèle's souvenirs content for the project, the very form of it is inspired by her character. This connection continues to inform the process of 'making something out of this', which Dicke is now working towards a 'final materialization'.

In Conclusion

The aim of this research project was to explore how different practitioners, within different disciplines, account for the way in which they present the lived experience of Gisèle d'Ailly. By including different practices – biography, documentary film and visual art – I have given an account in which multiple approaches are represented. Yet, the common ground in the three projects under study can be found in an attachment to feminist considerations regarding the complexity of experience, subjectivity and representation.

I have outlined how feminist standpoint thinkers claim that knowledge is socially situated. This is to say that what we regard as 'true' depends on which social position - based on factors such as gender, race, sexuality and class among others - we hold (Harding 1986). What is usually considered objective, these feminists have explained, is often based on accounts from a white, male point of view. This argument has proved to be particularly relevant in this case study, since previous accounts on the history of Castrum Peregrini, as a male-based intellectual circle, lack significant information on Gisèle's experience.

Stating that women's (and other oppressed positions) experiences significantly differ from the dominant accounts, standpoint thinkers have argued that it is those experiences of oppressed groups that should form the starting point for knowledge production (see Harding 1991; Hill Collins 1991; Mohanty 2003; Hartsock 2004; Smith 2004). They claimed that 'from the margin' one can better account for the power differences on which our society is build. More recent theories within the feminist realm have shown nonetheless, that the concept of *experience* does not offer 'uncontestable evidence' for knowledge production (Scott 1992). Who we are and how we experience is determined by discourse: it happens only within the framework of established meanings that is available to us. What we call 'experience' cannot be separated from the time and space we live in. To take 'experience' as a transparent base for knowledge claims, then, fails to critically consider the structures that

constituted these differences to begin with. Such an approach takes categories as 'man' and 'woman' for granted and risks naturalising this opposition instead of questioning it.

Rather than discussing who 'sees' best, Donna Haraway (1988) has argued to change the question into 'how to see?'. Haraway has proposed a concept of objectivity that neither plays a 'god trick', claiming to see everything from nowhere, nor makes knowledge depend on relativists claims. What constitutes accountable knowledge, according to Haraway, are those claims that take responsibility for their situatedness. This so-called 'embodied objectivity' is a way for all researchers - no matter which gender, race, class etc. - to account for their claims and consider their partiality.

It is the question 'how to see?' that I have adopted in this research project to understand the way in which researchers in qualitative research engage with the complexity of their topic. I have argued that the three projects I have engaged with operate rather as searches for 'translation' than as discoveries of 'truth' (Haraway 1988). Embracing the fact that there is not one 'truthful' account of Gisèle's life to *represent*, I have proposed to speak rather about presentations. The research projects that I have analysed can therefore also be better understood in the light of qualities such as 'plausibility' and 'reflexivity' rather than in a framework of 'verifiability', 'reliability' and 'falsifiability' (Griffin, 2011). The goal was not so much to give a thorough account of the medium specific qualities for presenting Gisèle in each project, as well as me in exploring different methods within the framework of each medium. Drawing from a 'logic of practice' that lies at the base of *creative arts research,* I have focused on the processes that build each project. Based on indepth-interviews with the three artist-researchers I have analysed the processes that underpin their research and their outcomes.

I have discovered that at the heart of each research project there is a deep concern for feminist ethics regarding *respectfulness* to the research environment – to Gisèle, to those closely related to her and to any participant (Hesse-Biber 2014: 85). Each of the artist-researchers confessed having encountered one or more difficulties addressing certain topics in the specific environment of the community Castrum Peregrini. The particularities of this 'closed' community therefore informs their approach. In the documentary film project, Janina Pigaht shows clearly how a certain interview strategy affects the information she receives from her participants. In establishing a bond of trust between her and her participants, Pigaht hears stories she might not have been told otherwise.

The concern for respectfulness is intertwined with another concern that I have encountered in each project – which is that of *reflexivity.* This concern manifests itself in

various forms. In Annet Mooij's biographical research it finds a concrete solution in the shape of a so-called 'intellectual biography': a textual account of how she has come to the 'translation' of her research material. Also Janina Pigaht, by making herself visible as an agent and a human being in her interviews, shows the 'vulnerability' that is needed in such a process in which the interviewer is after sensitive information.

Critical reflexivity has also informed the choice of research method and material of the artist-researchers. By comparing projects in different disciplines, I've shown how diverse research methodologies have led to different insights (Griffin 2011). In Gisèle's case a strong argument can be made for methods that take into account material objects as a research source, since her house provides a wide array of memorabilia. In Pigaht's documentary project this visual aspect is obviously important. Through image and sound Pigaht aims to 'translate' Gisèle's presence in 'the house'. Amie Dicke's visual art project shows how researching material objects can actually lead to a different understanding of reality. In her project Gisèle's lived experience appears not so much as her identity, but as a flux capable of moving others. In Dicke's project Gisèle's 'souvenirs' are not mere objects, but they are active agents in producing knowledge. By actively engaging with this material, Dicke provides an ongoing narrative in which Gisèle appears very much 'alive'.

Another effect of the artist-researchers' concern with reflexivity is their openness to dialogue. Not only have the three artist-researchers spoken openly with me about their possible uncertainties, not withholding their own emotions or agenda; they also showed significant interest in the projects of their fellow artist-researchers. This dialogue promotes further reflexivity throughout the research project (Hesse-Biber 2014). By sharing thoughts on how to go about certain (ethical) dilemmas each project can benefit. As one of the artist-researchers confirmed how, the practices of the others have strengthened her motivation to continue in the choice of her methodology. This openness to dialogue portrays these researches in the arts and humanities as dynamic. This dynamic nature is also reflected in the statement made by each of the artist-researchers that the course of the research cannot be foreseen. Each researcher waits for those privileged moments: the memory that Pigaht tries to 'seize', reading a fragment that makes Mooij 'jump up', the encounter between Dicke and an object that reveals a clue, or finding a little pink note of Gisèle in an unexpected place, like I described in the introduction of this thesis. The logic of practice, underlying this claim, allows critique and self-reflexivity in which intuition and reason go hand in hand as guides to a good end.

By comparing the *how* of each research project – biography, documentary film and visual art – concerning the lived experience of Gisèle, I hope to have contributed to a deeper understanding of the various ways in which such a complex topic might be approached. Not only, then, are my findings relevant to this particular research subject: I hope to underline the importance of the mapping of research method(ologies) in the broader field of the arts and the humanities (Griffin 2011). With this thesis I hope to produce a little (feminist) sound in the silence surrounding research processes in these disciplines within the academic world.

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Appendix I

Interview Guideline

The three in depth interviews with biographer Annet Mooij, filmmaker Janina Pigaht and artist Amie Dicke, that form the basis of this research project, are semi-structured. The following questions were envisioned to be answered by each interviewee:

- What are the sources that build your project and how do they reflect, for you, the lived experience of Gisèle?
- If factual materials appear to be contradictory or seem to be missing out on important issues: (how) do you fill in the gaps?
- What prior knowledge, if any, do you bring into the project and how does this affect the types of questions you ask?
- How does this knowledge influence the research style you take on?
- Is there a particular goal that your work is aiming for or a certain affect it aims to produce?
- How is Gisèle 'present' in your work? I.e. how is her voice represented?

These questions cover the major themes that are of interest to my research project. They have to be considered as a shorthand reference that I may rely upon, but that will not determine the entire conversation. According to the course of the interview I might want to emphasize one domain rather than the other. This might differ also from interviewee to interviewee.