

# HOMING – The Homes of the Women of Our Rural Home: *Documentary* *Co-creation As a Practice of Unforgetting*

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Photo Credit: Pigeon. 2019. *HOMING—The Core*. St-Norbert

**On the Other Side of the Field, a Quinzhee**

March 19, 2019, nine o'clock in the morning. I'm putting on my cross-country skis. My appointment is at ten o'clock in a quinzhee on the other side of the fields. I'm going to meet with a few of the women from my region interested in participating in the documentary co-creation *HOMING—The Homes of the Women of Our Rural Home*. With every sliding step, I exult. I remember that, as a child, we crossed the same field with my parents for the coveted purpose of going to eat french fries at the local snack bar. It took me time and effort, determination and imagination, to cross this field again. But this time, with another purpose. Not that I don't like french fries anymore—I'm a big fan of potatoes in all their forms, thanks to my grandparents and to Agnès Varda (Mercier 2019)—though there has been a shift in my experiences of home since then.

**From French Fries to Sopaipillas, From Sopaipillas to Banik**

A few weeks before the quinzhee invitation, I presented my research-creation project as part of the series *Les grandes exploratrices* at the Centre de femmes Avec des Elles in St-Gabriel-de-Brandon. Before inviting women to *HOMING*, it felt perfectly right to begin by talking a little bit about some of my travels and documentary co-creations as a mentor-filmmaker in the context of the Wapikoni mobile, the Mapuce School of Filmmaking and Communication of Ayja Rewe Budi (ECCM)<sup>1</sup>, and the action-research-creation project *Power of the Lens. HOMING* is the natural extension of the work I have been doing for over a decade, which has transformed my artistic practice from *mentor-filmmaker* to *mentor-filmlearner*. While working with an intercultural and interdisciplinary team of academics, Indigenous community researchers, filmmakers, and community-sector actors, I have learned that filmmaking can be used as a site of transformation of still-oppressive social relations. Integrating culture into the act of creating film, into its methodology, rethinking its structure and its process has been for me an ongoing exercise of learning how to make film

differently.

In order to stir up curiosity and stimulate discussion around processes of documentary co-creation, I shared three short films I had collaborated on during the past years. They were all connected to the idea of coming back home: the needs, benefits, emotions, and transformations involved. *Ince ka mogetun (I Too Was Reborn, 2018)* allowed me to address my collaboration with the Mapuce communities of Ayja Rewe Budi<sup>2</sup>, where I have learned that film creation can belong to a particular place. The creation processes of the short films produced by the ECCM are directly linked to the territory and to the people who inhabit it, to *kimvn* (Mapuce knowledge) and *rakizuam* (Mapuce way of thinking) (Rain et al. 2019, 78). *Hañá boade gáddáj (Hanná Returns Home, 2017)*, created with the Lule Sámi community in Drag, Norway, provided subtle insight into the power the lens has for valorizing culture and strengthening community. The filmmaking process had given the community an opportunity to remember and valorize the impact of a Sámi language kindergarten started by the parents of the Lule Sámi filmmakers over than 30 years ago. *Koski Kiwetan (Going Back to Where We Came From 2011)*, co-created with Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok women of Manawan, allowed me to address both the presence of the Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok in the region and my own story of ignorance, which is part of a larger story of colonial ignorance.

**Documentary Co-creation As a Practice of Unforgetting**

In the chapter “Remembering for the Future” of her book *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times*, Associate Professor of Sociology and Anthropology Alexis Shotwell, following American historian Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, defines “unforgetting” as an active act of resistance against infrastructures that normalize the colonial gaze. It is an activity in response to the “epistemology of ignorance” (Mills 2007; Sullivan and Tuana 2007 in Shotwell 2016) in which “ignorance is not just an absence of knowledge; it is a way to (not) know things. In our being, ontologically, we become who we are in part through

what we know and what we are made (or made able) to forget” (Shotwell 2016, 37). Who was I through what I had been made to forget?

I’m from St-Norbert, a small village in the Lanaudière region in Quebec. I was in my mid-twenties when I learned about the existence of Manawan, which is situated 174 km from where I was born and grew up. Before that, I had ignored that I lived on unceded land. I had a desire to better understand the ethics of intercultural encounters, but I had tasted tortillas, chapatis and sopaipillas before ever tasting an atikamekw banik. In my home region, the only roads I had ever taken were the roads that were visible to my settler eyes. These roads were ones of the traces without inventory (Gramsci in Shotwell 2016, 23) my “colonial ghosts” (Spoon in Shotwell 2016, 23) had deposited in me. When I started to think about the roads I had never travelled around my home—and about what it meant—I felt I had a responsibility to travel them. If “the colonial ghosts live in the bones of their descendants and inheritors,” (Shotwell 2016, 23) what kind of ghost do I want to be? What traces will I deposit in the bones of my inheritors? Shotwell affirms that, as settlers, we can play a role by “actively participating in a politics of responsibilities in our intellectual and social labour, actively challenging our own and others’ ignorance and occluded thinking, and taking up practices of decolonization” (Shotwell 2016, 25). It’s also necessary to do so in our creative labour. As a *filmlearner*, I feel that I “partake in the legacy of colonialism and have the potential to affect what is remembered and why” (Shotwell 2016, 41). It was now time for me to come back home in order to travel the roads I had never travelled, to see what I had not yet seen, to listen to what I had never listened, to learn what I had not learned before. It was now time for me to unforget, using documentary co-creation as a form of relational art, as a practice of encounters, of listening, and of memory.

*HOMING* is the way I found—am finding—to unforget. It is the way I found to come back home and to explore how documentary co-creation can be used as a political tool of rendering invisible (infra)structures—inside and

outside filmmaking processes—of identity sharing and of dialogue between women of diverse backgrounds living in a rural territory.

### Remaking Home Together

An official definition of homing is “relating to an animal’s ability to return to its territory after travelling away from it” (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2010). Like a pigeon. Like me. But is the pigeon still able to find its way home when home became this “unsettled space of impossible inhabitation” (Lauzon 2017, 4)? Or is there an urge, a necessity, to find new homes, like geese, caribous and other species affected by climate change do? Like human beings whose homes have been unsettled in “the aftermath of displacements, migrations, enslavements, diasporas, cultural hybridities and nostalgic yearnings [...]” (Lauzon 2017, 9). This piece and its aesthetic inscribe themselves in a development in contemporary art “which conveys home as a place of unmaking where longing is also a kind of belonging and absence a kind of presence, offers new models of intersubjectivity that recognize the embedded vulnerabilities of memory, inhabitation, and indeed human existence” (Lauzon 2017, 10). In *HOMING*, using the ever-evolving concept of home, I invite diverse women from my native rural region (Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok, non-indigenous, immigrant) to reflect on, converse and create their own notions and experiences of home.

*HOMING* embraces multiple theories, methods and working principles of the Open Space Documentary (Zimmermann and De Michel 2018) where designing encounters and emphasizing the significance of small places and polyphonic voices is central. In *HOMING*, through conversations, polyvocality is used to propose an inclusive present and future, where women of diverse backgrounds—and a pigeon!—who speak multiple languages, understand each other. This anchor in each one’s mother tongue is a key element of the project. I firmly agree with Barbara Cassin when she speaks of the bond between mother tongue and poetry: “But what is it that makes a tongue a ‘mother tongue?’ Perhaps the possibility of invention. Poetry, this making (of) language, is natural-

ly bound up with the mother tongue” (Cassin 2016, 46). In the project I have left it open for each woman to choose in which language she wants to express herself. I heard poetry emerging in French spoken as a second language. Poetry is all around us. Poetry might be more about the disposition to perceive it than poetic form itself.

*HOMING* takes care of each experience, each form of knowledge. In this way, *HOMING* proposes other ways of knowing and being. It opens up the path of *unforgetting*. Beyond stories, the process of co-creation is open, mobile and flexible, and invites each woman to participate on her own terms. I am very receptive to the concept of “sensitive engagement” that “involves a genuine attempt on the part of the filmmaker to understand the participant and their needs in relation to the documentary project or, to put it slightly differently, how their interests can be met in terms of their documentary participation” (Nash 2009; ctd. in Thomas 2017, 38). Here, the notion of “informed consent” shifts slightly in order to reflect the idea that “consent is a continuous process of negotiation” (Thomas 2017, 50), which brings forward the idea of

a very active dialogue, central to new approaches in co-creative documentary. While designing this project, I had many fantasies. Each of them is presented to the co-creators as such and is subject to change. This creation doesn’t belong to me. “Creative uncertainty” (Haraway 2016, 34) opens the space for “us” to happen.

As a result of my reflexive approach, I am the first participant in this documentary co-creation, exposing my own vulnerabilities and myself. In sharing my own intimacy, I pose the first caring gesture. This is not an easy thing to do, but it is part of the balance I need to now find between deep listening and deep speaking. This iteration of *HOMING* (Marcoux-Fortier 2019) is the fourth short film I’ve shown to the women as part of the invitation to become documentary *filmlearners* with me. In the same gesture, I also invited the co-creators to the place where I feel the most at home on Earth. It’s a family-made yurt in the forest behind my parent’s place, which is also the place where I was born. Meeting with my parents and Perro-the-Dog, food and story sharing are all part of the creative process. It is at the heart of my conception of home,



Photo Credit: Marcoux-Fortier, Iphigénie. 2019. *HOMING—The Core*. St-Norbert.

of well-being. If we are in a time of unsettled homes, I firmly think that we can challenge it by activating relationships. “Unmaking home” is actually for me a way of productively “remaking home together.”

This is what I’m looking for in the process of co-creating *HOMING*; the construction of “spaces of home” through singular encounters. Encounters with ourselves, with others and with the environment, which Félix Guattari theorizes as the Three Ecologies. In *HOMING*, the “spaces of home” are a good place to unite while being different. In Guattari’s terminology, *HOMING* is our small ecosophy. I like to believe that this approach to the documentary is part of what Guattari called back in 1989 the “post-media age...in which the media will be reappropriated by a multitude of subject-groups capable of directing its resingularization” (Guattari 2008, 40). In *HOMING*, quoting Guattari, the Pigeon says: “It is not only species that are becoming extinct but also the words, phrases, and gestures of human solidarity” (Guattari 2008, 29). As we are conversing around the concept of home, we are in a process of co-construction, a work-in-progress, of our common home; a home that is a co-creation itself, a sociocultural and an artistic gesture that belongs to a particular place. “Homing” could also be read as “becoming-home.” Becoming-place and becoming-mobility, becoming-dreams, becoming-vulnerabilities and becoming-death. Becoming-past and becoming-future. “Becoming-with” is an engaging gesture, a “response-ability” (Haraway 2016, 34). I’m eager to see how this small piece will grow in the coming months, linking voice after voice in a mosaic of new relations.

### Rendering Visible the Invisible

The aesthetics of *HOMING* is a way of being; a way of being together, of coexisting. But as an audiovisual media artwork, *HOMING* has at some point to transpose its relational aesthetics into images and sounds, into the world of the senses. *HOMING* plays with the contradictory union of an unhomey and a homely aesthetics.

The narrative structure of *HOMING* is a construction that emerges from the series of in-

imate conversations between the women. In the audio world, the voices encounter and speak to a space of intersubjective relations, of new assemblages where vulnerabilities are shared, a world of empathy and caring for others. “Remembering for the future,” as Alexis Shotwell would say. Indeed, this encounter in *HOMING*—both while performing it and in its traces—is an active way to “unforget.”

The visuals are created together with each woman. Camera in hand, I go where they invite me, film what they suggest as being meaningful in their visions and experiences of home. Landscapes are scrutinized, as well as houses, objects, archives and people. One of the women points to a tree that is significant to her. Another woman leads me to a dune that is central to her experience of home. As the poetry of the language, the poetry of the image is mostly everywhere. With *HOMING*, we also follow the path of other artists who positioned themselves as ghosts and wind haunters in order to see the past and “stem the tide of ruination” (Gan et al. 2017, G1). Yet, neither the Pigeon nor the women’s bodies ever appear in full opacity. Rather, we are traces of our bodies. The movements that animate the human bodies are not movements in space, but rather a pulse of our ghosts. The pulse between their presence and absence. The pulse between the past and the future.

Each microhistory is an assemblage of slowness. Where has the time gone? Maybe it has left the space to the silence? But is it really silent? When one starts paying attention, sounds are there to reveal the invisible. They reveal the winds in the branches, migrating geese, flying emotions. Being in the forest challenges the visual hegemony in which we, as human beings, are used to living in. *HOMING* is a dance with the “poetic universe” of the senses, using the Whiteheadian mode of aesthetics of “prehesion” as a way of “caring for, valuing of things” (Dombrowski 2004, 88; in Donovan 2016, 212). This, I hope, allows for the art of noticing (Tsing 2015), while looking for details and organicity.

### Beyond Story

“It is crucial to think *beyond* story; to learn from and/or imagine other organizing principles that may have a greater force,” argue Alexandra Juhasz & Alisa Lebow in *Beyond Story: an Online, Community-Based Manifesto* (2018) while reflecting about the urge to look for other modes of documentary. *HOMING* belongs to this current of thought and correspond to many of the speculations toward polyphonic new media practices (Zimmermann 2018, 9-15). It goes beyond the act of storytelling, inasmuch as it uses documentary co-creation to generate new social configurations in a rural territory. Since the visit in the quinzhee last March, twenty-six women have enthusiastically responded to the invitation of *HOMING*. We were born in Lanaudière, elsewhere in Quebec, in *Nitaskinan* (Atikamekw-Nehirowisiwok territory), in Ireland, Australia, Mexico, Bolivia, Chile, Romania, and Côte d’Ivoire. We are all different. Yet, we all share this rural place. We all relate to Lanaudière. And we are now united in a documentary co-creation process. In order to open our doors, converse, and create, we need to take

new roads. Storytelling is not the purpose of *HOMING*, it is the tool in order to know otherwise the land we live on. *HOMING*, in fact, is an act of rewiring the land and the people, an act of rewriting the future.

Who could we become while *HOMING* and unforgetting together?

The Mapuce School of Filmmaking and Communication of Ayja Rewe Budi has recently standardized the writing of words in mapuzugun in its communications using the spelling *ragileo*. In this system, the “ch” sound is written with the “c,” turning “mapuche” into a “mapuce,” without altering its pronunciation.

In the chapter “École de cinéma et communication mapuce: Espaces territoriaux, regard distinct et collaboration” from *Cinéma autochtones, des représentations en mouvements*, Juan Rain describes the Ayja Rewe Budi as an ancestral territory: “The Ayja Rewe Budi is an ancestral territory that is part of the wixan mapu bafkence, that is, ‘those who identify with the sea.’ This territorial area is located between the Xayxayko (or Imperial) river to the north and the Toltén River to the south; from an administra-



Photo Credit: Amy Magowan-Greene, Iphigénie Marcoux-Fortier and Meko Ottawa. 2019. *HOMING—The Core*. St-Norbert.

tive point of view, it corresponds to the municipalities of Puerto Saavedra and Teodoro Schmidt (IX Region) of the Chilean state. Using the term ‘territorial space,’ we design the territory from a holistic perspective that includes land areas as well as water, air and areas populated by non-human forces. All these elements coexist within a single territorial area” (Marcaux-Fortier et al. 2019, 75; traduction libre du français).

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