

Drawing, Diagrammatic Experimentation and Deliberative Agency in Rithy Panh's *Papier ne peut pas Envelopper la Braise*ⁱ

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Abstract

Engagement with semiotic in film studies has inevitably concentrated on a highly delimited notion of the index at the expense of iconicity and diagrammatic experimentation. Taking from the recent critiques of Grimshaw and Ravetz (2015) in visual anthropology and Stjernfelt's work on diagrammology (2007/2014), I shall be arguing for an account of documentary practice that is embodied and experimental, using Rithy Panh's *Le Papier ne peut pas Envelopper la Braise* (2007) as a case study. Formal analysis of this documentary film will also highlight the inter-relationship between diagrammatic experimentation and ethical deliberation.

Keywords: drawing, pictoriality, documentary practice, diagrammatic experimentation, dicisigns

The act of drawing as an embodied process is an issue that has been the subject of much recent debate within visual anthropology. Most notably, the work of Tim Ingold has frequently deployed the motif of drawing as part of a larger project that proposes an embodied and experimental form of anthropology. Graphic and fluid notions such as "wayfaring", "enmeshing" and "entwining" (Ingold 2011: 145-155) provide an

immersive and inter-connected account of knowledge, whereby the “world and its inhabitants, human and non-human, are our teachers, mentors, and interlocutors” (2011: 238). This and indeed much of what is elaborated throughout Ingold’s work is exemplary and productive. Nevertheless, his metaphorical opposition between the supposed distance of landscape painting and the improvisation of immersive drawing also overreaches itself, especially once he associates the documentary camera with a notion of “compositionality and totalization” that “cuts the relation between gesture and description that lies at the heart of drawing” 2011: 225 – also see Taussig 2009: 270).

Unwittingly, Ingold runs the risk of reifying long-standing ideas that are shared with other disciplines such as film studies and photographic theory, where there has been much discussion of “medium specificity” and the camera’s status as a form of neutral recording device.ⁱⁱ It is for this reason that the recent interventions of, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz are much needed. The two anthropological filmmakers emphasise the improvisatory and experimental nature of documentary filmmaking, whereby the camera is seen as “a tool rather than a technology” (2015: 267). A more fluid and creative account of the frame is also offered. We are urged to “interpret the camera as part of a continual framing and reframing process that produces a particular kind of heightened consciousness... and extends rather than reduces that continuity between gesture, observation and description that is drawing” (2015: 270). These remarks, designed to draw our attention to the role of creative framing within the canonical films of Marshall, Rouch and MacDougall, are also very pertinent to a documentary film from Rithy Panh that has not been released in the Anglophone world and has received less critical attention. *Papier ne peut pas Envelopper la Braïse* (2007) forefronts hand-made drawings and pictures within the frame, constantly drawing our attention to drawing as a form of both process and representation.

Rithy Panh’s documentary, however, is also an immersive and harrowing experience that describes the lives of young female prostitutes in Kampuchea rather than a portrait of amateur or professionalized artistic processes. Nevertheless, the act of drawing and experimentation with both mass-produced and personalised imagery are also an integral part of the protagonists’ ethical deliberation. The latter involves much intersubjective exchange of specific observations about individual conduct and general social critique, even leading to a decision to leave the profession on the part of one particular woman called Daⁱⁱⁱ, who is a central protagonist in the film’s narrative. Thus, what Grimshaw and Ravetz refer to as “heightened consciousness” (2015: 270) in relation to specific documentary film practice, might also be seen in more general and vital terms in Rithy Panh’s work. I shall be arguing that *Papier ne peut pas Envelopper la Braïse* is an instantiation of documentary as “a form of drawing”. But I will also be placing an even greater emphasis on the experimental nature of drawing in order to highlight the role of diagrammatic experimentation within ethical deliberation.

The latter part of my argument might seem counter-intuitive. Nevertheless, the inter-connections between pictoriality and ethical deliberation are prominent within C.S. Peirce's work on semiotic and inquiry. Initially, in an essay called "What is a Sign?" (1894), Peirce emphasises the importance of the icon, referring to both the creative and informational nature of "pictorial composition" across a range of practices, including architecture, mathematics, art, geography and cross-cultural communication (EP2:6-8). A strong aesthetic dimension is present in our engagement with the iconic sign. Initial contemplation allows the artist to "ascertain whether what he proposes will be beautiful and satisfactory" (EP2: 6). Furthermore, prominence is also given to pragmatic use and interactivity between sign user and sign, giving ample room for creative but nevertheless grounded imagination. With great relevance to visual anthropological practice and cross-cultural communication, Peirce refers to both to "imitative gestures", "pictures" and "pictorial ideas" (EP2: 6-7), which, for effective usage, also require what he initially terms "the *capacity* for experience" (EP2: 8), suggesting both the importance of previous knowledge and openness to ongoing encounters. Almost a decade later, in a lecture, rather aptly entitled "What makes a Reasoning Sound?" (1903), greater emphasis is given to inner deliberation, self-control and the cultivation of ideals, which are nevertheless also described in pictorial and experimental terms. Peirce speaks about how ethical ideals are contemplated aesthetically for themselves as well as being verified for overall consistency and unity, in a fashion that is consistent with his description of the deployment of diagrams and maps in his earlier essay. Furthermore, Peirce speaks about a third stage of self-control in which the individual "imagines what the consequences of fully carrying out his ideals would be" (EP2: 246). Such a process also involves some modification of what is already known through past social interaction and takes the form of what is called a "resolution". We are also told that "[t]his resolution is of the nature of a plan, or, as one might almost say, a diagram (EP2: 246).^{iv}

It should also be noted that recent work in Peircean scholarship has emphasized continuity and growth from simpler to more complex semeiotic signs.^v Donna West, in her work on deixis, emphasises that "deictic expressions, linguistic and otherwise, derive from indexical representations" (2014: 3). She also refers to inwardness in a way that refuses social atomism. We are also told that "recommending a course of action then draws from social and cognitive composites, integrating the two to arrive at novel 'pictures' of yet unseen spaces, times and eventualities" (133). Just as importantly, the Danish philosopher Frederik Stjernfelt speaks of a "continuous gradient scale from pure images to diagrams" as well as for "completely singular Dicent sinsigns on the one end to fully Dicent Symbols with general predicates, be they linguistic or diagrammatic or otherwise, on the other end" (2014: 95). Stjernfelt is at great pains to remind us that the proposition is not exclusively linguistic, and that "diagrams, gestures, movies etc." form

part of what he calls “picture acts” (2014: 52). The latter term hints at activity and experimentation on the part of the sign user in a social context, which allows information to be “derived” from the icon (2014: 55) and contributes to its transformation into a dicisign, whose basic function is to “assert statements, true or false” (2014: 54).

Nevertheless, it is worth repeating that my account of the movement from pictures to diagrams that I have taken from several sources and disciplines, is above all continuous, embodied and emergent. This is evident in the formal procedures at the beginning of *Papier ne peut pas Envelopper la Braise* that anticipate much of what follows in the rest of the film. As has been noted by Leslie Barnes, ‘the film is not narrated, and there are no ‘talking heads’’ (2015: 59). Instead, barely a word is uttered in a sequence that visually describes different architectural spaces and corporeal actions. A solitary unnamed woman stands with her back against a bleak and anonymous urban landscape. Three separate shots show individual female bodies fast asleep. Words and music from a radio are heard indistinctly in the background as a breakfast of shellfish is being eaten. The sounds of crunching and chewing predominate over the occasional muffled muttered word. It is only when we see close-ups of hands counting money and fumes being inhaled from red powder in a spoon that we become aware of our immersion within the world of prostitution.

Thus, in semeiotic terms, a context is established through a combination of (quali)signs and (sin)signs that convey the awakening of different corporeal senses, before giving way to more mediated (legi)signs such as words and propositions.^{vi} Yet, even when the latter emerge, instinctual and embodied signs of feeling and sensation are very much present. On an urban rooftop, a proud woman, called Da, sings her version of a popular Khmer melody, whose lyrics recount the loneliness of the prostitute in the face of widespread societal prejudice. The presence of semi-improvised melody and mournful tone of voice points us away from seeing the proposition in purely conceptual or linguistic terms.^{vii} Furthermore, the close-up of the young woman also draws our attention to the torrential rain beating upon her hair and skin. Other shots show her colleagues either fleeing the rain or using it to wash themselves, reminding us of the presence of signs that involve physical contiguity and haptic sensation. Different shot sizes and deep focus reveal the relationship between the individual human figures and their environment. At roughly eye level, we see Da having her hair washed by another girl. From slightly above, another girl looks down onto figures running in the street. In a much wider shot taken from a low angle, a defiant Da is seen against the background of a modern city.

It might be noted here that I have attempted to draw attention to the spatial and perspectival contexts in which people and objects occupy different positions in the background and foreground of the frame. The languid pacing of the film also allows us to become conscious of variations in scale, perspective and the changing directionality of moving subjects in a way that is integral to our emotional and intellectual engagement with the film. Although it might appear reductive to describe Panh's use and variation of spatial contexts as diagrammatic, this is no longer so once we see such activity as creative and experimental. As much is said by Stjernfelt in his attempt to distinguish between the diagram and picture through their different operational functions. We are told this:

as soon as an icon is contemplated as a whole consisting of interrelated parts whose functions are subject to experimental change, we are operating on a diagram... As soon as you judge, for instance, fore-, middle-, and background and estimate the distance, between objects depicted in the pictorial scene, or as some as you imagine yourself wandering along the path into landscape, you are operating on the icon – but doing so in this way is possible only by treating it as a diagram (2007: 92).

This also presents an account of the diagram that is less restricted than we might be used to. Instead, diagrams are distinguished from pictures not through convention but through context and actual use by. Stjernfelt's account also effectively describes the inter-relationship between much of what his protagonists do within the frame, Panh's deployment of sequential composition, and our critical engagement with the film.^{viii} This becomes even clearer once we consider the different uses and modifications of a single object that occur as it is moved from the background to the foreground of a single geographical space.

Pictures in the background and Inquiry in the foreground

As has been much noted (also see Barnes 2016: Doyle 2009: 2016: Tsang 2014) Panh's films have included extensive use of photographic reproductions often associated with the photographic archive from the Khmer Rouge era. This is not repeated in *Papier ne peut pas envelopper la Braise*. Instead, the film deploys contemporary imagery from popular mass culture in way that is nevertheless self-aware and critical. A wall of covered by magazine cuttings that show idealized faces and attire of Kampuchean women serves as a background for several key intersubjective exchanges between Panh's female characters.^{ix} Furthermore, varying proximities between background and foreground is accompanied by modification and active alteration of the imagery on the

part of the film's protagonists. Pictures become diagrams once they are subject to work and activity on the part of different sign users.

Initially, the magazine cuttings serve as a background^x for an encounter between Da and her sister Phirom. The positioning of the camera close to the sisters' faces and the amplified depth of field of the lens emphasize the distance between the idealized imagery in the background and the presence of quotidian suffering in the foreground. Da comforts and feeds her sister who is extremely unwell with a debilitating disease that is not specified for the time being. This is accompanied by a conversation that begins with simple propositions relating to objects that are directly in view, quickly giving way to more extended commentaries that refer to events that took place in other places and times. Da recounts anecdotes about the toughness of their shared childhood and the sacrifices made by their parents, who did their utmost to look after their offspring in the aftermath of genocide and foreign intervention.

Key elements of human reflexivity are emphasized in the encounter between the two siblings. We are aware of Da's capacity to adopt the perspective of both present persons and also that of past persons who are not immediately present once she attempts to project herself into the position of the parents in a vividly remembered past. In semiotic terms, this embodies a shift from "present" to "absent" objects that incorporates the imagined perspectives of absent speakers. What West describes as "an increased awareness of the influence of diverse Origos in the mix" (2014: 137) also contributes to a series of "expanded interpretants" (West 128-129), which define ongoing inquiry and shape future moral commitments and habit change^{xi}.

Nevertheless, a human potential for transformation should not be seen as something which is imposed from without. Instead, it demands inward reflection and even withdrawal from instrumental action. This is strongly hinted at in a discussion between Da and three of her work colleagues Aun Tauch, Mab, and Aun Thom, as they fix their make-up in preparation for work. The three girls are now positioned centimetres away from the pictures on the wall, making background and foreground extremely close to one another. Extreme close-ups of Da's face being powdered and nails being painted are now directly juxtaposed with details of the idealized images that occupy a proximate vertical plane. Visual juxtaposition within the frame is also accompanied by social critique expressed through words. Mab's assertion that "every time we sell ourselves, we lie to ourselves"^{xii} is complemented by Aun Thom's rejoinder that the girls need to "confront Truth and look at themselves directly in the face. ...You can lie to others but not yourself".

We also witness a modification of the pictures on the wall and different forms of diagrammatic experimentation that exceed what is normally associated with drawing. Two women, Da and Aun Thom, are presented in a wide shot that allows us to see that some of the images from the back wall have been removed and are being gradually replaced. Da uses scissors to making new cuttings from the magazine pictures to forms letters of individual words, while Thom draws pictures of flowers and greenery in her notebook. These small physical gestures are accompanied by anecdotes recounting different forms of horrific verbal and physical abuse from aggressive clients. Both women also comment on the lack of reflexivity and self-awareness of their clients. Thom remarks that “clients don’t know what we suffer”. Da also recalls how she would ask clients about their own mothers and sisters whenever she was subjected to physical abuse. It should also be noted that their critiques also incorporate imagined projection into the lived trajectories of people they do not agree with in a way that hints at emergent values.^{xiii}

It is useful here as well to recall Peirce’s distinction between the immediate object and the dynamic object. In very simple terms, the former is what is simply “represented in the sign” (EP 2:498) while the latter is something that drives inquiry forward, even if it is never fully specified by any finite community of inquirers or limited set of inquiries (West 2014: 117 – also see Stjernfelt 2014: 96-101). In this particular instance, the immediate object of the magazine cuttings can be seen as an idealized version of womanhood. The experiments that follow on from a recognition of the sign’s form constitute an attempt to define and understand a more grounded notion of womanhood, a process that is always in the making, but one which is constantly informed by lived experience, observation and experiment. It should be noted that brutal description of present circumstances is accompanied by new propositions that include personalised pictures from Thom and the formulation of new words^{xiv} from Da. Even if these are not fully articulated, they embody the desire for different ways of living and norms to be aimed at over the long term.

The Mirror as Iconical and Indexical Sign^{xv}

Nevertheless, as stated at the beginning of this essay, such a process involves much self-reflection, in which the individual takes stock of past social interaction.

Nursing a wound that has been inflicted by a violent client from the previous night, Da looks at herself in the mirror. After deploying a straightforward profile shot, Panh shoots almost directly into the mirror, producing an image that initially jars. Depth of field has been reduced because of Panh’s use of shorter focal lengths. Some areas of

the surface of the mirror are slightly obscured by dust and grease, making us aware of the mirror's separation from its background and its status as a sign. The mirror is used to indicate a wound that stands out from a background of flesh and different faces. The mirror also functions indexically for the viewer, both directing our vision towards the traces of abuse but also revealing the faces of other girls that are looking and commenting about an object in view. In other words, the mirror is deployed in a fashion that is extremely similar to diagrammatic experimentation because of interactivity between sign and sign user, whereby new lines and contours are drawn up between individual frames and even different sign users that exceed limited spatial or temporal contiguity for obvious reasons. It should be noted that Panh's inclusion of the mirror within the frame allows the eye-lines of his protagonists to almost coincide with ours, implicating us as both subjects and objects.^{xvi}

We are also implicated through further observations that are made verbally and exceed direct description. One of the girls draws a contrast between the relative safety of clients and the insecurities of prostitution, remarking that the death of a prostitute would never be recorded on any computer or published in a newspaper. Our awareness of the severity of the young women's critique may also be informed by previous knowledge of the precariousness of life in South-East Asia or analogous situations at home- regardless of whether this based upon first-hand experience or hearsay through conversation or other cultural artefacts. In other words, our engagement with the proposition *qua* proposition is dependent on what Peirce describes as collateral observation (EP 2: 403-410), whereby the sign user's previous acquaintance or even experiment with the object is as important as formal knowledge of the semantics of the semiotic sign.^{xvii} Further elaboration is provided through Peirce's distinction between a map as a picture and its use as a diagram: "[E]xperience of the world we live in renders the map something more than a mere *icon* and confers upon it the added characters of an *index*" (EP2:8).

Maps, diagrams and deliberative agency

Furthermore, it should also be noted that this account of the map is far from static. Peirce briefly alludes to the possible discovery of a "new island" within a familiar landscape such as the Arctic Sea (EP2: 8). In other words, mapping is an active process, involving the emergence of new objects in a changing landscape that demand different successive graphic variations. This has been recently developed at length by Stjernfelt, who has analyzed mappings that reflect geographical change over time that may even serve to establish new axiomatic rules. Examples provided by Stjernfelt include Jared Diamond's work on world maps, which produced new patterns of biogeographical development between continents, and Alfred Wegener's observations of different

coastlines, which led to a new idea that continents continue moving over time (Stjernfelt 2014: 288-291). The examples chosen by Stjernfelt occur within specialized academically practice, but it could also be argued that his chosen examples are also instantiations of practice that occur on a more quotidian level and are far from trivial. For the protagonists in *Papier ne peut pas Envelopper la Braise*, diagrammatical experimentation is an integral part of their deliberative agency, allowing them to see new relationships between past and present experience as well as informing their present relationships within contemporary topographies both local and global.

This is most prominent in a conversation between Da and Aun Tauch, in which the former attempts to explain the nature of her previous life in the refugee camps on the Thai border. A hand-drawn map has been created. The contours of the different buildings and roads of the camp, although hand-coloured, are somewhat abstracted and generic in a way that serve to demarcate spaces and possible trajectories. Da's fingers place new objects upon the surface of the drawing that represent a cistern and a small shop as well as the movements of soldiers guarding the camp and the people interned inside.

The addition of new objects within the contours of the map place individual daily routines within the context of displacement in the face of civil war and seemingly benign foreign intervention. Successive images of Da's hand, placing toy soldiers upon the surface of her drawing provokes Aun Tauch to ask why there were so many soldiers in the camp. Her inquiry is answered through a series of close-ups of Da's fingers manipulating toy trucks to retrace her family's trajectory of confinement and dependence, eventually leaving the confines of the camp to further poverty and social alienation. A direct critique of the indifference of the United Nations forces controlling the camp is tempered by Da's acknowledgement that "if it was not for the wars between Red, Blue and White Khmer factions, I would never have been put in a camp and become a prostitute".

Thus, a combination of pictures, new objects, and words serves to remind both pro-filmic subjects and the audience of relationships that are not immediately provided through direct perception. Yet Da's use of diagrams should not be seen as exclusively didactic. The open ended and continuing nature of the relationships that have been discovered is highlighted, once there is a transition from interior close-ups of experimentation with maps to wider images of Da walking through different urban spaces in present-day Phnom Penh. The presence of vehicles, the shrill sounds of traffic, and the different paths taken by Da within the frame are continuous with what we have seen in miniature represented form. Connections between past and present experience as well as the prominence given to Da as a living figure reinforce the diagram's

experiential and dynamic function. Above all, this presents Da as an individual actor, who is still finding her own position and negotiating a potential trajectory. Part of this trajectory involves a visit to her ailing sister, Phirom, who is resting in the mother's house, reminding us of unresolved inter-personal ethical issues that are nevertheless still framed within a wider ongoing historical and geographical process.

Indexes as Trace; Deixis as "Error"

It is in a heart-breaking sequence that the debilitating disease afflicting Phirom is named as Aids. Da applies ointments upon her sister's skin. Medium close-ups of scars on Phirom's arms and face give way to extreme close-ups that focus our attention on the texture of the pustules that have ruptured the skin's surface. Da tells her sister to wash her wounds, reassuring her that she will earn money for the upkeep of the entire family. During a conversation over a meal prepared by the mother, Da expresses disgust on hearing that Western charities have offered to pay for her sister's funeral even when the latter is still alive, albeit barely so, as she lies listlessly on the wooden floor.

We thus participate in a shift from a description of contingent objects in view towards commentary on wider social and geographical contexts. As stated at the beginning of this essay, complex propositions incorporate simpler dicisigns. Because of direct physical contiguity, Phirom's scars are akin to other examples originally provided by Peirce such as the footprint and the bullet hole. Once the physical index is perceived in an intersubjective context, perception is accompanied by self-perception, taking the form of an acknowledgement of error that contributes to a sense of responsibility.^{xviii} This is evident in Da's final response to her sister's predicament. Stroking the scars on her own arms that are the result of previous self-harming, she states that "I have made an error that is as indelible as the wound on my arm". Past and present experience is thus linked through an expression of remorse that she tricked her sister into prostitution after being similarly deceived by others previously. A potentially endless chain of blame is prevented from being so, through Da's assertion that "I am the sole person responsible".

Idealism and Instrumentalism

Da's emphasis on responsiveness and responsibility serves as a prelude for philosophically flavoured exchanges between her and Aun Tauch. At the same time as freshly prepared food is shared, different views are exchanged as to how general concepts relate to individual daily lives. This takes place through a form of call and

response, whereby Da is required to account for seemingly abstract terms such as Freedom, happiness and sentiment.^{xix} Her responses are grounded within everyday observation. Happiness and freedom are equated with having a house and being able to go on holiday, while sentiment is equated with a mother looking after her children. Addressing Aun Tauch directly, happiness is also compared to the love of children toward their parents. Abstractions and conceptions are thus clarified through examples taken from direct observation within daily life. However, major differences between Da's worldliness and Aun Tauch's idealism are quickly brought into sharp relief. On being asked to define justice by Aun Tauch, Da reproaches her friend for being too young and stupid to ask such questions.^{xx} Nevertheless, Da reluctantly provides a response, comparing social justice to a set of scales that is never evenly weighted.

Conflicting viewpoints becomes even more prominent, once the discussion is recommenced against the background of magazine cuttings. As magazine cuttings are reshaped into new letters, Da describes how the poor remain dominated through unreflective imitation of ostentatious consumption. In contrast, an alternative view is offered by Aun Tauch who espouses a notion of unbridled inquiry, citing a Khmer aphorism that defines human life and freedom of expression as coterminous: "a tongue lives and you die, a tongue moves and you live". Furthermore, in response to Da's continuing sarcasm, Aun Tauch's repeats another Khmer proverb that is used as the title of the film. "Paper cannot contain the embers", can now be seen as a belief that Truth will not perish. It is defined in personal and passionate terms, which is re-inforced visually through an image of Aun Tauch picking petals from a rose. This is a highly romantic(ised) image that is nevertheless highly ambivalent. Limitless passionate inquiry might also be undermined by the limitations of subjective idealism and collapse through a lack of grounding in shared lived experience.

It is cynicism and world-weariness that is brought to the fore in an exchange between Da and a younger woman called Aun Thom. Here, mirrors are incorporated within the frame to punctuate changes in the conversation. Panh's use of composition separates the mirror from its immediate background making it akin to a pictorial legisign because of our awareness of the sign's status as sign *qua* sign. Furthermore, the inclusion of the act of looking at the mirror within the mirror - which literally produces reflections within reflections - provides an ironic framework for the sarcasm and defiance of the two young women. After an initial expression of outrage towards the condescendence of a western woman from an NGO who wants Da to change her lifestyle, the conversation takes an unexpected turn. The two women describe the material privileges of their lifestyle. Da speaks casually about how her daughter might follow her footsteps as part of filial duty. This is paralleled by Thom's ambition to find a "sugar daddy", which is accompanied by jokes about different clients' genitalia.

The almost self-congratulatory celebration of contingency provided by the two young women is nevertheless immediately deflated. Da's young daughter is seen looking at her mother through the window of a door. It is then revealed that Da is drawing a picture of a young woman, to which she adds captions that lament the passing of time and loss of innocence. Da's capacity to see herself as both subject and object serves as a prelude for an acerbic confrontation with her mother, who expresses bitter disappointment with the two daughters and their choice of lifestyle. In response to Da's complaints about the cost of urban living, the mother emphasizes the devastation suffered by her generation in the years immediately following Year Zero. She refers directly to enforced communal living and the loss of her own parents: "And you think that you are having it hard...If you had been born during the Khmer Rouge years, you would have either been killed or have starved to death". Thus, an intimation of Da's growing awareness of the inter-generational context behind her present predicament colours how we engage with the final experiments with diagrams that bring the film to a provisional conclusion.

Diagrams, Shifting Perspectives and Women in the foreground:

Radical alterations are made to the magazine cuttings on the back wall which coincide with changes in the lives of the individual women. Here, Aun Tauch removes individual magazine cuttings and replaces them with images of herself, dressed either in the traditional attire of a dancer or as a modern wedding bride. When asked by Da as to why she is doing this, Aun Tauch comments on her confidence in her own physical beauty, repeating a Khmer aphorism that recommends fellow Khmers not to "look down upon prostitutes and what they do. Your own daughters and other people's are very similar". Aun Tauch's romanticism is now tempered by a recognition of unresolved social contradictions within Kampuchea in regard to the sexual agency of women. Arguably, her traditional costume reminds us of the repression of tradition under the Khmer Rouge, just as the photograph of herself in a wedding gown stands in contrast to the anonymity of the contemporary mass-produced images that have been replaced. Ever so subtly, this hints at the need for a political culture that would treat its citizens as neither subservient workers nor passive consumers, but would instead allow for growth and self-cultivation.^{xxi}

Furthermore, Da's instrumentalism, which previously verged towards cynicism, is now modified in the face of ongoing experience and interaction with others. It is through Da that we learn about the departure of many of the girls from the establishment and her own decision to change profession. The departure of Da's

colleagues is conveyed through propositions that incorporate gestures, traces, pictures, as well as written and spoken words. Each of the girls kisses the blank wall leaving behind traces of their lipstick, a gesture which is imitated by the pimp who leaves a thumbprint. Simple indexes rapidly become propositions, once Da proceeds to write each person's name underneath the trace with eyeliner. She also uses make-up brushes to draw eyes and mouths, turning the traces of the departed girls into pictures with captions.^{xxii}

Complex diagrammatic experimentation that provides information about changing individual trajectories is also accompanied by general social critique that is nevertheless grounded in self-observation. With a seemingly melodramatic gesture, Da rips the magazine cuttings and throws them in a rubbish bin. But this serves as a prelude for self-portraiture and introspection. Panh's camera gently pans between an extreme close-up of Da's face and a hand-drawn face. Visual juxtaposition emphasizes that the self-portrait is a picture because of its recognizable features. But the latter's connection with a perceiving and speaking subject also makes the self-portrait a diagram because it describes a subject who is literally a work in progress.

Da informs us that she has left the world of prostitution to work as a beer salesgirl. Her conscious decision to change her life narrative contrasts sharply with the acceptance of contingency on the part of her former colleagues, who have left the establishment with serious drug addictions and debts that force them to abandon their children. Da asserts that her new job allows her to enjoy "more freedom". While previously a notion of freedom was based on general observations about happy family life and basic living standards, Da's aspirations are now tempered by a pointed awareness of widespread social and economic inequality. Her rejoinder that "justice remains on the side of the rich" and the poor will always be seen as "guilty" reminds us that she still remains a hard-headed realist – even if previous self-pity and cynicism have been modified through her responsiveness to the experience of others. The film ends with a final diagram: Da sticks a printed image of a rose on a door, which is then shut tight. A frontal view of the picture of the rose accompanies the final credits.

A rose is a rheme and a rheme is a rose

The rose is a motif that was associated previously with Da's more idealistic friend Aun Tauch who we learn has since left the establishment. Here, I agree with Barnes' observation that the film succeeds because it interrupts our "moralizing pity" and "righteous indignation", literally so now that a door has been seemingly shut upon us. Furthermore, Barnes deploys a Brechtian notion of distanciation to speak of a shift of

focus away from the accumulation of information for information's sake towards the "development of reasoning skills and to the activity of learning itself (2015: 63). But this might evoke an overly dry and didactic account of Panh's use of diagrammatic experimentation that neglects the qualitative immediacy of the individual inquirer.

It is here that Barnes' comments are complemented by philosophy. On the issue of agency and self-control, Peirce originally attempted to speak about ideals that were cultivated through meditation. We are also told that "'Ideals' is far too cold a word! I mean rather passionate admiring aspirations after an inward state that anybody may hope to attain or approach" (EP2: 460). We thus might also see Da's final gestures in more affirmative terms than simply a form of subjective closure and refusal. Rather, we might see this as part of a wider process of self-cultivation where interaction with others and inward reflection mutually inform one another.^{xxiii} Because of its status as a recognizable picture (legisign), the image of the rose is of a more general inter-subjective type than the single object previously held in the hands of Da's friend. But the sign's status as a rhematic symbol also embodies possibility and qualitative immediacy. It reminds us of a more general need to withdraw from immediate instrumental action, if not as well our need to avoid the illusion that a vicarious engagement with the lives of other people constitutes some kind of facile solution for social and ethical issues that remain ongoing and continue to implicate each and every one of us. Yet inward reflection also allows the cultivation of long-term ideals that exceed momentary and local satisfactions.

This also highlights one of the achievements of Panh's film. A productive account of introspection that is not reducible to narrow subjectivity has been arrived at after much diagrammatic experimentation both within the frame and through the film's narrative structure. Furthermore, Panh's experimentation with diagrams and pictures is something that is further developed in his autobiographical piece *The Missing Image* (2013). The experimental documentary uses clay models and hand-drawings to recontextualize archival footage and reconstitute individual and collective agency. Panh's experimentation has wider implications for both theory and practice. Once documentary practice is seen in terms of pictoriality that involves a constant process of framing and reframing as part of diagrammatic experimentation rather than a "technology of capture" (Grimshaw and Ravetz 2015: 266),^{xxiv} an emphasis is placed on creativity, which is nevertheless still constrained by historical and social contexts. Visual documentation, embodied always through multiple and different variations of graphic, photographic and painterly qualities, would aim not solely for direct point to point correspondence but would serve as well as vehicles for the creation of new connections that modify present thinking and inform future conduct.

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