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“Stop That Acting!”

Exploring the concepts of authenticity and transparency in the works of Shirley Clarke

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About a year ago, I was scrolling through one of my social media feeds and stumbled upon a screenshot. It contained some statistics considering the percentages of women working in the film industry. It did not specify which industry, or on which sources the numbers were based, but they were low enough for me to become very much aware of the fact that the film industry still had a very long way to go considering equality between men and women. The numbers, all based on the year 2016, told me that 34% of the films had no female producers, 79% lacked a female editor, and 96% did not have a female cinematographer. This inspired me to look online for more information about this particular subject, and became very passionate about it. So when it was time to choose a subject for my thesis, I knew that I wanted to write about a female filmmaker. Because of my interest in the 1950's in the United States, I eventually read about Shirley Clarke. When I started researching Clarke and her work, I discovered rather quickly that there was not a lot of material written about her and her work. Not surprisingly, there was enough literature to be found that discussed the works of her male contemporaries who worked in the same circles of people who worked in the underground film scene in New York City. This motivated me to write my thesis about her work. The few articles that were written specifically about Clarke and her work, were mostly written in relation to either feminism, or her work would be compared to the work of her contemporaries. Most of the other information written about Clarke consists of her name being mentioned sporadically in the context of the New American Cinema Group. That is why I have decided to take two of her films out of her oeuvre and elaborate on those two works. Too little has been written about her movies, as they have been lost for a few decades and were only rediscovered not too long ago by the owners of the film restoration company called Milestone Films. With this thesis, I intend to shine a light on the important and forgotten works Clarke has made and point out why they are equally relevant to the films made by male contemporaries.

My research question is as follows:

How does Shirley Clarke explore the concepts of authenticity and transparency in her two feature films *The Connection* (1961) and *Portrait of Jason* (1967), and what is the result of this exploration?

The reason behind my decision for these two works as my case studies is mainly practical: most of Clarke's work is only available at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater, and Milestone Film has only restored a few of her short films and not all of her feature films. Luckily, both of these films proved to be fascinating options to elaborate on because of Clarke's choice of subject. *The Connection* was based on a play written by Jack Gelber, which was carried out by The Living Theatre, an experimental American theatre company founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. *Portrait of Jason* is the result of a 12-hour conversation between herself, Carl Lee (her partner at the time who also acted in *The Connection*) and Jason Holliday, an African-American, gay hustler who want to become famous with his nightclub act.

In order to answer my research question, I have divided my thesis into three chapters. The first chapter will introduce Shirley Clarke as an independent filmmaker who strived for emancipation. I will discuss her position as a female filmmaker particularly within the New American Cinema Group, in which she played a major part as the only woman out of twenty members. I will give a historical overview of how the New American Cinema group came into existence, who the leading figures in this movement were and some of the most important works that were made by filmmakers within this group. One of the most significant figures in the independent cinema movement in New York City, starting in the 1950's, was a woman named Maya Deren. Deren tried to organize a group of independent filmmakers as early as 1953, and because of her effort in favor of the underground American cinema, other independent groups such as the New American Cinema Group started to emerge. With this chapter, I want to establish an awareness of the times she was living in, and how difficult it was for her to establish herself, and how the subjects she chose for her features could be partially explained by her position as a female filmmaker.

My second chapter will elaborate on Clarke's first feature film *The Connection*. In this case study, I will examine how Clarke's adaptation of the play *The Connection* by Jack Gelber functions as a film and how this affects the spectator differently. In order to do so, I will firstly discuss *The Connection* in its original form – a play carried out by The Living Theatre in 1957. I will use the writings of Antonin Artaud, a revolutionary in theater and one of major influences of The Living Theatre, to examine the play. Artaudian principles stepped

away from traditional theater, and were used to draw the audience into the play in order to reflect on society. In addition to this, I will discuss Clarke's adaptation of the play, how it differs and how they show similarities. Clarke's *The Connection* has often been discussed in cinematographic terms of the *cinéma vérité*, which is problematic because after all, the film is a play. I will discuss the codes of *cinéma vérité* at work in the film, but most importantly I will discuss how Clarke's adaptation of the play functions *as a film* and how this mainly changes the relationship with the audience. Spectatorship is the key element in this case study. I will use the theories of Bertold Brecht and his *Verfremdungstechnik*, the works on theater and film by André Bazin and Jacques Rancière's theories on spectatorship to reveal the most important effects of Clarke's adaptation.

The third chapter of my thesis will be about *Portrait of Jason*. For this film, Clarke chose yet another interesting subject for her film – African-American gay hustler Jason Holliday. This extravagant man told stories about his life over the course of twelve hours in Clarke's apartment, only in the company of Clarke herself and her then partner Carl Lee. With this film, Clarke made a performative documentary which constantly plays with the concept of authenticity on different levels. In this film, spectatorship again plays a significant part. For this case study, I will use the concept of the performative documentary as described by Stella Bruzzi to examine *Portrait of Jason.* I want to examine how Clarke explores the concept of authenticity and performance in the film and how this effects the relationship between the spectator and the film.I will start with a historical context and describe the works of two important contemporaries who worked with similar subjects in their films, namely Andy Warhol and Jack Smith. Secondy, I will elaborate on the concept of performative documentary as described by Stella Bruzzi, and apply this concept with examples from the film. In order to do so, I have divided the third chapter in two different parts. The first part is about the performative subject Jason Holliday, and the second part is about the performativity of the film itself due to the interference of Clarke and Lee. In addition to Bruzzi's theories on performativity in relation to documentary, I will use the works of Judith Butler, who wrote about the concept of performativity in relation to gender and identity.

With these case studies, I want to encourage the reader to be aware of the very deliberate and interesting choices Clarke made considering the subject matter of her films. They may not have been as controversial as Jack Smith's subjects, nor was she the first to adapt a play or make a movie featuring a gay subject. What she did accomplish with these works is that she started a discussion on the concept of film itself, its relation to its audience and how easily concepts of transparency and authenticity can be called into question.

1. Shirley Clarke and the New American Cinema

In 1961, Shirley Clarke released her first feature film called *The Connection*, without the experience nor the material recourses to fall back on. The film cost $167.000 to make, and the money as raised by forming a 'limited partnership', which means that a lot of people invest a relatively small amount of money in the film. In this case, two hundred dollars. This had a few advantages for Clarke. First of all, she had all creative freedom because the investors themselves were not directly involved in the filmmaking process. Secondly, it became much easier to raise the money through the use of crowd sourcing (Bachman and Young 14). Shirley Clarke was one of the founders of the New American Cinema Group. This group of filmmakers came together in the late 1950s to find a way to make, produce and distribute films independently from the big Hollywood studios. For a very long time, before the Group was founded, several filmmakers had found different ways in order to accomplish independence from the Hollywood studios. John Cassavetes for example used his position as a Hollywood actor to make money in order to fund his films. His first feature however, was financed through contributions after a radio appeal and he found his actors through a workshop he had organized himself. Later on, he did turn back to Hollywood but always claimed that he was in complete control of the process (Bachman and Young 8). Other filmmakers, such as Irv Kerschner, also turned to Hollywood for specifically a professional cast, most of all the actors. Kerschner believed that in order to create a new kind of film, a professional cast would be needed. As he put it himself: "One of the requirements, of course, is a professional cast. This is a very difficult script, and should properly be played by the people we had in mind when developing the characters" (Bachman and Young 9). Independent producers at that time such as Denis and Terry Sanders, discovered that they could not always be fully independent and had to rely on established stars (Bachman and Young 10). These examples show how hard it was for filmmakers to become completely independent, and Shirley Clarke was one of the first filmmakers in the United States to establish a formal group that aimed for a way in which it would become easier for independents to produce and distribute their work. But she was the only woman in the Group. And not only did she struggle as an independent filmmaker, she struggled more than her male counterparts because the professional field of filmmaking was even less occupied by women than it is today.

In this chapter, I would like to examine how Shirley Clarke strived for emancipation,

not only as an independent filmmaker but more importantly, as an independent *female* filmmaker. I shall discuss position particularly within the New American Cinema and the New American Cinema Group, who its other founders were, and how it has affected the independent cinema in the United States. Secondly, I shall discuss Clarke's early work and how it was received in the independent film community in New York City. I will discuss her work in relation to that of other women active in the independent industry at that time, such as Maya Deren. How was their work received compared to that of other male independent filmmakers in that time? How do the struggles of the female filmmakers become apparent?

The New American Cinema

The beginning of the New American Cinema, in which Shirley Clarke played a major part, has its roots earlier than the 1960s. It began after the Paramount Decree, a famous United States Supreme Court case that stopped the major studios from preventing other smaller independents to show their films in their theaters. The major Hollywood studios owned their theaters in which only their films could be shown, and after the Paramount Decree they could no longer profit as much as they used to due to the exclusive right they had. This Supreme Court decision changed the ways Hollywood would produce, distribute and exhibit its movies. The Supreme Courts' decision did not work out well for the major studios. Because they no longer owned the theaters, the exhibition rates increased. Also, because they were no longer allowed to block-book films for an entire year, studios had to become more selective when it came to making films. This also increased the production costs. In order to make up for these losses, ticket prices went up, but attendance did not. The Paramount Decree marked the beginning of the end of the old Hollywood System (Tzioumakis 169).

The film industry needed help. They received it from low-budget independent productions which used a different approach to the way Hollywood made film. They used 'a mixture of different exploitation techniques, art-house filmmaking techniques and an emphasis on distinctly American themes within not always clear-cut generic frameworks' (Tzioumakis 170). These filmmakers however, were not the New American Cinema of which Shirley Clarke was a part. The filmmakers who, unintentionally, helped out Hollywood at that time were part of the "New Hollywood" or "Hollywood Renaissance". This Renaissance came into being due to the emergence of the New American Cinema. For the first time, it allowed Hollywood directors a lot of creative freedom. Movies like *The Graduate* (Nichols 1967) and *Easy Rider* (Hopper 1969) became 'mainstream', supported by and distributed through major Hollywood companies (Tzioumakis 171).

The woman and man who were most responsible for establishing experimental cinema in the United States in the postwar era were, according to P. Adams Sitney, Maya Deren and her husband Alexander Hammid. Sitney starts his well-known book *Visionairy Film: The American Avant-Garde 1943-2000* with a chapter on Deren's first feature film made with her husband in 1943 called *Meshes of the Afternoon*. Interestingly, Sitney emphasizes in his book that Deren was not the person in the collaboration that was the main author of the film. Despite various other sources, such as by filmmaker James Broughton and American film critic Parker Tyler (both contemporaries of Deren), who both claim that *Meshes* was a collaboration between Deren and Hammid, Sitney claims that "Maya Deren simply pushed the button on the camera for the two scenes in which he [Hammid] appeared" (Sitney 8).

Maya Deren

Maya Deren was originally a dancer, just like Shirley Clarke, and became interested in experimental cinema and started making films during World War II with her husband Alexander Hammid. In *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), Deren plays a woman who has multiple mysterious encounters with a hooded figure whose face is replaced by a mirror. This kind of film has a strong dream structure that resembles films such as the surrealist film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) by Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali. Deren herself explained the intention of the film as follows: 'This film is concerned with the interior experiences of an individual. It does not record an event which could be witnessed by other persons. Rather, it reproduces the way in which the sub-conscious of an individual will develop, interpret and elaborate an apparently simple and casual incident into a critical emotional experience' (Sitney 9). Despite the similarities, Sitney claims that *Meshes of the Afternoon* and *Un Chien Andalou* differ in many ways too, and that Deren and Hammond's film is not a surrealist one. He says that a comparison can be made, but that *Meshes of the Afternoon* used surrealism, either latent or conscious, as a vehicle behind the mechanics of the film (9).

Deren wanted to make films that were not influenced by commercial studios, producers or distributors. She scripted and made the films herself, acted in them and rented theaters in New York City in order to screen her own films and sent flyers to film societies to advertise her work (Thompson and Bordwell 452). Even as early as 1953, Maya Deren attempted to create a group of independent experimental filmmakers in order to help each other out, such as facilitating crew and equipment, but also in general to bring similar minds together to help and protect each other. But mostly, she wanted to form a group to help communicate between the filmmaker and his or her audience. She created a scholarship for

experimental filmmakers, called the Creative Film Foundation. She also started to organize the Film Artist Society, which became the Independent Film Makers Association in 1953 (Sterritt 182). This was founded to discuss the developments in underground American cinema. This, to some extent, was what the later members of the New American Cinema Group also would.

Points of focus of the New American Cinema Group

Shirley Clarke, John Cassavetes, Jonas and Adolfas Mekas, Edward Bland, Alfred Leslie, Lionel Rogosin and Robert Frank were the members of this movement that started by the late fifties. They distinguished themselves by being anti-Hollywood. What they wanted to accomplish was a complete independence from the traditional American film culture, not only films by major studios but also by independent studios. Jonas Mekas, a film critic and filmmaker, wrote about this New American Cinema in *Film Culture* in 1959, an American film magazine founded by him and his brother Adolfas in 1954. He stated that the filmmakers sought to ‘‘free themselves from the overprofessionalism and over-technicality that usually handicap the inspiration and spontaneity of the official [Hollywood] cinema, guiding themselves more by intuition and improvisation than by discipline’ (Tzioumakis 172). Early in 1960, a group of twenty three independent filmmakers, including Shirley Clarke as the only woman, came together in New York City to create an organization that became known as the New American Cinema Group. Mekas became the President of the Board. Together, they discussed problems and possible solutions to the problems they came across as independent filmmakers.

Distribution became one of the most important points of focus within the group (Mekas). The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group was released in the summer 1961 edition of *Film Culture*, and signed by several filmmakers including Shirley Clarke. It included their nine principles, which included, in short:

1. Rejection of interference of producers, distributors and investors;
2. Rejection of censorship;
3. ‘Seeking new forms of financing, working towards a reorganization of film investing methods, setting up the basis for a free film industry’;
4. Abolishment of the ‘Budget Myth’ by claiming that good films can be made with a low budget
5. Taking a stand against current distribution and exhibition policies
6. Establishing their own cooperative distribution center

7. Organizing a film festival on the East Coast that could serve as a 'meeting place for New Cinema' all over the world
8. Change in the unjust demands by the Unions on independent films
9. Raising a fund by putting aside a percentage of their film profits

They wanted to make very clear that the main difference between them and, for example, United Artists was that they did not come together to make money, they only wanted to make films (Lewis 283). What happened next was that in early 1962, when the New American Cinema Group had become a more formal group, twenty filmmakers came gathered again, including Mekas but also Clarke, to discuss the possibility of a Film Makers Cooperative. The Cooperative was to be a distribution organization that would market and release New American films (Tzioumakis 172). The Cooperative had an executive committee to supervise the films that they would distribute. They changed the committee every year and were open to distributing any type of independently made film. It took them a while to distribute their first film, because despite the fact that the Cooperative was non-profit, it turned out to be quite difficult to finance everything (Tzioumakis 173). But despite the efforts of the New American Cinema group, it turned out to be short-lived. The New American Cinema group did have a major influence on the New Hollywood and on the American independent cinema in general. Even though they stopped working together as a formal group, the members of the New American Cinema Group continued their work, one of them being Shirley Clarke.

Shirley Clarke: a woman filmmaker in the fifties and sixties

Shirley Clarke's feature films all have something in common: they are all about minorities. *The Connection* tells the story of a group of jazz musicians, all addicted to heroin, waiting for their connection to bring the next fix. Her second feature, *The Cool World* (1964), follows several black street gangs in the streets of Harlem in New York City. *Portrait of Jason* (1967) is about a gay, black hustler who tells the audience his life story. Interesting topics, considering Clarke was a white, rich female filmmaker who grew up with governesses and chauffeurs. Clarke turned to art to art to revolt against her oppressive father, and started to dance as a teenager. First jazz, later she switched to modern. In 1953, she made her first short, called *Dance in the Sun* (1953), in which she combined her passion for dance with her newly found curiosity for film, something she had in common with Maya Deren, whose work Clarke was not familiar with at that time. *Dance in the Sun* really is an extension of her dance. Choreography, rhythm, and movement, inherent to the medium of film but also to dance, play a major role in the short film. She transports a dancer on stage, back and forth through space

and time, and by the end when the credits are about to roll, puts the dancer back into reality (Harvard Film Archive). She took some film classes at the New York City City College, and continued making shorts. For her 1959 short film *Skyscraper*, she even received an Oscar nomination.

But despite of her efforts to become a filmmaker who could work independently from the commercial film industry, and establishing the Group in order to make sure others could as well, Clarke remained only one of the few women who actively participated in the independent film industry in New York City. Clarke did not become an active member of the feminist movement until the seventies, but later on in her career she said in interviews that there was a reason for her particular choice of theme in especially her feature films. They were all focused on African-American culture, drug addicts, and in the case of her last feature *Portrait of Jason* (1967), the gay scene became another theme she became interested in. Shirley Clarke herself said the following about this: 'I always felt alone and on the outside of the culture I was in… I identified with black people because I couldn't deal with the woman question and I transposed it' (Butt 40). After 1950, a 'specifically feminist film culture was constructed at the intersection of two cinematic practices': more participation of women in Hollywood in for example political filmmaking, and also in art cinema, according to James (308). Because thematic and formal conventions in film started to be analyzed more critically, especially the traditional roles of women in Hollywood film, counter-texts started to emerge. But it was especially when film theory started to enter the academic world as a different way of practicing cinema, especially the rise of feminist theory which started in the sixties (James 309).

Even though these new cinema practices started to emerge slowly, women were still hugely underrepresented in the film industry, both commercial and independent. Clarke made her first feature film in the decade in which the second-wave feminism started, in an industry in which women were still mainly something to be looked at in films, not the ones who would actually make the films. Or, as David E. James puts it, women were not excluded from cinema but rather hyper-exposed in it, 'their presence in cinema was confined to the use of the actresses' bodies in film narratives, a use that was thought ipso facto to objectify women and to repress their own sexuality' (304). Laura Mulvey has written one of the most famous articles on this phenomenon in Hollywood cinema, called "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Mulvey's article was published in 1975 and has a psychoanalytical approach to the pleasure an audience finds in looking. She describes the male gaze, which provides a pleasurable visual experience for men when they can look at a woman in cinema. The woman

is always the object of this gaze, not the bearer (837). The pleasure in Hollywood is produced in two ways: the first is the objectification of the image, and the second is identification with the image. The first form of pleasure is what Freud called scopophilia, which is the pleasure of subjecting someone to your gaze. The second form of pleasure is an identification with a character on screen, which comes about due to the Freudian Ego. Both of these pleasures are gendered, according to Mulvey. Scopophilia can only take place on an axis of passive/active, and the man is always on the active side and the women is on the passive side and serves as a 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (837-40). This distinction between active and passive is also due to the narrative structure of Hollywood film according to Mulvey. There is usually a dominant male figure with whom the spectator can identify, and the female characters tend to be either weak, or when they are strong, they need to be tamed (through marriage or death). James describes that 'feminist film thus discovered a special consanguinity with the avant-garde; for the general terms of feminist language […] were also those in which previous alternative film modes had constructed an unstable specificity for themselves as the other of the teleological, sutured, patriarchal narrative industrial film' (313).

Authenticity and transparency were very important subjects for Shirley Clarke to examine in her films. From *The Connection,* in which the diegetic director is constantly searching for moments of authenticity in his subjects the drug-addicts, to *Portrait of Jason,* in which Clarke herself and her partner Carl Lee search for one moment of truth in their constantly performing and lying subject Jason Holliday. Clarke never portrayed a woman as the main subject of one of her films. As she said in the quote mentioned before, she did not know what to do with 'the woman question' and that she 'transposed it'. She avoided the problem of objectifying a woman by a male gaze by not letting a woman be in her films at all, and made sure that the option of identification was not present either. All of the characters in her film are either black, drug-addict or gay, or all three. It was a different way of approaching the social protest within cinema. As Rabinovitz puts it: 'Out of traditional modes and antagonistic relationships between documentary and fictional narrative, Clarke inscribes new positions for social subjectivity' (93). She sees it as less of a feminized Other than as a prefeminist investigation of social subjectivities.

These marginalized groups with whom she identified, were not the audience she could expect when her films were released. Eventually, her films were mostly seen by her fellow avant-garde filmmakers or other American bohemians in particular in New York City. Even though at that time she gained a respected status as a filmmaker in her own scene, *The Connection* could not be shown for a very long time due to the censorship board in New York

City (I shall elaborate on that in chapter 2), *The Cool World* was only shown a few times and even disappeared for a very long time, and is currently being restored by Milestone Films. *Portrait of Jason* did not gain a lot of attention during its release, but was later on discovered within academic circles after the emergence of gay, lesbian and queer theory. Shirley Clarke has mentioned in some interviews from the 1980s that she continued to struggle as a female filmmaker. She was often forced to work with male producers, depended on male distributors and a crew that consistently consisted of men.

Conclusion

To conclude, Shirley Clarke has positioned herself as an avant-garde filmmaker at her time and was highly respected, but never gained the amount of appreciation that a lot of her male counterparts did. This was largely due to the fact that she was a woman who tried to be an appreciated filmmaker in a time when women were even less accepted in the film industry (both commercial and independent) as they are now. Despite all of the things that she has accomplished, a biography of her life does not exist. She is often mentioned in literature, reviews and important film magazines such as *Film Culture*, has played an important part in the prefeminist era in filmmaking, but has not been able to strongly position herself in the avant-garde film industry.

2. *The Connection*

In 1961, Shirley Clarke released her first feature film *The Connection*. She worked together with Jack Gelber on this film, who wrote the original script has an off-Broadway play that had been showing at the Living Theatre. The Living Theatre was an American experimental theatre company founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck. *The Connection* tells the story of a group of jazz musicians, all heroin addicts, waiting for their pusher to arrive with some new heroin for them to take. Aside from waiting for their pusher, they also seem to have struck a deal with a filmmaker named Jim Dunn, who is a cinéma vérité director. When the connection arrives, a dealer who is called The Cowboy, he is very suspicious of Dunn and wants him to do heroin with them in order to prove that he is not a narc who is out to get them arrested. After almost every person in the room has left for the bathroom to take the heroin, Dunn at last follows as well. While they are all high on the drugs, one of the addicts known as Leach, decides that he needs more and subsequently overdoses. While the rest of the men drag Leach to bed, Dunn seems to be giving up on the project and tells the camera man J.J. Burden that the film is his job to finish. As the beginning of the film suggested, Jim Dunn left all the material to J.J. Burden before he left and the latter tried to put together the material 'as honestly as he could', however, Dunn himself has gone missing.

In this chapter, I would like to examine how Shirley Clarke's adaptation of the play *The Connection* by Jack Gelber functions as a film and how it affects the spectator differently. In order to do so, I would like first to elaborate further on *The Connection* within its historical context and how much effort it cost Clarke to get the film distributed and shown in theaters. I would like to relate these struggles to Judith Malina and Julian Beck's Living Theatre, who also endured a lot of criticism due to their similar controversial subjects in the often Artaudian plays that were performed. In addition to this, I would like to examine Clarke's *The Connection* in relation to the Brecht's epic theater and Artaud's theater of cruelty. Bertold Brecht and Antonin Artaud both challenged the idea of a passive spectator. They wanted a theater in which the spectator would learn from what was taking place in front of them. Brecht believed this could be achieved by distancing the spectator, Artaud believed that this could be accomplished by letting the spectator abandon his position of viewer. Most of the literature on Clarke's film relates it to *cinéma vérité,* and it thereby neglects to discuss the film in relation to what it is based on: a play, and *cinéma vérité* is a term connected to films, not to theater. After discussing Clarke's *The Connection* in theatrical, Artaudian and Brechtian terms, I would like to elaborate on how these terms differ between the original play and Clarke's

adaptation, and how this changes the role of the spectator.

The Living Theatre and *The Connection*

In 1946 Judith Malina and Julian Beck, a young couple from New York City, decided that they wanted to create a theatre of their own, and they called it the Living Theatre. It had to be "a 'living' theatre, one that would emphasize contemporary plays performed in such a manner as to move the spectators" (Marrs 14). They worked in similar ways as the New American Cinema Group did, by trying to be financially independent from major companies, rejection of interference of producers, distributors and censorship, and taking a stand against the status quo. Malina and Beck did everything themselves, from creating the entire concept of their theatre to producing, directing, acting, selling tickets, reading the scripts, lifting and lowering the curtain and locking up the theatre at night. The Living Theatre was not about the themes and styles of the individual plays that were shown, but rather about the style and theme of the theatre as a whole. Charles L. Mee, Jr., an American playwright and active participant in the Off-Off-Broadway scene, frequently attended shows of the Living Theatre and describes how the uniqueness of Living Theatre lies in several aspects, particularly in the involvement of the audience. Mee says that: 'Few theatres possess such an unusual and uncompromising personal vision, a vision which makes hard demands on its audience' (194).

Antonin Artaud and the "Theatre of Cruelty"

Antonin Artaud played an important part in twentieth century theater and the European avant-garde. Artaud started out in France as a writer, and soon after he started writing he became involved in the avant-garde theatre. In 1931, Artaud witnessed a Balinese dance performance at the Paris Colonial Exposition, which inspired him to write his first manifesto called the "Theater of Cruelty". In this manifesto, Artaud explains this Theater of Cruelty and how it breaks with the traditional theater. Artaud believes that the civilization of his time has turned human beings into repressed and sick creatures, and that the true function of theatre was to free mankind of these repressions and liberate their instinctual energy. In his manifesto, Artaud explains the way in which he thinks this can be accomplished. The primary objective of the manifesto is Artaud break with the submission of the theater to the text. Instead, Artaud urges to 'recover the notion of a kind of unique language half-way between gesture and thought' (90). He wants to combine spoken language with visual language, the latter coming forth from objects, movements and attitudes and their meanings. These meanings must be turned into signs, from which the visual language can be made (90). Artaud wants to step

away from Western, occidental usages of speech and instead turn words into incantations. According to him, by using non-occidental usages of speech, one will utilize vibrations and qualities of the voice. This will in turn lead to a break with the 'intellectual subjugation of the language', because according to Artaud, a deeper layer of intellectuality can be found once language is freed from this subjugation and combined with gesture and the signs of the envisioned visual language (91). In the manifesto, Artaud discusses several elements of theatre individually such as the themes he envisions, the mise-en-scène, costumes, etcetera. I will elaborate on the points most relevant for my Artaud's thoughts on theater in relation to the Living Theatre. First, Artaud believes that the mise-en-scène should not just be as a 'refraction of a text upon the stage', but rather as 'the point of departure for all theatrical creation' (94). So instead of letting the text lead the play, Artaud wants to let the setting be the place to start. Language therefore will be secondary, and instead more rhythmic, expressive and visual. Musical instruments will become a part of the mise-en-scène as well and are to be treated as objects. Artaud is particularly interested in ancient and forgotten instruments, as he is also interested in old and ancient costumes and the preserved beauty they represent. Second, Artaud thoroughly describes in his manifesto how he envisions the stage or auditorium. He wants the site where the spectacle will take place to *not* be an auditorium or stage, but instead turn it into a place where the barriers between spectator and spectacle are taken away. The audience is to placed in the middle of the action and there will be direct communication between actor and spectator. Artaud then explains what the interior of this special structure in which the spectacle will take place will look like. He wants to create this venue out of a barn or hangar, where the audience will be seated in the middle of a room on mobile chairs, the walls need to be white and there will be overhead galleries to give the actors the possibility to move around the room in different perspectives of heights and depths (Artaud 94).

The Becks were the first Americans to incorporate the theories of Antonin Artaud in their productions. Artaud's theories were very abstract and hard to turn into comprehensible principles of modern theater. Similar to the works of Artaud, the Becks wanted to free people from their social, political and artistic restrictions. They searched for boundaries and tried to cross them. Just like Artaud, the Becks wanted to break with traditional theater (Marrs 15).

The Connection **and the "Theatre of Cruelty**"

The Living Theatre did not have an actual theatre building for quite some time in its early days. For three years, from 1948 until 1951, several performances were given at the Becks'

(they got married in 1948) living room. In June 1957, the Becks found a large abandoned department store building on which they signed a lease only a few months later. When they finally received the permits needed, the Becks, along with a lot of volunteers, started building the theatre. On 13 January 1959, the 14th Street Theater was inaugurated.

In spring of 1958, playwright Jack Gelber personally delivered the script for a play called *The Connection* to Malina and Beck. Gelber had been living in San Francisco and was interested in the Beat scene filled with its jazz music and poetry. Gelber felt proud of the way the "play's structure follow[ed] the form of a jazz improvisation, with actors and musicians giving solos based on a common theme" (Cotkin 124). The Becks were convinced after only reading a few excerpts of the script. They felt that this play would be perfect to apply their passion for the Artaudian principles of theatre. They had read *The Theatre and Its Double* by Artaud and realized that they needed a "theatre whose poetry was active aggressive' (Marrs 101). The Becks felt, just like Artaud, that society had become isolated from feeling (i.e. emotions, pain, empathy) and that this isolation had allowed barbarism such as genocide, poverty and hunger, to prevail. They believed that the Theatre of Cruelty would give the theater a function which allowed people to get in touch with their feelings again to make them care about all the suffering in the world. As the Becks themselves put it:

"Artaud believed that if we could only be made to feel, really feel anything, then we might find all this suffering intolerable, the pain too great to bear, we might put an end to it, and then, being able to feel, we might truly feel the joy, the joy of everything else, of loving, of creating, of being at peace, and of being ourselves" (Marrs 101).

The Becks saw Gelber's *The Connection* as an indictment against society. The message was clear: the junkies waiting for their pusher were no better off than materialistic people longing for more power, money and success. This theme fit well within Artaud's Theater of Cruelty because it showed addiction and suffering in a direct and brutal way. It was an opportunity for the Becks to start to experiment with other elements of Artaud's theories. Important was the way in which the play was going to be shown to the audience: with a play-within-a-play technique. Secondly, it allowed them to explore the audience/actor relationship. The play developed through improvisation. The Living Theatre actors were not meant to focus on a character and develop it throughout rehearsals, but rather they were expected to be themselves *and* develop a character at the same time. Especially with the jazz musicians who were cast to just be themselves on stage, and not a character, the Becks discovered that this 'playing self' changed the audience/actor relationship. It was more self-representation on stage than acting. As Malina Beck put it:

> "When a jazz musician plays his music, he enters into personal contact with the public; when he goes home after he has played, one who talks to him knows that there is no difference between the way he is now and the way he was on stage. This type of relationship with the audience creates in him a great relaxation. *The Connection* represented a very important advance for us in this respect; from then on, the actors began to play themselves" (Marrs 104).

Aside from the audience/actor relationship that differed immensely from traditional theater, The Living Theatre also aimed at changing the spectator's relationship with the action on stage in an Artaudian way. With their theater on 14th Street, the Becks had the opportunity spatially construct the theater in the way they saw fit. They did not hang a curtain and did not put in a classic heightened stage, which 'aided in breaking down the aesthetic distance between actor and audience' (Marrs 105). This was exactly what Artaud described in his manifesto: "A direct communication will be re-established between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed and physically affected by it" (96). Especially with *The Connection*, in which the audience witnessed provocative subject matter and language, and during which they were sometimes directly addressed by the actors during the play, the audience was involved in a way that was new and very different from traditional theater. There was of course a script, but due to the improvisations, one performance on the one day could be different from the one the next day. The audience was very confused with the premise of the play, not only because it was a play within a play, but also because the actors, as mentioned before, stayed very close to themselves instead of developing a character, which made the situation that developed in front of the audience look very realistic. It seemed as if they were either watching a play by the Living Theatre, or they were watching a film director trying to make a film about junkies, or they were simply watching heroine junkies shooting up and waiting for their pusher.

In sum, The Becks tried a new form of theater based on the writings of Antonin Artaud. They attempted to change the relationship between the actors and the audience, work with a more improvised way of acting and broke down spatial barriers within the theater.

Shirley Clarke's adaptation of *The Connection*

The play is quite similar to Clarke's film scenario, but it also differs in a few ways. The piece,

similar to the film, is a play within a play. But instead of being accompanied by a director and his camera man, the heroin addicts are joined by a producer, a first and second photographer, and a writer. The writer was hired to bring together a group of addicts, who were supposed to improvise a dialogue along lines that the author has previously laid down. The results are filmed by the two photographers. There are, as it were, four intruders who serve as a bridge between the audience and the junkies.

The play was not received well in the beginning. Louis Calta of the New York Times called it "a farrago of dirt, small-time philosophy, empty talk and extended runs of 'cool' music" (Marrs 27). Because of the use of improvisation mentioned in the previous paragraph, the play did not have a clear and coherent structure, and many critics compared it to a long piece of jazz that never concluded, due to a lot of strange unstructured dialogues. Above all, some thought that the play was a glorification of heroin. But then Kenneth Tynan (Clarke's brother-in-law) wrote a praiseful review in the *New Yorker* after he had seen the play in August 1959. He described *The Connection* as the "first really interesting new play to appear off-Broadway in a good long time" (Cotkin 123). Allen Ginsberg attended a performance of the play as well and promised Malina to write about it in *Village Voice.* He called the play "very down and accurate about people, played by great cats". It was a "real turn-on to native American theatre", and he concluded by saying "And therefore I declare that any drama critic who attacks this play is an out and out phony" (Cotkin 124). Allen Ginsberg was an American writer part of the Beat Generation, and his writings very were influential. Such a positive review in a prominent paper such as the *Village Voice* meant a lot for the Living Theatre's publicity, and *The Connection* started to gain more attention.

Clarke's adaptation of *The Connection* was received differently than the way the play was received two years earlier. Shirley Clarke was able to capitalize on the bad, but also the good publicity of the play and the reputation the Beck's had received so far with their Living Theatre. The play was now seen as an unconventional play and a novelty, and Jack Gelber had become "a new speaker for the Beat Generation" (Rabinovitz, "Points of Resistance" 117). In an interview with Lauren Rabinovitz, Clarke explains why she decided to adapt the play into a film after she went to see it in 1959: "I just knew it was photogenic and that it would be a perfect vehicle for me to explore ideas I had about dramatic feature filmmaking" (Rabinovitz "Choreography of Cinema, 9). She got in touch with Jack Gelber and he agreed to rewrite his original script for *The Connection* and turn it into a script for a feature film, in collaboration with Clarke. One of the most important things during the rewriting process according to Clarke, was writing down every single pan or tilt the camera would make in the

script. But as soon as they arrived at the sound stage in which the set was built, these camera movements turned out to be impossible to execute. This forced but also allowed Clarke to improvise more on set, and, as Clarke puts it, "react emotionally to the actors and what was happening. It saved me because I found a style that was real and not necessarily Jack's preconceptions of what should happen" (Rabinovitz "Choreography of Cinema", 9-10). Clarke has never made entirely clear why she decided to turn the play into her first feature film. After all, the medium of film was often resistant to theater as a model of film.

In the following paragraph, I will elaborate on cinéma vérité and direct cinema in relation to Clarke's *The Connection.* The film was often perceived as a cinéma vérité or direct cinema film, of which a few codes are definitely at work in the film. But these terms are problematic, because the film was originally a *play*. Additionally, Clarke's film does not take away any barriers between the spectator and the subject, but rather distances the audience from what is taken place on the screen. I will refer back to the Artaudian principles used in the play in comparison to the film, and how these principles change and differ. Just like the principles of the direct cinema and cinéma vérité, Artaudian principles were political for they all search for truth and authenticity through the medium. Both principles attempted to change the relationship between the audience and what was going on stage or onscreen. In sum, in the following paragraph, my aim will be to elaborate on how the play functions as a film.

The Connection and the codes of *cinéma vérité*

The Connection, at first, might come across as typical cinéma vérité film: the director seems to be wanting to capture something by not intervening in the situation. The film was shot by using hand-held cameras and portable equipment, the presence of the camera is acknowledged, and the room itself in which the story takes place suggests that that the space is not two- or three-sided as it is on a film set, but a naturally lighted enclosed room. Lauren Rabinovitz claims that Clarke wanted "to expose how cinéma vérité fails as an exposé" ("Points of Resistance, 114). And not only Rabinovitz, but several other people have written about *The Connection* in relation to the cinéma vérité. There is a problematic term in relation to the film, since the term cinéma vérité was coined by the French ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch in the year that *The Connection* was released. Rouch, together with sociologist Egar Morin, made a film in the summer of 1960 that was released in October 1961 called *Chronique d'un été*. The film starts with Rouch and Morin discussing whether or not it is possible to be a sincere actor in front of a camera. Throughout the documentary film, Rouch and Morin try to investigate the impact of the camera on the *milieu* and the relationship

between the object and the camera. They try to make this relationship apparent by showing themselves in the film as well, leading the scenes, interfering with the actors and constantly making the spectator aware of the presence of the camera and its relationship to the objects (Fieschi 7). *Cinéma vérité* is not only recognizable in its technical aspects, but even more so as philosophy. The filmmaker wants to eliminate as many barriers as possible between the subject and the audience (i.e. big film crews, costumes, make-up, large sets). It is not likely that Shirley Clarke was aware of the concept of *cinema vérité* while she was filming *The Connection*. Even so, it is still interesting to look at *The Connection* in relation to cinéma vérité, particularly because the film has been described as a *cinéma vérité* film or as a critique on the entire concept. This is problematic for two reasons. For one, it cannot be a *cinéma vérité* because it was originally a play and Clarke did not alter the script and changed the medium. Secondly, Clarke's film does not aim to take away any barriers between subject and audience in order to show the truth – quite the opposite. In the next paragraph, I would like to discuss some stylistic elements that cohere with codes of the cinéma vérité in order to clarify why *The Connection* is discussed frequently within those codes. Then I will elaborate further on how Clarke's adaptation functions as a film and how it is not at all a film that aims at removing barriers, but rather, puts them up.

The Connection corresponds stylistically with codes of the cinéma vérité. The entire film takes place in what appears to be one room that seems to be naturally lighted, and it does not look like a film set. The chosen camera angles emphasize this by only letting us see walls and windows that do not show what is outside. Only the sounds of the street, cars and people that can be heard from time to time outside suggest the location is in a city. The camera seems to be on a tripod, but the movements of the camera are jiggly and suggest that it is handheld. The movie was shot on fast black-and-white stock. Altogether, the framing and grainy cinematography is similar to the visual style that was used for cinéma vérité with its portable equipment (Rabinovitz "Points of Resistance", 115). Shirley Clarke also makes the spectator aware of the a second director, the one who is in charge of the camera that is not in the frame. By showing the second camera and a diegetic director and director's assistant in the frame, Clarke shows how easy it is for directors to control and manipulate the situation. Usually, the spectator is not made aware of the camera as much as in *The Connection*, but Clarke emphasizes its presence by adding a camera to the frame. What Clarke is trying to show here is that the director is in a privileged position. When only the subjective point of view of the director is shown, the spectator can look at it as though staring through a window without being seen, in other words, the spectator takes a voyeuristic position. By showing a director

within the frame, with a camera, who is communicating with the person who is operating the camera, the audience is made more aware of the numerous steps taken by the fictional filmmaker Jim Dunn in order to create this so-called 'honest human document'. In addition to this, when Dunn enters the frame for the first time, he is upset about the lack of activity of the junkies and tells them that they are stiffening. During this rant, it becomes clear that in order to create this 'honest human document', every movement, pan or tilt of the camera has been thought through. And when Dunn discovers that the camera was still rolling during his rant, he demands that this particular part will be cut out of the film. Becoming even more frustrated, Dunn exclaims: 'You junkies don't seem to understand that when a hand, see, is photographed, it becomes something other than just a hand. It's a matter of cinematic selection see?', hereby admitting that an image is never fully about showing what is true and honest. Figure 1 in the appendix shows Dunn telling the junkies to act more natural. The second film still shows the silhouette of Dunn with a camera in the background, making the spectator aware of the presence of this camera and the director. The third still shows Dunn adjusting the light while the camera is still rolling. These images show how Clarke makes clear that the audience is watching a film within a film, and that even thought *The Connection* might adhere stylistically to the codes of cinéma vérité, it is not a cinéma vérité film. By making the audience aware of the medium, Clarke changed the relationship between subject and spectator in more than one way, on which I will elaborate in the following paragraphs.

Gelber's *The Connection* as a film

The moment in which Clarke makes the spectator aware of filmic attributes is the moment where she distinguishes her version of *The Connection* from Gelber's, because after all, Clarke's *The Connection* is not a play but a film. Clarke changed the screenplay enough to make it appropriate for the screen story-wise, but the most important difference is of course the fact that with her film, there was not a performance taking place in front of an audience in real time. Even though the film sometimes still feels as if you are watching a play mainly due to the theatrical set in which it takes place, by using and showing filmic attributes such as the camera and the fictional director in the frame, Clarke managed to make the audience even more aware of the process of filmmaking and in doing so, she stayed very close to the medium of film. In the following paragraph, I shall discuss Clarke's adaption of *The Connection* in relation to the works of Andre Bazin on the relationship between film and theater.

The relationship between theater and film has been a complicated one, in particular

when the medium of film was a new invention. Some believed that theater and film were two different worlds that should not collide, others considered film as a lesser art or not art at all, but others, such as André Bazin believed that the two medium could very well work together. He considered the relationship between the two medium to be very close and older than most people realized and that it was not simply 'filmed theater'. His collections of essays on cinema were combined posthumously into two volumes called *What is cinema?*. In the first volume, Bazin has written a lot on the relation between theater and cinema. He considered two options: that the film is either a photographed play (filmed theater), or that the play is adapted to the requirements of cinema. In the case of the latter, according to Bazin, it is 'a question of a new work' (82). This is what Clarke has done with her adaption of *The Connection*, which is not just a photographed play, but more a way of making a statement about the medium of film. There are different ways in which cinema is able to reveal certain details that are not able to he treated on stage. I have chosen a few of those aspects and will discuss these in relation to Clarke's *The Connection* and how her adapted screenplay functions as a film. Bazin describes different ways in which the cinema differs from theater and how the medium of film can be an aid to theater. These different ways are all related to the characteristics of the mediums of film and theater. One of the most important aspects of these different functions of the medium of cinema is that it changes the relationship between audience and performance, the medium itself and by that to the concept of reality. In the following paragraph I shall discuss these aspects as discussed by Bazin more thoroughly.

The first aspect I mentioned was that of the change of relationship between audience and performance. In theater, according to Bazin, there is no 'cinematic realism', a function of the medium of film which lets the audience believe that for once moment you are actually there in the story that is shown on the screen. The curtain of the theater will always ensure that you are aware that whatever is taking place on stage is a performance. The cinematic realism is enhanced by the concept of the 'black box', a theater where all the lights are out and the audience's attention is drawn to the screen only. In other words, the relationship in theater is reciprocal, as the audience is aware of the actor and vice versa. The spectacle on the screen in a movie theater is unaware of its audience (Bazin 101). In addition to this, the theater is more limited to the space in which the performance is taking place, whilst in the world of the film, there are no limitations. Even though one might think that theater would be considered more realistic, Bazin explains that because of the objective realism of the actor, the stage and the theater itself, the actors become 'objects of mental opposition', and not objects with which the audience can identify itself (98). In other words, according to Bazin it

is easier for an audience to identify with the actor on screen in a film because there is no physical presence. Identification and illusion are a lot harder to achieve when the audience is witnessing a performance in the theater in with the real presence of an actor. According to Bazin, the distance created in cinema therefore results in a collective, passive audience whilst theater on the other hand requires individual, active audience participation. It is up to the film director to choose between these two attitudes of mind (Bazin 99).

This would mean, according to Bazin, that one can no longer speak of Artaudian principles in Clarke's *The Connection*, for it results in a passive, observant audience instead of an active participating individuals. The audience needs a performance as in the theater with physically present actors on stage in order to become active and participating. One could say that in the words of Bazin, as soon as the spectator is aware of the fact that they are in a cinematic realism within a black box, they become passive. This is interesting when compared to Clarke's *The Connection*. Clarke did not just photograph a play, but adapted it to the requirements of cinema, which, according to Bazin, makes the audience passive and thus the Artaudian principles of theater are no longer applicable on Clarke's adaptation of the play. Jacques Rancière has drawn different conclusions on the passive role of the spectator. In his work 'The Emancipated Spectator', in which he makes a distinction between self-consciousness and self-activity within the spectator. Self-activity we have already discussed in the form of the works of Artaud, and according to Rancière, the other important reformer in theater relying on self-consciousness was Bertold Brecht (1898-1956). The reformers wanted the spectators to stop being mere spectators and become performers of a collective activity (Rancière 274). They turned away from the pedagogical scheme of the knowing teacher versus the ignorant student, in which one assumes that the student knows nothing, and that whatever the student learns is exactly the knowledge of the master. According to this pedagogical scheme, primary knowledge is sent to the student by the master who thereby verifies that the student cannot understand this knowledge on his own. Hereby, the inequality is verified. The reformers have tried to achieve what Rancière calls the emancipated spectator. The reformers were aware of the 'gap': the distance between what he (the spectator) already knows and what he still does not know, but can learn by the same process' (275). As discussed before, Artaud tried to accomplish this by dragging the spectator into the circle of action, surrounded by the performance and create some sort of collective energy. Brecht's paradigm on the other hand, says that 'theatrical mediation makes the audience aware of the social situation on which theater itself rests, prompting the audience to act in consequence' (Rancière 274). Brecht's 'epic theatre' is in opposition to the dramatic theatre, and wishes not

to create an emotional response due to empathy by the audience, but rather that the epic theatre should appeal principally to the intellect of the spectators (Hecht 78). The audience needed to be distanced from the performance, the actor needed to be distanced from his character and the spectator from himself. This alienation, what Brecht called *Verfremdung*, would allow the audience to reach an intellectual level of understanding. Only by distancing and alienating, the audience would start to analyze and be empowered on an intellectual level. This distancing effect could be accomplished by breaking the fourth wall, addressing the audience directly and thereby disrupting the performance. Also, the performer needed to observe himself during the performance by looking strangely at his work and himself (Hecht 79). Brecht compared it to a person witnessing a car crash: it would be impossible for the person involved in the crash to achieve a certain degree of objective judgment, in contrast to the bystander.

This distancing effect is interesting to discuss in relation to Clarke's *The Connection*. According to Bazin, the audience would become passive whilst witnessing *The Connection* in a dark movie theater. According to Rancière, the spectator can also be emancipated because there is never simply an all-knowing master teaching an ignorant student. In addition to Bazin and Rancière, I discussed Antonin Artaud and Bertold Brecht who were both leading figures in the reformation of traditional theater. Whereas Gelber's play and the production of the Living Theatre relied heavily on Artaudian principles, these principles do not seem to be applicable to Clarke's adaptation. *The Connection* as a film seems to be a simulated *cinéma vérité*, which is received more in a Brechtian way by the spectator because there is a distance created through the medium of film. Interestingly, as discussed before, *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema as well, both aimed to portray whatever was shown in the film as real and true as possible by observing. Whereas the filmmakers of *cinéma vérité* interfered when they felt it was needed, the direct cinema filmmakers mainly let the camera roll and did not interfere. Clarke too makes the spectator very much aware of the medium of film within the story. But *The Connection* being a film within a film, instead of giving the spectator the impression of being drawn into the story and participating in it as happened in the theatrical production, Clarke's use of the medium of film creates a distance between the performance and the spectator. This makes Clarke's *The Connection* paradoxical, for the play's script has not changed and therefore the film is reminiscent of the play, then the film is presented as a *cinéma vérité* documentary while all the while the spectator is aware that after all, it is a film he is watching. According to Brecht, the distancing would lead to the audience contemplating the story that is acted out in front of them. Aside from Clarke's intentions to make the film the

way she did, the audience could indeed consider the film to be about drug addiction and what it can do to a person and see it as a critical view on drug addiction. It could also raise questions on authenticity in filmmaking, for the whole documentary is *staged* and therefore not a documentary but a fiction feature film simulating the conventions of *cinéma vérité.* In sum, *The Connection* as a film functions in different ways. Either in a Brechtian distancing way which leads the audience to contemplate, but it also raises questions on the questions of authenticity. Later on in her career, Clarke started to explore the questions of authenticity in film further with two other feature films, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the following paragraph, I shall move on to the content of the film and discuss *The Connection* by Shirley Clarke in relation to the Beat Generation and associating with Black culture. The Beat Generation and Shirley Clarke as a filmmaker share a common interest in minority cultures, particularly African-American culture. Both members of the Beats and Clarke have used their art to resist the status quo and deliberately place themselves opposite of the post-war commercial society that they strongly disagreed with. Aside from discussing the content of the film in relation to Beat Generation, I will analyze the film more closely and examine the Brechtian tools used by Clarke in order to create a distance and change the role of her audience compared to the Living Theatre's audience.

The Connection, the Beat Generation and associating with Black culture

The Beat Generation was a literary movement in the first place. But as a movement it is hard to define. They took a stand by detaching themselves from the current society. According to Allan Johnston, "in the eyes of the Beats, the society they faced was massifying and de-individualizing, while the state, the workplace, the media, and consumer culture appeared to be operating in tandem to require 'conformity' at all times and in all places" (104). The stand the Beats took against conformity against 'squares' similar to the movement of the New American Cinema Group. They as well, as discussed before, wanted to break the cinematic Hollywood tradition. This critique of people considered 'squares' becomes apparent in Clarke's *The Connection* a few times when the two different worlds in the film collide. For example, there is a moment where 'the connection' arrives with someone related to the church, a 'sister' from the Salvation Army. It is very clear that she does not belong in this world of junkies and drugs at all. It turns out later in the film that the connection had only just met her and used her to stay out of the hands of the police. *Pull My Daisy*, a famous Beat film directed by Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie, and narrated by Jack Kerouac sets up a similar relationship between social groups by using another church official, a bishop. It is a clear

example of the insider hipness played against the outsider squareness. This happens again in another way in the film. *The Connection* is a film about a film, with a diegetic (Jim Dunn) and non-diegetic director (Shirley Clarke). Dunn is complaining about the dullness of the situation, in which the jazz musicians are simply waiting for their dealer to bring heroin. One of the junkies suggests at a certain point that the whole 'documentary' might become a little more interesting if Dunn would be more willing to learn about their lives. In order to do so, he wants Dunn to take some heroin with them. This is another example of how Clarke sets up relationships between social groups. Director Jim Dunn is confronted with the 'other': the heroin addicted jazz musicians who consider Dunn a dull square. The only way in which the other can become a part of the group is to partake in a 'hip' intoxication, which leads him to derail entirely and presumably to his exit from New York as indicated by the film's opening statement (Sterritt 186). Eventually, Dunn fails at the entire project: at first he could not get the junkies to pretend to be themselves, or trust him until he took heroin as well. And eventually this intoxication leads to his disappearance and someone else editing and finishing his film.

There are also a few artifacts in the film that Clarke deliberately shows to the spectator. There is for example a sign that says "Heaven or Hell – Which Road do You Take?". The sign seems to be giving the characters a choice. Even though the junkies seem to have skills and interests outside of durgs, such as music and literature (heaven), they choose heroin (hell). The junkies are aware of what is happening outside in the world, but seem to deliberately choose to not participate in it. Especially Leach is very critical of 'square' daytime jobs, even though is not working himself. At a certain point in the film, the men start to talk about sports. They are reminded by junkie Leach that 'baseball ain't hip'. The camera starts to film the diegetic tape recorder owned by the filmmaker and thereby suggests that the conversation that is about to happen is significant. After Leach calls out the other men as 'you square daytime bastards', Cowboy joins the conversation:

> *Cowboy*: What's wrong with the daytime scene of being square? Man, I got nothing against them. They got lousy squares, and they got lousy hipsters. Personally, I couldn't make a daytime work scene. I like my hours the way they are, but that don't make me no better, man. No.
> *Leach:* You know I'd do if I had a daytime job, Cowboy?
> *Cowboy:* What would you do man?
> *Leach:* I'd work about – about six months, just to establish credit, you dig? And then

> I'd go out and get me every type of charge card that there is. Food, liquor, travel. You know, man? I could – I could fly all over this world baby, and what could they do? Throw me in debtor's prison or something? No, man. Like- like, we're living in the United States of America baby, And we're free here.
> *Cowboy:* Oh, Leach, what movies you been seeing huh?
> *Leach:* It's possible man, it's possible.
> *Cowboy*: It sounds like a lot of work man, an awful lot of work.

By portraying these contrasts in her film, Shirley Clarke made clear that she, like the Beats, was eager to break with the status quo.

Another interesting element that contributes to the reception of *The Connection* as a Beat film, is the emphasis on a marginalized group, in this case the heroin addicts but also the emphasis on the jazz music played by them. Black Americans had a 'privileged position in the beat imagination' (James 96). The Beats felt related to the African-American culture because they were a marginalized group, not accepted by the current society. Even though the reasons for being marginalized were completely different for both groups, the Beats appropriated the Black culture in their work. Jack Kerouac repeatedly wrote nostalgically about the 'Denver colored section' in *On the Road*, and Norman Mailer for example wrote an interesting but controversial essay on the criminal hipster called "The White Negro". African-Americans were idealized by the Beats in the figure of a jazz musician, who is excluded from the mainstream world and put in a marginalized corner because of racial stereotypes. Black music, and especially jazz, seemed to express an entire way of life. African-American history is a very complicated history in which they have been excluded and marginalized frequently. Music has been a very important aspect of African-American culture for a long time. Jazz music derives from this culture, and has been a way of expressing themselves for a large group of people. This is why the Beat Generation considered jazz music a form of social protest (James 97). While the Beat Generation mostly wrote about the aesthetic of jazz, in underground cinema it was documented and depicted in a parallel way. Just like the members of the Beat Generation, underground filmmakers shared their disaffection with cultural norms, particularly bourgeois, white ones. In order to protest these norms, they turned to minorities of which they were not a part. While it is interesting to see how Shirley Clarke as well turned to a marginalized group to portray in her first feature film, it also shows that she is not a part of this group but that she has placed herself outside of it. Contrary to the members of the Beat Generation, who were for example frequent attendees of jazz performances and who adopted

new, non-Christian spiritual beliefs, Clarke never tried to mingle. Rather, she observed and portrayed marginalized groups or individuals. In the following paragraphs I would like to address a few issues regarding either appropriating or associating with African-American culture. Despite good intentions, neither the Beats nor Clarke belonged to this culture and one might wonder why it had been socially accepted to appropriate as a white writer or filmmaker, while there are hardly any films made by and for African-Americans.

I would like to start with a comment by critic Kenneth Tynan, who wrote about the play of *The Connection* in 1959: 'some of the characters are Negro, others Caucasian. The color of their skin is of negligible importance' (Mapp 58). They were indeed all junkies, they were all waiting for the same fix, no matter the color of your skin. Even though this utopian vision seems true at first, there is a problem with this comment. *The Connection,* Clarke's and Gelber's version alike, both appropriate a culture that is not theirs: the African-American jazz culture. They portray a minority that they are very interested in because it derives from, as I have mentioned before, exclusion. Even though they might relate to exclusion, most filmmakers back in the sixties where white bohemians who *chose* an unconventional lifestyle, which is contrary to African-Americans, who did not have this choice.

The Connection is one film featuring African-Americans, something that started to happen more often after World War II. According to Edward Mapp, 'the American motion picture industry turned its attention, at least temporarily, to making films about the problems confronting racial and religious minorities' (37). But unfortunately, most of these film were made by white filmmakers, based on African-American stereotypes, and sometimes instead of African-American actors, white actors were cast to portray black characters (one of the first being the movie *Pinky* from 1949). This continued for a very long time, all the way through the fifties especially in Hollywood productions. John O. Killens was one of the first scriptwriters who believed that 'the plight of Negroes in American motion pictures cannot be improved significantly without the involvement of black writers' (Mapp 50). The early sixties, when Clarke made *The Connection,* were a time when racial issues in the United States started to draw a lot of attention. While some decisions were made in favor of the African-American community, the United States were still in the middle of the Civil Rights Movement. The problem in the film industry in the States was that the work of the NAACP and the pressure of the government to push African-Americans into the mainstream destroyed the Black feature industry. Even though that industry was mainly white-financed before the war, its production used to be in control of African-Americans. After the war, this changed and almost all of the funding, writing and directing was done by white people (James 179).

Around 1964, this resulted in a group of liberal integrationists in cinema. This group 'developed from the social intersections between the beat subcultures and Black bohemianism, from the attempts by the underground to model film practices on jazz, and from the reformist milieu of the New American Cinema Group' (James 179). This group had no bad intentions, but still failed to realistically portray the racial issues in their country. *The Connection,* for example, might seem as a film in which the colors of the characters skins are of 'negligible importance', it still relies heavily on a few stereotypes. The character of Cowboy is very interesting to address in this context. Time Magazine wrote in 1962 that the character of 'the connection', Cowboy, 'appears as a Negro dressed entirely in white – that is to say, as a union of opposites, as a completeness possible perhaps only in God' (Mapp 58). Edward Mapp argues that 'Cowboy performs an integrative function, he is the link between the other characters' (57). Even though these sources are written in different times, I would still beg to differ when it comes to the Cowboy character. In the film, half of the men are African-American, the other half is white. The African-American actors barely have any lines throughout the film and are the ones that are jazz musicians (the white actors do not play any instruments). Cowboy does not form a link between the junkies: they are all there with a similar goal. The only other people in the room who form no connection with the junkies are Jim Dunn and his camera man. Cowboy does not bring Dunn closer to the rest of the group by letting him take heroin with the junkies at all. Urging Dunn to take heroin comes from a suspicious point of view and it is not an attempt to connect – rather, this moment in the film emphasizes the gap between the 'other' and the white 'square' director who vanishes after the recording is done. He did not unite, he ran as far away from it as he could.

Brechtian techniques in Clarke's *The Connection*

The *Verfremdungseffect* of Bertold Brecht has already been discussed in a previous paragraph, but only in the context of theater. I have already discussed the cinematic illusion and how some critics believed that the audience of a movie theater would only be passive and would let itself be absorbed into the illusion presented to them on the screen. The audience would subjectively incline to the story unfolding on the screen. One of the most common results is identification, with usually the main character or hero, on the screen. The passivity of the audience is something that was challenged in theater by Artaud and Brecht. Just like Brecht, a lot of filmmakers in the independent cinema aimed at reducing the cinematic illusion. According to Jan Uhde, many filmmakers in the 1950's and 1960's used Brechtian techniques of estrangement, most notably Jean-Luc Godard. But there are a few techniques mentioned by

Uhde that are applicable to certain techniques Clarke used in *The Connection*.

Aside from the techniques, Brecht and Clarke firstly had another element in common in their works. Brecht was a critical moralist, who wanted to use his epic theatre in order to change the current society and make people reflect on that which he considered to be wrong. Clarke told Lauren Rabinovitz in an interview in 1983 about her intentions behind the film: 'I think it's about alienation, and that was something with which I did identify. Those were the days when I had a deep understanding of the word, and drugs as yet had nothing to do with it' (10). As a woman filmmaker, Clarke noticed that her male contemporaries had to struggle a lot less in order to be successful and appreciated. She was not taken seriously very often, and by making *The Connection,* she tried to make a film which displayed her personal feelings as a woman filmmaker at that time.

The first technique that I would discuss is what Uhde calls 'the weakening of continuous dramatic structure' (28). The usual development of such a structure is exposition, climax, catharsis, which makes it easy for an audience to be absorbed into the story. When this structure is weakened, distance is created. There are various ways in which a filmmaker can do this. One way in which Clarke does this, is by creating a story that does not have a clear classic beginning, middle or end. It mostly seems like a series of event unfolding in front of a camera, with no clear direction of what the diegetic director Jim Dunn wants exactly, except for documenting a group of junkies waiting for their pusher. There is a lot of talking going on, not much dramatic action, with not too many interruptions. In addition to this, Clarke uses several techniques that Uhde calls 'reminders of the medium' (29-30). This is a technique in which the filmmaker directly or indirectly points the audience at the 'fictitious nature of the projected events', in order to disassociate them (see fig. 2 and 3) (Uhde 30). I have already pointed out a few ways in which this happens very often in *The Connection*. After twelve minutes into the film, Jim Dunn, the diegetic director, steps in front of the camera to give directions to the junkies. He alters the light, the hidden microphones, he talks to the cameraman J.J, and throughout the rest of the film he repeatedly steps into the frame with a handheld camera. The junkies constantly look into the camera and address the audience or Dunn. Brecht did something similar in his plays as well. He believed that the breaking down of the fourth wall was another way of disassociating the spectator.

Another way in which anti-identification can take place is the use of 'quotations'. These are short images and sounds that could be considered as interruptions, but they can also be integrated in the film (Uhde 30). Clarke uses this technique as well, especially around the part in the film where Cowboy arrives. Figure 4 in the appendix is a compilation of a few

stills taken from the moment in which Cowboy arrives at the house. On the first still, the camera is pointed in the direction of the window, and in the distance a wall can be seen with some kind of advertisement on it. On the second, a swish pan is made towards the direction of the door through which Cowboy enters. On the third still, the hand of the cameraman J.J. is seen within the frame. On the final still, the vision is blurred and it is not very clear what is happening. It looks as if the cameraman is in a hurry to keep up with the action unfolding in front of him. It is chaotic and disrupting, especially because there was not much happening before. It makes the audience aware of the medium again and takes them out of the cinematic illusion. In sum, Clarke's Brechtian techniques distance the audience. Her adaptation of *The Connection* has withdrawn from the Artaudian principles at work in the original play, due to Brechtian techniques and by staying close to the medium of film.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed Shirley Clarke's first feature film *The Connection* from different angles in order to discover how her film, based on a play, functions as a film. The film loses the original Artaudian principles that were very present in the play, and instead, the medium of film works more in a Brechtian way and distances its audience. *The Connection* is not a critique of *cinéma vérité*, but rather a deliberately staged documentary in which it becomes clear that it is not, in Bazin's words, 'filmed theater' but a work on its own. Shirley Clarke managed to show with her film that reality does not exist in cinema, for there will always be interference from either the director, editing, or even the presence of the camera itself can cause the subject to behave differently. In addition to this, Clarke also changed the relationship between audience and performance. No longer were the Artaudian principles of the Living Theatre's production applicable, but rather, the use of the medium of film created a Brechtian distance. After examining how Clarke's adaptation of *The Connection* functions as a film, I elaborated on the content of the film and how this content differed once used in a different medium. In sum, by using the medium of film Clarke changed the effects of the play completely from Artaudian to a more distancing and Brechtian. Clarke portrayed a marginalized group as a staged documentary, which moved the audience from a participating one to a more contemplating one.

In the following chapter, I shall discuss the third feature film Clarke made in 1967, *Portrait of Jason*. This film is the result of an entire night in which Clarke and her partner Carl Lee filmed Jason Holliday, an African-American gay hustler who wants to be a night club performer.

3. *Portrait of Jason*

> *Voice-over: 'This is Shirley Clarke, Portrait of Jason, roll one, sound one'.*
> *Clarke: 'Okay, rolling!'*
> *Voices: 'Sound rolling. Camera rolling'.*
> *Clarke: 'Okay Jason, go!'*
> *Holliday: 'My name is Jason Holliday. My name is Jason Holliday'.*
> *Jason starts to giggle and continues: 'My name is Aaron Payne'.*

With these words, Clarke's 1967 film *Portrait of Jason,* starts. It tells the story of a black, gay hustler who goes by the name Jason Holliday, his real name being Aaron Payne. Holliday is on camera for an hour and 45 minutes, talking about himself. While the camera only moves only a little bit to the right and left (Holliday uses the living room as a stage, not taking up more than a few square meters), he explains that what he does is 'hustle', that he is a 'stone cold whore' and what he mainly talks about are his frustrations. He has been trying to get together a night club act that would get him the fame that he so desperately desires, but unfortunately many things in his life have gone wrong. He has been arrested for picking up an undercover police officer on Sixth Avenue thinking it was a potential client, he was incarcerated on Rikers Island along with a few other drags, he was forced into psychiatric treatment. His nightclub act, of which he seems to very certain that it is going to be a huge success, has still not come into being. He borrowed money from friends and family but he has failed so far at every single attempt at becoming a star. He talks about his childhood, about his abusive father whom he calls Brother Tough, about working as a domestic or 'houseboy' for the wealthy who caused an anger inside of him due to the amount of racism he encountered whilst working for them.

Portrait of Jason is a unique film: it is the first film to ever portray an African-American gay man as its sole subject, speaking very openly about the good but mainly bad things going on in his life at that time. The film came into being after a twelve hour shoot over night, where Jason Holliday was accompanied by Shirley Clarke and her partner Carl Lee (who was an actor in *The Connection,* playing the character of Cowboy). They interfere from time to time in Holliday's monologues to ask him questions. This has resulted in a documentary in which Clarke, just as she did with *The Connection,* explores the relationship between the film and the audience. In addition to this, she used the theme of authenticity again, but this time not as a staged documentary such as *The Connection,* but as a

performative documentary, which is a form of documentary filmmaking which also aims at portraying reality but unlike for example *cinéma vérité*, it adds fictional situations and interference by the director. *Portrait of Jason* is a film with a performative subject, Jason Holliday, but also a film with a Warhol-like intrusive presence of the filmmaker. I therefore consider the documentary to not just be a performative documentary, but also a documentary which already is inherently performative because of this intervention of Clarke and Lee. In other words, while Jason Holliday himself is constructing (or performing), Clarke and Lee do the exact same thing from behind the camera. This casts the notions of authenticity, objectivity and also truth in permanent question.

In this third chapter, I would like to examine how Clarke explores the concept of authenticity and performance in *Portrait of Jason* and how this effects the relationship between the spectator and the film. In order to do so, I will start with a historical framework in which I will discuss works similar to *Portrait of Jason*, most notably by Andy Warhol. Secondly, I will examine Stella Bruzzi's theory on performative documentary in relation to *Portrait of Jason.* Bruzzi discusses how an important misconception of documentaries is that they portray the truth. Instead, she argues, they often contain a hidden aspect of performance on either the side of the documentary subject, the filmmaker or both. Therefore I would like to divide this chapter in half: the first part will focus on the subject Jason Holliday, the second part will focus on the filmmaker and her companion Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee. Aside from Bruzzi's theory, I will also elaborate on *Portrait of Jason* in relation to the works of Judith Butler on performativity. For both parts of the last chapter, I will use several scenes from *Portrait of Jason* to illustrate the theoretical framework.

Historical framework: Camp film, Jack Smith and Andy Warhol

It is important to know that cinema was a marginalized medium within Black culture during the 1960s. Music, dance and literature served more as platforms for African-Americans to express themselves. This marginalized position of cinema in the African-American community reflects the hegemonic use of the medium. It was not until the seventies, when the African-American enrollment in higher education increased and thereby the access to the knowledge and materials needed, that an ongoing independent Black cinema started to emerge (James 178). But before that, according to David E. James, within the independent cinema, two groups emerged, 'corresponding to the liberal integrationist and the radical separatist phases of the Black movement' (179). Shirley Clarke is mentioned as one of the liberal integrationist filmmakers that developed from the beat subcultures and Black bohemianism

and also the reformist milieu of the New American Cinema Group. Clarke's second feature, *The Cool World*, is a good example an attempt to represent everyday life of African-Americans in (in this case) Harlem, New York City. But unfortunately, these films were, despite the good intentions, still made, produced and funded by white people. The second group James mentions is that of the radical separatists. One would expect that during the times of the Civil Rights Movement the black community would start to produce films, but as mentioned before, there was too little knowledge or access to cinema (James 181).

In that same decade, it was impossible for Hollywood filmmakers to discuss homosexuality openly in films. Due to the production code in Hollywood, also named the Hays Code after its creator Will H. Hays, homosexuality could not be represented in acts or words on the screen. The production code 'circumscribed notions of decency and taste as heterosexuality without nudity, adultery, illicit sex, miscegenation and physical expression of passion, including kissing and sex acts' (Mennel 26). These codes were strictly endorsed from 1934 until 1954, and eventually throughout the 1950s, these rules started to be contested by filmmakers, and eventually it was abandoned in 1968 (Mennel 35). It was not until in the early sixties queer aesthetics started to link trash cinema and B movies to experimental films and higher art. Edward D. Wood Jr. for example, made trash horror films with queer subtexts in the B-film industry during the 1950s. Wood's *Glen or Glenda* (1953), as the title already suggests, is about cross-dressing and transsexuality, opening with a scene in which a man commits suicide wearing women's clothes. This was something that never could have been done in Hollywood at the time. Another example is the underground filmmaker Jack Smith, one of the most famous camp filmmakers who embraced trash and used that in his low budget films. Camp artists challenged the modernist ideas of what high art was supposed to look or be like. Most importantly, according to Susan Sontag, the essence of camp is 'its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration' (2). Camp belongs not to everyone, but rather to a small and usually urban clique. Sontag continues with a long list of what camp means according to her. This is a list that is difficult to summarize, but there are a few key elements that would generally characterize camp. Firstly, it is a mode of aestheticism, a way of looking at the world in terms of artifice or stylization. Secondly, camp is 'disenganged, depoliticized – or at least apolitical' (Sontag 2). Thirdly, not everything is camp. Camp art for example can often be found in decorative art, and not in concert music. In addition to this it is important to realize that nothing is camp in nature, but man-made. Lastly, camp can be recognized by its extravagance. As Sontag puts it: 'Camp is a woman walking around in a dress made of three million feathers'. Not just the final result is what makes a work camp, but also the amount of

effort and ‘quality of ambition’ that is given by the artist (Sontag 7).

Jack Smith made experimental films in New York City, mainly during the 1960s. In 1963, he made his very controversial film *Flaming Creatures*, which was censored over explicit nudity. This angered him so much that he decided that from then on, he would screen his films himself. He also worked with Andy Warhol, who gained fame with his work as a pop art artist. Warhol surrounded himself with a group of queers and cross-dressers, whom he filmed in his Factory between 1964 and 1966 (Mennel 41). The two artists had some things in common: they were both gay, their works revolutionary, both very observant of the times they were living in historically and culturally, and they both made films. But whereas Warhol was famous of his commodification of ordinary objects, which he produced in the Factory on a large scale, Smith was more anti-commodification and made a lot of photographs and films that were never developed or finished and organized performances that would not be documented (Angell 164). Warhol and Smith probably met in 1963 at the Film-Makers’ Cinematheque in New York City, where they both regularly attended screenings. By the fall of 1963, they had become a part of the group of underground filmmakers circulating around Jonas Mekas (Angell 164). Warhol had just started making films, and Smith had already made *Flaming Creatures*, and it did not take long for them to start a collaboration. Jack Smith started shooting his feature film *Normal Love* in August 1963, and while he was shooting, Warhol was there with a camera as well. He called his short film *Andy Warhol Films Jack Smith Filming “Normal Love”*. By then, Smith’s film *Flaming Creatures* had become at the center of attention for the film censorship board in New York City, and most of the screenings held by Mekas or him in theaters were closely monitored by the police and eventually shut down or canceled quite often. The material for *Andy Warhol Films Jack Smith Filming “Normal Love”* for example is still lost because it was confiscated by the police in 1964 and never returned (Angell 165). This example illustrates the climate in which underground film in New York came into being – with a lot of censorship and even police interference. Warhol and Smith’s films contained nudity, homosexuality, drag queens and sexual references that were not approved of by these rules of censorship.

Andy Warhol and Jack Smith were important figures in the underground film scene in New York City in the sixties. Years before *Portrait of Jason*, they were prominent figures in gay cinema, who explored the concept of performativity, identity and authenticity. *Portrait of Jason* works with the same concepts, and has some similarities with works from Warhol and Smith. Later on in this chapter I will elaborate further on these similarities and give more examples of particularly Warhol’s *Screen Tests* with Mario Montez.

Stella Bruzzi and performative documentary

Stella Bruzzi's *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* introduces new ways with which to approach theories on documentary and to bring the theoretical discussions on documentary up to date. Bruzzi has dedicated a chapter to what she calls the *performative documentary*. Performativity has always been at the heart of documentary she claims, but because this notion of performativity was considered to fictionalize of even falsify, the concept of performativity has not been discussed much in relation to documentaries.

According to Bruzzi, the concept of performativity is often hidden, and either on the side of the subject or on the side of the filmmaker (106). She also describes a difference between documentaries in which the role of performance is to draw the audience into the dramatized situations, by adding fictional elements to a 'real situation' or by dramatizing this situation. This is called a docudrama. But when the performative element is used to make the audience more aware of the fact that real authenticity is never truly possible in documentaries, she calls it a performative documentary. Performativity then becomes an 'alienating, distancing device, not one which actively promotes identification and straightforward response to a film's content' (Bruzzi 106). So instead of trying to convince the audience that what they see it the truth and are authentic images, the performative documentary is stepping away from this utopian view as well and seems to acknowledge the performance instead of hiding it. According to Bruzzi, there are two different kinds of documentary that could be termed performative: the kind in which a lot of performative subjects are at work, and the kind that inherently performative and features the intrusion of the filmmaker (107-108). *Portrait of Jason* is both of these types of documentary.

Analyzing *Portrait of Jason* part one: Jason Holliday

I started this chapter with the first lines of the documentary, in which a few elements become clear straight away: first, that Shirley Clarke does not hide her intrusion with the subject, secondly that the subject is conscious of his involvement in a performative event, and lastly that the subject is a performative one, since he firstly introduces himself as Jason Holliday, only to correct himself and re-introduce himself as Aaron Payne. The image of Holliday fades and we can hear Clarke asking him: 'What do you mean, Aaron Payne?', to which he anwers: 'Aaron Payne… That was my given name'. He explains that when he was in San Fransisco, he got involved with a few people who gave themselves new names that suited their personalities better.

Judith Butler is mentioned repeatedly in Bruzzi's chapter on the performative

documentary. The concept of performativity was first defined by John L. Austin in relation to speech and communication. The well-known example of the words 'I do' at a wedding ceremony illustrate Austin's theory that there are constative and performative elements of language. The first always refers or describes, but the latter always performs what it alludes to, it is a part of the doing of the action. If two people say the words 'I do' at a wedding ceremony they are not just words but words uttered with the intention to be formally wed (Bruzzi 106).

Judith Butler describes performativity in relation to gender and identity. It works similar to the linguistic examples of Austin: if a gay couple walks hand in hand and is called names in relation to their sexuality, it is not a confirmation of their sexuality but according to Butler, a creation. It shows the hegemonic constructions of society in which heterosexuality is the norm, and any other kind of sexuality is not. 'There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions', Butler says in "Gender is Burning" (385). You are not born into a certain gender, you are made a man or a woman by society. The only way to change these terms by which we determine gender, is by looking at certain spaces or situations or performances that challenge these terms. Butler gives the example of *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston, 1991), a film about gay latino and African-American men who organize drag balls where they are judged in several categories on criteria including the 'realness' of their drag. These categories include social norms, some of them established in what is considered to be a sign of class in white culture, others come from street culture and others are for example about being feminine. This 'realness' could be fully accomplished once the performance cannot be read. This is of course complicated with these drag balls: if the category is about being feminine and accomplishing the highest level of what is considered feminine, this means that there is an embodiment of norms that decides what society, and the judges, consider to be feminine. A perfect or 'unreadable' performance at the drag ball is of course impossible. But this is not what is important. According to Butler, when men are in drag as women, what we have 'is the destabilization of gender itself' (386). It calls into question the norms that are generally considered by society to be the normative ones. This questioning can be used to break with normative terms about not just gender, but also, as becomes apparent in *Paris is Burning*, racism, misogyny and homophobia. The normative terms are destabilized because the subjects of *Paris is Burning*, the drags, are not conforming to heterosexual norms, gender norms or even racial ones. What happens according to Butler is that racist, mysoginist and homophobic norms oppression are appropriated and subverted (386).

Paris is Burning and *Portrait of Jason* both destabilize normative terms. Both films show us subjects that are frequently confronted with racism and homophobia, and they all use performance in order to be rescued from it. The drags do this by using gender as a way to accomplish a transformation that detaches them from the race, class and homophobia that haunts them. Aaron Payne chose transformation as well. Not necessarily a transformation of gender, but of identity. He *chose* to be Jason Holliday, a name he came up with when he was in San Fransisco that suited his personality better. This introduction, which Clarke asks him to elaborate on, is similar to the drag balls in *Paris is Burning*. With those drag balls, the spectator knows from the start that the event that they are watching is a performative one. They know that what they are witnessing is an competitive act of men dressed as women who are combating each other in order to achieve 'realness'. By introducing himself by the name he has given himself and the name that he was given, the name Jason Holliday becomes the drag on the men in *Paris.* Performativity according to Butler in relation to gender and identity comes into being through repetition of certain acts in order to make them look natural and normative. Just as the drags engage in repetative acts in order to achieve 'realness', Aaron acts as Jason in order to achieve his own realness. By stepping away from Aaron Payne, the person who went through a lot of abuse and racism when he was younger and a houseboy for a lot of rich, old, white ladies, and performing Jason Holliday, a star performer, he constitutes some sort of promise of a rescue from his former self and the abuse that came along with it. It is similar to the example of Venus Xtravaganza, who want to accomplish finding a man who will shelter her from racism, homophobia and poverty by becoming a woman. Venus performs her female gender in the way that Aaron performs Jason, hoping that by becoming a star he will be sheltered as well.

The film, just like Jason, only comes into being as it is performed. Even with a factual basis, in this case Jason and his stories, that predates the recording, a documentary is always performative. Without the interaction between the performance and reality, there would be no film. Jason is aware of his involvement in this performative event. He acknowledges the presence of the camera, of Clarke and Lee as he answers their questions. These interactions show that the spectator is not only watching a performative subject, Jason Holliday, but also a performative documentary. By interfering, Clarke and Lee make clear that it is their intention to show the spectator how they steer Jason's performance.[1] Their intention or encouragement of how they want the performance to be read is more clear than Jason's intention. The film

[1] Not entirely of course, because after all, *Portrait of Jason* only contains two out of the twelve hours of recording.

seems to be a constant negotiation between him and Clarke and Lee. In the following paragraph I will elaborate further on these negotiations and illustrate these with examples from the film.

Analyzing *Portrait of Jason* part two: Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee

So far, I have discussed the performative subject of the film, but the film itself is also performative. This becomes apparent with the parts Clarke and Lee play in the film. Because of their interference in the film, which consists of asking Jason questions or talking to him throughout the movie. Due to these interactions, the spectator will constantly be aware of the tension between the 'realness' of what is presented on the screen, but also of the way in which it is manufactured by the director. Jason seems to be free in choosing the stories he wants to tell over the course of twelve hours, but eventually, Clarke still directs him and chose which part ended up in the two hour documentary and which parts did not. In sum, there is a constant tension between apparent freedom of the subject to say what he wants, and also of restraint from the director's position. These are important characteristics of the performative documentary according to Bruzzi: 'the ethos behind the modern performative documentaries is to present subjects in such a way as to accentuate the fact that the camera and crew are an inevitable intrusion that alter any situation they enter' (108).

Because of this tension, there are several different ways in which the film can be read by the spectator. To start with, there is the expectancy of truthfulness and transparency when one watches a documentary. As the title of the film itself suggests, the spectator expects to see a portrait of someone named Jason. But from the start, the spectator is almost forced to become a critical reader of the film. As I have discussed before, Jason's performative role in the film becomes apparent as soon as he introduces himself as Jason Holliday, only to re-introduce himself as Aaron Payne seconds later. In addition to this, the voices of Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee can be heard loud and clear, asking questions and directing Holliday into a certain direction. For example, halfway through the film, after another cut in the film, you can hear Shirley Clarke ask Jason to 'sit down on the floor against the chair there'. She tells him when to start talking, where to sit, to elaborate on certain topics he speaks of. Especially by the end of the film the tensions seem to be running high. Jason is not talking very clearly anymore and the bottle of alcohol he has been sipping from all night is almost empty. While the image of Jason is out of focus, the spectator can hear voices, presumably the voices of Jason Holliday, Carl Lee and Shirley Clarke. Jason starts to whisper, and says: 'Don't trust me Richard, you'll see', to which Lee replies: 'I don't trust you'. Jason then continues: 'Cause

I'm out to get you. I'm about to hang you, baby… I wanna fuck you up so you'll be mine'. He then starts to giggle. It seems to anger Lee, because his tone changes and he starts to blame Jason for things that have happened in the past: 'Remember those dirty rotten things you wrote about me? […] What you tell those lies for? Why'd you do that to me? You rotten queen!'. At first, Jason denies these claims, but after a while, he starts to cry hysterically while Lee keeps on pushing him by asking 'Why'd you do that to me?' (see fig. 5). This particular moment in the film is performative on different levels. The interference of the people behind the camera, Carl Lee mostly in this example, reaches a climax in which they push the subject to start crying. But, as discussed before, the subject itself is performative as well. Not much later, the image of Jason blurs yet again and the shot is out of focus. Jason continues to talk, and when the shot goes back into focus again, Jason's tears are still visible but he has already switched to another subject and he is smiling again. It is unclear if his tears were real or not, if he truly went from being sad and hurt. In addition to this, due to the going in and out of focus of the screen, Clarke did not hide her editing but made it rather obvious that she had cut certain parts out of the film. There is even a part where you can see Jason's lips move and you can hear him talk, but what he is saying is not in accordance with the movements of his mouth. In the last moments of the film, Lee seems to be completely fed up with Jason's performance and yells at him to 'stop that acting!', to which Jason replies 'I'm not acting'. After being called out to be a 'goddamn liar', he admits: 'Yes… You're right again'. Authenticity and transparency are two things that are questioned by the spectator on several levels in *Portait of Jason.* Clarke is never hiding her and Carl Lee's interference in the film. Jason Holliday never covers up the fact that he is a performer who chose a name that suited better with his personality. Especially in the final moments of the film, when the subject is called out for being a liar who is only acting and not being truthful, authenticity even becomes a subject of conversation within the film itself. Clarke seems to be encouraging several ways in which her film can be read, but mostly she seems to encourage is to read her film as a performative documentary. As she said herself in an interview with Lauren Rabinovitz, she had become more and more interested in 'the whole discussion of documentary and dramatic films and what was truly true' ("Choreography of Cinema, 9).

Lastly, I would like to discuss another way of reading *Portrait of Jason,* namely, from a critical point of view that has nothing to do with either the alleged intentions of the director or the subject of the film. Because after all, Shirley Clarke is a white, heterosexual woman making a movie about a gay, African-American man who's dream is to become a successful nightclub performer. As Gavin Butt put it in his article 'Stop That Acting!', some might

consider the film an ‘entertaining spectacle of racial and sexual otherness’ (41). Similar accusations have been made against Jennie Livingston as well for *Paris is Burning*. Butler cites bell hooks (Gloria Jean Watkins), who sees Livingston as an ‘outsider looking in’ (390). hooks argues that there is no way in which Livingston can portray a progressive or counterhegemonic view from her ‘imperial overseeing position’ (Butler 390). She believes that Livingston used the desire to become stars of the gay men in *Paris is Burning* to make her film. Shirley Clarke could be accused of this imperial overseeing position, only using Jason and his desire to become a star for her own benefit. Clarke herself explained her choice of subject as follows: ‘For years I’d felt like an outsider, so I identified with the problem of minority groups… I thought it was more important to be some kind of goddamned junkie who felt alienated rather than to say I am an alienated woman who doesn’t feel part of the world and who wants in’ (Butt 53). In addition to that, she also stated: ‘I identified with black people because I couldn’t deal with the woman question and I transposed it. I could understand very easily the black problems, and I somehow equated them to how I felt. […] I always felt alone, on the outside of the culture I was in. I grew up in a time when women weren’t running things’ (Butt 53).

Conclusion

Whether or not Clarke’s film is made from a white, hegemonic position and an abuse of power, or made with good intentions by a woman who felt left out by a patriarchal film industry, eventually a documentary is always the result of a dialogue between a subject, a filmmaker and a situation that has been changed from the moment the subject and filmmaker (and crew) arrive. Jason Holliday had his intentions, and so had Clarke. In the case of *Portrait of Jason*, this has resulted in a performative documentary in which on several different levels the concept of authenticity and transparency is explored and questioned: from the subject himself, to the interference of Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee, to the concept of authenticity being discussed in the film itself.

Conclusion

To conclude my thesis, I would like to go back to my research question:

> How does Shirley Clarke explore the concepts of authenticity and transparency in her two feature films *The Connection* (1961) and *Portrait of Jason* (1967), and what is the result of this exploration?

In order to come to an answer to this question, I have first elaborated on the historical context of the times that Shirley Clarke was working in. Clarke played an important part as the only woman in the establishing the New American Cinema Group. Their aim was to become a platform for independent filmmakers where their fellow filmmakers could more easily fund and distribute their works, with no intention of making a profit. Clarke herself, aside from actively helping other filmmakers, started to explore the medium of film herself more and more. She still remained only one of the few women active in the independent film industry in New York City. The film industry remained patriarchal, even within the underground film. Clarke's choice of subject for the feature films that she started making in the sixties, have got a lot to do with her feeling excluded in the industry she was working in. She chose outsiders to be the main subject of her films, because she felt like an outsider as well.

Not only the main characters of her films showed similarities in being outsiders, there are also two important concepts that can be found in *The Connection* and *Portrait of Jason*: authenticity and transparency. In *The Connection*, an adaptation of a play, Clarke explored what the consequences of turning a play into a movie would be. Especially the relationship between the audience and the spectacle changes a lot. From Artaudian principles of pulling the audience into the spectacle from Brechtian, distancing techniques, *The Connection* works similar in some ways but mostly very different as a film compared to the original play. The film is a staged documentary, that challenges the audience to actively participate by distancing them from the event happening on screen. The illusion of authenticity seems to be enhanced in Clarke's version of *The Connection*, because the audience is made to believe that there truly has been made a documentary about a few heroin addict waiting for their pusher, while what they are watching is actually a staged documentary. In addition to this, especially because of the clever way in which Clarke mimics transparency by making it a movie in a movie, she encourages the spectator to reconsider the meaning of documentary. There will always be interference from a camera or a director who thereby change to situation no matter what.

Which leads us to the second and final case study in this thesis, *Portrait of Jason*, in which this questioning of authenticity and transparency in documentaries is pushed even further. *Portrait of Jason* does not only feature a performative subject, namely Jason Holliday, but is also inherently performative due to the interference of Shirley Clarke and Carl Lee while filming. Stella Bruzzi called this a performative documentary, the kind of documentary which calls into question whether or not a documentary can ever fully portraying the truth or be fully transparent. Bruzzi says this is impossible, and Clarke illustrates this in *Portrait of Jason* by not hiding her intrusions, but making them an important part of the documentary itself. So instead of believing that what is shown on the screen is the truth, as was the aim with direct cinema, the audience is now challenged to question not only the performance of the subjects, but also be aware of the presence of an intrusive filmmaker. Shirley Clarke has made two films in which she actively questions and explores the concepts of authenticity and transparency in the form of a staged documentary and a performative documentary. This has resulted in the need for an active spectator, who is asked to have a critical view on the films they are watching.

The Connection and *Portrait of Jason* are both brilliantly put together, and deserve more attention than they have had in the past decades. With this thesis I hope to shine a little light on the important works of Shirley Clarke.

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Appendix

Figure 1: still from *The Connection* (1961, Shirley Clarke). Director Jim Dunn tells the junkies that they are 'stiffening' and that they should just act natural.

Figure 2: still from *The Connection* (1961, Shirley Clarke). In the background, the silhouette of Dunn and his camera can be seen.

Figure 3: still from *The Connection* (1961, Shirley Clarke). Dunn has walked away from the camera and now tries to alter the light whilst the junkies are ‘acting natural’.

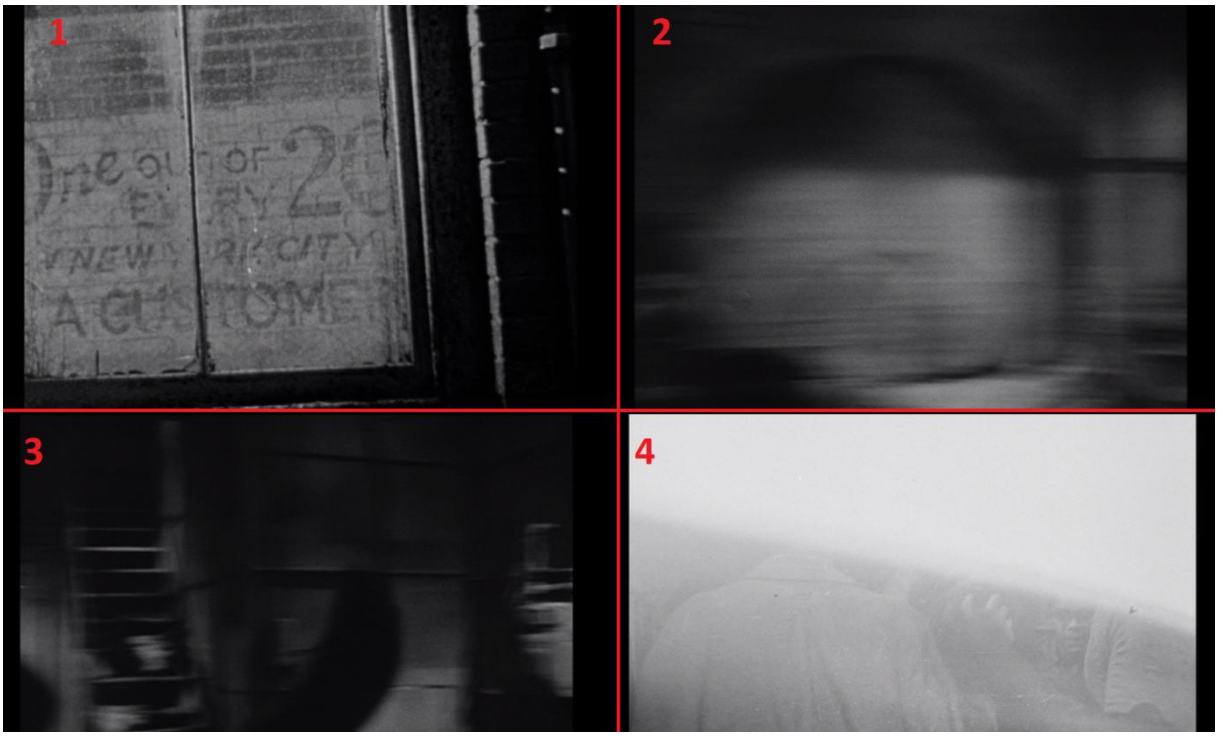

Figure 4: still from *The Connection* (1961, Shirley Clarke). Techniques used by Clarke in order to create quotations and disassociate the audience from the story.

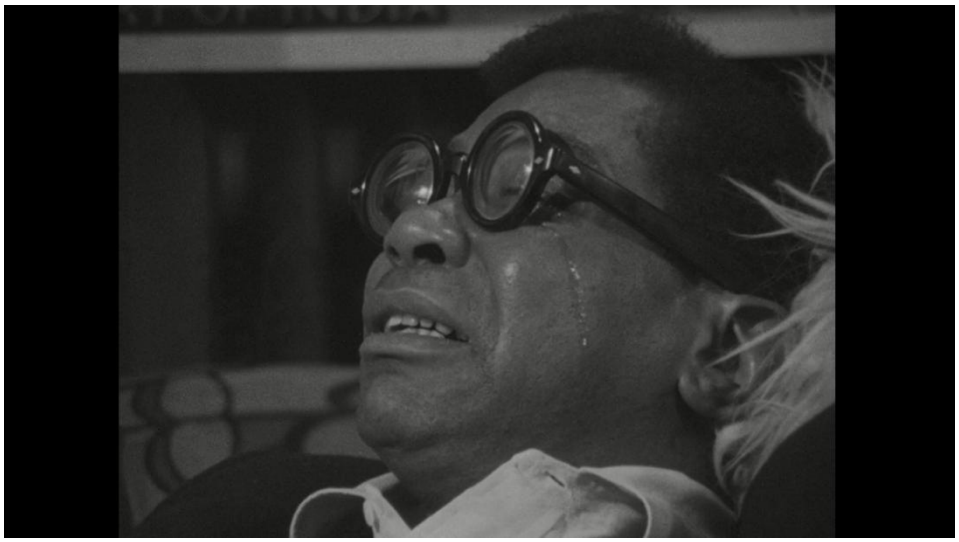

Figure 5: Still from *Portrait of Jason*, 1967. Jason Holliday starts to cry after Carl Lee has taunted him.