

P540 Thorolf Lipp lipp@arcadia-film.de Helping Things to Re-appear: Conversations with Minette Vari (2010, 43')

Film Summary:

This film portrays Minette Vari, a leading South African artist. Vari always works with her own body, documenting, altering and derealizing her performances with video. She is deeply fascinated by objects and their (hi-)stories. Both have and will always be there, but undergo constant metamorphoses.

Minette Vari is especially intrigued by how memory functions and heritage is constructed in a country like South Africa. Here, due to the incredible variety of cultures, voices, and agendas, history and histories are constantly in the process of being re-written. She thus applies various artistic techniques and aesthetic strategies to show that all attempts to get hold of truth and reality are constantly in flow. At the same time, however, her approach is platonic in that she sees herself as a tool for objects, stories, and histories to reappear, that structurally remain eternally the same.

Minette Vari: "Finding things to me is very important. I love serendipity, I love happening upon something. On the other hand, however, finding is more like retrieving. Everything already exists. I have the strange notion that even the art work that you are about to make is already existing in some other realm."

The diegesis of this film is formed by three cross-cut key elements: Firstly, the narration consists exclusively of in depth interviews with the artist that have been held over a period of two months in South Africa in 2008. Vari's comments on her works have been carefully edited to give a highly intimate insight into her artistic strategies. Secondly, these interviews were purposely shot in front of a blue screen. This technique allows embedding a selection of key scenes of her most important artworks into the background of the frame, and thus provides the viewer with an overview of Vari's work. Thirdly, we follow the artist during a two month period while she is conceptualizing, producing, and exhibiting her newest work, "rebus."

Abstract: Linear vs. Non-Linear. Or: Why I Would Not Make This Film again.

None of the visual or narrative elements of my film are "experimental" in itself. It is rather the combination of all of them, together with the fact that this film is part of a four part series that makes it outstanding in terms of its focus, visual style, and narrative form. Taken together, the viewer gets to see a carefully condensed comment of the artist on a time span of more than ten years of her work and life, a detailed insight into Minette Vari's philosophy, visual aesthetic and working mode. This film, together with the other three of the series, was made with the intention to create some sort of an archive in itself, a memory marker of a particular point in time in South African Art production.

However: who wants to see a film like this? Where is the audience for a linear narrative that deals with a very specific topic in a very particular manner and does not strive to entertain? Is this film a failure? Today I think that to achieve the goal of creating an audiovisual archive, a linear film is not the right medium anymore. The time to make films on specific topics is certainly not over. But today there exist different narrative forms that we need to experiment with in order to combine maximum public visibility while at the same time enabling further research through specialists. What I should have done, rather, is to try a different medium, such as a multimedia mind map. This technology enables new forms of cross-media narratives that constitute comprehensive "living", constantly updated online archives.

I will hence present a few examples of non-linear multimedia mind maps dealing with media, art, and memory, compare them with my linear film and discuss the specific communicative abilities of both narrative forms.