

# Up Close

About the Film Trilogy *Hairy Stories*  
and Intimacy in Anthropological Filmmaking

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## Resumé

Nærværende tekst tager sit udgangspunkt i tre kamerabaserede undersøgelser af kropshår, som er specialets produkt. Jeg kalder samlingen for *Hairy Stories*-trilogien, og den består af filmene *True Body* (5:14 min., 2016), *Body Hair* (15:51 min., 2017) og *Salon* (6 min., 2017). Teksten her præsenterer relevante teoretiske og metodiske problemstillinger når det kommer til intimitet i filmskabelse og kropshår. Jeg reflekterer over disse emner gennem empiriske eksempler; en empiri som kommer fra hele filmskabelsesprocessen: Fra planlægning over produktion til visning. Min problemformulering baserer sig på udarbejdelsen af de tre film om kropshår og ender ud i en teoretisk diskussion af afstand i forhold til repræsentationspraksis. Den lyder:

*Hvor kan intimitet være tilstede i antropologisk filmskabelse, og hvordan kan en kameradreven undersøgelse af kropshår bidrage til vores forståelse af hvad det intime er?*

Jeg konkluderer at vi kan se intimitet i filmskabelse mellem filmskaber og det filmede og/eller mellem filmen og dens beskuere. Kropshårsfilmene viser os at grænsen til intimitet er kulturelt og situationelt konstitueret. Man kan ikke tilgå en præ-filmisk urørt virkelighed med et kamera, fordi en virkelighed *med* et kamera er anderledes end en uden. Derfor vil en kamerabaseret undersøgelse nødvendigvis påvirke den præ-filmiske intime kvalitet, som man forventede at finde, og hvis der ender med at være en intimitet til stede i materialet, må kameraet have været med til at katalysere den.

Specialet er struktureret gennem tre kapitler. I første kapitel etablerer jeg en teoretisk kontekst omkring intimitet. Jeg skriver mig op imod en positivistisk forståelse af det intime som en på forhånd defineret afstand (Hall 1966). I stedet siger jeg at intimitet er kontekstuel: Intimitet er en oplevelse af nærhed, men hvornår noget er nært og om det nære er behageligt eller urovækkende, er kulturelt og situationelt defineret. Derfra taler jeg om intimitet i filmskabelse. Først, ud fra en diskussion af afstand i visuel antropologi, som en nærhed i relationen mellem filmskaber og det filmede (Mead & Bateson 1977, Henley 2004, Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009, Hastrup 1992, Morin 1988). Jeg placerer mit eget kameraarbejde hos Edgar Morin, som ser kameraet som katalyserende for sandhed. Dernæst siger jeg at intimitet også kan finde sted mellem film og beskuer, hvis man ser seeren som medskaber af det filmiske rum (Arntsen & Holtedahl 2005,

Sobchack 1992). I den sammenhæng kan en nær æstetik involvere seeren kropsligt (Marks 2002, Paldam 2016). I tekstens andet kapitel bringer jeg teori om kropshår på banen. Dels ser jeg på kropshårsbetydninger som udtryk for noget metaforisk; noget mere end håret i sig: Diskurs (Bartky 1997, Foucault 1991, 2009), samfundsskabende kategorisering (Douglas 1966) og historiske politiske strømninger (Herzig 2015) og dels tager jeg et mere oplevelsesorienteret perspektiv (Davies 2004). Jeg gennemgår mine tre film og forklarer hvordan deres udtryk har udviklet sig i samspil med de teoretiske perspektiver. I det afsluttende, tredje kapitel forholder jeg mig undersøgende til hvad sådan et nærbillede af kropshår kan fortælle os om det intime. Argumentet er empiribaseret og går på at kameraet bryder med usynligheden omkring kropshår ved selve filmehandlingen og ved at fremkalde synlige reaktioner hos publikum. Når vi kan se at grænserne for det intime sættes i spil hos publikum, ser vi at grænserne er kulturelt definerede. Derudover åbner kameraet op for et andet perceptuelt perspektiv gennem en makrolinse, der hjælper os med at udvide vores forståelse af kropshår ved at overøse os med materialitet (Vertov 1984 [1923], Elsaesser & Hagener 2010, Marks 2002). Jeg ender med at perspektivere til en diskussion omkring repræsentationspraksis (Haraway 1988, Nichols 1994). Projektet tilskriver sig en feministisk, situeret objektivitet gennem at være fortæller for filmskaberens kropslige involvering i filmen, gennem præference for en haptisk æstetik og gennem emnet, kropshår, som er privat oplevet og samtidig udtryk for politiske strukturer.

Formålet med produktspecialet var i første omgang at skabe et kreativt og akademisk funderet arbejdsrum, hvor jeg som visuel antropolog kunne udvikle en metodisk tilgang til kropshår; et emne omgærdet af usynlighed. Jeg har undervejs skabt kontakt til eksterne parter, og er lejlighedsvis lykket med at få filmene vist og diskuteret eksternt (se bilag 1). Det har været en gave at få lov til at producere film, som nu kan fortsætte deres liv i verden. Og det har været en givende vej, hvor jeg udover den akademiske og tekniske læring har fået et indblik i dokumentarfilmsbranchen gennem de eksterne samarbejder.

# Up Close

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Resumé (abstract)

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## Introduction

The attempt to cross the boundary to the more private or even intimate aspects of human life in ethnographic work is nothing new to anthropology. To situate the look to intimacy historically, we can go back almost 100 years to 1922, where Bronislaw Malinowski after several years of fieldwork on the Trobriand Islands launches *Argonauts*, the foundational work for ethnography as we know it today. Here he writes that if the ethnographer wants to bring real life home to his readers, he must take the intimate seriously:

*Neither aspect, the intimate, as little as the legal, ought to be glossed over. Yet as a rule in ethnographic accounts we have not both but either the one or the other – and, so far, the intimate one has hardly ever been properly treated.*

Malinowski 2002 [1922]:15

Malinowski comes to define ethnography as a science depending as much on an intimate involvement in people's everyday life, as an understanding of the legal aspects (ibid.). But what is intimacy in the first place, and how do we work with it as anthropologists? Whereas for Malinowski, an intimate involvement in everyday life meant to study the islander's sexual life, today, intimacy can designate practically everything in the near domain of human experience: From describing a relation to a pet (Charles 2017) over domestic violence (Bähre 2015) to a quality in an isolated language (Leonard 2016). Today, the anthropological fields are only seldom laid at distant tropical islands, and it could look like increased nearness in research areas also means an extended understanding of what the intimate can be.

This product thesis uses the topic of body hair to explore where in anthropological filmmaking intimacy can appear. I argue that intimacy is a culturally conditioned sense of nearness that can be situated both pre-filmically, in the filming situation and in a post-filmic reality between the film and the spectator. In the 35 pages to come, I demonstrate this empirically through the example of my *Hairy Stories* trilogy, the thesis' product. It consists of three films: *True Body* (5:14 min., 2016), *Body Hair* (15:51 min., 2017) and *Salon* (6 min., 2017). Whereas *Body Hair* is filmed and coproduced in Palestine, the other two films are filmed and produced in Denmark. To see them thoroughly as works that (also) stand on their own, it would be beneficial if you watch them before continuing reading on from this introduction.

My problem statement is based on this practical experiment with three films about body hair and a theoretical discussion of the implications of distance in relation to aesthetics and position in filmmaking. I ask:

*Where does intimacy appear in anthropological filmmaking, and how can a camera-driven exploration of body hair contribute to our understanding of what the intimate is?*

In *Hairy Stories*, I find that a condition of intimacy is related to nearness, the creation and crossing of boundaries and a need for reciprocity that makes it impossible to see intimacy without being implied in it. There appears to be significant differences in the cultural conceptions of nearness, depending on where and with whom the films about body hair are made: In Palestine, the filming of a female hand can be transgressive, whereas in Denmark it can be acceptable within the bounds of the public to stand almost naked in front of a camera. In other ways, the films demonstrate striking cross-cultural similarities when it comes to norms around body hair between women: The fierce cultural imperative to get rid of them, for example, is shared in all three contexts.

The paper consists of three chapters. In my first chapter, “Intimacy and filmmaking”, I establish my main theoretical framework: How can we understand intimacy, and where does it appear in anthropological filmmaking? I argue that intimacy is a culturally conditioned quality of nearness and that it can appear situationally in the relation between the filmmaker and the filmed, or the relation between the film and the spectator. In my next chapter, “The journey: Hairy Stories”, I give a theoretical context of body hair as well as develop the central ideas within the films. In my last chapter, “What do we see from up close?” I discuss how a camera-driven exploration of body hair can contribute to our understanding of what the intimate is, and I do a perspectivation to intimacy in relation to representational ethics.

I use both the terms ‘filmmaker’ and ‘anthropologist’ about my own role in the project. Whereas the filmmaker also needs to take pragmatic and aesthetic considerations in her work, the anthropologist can better afford to forefront ethics, ethnographic methods and the analytical aspects of filmmaking. For an anthropologist, there is no such thing as a fieldwork mistake. If you in any way can make it tell something about the context, it counts as data. A filmmaker, on the other hand, only has what she recorded. It is simple: If it didn’t make it to the camera’s memory card, it doesn’t exist. Luckily, most of the time, the two go well together.

# 1. Intimacy and filmmaking

Where does intimacy appear in anthropological filmmaking? In this chapter, I define intimacy ethnographically as a relational concept, characterised through a cultural contextual understanding of near distance, demarcated by a boundary to a public. Then I argue that intimacy in filmmaking can appear as a condition of nearness between the filmmaker and the filmed (an issue related to the filmmaker's position) or the spectator and the film (an issue related to the film's aesthetics).

## What is intimacy?

When I first started out with this project of making films about body hair, I presumed that intimacy was an intrinsic part of body hair and its removal. This was because body hair is located physically close to the body and, at least in a Danish context, deemed inappropriate as a topic for the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> My ascribing intimacy to body hair reflected a positivist view on the social significance of distances. I will illustrate this with cultural anthropologist Edward Hall, who in 1966 published *The Hidden Dimension*, a foundational work on *proxemics*; the study of human use of space and what it means for social interaction in the Western world. Hall describes and categories interpersonal distances into four zones, where the inner, intimate distance that allows for embracing, touching or whispering spans from the surface of the skin to 46 cm distance in its furthest (1990 [1966]: 118). Following, our cultural proxemics pattern regulates the use of space socially, for example by deeming it inappropriate for adults to interact within an intimate distance in public (ibid.).

Thus, in this positivist view on intimacy, hair removal is, per definition, intimate. The hair remover's hands need to be close to the skin in topic, and direct contact between skin and hair removal tool is necessary. Waxing and shaving is easily within limits of intimate distance.

However, as I will demonstrate in this paper, my empirical journey taught me that the intimate is a quality that doesn't stick to body hair or any other material. It turns out that I, and Hall, were slightly off. By making and screening these three films about body hair, I found that intense sensory inputs are always interpreted in the situation, culturally, contextually and not necessarily as intimate. Neither is 'the West' a cultural enclave with an aligned, uniform interpretation of space.

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<sup>1</sup> You can get a sense of the strength of this taboo from the reactions received by Swedish Arvida Byström, when she posed with hairy legs for an Adidas fashion shot and received a massive amount of rape and violence threats in her mailbox (Independent.co.uk 2017, Byström 2017).

In fact, it can be culturally interpreted as unintimate to have a stranger massage lavender oil into the naked skin of your plucked vagina. Or to show your pubic hairs to 24 academicians on a large screen. And in turn, it can be interpreted as culturally intimate to even be part of a film about body hair, despite that you don't talk about the topic, are properly covered and only filmed from a distance that makes you unrecognisable. It all depends on the cultural and situational negotiation of where the boundary to intimacy is. As such, there is nothing intimate about body hair, because the intimate is not, as Hall says, a fixed distance. Intimacy is a relational concept, characterised through a contextual understanding of nearness and a boundary that is meant to keep out a contextual other. It is therefore also inherently difficult to fix in general definition. A look at ethnographic literature on the topic shows further that intimacy is not necessarily neither pleasurable, private or small-scale (Besnier 2015: 106). The intimate may be a zone of discomfort or violence (Bähre 2015, Fleetwood 2015), capitalised upon by multinational companies (Sheller 2004, Constable 2009) or located in human-environmental relations (Kapusta 2016).

In other words: Ethnography troubles the intimate. Anthropological literature suggests that intimacy is connected to nearness, but *when* something is near, between *whom* it is near and *what* this nearness means, is unfixd. This is inherent to the context. As I will show in this paper, my camera-driven explorations of body hair contribute to these studies of intimacy. *Hairy Stories* underlines the contextuality of intimacy and suggest that when speaking about intimacy, only three common denominators seem to be at play: 1) a cultural, situational ascription of nearness, 2) that works through the demarcation of a boundary to a contextual other, that should be held outside and 3) has a relational nature that means it must be situated between parts. I return to this throughout the paper with empirical examples from the filmmaking and screening processes.

## **Intimacy in audio-visuals**

In this passage I talk about how the conditions of intimacy can spill over into concrete filmmaking topics, methods and aesthetics.

Intimacy and film is often connected to domestic documentaries, where the filmmaker turns the camera towards herself or her own family (Renov 2004, Jerslev 2002). Anne Jerslev points to the reflexive camera move towards one's private life as a defining gesture for the intimate documentary itself (2002: 41): A quality of intimacy derives from the pre-filmic relation between the filmmaker and the filmed, and spills over into an intimate aesthetics. Jerslev's intimate documentaries are thus about an intimacy that already exists without the camera, bounded in near,



personal relations. But she doesn't consider what intimacy is in the first place and neglects how the presence of the camera affects or maybe even creates it. In the below, I would like to extend Jerslev's definition of intimacy as a pre-filmic quality to a sense of nearness that also can be created in the *filmic* and/or spectating situation, what we may call the *post-filmic reality*. I distance myself from the idea that the camera can capture untouched, "innocent" pre-filmic intimacy: As soon as a camera is present, the boundaries of intimacy that have been agreed upon situationally will be affected. Consequently, I argue that the filmmaker's position (social, physical and cultural) is vital to whether intimacy is present in the material, and therefore a main point of methodological reflection in the filming situation. Also, the aesthetical choices affect the spectator of a film, whom I see as co-constitutive for the cinematic space (Sobchack 1992).

### **Nearness between filmmaker and filmed**

In filmmaking, the relation between the filmmaker and the filmed is one of the chronologically first places where intimacy may appear. In this context, a central question is how nearness appears in the filming situation. With nearness I mean a simultaneously close experiential and social distance between the filmmaker and the filmed. The question of distance feeds into a discussion of how much the anthropological filmmaker should be a participant, and how much an observer. In the below, I write intimacy into the canon of in visual anthropology by looking at how three paradigmatic attitudes think about the relation between the filmmaker and the filmed. These attitudes can be called 1) the indexical camera, 2) observational cinema and 3) the catalyst camera.

We start with the indexical camera. The earliest visual anthropologists saw the camera as the ultimate data collecting device. The camera was assumed to capture to world in a 1:1 indexical relation. We see this idea in the "tripod discussion" between Margaret Mead and George Bateson, some of the first anthropologists to use the camera in *Balinese Character* from 1942. Here, Mead represents a naïve realistic stance towards the camera (Mead & Bateson 1977: 79). She thinks of the camera as a superior fieldnote recorder, because it can catch raw ethnographic material that can be watched over and over: This gives the anthropologist time to discover what goes on in the background, and other scientists can re-access the pure empirical qualitative data, even years after the recording (ibid.: 78, 80). To get as unaltered material as possible, Mead argues, the camera should preferably be left alone in the middle of the village on a tripod. Bateson, on the other hand,

contests this. He argues that also a tripod shot is an altered shot – alteration is inevitable and thus a mere condition of filming. But worse, a tripod shot is an *unreflected* shot (ibid.: 78).

We can continue to imagine how Mead's position would result in a positivist approach towards intimacy as a pre-filmic condition that can be captured 1:1 by the camera. If we follow the rationales of the indexical camera, we could put up a tripod in the bathroom, leave the room, and then we should be able to see intimacy, if anything intimate was going on. This, I argue, correlates to a far distanced filmmaker-position: With the camera left on a tripod, the researcher does not even need to be present in the filming situation. Also, she wouldn't know what to look for, assuming a directed view would mess up the data. This rationale refers to an epistemology of the seen, where the invisible simply isn't there. It is based on a belief that the senses give a direct and transparent access to reality "as it is", and so objective truth is defined as a precise recording of observable detail (Suhr & Willerslev 2013: 2).

The wish to reach "life as it is" scientifically on film through non-interference later transformed into a more reflected and aware version of empiricism, called *observational cinema*. Observational cinema is a popular approach within ethnographic filmmaking (Henley 2004, MacDougall 1998, 2006). Visual anthropologist Paul Henley suggests that the genre is so popular within ethnographic filmmaking because of its direct methodological parallels to ethnographic fieldwork: Both idealise non-contamination and long-time relations (2004: 109-112). In observational cinema, the relation between filmmaker and filmed is one of complied distance. Visual anthropologists Anna Grimshaw and Anna Ravetz explain this by defining the practice of observation as ultimately different from that of spectation: Whereas the spectator is passive; a voyeur who is not implied in what is seen, the observer has an active but disciplined engagement with the world. The practice of observation can be taken as an ethical stance of respect and compliance to what is played out in front of the filmmakers' eyes (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009: 10-11). The observational camera style should always target a pre-filmic reality, and in *Hairy Stories* it might be most present in *Salon*, where a Brazilian wax is filmed in close-ups after the conduction of an ethnographic fieldwork.

In *Salon*, the style of filming is embodied in a cameraperson that doesn't interfere, but still is part of the social world. I was invited to film a waxing session that would have happened with or without me. My presence with a camera was facilitated by a fieldwork in the salon and previous encounters with the wax-client without a camera, and, as I will return to later in the paper, the experiences from the fieldwork fed into and developed my shooting plan as I got familiar with the field. This is the methodological point of observational cinema: The filmmaker's biggest task is

to get to know the pre-filmic reality to an extent that enables her to subordinate her person and influence on it (Henley 2004: 119). I see this as an expression of a critical distance between filmmaker and filmed, where the filmmaker is present, but trying not to affect the material, even though the intimate stays invisible. The question is whether intimacy is so inherently relational, that the “active, but disciplined” engagement between camera and the world (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009: 11) fall short in filmmaking. Maybe there are some things that can only be seen from an involved, near distance?

It could seem like this was the case, when we, during the first week of filming *Body Hair*, unsuccessfully tried to access hair removal in Palestine from an observational camera style. My producer Yasmin and I drove to one beauty salon in Ramallah after another, looking for a place that would allow us to do discrete observational filming of anonymised body parts during hair removal, but it was practically impossible because of the cultural configuration of intimacy. We worked in a context where the female body is tabooed and should be kept out of the public, so the women we met felt it would be too risky to be part of a film about body hair. The field only really opened when we became willing to stage it to a higher degree; to let the camera take the role of a social actor that was allowed to have an intention. We started to arrange hair removal events with Yasmin’s friends, in their private homes. The hair removals that I filmed weren’t scripted, nor uncommon, but in the very moment of filming, it was the camera’s presence that catalysed what happened.

Even more concretely, a distanced, discrete camera was coming up short when I filmed the scene where Yasmin and (blinded) wax each other in a couch. There was a clear quality of intimacy in the pre-filmic situation, so I started out with a very uninvolved tripod shot. I downplayed myself socially as much as possible, thinking that the camera would then capture the intimacy between the two friends in a ‘purer’ way. After a short while it became clear that I had to change position. I looked on the ongoing recordings on the camera’s screen: The fixed distance and my passive presence didn’t work at all. The recordings were stiff; the camera seemed disinterested in what was going on. I took the camera off the tripod and shifted to handheld, entering the action as a communicative being. In this way, I stepped into the situation as a participating social actor, going socially closer to what was happening in front of me. The resulting material had much more “nerve” to it; a feeling of presence and matter. I think this is because intimacy only appears if you are on the inside of the boundary that demarcates the limit to the outside, what we might call ‘the public’. As the passages above already have indicated, this boundary is culturally and situationally configured. The boundary may keep a researcher, being from the perceived outside, away from

accessing the perceived inner. Following, my argument is that if the filmmaker wants intimacy to appear in the material, she needs herself and the camera to enter the situation as a social co-creator of it to a higher degree than observational cinema allows her to.

This leads us to the third stance in my review of camera practices; towards how the camera can be seen as a catalyst of social truth. Most of my work relates to this stance, which is why I will go more into detail here. Kirsten Hastrup says that we anthropologists too are part of the social world we research, inevitably co-defining the reality we meet (1992: 10). Therefore, ethnographic knowledge creation is mutually conditioned by the presence of the informant and the anthropologist (ibid.). A catalysing camera acknowledges this and exploits the potential of it with rolling film, so to speak. In documentary film, the inclination to co-creation between onlooker and looked-upon can be exemplified with *Chronicles of a Summer* (1961) by filmmakers Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch. *Chronicles of a Summer* is a filmic experiment of *cinema vérité* (cinema of truth); a documentary tradition that takes the stance that truth is only approachable when the camera works as a *constructor* of truth, rather than a recorder of data (Morin 1980: 102-103). In *Chronicles of a Summer*, a philosophical problem between the two filmmakers about how the camera can capture reality ends out being solved by the camera's creation of multiple stages and levels of reality. The co-presence of perspectives allows for a reflection upon what real life is, and in this way, the camera becomes a catalyst for a higher truth above the singular human perspective.

Now, one might ask, what is 'the higher truth' of intimacy and body hair, and how does the camera catalyse it to appear in *Hairy Stories*? In *Hairy Stories*, there is a challenge of non-appearance, or invisibility. Body hair might be visible, but the experiential innerness of what body hair means, is not. With experiential innerness I refer to people's perceived expectations of how they should perform their bodies to be socially legitimate women, and the feelings of shame, worry, insecurity or pride that may arise if they do otherwise.<sup>2</sup> This quote from *True Body* illustrates how body hair are experienced internally to be regulated by outer, unnameable forces:

- If we were allowed to do as we like, I'm actually not sure I would remove everything.
- How should you be "allowed" to do as you like?
- Good question. No one comes and holds it over your head, and no one ever comments on your stubbles.

True Body 01:43-03:13 min.

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<sup>2</sup> In the second chapter's theoretical perspectives on body hair removal amongst women, I introduce body hair theory that helps us understand the inner experience of hair removal and how it is related to gender, class and race.

The woman experiences that her body hair means much more than the hairs in themselves, but it is difficult for her to point to where the perceived regulations come from. There appears to be a disconnection between inner and outer worlds. An uninaugurated onlooker may have concluded that she removes her body hair because she enjoys the shaving activity: Nobody tells her to do it, so the experience of compulsion is imminently invisible. Methodologically, the ethnographic challenges with experiential innerness can be understood through what Andrew Irwing (2011: 22) calls *the problem of interiority*. The “problem” is that anthropology lacks a generally accepted methodological framework for understanding how a sense of interiority relates to people’s public actions and expressions. There is no independent, objective access to interiority (ibid.: 24). So how do we approach these things in films? Whereas Irwing argues to address the issue of interiority through a collaborative, practice-based, ethnographic research (2011: 25), I suggest approaching interiority in ethnographic filmmaking by introducing the camera person as a relational being: To let her step closer to the filmed and in this way embrace situated subjectivity to access interiority.

We may categorise *True Body* as a performative documentary (Hollerup 2016a, Nichols 1994: 98-100). It has a high degree of scripture, in the sense that we planned the setup before filming. The referential claim; the relation between the pre-filmic reality and that which is seen on screen, is put into brackets, because it refers to a reality of experiential innerness within the performer (ibid.: 98). In this way, the camera catalyses a stage where the significances of body hair can be played out. Its presence allows for a filmic communication of the experienced cultural meanings of body hair. Sounds and images evoke a bodily reaction within the spectator, based on the spectator’s own referential relation to reality (ibid.: 100). Thus, the camera in *True Body* catalyses truth by setting a scene where it can be outplayed. Also, the interview is set up in a way that enables a homosocial bonding between the women, who, in front of the lenses, enter a conversational mode that ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch would call *ethno-speaking*. In this, individuals are catalysed by the camera to talk from the position of a certain cultural position (Hollerup 2016a: 4-5, Rouch in Fulchignoni 2003: 185). In the quote from the sauna, the probing question that allows the woman to develop her thoughts on how she could be ‘allowed’ to not remove her hair, comes from myself, who functioned as the interviewer during filming. We can ethno-speak in the same language, because we have an experiential sameness, and in this way the design of the production catalyses that our “truth” becomes visible in the filmic meeting. In relation to this, Edgar Morin argues for a truth concept that is internal to the observational practice: “*Truth is not a Holy Grail to be won, it is*

*a shuttle which moves ceaselessly between the observer and the observed, between science and reality*" (Morin 1988: 103). With this he means that truth is not 'out there' to be found, instead it is created in the meeting between the truth-observer and the truth-holder; the filmmaker and the filmed. It is thus meaningless to disguise or downplay the camera device, as in the tradition of observational cinema (ibid.). Cinema verité acknowledges the camera's inherently direct spatial, timely and material connection to the empirical field, whilst exploring the field of possibilities that emerges from this direct connection (ibid.). The camera person is allowed to probe and play into the situation, and she may also have something at stake; a personal vulnerability invested in the filmmaking project.

*Body Hair* is another example of a film that appeared in the relation between observer and observed. In the opening shot, Yasmin is sitting on a wall, looking downwards. From offscreen I ask her if I can "ask her about it", and she starts talking about her obsession with waxing, showing me and the camera the areas of special attention. Here, it is *our relation* that allows me to probe, based on the off-screen conversation we had just a moment ago. Indeed, as it appears in the film, the topic arose *between us*, under a workshop exercise where we both participated as filmmakers: We had been paired two and two to interview each other, and as we leave the room, Yasmin outbursts: "*I know what I want to ask you about!*". It turns out she had been sitting and staring at my hairy arms across the table for the last couple of days, and I hadn't even mentioned *Hairy Stories*. Thus, the beginning and the end of the film were filmed in this exercise, and in this way our meeting becomes the frame narrative of *Body Hair*. It illustrates how the camera can catalyse a moment of transcultural human exchange of experiences: As we film, we find out that we are indeed the same, but different.<sup>3</sup>

In visual anthropology, with its reference to documentary and ethnographic filmmaking theory, there is an epistemological tradition of creatively transforming *what* you know about something to *how* you let others know about something (Nichols 1991, 1994; MacDougall 1998; Grimshaw 2001). When the camera is allowed to be a creative tool to a higher degree, as visual anthropologists, we can use it to stage and frame reality in a way that reflect that knowledge. For example, if we are interested in body hair, and are familiar with its experiential innerness, we can use social and physical nearness as a guiding principle for our camerawork. According to

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<sup>3</sup> "Same but different" is a key vehicle of action within the feminist movement, as I will return to later in the paper's final chapter.

Rouch and Morin, the intimacy that possibly appears afterwards in the film, is explicitly a result of the exchange between onlooker and looked-upon. I argue that in terms of distance, this resembles a very near approach, because the staging itself is necessarily derived from the filmmaker, who will need to have qualified knowledge about the issue at hand to frame it in a productive way.

The problem with this is how to transcend the limits of your own world. How do you ensure ethnographic validity in productions like this? Maybe the filmmaker risks to create an intimacy that isn't even there in the first place, through the style of filming. Bousé talks critically about this risk in relation to wildlife films, where close-ups are used to create what he calls a "false" intimacy (2003: 125). And true, if we lay the film's reality claim exclusively in a pre-filmic reality, this is highly problematic. An alternative is to see filmic time as the result of the filmmaking meeting, like Morin does. When both researcher and researched is present in the film's diegesis (like it is the case in the film *Chronicles of a Summer* and all films in *Hairy Stories*) the knowledge process is democratised: The researcher's speaking position is less privileged, and the researched is less objectified. Another alternative truth claim, that would enable even wildlife films to be classified as true, is to say the film's reality is created in the space between a film and its spectators. In the above, I mentioned that *True Body* was an example of a performative documentary. According to film theorist Bill Nichols, a performative documentary also targets reality through viewer response: It works towards evoking a reaction amongst the spectators, with an element of defamiliarisation that suggest that something we take for granted can be understood differently (1994: 99). In the next passage, I use Vivian Sobchack's theory of the spectator of co-constitutive for the cinematic space (1992) to argue that also non-performative films, like *Salon* and *Body Hair*, can be interpreted to have a kind of post-filmic reality.

### **Nearness in the relation between film and spectator**

When you theorise ethnographic spectatorship, you introduce the knowledge recipient alongside the knowledge subject and the knowledge researcher (Arntsen & Holtedahl 2005: 67). Herein lies an acknowledgement that the spectator of a film is situated, just like the filmmaker, and plays a significant part in the total production of meaning. In this passage, I will use the theorisation of spectatorship in a discussion of how intimacy may also be understood as a quality of nearness in the relation between a film and its spectator. This relates to the paper's third chapter, which talks more concretely about what happened in the post-filmic reality of *Hairy Stories*.

I understand nearness in the relation between film and spectator as a bodily relationship deriving from the films' aesthetics. This is possible because a camera-driven research provides a sensorial context to the object of study. As visual anthropologist David MacDougall tells us, film differs from text because it enriches the object of study it with a complex multisensory and interpersonal context (2006: 43). In filmmaking, nearness can thus be understood aesthetically as inspired by physical conditions of near-distant sensory perception. Sensory inputs are stronger from a closer distance. You may not only see and hear, but also smell, feel and taste on a physical near distance (Hall 1990: 116). In the below, I will suggest that this heightened corporality can draw the spectator into the film in a bodily way. It can also draw the spectators together in the spectating situation, possibly creating an unpleasant sense of intimacy amongst them,

It may seem commonsensical that a near photographic style in close-ups can enhance a sense of intimacy aesthetically (Jerslev 2002: 41). But there are differing understandings of where exactly this sense of intimacy comes from, and what kind of reality it refers to. In the paradigm of observational cinema, the filmmaking approach that resembles ethnography the most (Henley 2004), the cinema's sensorial potential originates in the filmmaker's sensorial apparatus. The bodily identification between spectator and film is explained by mimetics, as the filmmaker's sensorial apparatus is "borrowed" by the audience, who hereby can mirror the filmmaker's presence in a specific time and place (Grimshaw & Ravetz 2009: 22-23). Thus, if the filmmaker is in a perceived intimate situation, the audience will be so too – a stroke on the hand in the film will be mentally mirrored as a stroke on the hand by the spectator. In observational cinema, post-filmic intimacy is thus meant to be directly connected to a filmic reality, which ideally should also reflect the pre-filmic reality very closely.

We find an alternative approach to a post-filmic embodied spectatorship with Laura U. Marks, who talks about *haptic visuality* as near-distant audio-visuals. A haptic visuality transcends the referential claim to a pre-filmic realism of observational cinema (2002: 15). It is characterised by limited visibility that makes the viewer incapable of mastering the image. The ethical implication is a more interdependent relationship between what is seen and who sees (ibid.). In *Hairy Stories*, haptics are the most present in *Salon*, where all framings are held in close-ups or extreme close-ups of hairs and slimy, pink wax on transparent paper, but also in *Body Hair*'s images of thick, green wax with hairs in a wax heater and grainy, yellow paste smeared onto a woman's face. A haptic cinema invites to interaction through its textured or slimy surfaces (Paldam 2016: 69). Near-distant images have an openness that invites the perceiver to engage in the surface (Marks



2002: 13). Also, sounds that are taken from close distance can have a sense of materiality that invites the listener to interaction, because sounds too can be partial and need active co-constitution to be meaningful: As the opening shot of *True Body*, where a harsh, confusing offscreen sound engages the spectator in a process of co-constitution, trying to make the sound meaningful. Thus, audio-visual openness, as a lack of solid material surface or wholeness, trickle the eye and the ear. Here, an important point is that physical distance is decisive for what kind of the texture is seen on the camera: Wholeness or partiality is a matter of perspective. For example, when you look down at your hand, your perspective probably gives you the impression that your skin is whole and solid. But when seen from a macro lenses, the surface of the skin is significantly enhanced, and it appears to be textured and coarse instead of smooth. The level of detail from a close-up draws the viewer mentally closer to the image and affects a sense of corporality (Paldam 2016.: 68). By framing the world in extreme closeups, the camera may evoke a sensorial experience of touch within the spectator, where an image or sound can be felt as a tactile stimulus. Haptics can in this way stimulate what Marks' call an *erotic engagement* between images and spectator, a continuous dialectics between who sees and what is seen (2002: 13-15).<sup>4</sup> Haptic visuality is partial, obstructed or blurred, and therefore, the viewer needs to be specifically active to co-constitute the cinematic experience from the traces left by the images (ibid). The usual control of the spectator (of meaningful categories and definitions for what we see) is given over. Marks argues that aesthetics in this way also can be an ethical stance, because haptics demand a profound respect for otherness as otherness, without the need of mastering it into one's own categories (ibid.: 20).

Both the realist depiction of touch in observational cinema and the avantgarde use of haptic visuality can be located within the phenomenological paradigm within film theory, which have been in rise since the 1990s (Elsaesser & Hagener 2015: 130). Here we find a shared dissatisfaction with ocularcentrism; the tendency to disregard nonvisual parts of film in film theory (ibid.).

Media theorist Vivian Sobchack is a key thinker in this critique of ocularcentrism, propagating a move towards embodied spectatorship. Sobchack's critique takes point of departure in the viewer's embodiment and necessarily embodied reactions to cinema's address, which she sees as inherently sensorial (ibid.: 126). She argues that the cinematic experience is an intimate exchange between two bodies: That of the viewer and that of the film (Sobchack 1992 *in* Marks

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<sup>4</sup> Images with sexual content may correspond with the characteristics of the erotic, but the two kinds of eroticisms are fundamentally separated – one describes a subject, the other a visual engagement (Marks 2002: 20).

2002: 13). Cinematic space is conditioned by its performance by the spectator. Thus, instead of seeing the viewer as a passive receiver of the film, viewing is conceived as a synesthetic, dialogical act between material and person. The two are mutually constitutive of each other (ibid.). I extend this to talk about how a post-filmic reality is created amongst the spectators in the concrete spectating situation, with its own concrete cultural and situational configuration of intimacy. As I will return to in chapter three, the boundaries of intimacy in the spectating situation may differ significantly from the boundaries of intimacy in the pre-filmic or filmic reality, because the audience haven't had a chance to negotiated intimacy in the same way as those on screen have.

Much of the intentional shaping of the relation between the film and the spectator happens in the editing room. After the camera has been selectively used in the field's recording situation, the analytical potential lies in how the content of a film is articulated through cuts and assemblies (MacDougall 2006: 51). As the Danish director Jørgen Leth notes, there is always someone who decides what the eye should see: The person who does the final cut often holds the contested right to decide what is told (2009: 49). And to add to complexity, in our era of digital software, where a cut is nothing but a shadow on the raw footage, the same material can be made into an endless amount of films. My experience is that the degree to which the final film appears as intimate to watch depends almost entirely on how the material is put together. As Suhr and Willerslev argue, invisible matters, such as intimacy, emerges in the gap that opens when different pieces of film are juxtaposed in montage (2013: 1). One plus one is more than two: The sum of all parts is less than what emerges in the space between them (ibid.). I argue that editing can facilitate a sense of intimacy in the relation between the final film and the spectator by fore fronting moments of touches, haptic images and reciprocal interactions. Editing also have the potential to produce an internal tension in the film in a kind of *intellectual montage*, where images are contraposed intentionally to create new understandings (Eisenstein 1963: 28-44). For example, in *Body Hair*, where a hairy plant is put next to a shot of a horse and a hairy piece of wax, and in this way the montage implicitly points towards a theme of nature versus culture. Or in *Salon*, where an observational, matter-of-factual style filming and editing is in tension with how we usually think of genitals. The spectator might have expected a shyer camera; unsure of its own place in the situation, but gets instead a calm, observing frame. In this case, the style of filming and editing contributes to bringing forth the ethnographic context in the film: Exposed genitals are commonplace in the salon's treatment room and therefore not kept distance to, just like in the film.

*Summary chapter 1*

In chapter one, I have situated intimacy anthropologically as an inherently contextual phenomenon. *Hairy Stories* points to intimacy in filmmaking as a quality of nearness in the filmmaker's relation to the filmed, which is best explored through a catalyst camera. As I return to and exemplify further in chapter three, the body hair films also show that intimacy can be a quality of nearness between the film and its spectator. This quality of nearness isn't necessarily pleasant, and as I will show, it may induce furore and discomfort amongst the audience. First, the next chapter will talk about body hair and how the *Hairy Stories* came into being.

## 2. The journey: Hairy Stories

Body hair is the shared topic for the *Hairy Stories* trilogy. More exactly; female body hair, as it is seen in a variety of settings and through changing audio-visual approaches towards reality. But what is it about body hair that makes it a fitting topic for a discussion about where intimacy appears in anthropological filmmaking? In this chapter I look at how intimacy is pre-filmically at play around body hair, and why it is challenging to make these things appear in a film. This is thus about assumed intimacy around body hair *before* the camera enters a situation, and following, how the entering of the camera can challenge the veil of invisibility of the hidden body hair significances. Everybody has body hair, and in this way, body hair is a very common and known phenomenon. However paradoxically, filming it and then exposing it in public, on a screen, may be experienced as transgressive. When we film body hair, we contest that hair is too private, too nasty or too banal for publicity, and legitimises it as a topic for research and public discussion (Lesnik-Oberstein 2006:2).

The three films present different perspectives on body hair, in different cultural settings and through different audio-visual methods; that is: Different ways to cross the boundary to assumed pre-filmic intimacy in anthropological filmmaking. There is a certain sense of chronology and development throughout the trilogy, due to the time span of the project. From when the first film was born as an idea, to the handing in of this thesis, two years have passed. But my journey of body hair started even way before that. In a sense, the deconstruction of body hair significances into cultural constructs is my coming-of-age story as an anthropologist; a personal journey that brought cultural relativism under my skin and feelings of self.

### Body hair perspectives

How many times have I not wished to be relieved of the duty of shaving these darned legs? One cut goes wrong and before you know it, your blood has overflown the bathroom floor. The hair gets stuck in the razor, peeking out between the blades, resembling a miniature furry animal. And in the evening, they are back again: The body hairs. Creeping out of the skin in an endless silently growing stream of bodily by-products. Not me but neither outside of me. Body hairs are abject, absurdly transgressing the firm boundaries of subject and object. In *Powers of Horror* (1980) psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva writes about the potency of this impossible category at the boundary of

the self. Just as the infant affirms its ego by expelling its mother from the symbiosis, the body's firm boundaries are psychologically affirmed by the expelling of hair. Kristeva argues that floating breastmilk, sweat, tears, hair that sticks to the skin and other disturbing bodily matters have universal monstrous qualities for the human unconscious: It exposes a fragility between the self and the other, threatening to destroy the boundary between subject and object, and thus the subject's existence as different from the object (Kristeva 1980: 230, Macdonald 2006: 69, Hollerup 2016b: 4). Anthropologist Mary Douglas' structuralist account of the sacred and the profane from 1966 takes the concept of the abject to a cultural level, situating it in specific cultural contexts. As with Kristeva, Douglas' classificatory systems work by creating mutually constituting categories and drawing the boundaries between them (Douglas 1966 *in* Macdonald 2006: 69, Hollerup 2016b: 5). Thus, in this case, it could be said that in the specific cultural classificatory system I am writing from, a hairless female body is commonly seen to confirm the masculinity of a hairy male (Macdonald 2006). Items that transgress our categories, that are neither this nor that, possess a specific destabilising potential for society. They are "matter out of place" (Douglas 1966: 36). In this way, a hairy female becomes a threat to the stability of society's gender categories at large, a social monstrosity. My poor abjected body hair appear to be so close to what is often understood as the individual's domain, "the self" and an intimate matter of personal care; and yet somehow, they are simultaneously socially disturbing to the extent of being destructive to society.

My own interest in body hair as a topic for anthropological investigation started out when I realised that there should be absolutely nothing to hinder me from stopping shaving my legs. I have never been especially interested in impressing people with my physical appearance, but at that time I was even engaged and had no conscious desire to obtain the sexual attention of other men than my own, who said he didn't care about hair. And yet, I just couldn't meet the world in my long black hair-leg fur and shorts. The internal conflict was mesmerising to my inner ethnographer. What was going on within me with all this shame and insecurity about body hair? Where did the strength of this behavioural pattern come from, and how was it distributed as a shared societal phenomenon that I could recognise amongst practically all the women of my own generation that I met?<sup>5</sup> How was this norm kept so fiercely alive without ever being verbalised in conversations? It was especially the norms' life in the intimate sphere, what I have referred to as experiential innerness, that caught my attention. These cultural urges to act in a specific way did not happen to me in a social or public

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<sup>5</sup> See Toerien et al. 2005 for supporting statistics.

setting. It was not something that was discussed and decided between friends, and it was not something that was directly conditioned by the actual gaze or comments of other people. It happened at home, in the decision-making process in front of the dresser and its options of shorts or trousers. But somehow these very privately felt emotional reactions of shame and anxiety were apparently also 1) shared, and 2) contingent – dependent on time and space. Thus, they had to be connected to a larger, changeable societal level and would thus make out for a great topic of anthropological enquiry, providing ethnographical privileged access and position for a dark-haired woman such as myself.

The contingency of body hair removal is empirically documented in Rebecca Herzig's *Plucked* (2015), a historical account of body hair practices in the United States. Herzig demonstrates how the removal of female body hair is a historically specific norm related to broader issues of gender, class and race. She shows how in the early 20th century, visible female body hair, like women's paid labour outside the home, suddenly became a symbol of women's 'excessive' independence. Critics of the new women's roles saw body hair as one amongst other signs of exaggerated masculinity (ibid: 76-77). Women who pushed for voting rights and access to the labour market were thus depicted as hairy to underline their sexual invertedness (ibid.). This negatively loaded image of female body hair got mixed together with the hygiene movement, which aimed to protect the social fitness of whiteness by preaching spotlessness for the not-so-white immigrants. The segregation of oneself from the body's organic life, including hair, was central to this idea of hygiene (ibid.). Additionally, trends in fashion shifted to clothing that revealed more of the woman's hairy parts, and soon women's magazines began to promote hairless limbs as a necessary requisite for female beauty (ibid.: 78-79). For a while, hair removal by x-ray became a popular means to stay beautiful amongst American women; much less complicated than the painful multiple-needle electrolysis or short-lived shaving efforts (ibid.: 81-88). To put this cultural interpretation of "body hair as gender-inverted-excessiveness" into perspective, the first records of hair removal in the United States that Herzig finds are about how the settlers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century found the native Indian body to be mysteriously hairless. It was an academic puzzle whether the hairlessness was due to strange hair-picking practices or if the Indians simply failed to develop body hair when reaching puberty. Both possible reasons were interpreted as an indication of the Indians relative inferior position as underdeveloped and savage to the white, hairy, reasonable man (Hollerup 2016b: 3, Herzig 2015: 19-27). Thus, Herzig shows us that body hair removal is

contingent and related to several other issues of relative human positioning and justifications, as class, gender and race.<sup>6</sup>

So far, so good: Today, in this place of the world, the gendered identity “woman” seems to be related to the practice of regularly removing body hairs from specific places on one’s body. But how does it work in practice – how is this cultural distribution of norms invisibly and unnoticeable obtained into my intimate sphere? Here, a Foucauldian perspective may help to explain how disciplinary mechanisms of perceived surveillance affect body hair practices (Foucault 2009: 20). Disciplinary power is often illustrated by the architecture of the Panopticon prison: a circular construction of cells with a watching tower in the middle. The inmates are isolated from each other and are not able to see if they are being watched at any given moment. However, they are aware of the possibility of being watched from the tower. Power is a) visible and b) unverifiable. Once the technology is constructed, no guard is actually needed in the tower, and the inmates become the real bearers of the system (Foucault 1991: 201-202).

In this way, disciplinary mechanisms create autoregulation in the intimate sphere – amongst Panopticon’s prisoners as well as amongst women, who need to make themselves up to be recognised as such in the eyes of society (Black & Sharma 2001). Sandra Bartky (1997: 94) argues that the beauty system of women is regulated like this to produce the docile bodies that facilitate patriarchy. The time and effort put into being recognised as a beautiful female should be regarded as valuable resources. The beauty work is legitimised by the narrative of individuality and freedom, the so-called “Beauty Myth” (Wolf 1990). What women do in the name of beauty may be disguised under the illusion of free choice, but it is, in fact, a conformation to normative femininity as dictated by the disembodied patriarchal gaze (Bartky 1997: 100, 102-103, Hollerup 2016a: 9-10). The experience of being watched derives from the heavy exposure of images of objectified women in the public and of normative stances on the female body that are dispersed in society. In this sense, the media becomes the visible expression of power; the guarding tower that is seen by Foucault’s inmates. As Foucault also notes, the machinery of the Panopticon is extremely efficient due to its impersonal nature (1991: 202). There is no need for a sovereign king to execute this form of power, the position in the tower can be taken by any anonymous and temporary observer. The woman will

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<sup>6</sup> Note how the dominating body hair ideal in the expanding Western world today is easier, cheaper and less painful to obtain when your genetics are disposed for blonde, light and soft body hairs.

regulate herself automatically based on the anxiety for being punished, no matter whether a concrete observer actually observes and judges you from a normative patriarchal gaze. Bartky argues that this experienced existential need for intimate self-modification produces a shared low self-esteem amongst women and enforces women's inferior position in society at large, for example in the labour market (ibid.). In the production of docile bodies, culture is intimately incorporated into bodily practices, a working of power through emotions – effective self-regulation through discipline and governmentality; the regulation of a mass of people by conceptualising them as *a* people – “the women” people (Davies 2004: 50).

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Now we are at the stage of the journey where we arrive at the *Hairy Stories*. The reader may sense how the Foucauldian school of thought, with its weight on power and its critical (one might say cynical) stance, has influenced the first film in the series, *True Body* (Hollerup 2016). This first film was an attempt to break the boundary of my own intimate through a performative documentary.

**True Body. 2016, 5:14 min.**

In *True Body* we see a full-body shaving. First, we see a leg, then a toe, a stomach, an armpit. A person is shaving herself from top to toe, like in a performance. The shaving scene is held in cold colours, lit by the sharp daylight from the windows in the clinical, white tiled common-shower. The shaving scene is cut together with a complimentary scene from a sauna, where four female bodies are sitting together wrapped in towels. The light and the colours from the sauna are warm. The women eat grapes and drink champagne while they talk about their experiences with body hair removal. The conversation from the sauna goes across the two scenes, mixing in with the harsh sounds of rhythmical shaving. A razor blade is continuously moving across skin, carving off the hair. After the body has been shaved, the shaving woman cuts off her head hair and shaves her scalp. Blood floats from behind the ear. The film ends with her standing and staring at the camera with a bald head. The question posed by the film is framed by one of the women in the sauna. What is a “true” female body actually?

We wanted to audio-visually create a link between our, the filmmakers', own cultural unconscious and a concrete practice: the shaving of body hair. It was a transgressing of own intimate boundaries, in a double sense: first, as a ‘domestic ethnography’ (Renov 2004) looking inwards instead of



outwards through the means of the performance; second, by using myself and my own physical body as the object of the camera, meaning also spending many hours editing clips with the main character being myself. Not as a person, but as a body, putting the anthropologist's double perspective at the edge (Nichols 1994: 96-102).

We gathered four women to sit in a sauna and eat grapes and talk about experiences with body hair, and we planned the performative shaving in the shower room – if it weren't for the film, none of this would have happened. However, the performance is still connected to a historical world: *True Body*'s ethnographic knowledge claim partly lies in the unscripted sauna conversation, and partly it is existentially situated in the body of the performer (ibid.). The film's target is the viewer response. In this case, the shaving of the head hair defamiliarises the shaving practice as such. Also, the way the head- and body shaving happens; rash and ungentle, gives the impression of interior-felt compulsion. The strangeness of the unexpected opens a window for a heightened awareness of the configurations of meanings around a topic or practice (ibid.: 99). In contrast, the conversation between the women in the sauna is kind and trusting, representing an opportunity of salvation in unison. The contrast between the scenes contributes to a narrative where a capitalistic ideal of freely chosen femininity is juxtaposed with an experiential compulsion.

Until this point in *Hairy Stories*, I had only looked at how to break the boundary of intimacy in a culture I was part of myself. But the need for new methods arose: viewer feedback on *True Body* and the project of body hair at large pointed towards another experiential dimension of body hair, that the film failed to contain: Wellness. The pleasure of smooth legs. How feeling feminine can make you feel empowered and spirited.

This perspective is represented in *Reshaping the Female Body* (Davies 2004), a book about body modifications amongst women. Here sociologist Kathy Davies criticises critical beauty theory with point of departure in her well educated, feminist friend, who wanted a plastic surgery. Davies asks, how does this make sense in the light of sociological theory? What are feminist scholars missing here? She argues that sociologists tend to reduce the women to cultural dopes, overlooking how women accommodate and negotiate the ideals in real life practice. The specific woman's relationship to her body is too often neglected (ibid. 49). Davies argues that this is theoretically and ethically problematic and encourages researches to recast women as agents, explore their lived relationship to their bodies and analyse the contradictions that may appear instead of submitting them to 'false consciousness' (ibid.: 56-58). Women's actions are active,

meaningful solutions, rather than compliance to an ideological system. And when moral ambiguity appears in the field, it should be taken seriously that women can, at the same time, both legitimise and criticise own decisions. It doesn't have to be either-or. I've tried to bring this focus on embodiment and openness towards contradictions with me in the making of the second film, *Body Hair*.

**Body Hair. 2017, 15:51 min.**

In *Body Hair* we meet women in Palestine, who help each other with hair removal in their private homes. The point of narrative view is from the side of a Danish woman who seems to be curious about Palestinian body hair removal. Her camera follows Yasmin, who first goes to see her friend (blinded). They heat a can of green wax and do hair removal in the couch, on themselves and each other. Then Yasmin goes to another friend, (blinded), who is visiting her mother. The mother has worked as a cosmetologist and teaches (blinded) how to make a yellow facial mask that, amongst other things, removes the hair from the face. The film ends out with a turn of perspective, where Yasmin takes the camera and asks the Danish woman how she does with her body hair. In between the meetings between women, we see images of hairy plants, a hairy horse and close-ups of anonymous hair removals.

*Body Hair* is filmed in Palestine during a three-week camp for Danish and Palestinian filmmakers, arranged by Aarhus Film Workshop and FilmLab Palestine. It explores women's lived relationship to body hair in a political tense world. *Body Hair*'s theoretical approach to body hair is to see the manipulation of one own's physical appearance as a bodily experience, rather than treating the body as a representation of power disconnected from the actual body (Davies 2004, Ucock 2005: 292). It also evolves around the methodological question: How do I get access to film hair removal practices in a place where it is highly tabooed, and the cultural 'packaging' of gender, religion and public/private divide is totally different from my own? The solution was to highlight the sociality of body hair removal. Positionally speaking, I am (inevitably) present in the narrative, but it's not about me: This is a cultural setting far away from my own.

When I moved away from the idea of body hair removal as the production of docile bodies, the social embeddedness of hair removal and the camera's role in filming the intimate started to appear in a different way than it had done during the filming of the highly scripted *True Body*. During the three weeks of filming in Ramallah, I was overwhelmed with issues of context: Body hair is not just body hair. I experienced that hair removal amongst women in Palestine was easy to talk about, but

almost impossible to film. Most of the women I met in Palestine were eager to share stories and techniques, but there was heavy worrying amongst the salon owners (and their husbands) that it would have serious consequences for themselves and their business if they participated in the filming. The taboo was also heavily gender-based. In a men's salon in Ramallah, I could film whatever I liked – faces, conversations, insults of hairy women, everything – if I just promised not to mix the images with images of women. It seemed like the camera's gaze on a female body could potentially destroy the fragile and valuable intimacy of the woman, not only affecting her and her family's honour but even also contaminating other people who appeared in the same film. Later, the issues of context re-actualised themselves, when the film was shown during Palestine Film Days in a Danish cinema. As I will get back to in the third chapter, the screening of *Body Hair* was interpreted by some in the, mainly Palestinian, audience as really disturbing to the narrative of Palestine as a country in conflict with Israel.

The experiences I'd had in Palestine and at home with *Body Hair* highlighted the significance of the social, spatial, economic and cultural context when filming body hair and intimacy. The third film, *Salon*, is therefore situated in a cultural setting that is my own and yet not at all; a beauty salon in Aarhus that specialises in hair removal with wax and sugaring techniques. To give a short context to the field, the customers are mainly women of age 17 to 60. The most popular service is, without comparison, the Brazilian wax, a treatment that removes the hair on the genitals. Initially I found this particular place interesting for my intimacy studies because I've found that touching another persons' genitals is a gesture that is understood as intimate in many contexts, and yet, I kept meeting people whom I perceived to be bodily shy who regularly paid for the treatment in this specific salon. The film is thus concerned with the theoretical question: how is intimacy dealt with in a capitalistic context with focus on production? And methodologically, it's focused on how to get access to a social swing door situation and depict the social setting that facilitates the coding of genital touching as non-intimate.

**Salon. 2017, 6 min.**

In *Salon* we see a piece of skin with body hairs in an extreme-close-up shot. A nail enters the image, and a cut brings us into the next frame, where we see a hand in a glove smearing wax onto a vagina. The conversation starts: "I'm off work tomorrow", a female voice says. "That's nice, what are you doing then?", another replies. The waxing is filmed entirely in close-ups or closer framings. We hear the two women, the customer and the treater, talk about business plans, Botox

and eczema. The camera has a steady, observing presence. The editing is experimental and disruptive, sometimes replaying or slowing down movements, zooming in or counter posing several images in one frame. At one point the camera holder enters the conversation, disclosing her embodied presence by voice. After the client's anus is waxed, the treatment is done: "I can go without panties now", the customer says. "Voilà": A medium shot ends the sequence, showing the result: A hairless, naked lower body with irritated skin around the genital parts being brought down towards the floor by the mechanical couch.

I conducted a classic fieldwork as a preparation for the filming to understand the contextual implications for intimacy as located in this special configuration between capitalism, gender norms, bodies and touches. The fieldwork facilitated my access to filming a regular customer and moved me away from my first assumption that it must be intimate to have a Brazilian wax done. After a dozen sessions of observation and informal interviews, and a few instances of participant observation where I had my own legs waxed, I found that the waxing treatment is facilitated by a verbal communication style and the accommodation of treatment rooms that works to take away intimacy from the touching-situation.<sup>7</sup> The waxing could not have been without it, or, at least, would have been something fundamentally different without it. Originally, I had thought to de-socialise the context of waxing by not including conversations, but I felt the conversational context was what enabled the waxing to be done without being intimate. Aesthetically, the images in *Salon* are made with concern to forefront the materiality of body hair removal. The aesthetics becomes knowledge creating, because the nature of the images frames the waxing narrowly, pinpointing the action as it is: is it intimate to have a hand removing a strip of wax on a vagina? Maybe it is more intimate to watch than to do? And what kind of knowledge about waxing is produced, if I intensify it on the editing board by replaying the moment of hair removal three times?

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<sup>7</sup> Noteworthy, me introducing a researcher and a camera in the situation, somehow seemed to add intimacy again

*Summary chapter 2*

In this chapter, I have laid out a set of theoretical perspectives on body hair and explained how they feed into the production of *Hairy Stories*. In *True Body* I started out with a Foucauldian-inspired approach to body hair, taking a critical stance to cultural imperative to remove body hair, based on my own bodily experiences. Then I turned the camera away from myself and moved on to a cultural context that was very far from my own, in Palestine. Here I made *Body Hair*, a film that highlights the experiential dimensions of body hair removal. The making of this film put focus on issues of context and underlined how intimacy is constructed culturally in the concrete situation. To explore this further, I ended up doing a fieldwork in a wax salon in Aarhus. Here I got a valuable insight in how the waxing situation is shaped by the treator, who takes out intimacy of it by talking in a specific way. These insights shaped the production of the film *Salon*.

### 3. What can we see from up close?

How can a camera-driven exploration of body hair help us to understand what the intimate is? In this final chapter, I discuss what happens with what we thought we knew about intimacy when we go up close on body hair. The chapter also relates to issues of representation.

#### A real close look

The title of this paper is “Up Close: About the Film Trilogy *Hairy Stories* and Intimacy in Anthropological Filmmaking”. The “up close” entails that the project takes its point of departure in a movement inwards, towards the body. A narrow frame is a narrative choice, because the story told by an image depends on how it is framed. A close-up – whether epistemological or aesthetic – enables you to see some things clearer whilst leaving others out. This can be deliberating: As Marks also puts it, the symbolic order of language falls apart when we engage in materiality, because we stop to see the material as part of an object with a fixed cultural meaning (Marks 2002: xi-xii, Paldam 2016: 68). The direct imminence of a material can open our perspectives on the categories it is part of. In this chapter I will try to figure out what kind of new horizons that have emerged because of my close-up on body hair.

First, I argue that *Hairy Stories*' close-up on body hair tells us that the boundary between the intimate and the public is culturally conditioned. The cultural contingency of the intimate is best seen empirically in *Hairy Stories* when there is a direct clash between where the boundaries to the intimate is situated.

My first example of this is Palestine based *Body Hair* and the audience response I've received on it. In *Body Hair*, the case is that a Danish woman's configuration of intimacy is the starting point for a film about body hair, which, at Palestinian Film days in Aarhus, is screened to an audience with a very different configuration of the boundary to the intimate.<sup>8</sup> After the screening, in the following Q&A, an intense discussion arose. Some in the audience even thought the film must have been paid for by Israelis to cast a negative light on Palestinians.<sup>9</sup> I was quite surprised and wanted to get a better grip of what was going on amongst the audience, so I arranged

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<sup>8</sup> Most of the audience had an Arab heritage.

<sup>9</sup> Despite that the pro-Palestinian women, who were in the film, liked it very much.

for an interview with one of the organisers behind the screening. She had the ‘double perspective’ of a Palestinian background and a life spent in Denmark, and explained it like this:

We have a much larger case to fight for, with the land and the thing with Israel. So, when you focus on social issues within the Palestinian population, we don’t think it is important. And then you start to wonder, how come you are showing the Palestinians like this?

(Transcription from interview)

The festival organiser expresses that she wouldn’t have had a problem with a film from Denmark about body hair, but she feels that a focus on body hair practices was “matter out of place” in the narrative she wants to promote about Palestine. Not only because of the actual matter, hair, itself, but because of its context: The hair we see in *Body Hair* is in a tense world with a very fixed prevailing understanding of politics as the fight over land and rights with Israel.<sup>10</sup>

In chapter two, I used Mary Douglas to show why body hair, as a matter out of place, can be felt like a threat to a cultural system: It threatens with a breakdown, because it is classificatory dirt to the structure (Douglas 1966: 36). Douglas mentions *secular defilement* as a social strategy to keep “matter out of place” out of place (ibid.: 30-41). Through defilement, the articulation of a distance, the matter is pushed out of the cultural system. This would explain why the audience claimed I must have been paid into give a negative image of Palestinian women. The alternative to this rejection, this cultural ascribing of dirt (corruption) to my work, would have been to include body hair removal in the cultural pattern, affecting a more fundamental change on the gender-biased division between what is spoken about and what isn’t (ibid.: 41).<sup>11</sup> The rules for discourse on female bodies in Palestine are reflected in this quote from *Body Hair*:

- For us to talk about our bodies, unfortunately (...) I write more about resistance. And about the motherland and longing and love. But I’ve never written about the woman’s body (...) And her relationship with her body, because...
- It’s always the man’s relationship with the woman’s body. In our culture the woman doesn’t have a relationship with her own body.

(Body Hair, 08:52 min.)

Here, (blinded) and her mother talk about how they see a strong cultural gender-based pattern in the Arab world that decides how bodies can be approached, and by whom. A woman who writes about

<sup>10</sup> This contrasts with my understanding of politics in the previous chapter, where I argued that body hair culture can be seen as expressions of gender, class and racial structures in society, and therefore is political. I return to the feministic personal-as-politics paradigm later in this chapter.

<sup>11</sup> For comparison, my film was shown together with a dramatic documentary about honor killing that went by relatively unnoticed – it was less problematic to the context of the public and politics.

a female body, or a woman who makes a film where women walk about the relationship to their own bodies, is a clear break with this pattern.

The transgression is thus double. There is the transgression of introducing what is seen as an intimate topic (body hair on women's bodies) to a political forum (the public cinema) through the camera, and there is the transgression of seeing the unseen in the first place – to see a woman's body with a woman's eye. I would say this last transgressing is also conditioned by the camera, because the camera works as a catalyst to create a space where the invisible can be spoken about, as I talked about in chapter one with reference to Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch. Thus, the close-up on body hair is, in this case, the reason we learn something about a cultural definition of intimacy that tells us more about the cultural system it is part of. In turn, we also see how the cultural system conditions what body hair is – in this case, dirty on women and definitely not as part of the nation's narrative about itself.

The cultural context of what happened in the cinema is presumably even more complex than I am aware of. Religiously explained rules about women's head hair makes a special spot of cultural unison across the borders between Israel and Palestine. As Loewenthal and Solaim argue, hair covering is a central issue for both Muslim and Jewish women in relation to identity development, spirituality and social relations with men (2016: 164-168). Some Muslim women cover their hair with a veil and some orthodox Jewish women shave off their hair and wear a *sheitel*, a religious wig, after marriage (ibid.). Here goes the limit of my project, but one may speculate whether deeper cultural significances of hair could help explain the spectators' relation to what they saw on the screen.

Next, making *Salon* in my own hometown broadened my understanding of how the cultural boundaries of the intimate differ also within a Danish context. It is not about "Arab" versus "Western" intimacy; it appears that boundaries of intimacy are negotiable and situational on a much smaller scale. During the fieldwork in the salon, I found that the boundary of intimacy was configured situationally, in the context of a business setting. The treater skilfully reconfigured the boundary of the intimate when it comes to nudity and touch by crossing it in conversation. I came to see the reconfiguration as a social technique that very much relied on the treater's storytelling, where she repeatedly embarrassed herself in a non-embarrassed way. She told dramatic stories from her life in a fun and light narration, often in direct contrast to the heaviness of the story – and in a tone of voice in direct contrast to the potentially awkward ambience around having a vagina waxed.



Regularly, when I wrote out my fieldnotes at home, the transcription of what had actually been said seemed totally off the experience I'd had in the salon. There was something essential about the way things were being said, that affected the situation in a significant way. I realised that I had to change my plans for filming, so they would also include the conversation between customer and treater.

Interestingly, when I did the actual filming of the Brazilian wax, the presence of the camera seemed to disturb the social configuration of intimacy in the room. Both the customer and the treater were unusually silent in the beginning.<sup>12</sup> Maybe they momentarily felt the camera created a bridge into another kind of room, where the boundaries of intimacy are configured to include genital waxing as an intimate practice? Now, *Salon* has been screened a few times in higher education facilities, and the audience often finds it transgressive to watch: The film is interpreted as crossing the boundary of the intimate in the spectating situation. This makes sense, because at the moment of screening, the room the audience is in, and the position they are at, have a different configuration of intimacy. The audience haven't had the chance to negotiate the conditions of intimacy amongst themselves, in their own situated social reality, in the same way as the wax treater, the wax client and I did in the filming situation. In other words, the narrow frame of the film doesn't accommodate the contextual modifiers of genital waxing in the same way as reality did.

A close-up on body hair can thus potentially put a sense of intimacy into the relation between spectator and film in a post-filmic reality. In the salon we learn that body hair removal isn't necessarily intimate. However, in the filming situation, the presence of a distanced observer (the potential spectator) momentarily disturbs the pre-filmic and filmic reality and its local configuration of intimacy. What wasn't intimate suddenly becomes it, because another, non-present part steps into the social reality. In addition, during screening of a final film, the spectator may experience an intimacy that is disconnected to the film's diegesis, but instead happens in the film's post-filmic reality, in the space between her and the screen, or her and the other spectators. This can be awkward and unpleasant, because the condition of nearness is sudden and isn't negotiated as it would normally be in a social situation.

Second, I argue that the camera's superior optic perception endorses us with a more-than-human perspective that in itself opens for a reflection upon the significance of body hair. One may say that in filmmaking, the cultural conditioning of vision is paired with the camera's technological conditioning of vision. Visual anthropologist Christian Suhr even talks about the camera as a third

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<sup>12</sup> This was not the case on an earlier observation with same customer, without the camera.

actor of knowledge creation; a technological device that sometimes challenges the filmmaker's project with its own mechanical agenda (2015: 1-5). A macro lens enhances the world drastically and challenges the boundary between the seen and the invisible in a physical way; transgressing human vision through its optics. In 1923, Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov talks about this as the potential of the 'kino eye'; the camera that transcends the shortcomings of the human eye (1984 [1923]: 14). Vertov envisions that the kino eye's flexible perspective can help us access a truth above human imagination; laying the grounds for a *Kino Pravda*, a cinema of Truth that can expand human social consciousness and support the realisation of communist society (ibid.: 21). But, whereas for Vertov, the promises of a cinematically induced Utopia mostly bounded in the mobility of the camera, in our case, an aesthetics of intimacy (as understood as nearness) can use the lenses' transgression of the seen to access new truths through materiality. This is what I try to do in *Salon*, where intimacy comes in as an aesthetic of extreme physical closeness to body hair. I filmed them with a macro lens that allows me to go super-close-up on the hairs and keep them in focus in an extremely close filming distance. The hairs we see in *Salon* have an imminent materiality that almost helps them escape the symbolic order of significance: When the patterns on the skin and the structure of the hair is visible, they are not even interpreted as body hair. They are just perceived as matter. Marks points to this as one of the ethical consequences of a haptic visuality: When filmmakers chose an aesthetics with emphasis on the partial and the material, we transcend the categories of the language and the symbol order of culture that it supports. The symbolic breakdown opens a window for political change, because it becomes possible to grasp and comprehend in a new way (Marks 2002: xi-xii, Paldam 2016: 68). This relates to *New Materialism* in documentary filmmaking and its focus on multispecies relations (Kara & Thain 2014: 187). New Materialism aims to create high sensorial potency in the images, so that the cinematic subjectivation becomes a "life form" in its own rather than a representation of reality. The spectator is introduced to a new way of being with hairs through the camera, beyond human perception (ibid.).

In the editing, I enhanced the sensorial qualities of the filmic material in a kind of Eisensteinian intellectual montage, aiming to affect the viewing situation out from an intention to give attentional priority to the material aspects of hair removal (Eisenstein 1963). For example, the split screen enhances the sensuous quality of the images, whilst counteracting any tendency to narrative integration. The intention is to make people pay attention to the structural physical qualities of what is seen and heard. Slowing down, zooming in, playbacks, delinking sound and images, extreme close-ups and jump cuts are all techniques that disturb common sense perception.

These techniques can also be classified as part of a haptic visuality, because they create a disturbance that prevents us from catching the focal object. In this way, also distorted editing helps what is seen to escape identification with a category that we have an opinion about (Marks 2002: xi-xxi, Paldam 2016).

In *Salon*, optical technology and software becomes a means to transcend the boundary of the seen and the invisible. The extreme close-up on body hair opens a new world beyond human perception, defamiliarising the cultural significances we know from our usual perceptual perspective. As spectators, we are buried in materiality of hair and distanced to how it fits in the symbolic order, of 'male' versus 'female', 'cultural versus 'natural'. An enhanced organic tactility in the image can also be scary and disturbing, because it reminds us that everything is perishable: "*Materiality is mortality*", Marks says; "*Symbolization, or the abstraction of communication, is to hold mortality at bay.*" (2002: xi). In the extreme close-up, body hair and skin become carnal to a previously unknown degree. The viewer is engaged in an embodied relation with what is seen, rather than an intellectual, distanced understanding of matter.

Both the examples above show us that when we go close to something that is usually invisible with a camera, we may break physical and cultural boundaries of the seen. This can cause a reaction of intimacy within those who watch the films afterwards. There is thus not only intimacy in the pre-filmic and filmic reality. With reference to Sobchack's theory of the spectator as co-constitutive for the cinematic space (Elsaesser & Hagener 2015: 126), we may speculate whether the "active element" of intimacy in *Hairy Stories* lies just as much here. Maybe the films are only truly about intimacy in the moment someone watches them and are bodily affected by them.

### **Intimate audiovisuality as representational ethics**

In this last passage I will draw a perspective to representational practice within visual anthropology. I argue that a close-up on body hair can cast light on the *anthropological unconscious*, defined by Nichols as a tendency in observational ethnographic filmmaking to overlook whiteness, maleness, the embodied gaze; the discourse of science and the spectator (1994: 65). This relates to a feministic ethics of representation, because it articulates a critique of critical distance as an all-encompassing ideal in science. The critical distance neglects that some things can only be seen if the one who sees is located *inside* the situation.

In the canon of anthropology, the debate around representational practice is associated to the *crisis of representation* (Marcus & Fisher 1989) and the debate around *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus 1986). The crisis designates a disciplinary moment of heightened awareness, partly caused by the rise of postcolonial and feminist voices. Those who traditionally had been looked at started to speak up and look back at anthropology as a discourse of power. In the below, I will use film theorist Bill Nichols and feminist sociologist Donna Haraway to articulate a critique of critical distance. I situate *Hairy Stories* with them rather than *Writing Culture*, because they address the act of looking, the gaze, as a point of departure for epistemological critique.

Filmmaker Kay Donovan argues there is a basic ethical engagement towards the other in all representational practice, including documentary filmmaking (2012: 345). By taking up the role of the storyteller, the filmmaker transfers her interpretation of a world to an argument about it that helps the spectators to make sense of it, thus contributing to the discourses around the topic of the film. In this way, filmmaking is also the engagement in an ethical discourse (ibid.). Intimacy as an audio-visual method is near distance and anti-objective in the sense of being inherent to the, per definition, subjective relation. This emphasises the embodiment of the filmmaker, that functions as an important co-constituent of the filming situation. But, looking to literature, it is contested to which extent the filmmaker should have an explicit, acknowledged presence in the film's diegesis. For example, art critic Hall Foster warns anthropologists who work artistically to overidentify or disidentify with their objects of study (1999: 180-204). Foster addresses what he sees as an 'artist envy' within anthropology, where the artist becomes an ideal for formal reflexivity (ibid: 180). An anthropologist with artist envy self-idealises herself as an artistic interpreter of the cultural text, distancing herself from disciplinary methodological prescriptions that ensures critical distance (ibid.). With this follows a risk to overidentify or disidentify with the other (ibid.: 203). Foster argues that formal reflexivity is a two-sided coin that needs to be balanced: Frame the framer but be careful with pronouncing the self in a way that obscures the other (ibid.). He thinks that critical distance should be held highly as an ideal for representational practice.

Admittedly, in *Hairy Stories*, there isn't always much distance between the one who looks and the one who is looked upon. The whole project grew out of my bodily experiences and an attempt to answer the methodological question: How do I communicate the intensity of the experienced cultural coding of body hair in my own culture? And my answer was at first, in *True Body*, to do it through a performance with my own body. In fact, even though *Body Hair* and *Salon*

have a higher degree of otherness, I have an explicit embodied presence in all three films on-screen. This is a way to frame the framer, but a valid question considering Foster's critique of artistic anthropology would be if I'm too close to the subject; too over pronounced in the productions. Some would probably say that is the case. However, it can also be argued that nearness between the representor and the represented is a good thing. For example, film theorist Bill Nichols argues that looking at one's own culture represents a democratisation of the representational act (1994: 64). The divide between a professionalised "we" that investigates a mute "they" erodes. The reversed gaze troubles the authority of representation in anthropology and observational filmmaking, because most ethnographic filmmaking is facilitated by a presupposition that the cultures are fundamentally separated (ibid.: 63-65). They rest on a boundary between "here" and "there" that can only be passed by the principles of fieldwork and location filming, and this gives the visual anthropologist authority to speak on behalf of the others (ibid.: 67). Nichols suggests that when these boundaries are blurred, as in *Hairy Stories*, the representation is more ethically sound. There is less unconscious pretence of infinite anthropological privilege, resting on distance and unawareness of the body of the researcher (ibid.: 65). Donna Haraway talks further about the presumption of distance as an unethical 'God Trick' of science (1988: 582-583). Scientific distance enables inscription and definition of bodies without responsibility, with a gaze that sees whilst avoiding being seen itself, represents without being represented (ibid.). I suggest this also corresponds to the critical distance of classic ethnographic cinema, as I earlier referred to with reference to an observational camera style, and its aim to reduce the camera's presence as much as possible. As mentioned in chapter one, in *Hairy Stories* the camerawork is often done with the aim of physical, social and epistemological nearness between the filmmaker and the film. In this way, the camera is positioned as a catalyst for what is seen in the filmed. Therefore, I also chose to frame the framer within the films' diegesis by leaving traces of myself in the finished film. It is not a camera that observes from nowhere; it is held by a particular breathing body with a limited vision. This is in line with a feminist objectivity, defined by Haraway as a acknowledged situated, partial view in scientific research. All eyes belong to a body, and therefore knowledge claims are only responsible if they are easily locatable in an explicitly positioned enunciator (ibid.: 583).

A feminist representational agenda also shows itself in *Hairy Stories* in other ways. For example, the haptics replicate the ideal of partiality in the films' aesthetics, and the topic of body hair is near to the body and has significant gender dimensions. When you film body hair, you implicitly take an ethical stance that also the personal is worth watching and discussing in the public

domain of the cinema, and in this sense, a political matter. The “personal as politics” derives from a method of everyday reflexivity, which is historically connected to the 1970s women’s movement. The women’s movement reinterpreted what was earlier thought of as purely private matters in the intimate sphere of the family, such as childcaring, housekeeping and the women’s roles attached to these, into political issues (Nichols 1991: 64, Hollerup 2016a: 7). When the gendered experiences were taken out in the public from the zone of the private, it appeared that gender roles are structurally configured and have a significant dimension of power to them. Making films about body hair replicates this strategy and is thus also in this way an ethical stance towards feministic representational practice: It implicitly claims that we need to take intimate matters seriously, and we are better capable of representing them, if we are situated close to them.

In this way, the *Hairy Stories* project locates itself amongst many other and diverse artistic projects, where a concrete body is used to articulate a political argument about larger structures of gender and economy. Within a Danish context, the reader may be familiar with the *kussomat* machine; a chair with a built-in camera that can photograph women’s genitals, or body positivist performers; such as stand-up comedian Sofie Hagen ([kussomat.dk](http://kussomat.dk), [sofiehagen.dk](http://sofiehagen.dk)). The so-called GirlSquad group is another recent example, where three semi-famous women take sexualised self-portraits to make a statement about how women own their own sexuality and should capitalise upon it, if they want to (Krarup et al. 2017). The political messages of these examples are different, but they share the fact that they address gendered experiences from a speaking position within concrete bodies. In this way, they produce knowledge and trouble within existing cultural ideas from a position far away from critical distance.

A similar critique is articulated in *Hairy Stories*, where it appears that we who want to identify with a cultural identity as women, are, in some sense, the same across our isolated bubbles of intimate spheres. In Palestine, in anthropology class and in the waxing salon: We all experience a cultural gendered prescription for how it is appropriate to wear our body hair. And we are also different. We deal with the norms in different ways, following different strategies: Yasmin removes hair all over her body, I feel simultaneously ashamed and empowered when I don’t, (blinded) uses her body hair as a lifehack to avoid unwanted attention on the beach, the wax salon client has her vagina waxed, so that she can meet men romantically after a divorce, and the wax treater makes a business out of helping women to feel like real women in the eyes of society.

We are the same, but different – with a close-up on body hair, we learn that we are all exposed to and affected by the norm of a hairless female body, but we just deal with it differently. In this way, the close-up teaches us that there is no such thing as a “natural body”, because no matter how you do with it, your actions inevitably relate to cultural ideas.

### *Summary chapter 3*

In this chapter, I have shown how the camera breaks invisibility around body hair through the close-up. The close-up is thus understood epistemologically as reflexivity of everyday practices, spilling into a catalyst camera style, and aesthetically as near distance haptic visuality. A close-up on body hair challenges what can be seen and what can't be seen, culturally as well as physically, and in this it makes the boundary to the intimate appear in filmic and post-filmic realities. With departure in my own body, I experiment with and erode the here/there and us/them divide in ethnographic filmmaking, ascribing to a feminist ethics of representation, where the perspective is explicitly limited and partial. Being up close (in more than one way) shows us something about body hair, that would have been invisible from a critical distance.

## Conclusion

Intimacy does not only appear as a pre-filmic topic in anthropological filmmaking (Jerslev 2004: 42). Intimacy may also appear in the filming situation as nearness between a filmmaker and the filmed, and I suggest that this is best facilitated by a catalyst, creative camera. Further, intimacy can appear in the post-filmic cinematic space, as the result of near-distant or haptic audiovisuality that engages the spectator bodily into the film. This can create a sense of possibly unpleasant nearness to the film and to the other spectators in the cinema, who haven't taken part of the negotiations around intimacy that went on pre-filmically. A camera-driven exploration of body hair contributes to our understanding of the intimate by pointing to its contingency. As Besnier rightly points to, intimacy means nothing independent of its context – it can best be understood as a discursive phenomenon that, once established, help people to categorise and navigate in the social world (2015: 109). *Hairy Stories* shows us that something as imminent as body hair always will be cultural. Body hair is interpreted through cultural visions that define the categories of intimate/public, male/female and natural/cultural and situate body hair in relation to them. If the categorisation is transgressed (by a filmmaker, for example) hair can be culturally contaminating. The camera has an ability to catalyse this kind of cultural meanings: To make the boundaries visible. Not only by its macro optics that can make hair look like an alien lifeform. Also, the camera's very presence in a room in the filming situation and its display of the unseen in the screening situation affect visibility.

Investigating body hair as a young woman in 2018 is to ascribe to a situated and partial view and thus a feminist ethics of representation. My own body is part of my research object, eroding the divide between the one who sees and the one who is looked upon in a kind of epistemological close-up. At the same time, there is a movement outwards in the trilogy. Whereas *True Body* starts from the innermost position of the researcher's concrete body, *Body Hair* moves outwards to another cultural context, looking at body hair as it is situated in concrete relationships between a mother and daughter and friends, in their private homes in Palestine. *Salon* takes the significance of contextuality to a new level by erasing geographical distance and still managing to present substantial otherness. If I could develop this project from here on, I would go to even further away from myself to see what we can possibly learn about intimacy, gender and bodies when hair is situated in a context of masculinity. I imagine a film about bald men who wear wigs or have lots of hair on their backs. However, for now I conclude with a critique of critical distance and objectivity as ultimate answers to how to know scientifically: Certain things can only be seen from up close.



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## Appendix 1: Hairy Stories – Curriculum Vitae

This is an overview of who are responsible for the films and where they have been screened.

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### ***True Body, 2016. 5:14 min.***

Instructed, produced and edited by Louise Hollerup, Shannon Turner and Maja Byriel  
Produced in Eye & Mind, Laboratory for Visual Anthropology

#### **2016**

- March 23<sup>rd</sup>. Moesgård museum, short talk and screening for students in anthropology during the course *Antropologisk Vidensformidling*

#### **2017**

- 29<sup>th</sup> March to April 1<sup>st</sup> – RAI Film Festival, Bristol, UK (library access during the festival)
  - May 19<sup>th</sup> – Screening in loops at Disko Dusken. A body hair event organized by F16. Dome of Visions
  - December 7<sup>th</sup> – Guest teacher and screening at a sexuality course on psychology, master level, AU
  - December 8<sup>th</sup> – Guest teacher and screening at the documentary class, Nordiska Folkhögskolan, Kungälv (Sweden)
  - December 14<sup>th</sup> – Talk and screening at Gendering in Research, Interacting Minds Center, AU
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### ***Body Hair, 2017. 15:51. Palestine/Denmark***

Instructed, filmed and edited by Louise Hollerup  
Produced by Yasmin Zaher, Aarhus Film Workshop and FilmLab Palestine

#### **2017**

- April 29th - Screening and Q&A at Palestine Film Days. East of Eden (Øst for Paradis), Aarhus
- April 25th – Screening at a Palestine event at Mellemfølkeligt Samvirke, Copenhagen
- June 5th – Screening at Common Fridaybar, an event for filmmakers in Aarhus. Moesgård

- May 19th – Screening in loops, Disko Dusken. Body hair event organized by F16. Dome of Visions
  - December 7<sup>th</sup> – Guest teacher and screening at a sexuality course on psychology, master level, AU
  - December 8<sup>th</sup> – Guest teacher and screening at the documentary class, Nordiska Folkhögskolan, Kungälv (Sweden)
  - December 14<sup>th</sup> – Talk and screening at Gendering in Research, Interacting Minds Center, AU
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### ***Salon, 2017. 6 min. Denmark.***

Instructed, filmed, produced and edited by Louise Hollerup

#### **2017**

- December 7<sup>th</sup> – Guest teacher and screening at a sexuality course on psychology, master level, AU
  - December 8<sup>th</sup> – Guest teacher and screening at the documentary class, Nordiska Folkhögskolan, Kungälv (Sweden)
  - December 14<sup>th</sup> – Talk and screening at Gendering in Research, Interacting Minds Center, AU
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#### *Forthcoming*

- Talk and screening of all films for Sexuality Studies research group at AU <http://epicenter.au.dk/showevent/artikel/body-hair/>
- Talk and screening of all films for Aarhus Feminist Reading Group
- A website for the project is under construction, [www.hairy-stories.com](http://www.hairy-stories.com)