

Hamartía: from the Greek: error, mistake.

A moment in the dramaturgy of Greek tragedies: the hero – protagonist causes a fatal disturbance of the natural order. He is driven to it by a tragic mistake or a psychological motive. This error puts him at the mercy of almighty Fate. The hero, who takes responsibility for the disturbance, is drawn into a process of heroic suffering which drives him to madness or suicide, or to cathartic understanding and reconciliation.<http://www.dbnl.org>

HAMARTÍA *explanation by the maker*

Louis van Gasteren plays a central role in *Hamartía*. He had the courage to allow the maker frequent close access, but ultimately our meetings did not result in a film analyzing the oeuvre or the soul of the much honored filmmaker. Instead, it became a film focusing on my attempt to give shape to a theme. That's why it is called *Hamartía*.

This project started many years ago, when Louis entrusted me with his complete film archives. With his films, Louis had been unparalleled in documenting the turbulence that changed the Netherlands from a sleepy polder into a steaming kettle boiling over with social renewal. I didn't really know why he had chosen me as his archivist, but I felt it would give me a wonderful opportunity to make a documentary-like chronicle about upheaval in a society populated by inspired revolutionaries.

Louis van Gasteren was not only a razor-sharp observer of his era, he also played an important part in the turbulent developments since the 1950s. Needless to say, much had already happened in his life before that time, and I knew that he had been involved in a dramatic event during the German occupation. I was under the illusion, however, that I wouldn't have to pay a lot of attention to this much talked-of event. It was an exaggerated, even minor aspect of the phenomenon Van Gasteren in my eyes. Moreover, I had just completed a film about the Second World War. What I wanted to do now was to film a portrait of a remarkable man in his remarkable era.

Assisted by the editor Tom Rooduijn, a man who knew everything there was to know about Louis, I started to film my conversations with Louis. About his parents, about how he viewed humanity and the world, about his annoyances. And about his oeuvre. The latter inevitably evoked associations with the war, a subject I naively had thought I could leave on the sidelines.

The talks did not constitute true interviews – I continually felt how this strong director kept taking control. Whatever the subject, Louis always managed to frame his answers in such a way that the conversation went the way he wanted. So, after about three years I thought about discontinuing the project. I did not want to be a ghostwriter to Louis' autobiographical film. Also, I came to realize my uneasiness had to do with something else: I began to feel that from the very start Louis had wanted something specific from his archivist, something that had to do with the event I would have liked more or less to ignore. Was it possible that my film was meant to relegate the tragic incident in 1943 to the past forever?

The sideline became the backbone of this film, the war incident became more and more prominent. When that appeared to create a chasm between maker and the person portrayed, I emphatically assured Louis I was not out to discover the factual truth, which was why I also was not interested in having other people in front of the camera. What I wanted to do, was work something out that Louis himself had been looking for in vain: “I have not succeeded in elevating my act of liquidation in 1943 to a philosophical fact, that is to say: The Choice,”

In Louis' eyes his free will had been subordinate to circumstances that made his deed inevitable – in other words, a kind of natural disaster. According to Louis, he had no choice, something that touches the heart of every tragedy: even if you are not free, you are still responsible for the consequences of your actions.

That's what this film is about. Hence its title.

Rudolf van den Berg

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