Post-1990 Documentary

Reconfiguring Independence

Edited by
Camille Deprez & Judith Pernin

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Introduction

Camille Deprez and Judith Pernin

The documentary field is arguably one of the most vibrant, challenging and creative areas in moving images today. In countries with well-established film and television industries, documentary production has been considerably revitalised since the late 1980s. From this period onwards, new distribution opportunities through specialised TV channels and circulation in both international film festivals and theatres have steadily ensured the vitality of both documentary TV programmes and feature-length documentaries. Simultaneously, the globalisation and popularisation of video and digital technologies around the world, and the concomitant development of video practices outside conventional cinema, have transformed the documentary form into a common means of creation and expression. This new surge of interest in documentary practices and forms can be partially explained by easier access not only to cheaper and more user-friendly technology, but also to new distribution platforms, and it has resulted in the emergence of truly innovative documentary movements and breakthroughs by new filmmakers or artists embracing the documentary as an art form, mode of enquiry and work method.

While pursuing our respective research on Indian and Chinese contemporary documentary films, we came to realise that despite local disparities, both countries – and many places around the world – were confronting this general context and the correlated advent of new types of documentaries, which often claim to be 'independent' art forms or means of expression. These filmmakers' work methods and ethics, their modes of organisation and in particular the creation of autonomous structures and documentary events, their difficulties and,

at times, their filmic styles gave us enough ground for comparative discussion to conceive of this collection of essays. The 'independent' documentary images that we associate with this worldwide phenomenon include the works of filmmakers, artists, activists, journalists, ordinary citizens and anonymous online content, and document all sorts of events, from the genocide in Cambodia to the political dictatorship in Chile, the unrest across the Arab world to the Occupy movements around the globe. However, to our knowledge, academic publications seldom identify significant similarities between heterogeneous documentary practices and forms, which often remain overshadowed by their categorisation in terms of format, medium and terminal (film, video, TV channels, web, mobile and so forth), genres (creative documentary, documentary video art, activist film, citizen reportage, web documentary), subject matter and place of origin. Drawing from such first-hand observation, this collective volume sets out to draw attention to these similarities by offering in-depth analyses of significant independent documentary works in the post-1990 era. Concurrently, the case studies also reveal that this 'independence' incorporates a large variety of viewpoints, work methods, industrial and commercial strategies, content and styles.

EMBRACING A VAST ARRAY OF PRACTICES

Among these manifold practices, amateur filmmaking has actively contributed to the recent diversification of the documentary. Documentaries have grown more ubiquitous with the advancement of portable film and video cameras in the twentieth century, and the recent digital turn has brought another crucial development – that of instant editing and sharing, and the subsequent emergence of a 'conversational use of images' (Gunthert 2014). While documentary has always been at the centre of amateur practices (in family and holiday films, and occasionally in more 'serious' matters), with the popularisation of DV and mobile phones, amateurs produce even more images of their daily life. Often criticised as exhibitionist and self-centred practices emanating from a society obsessed with exterior signs of happiness (Buckingham and Willett 2009; Goggin 2006; Hodkinson 2010), these digital amateur documentary images have at the same time been hailed as empowering gestures leading to democratic transitions, because instead of being confined to the memory trove of their producer, they are able to circulate widely, generate debate and sometimes trigger political action (Howard and Hussain 2013; Kamalipour 2010; Wilson and Dunn 2011). In her book on British amateur film, Heather Norris Nicholson recasts 'amateur film and video practice as direct visual antecedents to the mimetic processes of today' (2012: 246). She warns us not to overlook the social aspects pertaining to this type of filmmaking, and her

historical research reveals how 'earlier dismissive treatment of amateur activity as parochial and limited in content now seems misleading' (246). To a large extent, scholarly interest in amateur documentary images and their potential to foster social change seems acknowledged today, partly due to their transformation in scale, from a largely private practice to a worldwide phenomenon. Similarly, by showing the porous limits between amateurs and prominent figures in documentary filmmaking such as Peter Watkins – we could also add in a different category Jonas Mekas – Nicholson highlights possible shifts from anonymous amateur practices to authorship, something that, in turn, needs to be addressed today in the light of these recent practices (see also Fox 2004). New perspectives on this question may very well arise from approaches that overcome differences and reveal significant analogies, instead of working along artificial or outdated lines of distinction.

The independent documentarists' drive towards the unique freedom attached to amateur status shows that independence cannot be analysed without taking into account the wider issue of free speech as a fundamental right, and thus the complex relationship between filmmakers (or artists in general) and ruling political systems. However, creative freedom remains an objective to be achieved as modes of control remain pervasive around the globe, whether from state censors, lobbyist groups acting on ideological or religious convictions, free market regulations, technical limitations or even self-censorship resulting from all sorts of real and imaginary pressures. Censoring measures can take on more or less coercive forms, from conditional funding to script control, ratings, imposed cuts and bans, depending on the specific local context. Thus, being an independent documentary maker, producer, distributor or exhibitor seems to refer to a political commitment against these various forms and levels of constraint, which are all connected, to various extents, to the larger issue of censorship. As the book intends to demonstrate, independence is at best a relative achievement, and ultimately independent documentary productions intersect with different modes of control in multiple ways. In the increasing number of countries driven by the liberal model of market economy since 1990, and beyond legal battles to defend freedom, censorship has also become an efficient instrument of the commodification of culture (Bhownik 2009). Therefore, despite local disparities, independent documentaries share a common resistance against (or challenge to) state control, free market-driven economy and conservative social norms and their watchdog organisations.

In India, for instance, the state has created several instruments of film control (see Chapter 3). Under pressure from the ruling government, documentaries dealing with politically sensitive issues can be refused certification and thus be banned from public exhibition on television, in movie theatres and in state-sponsored film festivals. The state also exercises some control over the funding and distribution of documentaries through various

public organisations (including the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, Films Division, Doordarshan TV network and Mumbai International Film Festival, as well as various ministries and official agencies). However, the 1990s have placed this efficient set of official control apparatuses under growing strain, forcing their representatives to free up space for independent documentary expression. Economic liberalisation and the concomitant satellite TV revolution have ended the monopoly of Films Division and public broadcaster Doordarshan, allowing non-governmental organisations (NGOs), private and individual documentary production and distribution to develop. This evolution accelerated after 2000, when the opening of new independent exhibition places (film festivals, art galleries, online distribution) started to make censor certificates obsolete. These economic and technological improvements also influenced the evolution of Indian mentalities. For instance, despite lengthy legal battles, high court decisions usually favour the rights of filmmakers over state bans or restrictions, as in the case of Anand Patwardhan, Tapan Bose, Suhashini Mullay and Rakesh Sharma.

Although this new environment seems to benefit free creative and artistic expression, contemporary documentary filmmakers continue to face serious challenges. Post-1990 India has been marked by intensified communalism and tensions with Pakistan. Independent filmmakers were eager to document these sensitive issues, which immediately fell under the strict scrutiny of the state at a time when the Hindu nationalist party (Bharatiya Janata Party [BJP]) was rising and finally governed the country (from 1998 to 2004).[1] This government justified its strict censorship policy in the name of national security and public order following the deadly anti-Muslim riots at the Babri Masjid in Bihar (1992) and later in Gujarat (2002). However, it mainly covered the strong anti-Muslim drive revealed by these films, official recognition of which could have led to international outrage and sanctions. Although such documentaries faced bans for several years after their release (*Bombay's Blood Yatra* dir. Suma Josson, 1992; *In the Name of God* dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1992; *Chords on the Richter Scale* dir. Shyam Rajanakar, 2001; *Aakrosh* dir. Ramesh Pimple, 2003; *Final Solution* dir. Rakesh Sharma, 2003 and others), they all won their legal cases before the high court. The judges openly opposed the decision of the Censor Board and emphasised the positive impact of the films, which they claimed delivered a 'message of peace and coexistence and compassion for the people who suffered in the riots' (Bhownik 2009: 300). This is only one of many examples of the contradictions arising from different state representatives on the issue of censorship. Another instance is the national awards honouring these same oppositional documentaries banned from public exhibition (such as Tapan Bose and Suhasini Mulay's *An Indian Story* and *Bhopal: Beyond Genocide* in 1982 and 1987, and Anand Patwardhan's *War and Peace* in 2003). This situation demonstrates both the state's ambiguous

position on controversial sociopolitical matters and its possible evolution from a conservative to a more open-minded approach to issues of cultural control, as well as the question of the film's influence on public opinion in the digital era. This gradual open-mindedness, if confirmed, would also modify the meaning of 'independence' for Indian documentary practitioners, who would not necessarily have to position themselves vis-à-vis official apparatuses any longer. In fact, over the past ten years, a majority of documentary filmmakers have been ignoring the instruments of state control and screening their films in newly available spaces (independent film festivals, cultural centres, art galleries, online distribution platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo) without being cleared by the Central Board of Film Certification. This recent strategy of political defiance also contributes to a pragmatic evolution on the part of the government, which is forced to reposition itself, in order to save face and maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the general public. Elsewhere, pragmatic and ambiguous relations with censorship representatives are also at work and thus question the very usefulness of the notion of 'independence'.

PROBLEMS OF TERMINOLOGY

Before delving into this question, it should be acknowledged that in addition to their strong connections to the 'digital revolution', all of these documentary images try, to varying extents, to position themselves towards censorship and overcome the lack of visibility of certain issues in the mainstream media. Thus, they reflect upon the notion of truth – as defined by conventional, commercial or official productions – by experimenting with the status of the enunciator, participatory practices and live recording, and by adopting or inventing new image production, distribution and exhibition strategies. Reflecting on their status and identity, practitioners have adopted various ways of defining themselves over the past two decades. While some claim their independent stance, others conceal, internalise or simply ignore it. Instead, some may refer to other terms to qualify their practice according to local specificities, ideological beliefs and other collective or individual factors. Puzzling and imprecise as it may be for scholars, this variety of terminologies should not minimise the existence of a general and obvious community of practitioners, the similarities between their works or the parallels between these independent documentary movements.

In film studies, the notion of 'independence' has been defined in different ways according to specific historical, geographical, political, economic, social and cultural contexts. In the United States, it was understood first in economic terms, and then as an alternative to the Hollywood studio system, to describe film professionals developing their own styles, personal sociopolitical views

and distinctive production, distribution and exhibition strategies outside the main studios (Andrew 1998; Davies 1981; Hall 2009; Holmlund and Wyatt 2004; Levy 2001; Lewis 1998; Mendick and Schneider 2002). More interestingly, other publications emphasise the complex professional and aesthetic interconnections between these alternative films and Hollywood, and the fact that independent productions often develop within the remits of the mainstream studio system (Balio 1987; King 2005, 2009; King et al. 2012; Merritt 1999; Murray 2011; Tzioumakis 2012). Elsewhere, however, this classic definition does not necessarily apply. In France, for instance, the film and television industry operates in close relation to the state, which funds and regulates it. In China, in the absence of a private film sector (progressively made possible by the late 1970s Reforms), documentary production and circulation was the monopoly of state studios until the 1990s, whereas in India, over the same period, art and documentary cinemas were largely confined to the control of state organisations. In such cases, 'independent film' seems to refer to films produced and screened outside national film institutions, a definition that often bears a connotation of political resistance or opposition to mainstream media and state discourses, or else a distinct film aesthetic. But what about countries where film production is so scarce that the mainstream film industry does not even exist? This is the case in most sub-Saharan countries, where decolonisation has not yet triggered the development of a sustained film and television industry able to provide sufficient mainstream images against which to position oneself. In most cases, the production of feature-length fiction or documentary films faces many logistical and practical obstacles, requires tremendous local effort and tenacity, and very often requires the collaboration of agents from other national film industries, such as co-producers or funding and promotional events organisers (pitching forums, writing residencies and the like). Although launched in 1969 in Burkina Faso, FESPACO, the largest film and television festival in Africa, is still largely funded and supported by donations from Europe, Asia and United Nations agencies. Recently, joint initiatives between European and local African structures[2] have helped practitioners develop documentary projects, but in the absence of strong domestic industries, their productions remain dependent on foreign funding and circulation networks.

Beyond the issue of external influence on the shaping of an 'African cinema' according to international rather than local standards and expectations, the very question of a cinema's 'nationality' becomes vague when film structures and people from diverse countries cooperate on the same project. A transnational cinema seems to be a valid answer to this issue of belonging in a globalised world, and to the limitation of nationality as a framework for film studies (Hjort and Mackenzie 2000; Hunt and Leung 2008; Kauer and Sinha 2005; Nestingen and Elkington 2005; Zhang 2009). Specific circumstances can crucially raise

this issue, as in the case of Palestinian films. 'Emerging as a stateless cinema of the most serious national consequences' (Dabashi 2006: 11), Palestinian films are often not recognised as such in major film festivals, and most of those making it to the international scene benefit heavily from foreign funding (which, as argued earlier, constitutes a form of dependency).[3] In a different context, Taiwanese filmmakers share a comparable, yet more fortunate fate. If the Taiwanese film industry has proven its stability, specificity and creativity, its identity is occasionally threatened on the international scene. Unrecognised by the United Nations, the island is considered a renegade province by the People's Republic of China, and the terminology used for Taiwanese films in international festivals confuses organisers and audiences alike, while pressure is usually exerted behind the scenes to label them as 'Chinese/Taiwanese'. Other complex national and international restrictions can be found in India, where separatist movements occur in several provinces, such as in Kashmir, Punjab, Jharkhand, Mizoram and Assam. Given the state's minimisation of such oppositional voices, documentaries dealing with this sensitive issue are predictably scarce in national film festivals and public broadcasting, but are likewise seldom promoted by international film selections and foreign TV channels, which prefer to focus on generic, 'exoticised' and therefore stereotyped representations of the country, from the 'inhumane' caste system and other local customs to the 'eternally spiritual' and 'non-violent' India. Hence, in some places, (documentary) filmmaking can be, in itself, an act of resistance and a declaration of independence against powers that relentlessly try to muffle legitimate national voices and dissenting identities.

More than merely highlighting identity issues, reliance on foreign-based film industries or structures through informal collaborations, subventions, co-productions and the like tends to somehow undermine the author's discourse as irrelevant or opportunistic. The reception of Chinese independent films in the 1990s and 2000s by the media and film scholars alike testifies to the difficulty of positioning oneself after achieving worldwide recognition, while occasionally enduring drastic domestic constraints. The 'independent' label often proves controversial in such circumstances, and as the reasons for the adoption of this label are sometimes misconstrued as overt dissent, the filmmakers' agendas are often read in simplistic political terms. Applied interchangeably by the media and distributors with other terms such as 'underground' or alongside a rhetoric of 'dissidence', 'independent' has become, for some film professionals, a 'meaningless label save for marketing and academic purposes, or to "lionise" independent films' (Li et al. 2010). Hence, to be considered 'authentic' when working as an independent film practitioner and experiencing success on the international film scene can prove very difficult. However, despite such discussions on the worldwide reception of local independent talents, the reshaping of the film industry and festival circuit calls for

multinational collaborations and the circulation of works that are essential to vulnerable film forms, such as, but not only, the documentary.

The confrontation of these two phenomena – the identity crisis faced by filmmakers whose nationality causes problems, and the growing transnationality of the film production process – has generated a film category aptly defined by Hamid Naficy as 'accented cinema' (Naficy 2001). These 'exilic and diasporic films' (3) are 'by no means an established or cohesive cinema' (4), but 'are fundamentally "critical" . . . for they are often non-commercial and usually artisanal and collective in their production' (45). In some respects, Naficy's definition cannot but strike us as being incredibly close to the film category we try to define, especially in its 'interstitiality' – a mode of operation 'located at the intersection of the local and the global' (46), where actors operate 'both within and astride the cracks of the system, benefiting from its contradictions, anomalies, and heterogeneity' (46). Many independent documentary filmmakers will recognise themselves in the characteristics Naficy enumerates: financing difficulties, accumulation of labour, self-inscription, authorship forced by constraints, distribution delays and so forth. Indeed, when they manage to enter the professional film sector, such films are supported by companies that create 'crossover audiences by cross-listing and cross-packaging diaspora-made and exile-made films with their films by and about immigrants and other traditionally disenfranchised populations, such as ethnic minorities, women, and gays and lesbians' (44). Hence, the similitude between 'accented films' and other independent film movements explains our difficulty, as scholars and spectators, in making sense of this profusion of labels.

Communities of independent filmmakers have responded to this blurring of definitions with local adjustments and terminologies more appropriate to their situations. After a decade of 'independent' (*duli*) or 'underground' (*dixia*) works or film-related events, Chinese independents turned to the notion of *minjian* in the early 2000s. This multifaceted term literally means 'among the people' – 'people' here being understood in its folk, rather than Marxist, connotation. Escaping other politically loaded terms such as 'independent', the films or events created under the *minjian* rubric pertain to a realm apart from state institutions, and their activities are carried into the 'space of the people' – a space that is not under direct state supervision, like small private businesses since the opening up of the Chinese economy. This is how such films have come to be known as *minjian* films, and since the term clearly indicates autonomy from the state, it has often been translated as 'unofficial' – a word that does not entirely cover the implicit meanings of the Chinese one. As this lengthy explanation shows, local economic, political and cultural specificities, combined with translation difficulties, tend to increase the possibility of misunderstanding local film movements on the international film circuit. In the Chinese case, strategies to help independent cinema break free from

state intervention and control did not end with the creation of an alternative, local label for 'independent', but went so far as to disguise independent 'film festivals' as 'image exhibitions'. Unlike their official counterparts, such as the Shanghai International Film Festival (*Shanghai guoji dianying jie*), most of the events emerging in the People's Republic of China in the 2000s showcasing independent works have not operated under the label of 'film festival' (*dianying jie*), but rather as 'image' or 'video exhibition' (*yingzhan*). By creating such labels, Chinese independents operate *de facto* under slightly modified terms and can thereby escape the supervision of the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPRFT).[4] In this case, more than reflecting an identity quest, the terminological richness sustained by debates over independence echoes a more important and concrete survival problem for people who, for one reason or another, choose not to follow commercial and official filmmaking guidelines.

In other contexts, where state authority has not played such an overwhelming role in shaping independent status, the worldwide transformation of film and video production systems has also led scholars to further examine the notion of 'independence' from the 1980s onwards. As the most prominent example of independent cinema, the US model has been one of the first to undergo such in-depth questioning and demonstrates that our understanding of the manifold notions of 'independence' is germane to historical contexts (Biskind 2005; Hillier 2008; Holm 2007; Newman 2011; Pribram 2002). Michael Newman, for instance, more specifically focuses on the US context over the period 1989 to 2010, which opens with the launch of Sundance – the now iconic independent American film festival – and terminates with Disney's shuttering of its distribution company Miramax – both considered decisive in 'branding' independent American cinema as a national alternative to mainstream film culture. Preferring the notion of 'indie' cinema, which includes textual features, specialised institutions and the audience's shared knowledge and expectations, the author shows it occupying a negotiating terrain, partly outside (a kind of 'niche media' reacting 'against conglomerate gigantism') and partly inside the system (its mini-major producers and distributors, such as Miramax, can be considered a 'symptom of this system') (10). He also reminds us that indie cinema constitutes a form of high culture that reproduces existing social class stratifications, as a result of which its 'alternative' status remains questionable. Beyond the US context, Iordanova et al., in their book on *Cinema at the Periphery* (2010), explore the multi-layered concept of 'peripheral' cinema (in terms of location, practice, subject matter and narrative strategy). This collective publication contributes to a blurring of the conventional binary opposition between a cinema of the 'periphery' and that of the 'centre' and instead uncovers their multiple interactions. Others have applied the general issue of 'independence' to specific national contexts, in order to

investigate the diversity of practices and forms it often entails (Barlet 2010; Baumgärtel 2012; Ingawanji and McKay 2011; Pickowicz and Zhang 2006 and others). In his edited volume on film independence in the French context, Laurent Creton notes that complete independence is hardly attainable and remains at most partially fulfilled. The issue therefore consists of identifying possible dependences before 'selecting, conciliating and dealing with them' (Creton 1998: 11).

In fact, as suggested above, over the past twenty years, this significant number of academic studies has addressed the definition of non-mainstream films, each author suggesting either a new definition of an old term or a new term inclusive of an older definition. While these efforts all contribute to more refined concepts and increasingly accurate descriptions of various realities, this substantial array of terminologies – 'independent', 'indie', 'underground', 'alternative', 'accented', 'marginal', 'peripheral' – masks important similarities, while calling into question the validity of them all. In this regard, the term 'creative documentary' is a relatively new addition to this lexical domain, and was primarily developed to promote strong authorial endeavours and differentiate such works from mere journalistic reportage. So far, this term has proven especially relevant for the industry and practitioners. In the Netherlands, the leading International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) – active since 1988 – presents itself as 'dedicated to the exhibition and promotion of ground-breaking creative documentaries'.[5] In their online mission statement, the organisers further define this notion:

> The creative documentary is an art form. The documentary-maker is therefore an artist – not a journalist . . . Like reportage, documentaries provide insights into the world around us; but they are also characterised primarily by artistic qualities: innovation, originality, professional skill, expressiveness and cultural/historical value.[6]

Similarly, in France, the notion became formally employed in 1987 by the state film regulating body (Centre National de la Cinématographie [CNC]) to define films

> referring to the real, transforming it through the original gaze of the author, and testifying to his spirit of innovation in the conception, realisation and writing. It is distinguished from reportage by the maturity of the approach and reflection on topic, the strong imprint of the personality of a filmmaker and/or author. (Schmitt 2002: 208)

In the French context, this institutional definition was explicitly designed for a category of films and TV programmes that could receive specific state funding

and broadcasting support. At the institutional level, the category did not last and was revoked in 1996, because it was too narrowly defined and thus too few documentary works could benefit from it. But it was resurrected in 2012 to avoid the misuse of subventions, as many commercial reality TV programmes – arguing their documentary nature – were receiving support through the relevant CNC commission (Barreau-Brouste 2013). Since then, the term has enjoyed wide support among film and TV professionals, who tend to prefer it over other alternatives. Thus, the durability of these terminologies greatly depends on the context, but when a term falls into disgrace in one sector, such as academia or the film and TV industry, it can still survive in another, such as state institutions. Meanwhile, other terms are being forged or redefined to serve various purposes (legal, economic, literary and so forth). This constant inventiveness results from a certain unease with all these words, and more specifically with the term 'independent', which is perhaps the most widely used and supposedly the most ill-defined.

INTRODUCING A NEW APPROACH TO THE DOCUMENTARY

Instead of working on a definition that would comply with each different production, distribution, exhibition and formal context, this book aims at examining recent cases where independence is at stake, either in the discourse developed by documentary practitioners themselves or in the supposed systems within which documentary images are produced. Hence, the purpose of this collective volume is to adjust an ever-changing term to the concrete modifications of documentary film practices, as well as to the new constraints and opportunities that have appeared in this field over the past twenty-five years. Clearly, the technological changes taking place in the 1990s and 2000s have played a significant role in reshaping documentary film practices. But the consequences of the digital revolution still need to be addressed without overestimating the impact of technology on other political, economic, social and cultural changes.

Since independence can only be defined in relation to existing institutions, concrete work methods and aesthetic frameworks, we decided to select case studies that could precisely illustrate situations where recent documentary practices help rethink the notion of independence. Open to a large array of geographical – and thus cinematic – contexts, these observations focus on the interactions between these new documentary practices and the established film and television industries, distribution and exhibition strategies, as well as the theoretical legacies of influential documentary film authors. In addition, continuities as much as changes are closely analysed in this volume, for

they reveal important characteristics in the filmmakers' relation to their own work habits and support a refined historical periodisation, beyond the obvious breaks triggered by radical technological innovations.

Similarly, the subjective turn brought about by these self-productions and made possible by a growing accessibility of video practices to non-professionals has been regarded as a distinctive feature of amateur digital image-making. However, a closer examination of this issue shows that subjectivity and the emphasis on personal experience are not only a characteristic of modest documentary flicks circulated on the Internet, but are widely observed across the documentary field. Renowned filmmakers such as Rithy Panh, Agnès Varda, Jonas Mekas and Chris Marker, for instance, decided to address very important historical, social or aesthetic issues from a very personal angle, thus using subjectivity to make their works even more complex and engaging. We would therefore argue for a need to reassess the contribution of the personal in documentary forms, apart from simplistic observations of self-centredness in the digital era.

The rise of digital technologies has also moved documentary film reception to spaces usually devoted to art appreciation, to a media sphere developing alongside the mainstream and to the booming documentary film festival scene. Consequently, viewing modes have been adjusted to these recent transformations. The displacement of the documentary spectator also very often means his transformation into a more mobile, participative subject, engaged in the viewing process as well as in discussions – and, at times, actions – generated by the works themselves.

Drawing upon these introductory remarks, the book correspondingly looks into discourses, aesthetics, production, circulation and uses of still under-researched new documentary images, provides carefully documented case studies and critical analysis by each contributor and includes the necessary combination of empirical approaches and theoretical assessments to comprehend independent documentary works of contemporary significance. There is consequently overlap among each of the three main sections in terms of format, medium, terminal, genre, subject matter, purpose and national boundaries, as they critically engage existing concepts from the areas of film studies and cross-media studies. Far from trying to restrict the debate to limited areas, formats or authors, this collective volume intends to foster curiosity, renewed discussion and innovative research projects on the documentary.

While closely reflecting these research objectives and methodological approaches, the three main sections also take into consideration the ever-changing political, economic, social, cultural and technological context of the post-1990 era. The first section on 'History and Spaces of Resistance' looks into breaks and continuities between older and newer influential documentary

filmmakers and forms, and investigates how they can provide spaces of resistance outside official and mainstream discourses. It explores the theoretical and formal legacy of previous documentary movements and how recent works attempt to rethink, reuse and combine them in the post-1990 period. Here, history is understood both as film history and as general social history, which usually takes centre stage in documentaries and which independent filmmakers tend to examine outside common and official narratives. This section begins with a chapter on 'Post-unification (East) German Documentary and the Contradictions of Identity', in which Barton Byg presents the continuing collaboration between East and West German filmmakers before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall as an unexpected yet defining aspect of independent documentary filmmaking in Germany. Based on this initial statement and specific film case studies, Byg further analyses the 'Eastern', 'European' and 'non-European' elements in contemporary German documentary films, in order to unveil practices in opposition to highly organised national media institutions and contesting views of official historical representations.

The second chapter further elaborates on independent documentary as a challenge to both mainstream media organisations and official history. In 'No Going Back: Continuity and Change in Australian Documentary', Deane Williams and John Hughes discuss how, over the years, Australian filmmakers have responded to the public broadcaster's control over documentary funding, forms, production and distribution patterns. They selected a group of documentary programmes dealing with asylum seekers, contrasting the 1952 state-funded documentary film *Mike and Stefani* with the 2011 public reality TV series *Go Back to Where You Came From*, to show how the official discourse on refugees has evolved and how documentary practitioners manage to maintain their creative and intellectual independence, even when collaborating with the public broadcaster.

The next chapter, 'A Space in Between: The Legacy of the Activist Documentary Film in India', continues the discussion by exploring the legacy of the 1970s activist documentary in contemporary India. Camille Deprez mainly argues that behind claims of 'independence', Indian activist documentarists have never completely operated outside of official and commercial domains, but have progressively developed a space of resistance in between these two prevailing spheres of influence, based upon complex collaboration procedures, in order to transform these official and commercial discourses, practices and styles from within the system.

Eric Galmard suggests another approach to the notion of legacy. In his exploration of Joris Lachaise's 2011 documentary *Convention: Black Wall / White Holes*, he analyses how the French filmmaker critically positions himself against the French colonial past of Africa, and also how he inherited and marked his differences from two leading filmmakers, Jean Rouch and

Pier Paolo Pasolini, who filmed Africa in the early years of decolonisation. By focusing his study on the functions of speech, language and voice, Galmard demonstrates that introspective, reflexive and deconstructed forms constitute key features of independent documentary filmmaking today, while suggesting that despite obvious efforts, the position of European filmmakers towards the former colonies remains largely problematic.

Finally, in 'Chris Marker: Interactive Screen and Memory', Kristian Feigelson explains how this influential figure's ceaseless experimentation with new technology has contributed to interrogating the boundaries of documentary cinema. He argues that video and digital technical advancements have allowed Marker to further develop his inquiry into image objectivity, and to keep looking back on the history and memory of the twentieth century in a non-linear, reflexive and interactive manner. Hence, his oeuvre should be understood as a unique space of resistance, made of breaks and continuities against a one-sided, fixed, linear and causal recollection of the historical past.

The second section, 'The Personal Experience', aims at presenting the growing interconnection between the individual and the collective as a major characteristic of independent documentary practices today, by stressing how subjectivity and personal experiences address wider, common sociopolitical issues. In this light, Raya Morag analyses Rithy Panh's documentaries, in order to demonstrate how the filmmaker – the only survivor of the Khmer Rouge regime and genocide in his family – undermines the perpetrator's extermination to reconstruct Cambodia's collective post-traumatic memory and honour the human condition. Morag argues that by personally confronting this harrowing past and the people responsible for it, Panh has turned the documentary film into an efficient and innovative instrument of truth-seeking and reconciliation.

Reconciliation is also at the heart of Juliette Goursat's examination of four Chilean autobiographical documentaries that break away from the consensual representation of Pinochet's dictatorship delivered by the existing regime. In her chapter on 'Contesting Consensual Memory: The Work of Remembering in Chilean Autobiographical Documentaries', Goursat suggests that filmmakers investigating their own personal family history can thereby delve into a prohibited past and critically question individual and collective memory. In doing so, they maintain their independence from the propagandist views of the pro- and anti-Pinochet factions, as well as from the current government of transition.

Sheila Petty approaches the issue of personal memory from a different angle. In '"We All Invented Our Own Algeria": Habiba Djahnine's *Letter to My Sister* as Memory-Narrative', she analyses how the filmmaker re-investigates the assassination of her activist sister by Islamic extremists, ten

years after the event. Using the epistolary mode, Djahnine delivers a personal and autobiographical interpretation of the Black Decade of the 1990s. The cinematic reminiscence of her deceased sibling, Petty argues, turns this intimate and silenced memory into visible images and audible sounds, while re-emphasising the contested role of women as active political, social and cultural agents of Algerian society.

The personalisation of independent documentary cinema often relies on the one-person filmmaking mode, as Liani Maasdorp describes in the case of South Africa. She explains that in the post-1990 context, South Africa's political shift and, more importantly, the shortage of public broadcasting funding have generated individual and thus more personal documentary practices. Consequently, working alone and focusing on personal stories has led to a new level of critical commentary about the apartheid regime and the post-apartheid national identity.

Mike Ingham completes this section with an exploration of Anson Mak's essayistic documentaries and her personal vision of the Hong Kong cityscape. While claiming that her radical and critical ethnographic film practice reinvents the meaning of the film essay, Ingham also closely looks at how the filmmaker articulates her independent political views and aesthetics around her own and others' personal experiences of Hong Kong.

The third and final section, 'Displacement, Participation and Spectatorship', focuses on the development of new documentary forms and viewing sites resulting from the digital revolution and the reorganisation of the documentary industry over the past two decades. It opens with Aida Vallejo's chapter on 'Documentary Filmmakers in the Circuit: A Festival Career from *Czech Dream* to *Czech Peace*'. There, she considers the recent development of film festivals, some of which are entirely dedicated to the documentary, as a key agent in the definition, funding, distribution and exhibition of independent works. Based on an ethnographic case study, the chapter looks at how two young Czech documentary filmmakers learn to navigate the international festival circuit and develop different kinds of dependencies to ensure global circulation of their productions. She reveals that mastering complex networks of collaboration between filmmakers, festival programmers and industry professionals can not only ensure or threaten the successful performance of documentaries in the festival circuit, but also temper their independent status by bringing other labels – such as the creative documentary – to the fore.

Other chapters in this section examine the importance of participation and interactivity in the definition of independent documentaries in the contemporary context. 'Experiments with Documentary in the Gallery: Material Traces of Lebanon' draws upon the recent interest that art spaces have expressed for the documentary form. Tess Takahashi first asserts that

'speculative' forms of documentary art – which she defines as playful, experimental and unbridled – accentuate the uncertain boundary between fiction and fact, but also between evidence and affect. With this in mind, she proposes a detailed study of the work of artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, who use the speculative documentary form to examine the legacy of the Lebanese Civil Wars through its material traces. This case study shows that by confronting spectators to cinematic loops and material traces of the Lebanese Civil Wars in gallery installations, their documentary works formally and intellectually challenge their understanding of public and private memory, under which material and affective traces of these traumatic events continue to circulate today.

Elaborating further on the notion of documentary interactivity, Hilary Chung and Bernadette Luciano explore the issues of autonomous navigation, multiplicity and self-reflexive aesthetics in Sergio Basso's documentary film *Giallo a Milano* and the associated web documentary *Made in Chinatown*, in order to understand the new modes of audience engagement provided by this combination of formats. They, more precisely, suggest that embracing the web documentary format triggers the immediate reaction of viewers to sociopolitical issues and creates a new kind of activist reflection, at once discontinuous, fragmentary and thus open to debate.

In a different vein, Mick Broderick and Robert Jacobs also look into new forms of audience participation, while analysing documentary responses to the earthquake, tsunami and reactor meltdowns that took place in Fukushima on 3 March 2011. 'Fukushima and the Shifting Conventions of Documentary: From Broadcast to Social Media Netizenship' demonstrates that Japanese netizens and social media platforms gather grassroots dissenting voices that challenge the hegemonic narratives delivered by the government and the mainstream media. Stressing the role of digital documentary practices in bringing information to the common people, this text emphasises the importance of independent initiatives in balancing discourses in the public sphere.

Online documentary practices are also at the heart of the book's last chapter, in which Judith Pernin puts in perspective the uses generated by the independent Chinese documentary movement from the dawn of Internet film forums in the mid-1990s to the microblogs in the late 2000s. Two decades of online practices in this small film milieu reflect the evolution of both web-based platforms and Chinese independent documentary filmmakers. Using detailed examples, she indicates that their unofficial cinephilia, emerging from piracy practices, quickly moved towards exchanges reflecting the filmmakers' concerns for recognition of their works and, beyond that, for the sensitive sociopolitical issues dealt with in their films. The popular practice of online document sharing completes and extends their film practices and creates a wider network ranging from film enthusiasts to activists.

NOTES

1. Interestingly, if these topics did not take centre stage after the national election of the Congress Party in 2004, problems persisted on the ground and the Congress administration remained nervous whenever communalism and the tense relationship with Pakistan caught the interest of documentary filmmakers. So, contrary to pro-Congress observers, official censorship quietly continued, despite the change of power over the decade from 2004 to 2014. The recent rise of a new anti-corruption party, the Aam Admi Party (the Common Man Party), and the national re-election of the BJP, the Hindu nationalist party, in May 2014 may prompt new positions on this sensitive issue.
2. Such as the network Africadoc or the Cinéma du Monde initiative. See their respective websites, http://www.africadocnetwork.com/en and http://www.lescinemasdumonde.com/nouv/, accessed 9 April 2014.
3. In the introduction, Dabashi recalls the situation of Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* rejection from the 2002 Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as a case in point.
4. Formerly known as the State Administration of Radio, Film and Television (SARFT). A merger with the General Administration of Press and Publication (GAPP) occurred in March 2013.
5. For information on the IDFA, see http://www.idfa.nl/industry.aspx, accessed 25 March 2014.
6. For information on the IDFA's mission, see http://www.idfa.nl/industry/mission-statement.aspx, accessed 25 March 2014.

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PART I

History and Spaces of Resistance

CHAPTER 1

Post-unification (East) German Documentary and the Contradictions of Identity

Barton Byg

In assessing what post-German Democratic Republic (GDR) documentary brings to independent documentary film culture in Germany, one is struck in general by the relatively privileged status the 'independent' documentary has long had. Despite being 'marginal' to the major media industries based on entertainment, documentary films in Germany enjoy considerable status, exhibition outlets and funding, even where topics are politically controversial and methods are either avant-garde or critical of the mainstream. Prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall, the position of secure employment, steading funding and guaranteed screening outlets even made GDR documentary filmmakers the envy of their Western counterparts. Granted, there were constraints and restrictions, but the principal difference in working conditions that German unification brought to former GDR filmmakers was a less secure, project-based funding system and a shift in screening venues toward television – the West German media system, in other words.

But this chapter will not dwell on the process of integration of the former GDR documentary filmmakers into the new funding and production context, which has been achieved with remarkable success in many instances. Instead it will concentrate on three major themes that have helped make this integration successful and have contributed new strengths to German independent documentary as a productive and innovative enterprise. It will first illustrate the phenomenon of collaboration between filmmakers from both East and West Germany, which preceded the fall of the Berlin Wall and provides the basis for unique accomplishments in documentary. Then, partly based on these East-West collaborations, it will discuss examples of German documentary's

frequent explorations of non-European topics, which challenge the clear separation of European and non-European in both politics and film art. Here, the film collaborations between Helga Reidemeister and Lars Barthel will serve as a case study. And finally, also as a result of decades of experimentation with the nature of the film medium's presentation of 'reality', 'history' and the individual human subject, Thomas Heise's German 'portrait film' *Barluschke* (1997) will be explored as an example of this defining quality of independent German documentary filmmaking in the context of the post-Cold War.

Regarding the filmmakers of the former GDR, since most of them now work with a well-subsidised medium in one of the world's wealthiest countries, it may seem disingenuous to categorise them as 'independent', let alone at the vanguard of outsider activism. Yet since they started out in a system which persecuted artists before 1989, they maintain an 'oppositional' or at least 'alternative' identity in a globalised media context. And here, they have always had much in common with independent documentarists from the former West Germany. Identity tension has always been central to German culture in the modern era, especially in the post-WWII period of the Cold War. State ideology in the East attempted to create a new 'socialist personality', while in the West, the continued presence of reminders of the Nazi past provided challenges to constructing a cultural identity. In the period since the end of the Cold War, these tensions continue to be productive for independent filmmakers. I argue here that their accomplishments go beyond the conventional documentary's occupation with Germany itself, its history or social problems, but rather take them into explorations outside Germany, or into the interior of the contemporary self – 'into the abyss' – as a construction of history, memory and social relations.[1]

The concept of the rhizome, from Deleuze and Guattari, can help us understand what is 'Eastern' about contemporary German cinema, or what is 'oppositional' within highly organised national media institutions. The rhizome has subterranean connections that only here and there reach to the surface to achieve a recognisable, nameable identity (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21). As with their connection to international independent documentary as a category, the connections of former GDR artists, their works and themes, to cultural phenomena in their own lives, in film history, in German history or across political and geographic borders are anything but linear. They are unpredictable, asymmetrical, often poetic and so 'rhizomatic'.[2]

This chapter thus excludes the rather conventional documentaries that rely on historical narrative, either to look back at the East German socialist system and its injustices or to advocate for a settling of accounts. These aspects are politically and socially significant, but fall within well-established forms of the international media.[3] It also excludes a number of documentaries relating to underground and oppositional movements in the GDR. Some of these clearly

fall into the 'independent' category, but would deserve a separate treatment beyond the scope of this chapter. An 'archival' aspect of independent documentary by Easterners about the East since 1989 has been devoted to the demonstration that there was, indeed, if only in a limited sense, an 'avant-garde' culture in the GDR, despite the state's strictures and the cultural policy's insistence on the official doctrine of 'socialist realism'.[4] Parallel to these underground and avant-garde movements, we also see an independent strain of East German documentary with connections to its Western counterpart.

EAST–WEST COLLABORATION BEFORE AND SINCE 1989

Numerous examples of collaboration reveal the intertwined nature and common concerns of East and West German documentaries, both before and after 1989. A recent example of collaboration is the book *Fantasie und Arbeit/ Fantasy and Labour* (2009) by filmmakers Helke Sander from the West and Iris Gusner from the East, comparing reminiscences about their careers as woman filmmakers on both sides of the Cold War. Johann Feindt's (West) and Tamara Trampe's (East) collaborations include a portrait of a Stasi psychologist, *The Black Box* (1991), and a return to the WWII generation, *My Mother, A War, and Me* (2014), reflecting common concerns with accountability, but also with memory and cinematic representation. Sybille Schönemann's *Locked Up Time* (1990) presents a similarly complex blend of expulsion and return, memory and injustice. Imprisoned for attempting to leave the country in 1984, then expatriated to West Germany, the filmmaker returns to the East in 1990 to interview those responsible for her mistreatment. In the US, National Public Radio reported that Schönemann had returned to the East with a West German crew to film the sites of her imprisonment, but the crew actually included the same people she had worked with in the East before her expulsion. This is an example of the intertwined nature of German documentary, both during and after the division of Germany, rhizomes that Cold War presumptions in the media tended to overlook.

New forms also reflect collaborations between East and West, sometimes in ways that, again, are not immediately legible as 'Eastern'. Harun Farocki counts as one of the leading international figures in German documentary, and since 1989, his engagement with the former East has markedly increased. Former GDR documentarist Lew Hohmann has worked with Farocki as a producer, while Farocki has supported and collaborated with a younger generation of East-West filmmakers. One prominent example is feature film director Christian Petzold, who blends fiction and non-fiction, while often addressing themes related to the former GDR (Fisher 2013). Petzold's East-West mystery thriller *Yella* (2007), for instance, restages almost verbatim

portions of Farocki's *Nothing Ventured* (2004), his documentary about venture capital negotiations.

The contradictory, rhizomatic nature of the East German presence within German cinema is thus not new, but it is one sign of continuity with developments throughout the period of German division. Open exploration of global political issues, with observational rather than agitational or activist methods, was a way of resisting the state's didactic prescriptions for art and media in the GDR period. Since German unification, such nuanced and complex explorations of documentary form – interweaving issues of identity, guilt, agency, perception and memory – all contribute to German independent documentary film's challenge to the presumptions of mainstream documentary and mass communication.

THE JOURNEY OUTWARD WITH REIDEMEISTER AND BARTHEL

As a case study standing in for several other filmmakers in regard to East-West collaboration and continuity over the historical break represented by German reunification, I will concentrate on the post-1989 journey of cinematographer and director Lars Barthel. Concern for social justice and a fascination with faraway lands connect East and West German independent filmmakers in many ways, and Barthel's longstanding collaboration with the West Berlin feminist documentarian Helga Reidemeister shares both aspects. Their journey takes them from Berlin to India, Texas and Afghanistan.

Reidemeister's interaction with the GDR has been more intensive and extensive than perhaps any other Westerner. It is exemplified by the film *Location Berlin* (1987), which depicts the Berlin of the late 1980s as if the Berlin Wall had never existed. Her concern for East German intellectual and political history goes beyond the Berlin Wall in other ways, as in her tracing of the East German origins of student activist Rudi Dutschke's biography to the intellectual tradition of Ernst Bloch and Hans Mayer in *Walking Tall: Rudi Dutschke - Trails* (1988), or her film on the Soviet soldiers being transferred 'home' from the GDR in the 1990s in *Rodina Means Home* (1992). The transition from Reidemeister's own analysis of internal European concerns of the Cold War to a more global exploration is found in *Lights from Afar* (1998). Working, as in all the above-mentioned films, with the GDR-trained cinematographer Lars Barthel, in *Lights from Afar*, Reidemeister references the moody photography of the GDR photographer Robert Paris and to an extent the worker portraits of his more famous mother, Helga Paris. In response to his feeling of displacement in central Berlin during this most violent stage of its architectural transformation into a centre of German economic and political

Figure 1.1 Robert Paris in *Lights from Afar* (dir. Reidemeister, 1998). Courtesy of Lars Barthel.

power, Robert Paris escapes to India where he photographs the stunning spectacle of workers breaking up ocean-going freighters by hand.[5]

Presenting the exotic scene in South Asia as an escape from Berlin, the film reveals both the director's and Paris' skepticism towards unified Germany. But the biography of the film's cinematographer Lars Barthel also plays a role here. Barthel was trained at the East German Academy for Film and Television (*HFF 'Konrad Wolf'*) and married an Indian student filmmaker, Chetna Vora. For reasons of content (non-flattering depictions of everyday life in socialism), or perhaps partly because they had applied to leave the country for India, their student films were banned and they left the GDR in 1982. Vora returned to India where she soon died, and Barthel's film *My Death, Not Yours* (2006) includes his pilgrimage to India to return to his wife's homeland, visit her parents and take leave of the haunting memories of her. This pilgrimage, like that of Robert Paris, includes images of ship-breaking that Barthel had shot while in India with Vora, anticipating similarly powerful images from *Lights from Afar*. In both films, East German memories from the Cold War and the contradictions of unification are projected onto the pre-industrial catastrophe of exploited, endangered, yet indestructible labour power. In East German feature films as well, the anachronistic aspects of the worker's body (usually male) often provides a poignant counterpart to the socialist ideology of technical and scientific progress.

For Barthel's and Vora's position as artists, the industrial cooperation and labour solidarity between German and Indian communists was a given, which often presumes more mutual understanding than is actually credible, but also stresses a sense of common interests and shared vulnerabilities among workers. The lack of subtitled dialogue in Reidemeister's film exaggerates the distance between the German artist and the South Asian worker, underscoring the romantic aspect of the portraits captured there. But Robert Paris also has a poetic, visual intimacy with the workers – surely, thanks, in part, to Barthel's closer familiarity with the people in the image. Although Paris' pilgrimage to

the ship-breaking sites in India culminates in stunning portraits he 'captures' among the workers, Reidemeister first places Paris in the social and industrial context. He is seen sleeping among other passengers in a compartment of the Indian railway and socialising with the ship-breakers for quite some time before Reidemeister reveals the resulting black and white images Paris produces of them.

Barthel's ability to film an intimate setting outside Europe also makes a strong contribution to Helga Reidemeister's recent documentary – a Romeo and Juliet story from Afghanistan, *War and Love in Kabul* (2009). Here, GDR experience joins with international, leftist documentary practice that arose on both sides of the 'Iron Curtain' from the 1960s onwards and intensified during the student movements' anti-imperialist resistance to the US war in Vietnam (1959/1964–1975). It emphasises the long-term development of international cooperation and social and political relationships both within the production team and beyond the filmmaking enterprise itself. Reidemeister's Afghanistan trilogy – and this partly animates her continued engagement with the GDR – is political in an everyday, grassroots level sense of the word, while for Barthel, film is a personal tool of discovery and self-discovery. Film is a means, not an end, bringing the political values of the West German student movement into connection with the legacy of state socialism's ideological solidarity with the developing world. Both the West German student movement and the East German state are now in the past, but their rhizomatic connections are present here, on a personal and artistic level.

THE JOURNEY INWARD: FAMILY PORTRAIT, ESPIONAGE AND MEMORY IN *BARLUSCHKE*

While mainstream film seeks to narrate and commemorate German unification, independent documentary is much more likely to challenge such categories of historical representation – that is to say, the stability of individual identity or the supreme power of state surveillance and control, also expressed through the apparatus of film itself. Here, German independent documentary connects with a long tradition of critical, independent documentary practice and theories of media representation based on the work of the dramatist Bertolt Brecht, and closely aligned with the aesthetic positions of 'political modernism' (Rodowick 1995: ix–xiv). A strong example of this 'journey inward' can be found in the work of Thomas Heise, particularly his 'portrait film' *Barluschke* of 1997.

In the opening of the film that bears his name, the former spy Berthold Barluschke is setting up a photo shoot, directing his family to arrange themselves for the camera as if he were the film's director, not Thomas Heise. This

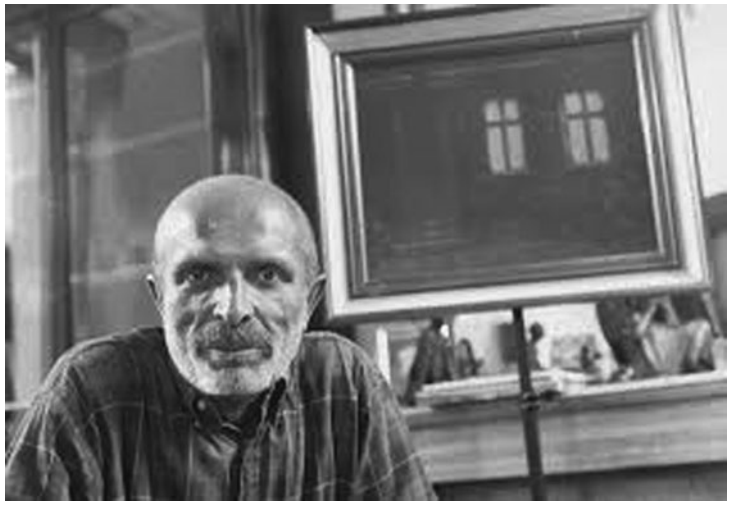

Figure 1.2 Barluschke in the eponymous film (dir. Heise, 1997). Courtesy of Thomas Heise.

link between espionage and film directing is not the only connection to Johann Feindt's and Tamara Trampe's documentary *The Black Box* (1992), about a Stasi psychologist who also had dreamed of being a filmmaker. The films also bear similar subtitles: for *The Black Box*, 'Attempt at a Psychogram'; for *Barluschke*, 'Psychogram of a Spy'. And both are equally important as explorations of the potential of non-fiction film as avant-garde art, as they provide inquiries into the psychology of espionage.

'*Es ist alles nur ein Film*' ('It's All Only a Movie') is the provocative title of critic Julia Zutavern's analysis of *Barluschke* as 'simulation of memory and memory politics' (Zutavern 2009: 38). While multiple views are presented of Bert Barluschke (his fictional identities as a spy, his family and documents of his life), the film invites multiple ways of focusing a response to it. The film is thus more than a study of East German espionage during the Cold War or even a particular spy during the Cold War. As Zutavern observes: 'For stretches the audience may feel they know who Bert Barluschke is, or rather: who all he has already been. But with noteworthy casualness this certainty on the part of the viewers is withdrawn' (2009: 42).

Uncertainty about a fixed identity for Barluschke, the 'casualness' and 'randomness' with which the film presents his life, is part of the film's independent method, not a weakness. A number of facts – which a conventional and potentially sensational documentary or fiction film would emphasise – are presented indirectly, or are barely mentioned: that Barluschke was affiliated with the CIA as 'Harry Bolden', that he is HIV positive, that he mourns the death of a male lover, that the Stasi presented his parents with an adopted son to replace

Barluschke when he went West under an assumed identity or his wife's Jewish American background and political associations. The contemporary innovation of the film lies in part in the dizzying variety of documentary approaches to present Barluschke. We see documents from many sources – photos, family videos, Stasi evaluation reports, transcripts from court findings – and hear commentary from his wife, his children and his childhood girlfriend. Then there are Barluschke's own interventions of self-presentation. Some are by way of music – he plays classical passages on the piano and recordings of Mikis Theodorakis, whose variety of artistic and political identities he professes to admire. His performance repertoire includes smoking and gesturing, male camaraderie, fatherly rage, emotional withdrawal and so on. Heise does not pretend that any of this adds up to a whole in regard to narrative or identity. For instance, as Barluschke speaks of his post-1989 experience, a list of criminal charges of the illegal sale of military material is typed at the bottom of the screen. Zutavern observes: 'This shot reveals how much the director avoids staging memories and documents as biographical facts, giving them an explicitness and objectivity which he cannot guarantee' (Zutavern 2009: 44). Critic Detlef Friedrich objects to this absence of 'objectivity', as it allows Barluschke to manipulate the filmmaker. He shows that Barluschke wears various masks, but does not remove any of them. The spy Berthold Barluschke is a match for the questions of this interviewer. Heise speaks to him with the intimate pronoun '*Du*': 'You have a certain repertoire. You pull out the corresponding film and let it run'. Barluschke looks into the camera, halfway touched. 'All right then', says Heise, 'shall we have a smoke? Do you still have cigarettes?' The brotherliness gets in the way of finding out the truth (Friedrich 1998: 10). But the gesture of sharing a cigarette when words have been exhausted is also communicative of a 'truth', more in the sense of Brecht's theatre – the gesture reveals the communication (and lack of it) between the two men, their rivalry and their similarity.

The presence, and even complicity, of the filmmaker is an aspect that connects the film both to earlier, avant-garde moments in documentary film and to their Brechtian aspects, as I have explored elsewhere (Byg 1997a, 2013). Zutavern also emphasises the relation of Barluschke to German memory politics and the GDR's place in this construct. She sees Heise's work as a 'means toward collective remembering', for instance (Zutavern 2006: 38). But again, in expecting the film to provide collective remembering, these critics overlook the way the film is also working on film itself as a cultural form, not a transparent tool to generate or display collective cultural memory. Any construction of Barluschke or of the GDR as an object of memory politics is fragmentary. There is no whole that can be constructed. Here, the strength of the film 'as film' should be underscored, not only as an 'advocate of memory' as Zutavern suggests, but also as a contribution to the understanding of how aesthetics and

meaning intersect in 'post-Brechtian' film as such. The overarching tension between identity and memory, which Zutavern describes as Heise's 'pessimism', I would instead describe as the project of the film and its aesthetic and emotional achievement.

Here, a reference to the 'post-Brechtian' context in international cinema is illustrative. Martin Brady cites Peter Wollen in underscoring the 'materialist concerns of avant-garde film . . . and Godard's Brechtian experiments' (Brady 2006: 312). Fragmentation and theatrical distanciation produce a 'critical materialist cinema in which a film becomes a text comprised of semioticised material rather than a "film-object" or "film-representation"' (2006: 312). Through the lens of a 'post-Brechtian' avant-garde then, one can look at Heise's film differently. While the film's fragments do not add up to an intact whole, I believe the work's strength is that it presents Barluschke as a text to be read, differently with each viewing and by each audience. It challenges a fixed East German identity, as well as West German, US and international positions on the Cold War and their personal traces in the family around Barluschke as well. The film, in short, is more significant than critics have assumed by relating it solely to GDR memory. Rather than an interrogation of memory in regard to the GDR past, I believe one should see Heise's film as a 'post-Brechtian' interrogation by way of film of two kinds of 'myths': the myth of an individual identity and the myth of a national identity. It is precisely 'independent' filmmaking that takes on such a task of opposing the mythmaking of historical narrative. The introduction of the Stasi and spies into the film as 'co-directors' – as authors of meaning – make the film a more radical challenge to the concept of 'historical truth'. As one critic writes:

> For Heise, Barluschke is a kind of total subject, in whose difficult psychology one can recognise how the Stasi molds the individual. 'Objective control' is crucial for Barluschke, which is why he uses his video camera even to film wrenching family scenes, which Heise edits into his film knowing full well that he thereby shares this totalitarian positioning. (Rebhandl 2003)

Against this multiplicity of fictions and realities, the least accurate description of Barluschke as a person seems to be the Stasi's evaluation, which concludes: 'He is characterised by firmness of principle, a sense of responsibility and political reliability'. The 'evaluation' this film presents, with a wider range of means ('testing' situations, as Walter Benjamin put it)[6] affirms at least one aspect of the Stasi evaluation: that Barluschke is a good actor (an effective agent). Indeed, even within the family, for all the fissures in its structure and all the doubts about whether he can stay with them or whether they can tolerate him, even this structure turns out to be, as in Stasi language, an effective

'operative procedure'. The 'act' of paterfamilias, flawed as it is, is ultimately successful. It is we, the audience, who are left to ask at what cost and what the success of such a family structure means. Here, I believe the composition and the counterpoint of non-narrative devices in the film have the most significance. The composition of the interview partners in space, aside from a few 'establishing' scenes which place them in the Paris apartment being given up, the new apartment Berluschke will inhabit alone or his rural origins in Germany (to which the film almost obsessively returns), most of the interviews which deal directly with their lives are composed with little sense of context. It is only Heise's film, with typewritten texts and images of East German army trucks or voice-overs quoting Stasi reports, that the 'objective' world to which Barluschke refers is 'documented' to the extent it is reliably revealed at all.

Heise only makes gestures toward such phenomena, although Barluschke refers to 'material' in Switzerland that keeps himself and his secrets safe, perhaps money or compromising documents from various espionage agencies. Here, as in his film *Fatherland* (2002) about the post-Cold War use of military bases northeast of Berlin, Heise approaches history by means that are personal. He observes how people talk or are silent about the past as they reveal themselves in dialogue with the filmmaker and his camera. As Julia Zutavern says of Barluschke's compulsion to speak, yet without revealing himself: 'Barluschke avoids saying anything, by speaking' (Zutavern 2006: 44). Rather than uncovering the 'truth', the documents and locations set a mood or provide a poetic commentary, a counterpoint to the conventional interview structure of question and answer.

All the shots in which several Barluschke family members are present are filled with turmoil and even conflict. This applies to the opening scene that Barluschke stages for Heise, and any images later in the film where more than one of them is present, even in their new apartment. In particular, the family videos Barluschke has taken after their return to the GDR in the 1980s are filled with painful conflict. His attempt to keep them all at the family table with himself holding forth at its head fails when daughter Anna slips his grip and runs off-screen past the camera. As the filmmaker here, Barluschke compulsively and stubbornly stays in frame, and does not follow or attempt to retrieve her once she has left the camera's field of vision. A press release of the German Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Files (BStU 2011) is typical of the tendency to see *Barluschke* as a Stasi story relating entirely to the former East and not its rhizomatic extensions across borders and into the present. The text applies Joana's description of Barluschke's background – 'as if from another age' and 'dark: In English one would say Gothic, gloomy' – to the GDR state or Barluschke's Stasi agent activity and not to his rural family origins, as is actually the case.

The Stasi explains much of the mystery and human manipulation that marks these biographies, but it would be a mistake to ascribe all of it to this

source. It would also underestimate the meaning and resonance of the film as a work of art – a description of a successful spy as a failed film director. Heise appends a philosophical statement to the film's conclusion, from Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*: 'Every human being is an abyss, dizzying to look down into'.[7]

CONCLUSION: EAST GERMANY'S LEGACY

After reunification, former East Germans working in independent documentary thus continued to explore the intersections between the abyss that is each person's biography and the expanse of world geography after the Cold War, building on common projects begun even before German unification. Such partnerships as that of Lars Barthel and Helga Reidemeister still investigate the world outside Europe from an independent, critical perspective. Similarly, filmmakers in the Brechtian tradition of documentary, such as Thomas Heise, investigate the very definition of the individual in the contemporary era, and the construction of identity through film. With rhizomatic connections across borders and time, their films interrogate the presence of the past and place viewers and subjects in new and open-ended relationships to one another for the future. In doing this, the films not only question the abuse of state power, but also problematise the very materials of filmmaking that echo this power. Consciously re-enacting some of the mechanisms used by state security forces in East Germany, complicating the presentation of 'evidence' or moving European experiences of history into non-European settings, these independent documentaries work to undo the reduction of human lives to mere records and documents – or even to 'stories'.

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NOTES

1. I have written elsewhere about the challenges faced by GDR filmmakers in the years immediately following the reunification of Germany (Byg 1997b, 2013). A certain historical

continuity of filmmaking does exist between East and West Germany, and this is perhaps most pronounced in documentary. Cooperation existed before 1989 and continues today. This means that where the subject matter does not reveal it, there may be very little reason to identify the work of a 'former Eastern' filmmaker as relating to the East. Post-GDR culture is not automatically legible as such. In a related manner, I have stressed the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'minor literature' to reveal the alternative, if not oppositional, nature of German cinema to the extent that it does not belong to, or even rivals, dominant structures in the international film industry and globalised media in general (Byg 1995: 150–1).

2. One rhizomatic aspect of GDR documentary is its blending, or intersection, with West German film, both before and after 1989. Regarding construction of identity through film, a German film book from 2006 focused on 'A Portrait of International Documentary Filmmakers' with the title *Poeten, Chronisten, Rebellen* – 'Poets, Chroniclers, Rebels' (Teissl and Kull 2006). Of only three German filmmakers featured, two are from the former East, Volker Koepp and Thomas Heise, the third is the renowned West Berliner Harun Farocki. This example will be of significance to our analysis below, especially the question of 'poetic' and 'rebellious' versus historical chronicles with a narrative basis.
3. Examples of an historical settling of accounts (*Abrechnung*) would be television histories, such as the four-part TV film *That Was the GDR* (1993) or films produced on behalf of the Stiftung Aufarbeitung (Federal Foundation for the Reappraisal of the SED Dictatorship). The latter is an attempt to set the balance against the oppression of the GDR state, using resources from the former governing party to focus on histories of its injustices and the victims, and also utilising the general film style of television history or journalism, not 'independent' cinema.
4. Cultural theorist Wolfgang Engler even entitled a book focusing on the optimistic times of the early 1970s *The East Germans as Avant-Garde* (Engler 2002). Post-1989 films concentrating on the independent and underground arts and performance scene in the GDR include *Counter-Images*, *Assertion of Space*, *Poetry of the Underground* and *La Villette*. The painter and filmmaker Jürgen Böttcher spans both official and avant-garde art, as well as past and present, in his 2001 film *A Place in Berlin*. Here, an official monument and the artworks that became part of it are revisited with the inclusion of previously unseen film footage from 1981–6. The juxtaposition of media forms, improvised music and levels of indexicality and memory leads to an avant-garde construction. The images of the statue of Friedrich Engels hanging in the air raise the issue of the sacred in GDR memory, perhaps ironically, as Ralf Schenk has observed the similarity to the suspended statue of Jesus on the cross in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* (Schenk 2001). The 'suspended Friedrich Engels' may also have been a reference at the time of filming in 1986 to the banned Barlach film *The Lost Angel*. Although elegiac in showing the 'official' GDR monuments as fragile and transitory, Böttcher's film avoids reinstating official art, instead documenting its transitory nature, both at the time it was being produced and today, as it becomes one architectural feature among many in the urban landscape, with its socialist provenance obscured. This 'independent cinema' approach distinguishes the film from any attempt to 'restore' socialist art to its former place, the kind of moves that have understandably caused controversy since 1989.
5. This otherworldly reality of ship-breaking in South Asia has become something of a pre- and post-industrial spectre in contemporary culture in itself (see the websites and other references listed in the bibliography for the artists Reeves and Langewiesche, Burtynski, Reichmann and Hutton).
6. Walter Benjamin referred to the cinema's representation of an actor as more analagous to scientific 'testing' than a performance over which the actor has control (1968: 219–26).

7. Büchner's *Woyzeck* (1936–7), a classic of German theatre with many modernist adaptations, is also echoed in the work of the West German filmmaker Werner Herzog. Herzog filmed the drama in 1979 (*Woyzeck*), but also alludes to this famous line in the title of his documentary on men sentenced to death, *Into the Abyss* ([*Tod in Texas*], 2011).

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CHAPTER 2

No Going Back: Continuity and Change in Australian Documentary

Deane Williams and John Hughes

Documentary dealing with immigration and the migrant experience in Australia is a continuous thread running through Australian cinema, more recently eclipsed by works equally complex in their articulation of politics and culture, responding in different ways to Australia's reaction to refugees and the troublesome obsession in Australian domestic political discourse with 'border protection'. In what follows, we make reference to state-sponsored documentary of the early 1950s supporting immigration in post-war reconstruction, and to a number of recent documentary projects across a spectrum of contemporary forms, projects that respond to public debate around asylum seekers and refugees. Questions of editorial and creative independence and the relationship of these with Australian public television have become increasingly complex and problematic in recent times. The examples we discuss illustrate a diversity of strategies filmmakers have adopted in responding to recent developments in both the financing and production context, and the prominence of political contestation concerning refugee policy. But before turning to the films themselves, aspects of this political and film production context need to be outlined.

Setting aside the occupation of the continent and dispossession of its original inhabitants by the English arriving by boat in the late eighteenth century, Australia's first experience of 'boat people' followed the victory of the Vietnamese in the American war in Vietnam. A conservative government under Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (from 1975 to 1983) accepted large numbers of refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia in a manner recognised today as a humane response to the Indo-Chinese refugee crisis. A small

proportion of these asylum seekers appeared on the horizon as 'boat people',[1] and it was this *visibility* that initiated an abiding obsession with 'illegals' and border control that has, on the one hand, tempted and lured opportunistic politicians and, on the other hand, plagued governments on and off ever since. Over the past twenty-five years, Australians' attitudes to asylum seekers arriving by boat have gradually become increasingly hostile (Betts 2001: 7), even though by any measure, Australia has far less to deal with than many other countries.

The visibility of boat arrivals, and some Australians' growing hostility toward them, had an abiding focus when a Norwegian ship, the *Tampa*, rescued four hundred people from a shipwreck in August 2001. A federal election due toward the end of that year excited a promise that 'stopping the boats' was likely to be a winner.[2] The government insisted the survivors of the shipwrecked *Palapa*, already at sea for days, were a problem either for Indonesia or the country of the rescue ship, Norway. This was despite the fact that Australia was the coastal state with the nearest port. The Prime Minister John Howard, a master of 'deceiving without lying' (Marr and Wilkinson 2003: 50–1), shut the country's borders to the shipwrecked asylum seekers, and established a virtually secret task force within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to coordinate a programme – 'Operation Reflex' – involving a number of government departments and the Royal Australian Navy to prevent asylum seekers arriving by boat from landing on Australian territory, despite international conventions (to which Australia is a signatory) specifying that refugees might lawfully seek asylum.

This '*Tampa* affair' and the 'children overboard case' are well known in Australia for initiating a persistent discourse of competitive cruelty between the two major political parties, seeking to discourage boat arrivals. In the children overboard case, Prime Minister Howard and Minister for Defense Peter Reith claimed they were told by the Navy that asylum seekers had thrown children into the sea. This claim was not true. 'Genuine refugees don't do that', said the Prime Minister, 'I don't want people like that in Australia' (Marr and Wilkinson 2003: 186–7). Reith was corrected by the Navy and told there was no evidence to support this claim, and yet 'within three hours Reith was claiming to every media outlet in the country that it had occurred' (2003: 201). The Howard government was returned in the federal elections of November 2001, in a victory that many commentators considered significantly aided by the governments 'turn back the boats' policies (Marr and Wilkinson 2003: 2; Kelly 2009: 596–7). The Labor Party quietly acquiesced to the increasingly extreme measures of the Howard government, in order to deny Howard the opportunity to portray members of the Labor Party as 'soft on boat people'. In 2007, a Labor government was elected promising to reverse the Howard legacy. But gradually, the old policies have returned, as both major parties declare their

determination to 'stop the boats'. These events have engaged Australian documentary makers, who have also had to deal with substantial shifts in funding and production circumstances.

Over recent years, Australian independent documentary production has been reconfigured from a tradition and practice of small teams of filmmakers developing and producing works in an artisan mode – similar to that of the novelist, the writer, the independent scholar, the painter – in favour of a rationalised creative economy where consolidated, larger firms are subsidised to deliver factual television programming as outsourced producers. In the 1970s and 1980s, independent documentary circulated through the self-managed distribution and exhibition mechanisms of festivals, filmmakers' cooperatives and non-theatrical educational markets. The challenge for filmmakers was gaining access to television audiences, as public television made their programmes mostly in-house and resisted films made independently. In the 1980s, independent filmmakers began to break through, as public broadcasters sought to shed staff and outsource their production. Since the late 1960s, Australian governments have supported documentary alongside subsidies to the feature film industry. Public broadcasting, with its charter requirement to support Australian creative resources, commissioned work proposed by filmmakers in a competitive context where, while only about 10 per cent of the projects proposed were commissioned, for the most part the ideas were initiated from independent filmmakers. Gradually, television executives, commissioning editors and programmers have assumed more editorial and creative control over the work they commission, as a presale (about one-third of a film's budget) determined filmmakers' access to production funding. At the same time, public television has increasingly favoured factual series, factual entertainment, reality TV and other formats over the single, artisanal, independent documentary.

Policy architects in the screen agencies and government sought to engineer fewer, larger companies delivering products to Australian and international television, rather than supporting what they saw as a 'cottage industry' (FitzSimons et al. 2011: 232–41). The priority of policy is the appearance of an economically viable factual production sector, rather than a concern with cultural diversity or critical, independent filmmaking. Structural changes to governmental support mechanisms implemented in 2008–9 have squeezed the already marginalised documentary sector into producing factual programming. There are exceptions, 'pockets of resistance', within the institutions and programmes. One tiny fund survives within Screen Australia that will countenance documentary proposals without a television presale. It is this fund that supports a high proportion of Australia's creative independent documentary. There are other exceptions. Powerful single documentaries are still occasionally commissioned – we discuss two examples below. And the reality TV

format shows can deliver a documentary imperative, as we will argue in our analysis of *Go Back to Where You Came From* (dir. Poole, 2011). Also, filmmakers continue to make and distribute independent documentary, despite the hegemony of television.

In the Australian context where public television has played a major role since the 1980s in commissioning documentaries and shaping the films' form and discourse, are we moving further away from filmmakers' creative and editorial independence, as elsewhere in the world after the 1990s? In order to examine this point and assess the evolution of the role of Australian television, we will focus on a group of films dealing with asylum seekers, refugees and immigration. Here, independence is not only understood in terms of production and distribution patterns, but also, and more importantly, in terms of political stance and social commitment. We will mainly examine two projects: one that sits at the commencement of official government filmmaking, and another, a television series emblematic of recent developments in Australian factual programming. Both of these projects, *Mike and Stefani* (dir. Williams, 1952) and *Go Back to Where You Came From* (dir. Poole, 2011) address Australian responses to asylum seekers and refugees.

MIKE AND STEFANI: POST-WAR AESTHETICS AND POLITICS

In the late 1940s, when Ron Maslyn Williams set out to make what became a classic of post-war Australian documentary, *Mike and Stefani*, he was working to a clear brief in a troubled world. Australian planners had decided that the country must 'populate or perish' and Labor Party Minister for Immigration Arthur Calwell was adamant that this programme would be an all-white affair. Calwell was also Minister for Information, and as such the responsible minister for the newly established Australian National Film Board (ANFB). Not surprisingly, films directed toward supporting the post-war immigration programme were prominent in the early films made by the ANFB's production division and commissioned by the Department of Immigration.

Mike and Stefani was the most ambitious and complex of these. Williams and his cameraman Reg Pearse returned to Europe in 1949, where they had been located from 1940 until 1945 with the Australian Department of Information, shooting newsreels for Cinesound and Movietone. On this project, they were shooting, in 'dramatic reconstruction', the real-life story of displaced Ukrainians Mycola (Mike), Stefani, Ginga and Ladu. Shot on location, including displaced persons camps and the ship on which the protagonists travelled to Australia, the film included newsreel footage Williams and others had shot in Europe during the war. Australian policy planners engaged

with post-war reconstruction feared Australians might not welcome European migrants who were not British. From the point of view of documentary practitioners alert to the emerging international discourse in non-fiction film, this was the kind of problem that modern documentary might address. The 'engineering of consent' (Carey 1995) among a suspicious population could be achieved, Williams believed, by making a certain kind of film. Williams explained to Calwell: 'If you show the Australian people, who are an emotional and sentimental people that these "Balts", "Wogs" or "Dagos" are human beings who've had a terrible time, you'll find that most Australians will be on their side' (Williams 1977). A second strand of editorial required of the film was to reassure Australians that the selection processes were rigorous.

Mike and Stefani is a documentary rich with interpretive potential, ideologically, at the level of editorial, and philosophically, in its creative priorities and aesthetic form. At certain points, the film draws on cinematic melodrama and at others is redolent with the 'revolutionary humanism' identified by André Bazin in his theory of neorealism (Williams 2008: 135–8). Technically, the film is proficient, its narrative and aesthetic imaginative and rich, while the integration of newsreel footage of war-torn Europe with dramatic reconstruction showing people fleeing across barren landscapes, narrated in broken English voice-over – offering first-hand accounts of the conditions under which refugees found their way to displaced persons camps – is clever and moving. It is an exemplary instance of the rare, successful creative experiment in a government-sponsored film.

Formally, the film was a marked departure from the informational, newsreel and instructional modes of the immediate post-war years, when films were designed to raise morale in the spectrum of post-war reconstruction. At a variance to these films, *Mike and Stefani* belonged to a 'creative', poetic or essayist idiom or voice. Williams himself understood his film as neorealist in terms of its use of locations, social actors – it is cast entirely of 'actuals' – its episodic structure, its soundtrack score hinting at melodrama and its humanist and romantic rendering of the world, a worldview directly influenced by the films of Roberto Rossellini (Williams 2008: 123). Williams' progressive Catholic humanism – a sensibility informed by compassion for individuals challenged by fate and blessed by grace – was in conflict in some ways with other moments of the committed modern documentary movement in Australia, which assumed a more instrumental social imperative. Williams positioned himself more as an artist and a romantic; an intellectual of the Catholic left. Williams' contribution to Australian politics and letters is yet to be developed and explored as fully as it deserves.

Structurally, the film splits into two around its dual editorial objectives. The first part of the film dramatises Mike and Stefani's idyllic pre-war romance, their separation, displacement and reunion in the camp. The second

part of the film includes a long sequence of eight minutes, depicting their interview with an Australian immigration official working with the United Nations (UN) refugee resettlement agency. This long live action scene is composed from a number of set-ups, illustrating that this is not simple documentation of an actual interview as it unfolded. A young Australian departmental official, Harold Grant, conducts the interview aided by a German translator. The question (via the translator) that generates the most agitated performance from Mike is: 'Why doesn't he want to return to his own country?' Slightly overcome with emotion, to the embarrassment of his anxious wife, Mike replies directly:

> – Mr Consul, you ask why we do not go to our country, because our country is run by Polish government (sic). We're always afraid for our tomorrow. It is not sure for us. I want to build one future for my child, for us [Shouting] it is not possible to live in our country just now.

Glancing down, as if reading from a script, he continues:

> – Millions of people from my country are sent to far Siberia, from the Ukraine, from Poland, from Lithuania, from Latvia. We cannot more stay in this country [glancing down] by this government, this regime. We cannot follow for our God. We have no Church for us. Nothing we have.
> – And why does he want to go to Australia?
> – I want at least (to be) free to live.

The slightly querulous young official seems a little stern as we hear Mike in voice-over, 'Thank you very much, sir', and cut to a close-up of a rubber stamp marking the page revealing 'accepted'. Grant, in voice-over: 'Goodbye, good luck; next one.' A ship's whistle blows, an anchor is raised, we see a long pan across portraits of fine looking young people leaning against a ship's railing approaching their new homeland. We see the film's nuclear family alone, looking out to the future; this vision providing the bed for Stefani's closing editorial voice-over: 'Oh God, now our children will be free.' Today, these universal sentiments remain affecting. The desperate plight of the refugee remains immediately recognisable, while the political and historical universe fashioning the relations between the asylum seekers and the Australian state are utterly transformed. While Mike and Stefani's well-founded fears played neatly into Australia's Cold War anti-communism, clearly here is a family suffering from displacement (if not persecution) and, importantly, welcome in Australia. Not so the refugee arriving by boat in Australia today (as outlined above).

Although it received critical acclaim, winning Best Film at Australian's first international film festival in Olinda in 1952, the film had difficulty finding

a release. The government departments that commissioned the film were anxious. The sombre, infuriating selection interview caused the most concern, not only for distributors and festivals, but also for one of its primary purposes – distribution through diplomatic posts abroad. On the one hand, immigration officials feared the film might depict Australian treatment of this nice, professional Ukrainian family too harshly. The concern was that the interview was so dire that it discouraged those seeking to immigrate, and suggested that after all these displaced people had suffered, Australian procedures were compounding their plight. So, the film was shelved. *Mike and Stefani* was designed to address anticipated public resistance to the inclusion of non-British displaced persons in post-war immigration programmes. Today, quite different modes of documentary seek to address public attitudes that mirror those of the early post-war years.

DIFFERENT REGISTERS: INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY AND REALITY TV

Steve Thomas' *Hope* (2008) is a first person essay made in collaboration with the film's subject, Amal Basry, who was one of the few survivors of SIEV X (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel Unknown) – an asylum seekers' boat that sank in October 2001. Around 350 people drowned, only seven survived. *Hope* is not an investigative documentary on the SIEV X disaster, but rather goes directly to the experience of Amal, in her dedicated advocacy supporting the survivors and her search to fathom the tragedy she has survived. On the *Hope* website, Thomas discusses financing the film and the broadcasters' reasoning in rejecting the project. He says they considered audiences 'oversaturated' with stories about refugees, and SIEV X was old news (Thomas 2009). With the help of co-producer Sue Brooks, he was able to raise enough money through foundations and crowd funding to finish the film at feature length. For Thomas, a high level of collaboration and accountability is essential for ethical engagement between filmmaker and subject. Writing on making *Hope*, Thomas' insightful reflections concerning ethical issues that projects of this kind raise for filmmakers constitutes an important contribution to documentary scholarship (Thomas 2010). He argues that the values and working practices now commonplace in factual production militate against this ethical practice with regard to relations between filmmakers and their subjects. Australian television has yet to broadcast *Hope*.

Two other significant documentary projects challenging audiences to encounter the experience of asylum seekers today in imaginative and critical ways are Anne Delaney's *A Well Founded Fear* (2008) and Russell Vines' *The Man Who Jumped* (2011). Both were commissioned by hybrid public

broadcaster Special Broadcasting Service (SBS)[3] with presale license agreements to around 30 per cent of their budgets, and principle investment from government subsidy allocated on confirmation of the broadcaster's presale commitment. In *A Well Founded Fear*, Anne Delaney and her co-director Bentley Dean travel with Phil Glendenning, director of the Edmund Rice Centre, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) advocating for refugee rights, as he seeks to discover what has become of individuals who returned under pressure and force to Afghanistan, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. The film begins with Glendenning visiting neighbours and friends of several Hazara families, who were returned by the Australian Government to Afghanistan in 2002 on the grounds that the Taliban had been overthrown and that therefore their 'well-founded fear' of persecution had passed. The point is clearly made that Australian authorities either do not know, or do not care, that these individuals and families are far from safe; some found, some missing, some dead. While the observational style throughout the film foregrounds Glendenning as a narrative thread linking stories, the emphasis remains on the subjects. Glendenning's emotional journey is also intense and affecting. While the historical veracity of the subject's stories is substantiated, there is no pretence of objective journalism here. Glendenning's presence in the film is not that of a celebrity on-screen narrator, but a curious and compassionate Australian rather unsettled, even horrified, at what he learns as the film progresses.

In another vein, *The Man Who Jumped* (dir. Vines, 2011, financed with an SBS license presale and investment from Screen Australia's National Documentary Program – the surviving remnant of the post-war agency that produced *Mike and Stefani*) recounts the story of another Hazari man, Mazhar Ali, eventually denied asylum and deported to Pakistan. Unlike other films discussed here, *The Man Who Jumped* adopts conventions of current affairs, but it develops its editorial in a far more essayist mode than current affairs normally allow. It is a case study of Ali, whose image made the front pages of newspapers in Australia and around the world when on Australia Day 2002, he jumped into coils of razor wire from the perimeter fence of the Woomera detention camp in outback South Australia. Woomera's Hazara refugees are one group among many whose mandatory detention and conditions of confinement by governments seeking to 'send a message' to would-be asylum seekers has been an ongoing source of disquiet, protest and resistance among informed Australians. When *The Man Who Jumped* was broadcast on SBS in 2012, a decade after the events it depicted, things had not changed all that much. The radical gesture of this film lies in its editorial strategy. Deploying an orthodox contemporary treatment – including dramatic reconstruction with highly stylised lighting and camera work, a celebrity narrator, expert commentators and audio stings – Ali's character and personality, his compassion and courage, his astute, unhesitant commitment to his fellow Hazara, is expertly fashioned.

This man depicted by mainstream reporting in 2001 as some anonymous mad extremist attempting suicide on television is revealed instead in this film as an exemplary hero. There is no need here for the on-screen Aussie interpreting for 'us' on behalf of the 'other'. *The Man Who Jumped* builds its case study directly, leaving the spectator wondering why Ali has not been awarded a human rights medal for bravery, rather than sent back (to where the government thought he came from). And this without any hint – apart from that inherent aesthetically in the 'dramatic reconstructions' – of a rhetoric of melodrama. It is regrettable that SBS has struggled to maintain numerically significant audiences. Running commercials during programmes, rather than between them – a strategy to raise revenue introduced in 2006 – has not helped build audiences.[4] *The Man Who Jumped* was probably seen by around 250,000 people when it was broadcast. However, its social impact may well be much greater as it circulates in a variety of non-theatrical and educational settings.

The three-part series *Go Back to Where You Came From* (2011), produced by Cordell Jigsaw Productions for SBS television, deploys 'reality TV' in the documentation of a kind of simulation game, in which six people characterised as 'ordinary Australians' are subjected to a series of encounters casting them into physically and emotionally confronting situations with refugees and asylum seekers. The show follows them as they travel back from the western suburbs of Sydney, through Malaysia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Jordan and Iraq. Described as an observational documentary, the reality TV dimension adheres to a structure in which audiences are invited to watch as the cast participants struggle among themselves against a set of environments manufactured to test them. The stress against which they are tested is constituted by refugees, asylum seekers and their circumstances. The appeal to audiences is the interpersonal dynamics, the conflict, suffering and stress of the Australian cast. Through this set-up, audiences could ponder the spectrum of attitudes displayed by the cast and learn quite a lot about the life experiences and dilemmas facing asylum seekers today.

Go Back was a breakthrough show for SBS ratings. At the time of writing, there have been two three-part series (2011, 2012).[5] The format has been exported internationally. Versions of the series are expected to roll-out in Germany, France, Norway, the Netherlands, Sweden, South Africa, Canada and the United States. The second series rated as well as the first, but it cast celebrity talents, such as a right-wing politician and an activist comedian of the left in the roles occupied by 'ordinary Australians' in the earlier series. This brought the reality TV conceit to the foreground, to such an extent that any insight that might have been available within the personal encounters – that moment of 'authenticity', the 'redemption' Jane Roscoe (2004) seeks in the reality show – was entirely liquidated. The format dominated any possible documentary encounter that might remain available in the work. Not so the

first series, discussed further below. *Go Back* is one among many documentary interventions into the contemporary debates around asylum seekers and refugee policy. Some have been made with television presales supporting independent filmmakers' work, while others have been made despite broadcasters' failure to support them. Around the world today, financing documentary without the endorsement of television is increasingly difficult, and Australia is no exception.

Go Back was a big hit for SBS. Although it was not able to compete with *MasterChef* in the same time slot on a commercial channel, which always gets about 1.5 million spectators, it became the SBS top-rating show in 2011 with 600,000 viewers. The show was financed in the same way as the previous films cited – with an SBS presale and principle investment from the government's Screen Australia. Its status as an independent documentary series therefore is a matter of degree in several domains. The six 'ordinary Australians' were well cast: they included three men and three women, five of the six shared an antipathy toward 'boat people', from crude, self-confessed racism (Rachael 'I just don't like Africans'), hostility towards 'illegals' and 'queue jumpers', through to generalised resentment about these 'criminals' getting government handouts. The exception, Glenys, a 39-year-old country and western singer from Newcastle, expressed her sympathy toward asylum seekers. Out of compassion, she says Australia should welcome more refugees, as Australia is privileged in so many ways. Others cast were Roderick, a 29-year-old who is politically active and ambitious; a young Liberal from Brisbane, Adam; a 26-year-old lifesaver from Cronulla, present during the race riots there in 2003; Darren, a 42-year-old businessman and ex-soldier from Adelaide, horrified that anyone could risk the lives of their family by getting on a boat ('We need to send a tougher signal'; 'this is not on . . . people who come here without documentation should be immediately repatriated'); and Faye, a 62-year-old ex-social worker, outraged when a detention centre was built next door to her idyllic farm in rural South Australia ('They've got everything there, even flat-screen TVs!').

The on-screen master of ceremonies is David Corlett, who has written widely on refugee issues and whose book, *Following Them Home*, also informed the film *A Well Founded Fear* (2008). The series opens with a scene in which Corlett confiscates the participants' mobile phones and wallets, announcing that they will not be able to call their families for the twenty-five days of the 'social experiment'. The structure of the series reverses the chronology of refugees' journeys – here, beginning where refugees have settled and then, one step at a time, going back to where they came from. All the situations have been carefully prepared, and the narratives threaded through seem designed to challenge particular blind spots and prejudices of the individual participants, while also providing potentially deeper links between the refugees' participants encounter and aspects of their own life experience.

In the first episode, one group visits Iraqi 'boat people' settled as refugees in Western Sydney (according the Department of Immigration and Citizenship in 2013, more than 90 per cent of those who make it to Australia by boat are found to be refugees). Some of the participant's questions are answered: 'Why did you destroy your papers?' 'The people smugglers demand them'; 'Why didn't you refuse to hand them over?' 'They would kill us'; 'Really?' 'Yes!' Others (including Rachael) visit and sleep over for a couple of days with an African family, considered 'good refugees' because they have been accepted into Australia through official channels, some of the 1 per cent of refugees who are resettled internationally through UN processes. Next, the participants are taken one step backwards to the Villawood detention centre. There is no coverage from inside Villawood, as reportage is strictly controlled, but as the visitors emerge they are clearly disturbed and upset. One man has explained to them his conviction that the only option if his appeal application is refused is to commit suicide, because returning to Afghanistan, as the government has planned for him, is intolerable. Next comes the Indonesian fishing boat with its staged crisis at sea, a rather predictable factual melodrama, and possibly the least successful simulation. The presence of a crew shooting this staged life-threatening situation draws attention to the contradictions of the reality TV conceit that is driving the show.

In Malaysia, where there are 100,000 'illegals', the Australian participants of the show camp in extremely overcrowded conditions with Chin families fleeing persecution in Burma, and join a police raid on 'illegals' working and living on a building site – a troubling scene in which some of the Australians help the police round up 'illegals', and Rachael exclaims: 'This is what we should be doing!' Gradually, attitudes begin to change a little. Some participants concede that, faced with this situation, the only option would be to try escaping to Indonesia by boat.

Across the series' three-hour duration, the Australian participants encounter harrowing experiences, visited upon perfectly warm and welcoming families faced with impossible decisions. By the end of the show, these emotional encounters have produced greater compassion among the group toward refugees: the closed minds and hearts are less so; the approach of the self-confessed racist has shifted: 'I look at them differently, they're not black people, they're African people.'

CONCLUSION: INDEPENDENT OR NOT?

Go Back to Where You Came From goes some way to correcting what is missing, and intentionally elided by politicised media discourse, extrapolating the complexity of issues around asylum seekers and refugees in Australia. Familiar and

horrific images from television news deployed in *Go Back* repeated to slightly different purposes each time they appear show footage of a boat smashing against cliffs at Christmas Island in December 2010. Forty-eight people are known to have drowned in this incident. These terrible images have developed many important meanings. They are evoked to eclipse 'we will stop the boats' (citing national security and border control) with 'we will stop the boats' (to save lives lost at sea). Whereas the forbidden image of asylum seekers arriving by boat evoked resentment, threat and fear for some and compassion for others; today, the image denotes a political debate and a failure of the government to resolve the issue. While it is difficult today to be as confident as Maslyn Williams was when he advised his minister in the late 1940s of the efficacy of documentary in achieving compassionate political consensus, *Go Back* goes great distances to reinstate compassion as the dominant term over politics, while the structure of its popular 'reality' strategy, foregrounding the ordinary Australian, takes dangerous risks of its own.

While the show provides an opportunity to reflect on emotional, psychological and ideological resistance to compassion that seems endlessly capable of manipulation for opportunistic political purposes, it does not address the privilege and power of decision-makers, whether those determining policy or at the level of everyday public opinion. The 'us' and 'them' and its hierarchy is reinforced just as it is challenged; an unquestioned assumption in *Go Back* is that '*we* decide' – that is to say, those of us inside the protected borders decide. The spectator's point of view is positioned with the Australian cast. Australians' entitlement to refuse is considered absolute. The dialectic of tolerance is at play here: in delivering judgements of the 'good refugee' against the 'bad refugee', the privilege of the tolerant over the tolerated is affirmed. The hand bestowing the gift of tolerance positions the receiver below it. *The Man Who Jumped* does very important work in this terrain, bringing the figure of the threatening other to centre stage as hero.

Go Back does its work equally well in another register. Bringing half a dozen white Australians into a simulation of the actuality of displacement, affecting many millions of displaced persons with its creative treatment of this actuality and enticing half a million others to watch and argue, is surely firmly in the documentary tradition. Its status as independent documentary, however, is less clear. It was made by a company independent of the broadcaster and independent of the government agencies that were its principle investors, as were the other broadcast works cited here. However, in the case of *Go Back*, it was the SBS Commissioning Editor Peter Newman who appropriated the project, adapted from a concept brought to them, and selected a different company to make it. *A Well Founded Fear* and *The Man Who Jumped* are independent films, as they were initiated and developed editorially and creatively independent of the broadcaster. Among the films discussed here, only *Hope* could

claim entirely uncompromised editorial and creative independence. Maslyn Williams' film made for the Australian National Film Board as a commission from the Department of Immigration in the early 1950s has the least claim to independence, and yet in other respects – its aesthetic innovation and robust editorial – is as much an authored, creative documentary as many more recent films, driven as they often are by the authorship of format and genre.

NOTES

1. Between 1976 and 1981, 2,059 Vietnamese arrived by boat. A second wave of arrivals by boat began later in the 1980s. In 1999, the 'third wave' of asylum seekers began, mainly from the Middle East. In 2013, asylum seekers arrived mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka (Phillips and Spinks 2013: 3). For comparative numbers of asylum seekers arriving by boat or plane, see Department of Immigration and Citizenship (2012).
2. This phrase was again successfully employed by the Tony Abbott-led coalition of liberal and national parties in September 2013.
3. SBS is Australia's second national public broadcaster, established to reflect Australian multiculturalism. SBS TV is hybrid insofar as it derives revenue from both government and on-screen commercials, which since 2006 have been broadcast during programmes, as well as between them.
4. In 2007, Richard Finlayson, then head of SBS commercial affairs, was reported in the broadcasting industry magazine *B&T* as expressly setting out the SBS ambition 'to position SBS as Australia's fourth commercial network' (Dempster 2007: 28).
5. A third series is planning to exercise the format inland, casting diverse participants who will encounter various indigenous communities.

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CHAPTER 3

A Space in Between: The Legacy of the Activist Documentary Film in India

Camille Deprez

The first international wave of activist documentary cinema began around the late 1960s and the early 1970s, including in India. This was a time when filmmakers leaned towards more personal arguments about political and social issues, when documentaries moved away from observation and favoured intervention in society and when a new documentary practice and style developed, determined by low budgets and striking content. Later, in the 1990s to 2000s, the digital revolution brought further developments to this mode of filmmaking worldwide. In India, along with the market-driven satellite TV boom and privatisation of the sector of the early 1990s, it has allowed a wider range of politically committed documentarists to make and circulate their films. This new context has broadened documentary production, distribution and exhibition strategies, and thus complicated the meaning of the 'activist' documentary endeavour.

In general, film scholars tend to define the activist documentary film in loose terms. Bill Nichols describes it as a way to 'engage aesthetically and transform politically' (2001: 225), while the *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* designates the activist film and video as 'one of the sets of tactics and strategies developed by social movements . . . to prompt social change . . . using all the available means of persuasion and coercion at their disposal' (2006: 7–9). Academics also agree that the digital and web revolutions have allowed more user-generated and participatory content to be produced, and thus have enabled, in theory at least, 'average citizens to circumvent the gatekeeping of commercial media and traditional channels of political discourses' (Aguayo 2011: 362–3). In today's satellite TV and digital eras, do Indian

activist documentaries develop similar characteristics to those emerging in other countries around the world? Or if one assumes that the definition and function of the activist documentary film vary according to specific contexts, how did historical events and national policies influence the evolution and role of the activist documentary film in India?

This chapter will look into the definition and legacy of the early activist mode of documentary filmmaking in 1970s India and will show how current filmmakers reinvent its meaning by shifting its initial boundaries of total independence to more subtle and moving grounds. It will argue that beyond claims of 'independence', recent activist documentaries have inherited a space of resistance that never totally broke away from the official and commercial spheres, but rather developed a 'space in between', based upon complex systems of collaboration, in order to change these official and commercial discourses, practices and styles from within.

DEFINING THE INDIAN ACTIVIST DOCUMENTARY FILM

In the 1970s, India went through a multifaceted crisis that led the population to demonstrate against unemployment, poverty, inflation and political corruption. In the name of national security, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a State of Emergency from 1975 to 1977 and imposed tighter official control over the media, including the documentary film. Films Division's official documentaries praising Indira Gandhi and her iron-fisted politics were broadcasted on public television, then considered the new medium of mass persuasion (Deprez 2012). The Indian Government also firmly controlled the Central Board of Film Certification, in charge of clearing films for public exhibition.[1] Dissident documentaries were either heavily censored or banned from the mass media, movie theatres and major film festivals. In this context of unprecedented socio-political unrest in the history of independent India, a few student activists saw in the documentary film the most efficient medium to provide an instant record of arresting events taking place in real-time, without re-enactment (Garga 2007: 188–93). Three first-time filmmakers, Gautam Ghose (*Hungry Autumn*, 1974), Utpalendu Chakraborty (*Mukti Chai/A Cry for Freedom*, 1977) and Anand Patwardhan (*Kraanti Ki Tarangein/Waves of Revolution*, 1977; *Zameer ke Bandi/Prisoners of Conscience*, 1978) gave unparalleled visibility to the 1974 famine in West Bengal – the non-violent anti-corruption movement in Bihar that led to the enforcement of the State of Emergency and the issue of political prisoners.[2] These filmmakers shifted the gaze from a positive and idealised representation of independent India and its cooperative people – typical of Films Division's productions – to its disturbing problems of social injustice and the ability of local citizens to take action for their own social and economic betterment.

In the short-term context of the Emergency, filmmakers had to work outside national film structures. Due to their critical approach to the socio-political situation of India and to a larger context of media state monopoly and strict censorship, their documentaries were produced under political and financial constraints. But instead of restricting their work, it became a framework within which they invented innovative production, distribution and exhibition strategies. Films were financed through private donations; they were shot with affordable cameras and sound recorders; and old film stock was recycled to bypass state quotas.[3] Low budgets became a trademark, which could instantaneously distinguish their work from that of official documentaries. They made and screened their films underground, within student unions and militant groups in India or among the educated diaspora abroad, based on their personal initiatives and networks. Such efforts helped to create a new visibility for these specific political and social issues within activist circles and local communities, as well as in foreign universities and film festivals.[4]

Early activist filmmakers introduced a new selection of topics, which focused on all forms of social injustice; a unique record of real-time political, economic and social change; and an unprecedented focus on the role of civil society in triggering such change.[5] This challenged the official documentary film discourse – widely circulated in Indian theatres and on public television[6] – of the ruling political powers and economic forces making unilateral decisions for the people's 'own good', but without them ever being consulted. Communities marginalised or depreciated by the public and private media therefore became the main focus of activist documentaries. Filmmakers developed new strategies in order to fill the gaps of official history. They brought visibility to political and social issues that remained uncovered by the official and mainstream media, because they interfered with the government's self-assessed achievements since Independence. They defied this official version by contrasting the West Bengal famine in *Hungry Autumn* (dir. Gautam Ghose, 1974) with the overrated success of modern agriculture and industry, while demonstrations, rallies and the existence of a large number of political opponents to the state in *Waves of Revolution*, *Prisoners of Conscience* (dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1977, 1978) and *A Cry for Freedom* (dir. Utpalendu Chakraborty, 1977) contested the common portrayal of Indira Gandhi and public institutions as successfully leading the nation. Activist documentaries made in the 1980s began to expand the issues under investigation. They revealed the growing gap between rich and poor (*Shelter* dir. Uma Segal, 1984; *Bombay Hamara Shahar/Bombay Our City* dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1985), the people's oppression by the very institutions meant to protect them (*An Indian Story* and *Bhopal: Beyond Genocide* dirs Tapan Bose and Suhasini Mulay, 1981, 1984) and the system of coercion imposed upon people by traditional customs, the persistent caste system and lenient enforcement of the law (*In Secular India* and *From the Burning Embers*

Mediastorm, 1986, 1988). But the films continued to show how public institutions, including political parties, the army, the police and the administration, had failed in their self-proclaimed ambition and duty to protect national unity, democracy and social justice.

Although such events could be missed or denied access, these new films partly overcame their under-representation in official documentaries and the mainstream media. The filmmakers' engagement in various causes outside of filmmaking (the students' anti-corruption movement, the fate of prisoners of conscience, the poor's struggle for survival) allowed them to attend and record demonstrations, rallies, riots and natural or industrial disasters. Since these filmmakers were documenting sensitive issues taking place at a precise time and place (which could therefore easily be missed), they created a new kind of documentary that mixed live images and direct techniques of filming with recorded, recycled and, on rare occasions, re-enacted footage, in order to compensate for a lack of access to events and information. This restricted access often led filmmakers to rely on other kinds of documents: sounds rather than images (voice-over commentaries, interviews, activist songs, natural sounds, post-production sound effects), trivial representations of everyday rather than extraordinary events (images of people carrying out their daily activities) and

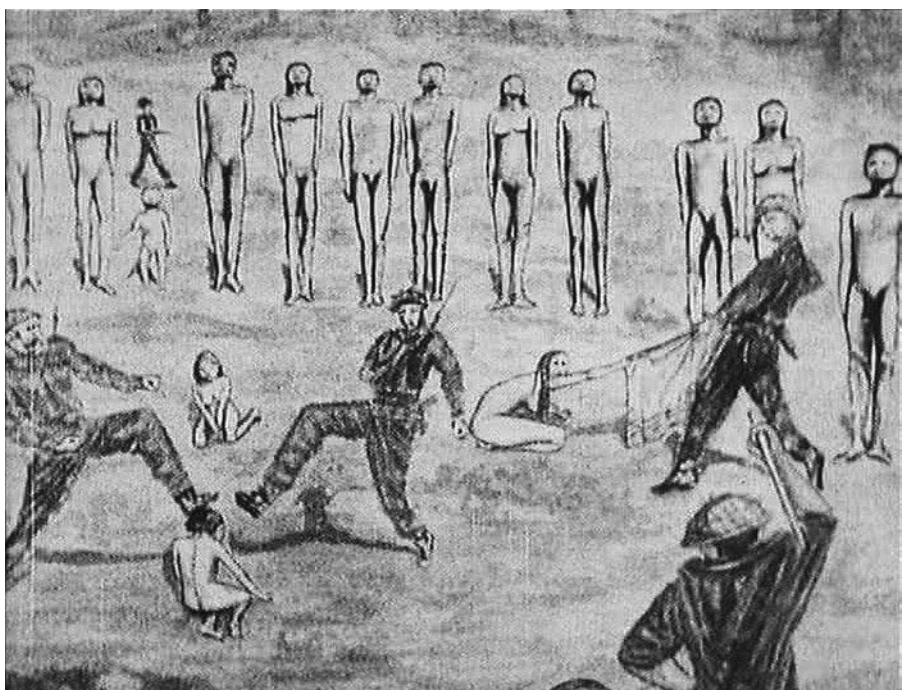

Figure 3.1 Militant drawing of life conditions in a political prisoners' camp in *Prisoners of Conscience* (dir. Patwardhan, 1978).

recycled rather than new images (press clippings, militant drawings, posters and other printed materials, or the repetition of the same footage within one film). Along with limited budgets, this strategy contributed to the creation of what could be called an 'aesthetics of deficiency'. This style implied substantial work to be done during post-production. It included a contrasting montage based upon conflicting images, as well as the construction of a sophisticated soundtrack composed of extensive voice-over commentaries, music and sound effects. Because these films are associated with direct and observational cinema, scholars and journalists tend to describe them as 'rough', 'direct' and 'fly-on-the-wall', due to the filming being largely unplanned. Consequently, these observers misconceive this post-production phase and neglect to present it as a common feature shared with official and commercial documentaries of the same period.

Concurrently, early activist filmmakers were among the first to personally engage with their subject. Under the international influence of *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema, filmmakers and the act of filming became more visible (a microphone, a sound recorder or the filmmaker himself could appear on-screen). They made their intervention both visible and audible, and thus presented situations, places and people from the point of view of insiders, as compared with the former external observations. They used the documentary film medium as a vehicle to deliver their argument to the audience, which was emphasised by the juxtaposition of contrasting images and sophisticated soundtracks. Thanks to an extensive use of handheld camera work, viewers started to hear or see the filmmaker interacting with situations and protagonists, who would regularly mention that a camera was interfering with their lives. One of the most powerful examples can be found in Anand Patwardhan's *Bombay Our City*, when one of the many victims of slum evictions by local authorities confronted and challenged the filmmaker facing his camera:

> You record our voices on your tapes, but can you do anything for us? . . . Do you have a solution? . . . You won't give us shelter even for four months. You just want to earn a name taking photographs . . . The Government has discarded us. You and I can do nothing. So don't take photographs of the poor.

These documentaries should therefore also be understood as self-criticism. The filmmakers are inevitably the product of this imperfect Indian nation that they criticise in their films. This permanent ambivalence led activist filmmakers to map a space of resistance never completely cut off from official and commercial spheres, because they understood it was the only viable option to bring about a message of political and social change.

Therefore, filmmakers drew upon their new recycling habits to develop a compromise strategy based upon strategies of appropriation and transformation. For instance, they seized and reinjected a sense of social justice in the notion of 'democracy', values of 'equality' and 'freedom', as well as in the national historical figures of Mahatma Gandhi, Bhagat Singh and Bhimrao Ambedkar, which they considered monopolised and commodified by the state, the mainstream media and neoliberal economic forces.[7] They also deconstructed the Films Division's trademark voice-of-god commentary, archival footage of state action (such as public major works, official visits and speeches) and propagandist images of India (such as local customs symbolising a people united in diversity), first used as positivist tools of mass persuasion, without completely breaking free from these points of reference. Although they criticised the official message delivered in the Films Division found footage by confronting it with their own footage in a starkly contrasting montage (such as official images of development and progress versus activist images of deep poverty), this strategy also demonstrates the profound impact of official documentaries on their personal memory and understanding of Indian history. Influenced by these early elements of cooperation with state and mainstream media, contemporary filmmakers have developed a more complex and subtle mode of politically committed documentary cinema.

MAPPING A COOPERATIVE SPACE OF RESISTANCE

Since the early 1990s, the liberalisation and privatisation of the Indian audiovisual sector, resulting from the satellite TV revolution and the concomitant end of the public broadcasting monopoly, have broadened production, distribution and exhibition opportunities for a new generation of documentary filmmakers. Filmmakers have also benefited from the generalisation of video and digital technologies, which has given them access to new affordable, miniaturised and user-friendly cameras, editing software and online distribution platforms. Compared with the context of the 1970s and despite limited means, this technological revolution facilitates the filmmaking process and makes film stock quotas and other state restrictions obsolete. The uncompromising independence of the Emergency period has evolved into a more flexible definition of the term in the post-1990 context, which transcribes into the themes and style of the films.

Politically committed filmmakers continue to explore marginalised groups of people, while exploring a wider range of topics that reflect the evolution of Indian society, the interests of a growing middle class (to which most Indian documentary filmmakers belong) and the world at large. They include contemporary issues, such as the religious clashes between Hindus and Muslims

against the rise of Hindu fundamentalism (*I Live in Behrampada* dir. Madhusree Dutta; *In the Name of God* dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1992; *Father, God and Holy War* dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1995; *Final Solution* dir. Rakesh Sharma, 2003), the state-fuelled contentious relationship with Pakistan (*A Season Outside* dir. Amar Kanwar, 1997; *War and Peace* dir. Anand Patwardhan, 2002), the struggle for autonomy in various regions of India (*A Night of Prophecy* dir. Amar Kanwar, 2002; *Tales from the Margins* dir. Kavita Joshi, 2006; *Jashn-E-Azadi* dir. Sanjay Kak, 2007; *Inshallah Kashmir* dir. Ashvin Kumar, 2012) and industrial and environmental disasters (*Seeds of Plenty/Seeds of Sorrow* dir. Manjira Datta, 1992; *Narmada Diary* dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1995; *Eternal Seed* dir. Meera Dewan, 1996; *Fishing in the Sea of Greed* dir. Anand Patwardhan, 1998; *Words on Water* dir. Sanjay Kak, 2002; *The Sovereign Forest* dir. Amar Kanwar, 2012). These latter themes reflect the filmmakers' growing awareness of, and concern for, global issues and the negative impact of corporate neoliberalism after the government decided to open India up to a free market economy and transnational corporations in the early 1990s. New subjects also reveal the interests of post-1990 middle-class documentary filmmakers that are still considered social taboos by the larger conservative Indian society, such as sexuality, queer identity, prostitution and disability (*Unlimited Girls* dir. Paromita Vohra, 2002; *In the Flesh* dir. Bishaka Datta, 2002; *Tales of the Night Fairies* dir. Shohini Ghosh, 2002; *Delhi-Mumbai-Delhi* dir. Saba Dewan, 2006; *Bilal* dir. Sourav Sarangi, 2008; *I Am* dir. Sonali Gulati, 2011), and which are either ignored, underexamined or stereotyped by official documentaries, the traditional media and commercial cinema. In front of their cameras, these themes redefine the limits of activism and the meaning of social injustice by adding individual self-assertion and the fight against social stigma to the initial battles for a collective political cause and primary needs.

Simultaneously, the state and mainstream media came to realise that they were missing out on a unique source of creativity. Their policy of greater openness encouraged various practices of cooperation with activist documentary filmmakers, including official and commercial production (funding),[8] distribution and exhibition support (TV broadcasting, recent selections in national film festivals and public screenings organised by independent filmmakers at Films Division). This contradicts the common preconception that activist documentary makers one-sidedly push to be acknowledged by the official and commercial spheres, but shows that this process proceeds from mutual interests. Although documentary filmmakers continue to pursue the informal patterns of early activist film circulation, the 1990s and 2000s brought a series of changes in the distribution and exhibition sector, which also consolidated the activist documentary film by progressively taking these documentaries out of confidentiality and into the national public sphere of India. These changes included the privatisation of TV broadcasting, the urban evolution

from large single-screen theatres to multiplexes with smaller auditoriums, the development of VCD and DVD technology, the creation of new film festivals (some of them specifically showcasing documentaries), the proliferation of art galleries and access to the World Wide Web. It seems that in India, activist documentaries are no longer confined to clandestinity, but continuously fight to exist alongside – and not at the periphery of – official and commercial documentaries. The limits between them keep shifting according to specific circumstances and issues, but are never completely separate.

Therefore, their distribution and exhibition strategies should not be considered a parallel space for Indian political documentaries, but rather an intervention in the national film sphere. The practice of state censorship kept restricting independent documentaries' access to public TV broadcasting, state-financed film festivals and mainstream film theatres after the end of the Emergency. These restrictions encouraged some filmmakers, including Anand Patwardhan, Tapan Bose and Suhasini Mulay, to engage in regular legal battles during the 1980s and 1990s against state censorship and for the public broadcasting of their films in the name of freedom of expression (legally protected by the Constitution of India) and the public's right to information.[9] It is largely because these filmmakers won their cases before the Supreme Court of India that recent politically and socially engaged documentaries are more frequently telecast on public and private TV networks. In 2004, this new generation of filmmakers pushed this counteractive distribution and exhibition strategy to new grounds by organising their own documentary film festival. *Vikalp* ('initiative' in Hindi) was created in reaction to the state-sponsored Mumbai International Film Festival's (MIFF) rejection of films that were denied censorship clearance. This policy specifically targeted activist films such as Rakesh Sharma's *Final Solution* (2003), which documented the deadly 2002 communal riots between Hindus and Muslims in the state of Gujarat, and strongly criticised the then Chief Minister Narendra Modi for sparking the violence before and during the riots. In the larger context of opposition to the BJP-led government,[10] filmmakers opposed this decision, withdrew their films from the MIFF and immediately set up a counter-film festival that discarded such requirements. Documentaries considered politically controversial by the state-sponsored MIFF were screened at *Vikalp*, on the opposite side of the same road (Karlekar 2011). The wide coverage of the event in the mass media and its success with the urban educated audience prevented the state from taking measures against this initiative. Authorities had to tolerate this counter-discourse on their own territory. This independent film festival is an example of concrete activist intervention in the national sphere, whereby documentary filmmakers resisted the state using similar tools (a film festival) and location (the same street), in order to outwit official oblivion.

Thus, many films persist in recording testimonies of besmirched rights and

social injustice, and in showing various means of resistance – demonstrations, hunger strikes, boycotts, rallies, election campaigns, theatre plays, concerts – collected at the grassroots level, rather than from the ruling elites. Yet compared with the films of the 1970s, they include more personal testimonies than general accounts of history. For example, the narrative structure of films such as *Narmada Diary*, *Unlimited Girls*, *Tales of the Night Fairies* and *Bilal* follows that of a personal diary. They reflect the filmmakers' personal involvement in the events filmed by showing their physical presence on the ground (via images or sounds), their personal connections to local organisations and people, as well as their intellectual engagement with specific issues: the fate of tribal communities and the environment, the meaning of feminism, the conditions of sex workers and the blind. This strategy requires filmmakers to develop close relationships with their protagonists and build a strong network of contacts at the local level, using local organisations, NGOs and personal acquaintances.[11] They also rely on documents and fragments of lived experience usually overlooked by official and commercial documentaries, such as family photographs, amateur and home video footage, or personal belongings provided by ordinary citizens, local organisations and NGOs, abandoned by these ordinary citizens in war zones, due to floods, slum clearance or communal violence. Film subjects are treated at the individual, everyday and mundane levels that have become integral parts of a new dissenting representation of political and social issues in post-1990 India. Supported by miniaturised and high-resolution digital technology, the camera has come closer to the characters, often in the privacy of their homes, and is frequently placed at their level (on the floor, a bed, a table) for increased intimacy. This pointillist, individual and intimate approach to various political and social subject matter contrasts with the more general, collective and distant accounts delivered by official and commercial documentaries. They add subtler and, at times, contradictory details to issues of common interest, which lead the viewers to a higher level of understanding of lived experiences. For example, in *Roshan Bayan / The Lightning Testimonies* (2007), Amar Kanwar presents quiet moments of poetic contemplation to suggest the intense suffering of female victims of sexual violence. This strategy is achieved through the combined use of silence, night shots, deep colours invading the frame (blue or red), close-ups of nature (leaves, cobwebs) and everyday objects (ritual tools and books) that survive and silently bear witness to these traumatic events.

Hence, these films may still include images of arresting content and crude violence, which they claim are caused by the failing state and repressed or falsified by official and commercial TV documentaries. However, continuing the 1970s practice of recycling, they regularly use state or mainstream media as a point of reference in their dialectics. For instance, the state-inspired voice-of-god commentary has diversified into assertive (Anand Patwardhan,

Figure 3.2 A photograph of Fearless Nadia in *Unlimited Girls* (dir. Vohra, 2002).

Sanjay Kak), more doubtful and plural (Paromita Vohra) or poetic comments (Amar Kanwar), or has transformed into less intrusive text inserts (almost all post-1990 politically committed documentaries). They serve more elaborate and personal arguments, to which filmmakers still hope the audience will adhere. Similarly, the regular use of television found footage borrowed from news, official and entertainment programmes, mainstream press clippings and extracts from famous Bollywood films, songs and posters is claimed to challenge the depiction (or omission) of places, people and events by the official and commercial media. This playful cross-fertilisation perverts their original meaning, but also demonstrates the permeable boundaries between independent documentaries, official films and commercial television and cinema. For example, Paromita Vohra recycles and appropriates popular icons. She created her online avatar 'Fearless' in reference to Fearless Nadia, an Anglo-Indian actress who wore a mask and performed in 1930s Indian adventure films; and she dresses up as Annapurna, the goddess of food and nourishment; or includes several close-ups of a poster representing the American super-heroine Wonder Woman. She hides behind these fictional doubles to make undercover interventions in real life events. Through this recycling process, she plays the role of a mediator between the world – as it is represented by the mass media

and entertainment industries – and spectators, inviting them to engage in a process of questioning and appropriating issues, such as the meaning of feminism in India today or the social divides created by food customs in Mumbai. In *Something Like a War* (1991), Deepa Dhanraj uses original footage from public TV campaigns to emphasise the negative impact of family planning programmes on poor women. One shows a hand squeezing three tomatoes inside a small jar, while repetitive and nerve-wracking high-pitched musical notes accompany a male's voice inciting the spectators to limit their families to two children. Despite this explanatory voice-over commentary, the powerful image and music tracks contradictorily convey the stark violence of women's sterilisation. In addition, this strategy of cinematic recycling can overcome the persistent difficulty of accessing sensitive information by constructing non-existent images of state control and people's inner feelings out of found images and sounds. Filmmakers have therefore varyingly inherited their elders' aesthetics of deficiency, but supported by the evolution of video and digital technology, most of them have transcended it by enhancing the sophistication of the contrasting montage and sound design of their films. Paromita Vohra's documentaries, for instance, playfully contrast images from lived experiences with computer screens, animation and humorous fictional sketches, and mix

Figure 3.3 Footage of an official family planning programme in *Something Like a War* (dir. Dhanraj, 1991).

live sound recording with a polyphony of voice-over commentaries, additional music and sound effects. In a different style, Amar Kanwar's activist film essays contradictorily rely on Indian literature, poetry and music to represent trauma and instances of sociopolitical violence. These recycling strategies and greater aesthetic sophistication give form to non-existent images and compensate for the incompleteness of existing filmed sequences. By doing so, they further challenge official and free-market oriented views, while serving more personal approaches and open arguments, as compared with the activist documentaries of the 1970s.

In line with their predecessors, filmmakers oppose the idea that their fate rests in the hands of the state as their sole provider and protector. They therefore invite under-represented and underprivileged citizens to participate in the content and narration of the films. But they have found new ways to appropriate this grassroots milieu long-deserted by the state, and incorporate increased participation, live recording, personal physical and intellectual engagement in order to uncover local cases of social injustice and efforts to overcome them. They believe that it is precisely in this political vacuum between the people and top leaders that grassroots activist actions and individual acts of resistance become meaningful. They record ordinary citizens challenging or opposing the state and prevailing economic forces, not to eradicate them, but rather to change their organisation and rules from within. Documentaries such as *Tales of the Night Fairies* (dir. Shohini Ghosh, 2002) and *In the Flesh* (dir. Bishaka Datta, 2002) give an account of the daily lived experiences of sex workers and oppose the conservative representation of prostitution as exploitation and victimisation – a point of view that is conveyed by other activist films – in favour of a more audacious message of self-empowerment. The films support the sex workers' fight to be legally decriminalised, to be recognised as a conventional trade and to be given the right to form unions; that is to say, to be taken from the margins to the heart of society. In order to trigger an awareness of the audience, the viewers are turned into witnesses of various cases of social injustice. These eye-opening films force them to leave the comfort of ignorance or disinterestedness, and this strategy is supposed to lead them to more actively oppose injustice and challenge positions commonly approved by the prevailing political and socio-economic forces. But the early hope for a reasoned resolution of social and political issues has blurred into more complicated and ambiguous arguments. Paromita Vohra, for example, subscribes to a new political commitment that no longer means pleading a cause or looking at the underprivileged categories of society, but requires getting involved in formal experiments, giving free rein to her own creativity and embracing ambivalence and humour in a context of rapid social and identity change. In *Unlimited Girls*, she films her fictional double's participation in an online feminist chat room, where Indian ladies share their witty points of view on their situation

as women and their relationships with men. They do not assess the status and role of middle-class women in contemporary urban India, but reveal their doubts, confusion and contradictions. However, whilst recent documentaries deliver more open and elaborate arguments, their very existence still depends on the failure of official politics, market-driven economy and social customs to fairly represent and serve the general public.

CONCLUSION: THE PARADOX OF IN-BETWEENESS

In the post-1990 context, Indian activist documentary filmmakers belong to a wider range of backgrounds, including sociopolitical activism and NGOs, TV broadcasting, education and academia, creative documentary filmmaking and new media arts. They have developed various practices of collaboration with the public and private film and TV sectors in order to change their discourses, practices and styles from within. Their pragmatic strategy of bringing the margins closer to the centre, inherited from the early activist filmmakers of the 1970s, presents civil society, local initiatives and personal involvement as the best responses to the shortcomings of the state and leading socio-economic forces. In this way, they rewrite events from the perspective of 'common' people and attain a new level of cultural and historical commentary.

Compared with the documentaries of the 1970s, however, these recent films have contributed to replacing an overt confrontation to the state, the liberal model of market economy, the dominant sociopolitical system and the commercial media with affirmed pragmatism and cooperation; top-down pedagogy with grassroots participative debates and unrestricted arguments; factual urgency with more mundane and personal representations of events; and solemnity with increased recycling, poetry, playfulness and humour. Their development of a space of resistance between complete independence and official and commercial imperatives is representative of similar situations elsewhere in the world. In most instances, activist filmmakers never completely break away from the prevailing political, economic and social systems, because without their support, they would probably remain an unheard voice of dissent, suffocated by official discourses and commercial pressure.

NOTES

1. Since Independence, this board controls the content of both fiction and documentary films, and either asks for cuts or bans films from public and private screenings. It specifically focuses on maintaining communal and religious harmony, avoiding obvious

sexual references and anything that could threaten the security and sovereignty of the country.

2. Today, politically committed documentary filmmakers mainly acknowledge the legacy of Anand Patwardhan, certainly because Ghose and Chakraborty stopped making activist documentaries right after this early attempt, and because their two films have not circulated widely in India or abroad. They remain barely accessible for viewing today. For these very same reasons, they will not constitute a strong focus of interest in this chapter.
3. Until the introduction of video in the 1980s, the state imposed raw film stock quotas. This restricted the possibility for documentary filmmakers to experiment with form and even complete their works as planned, but it also developed solidarity between practitioners to access film stock. The digital revolution has therefore both facilitated film production and reduced this sense of community belonging.
4. For instance, *Hungry Autumn* won the main award at the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, while *Waves of a Revolution* was smuggled to Canada and circulated in North America by non-resident Indian organisations and individuals.
5. The notion of 'civil society' includes organisations, social movements and community action groups and defines a space of public, associational and tolerant activity where people come together outside the control or sponsorship of the state to meet their self-described goals or share and actively defend their interests in solidarity (Freizer 2004: 31, cited in Gellner 2009: 62).
6. In India, the public broadcaster Doordarshan had full monopoly until the early 1990s, and the screening of Films Division documentaries remained compulsory in every Indian theatre until 1996.
7. Activist filmmakers argue that Gandhi's non-violent struggle for Independence, Bhagat Singh's Marxist and areligious fight against the British colonisers and Ambedkar's significant contribution to the *Dalits*' (untouchables) empowerment have been deprived of their genuine meaning to serve the ambitions of the state, mainstream media and neoliberal forces.
8. In recent years, activist documentaries have been funded, rewarded and commissioned by public institutions such as Films Division, Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT), Doordarshan, the Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) and the National Film Awards, as well as by Indian and foreign private TV channels.
9. A more detailed account of Anand Patwardhan's court cases is available online, see http://www.patwardhan.com/Censorship/Index_Censorship.htm, accessed 21 November 2013.
10. Narendra Modi is one of the leaders of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) – the Hindu nationalist party that led the government from 1998 to 2004 and supported his anti-Muslim stand. During this period, many documentary filmmakers united against the state's drifting into communal violence by tackling the issue in their films, or by participating in *Vikalp* and other independent film screenings. This initiative has continued ever since, but clearly lost its activist momentum during the National Congress Party administration (2004–14). It remains to be seen if the national re-election of the BJP in May 2014, with Modi as Prime Minister, will engender a new wave of anti-government documentary film projects.
11. Scholars have noted that the 'strength of many contemporary political filmmakers lies precisely in their ability to integrate themselves into the lives of people' (Youdelman 2005: 403).

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CHAPTER 4

Languages, Speech and Voice: The Heritage of Jean Rouch and Pier Paolo Pasolini in *Convention: Black Wall / White Holes*

Eric Galmard

In 2011, French filmmaker Joris Lachaise[1] directed the film *Convention: Black Wall / White Holes*. He used the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of Mali's independence and his journey through the country as an opportunity to assess bodies and words, which – as the title suggests – constantly interrogate the conscious and unconscious relations with, and references to, the colonial heritage. Knowing that he is not on uncharted cinematic territory, the filmmaker explicitly refers in voice-over to Jean Rouch and Pier Paolo Pasolini, among other leading documentary makers (Chris Marker, Johan Van Der Keuken). He intends to 'pay them a tribute', but he also claims 'Africa's right of defence'[2] and 'retrospective criticism' through 'these images'. Here, it should be kept in mind that these two filmmakers hailed from France and Italy, countries that had built colonial empires. Because they belonged to a generation that experienced the peak of empire and the decolonisation that followed, both expressed their sympathy for the independence of African countries: Rouch chose a 'humanistic' position based on a personal and empirical relationship with African people, while Pasolini opted for Marxist theoretical positions. Lachaise refers more to Pasolini and includes a sound abstract from his film *Notes Towards an African Orestes* (1970), in which we hear the voice of the Italian filmmaker, followed by Lachaise indicating that this 'film draft' of a never completed film has, in a way, allowed him to choose the form of a 'film project' in *Convention*. In fact, Lachaise is in line with Pasolini, because his film is open in form, offers a kaleidoscopic gaze, is divided into a series of chapter notes and rejects any form of grand linear narration. However, he also mentions the criticism of African students, who

blamed Pasolini for his fixed, essentialist and generalising representation of Africa and tribalism.

This chapter will draw from Lachaise's comments and analyse his documentary approach in *Convention*, in order to identify how, as a Western filmmaker filming 'Africa' today – a decolonised Africa, of course, but still influenced in many ways by the colonial period – he positions himself vis-à-vis this double cinematic heritage of the French ethno-filmmaker and Italian film poet.[3] This heritage seems of particular interest for contemporary independent documentary films. Indeed, in the context of modern cinema of the 1960s, these two filmmakers, in their own particular styles, drew a new path for the documentary film and broke away from the conventions of the genre. Pasolini developed a kind of film project against didactic and close-ended documentaries, while Rouch tried to report (or even adopt) the Other's point of view and thus broke away from colonial cinema, in which the dominating voice of the coloniser always prevailed.

More specifically, this chapter will analyse the functions of speech, language and voice in the film *Convention*, because they are at the core of our interrogations concerning this heritage. On the one hand, they play a significant role in the two filmmakers' documentary practices to which Lachaise constantly refers. On the other hand, they seem to represent an important feature of recent independent documentary film. After a period dominated by direct cinema, the voice-over seems to have made a significant comeback in the independent documentary films of the 1990s onwards in terms of quantity and aesthetic influence. This personal cinema of the 'I' follows the path of intimate introspection, as well as that of a reflexive and deconstructed documentary film (and archival images).

REJECTING COMPASSION

Right from the beginning of the film, Lachaise's voice-over commentary introduces a reflexive question about his position, the place 'where he speaks from':

> The author of this film was born in France, he belongs to the Western type and he is, they say, a white man. Because he doesn't want to accept the heritage of this name, heavily charged with colonial connotations, the author of these images prefers not to say I; he prefers not to say I am the white man's point of view.

It should be said right away that critics did not appreciate this use of the third person or its justification by the filmmaker.[4] Olivier Barlet, on the *Africultures* website, talks about a 'way not to assume his role and his speech [which] is

completely illusory, annoying and typical of discourse of culpability'. In my opinion, it should be understood as a form of subjective freedom, a search for independence and a right of inventory, and beyond this, the importance of looking at Africa today without being restricted by colonial and neocolonial representations. This use of the third person also mainly corresponds to an effort to maintain his own gaze at a distance:

> In order to prevent reopening the colonial wound [which the filmmaker explains in the following sequence], one can disappear or keep quiet about Africa. The author of these images chooses to expose himself, but as a fragmented subject. He places his own gaze in front of himself as an object rather than a question.

But, as we will see later on in this chapter, this search for distance is also subject to potential contradiction.

Here, we are far from the trust and empathy manifested by Jean Rouch's commentary voice: a narrative voice that plays the role of the griot and seems to talk directly to the African children in *The Lion's Hunt with an Ark* (1967); a translating voice that passionately guides the viewer through the chain of displacements, gestures and speech in the Haoukas' rite of possession in *The Mad Masters* (1955); a friendly voice that talks to close relations[5] in *Jaguar* (1967) and 'leaves the speech' to others, as it is clearly said in *I, a Negro* (1958). In all cases, this voice takes on the role of a mediator between African people and the (Western) audience, and does not hesitate to speak for the filmed protagonists. It is well known that from the 1960s onwards, Rouch's position was criticised by African intellectuals, who opposed his paternalistic position of speaking on behalf of African people. These criticisms became stronger when synchronised sound technology started to develop, because in his 'ethnographic' films, Rouch continued to use his own voice, rather than subtitled African voices. If we deepen our analysis, we can identify in Rouch's voice an attitude that this is at the core of his work – a kind of 'utopian identity', as suggested by Maxime Scheinfeigel (2008: 117). Thanks to his ethnographic cinema, which focuses on trance and rites of possession, this voice invents another identity, becomes another. Scheinfeigel further suggests that one

> should enter the circle, and even more, to place oneself at the centre of it, where others stand; one should take their place, incorporate them . . . become the other; Rouch becomes a 'film genius' by entering a stage of self-dispossession and by incorporating the other in a 'film trance'. (Scheinfeigel 2008: 121)

Becoming somebody else is a form of self-fantasising. Rouch offers a similar opportunity to his African alter egos: in *Jaguar* and *I, a Negro*, they invent

their own nicknames, which refer to white American actors.[6] In both films, the 'actors' make up their partly fictional identities during the shooting and later during the post-synchronised voice recording through a process of enunciative split. They find themselves commenting on their own comings and goings, which leads to a complex enunciative situation. In *Jaguar*, for instance, the person Damoure Zika orally comments on the film protagonist Damoure Zika, to which is added the implicit super-enunciator Jean Rouch. As the author of the film *Jaguar* (and *I, a Negro*, whose title could be understood literally), Rouch influences the character of Zika, then the comments made by the subject 'Zika', although his level of influence is difficult to estimate. The film therefore combines the filmmaker's and the filmed protagonist's enunciative utterances, which Gilles Deleuze, referring to Pasolini's notion, describes as 'free indirect speech',[7] and emphasises Rouch's tendency of associating himself with his filmed 'characters' (Deleuze 1985: 198–9).

It seems that no such situation appears in *Convention*. We do not notice any self-fantasising process in the people filmed, which could have resulted in a kind of self-reinvention. In a postcolonial context, they are first defined by their relations with various kinds of languages, both verbal and non-verbal. Also, there is no sign of empathy (which in the case of Rouch reflects his will to become another) in the filmmaker's voice-over commentary. When presenting the filmmakers' intentions and plan, this voice can even sound cold and arrogant. This presents the risk of being criticised for precisely what the filmmaker, through his cautious enunciation, tries to distance himself from: a superiority complex or at least the dominating position of the white man – here, the intellectual white man, who would endorse a kind of theoretical, disembodied voice, and would involuntary be associated with the impersonal authority of his 'master's voice'. Finally, the film does not include any enunciative mix between the voices of the filmmaker and the people filmed, in the style of a 'free indirect speech'. However, it seems that in *Convention*, relation to Rouch's filmmaking is noticeable, as if, despite his intention of 'retrospective criticism', Lachaise was still partly attached to Rouch's heritage. This attachment can be found in the internal division of the subject[8] between the gaze of the filmmaker in action and the voice. It looks as if the voice is constantly placing the emotional impact of the visual shots at a cold distance, although these shots show an ability to come closer to the filmed bodies with a quasi-tactile perception of faces, arms and hands, and to get as close as possible to the movements of the victorious cyclists embracing each other or dancers during the most intense moments of their performances. Some camera movements, either swish pans or accelerated travelling shots, follow or get ahead of filmed bodies and gazes. Here, it is tempting to associate Joris' camera with Jean Rouch's favourite notion of 'cine-trance': '[The cameraman-filmmaker] truly enters his subject, precedes or follows the dancer,

the priest or the craftsman; he is not himself anymore, but a "mechanical eye" associated with a "mechanical ear"' (Rouch 1973: 63). The filmmaker seems to deliberately play with the tension between the two polarities of his film apparatus: the hyper-sensitivity and quasi cine-trance of Joris' camera on the one hand, and the hyper-consciousness of Lachaise's camera on the other hand, which develops into an analytical form commenting on the shots filmed by Joris' camera.[9] This internal division is, in fact, at the service of this film project's intentions – namely, rejecting the expected emotional reactions of a white filmmaker shooting in Africa and, more specifically, any compassionate behaviour. Simultaneously, the film should also be considered a challenge to the 'discourse [and the gaze] of culpability' mentioned by Olivier Barlet about *Convention*, and perhaps be relieved of its 'affixed name'.[10] In doing so, Lachaise is, of course, reacting against a contemporary behaviour (or shall we say position) vis-à-vis Africa, which is quite different from that against which Rouch was fighting in his films, but he re-employs its essentialist principle in an inverted manner. The figure of the savage has turned into that of the victim. This change explains the gap between Rouch's empathetic approach – up to the assimilation of the Other – and Lachaise's divided approach between an empathetic camera gaze and a distant camera voice. However, both filmmakers want to fight against essentialist postures, which in the present, just as in the past, prevents one from genuinely looking at the African continent. However, a question needs to be raised: beyond intentions, does Lachaise fully succeed in breaking free from Rouch and Pasolini's contradictions?

AN EMPIRE OF SIGNS

In his film project, Lachaise offers an analytical look at the world. He first identifies an 'empire of signs' in line with Roland Barthes, who in his essay on Japan refused to look 'towards an Oriental essence' to see a 'stock of characteristics, whose concentration, the invented game, allows [him] to "flatter" the idea of an incredible symbolic system, completely detached from ours' (Barthes 2007: 11). But while the linguistic signifier and its scriptural embodiment are pervasive in Barthes' empire of signs, in *Convention* it is mainly defined by a void, by the scriptural lack of an indigenous linguistic sign. Instead, various verbal and non-verbal languages and heterogeneous systems of signs coexist, which the filmmaker calls 'conventions' and which control the symbolic and material exchanges within the social field: figures drawn in the sand, shamanic jacks in which destinies can be read, coded gestures and speech that define the exchange value of a traditional wedding between two families. Lachaise emphasises these various systems or speeches, but does not explain or interpret them in his voice-over commentary, something Rouch would probably

have done as he willingly positioned himself as a 'cultural translator'. Lachaise is not trying to directly convey ethnographic or ethnological meaning. Local, social and cultural meanings fade away. For instance, the words pronounced (off camera) by the shaman are not translated. The powerful otherworldliness coming out of these conventions presents a risk. This risk, present in the film, is to fall into the same trap – that of an exotic representation of the Other as being beyond understanding and that of a representation of the world (made of a mix of heterogeneous languages) as essentialist folklore. In Lachaise's documentary practice, the viewer's attention is focused on objects, gestures and bodies rather than speech, because they play an important role in these conventions. The viewer must then freely exercise his gaze, as understanding the relations between these conventions and the colonial past is at stake. This is, indeed, the main objective of this documentary film process.

Lachaise uses specific film devices to support his objective. He uses a set of experimental or artistic methods, not only in terms of visuals (split and off-frame bodies, out-of-focus and superimposed images), but also sounds (unreal sound layers, sound cuts). Reaching out to an abstract form, these film elements contribute to the filmmaker's reflection on the temptation of delivering a homogeneous and continuous representation of 'his' Africa. They stimulate

Figure 4.1 Dancers and choreographers in *Convention: Black Wall / White Holes* (dir. Lachaise, 2011).

sensations of discontinuity and break between and within shots, and thus contribute to an exploded vision of spaces and bodies. By doing so, they also oppose any attempt to apply a global (and simplified) understanding of these 'African realities'; we should bear in mind that this was an important critical comment made by African students against Pasolini's approach. Besides, first and foremost, they direct and refine the viewer's gaze by offering some kind of film 'visions', as mentioned earlier. These visions can be remarkably efficient and avoid realism in favour of a collective subconscious and non-thought, in which the colonial heritage metaphorically looms large.

Thus, at the end of his film, Lachaise shows a body language workshop in which the movements of black dancers are rectified by white trainers. The sudden change to an overexposed black and white sequence, showing an alignment of black bodies palpated by white hands, directly refers[11] to the imaginary of slavery. In a subtler manner, the filmmaker plays with several changes from black and white to colour, as well as with a sophisticated soundtrack to represent a tribal dance. This representation also includes a citation from *Notes Towards an African Orestes* that requires further explanation. As Lachaise explains in his film, the Italian filmmaker suggests a reflection about a possible adaptation of Aeschylus' trilogy in the contemporary African context. For Pasolini, this project is about drawing a comparison between the birth of Athenian democracy on the one hand, and what he calls the 'disappearance of tribal societies' in a decolonised Africa on the (long) road to democratisation on the other. In Aeschylus' *The Eumenides*, the development of democracy is represented by Orestes' trial and by the transformation of the goddesses of revenge (the Erynies) into goddesses of benevolence (the Eumenides) under the influence of Athena, the goddess of reason. At the end of his film, Pasolini represents this transformation of the goddesses, which symbolises the passage from a society governed by gods to a society governed by human laws, through the dance of the Tanzanian tribe Wa Gogo. According to him, this dance shows a kind of loss of spirituality, even if he does not eliminate the possibility that these dances can still express self-preservation. Pasolini's voice-over commentary explains that

> in the past [. . .], it was a rite with specific religious or perhaps cosmogonic meanings. Now, you see, the Wa Gogo people, who in the past truly accomplished these gestures, happily repeat them for fun, and deprive them of their former sacred meaning in favour of pure pleasure.

In *Convention*, the chapter's title over a black background – 'Of the myth of the Eumenides' – associated with the tribal dance that follows, reinforces the statement included in the citation. The first shot of this sequence is striking. In

a close-up, we see a bracelet made of bottle caps around a dancer's ankle. Here, Lachaise shows the possible recycling of consumer goods into an indigenous cultural practice. This process of transposition represents a kind of resistance, because it contributes to maintaining the traditional form and meaning of cultural practices by or for the participants, and therefore challenges the development of capitalist values. The rest of the sequences does not seem to follow Pasolini's point of view. Indeed, it is hard to interpret this dance, as Lachaise films it as pure playful pleasure. The squeaking sound layer coating the images, the fixed, almost distraught, gazes of those who observe in black and white, and, more particularly, the surreal colour inserts of fish cut into pieces in a pool of blood or a human spinning top getting dangerously close to the camera, emphasise the archaic and violent power of dance and its preserved meaning for the participants and the audience alike. Of course, using experimental tools associated with editing that immerses the viewer in a sensorial experience (mainly based on sound), Lachaise claims his highly personal and subjective representation and almost makes it into a kind of mental vision. Thus, unlike Pasolini in 1970,[12] he refrains from any generalising judgement about the evolution of African societies, and it is not by coincidence that at this very moment in the film he includes the sound abstract from the African students criticising Pasolini.

Instead of Pasolini's generalising and closed interpretation, which is to a certain extent opposed to the open form of a 'film project', Lachaise suggests an explicitly subjective mode of film representation that is heterogeneous, exploded, matching in a way the suggested representation of the world made out of a heterogeneous system of signs and speeches. Despite this internal coherence, this film strategy also presents ambiguities. On the one hand, the updating of the colonial imaginary in the present time reproduces this imaginary and makes it look almost natural and obvious that trainers should be white and dancers should be black. On the other hand, this position of a subjective gaze, combining an experimental and surreal approach while insisting on archaic and violent characteristics of rituals, presents the risk of objectifying participants, who are deprived of speech, and of returning to a certain exotic fascination with savagery.

THE USE OF OUR LANGUAGE

Among the various systems of signs, the relation to languages becomes a priority, and this is where Lachaise intends to bring meaning, as exemplified by the beautiful citation from poet Osip Mandelstam underlined at the beginning of his film: 'We didn't learn to talk, but to stutter, and it is only when listening to the growing noise of time, and whitened by the crest's froth, that we have

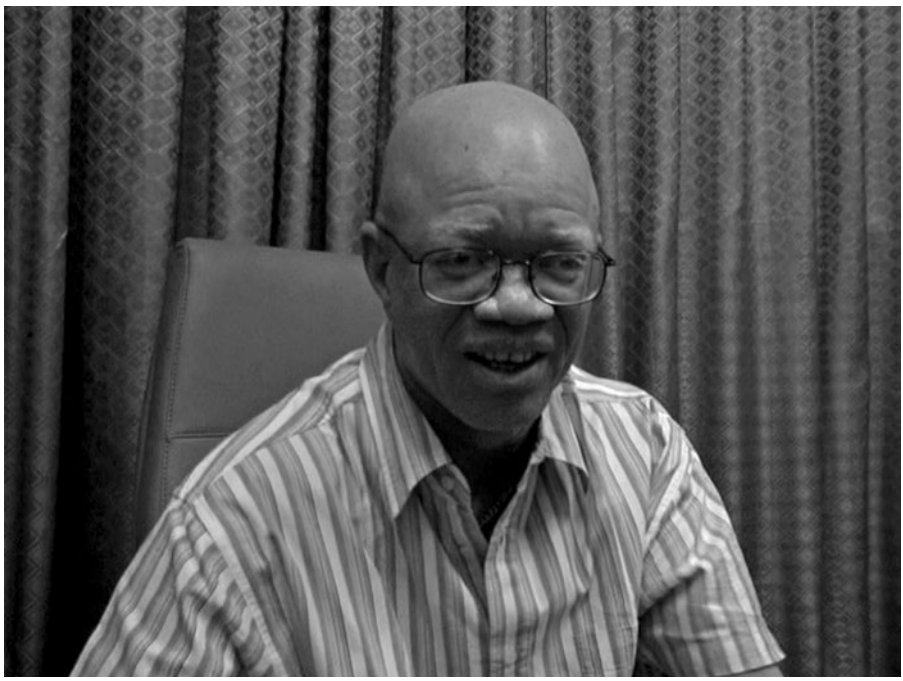

Figure 4.2 The intellectual in *Convention: Black Wall / White Holes* (dir. Lachaise, 2011).

found the use of our language.' How, based on the historical linguistic heritage of the former coloniser, can one find a language use that allows genuinely independent speech? Two 'characters', who are not precisely socially identified by the filmmaker, confront each other from afar. Towards the end of the film, Lachaise explains this opposition in his voice-over commentary:

> [H]e is balancing[13] between the scholar's choice to embrace the language and culture of an old oppressive minority and that of a new [self-proclaimed, A/N] evangelist, who re-initialises the language by reinventing the very signs of the alphabet.

So, on the one hand, the choice of *logos* is made by an albino intellectual who appropriates the language of the former coloniser because it is best adapted to the modern world and to his democratic discourse; and on the other hand, the evangelist leans towards myth – the myth of the origins of language, of the creation of a language bearing the sacred words of God and which requires the reinvention of an original writing. On the one side, a logic of appropriation, and on the other, a will to reinvent. This ambivalence comes as another echo to the problematic, which Pasolini presents in his *Notes Towards an African*

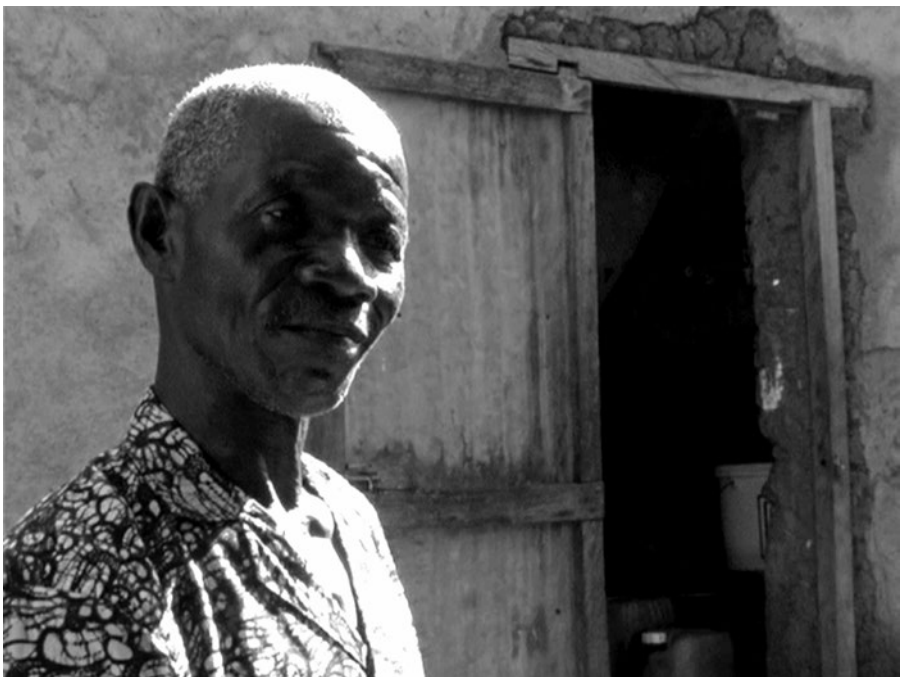

Figure 4.3 The evangelist in *Convention: Black Wall / White Holes* (dir. Lachaise, 2011).

Orestes. Pasolini tries to confront the 'African' cultural basis, its mythic and spiritual core with the deep transformation of societies implied by the process of democratic 'modernisation'.[14] In *Convention*, the polarisation between the evangelist's use of the origin myth[15] and the intellectual's emphasis on the necessary adaptation to the modern world is a clear continuation of Pasolini's legacy.

However, in Lachaise's film, the crucial issue deals with the 'right' use of language, one that is truly free and independent. In this respect, the sequence in which a little girl, facing the camera, repeats the syllables of a French nursery rhyme with a vacant look, as if she were 'inhabited by a foreign body',[16] effectively shows the importance of the colonial reference and the blind linguistic transmission through which it can colonise the mind. The situation of the French-speaking intellectual[17] is evidently socially quite different. He possesses personal skills that allow him to truly appropriate a 'modern' language, the language of human rights and democratic revolution, as if it now belonged to him and not only to the French people.[18] At the very end of the film, Lachaise abruptly edits out the words of the intellectual and keeps only the sound of his breathing at the beginning and at the end of his sentences. In his voice-over commentary, he justifies this choice as a means of

'taking hold of a body's inception between each word'. Here, Lachaise seems to cinematically place him closer to the myth developed by the evangelist, who explains that Adam and Eve originally did not speak any articulated language, but expressed themselves through loud breathing, much like deaf and dumb people. Shall we understand that Lachaise chooses sides with this final ironical editing? To say the least, he seems to suggest that something is missing from the speech of the French-speaking intellectual, that it cannot be fully satisfactory. Besides, the film also visually and aurally shows how the French language is politically used to mention national independence and the prejudice of the former coloniser against Malian people. The filmmaker associates this rhetorical use of language with images of a stationed train and close-ups of travelling vendors walking in different directions. The French speech is then suddenly followed by direct sounds of Bambara words, conversations and the shouting of travelling vendors surrounding the train. Eventually, the train slowly gets going, while a patriotic song, still in Bambara but briefly introduced in French ('From now on, the Sudanese Republic shall be called the Republic of Mali'), suggests the independence of Mali. A lateral tracking shot closely follows teenagers running after the train, showing only their legs. At the end of the tracking shot, the song continues in French, speaking of the ideal of a 'united Africa', and at the back of the train, a last tracking shot shows women and children on the rail tracks, progressively distanced from the train. This short sequence description emphasises Lachaise's intention to metaphorically represent a people (on the move). In this sequence, his mise en scène of language usage brings us back to the character of the intellectual. What is missing from his explanation of the choice of the French language, which he only refers to for himself and his children, is perhaps the people. What is missing is the first person plural used by Mandelstam: 'we have found the use of our language'.[19] Thus, implicitly, *Convention* suggests that the use of the language of the former coloniser is restricted to the social and political domain, and as such it remains an instrument of control within the borders of decolonised African countries. Moreover, within the film, language also remains an instrument of control that not altogether willingly refers to a colonial imaginary world: the intellectual, who has a perfect command of the French language and who delivers a modern discourse, is an albino; facing him, the self-proclaimed evangelist from Mali delivers a strictly mythical and anti-modern speech and is subtitled when he speaks French. Similarly, most of the other people appearing in the film are deprived of a personal voice (except ritual words), and thus cannot access the status of subject in their own right. The power of speech is restricted to the speaking and filming author.

CONCLUSION: A CRITICAL, YET AMBIGUOUS, INVENTORY

This analysis of Joris Lachaise's documentary film approach is an attempt to show how the filmmaker, who is aware of his difficult position as a white man talking about Mali, tries to find a clear and balanced position for a French filmmaker filming in Africa. In order to achieve this, he builds a critical relationship with two earlier leading figures of documentary cinema. From Rouch, he borrows a form of film trance, but his use of the voice-over commentary differs radically from that of the ethnologist-filmmaker by willingly refraining from empathising with the people filmed. From Pasolini, he acknowledges the influence of the project form of his film, as well as the crucial issue of the tension between myth and logos, between an archaic essence and democratic modernisation. However, his approach differs from that of Pasolini when he asserts his subjective look, using 'experimental' devices based on heterogeneity and fragmentation. Lachaise clearly positions himself against the contemporary context. He distances himself from Rouch by opposing any temptation of compassion for the Malian people he films, and from Pasolini by refusing to conclude his film with a general ideological statement about Africa. Through this critical dialogue, which is also a kind of inventory, Lachaise develops an original film practice in order to question notions of independence, the autonomy of bodies, gestures and words from the colonial referent in Mali. He finds answers in various types of 'conventions' related to invention and appropriation or conversely to blind or unconscious transmission. In the context of a national community bearing the marks of its colonial origins,[20] these answers keep reflecting on the difficult issue of living together.

But, in doing so, it seems that Lachaise does not completely resolve the contradictions of Rouch and Pasolini.[21] By keeping his own white speech at a distance, he embraces a discourse that leans toward domination. When he represents the colonial imaginary world, he takes the risk of including it in the postcolonial present time in an 'obvious' fashion, as in the case of the long final scene of dancers in formation. By emphasising the sociopolitical uses of a language, he dramatises an opposition between the albino (white) intellectual and the evangelist that resembles colonial stereotypes. By representing ritual conventions, he deprives the people filmed from expressing their personal voice and maintains control over the words used. While the film offers an original and fascinating film approach, it also reveals the complex relations between French (and European) filmmakers with the former colonies.

Translated from French by Camille Deprez.

NOTES

1. Joris Lachaise was born in 1980. After studying philosophy, he started his documentary film career as a camera operator and editor. In 2004, he collaborated with Jean-Pierre Krief to make a film on the Iraq Special Tribunal for Arte TV station. He has also made video works based on sound compositions. In 2009, with Thomas Roussillon, he co-directed a film on Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers in the French town of Angers before moving on to his *Convention* film project in 2011. Joris Lachaise is currently developing new film projects in Africa.
2. By advocating 'Africa's right of defence' in a film entirely shot in a single African country, Lachaise does not fully escape African students' criticism against Pasolini, who contested his hasty generalisations and essentialist vision about the African continent.
3. The colonial issue is addressed differently in the works of the two filmmakers. It is a crucial issue in Rouch's films (particularly in *The Mad Masters* in 1955) and a secondary one in Pasolini's oeuvre.
4. See, for instance, Olivier Barlet (2011) and Tom Brauner (2011).
5. Rouch created a real 'cinematic family' with his African collaborators Damoure Zika, Lam Ibrahim Dia and Tallou Mouzourane.
6. The white American actors are Eddy Constantine, who also had a film career in France, and Edward G. Robinson, an actor from Hollywood. Evidently, these nicknames suggest the film characters' fascination with the West.
7. Pasolini defines a camera position and an enunciative form that allow 'the author's immersion into the soul of his character' as 'free indirect subjective' (Pasolini 1989: 26).
8. We have already mentioned the fact that the filmmaker defines himself as a 'divided subject'.
9. This is also how the sentence cited above should be understood: 'He places his own gaze in front of himself'.
10. 'His voice only represents him: it talks in this name, in the third person, showing the division that an affixed name creates within himself', says the voice-over commentary.
11. Some might say in a stereotyped manner.
12. As one might expect, from a postcolonial point of view, Lachaise has been constantly and severely criticised for this position. For example, refer to Cyril Cossardeaux' critical text published in 2009 on the *Culturopoing* website on the occasion of the DVD release of *Convention*.
13. In the original French version of the commentary, Lachaise uses the word 'weight' and shows a close-up of a scale on which two large bowls have been placed, hence the use of the word 'weight'.
14. Yet the Italian filmmaker, whose loathing of Western capitalist and bourgeois society is well known, does not indulge in stereotyped primitivism.
15. One notices that this character could also appear in a Pasolini film.
16. As aptly written by Tom Brauner in his critical article (Brauner 2011: *op. cit.*).
17. This character is an albino, and Lachaise only films him in a room completely sealed with heavy curtains, as if he were cut off from the outside world.
18. These African intellectuals, trained in France or in other developed countries, are among the first to circulate Western-oriented views.
19. This analysis first intends to understand the point of view expressed in the film. However, we are aware of the multilingual situation of many African countries and of the difficult task of applying concrete policies. In Mali, Bambara is the main language, spoken by around 80 per cent of the population.

20. The postcolonial national borders, decided by the former colonisers, do not take the specificities of African people into account.
21. Neither Rouch, with his discourse 'in the name of', nor Pasolini, with his discourse 'about', escaped the contradiction of a pro-African discourse, which tends to reproduce the colonial position in one way or another.

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CHAPTER 5

Chris Marker: Interactive Screen and Memory

Kristian Feigelson

Chris Marker (1921–2012), the creator of more than eighty films, has become a source of fascination for an entire generation of documentary filmmakers, as well as for the general public. In the 1950s, he succeeded in rejuvenating the documentary form and has since wielded considerable, though discreet, influence. The invention of mobile video cameras in the 1960s accorded greater liberty to documentary cinema. There was already talk of a New Wave in this field when Chris Marker reinvented the documentary essay, successively using various technologies from 16mm to Super 8, still photographs and digital images, while experimenting with the CD-ROM release format and finally with more recent online distribution platforms. The diversity of his artistic career and the different facets of his activity, successively or simultaneously as journalist, publisher, photographer and filmmaker, are too extensive to summarise here. His work cannot be reduced to documentary output, which was regarded as political or experimental cinema at the beginning of his career.

Chris Marker's polyphonic body of work (from *Letter from Siberia*, 1957 to *La Jetée*, 1962; *Joli Mai*, 1963; *Be Seeing You*, 1968; *Class Struggle*, 1969; *Sans Soleil*, 1982; *Level Five*, 1996; *Immemory*, 1997; *The Last Bolshevik*, 1998; and so forth) can be explored from various angles, but this oeuvre consistently addresses the question of image objectivity, reconstructing itself each time in new cinematic forms. At the crossroads of documentary and fiction, Chris Marker took an original approach as a cine-traveller and cine-writer, submitting each film to its own subjectivity in a meditative mode. Political but indifferent to fashionable trends, his cinema reflects on the contemporary world

and the progress of history. Film history runs in parallel with the evolution of societies, and Marker embraced and appropriated successive technological innovations in his own practice over the years. This ongoing transformation of documentary film against the background of constant technological refinement was a major concern for Chris Marker, because it allowed him to reflect on memory and history well before the advent of digital technologies in the 1990s. Interestingly, he continued exploring each possibility provided by these new technologies, while maintaining a consistent approach and discourse toward both cinema and the world. Therefore, one may wonder what would be the best way to follow the major shifts in this body of work, in order to understand how its documentary core was constantly overtaken by ceaseless inventiveness. This article will more specifically examine the continuities and breaks in Marker's uses of technology and his views on history, as well as the specific bond he created with his audience. This unique relationship, which characterises Marker's entire body of work (though more radically after 1990), stems from his concern with interactivity: an idea that operates under different definitions and is manifested in diverse ways within his art. Above all, his main objective concerns the circulation of images that explore cinema's various visual frameworks and how they transcribe history in different ways.

QUESTIONING IMAGE OBJECTIVITY AND INVOLVING A PARTICIPATIVE SPECTATOR

One of the first films prefiguring his mature style, *Letter from Siberia* (1957), opened a new, vast scope for contemplating the objectivity of images.[1] Thousands of kilometres from Paris, in Yakutsk, the capital of Siberia, Marker used innovative methods to elicit essential questions about the status of the image. The famous scene showing a Yakutsk street undergoing repairs allows him to explore the objectivity of images, beyond its status as political metaphor for the USSR at the time. The commentary makes three suggestions for interpreting this scene of Yakutsk workers: 'Record images of the Yakut capital as objectively as possible . . . ? Depict the USSR in terms of hell or paradise . . . ? Yakutsk, a modern Soviet city . . . or simply Yakutsk, where the same buses always pass each other . . .' Is this the face of paradise or hell, a godlike camera unveiling the double face of reality? Or is it merely a seemingly objective observation of a given social situation? Here, the film's commentary takes up the question of the distortion of reality by 'objectivity' and attempts to transcend the banality of images (of faces, forests or turbines in motion), in order to examine the filmic process more deeply. Chris Marker reorganises images from diverse forces, recombining them in such a way that the viewer must question the frontiers between them.

In his work, the usual barriers between fiction and documentary are constantly blurred, inviting the audience to reflect on the status of images. He rejuvenated the documentary format by borrowing the approaches of fiction and dramaturgy to juxtapose images. *Embassy* (1973), for example, is a fake news report on the Chilean coup d'état. Marker created a narrative using a range of cinematic methods, from drawing on various archival sources to montage. At the intersection of all these film formats, Marker questions the nature of cinema, creating new images and using them alongside archival images exploring society and history. By re-examining images of the past in the light of the present, the filmmaker also interrogates the process of film production and projection. He thus foregrounds the idea of the equivalent gaze between the filmed and the filming, and unveils the true function of his camera:

> First, when they don't suspect you, you catch them, using your best judgment . . . That gives you a strange feeling of possession: the fact that they'll never know that their image exists, that you are the only one who knows . . . Then, when the game of hide-and-seek begins, it's clear that you have fired the first shot, but they've seen you. You're on an equal footing. (Marker 1967: 87)

Paradoxically, his efforts to reveal the visible are contingent upon his own personal invisibility within it, while his subjectivity manifests itself through montage and voice-over. An essential aspect of his body of work is the fact that he never appears while presenting what is to be seen. All Marker's films are fundamentally subjective and never in accordance with a normative framework. In this respect, they never conform to a normative framework. His work on images was carried out within the same interpretative framework as his first films made in the 1950s. He continued in the same vein or reinvented it for new media forms even in his most recent works. The filmmaker can become an indispensable interlocutor in his own cinematic apparatus incorporating travel and literary writing. His style of film writing is very introspective. But the director, like the viewer, must be capable of inventing and connecting his images.

Marker's work constantly addresses the viewer, who contributes to this examination of the image. Marker affirmed this interactivity. In the CD-ROM *Immemory* (1997), he 'offers his own random navigation to the visitor' by constructing this work as a series of bifurcations, loops and intersections that allow the viewer to choose his or her own guided visit, roaming the different image territories of Cuba, Japan and Russia at will. The visitor browses through this work as through a photo album. The image assumes meaning by attracting one's gaze and authorising differing interpretations. The task of

the documentary maker, in keeping with the cine-traveller tradition (that of roaming the world), as well as of the cine-writer (that of analysis), is to facilitate this global circulation. The filmmaker is a go-between, a passer-by who creates a dialogue of images via non-linear editing that imitates the complexity of the world. The filming and the filmed exist in reciprocity, or duplicity; allies in the tasks of understanding the world and deciphering it through images.

In *Immemory*, Marker offers an exploration of time that allows renewable exchanges with his viewers. In this exploratory work, fragments of vanished imaginary, literary and cinematic worlds appear, opening up a pathway of regained time. The multimedia interface is composed of seven interconnected zones: cinema, photography, war, poetry, memory, travel and the museum. Every bifurcation becomes possible. The cat Guillaume (Marker's chosen fetish animal) is present at different levels of this installation to suggest detours from the main pathways. He provides interactive links that distract the user, who can thus freely move from one subsection to another and then return to the present path. Movement becomes random, allowing the user to revisit Marker's multiple voyages, from Cuba to Japan and the USSR, and thus consider all of his explorations together. Faithful to the pioneering spirit of his first films, Marker's fundamental approach can be defined by this continuous interaction between the director and the audience, who share the same goal of grasping the imagining of the world.

USING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY TO REVISIT HISTORY AND EXPLORE MEMORY

Marker's first films can be more easily characterised as classic documentaries than his later works, although these continued in the same vein. From 1990 onward, Chris Marker undertook a substantive project using a series of new images that questioned his documentary technique, as well as his approach to cinema. The installation *Zapping Zone* (*Proposals for an Imaginary Television*) (1990–4) shows a series of visuals drawn from network television sources on several screens – news reports on the Ceausescu trial, music videos and clips from feature films – resulting in truly cacophonous remixes of sights and sounds reminiscent of John Cage's pioneering musical works. This piece readapts a preceding musical installation on the occasion of the Paris-Berlin exhibition *War and Revolution* (1978), which had invited contemplation of the status of archival images from World War I and the Soviet revolution – here, converted into computer-generated pictures reflecting on these events. Later, in 1997, the aforementioned CD-ROM *Immemory*, with its mobilisation of new digital technologies, offered a new perspective on his work as a filmmaker. In 2006, he directed *Leila Attacks*, a micro-fiction uploaded to YouTube about

a pet mouse belonging to the self-defined 'best-known author of unknown films'. A series of video clips and short films followed on YouTube, all evoking questions of the legacy and memorial possibilities of images. His task here was to supply ample working material for understanding the conditions of image production, witnessing its genesis and showing the permutations of its discourse, using ever more diverse media formats, from 16mm to digital video. Here, the documentary filmmaker focuses on the question of image memory, which is distinct from the subjectivity of recall. For Marker, memory can be treacherous. He expresses as much in a commentary in *Sans Soleil* (1982): 'I will have spent my whole life questioning the function of memory, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its underside.' As in *Immemory*, he prefers to chart memory in its peripheral spaces in an attempt to understand its true place in or among the past, present and future.[2]

Chris Marker was before his time in understanding to what extent new technologies could prompt new ways of thinking (Gauthier 2001). With *Immemory*, he invented a multimedia volume layered by different strata of his own history. *Immemory* recounts not only his journeys as a cine-traveller or cine-writer; this CD-ROM has also become a sort of time machine, an odyssey through a cinema that suppresses and is betrayed by memories, in order to reveal a more complicated question of temporality.[3] Devoting himself more intensively to this idea after 1990, Marker made full use of available multimedia resources, taking on the role of an archaeologist to coax imagined fragments from his own memory. Following the use of still photos as a continuous series of immobile pictures to represent memory in *La Jetée* (1962), this remembrance of past images became an important element in his body of work and came to fruition in *Immemory*. Thanks to the interaction between these elements, the filmmaker became an emissary time traveller (Biro 2007), as Marker positioned himself in the future to describe its relation to the present and the past. These various temporalities coexist in his films and installations. *Immemory* allows him to synthesise a futurist reflection on the development of animation and its relationship to the cinema.[4] For example, classic paintings are manipulated to offer new images. Links between time and images become ever more complex.[5] Linear time is perpetually deferred, becoming nearly irrelevant. The film appears as a sort of time machine or temporal mirror.

In the same way, *The Owl's Legacy* (1989) (the owl being another of Marker's favourite animals) revisits Greek philosophy in the past perfect, as a retrospective look on the present that reflects the world to come. An avid reader of Jules Verne, Chris Marker incorporated the explorer and writer's rhetoric on time and obsessively travelled the planet in order to recreate it in writing. As a cine-traveller, Marker collected not only images, but also impressions. He shared Verne's views of voyage and temporality, forever returning to his images to parse them in depth. He revived the tradition of cinema as

optical theatre and keeper of memory, integrating the disparate pieces of a puzzle that reveal invisible histories. Film places these 'puzzle pieces' in a state of tension with one another so that one image confronts the ensemble. In this multimedia documentary *The Owl's Legacy*, the return to ancient Greece puts all of Western knowledge into perspective, suggesting that one can explore a subject, while apparently depicting another. The transition from one image to another corresponds to the passage from one memory to another and represents the imagined fragments of the world being knitted together (Bellour, in Mayo 2000).

New image technologies greatly facilitated the documentary maker's task by allowing him to fragment archival material and associate the mute depictions of the past with reworked sound to create elegiac, labyrinthine works.[6] The soundtrack supports and elucidates the narration Marker lays over the image. Several visual layers are superimposed, rejecting a linear, fixed representation of history. Viewers are invited to penetrate this visual museum, a journey of fragmented, interwoven images and texts, so that they can reconsider their own personal representations of the past. In playing with the tension between history and memory, Marker separates the images of the world from the artificial process of recall as they find their place in a collective, imagined unconscious, functioning as 'memory screens' in the sense intended by Dziga Vertov. Marker frequently mentioned his concept of 'kino-eye': a cinema able to see what the eye fails to perceive.[7] But if Marker suggests questions, he does not provide answers, giving the film the open-endedness of a contemplative or documentary essay.

A REFLEXIVE APPROACH TO THE DOCUMENTARY FILM

In his documentary-essayist approach, Marker constantly unveils the profound strangeness of the correspondences between voices and images. Each visual prompts the viewer to re-examine the text, and each commentary on an image contains an element of the imaginary. Marker can make an image express anything and its opposite. We may recall the emblematic scene of Yakutsk in *Letter from Siberia* (1957), in which Marker casts doubt on the objectivity of the scene through three differing narrations, as he did later in other forms and films.

Film, as the object of these reflections, opens up an entire range of questions. Marker was also concerned with the functions of film and imagery. The idea of an unfinished film in flux lurks behind each of his films, belying their finite nature. It is as if each film called forth a new, phantom film that comments on the previous one and evokes its potential audience. This open dialogue allowed Marker to explore themes over the long term as they echoed

through successive films. His documentary essays, which represent this aspect especially well, may explore territories (Japan, Russia, China, Israel, Cuba) or other filmmakers. The continuous dialogue between films can be found, for example, in Marker's images of Japan in *The Koumiko Mystery* (1965), *Sans Soleil* (1982), his portrait of Akira Kurosawa in *A.K.* (1985) and *Level Five* (1996), about the battle of Okinawa. Initially merely referenced in the caption of a photograph in the 1965 film, Japan gains corporality through the female figure of Koumiko (Capel 2013; Koide 2010) and then becomes the manifestation of faraway mysteries through the permutations of its mythologies in literature and cinema. The documentary maker's journey took him past the surfaces of people and places to plunge into history and memory. He attained a temporal estrangement to unify lines of questioning that ranged widely across time and space.

The same process occurs with the USSR and Russia, which are associated with male figures and filmmakers. From *Letter from Siberia* (1957) to *The Train Rolls On* (1971), *The Last Bolshevik* (1992) to *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich* (1999), Marker's filmic and dialogic continuities create correspondences. His films also provide a retrospective look at his own journeys and activities vis-à-vis the USSR in the twentieth century. Once again, we find the filmmaker's stylistic recurrences and obsessions. Journeys into the Russian past encourage contemplation of the status of images, while challenging official history. This revisiting of Russia and the USSR's cinema and history creates as many new fictional spaces as it questions the Soviet experience. By diversifying visual and oral sources of information (archives, interviews) that distinguish it from a classic fictional film, *The Last Bolshevik* (1993) offers a re-examination of Soviet history mixing archive and fiction. Marker bases the film equally on his own and his interviewee's emotions, reorienting the film around a series of detailed commentaries (Feigelson 2002). Pursuing his work as a documentary essayist, he creates a composite story divided into six separate 'letters' that present historic facts in the form of a plot-driven and epistolary narrative. The filmmaker thus creates tension between alleged 'objectivity' and his own subjectivity, as he reconsiders the history of the USSR along with its representations, in order to ponder the true ontological status of images.[8]

From 1990 onward, Marker expanded on these new tendencies, looking back at his own body of work.[9] He augmented his information sources, using documentary and archival images and interviews related to cinema, but also examining cinema through the twists and turns of history. His films cannot be defined by the classic norms of linear documentary, but aim to offer pluralistic, even fragmentary, interpretations of history, with the ultimate goal of establishing a coherent discourse on certain societies. He accomplished this by confronting various visual sources with archival images. If cinema is a journey, it is also the necessary appraisal of history. The USSR became Marker's favourite

territory for this process, while Japan and other societies had earlier occupied the same role. But above all, his mode was one of nostalgia – here, in the sense of its Greek roots, *nostos* (return to the native country) and *algia* (relating to pain). Does an emotional geography of nostalgia exist within this subjective Russia envisioned by the filmmaker? Was he homesick for a country such as the USSR, which no longer exists and perhaps never truly existed?

Marker worked in a melancholic mode, first with the epistolary model that he developed in 1957 in *Letter from Siberia* and which he revisited in his later film missives addressed to the deceased directors Medvedkin and Tarkovsky. Marker adapted the Russian tradition of the camera as tool, but also used it as a pen, analysing a given situation and giving a critical, complex account of it, all in a melancholic and nostalgic mode.[10] Marker adapted these methods in *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevitch* (1999), his homage to the filmmaker Tarkovsky, although this film may be described as rather literary in form. Even the title ironically references Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*, published in 1962, which describes daily life in a Soviet labour camp. Here, cinema is placed in the context of experience in the concentration camps of the twentieth century. The film opens on rushes and archival images of Tarkovsky's own films, as though he wished to reflect on the meaning of cinema in its capacity as the memory of the world. Here, the reviled dissident Tarkovsky, whose life ended in Paris in 1986, appears in counterpoint to the honoured 'official' filmmaker Aleksandr Medvedkin, who died in Moscow in 1989. The wheel seems to turn full circle in this parallel portrait of two dead friends, returning to a consideration of the power of images to rewrite the Russian and Soviet past. Writer and director, traveller and unclassifiable creator, Marker successively crossed each boundary between documentary and fiction – real and imaginary, subjective and objective – to undermine the established codes of documentary cinema. For this journey is likewise a plunge into the realm of images. As the philosopher Georges Steiner is quoted in *The Last Bolshevik* in 1993: 'It is not the past that dominates us, but the images of the past'.

Marker's post-1990 works never cease to raise open-ended questions. In a constant play between visual and voice-over, he returned obsessively to the questions of history and memory, the past's oblivion and the present, reality and imagination, cinema and photography, animated image and moving image, utopia and revolution, the future and nostalgia. Like a vast kaleidoscope, this work combines different facets of these themes. It branches out and creates an arborescent structure, whose intersections and parallels facilitate the creative process. One shot calls forth the next, while different visuals coexist in two-way movement between the dream picture and the archival image, juxtaposed (through editing) yet distant (drawn from various time periods and source materials). In pursuit of the ideal film, Marker's work assembles

fragments of a dream. Each work is a film-within-a-film with a collective dream as background.

In the twenty years separating *La Jetée* (1962) from *Sans Soleil* (1982), one finds scattered allusions to the film *Vertigo* (1958) by Alfred Hitchcock, which Marker revisited later on in *Immemory* (1997). Furthermore, most of his films are based on a similar strategy to that of *Vertigo*, the quintessential Hitchcock film. *Vertigo* is the exemplar of this 'spiral of time' structure, within which Marker weaves an immense canvas, mixing the themes of travel, wars and revolutions. Like a toolbox from which the filmmaker chooses different devices to accomplish his task, his oeuvre is a palimpsest of this back-and-forth flux of images, constructed in layers and accumulating traces of previous films to show Marker in a process of constant rewriting and experimentation with his own authorial style. *La Jetée* sets the pattern for these lines of questioning in 1962, announcing a series of doubles and parallels that only intensified after 1990.

But what causes all these images – a mixture of his creations and extracts from other sources – to cohere into a single film? By playing on these various methods of combining (for example, image and narration), the filmmaker distances each element from the rest. The gaze also constructs these images. In *Sans Soleil*, a Japanese gaze can recall that of an African, for the film is based on the idea that all gazes are equivalent: 'Those who see images are seen in turn by images that are greater than they are . . . The more you watch Japanese television, the more you feel it is watching you' (Marker 1967: 82–5). In perusing these images, the viewer evaluates them. Marker ultimately created a specific structure, in which the film shows, in retrospect, how a journey unfolds over time and how it engages the viewer. The ever-reflexive image can be reinterpreted according to its place in history. The filmmaker acts as both witness and visionary at the intersection of past and future. Marker's prevailing idea is of the viewer immersed in complex, unknown filmic landscapes. The cinematic traveller helps the audience understand and decipher his journey. In his role as witness, he mixes approaches borrowed from *cinéma vérité* and direct cinema in order to explore the twentieth century in images.

CONCLUSION: AN INTERACTIVE BODY OF WORK AS A METAPHOR OF MEMORY

Over the course of fifty years, Chris Marker's cinema progressively developed the most innovative and varied aspects of visual research: from documentary to filmic essay, from political cinema to experimental video installation. Ever with an eye on technical evolution and innovation, he created a critical body of work with an incisive and ironic view of the world. He was at odds with the

technical media in his efforts to surpass them, but in accord with the stance of the independent artist. Chris Marker eluded all attempts at classification. Without a doubt, in remaining unclassifiable, he safeguarded his creative and intellectual independence.

In keeping with his exploration of history and remembrance, his documentary experimentation was seemingly inexhaustible and played with a variety of scales and media. His cinema acts as a metaphor for human memory.[11] Marker expressed himself in the present, past, conditional and future tenses, as if to emphasise the timelessness of images. Whatever the source of his images, his cinema reveals its true nature in the attention it brings to the gazes of the filmmaker and the filmed. His subjective, reflexive approach gradually incorporated new technologies, capturing words and acts in the continuous flux of the world's visual memory.

His documentary technique relied on his ability to plunge beneath the surface of the screen and discover the particular subjectivity of each image offered to the viewer's gaze. Marker, the archaeologist of images, sought material traces of reality as he pondered new ways of writing the cinema. How can documentary film – and cinema at large – ultimately help us change our perception of reality? This is the fundamental issue raised by Marker, given fiction's capacity to appropriate reality. If images are unpredictable in their use, what status can documentary film enjoy? This mysterious film explorer remained faithful to his itinerary of always being wherever he was not expected. As a result, his cinema, interactive and prophetic before its time, has contributed greatly to the transformation of documentary's interpretative perspectives in non-linear, reflexive and participative ways.

Translated from French by Julia Zelman.

NOTES

1. In issue 461 of the *Radio-Cinéma* journal, published on 16 November 1958, André Bazin noted:

   > With Chris Marker, the image is not what constitutes the film's primary material. Nor is it the exactly 'commentary', but rather the idea. *Letter from Siberia* is first and foremost a film made with ideas (ideas naturally issuing from knowledge and direct experience), but specifically – and here is where the cinema comes in – ideas built on documentary images.

2. This idea is of a piece with the work begun in *La Jetée* (1962), whereupon Chris Marker comments:

   > This film is the story of a man marked by a childhood memory. This violent, shocking experience does not take on meaning for him until much later, on an Orly runway some time before the triggering of the Third World War.

3. Information available at www.chrismarker.org/immemory/, accessed 23 February 2014.
4. Furthermore, the CD-ROM declares:

> Like many children of my generation, *La Famille Fenouillard* was, along with Jules Verne, my first open window on the great world, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that most of my travels have had the purpose of verifying the teachings of this fundamental book.

We may also note that for several years, Marker headed the Editions du Seuil's Planète collection on travel. On Jules Verne and Marker, as well as on *Sans Soleil*, see Gauthier (2001) and Niney (2000).

5. For example, in 1977, the documentary *Grin Without a Cat* takes up this division. Based on a return to revolutions past, he reveals current struggles that foreshadow scenes from the Third World War (see Marker 1978).
6. The soundtrack represents the subjective hearing of the filmmaker, as well as the main thread of memorial contemplation (Habib and Paci 2008).
7. This references not only Vertov's Soviet documentary histories, but also the Freudian concept of memory screen originating in 1896, contemporaneously with the birth of the cinema (Freud 1956: 197).
8. For example, in this film, Marker comments on the work of the documentary maker Roman Karmen on the Second World War and the role of the documentary:

> Karmen did not believe in objectivity. He used to say, 'The world is an endless war and there are two sides. The artist chooses his side and does everything to make it victorious. The rest is hogwash'. Roman was like that. You were all like that.

9. In 2010, we corresponded on the occasion of the film festival Est/Ouest Transsibérie (East/West Trans-Siberia) in Dié, France, for which he had refused to allow the screening of *Letter from Siberia* for the opening of the event, considering all of his production before 1960 as irrelevant.
10. Marker often lays claim to the Soviet tradition of *cinéma vérité* in Dziga Vertov's group: he uses the camera as both a weapon (*oruzhie*) and a tool (*orudie*). The term 'camera-pen' derives from the *caméra-stylo* mentioned in an essay by the French critic Alexandre Astruc, 'Du Stylo à la Caméra et de la Caméra au Stylo', published in the film journal *L'Ecran Français* in 1948.
11. 'I write to you from the country of obscurity', as he put it in his premonitory film *Letter from Siberia* in 1957, speaking of the role of cinema as bringer of light. This quote echoes a text by Belgian poet Henri Michaux, published in the book *Plume, Lointain intérieur* (1963).

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Marker, C. (dir.) (1982), *Sans Soleil*, France: Argos Films, 100 mins.
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Marker, C. (dir.) (1990–4), *Zapping Zone* (*Proposals for an Imaginary Television*) [*Zapping Zone (Proposition pour une télévision imaginaire)*], France: Georges Pompidou Museum, multimedia installation, 250 mins.
Marker, C. (dir.) (1992), *The Last Bolshevik* [*Le tombeau d'Alexandre*], France: Les Films de l'Astrophore, La Sept, Centre National de la Cinématographie (CNC), 116 mins.
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Marker, C. (dir.) (2006), *Leila Attacks*, France: Auto-production, 1 min.

PART II

The Personal Experience

CHAPTER 6

The Survivor–Perpetrator Encounter and the Truth Archive in Rithy Panh's Documentaries

Raya Morag

In this chapter, I propose an analysis of Rithy Panh's documentaries, *S21: The Khmer Rouge Death Machine* (2003), *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* (2012) and, to a lesser degree, *The Missing Picture* (2013), as what I term 'perpetrator documentaries' – that is, documentaries that focus on the figure of the perpetrator, while unravelling the long-time enigma of the 'ordinary man turned perpetrator' (Browning [1992] 1998: 159–89). I suggest that the survivor–perpetrator encounter staged at the heart of *S21* and *Duch* is a major characteristic of Panh's perpetrator documentary cinema, aiming at undermining the perpetrator's ideology of extermination and reconstituting the human condition. This encounter is built on a conjuring act, in which the dead play the third, meaningful other: they are participants. Furthermore, I describe the cinematic strategies through which these three post-genocide documentaries constitute a cinematic 'archive of truth'. Identifying the major tropes that most potently mobilise this archive examines the role of Panh's perpetrator documentaries as a transgenerational site, one that confronts the post-1979 generation with the double enigma: of the 'ordinary perpetrator' and self-genocide. In the midst of Cambodia's struggle over the post-Khmer Rouge national narrative, Panh, the survivor, has put forward a new episteme with which Cambodia's collective post-traumatic memory should be re-established.

PERPETRATOR DOCUMENTARIES

S21, *Duch* and, to a lesser degree, *The Missing Picture* represent a unique case of perpetrator documentaries, because of the post-traumatic ways by which the director – a survivor of the Cambodian genocide who lost his family – identifies his major mission: to confront the perpetrator. In *S21*, made after years of searching for perpetrators in hiding in rural Cambodia, Panh interviews ten low-ranking perpetrators who worked at the Phnom Penh torture and execution centre, Tuol Sleng, code-named S21:[1] former guards, an interrogator, torturer, photographer, doctor, security deputy, Head of Registers and driver.[2] Panh questions the former guards about their part in Tuol Sleng's technologies of death together with former prisoner Vann Nath, whose paintings of Pol Pot enabled him to survive S21. *S21* stages the survivor–perpetrator confrontation in a series of interviews mixed with the former guards' re-enactments of their daily routine in Tuol Sleng. In a few remarkable scenes, when asked by Rithy Panh to demonstrate their methods, the former guards re-enact their deeds in the empty cells of Tuol Sleng – which became the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in 1980 – as if they were once again in the past: shouting at imaginary prisoners, kicking and cursing them, checking the locks and so on. The bodily demonstration, based on reflexes, attests to the power of the realist re-enactment to uncover a secretive and unknowable past, as well as the perpetrators' susceptibility to indoctrination, still embodied after twenty-four years. Contrasting perpetration with acknowledgement, the perpetrators' verbal confessions for what Kelman and Hamilton termed 'crimes of obedience' (Chandler 1999: 137) are thus combined, and grapple, with their bodily reflexes. Thus, Panh's perpetrator documentary renders two confessional modes: one that is forced, verbal, partially self-incriminatory and mostly disavowed; and one that is automatic, out of habit and inscribed on the body. In contrast to the group of perpetrators interviewed in *S21*, the only interviewee in *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* is the former commandant of Tuol Sleng, Kaing Guek Eav, nicknamed Duch. Between 1975 and 1979, 'at least 12,380 people were tortured' (Panh and Bataille 2013: 1) and approximately 17,000 were executed under his orders (Dunlop 2009: 5). In his eerie autobiographical memoir, *The Elimination: A Survivor of the Khmer Rouge Confronts His Past and the Commandant of the Killing Fields*, written with the French novelist Christophe Bataille in 2013, Panh describes the making of the film *Duch* as crucial to him, because Duch does not appear in *S21*, a film which 'is almost entirely an indictment of the man' (Panh and Bataille 2013: 7).

The historical-political circumstances that enabled the making of *Duch* are worth mentioning. It was only in 1999, after the last of the Khmer Rouge had surrendered to the government and the civil war had come to an end, that while on a visit to the district of Samlaut – often considered the birthplace

of the Khmer Rouge revolution – the American photojournalist Nic Dunlop (together with Nate Thayer) identified Duch. Duch, who had disappeared twenty years before, had taken on the identity of Hang Pin and presented himself as a schoolteacher, working with American refugee aid organisations. Shortly after the story of his discovery appeared in the Western media, Duch gave himself up to the authorities (Dunlop 2005).

For the making of *Duch*, nine years after *S21*, Panh spent hundreds of hours interviewing Duch during the period of his arrest and trial.[3] The mise en scène is built around Duch's desk – a major trope that symbolises the bureaucrat's mindset, his devotion to the segmented, routinised and depersonalised bureaucratic and administrative aspects of the extermination process. Because in some scenes Duch sits near a desk in an empty court hall, this trope, empowered by the Q&A format, also symbolises an imaginary trial.[4] As the camera repeatedly shows, the desk – much like the one Duch had in the past – is covered with piles of documents found in Tuol Sleng, and representing the dead. Panh asks Duch to read them out loud: slogans of the Angkar party (including 'Only the newborn child is pure!' or 'If we protect you, we earn nothing. If we cast you out, we lose nothing!'), prisoner accounts, his own comments written on the accounts, interrogators' reports and rules written for the guards. Panh also asks Duch to look at photo prints taken of prisoners before their execution, at Van Nath's paintings of scenes of torture and suffering in S21 and to listen to video testimonies describing 'some' of the atrocities carried out under his command. As will be described below, this proliferation of means aims at refuting, contradicting, opposing and disproving Duch's lies.

When discussing perpetrator documentaries in general and confrontation scenes in particular, the use of the term 'confession' is highly problematic. We should recall that in totalitarian regimes like Pol Pot's, victims were frequently forced to write accounts ('confessions') before their execution in order to justify it. Once the regime proved through these forced accounts that the prisoners were traitors, in an inversion of cause and effect, the 'confession' itself became the excuse for execution. I regard the pervasiveness of the term 'confession' in this context in genocide and trauma studies a regrettable misuse of a term taken from the perpetrators' discourse, perhaps further proof of the power of the perpetrators and their forged rhetoric to pave their way into even the most critical discourse. Moreover, the use of the term 'confession', when referring to what I suggest should be regarded as the prisoners' 'execution account', is evidence of another inversion – in fact, it is the perpetrators who should confess their crimes. Using the term 'confession' in relation to the prisoners and not themselves masks the perpetrators' constant refusal to acknowledge their responsibility, to confess.

As I have argued in other forums,[5] the term 'confession' is more appropriate than the term 'testimony' to define the perpetrators' acknowledgement of their

deeds and should be used to differentiate between the victim and the perpetrator. We are, undoubtedly, morally committed to listen to the victims' testimony and, as an imaginary supportive community, to ease their suffering. In the post-Holocaust era, we have learnt to accept their 'emotional testimony' as truth, as described by Dori Laub in the famous case of the Holocaust survivor who testified about the Auschwitz uprising, stating that 'four chimneys [were] going up in flames' where 'historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four' (Felman and Laub 1992: 59–60). However, our acceptance and the connotations ascribed to testimony in the post-Holocaust era as a result of the huge scholarly effort to comprehend the Holocaust should not be taken into consideration in regard to the perpetrator's confession. This is particularly evident in clear-cut historical episodes like Khmer Rouge Cambodia (as opposed to South Africa's apartheid regime, for instance). In the case of genocide, the perpetrator's confession should not be based on the psychological register (as is the victim's testimony, grounded in his or her personal feelings, reflections, projections and so on), but on the ethical register – that is, it should be based on an uncathartic, accurate, unconvoluted, cognitive acknowledgement of his or her crimes (Morag 2013: 14–21). Because Duch's confession is revealed to be rooted in total unacknowledgement, during all the years he spent shooting the film, Panh refrained from anchoring the confrontation in the discourse of reconciliation, forgiveness and similitude, but rather embraced that of responsibility, accountability, justice and difference.

Since Duch had read these execution accounts[6] in the past and related to them as true confessions,[7] Panh's requirement that he reread them becomes a form of re-enactment of Duch's deeds through the speech act. Duch's rereading thus becomes a substitute for his unperformed confession, for his obstinate refusal to acknowledge responsibility for his crimes. The rereading is also a substitute for – and, ironically, also refutes – Duch's lies. For example, he reads the comment he wrote on one of the execution accounts: 'Carry out torture!', but nevertheless says:

> I tend to regard myself as innocent. I belonged to the police force of Democratic Kampuchea . . . so the government is responsible for this crime . . . I admit that I just held hostage [sic] by Khmer Rouge regime from 17 April 1975 to 6 January 1979.[8]

In contrast to the bodily re-enactments in *S21*, Duch's rereading of these records is not performed automatically. In further contrast to the guards, he is neither possessed by the past, nor reliving it. On the contrary, his rereading is saturated with denial and negation, using Angkar party rhetoric as a major tool of his determined confrontation with Rithy Panh.[9]

Although this confrontation is conducted persistently throughout the entire

film, we hear only the perpetrator. Panh, the survivor, is neither heard nor seen in the frame. In both *S21* and *Duch*, the confrontation, staged as a battle between survivor and perpetrator, is meant to undermine the perpetrator's ideology of extermination and reconstitute the human condition. As Hannah Arendt suggests, to deprive men of their humanity is a powerful instrument belonging to the arsenal of the extermination process ([1963] 2006: 69). It has to do with the strategy of denying the reality of extermination by hiding any traces of mass murder, while at the same time asserting, in this case, that the 'new people', as they were called by the Khmer Rouge (the middle class, ethnic minorities, intellectuals, the urban population, artists and any other social stratum defined by the regime's heterophobia as an enemy),[10] were no longer human beings. This murderous utopia created its own language of extermination, including assimilation of the dead and the survivor – that is, it related to the living as if they were already dead. The regime's ideology destroyed the symbolic boundary between life and death, which establishes the human condition. Under this 'ideocide' (Appadurai 2006: 1–13), both the dead and the living become identical and are destined to disappear, without leaving either trace or memory.

Opposing the Khmer Rouge's logic of elimination, Panh creates a cinema that holds past traces and thereby reconstitutes, through this conjuring

Figure 6.1 *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* – the truth archive (dir. Panh, 2012).

confrontation, the symbolic space between the perpetrator, the survivor and the dead victim. The dead are ceaselessly presented through both the accounts and the photos, and thus become a third participant. As Panh tells us in *Elimination*:

> Duch asks me why I'm always showing him photographs. 'What's the point?' he asks, in that tone of his. I answer, 'But the thing is . . . they're listening to you. Koy Thourn is here. Bophana's here.[11] Taing Siv Leang too. I believe they're listening to you'. (2013: 261)

Panh's concrete and constant battle with Duch aims at overcoming the perpetrator's psychological reactions, inner mind structures, propaganda techniques, explicit and implicit strategies and dynamics of argumentations and language – all of which are described by genocide scholars from Leo Kuper (1985) to Israel Charny (2009) and others – and turn these psychological reactions into an ethical reaction.

In one of the striking confrontation scenes, Panh presents the following dialogue. Duch (holding a photograph of a tortured prisoner, the camera follows his gaze):

> Let's talk about hitting intelligently. Mam Nay aka Chan could beat someone while thinking about what he was doing because he was not hungry for recognition. He was a very good interrogator. He behaved according to the answer he got. He hit very hard. He would deliver a very strong blow from time to time if it was necessary. He would strike one, two, three blows and almost never reached five! [Cut to an illustration shot of a blow which lasts just a moment, the time the blow itself takes.] Those who hit without thinking were like Comrade Touy. He wanted the same power as Comrade Pon but he never reached Pon's level because I hadn't had much time to train him. Thus, he had only one method: torture. Biff! Boom! He controlled his blows so that the prisoner wouldn't die. He wanted to compete with Pon. [The camera reveals an image that soon will be comprehended as video testimony, which Panh shows to Duch (and the viewers) in order to refute Duch's previous statement. Duch watches the video on his computer.]
> I met Mam Nay aka Chan in 1973 in the secret prison M13. I saw him use an AK47 to execute someone. [The video's frame is enlarged and we see the testimony on the entire film screen.] There was a place there that we called the winner's podium. When a person was tied to it, he was to be executed. Every prisoner knew what it meant (execution). On that day, the prisoners were gathered around the podium. Chan killed one of them with his rifle. Blood splattered all over the prisoners standing around, on

everyone who was there. It was terrifying. He wanted to scare us with this behaviour.
[Close up on Duch. He laughs.]
[On the soundtrack we hear the propaganda songs. Duch sits behind his desk.]
Duch: You can put it that way. But if you do, you will make me acknowledge lies. I will not accept this. My officers knew how to hit. But to say that Mam Nay was the one who shot is not true. Not true. He had beaten prisoners in the past. Sometimes he interrogated with his eyes closed. From time to time he would get up and pick up his long stick to hit with. [Duch shows the presumed length of the stick on his stretched arm.] Then he would go to sleep. [A short shot of a tortured prisoner tied to the podium.] Then he would come back to interrogate the prisoner. Mr Witness may keep talking, there's nothing I can do. There's nothing to document this . . . Mr Witness is speaking up, but he has no documents either. So he can keep talking all he wants.

Panh shoots Duch either with a head-on or medium close-up; however, in spite of the fact that we experience an abundance of close-ups, Duch almost never gazes at the camera. His unlooking means he considers himself someone

Figure 6.2 *Duch, Master of the Forges of Hell* – Duch's laughter as a mark of sadistic violence (dir. Panh, 2012).

not willing to be gazed at. His horrific pride in mastering torture, training his officers to 'hit intelligently', as he calls it, culminates in the moment in which in this scene instead of confessing the beating as a crime, he smugly laughs and then addresses 'Mr Witness' as a liar. Duch's laugh is not an expression of embarrassment or confusion in the face of contradictory evidence, but rather a mark of sadistic violence. As psychoanalytic research claims: 'In *sadistic lying*, the intent is to attack and triumph . . . the object needs to be controlled and humiliated for the self's gratification, often to reverse an earlier experience of humiliation' (Lemma 2005: 738 [emphasis in original]).

As hinted at above, the battle against both the perpetrator's lies and his perseverance of self-image as the 'master of torture' is built on the juxtaposition of voices. Panh, who is not only the writer and director of this film but also its co-editor, establishes a polemical narrative through counter-editing. In other words, his voice as a survivor is heard through the editing. Re-emphasising the evidentiary status of archival representation and empowering the referential grounding by repeating the same images over and over, the clips taken from propaganda films and the video testimony stand, of course, in total contrast to Duch's reaction. As Panh says: 'Thanks to the cinema, the truth comes out: montage versus mendacity' (2013: 114) and 'Duch reinvents his truth in order to survive . . . I edit my film, therefore, against Duch. The only morality is the editing, the montage' (2013: 186).

Using the camera's constant display of documents and counter-editing, Panh constitutes what I term a 'truth archive'. In the same line of reasoning as in the debate on the use of 'confession' versus 'testimony' summed up earlier in this text, and in reference to the status of the victims' 'emotional testimony' as truth, I use the word truth to emphasise Panh's efforts to expose Duch's lies in regard to the Cambodian genocide. In many respects, this use transcends traditional debates over documentary truth that take place in documentary research. Panh's perpetrator documentaries, I argue, take the truth value of the evidence they present, while confronting the perpetrators' lies as an ideal, rather than as a ground for a post-*cinéma vérité* or postmodern controversy. In other words, the traditional questions of objectivity, authenticity, transparency, the nature of evidence, accuracy and so on become irrelevant in the face of lies concerning the 1.7 million dead. The scale of the historical event demands putting aside any discussion that might impede the revelation of truth. Simultaneously exposing the mode of production, Panh's cinema both provides the basis for the evidence it presents and stands for the spectator's cognitive engagement with the value of truth as a necessary ideal in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodian society and culture. Put another way, Panh's perpetrator documentary cinema is built on transforming the perpetrator's constant denial of his responsibility, as attested to by these documents, testimonies, photos, notes, paintings and slogans, into an archive of truth. A

cinema of refuting, it uses the battle to put forward a new collective imagery. Reconstituting the symbolic space while conjuring the dead and transforming every visual, audial and bodily detail disclosed about Tuol Sleng's Death Machine into a chronicle of truth means distinguishing between the subject positions entailed in the battle. The evolution of the three films (*S21*, *Duch*, *The Missing Picture*) in terms of subject positions is intriguing. Panh's struggle against the ideology of elimination entails concealing his own traumatic past. Reconstitution of the distinction between life and death, survivor and victim, humanity and elimination becomes symbolically central through this present absence; his appearance or lack of it; detailing his personal memories or refraining from doing so. Playing with the object/subject dialectic – one that was fulfilled so harrowingly by the Khmer Rouge terror – Panh uses these diverse ghostly positions to confront the perpetrator's mindset and rhetoric of utmost objectification.

In *Elimination* (2013), Panh's memories of the horrific experiences he underwent as a young child under the Pol Pot regime are interwoven with his reflections on the hundreds of hours of interviews he conducted with Duch. But in this memoir, like in his film *Duch, Masters of the Forges of Hell*, he never confronts Duch with his own personal memories. In other words, Panh renders the battle with this high-ranking perpetrator, Pol Pot's chief executioner, by omitting both the post-traumatic reactions and affects invading his present, while recalling the past, and the psychological crises (expressed only in the book) he went through during, and as a result of, his lengthy talks with Duch. I suggest that in taking this allegedly unpersonal subject position upon himself in *S21* and *Duch*, Panh presents what will later become one of the most innovative steps taken by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Court of Cambodia (ECCC) in relation to Duch's trial: the inclusion of civil parties in the proceedings. As the research, and even the weekly Cambodian TV show *Duch on Trial*, which followed the development of the trial from 2009 onward, state, for the first time in an international criminal trial, survivors of mass atrocity were included as civil parties, rather than as mere witnesses. They were permitted to address the court from the commencement of the proceedings – unlike witnesses, who only address the court at trial – and to question witnesses, experts and the accused.[12] Panh, like the civil parties in Duch's trial, Case No. 001, is an active participant every step of the way. Unlike them, he does not disclose his memories to Duch.

Moreover, in *The Missing Picture*, it is the voice-over of the actor Randal Douc[13] that we hear reciting Panh's memories as if it were a first-person narration.[14] Panh's disembodied voice and physical absence in all three films is used as a strategy that reflects on subject/object positions, constantly evoking self-reflexive questions in regard to these positions: what makes one a subject? Or an object, for that matter? What is the meaning of having a voice or being

deprived of one? Of having a body or – out of torture, hunger or hard labour – becoming body-less? Furthermore, and most importantly, Panh's disembodied voice means deliberately avoiding any comparison between the survivor and the perpetrator. According to Panh's perpetrator documentary cinema, as suggested above, the perpetrator's story should be told in different terms than that of the survivor (or the victim). In other words, the necropolitics[15] of the Cambodian genocide are transformed through the perpetrator's perspective to a space in which the perpetrator is called to imagine himself as a member of a response-able community. Thus, it is only in *The Missing Picture*, after Duch was sentenced to life imprisonment by the ECCC, that Panh discloses his personal memories. However, in this documentary as well, he reflects on subject/object relationships, on objectification and dehumanisation. This is carried out mainly through the use of hundreds of clay figurines, which, by nature silent, represent the ontology of creation and destruction in a material, close to earth, manner. The fully manipulated clay bodies are placed in elaborate dioramas or superimposed by deliberately rough-edged visual effects, which highlight the gap between the deeds and rhetoric of the Pol Pot regime and the suffering of the Khmer people.

Three major spectatorial positions, I suggest, are revealed in Panh's perpetrator cinema: first, objecthood – tasting the impossible status of being an object in the web of the other; second, self-othering – imagining the other who does not resemble the self, and the otherness within the self. This position includes acknowledging direct or indirect symbolic collaboration with different degrees of perpetration, mainly through state terror. The third spectatorial position is subjecthood – regaining self-identity, a post-genocide self, through participation in 'truth archiving' processes. These complex processes include opposition to the Khmer Rouge regime (which is relevant for many Khmer Rouge families),[16] acknowledgement of (various levels) of responsibility, rebuilding of the historical past and participating in commemoration of the dead. In proposing these spectatorial positions (and their linear or simultaneous adoption), Panh's cinema demands not only the emotional investment of the viewers, but an ethical investment as well.

MAJOR TROPES OF NON-PLACES: THE PIT/LAKE/SWAMP, THE EMPTY CITY AND THE LABOUR CAMP

In the last ghostly scenes of *S21*, three of the former guards re-enact the slaughter they conducted at Cheung Ek, the execution zone. Panh, who was a co-cinematographer in addition to being the writer and director, films the atrocity site relentlessly. When the former guard demonstrates how he used to cut the blindfolded prisoners' throats, Panh's camera movement imitates

the falling of the body into the pit. This execution zone – like the artificial lake built over the pit behind the hospital, to which as a youngster Panh had dragged bodies every morning, and to which the bodies of his mother and sisters were also thrown (as described in *The Missing Picture*) – become not only a synecdoche for over 20,000 killing fields in Cambodia,[17] but also a major trope of perpetrator cinema, an open trace. Showing both the pit and the lake that became a swamp, a toxic place, reflects on their counter-image: the rice paddy. In this way, the trope connects the tragedy of this self-genocide with the destruction of Cambodia's fertility. Both Tuol Sleng (which was previously a high school) and Cheung Ek were created by the Pol Pot regime. The films present them both as places of abject excess, displacing the emptiness of Phnom Penh and other major cities that were evacuated on 17 April 1975. Rithy Panh's camera tracks the empty streets of Phnom Penh in *S21* and *The Missing Picture*, trying – through a long take – to capture the emptiness, which attests to the transformation of millions into non-people. The urban city turned into a placeless location inhabits, though secretly, the Tuol Sleng prison as its horrific replacement, while the non-places of rural Cambodia's labour camps (located everywhere and nowhere) became ghastly substitutes for the city.

Panh establishes the geographies of the Cambodian genocide as a chain of tropes in which the pit/lake/swamp and the emptied city/labour camp become prominent in the truth archive. Perpetrator documentaries are associated with being in the actual space where the event took place, the site of atrocities, taking the Barthesian 'being there' literally. This conception accentuates the evidentiary of the physical space over the volatility of time, which characterises victim testimony (Morag 2013: 14–21). The site of atrocities is a key point of reference for the perpetrator's acknowledgement. As Boreth explains:

> In 1995, Cambodians' concerns for the victims' physical remains began to increase when King Norodom Sihanouk suggested that the bones at Tuol Sleng and the nearby Killing Field of Choeung Ek, south of Phnom Penh, be cremated. Cambodian funerary customs require that the remains of the dead be cremated so that their souls can be liberated and can be reborn. This obligatory ritual act was not carried out, however, because many Khmer Rouge members are now on trial, and the skulls are evidence of the regime's crimes. Another pressing issue that worries both Cambodians and the international community is the preservation of the bones of victims found in sites in the provinces. These remains are decaying and will soon disappear. (2003: 70)

It seems that in the two decades that have passed since King Norodom Sihanouk made his suggestion, neither the religious funeral rituals nor

preservation have been carried out. In the total lack of both perpetrators' acknowledgement and a huge governmental effort to bring hiding perpetrators to trial, the sites of atrocities become constant, physical reminders of the conflictual relations of the invisible and visible in post-Khmer Rouge Cambodia. In the absence of digging, cremating and preserving, that is, filming becomes the utmost act of embodying the buried truth.

CONCLUSION: 'DIG A HOLE AND BURY THE PAST'

In the Cambodian genocide, 'a greater proportion of the population perished than in any other revolution during the twentieth century' (Jackson 1989: 3). Rithy Panh's perpetrator documentaries not only shape the collective post-traumatic memory, but also constitute for later generations the means to imagine an unknown past and discover its implications for their lives. In this, perpetrators' memories, together with those of survivors, are tested by their ability to establish the social, political and cultural processes required from Cambodian society in the aftermath of horror. In Cambodia during the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) period, there were undoubtedly 'other Duchs' – men and women who ran the prisons and torture chambers, supervised mass murder, used slave labour and are still free and undetected. Recent research shows that attitudes toward the ECCC are positive and that support for truth-seeking is still strong and increasing (Pham et al. 2011). Nevertheless, the public debate over the ECCC as a hybrid tribunal continues:

> Currently, five suspects are supposedly under investigation in preparation for Cases 003 and 004 of the ECCC. These allegedly committed crimes are similar to Duch's (crimes against humanity, war crimes, and human rights violations resulting in thousands of deaths); like Duch, they were not in the senior leadership of the CPK. However the fate of Cases 003 and 004 is at best uncertain. Despite officially 'inviting' the UN to help the state prosecute the atrocities, the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP)'s preferred solution remains, as current Prime Minister (and former Khmer Rouge cadre) Hun Sen put it, to 'dig a hole and bury the past'. (Gray 2013)

It seems that the struggle over the post-Khmer Rouge national narrative is still at its height. While competing cultural processes in the aftermath of trauma (such as repression, silencing, forgiveness, reconciliation, acknowledgement of guilt and taking responsibility) are present, Panh's cinematic archive of truth strives to construct Cambodia's national consciousness. In doing so, it advances the possibility of cinematic creation of ethical communities.[18]

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NOTES

1. 'The "S" . . . stood for *sala*, or "hall", while "21" was the code number assigned to *santebal*, a Khmer compound term that combines the words *santisuk* (security) and *nokorbal* (police). "S-21" and *santebal* were names for Democratic Kampuchea's security police' (Chandler 1999: 3).
2. 'First I went to see the torturers in their homes. I spoke to them. I tried to persuade them. Then I filmed them in the very places where their acts had been committed. I often paid someone to take their place in the fields because a shoot could require several days. I gave them room and board . . . I wanted to make them draw near and feel the truth, to punctuate the small lies and refute the big ones' (Panh and Bataille 2013: 7).
3. On 31 July 2007, Duch was convicted of crimes against humanity, murder and torture for his role during the Khmer Rouge rule of Cambodia. He was sentenced to thirty years' imprisonment. Duch, represented by Cambodian lawyer Kar Savuth and French lawyer François Roux, appealed his provisional detention by the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), based on the more than eight years he had spent in Cambodian military detention before trial. The appeal was unsuccessful. On 2 February 2012, the ECCC increased his sentence to life imprisonment (see Glaspy 2008).
4. The questions are not heard, but are very much present because of the documents, as will be described below.
5. See Morag (2013: 14–21) for a discussion of these terms. Though I refer to perpetrator trauma – a totally different sub-genre – I regard the distinction between the victim's testimony and the perpetrator's confession, and the difference between the victim's psychological register and the perpetrator's ethical register, as valid in the case of perpetrator documentaries as well.
6. According to Chandler, roughly 4,300 accounts were found in S21. These texts, in which the prisoners admitted to counter-revolutionary crimes, range from a single page to several hundred (1999: 1–13).
7. 'Duch's neatly written queries and annotations, often in red ink, appear on hundreds of confessions. They frequently correct and denigrate what prisoners confessed, suggest beating and torture' (Chandler 1999: 22).
8. All citations are taken from the film.
9. As Browning contends: 'The men who carry out "atrocity by policy" are in a different state of mind' ([1992] 1998: 161).
10. In *Elimination*, Panh writes:

> Overnight I become 'new people', or (according to an even more horrible expression) an 'April 17' . . . The history of my childhood is abolished. Forbidden. From that day on, I, Rithy Panh, thirteen years old, have no more history, no more family, no more emotions, no more thoughts, no more unconscious . . . What a

> brilliant idea, to give a hated class a name full of hope: '*new people*'. (Panh and Bataille 2013: 23 [emphasis in original])

11. The love story between Bophana and her husband and her subversive stand against the Khmer Rouge and her torturers in S21 became one of Panh's major symbols. See Panh's film *Bophana: A Cambodian Tragedy* (1996).
12. See AIJI (2012) and *Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia Case 001* (ECCC) (n. d.).
13. He played Monsieur Jo in Panh's *The Sea Wall* (2008).
14. The narration was written by Panh (with Bataille).
15. For the use of this term, see Mbembe (2003). Though I disagree with his political perspective, I find his definition of political counter-spheres a productive one.
16. See, for instance, Janet Gardner's documentary film *The Lost Child: Sayon's Journey* (2013), which tells the story of a child-soldier kidnapped by the Khmer Rouge at age six and later adopted by an American family. Unable to recall his traumatic memories, he returns to Cambodia and finds his remaining brothers. Verifying that they are his lost family through DNA tests, he also discovers that they survived because they belonged to the Khmer Rouge.
17. According to the Yale University Cambodian Genocide Program (CGP) (1994–2013), there are 309 mass grave sites with an estimated total of 19,000 grave pits. Information available at http://www.yale.edu/cgp/index.html, accessed 11 November 2013.
18. A continuation of his film practice, the Bophana Audiovisual Resources Center in Phnom Penh, launched by Rithy Panh, is working on training a new generation of filmmakers after the mass murder of the previous generation of filmmakers, actors and actresses, as well as archiving audio-visual material relating to the Khmer Rouge period and beyond (see http://www.bophana.org, accessed 30 October 2014).

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CHAPTER 7

Contesting Consensual Memory: The Work of Remembering in Chilean Autobiographical Documentaries

Juliette Goursat

The plebiscite of 5 October 1988, in which 55.99 per cent of Chileans said 'no' to Pinochet, marked the end of military dictatorship, but did not restore a proper democracy. It opened a new period that political analysts named the 'transition', to designate an alliance between politics (re-democratisation) and economics (neoliberalism). During those years, the post-dictatorship presidents – until 2010, all from the Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia[1] – were determined to reconcile Chileans, whom the dictatorship seemed to have irreparably divided. As Peter Winn writes: 'in the face of the left's demand for "truth and justice" and the right's reluctant willingness to accept reconciliation on the condition that *neither* would happen . . . the Concertación . . . took a middle way: "truth and reconciliation" ' (2007: 9 [emphasis in original]).

Facing these strong antagonisms, the government of the transition opted for a strategy of 'discourse of national reconciliation' and, on a more general note, for a consensual model (Richard 2010: 31). According to Nelly Richard, the 'consensus' marked a politics conceived of as a 'transaction' based on 'agreements, with its formula of pacts and technicized negotiation' (2004: 65). Instead of embracing the conflicting perspectives on the repression, the Concertación strove to avoid disagreement. It tried to put in place a framework – a consensus – that would symbolically neutralise the forces in dispute and compel voices and conduct to unanimity through moderation and resignation. The promotion of reconciliation justified excluding from the official memory anything that could purportedly introduce dissention and stir up old antagonisms: on this basis, 'authoritarianism' replaced 'military dictatorship' in official speeches; the political project of Allende's government was not mentioned;

and subjective testimonies were scrupulously kept out of institutional discourse. The transition shaped a smooth image of the past, which could save it from its contradictions, but 'deactivated the critical work of memory' (Richard 2000: 176). For the sociologist Tomás Moulian, who affirms the necessity of reflecting on the past, 'consensus is the highest stage of oblivion' (1998: 37).

In this context in which the efforts of the new regime to contain memories were salient, Augusto Pinochet's arrest in London in 1998 came as a catalyst: it brought into the open the unspoken testimonies that masked the deep division between Pinochet's supporters and opponents. This resurfacing of repressed memories, which subverted the rhetorical apparatus of the transition, finds one of its main expressions in the artistic field – in documentary filmmaking in particular. Following the Pinochet affair, filmmakers ventured to recount the devastating effects of the dictatorship on their own lives and those of their families, thereby affirming the legitimacy of their personal testimonies' existence in the collective memory. By having recourse to their own experiences, these filmmakers attempt to create images and narratives of the past that will overcome the absence or lack of testimonies and traces around the period of Pinochet dictatorship in traditional media and official discourses. As is often the case, autobiographical films constitute an act of resistance against – or at least independence from – political and cultural institutions, which they more or less explicitly contest. Here, Chilean filmmakers' need for autonomy marks a disagreement with respect to the politics of the transition, the restrictions imposed on memory, the official version of history and, to a lesser extent, neoliberalism.

Focusing on four documentaries containing a strong autobiographical dimension – *En Algún Lugar del Cielo* (dir. Alejandra Carmona, 2003), *Calle Santa Fe* (dir. Carmen Castillo, 2007), *Mi Vida con Carlos* (dir. Germán Berger-Hertz, 2010) and *El Edificio de los Chilenos* (dir. Macarena Aguiló, 2010) – I will analyse how these films break with the consensual and normative image the transition fashioned out of the past. I argue that the rupture lies in the work of memory these films bring to the foreground. Whereas the transition passively referred to the past and evoked it without question, these filmmakers not only receive an image of the past, they search for it. In this quest, the autobiographical form plays a decisive role, allowing them to reveal the work of remembering and sometimes to undertake a critical scrutiny of memory, as Carmen Castillo does in *Calle Santa Fe*.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DEVICE: REMEMBERING FOR ONESELF AND FOR OTHERS

Chilean autobiographical documentaries emerged after the Pinochet affair as a reaction to the years of the transition when 'biography and subjectivity – as

living materials of an historical experience broken by violence – remained without documentary supports, without narratives' (Richard 2000: 178). As a symbolic operator of the transition, Chilean television during those years 'implemented various visual devices of obliteration, which eliminated from the screen anything that did not fit with the frivolity of the new aesthetics of diversion' (Richard 2000: 178). Anything that exhibited traces of violence became, for reasons of style, incompatible with the stereotypes of the advertising market.

Facing gaps in the public and visible narrative of memory, which they could perceive more distinctly when in exile, filmmakers Alejandra Carmona, Carmen Castillo, Germán Berger-Hertz and Macarena Aguiló testify to the crimes of the dictatorship by engaging their own histories and points of view. They show disasters that could not fit into the precarious mould of an official political register that excluded anything that could allegedly destabilise the fragile balance of the consensus. Alejandra Carmona (*En Algún Lugar del Cielo*) and Germán Berger-Hertz (*Mi Vida con Carlos*) relate how the assassinations of their fathers have irreversibly shaken their lives and those of their families. At the same time, they embark on a work of remembering that strives to recover the memory of their loved ones and clarify the circumstances of their murders through testimonies. In *Calle Santa Fe*, Carmen Castillo reassembles the memory of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR)[2] and recounts their battle against Pinochet, thereby reacting against the amnesia of the transition that sought to erase the violence of the dictatorship, as well as the dreams and political project of the militants fighting with Salvador Allende. Macarena Aguiló (*El Edificio de los Chilenos*) focuses on another consequence of the dictatorship: after being abducted by the National Intelligence Directorate (DINA), she left for Europe and was one of the children who took part in the project 'Hogares' (project 'Home'): while their parents fought for freedom at home, sixty MIRist 'siblings' were raised safely and communally by 'social parents', first in Europe and then in Cuba. In focusing on the deeds of those who resisted before denouncing Pinochet's crimes and remembering tragedy and death, these documentaries displace the traditional point of view on the dictatorship and escape the dangers delineated by Elizabeth Lira, who fears that collective memory in Chile 'may become trapped by the duty to commemorate a tragedy, at the risk of forgetting the meaning of the lives of those who died in these circumstances' (2011: 126).

In order to assert their dissonant voices, these films adopt certain enunciative and narrative strategies, which I suggest we call an 'autobiographical device'. In each of these documentaries, the filmmaker – also the narrator and main character – takes charge of the testimony through a first-person voice-over and the presence of his/her body on-screen. The specificity of these narratives is to take the form of a quest that aims at recovering memory and/

or submitting it to diverse interpretations or meanings. Through this process, the filmmaker reveals the reflexivity of a memory searching for a clear and just representation of the past and attempting to draw lessons from it. The presence of her/his body on screen attests to more than the subjectivity of a defined point of view; it authenticates the narrative, which is to be considered as a testimony complete with historical value.

The work of memory, which is essential to the achievement of a truthful relation to the past, requires that the subject face suffering (and the limits of the legal system) head on. Germán Berger-Hertz and Alejandra Carmona suffer from the loss of their fathers; Carmen Castillo from the loss of her partner and her political ideal; Macarena Aguiló from a feeling of abandonment. While suffering often hinders the work of remembering and isolates subjects, the making of an autobiographical film facilitates the search for the past by initiating a dynamic process whereby the director interacts with people and restores bonds and continuity between the past and the present, oneself and others. Like any act of creation, it endows the quest for memories with a surplus of meaning and helps post-dictatorship filmmakers regain the intensity and desire they have lost. The camera empowers subjects to speak, to open themselves up to the language threatened by suffering. In using their own words, sounds and pictures, filmmakers reclaim a language that the rhetoric of consensus and the media of the transition have attempted to appropriate and create a space allowing other people to recover their own voices. Their autobiographical documentaries are not a solitary or solipsistic enterprise, but proceed rather from solidary exchanges between memories that aim to reconstruct the filmmaker's own memory, and to give his or her life coherence again.

Having confronted violence, Alejandra Carmona, Carmen Castillo, Germán Berger-Hertz and Macarena Aguiló are dispossessed of a common repertoire of symbols, bindings of recognition and scenes with which they can identify; as such, they have little recourse other than to refer to themselves and their own experience. As they reform their own memories and gather other personal testimonies, however, they gradually mend the inter-narrative tissue of memories and give weight to their own testimonies and those of others. If the filmmaker's story gives the film its main narrative thread, the other testimonies that cross it make manifest the possibility of linking memories in order to reconstruct a shared memory. The articulations between individual and collective history find a visual transposition in the combination of personal and historical archives. The filmmaker's personal documents (home movies, amateur films shot in Super 8, photos, children's drawings, letters) are reassembled and connected to footage that reactivates the historical memory of the traumatic past that the years of transition strove to contain: footage including anti-Pinochet rallies in memory of Salvador Allende, actions and meetings of the MIR and

rarely shown violent scenes (for example, activists on their knees taken away by policemen, or repressed protesters in anti-Pinochet rallies).

By telling the stories of their own experiences and gathering the testimonies of others, Alejandra Carmona, Carmen Castillo, Germán Berger-Hertz and Macarena Aguiló bring an unknown or forgotten fragment of Chile's history to the foreground. Their documentaries give a voice to people – resistance fighters, MIRists, but also their children and loved ones – whose memories have been repressed and considered unworthy of being part of the collective memory. From these testimonies, several common themes emerge: the meaning and sacrifice of political commitment, a life in hiding, missing people, mourning, torture, exile, the dissolution of families and the abandonment of children by anti-Pinochet activists. In so doing, their autobiographical documentaries hope to hold up a mirror to the incredulous viewers who have been watching the spectacle of consensual memory from a distance.

EXERCISES OF MEMORY: *EN ALGÚN LUGAR DEL CIELO*, *MI VIDA CON CARLOS* AND *EL EDIFICIO DE LOS CHILENOS*

Released in the 2000s, *En Algún Lugar del Cielo/Somewhere in Heaven* (dir. Alejandra Carmona, 2003), *Mi Vida con Carlos/My Life with Carlos* (dir. Germán Berger-Hertz, 2010) and *El Edificio de los Chilenos/The Chilean Building* (dir. Macarena Aguiló, 2010) are all directed by filmmakers in their thirties who were children when Pinochet seized power and who have experienced exile. They are also all sons and daughters of militants: Germán Berger-Hertz's parents were members of the Communist Party; Augusto Carmona and Macarena Aguilós' parents were MIRists. Nevertheless, these filmmakers do not tell their stories from a political point of view, but instead valorise emotions, expressions of suffering and imagination. By looking beyond politics, their documentaries escape the pitfalls of a mythicisation of the anti-Pinochet fight – which militant artists had not avoided – as much as they thwart the official memory of the transition. They show memories still actively struggling with the past, and make explicit the benefits of remembering.

In *En Algún Lugar del Cielo*, Alejandra Carmona comes back to Chile to 'rebuild the scattered pieces' of her story. She retraces her exile in Germany and Barcelona, as well as her family's life after the coup. Since she was only twelve years old when her father, Augusto Carmona, was murdered, she wants to know 'how he really was'. Through the testimonies of his friends, she discovers his more 'playful' side and 'innocent' nature. Alejandra Carmona also attempts to clarify the circumstances of his death. Accompanied by María Angélica Alvarez, a former MIR activist, she revisits the places of the last

moments of her father's life. She eventually stops to recollect herself in front of the house where he was murdered. In showing her memory's personal itineraries, she reveals that houses, crossroads and streets in Santiago are meaningful to individuals as silent witnesses to disappearances and Pinochet's crimes.

Although the work of remembering entails a confrontation of suffering, Alejandra Carmona emphasises the benefits of facing her past:

> *Alejandra Carmona (voice-over)*: As I face my past and extract the memory of my country . . . the wish to live my own life becomes stronger . . . [F]rom pain springs up again the memory of their [her father's generation] energy when the creation of a new world seemed possible . . . I begin to walk from what is most fragile and what I love the most, my daughter, attentive . . . not to harm anybody, to make love prevail.

The memory of Augusto and of a generation's dreams anchors the passing down of ethical values. The dialogue between the filmmaker and her daughter, who imagines that her dead grandfather lives in the sky, emphasises the transmission of memory and the need for a poetic viewing.

After focusing on Alexandra Carmona's story, the narrative dilates and the 'I' gives way to the 'we' when her friends relate stories of violence and exile that are very similar to her own: 'My life, says Alejandra Carmona, and that of many of my friends, was a continuous coming and going. There were many stories that began over and over. Will we find serenity now?' 'How can we sum up all our stories?' – she asks eventually, so as to call upon other filmmakers to relate their own experiences and to collect other stories; only together can they work to build a collective memory. The inclusion of other experiences attests to the entanglement of stories and memories, but also the director's will – noticeable in the other autobiographical documentaries – to give her personal story a general scope, as the final inscription attests: 'To all mothers, fathers, sons and daughters who lived this story.' Alejandra Carmona first demonstrated that it was possible to tell an experience that seemed 'inenarrable' and 'unsubstitutable' (Ricœur 1994). Her documentary gave filmmakers and especially women who were linked to the MIR, like Carmen Castillo, the courage to embark on similar projects.

Like Alejandra Carmona, Germán Berger-Hertz (*Mi Vida con Carlos*) undertakes to rescue the memory of his father, Carlos Berger-Hertz, murdered by the Caravan of Death – a Chilean Army death squad – when the director was one year old. Knowing who Carlos was, and how he lived, worked and died, is essential to the construction of his identity. As the director points out, his mother (Carmen) and uncles (Eduardo and Ricardo) have never talked about his father, whose body has remained unfound. Therefore, making a film

about Carlos creates memory images and gives him a materiality that will save him from oblivion and disappearance.

The film opens with a Super 8 home movie of Carlos running in the sea and plunging into the water. For Germán Berger-Hertz, these photograms, which recur during the film, are the unique trace and perception of his father in motion. They represent metonymically the filmmaker's memory of his father: persistent and evanescent, tenacious and tenuous in face of the immense vacuum that it has to replace. As another motif of the film, family photos are submerged in water, as if memories had to struggle against their own dissolution when they are not able to resurface.

Since grief has locked the work of remembering, the filmmaker's role is to liberate speech in order to liberate memories. Germán Berger-Hertz suggests to his mother and his uncles that they go to the Atacama Desert – where Carlos was murdered – and tell each other everything they should have said about Carlos after his disappearance. In the silence of the desert, the director reads aloud and in front of the camera a letter he wrote to his father:

> *Germán Berger-Hertz*: Dear Dad . . . We don't know where your body is, but today we are here and we begin to recover your memory . . . We are remembering you and your presence is being reborn among us. Today, we are here doing an exercise of memory ['ejercicio de memoria'] . . . They [Eduardo, Ricardo and Carmen] are confronting their grief . . . they open up their memories and I fill in my white page. Therefore, I begin to have a life with Carlos.

This scene is emblematic of the 'performative'[3] value of words and the role of the camera in the work of remembering (Austin 1962: 6). Germán Berger-Hertz, his face tensed with grief, keeps his eyes fixed on his text, but when he utters the words 'exercise of memory', he looks briefly at the camera so as to make known that by capturing his speech, the camera confers to it the status of testimony. The end of the reading is marked by a loosening of the filmmaker's face, which is emphasised by the moving away of the camera and the return of the music.

The work of remembering would not be complete without the transmission of Carlos' memory from one generation to another. For his daughters, Germán Berger-Hertz brings his father to life with tricks: he hides lollipops to which he ties words he imagined Carlos would have written, thereby showing that imagination can retrieve memories when they are missing. It is striking to notice that like *En Algún Lugar del Cielo*, the film ends with a dialogue between the director and his daughter that actualises the transmission of memory and confirms the desire to avoid repeating the mistakes of the previous generation.

For these directors, the birth of their children have made urgent the need

for transmission. The first word of *El Edificio de los Chilenos* is 'mom'. The child of the director calls her mother while the television broadcasts a report showing Macarena Aguiló speaking about her abduction by the DINA when she was a little girl. She then evokes in voice-over a dream in which a snake appears from the palm of her hand. With her other hand, she grabs the snake, throws it to the ground and discovers that it was hiding a giant, empty tunnel. She says later: 'Project Homes and my childhood were stashed away in a trunk that I would open every so often, searching for traces of something, as if it were a hidden treasure.' At the end of her film, Macarena Aguiló has not suppressed the grief of a childhood marked by the absence of her parents. However, by collecting words, pictures and letters, she is able to fill the void – which was perhaps more intolerable than the abandonment itself – left by the absence of narrative and words. She gathers the letters she received from her parents during her years of exile in a book and gives a copy to her mother. Even though the past cannot be changed, it is possible to renew its meaning and to learn its lessons, if one considers it. This is what the last sentence of the film suggests: '[E]mptiness is a path that is only filled when you walk in.'

Macarena Aguiló, Alejandra Carmona and Germán Berger-Hertz have progressed in their processes of reparation by being able to learn from their pasts. Therefore, their documentaries demonstrate that 'reconciliation'[4] is the result of a long process involving a work of memory, while avoiding the traditional figure of the victim, who is reduced to an unambiguous role and testifies only to suffering and a traumatic past. In spite of everything, Germán Berger-Hertz can 'dream, love and dance'; Alejandra Carmona wants to 'make love prevail'; and Macarena Aguiló acknowledges that this 'tremendous invitation to commitment' is maybe what she can now offer. The affirmation of these values, which are considered 'utopic' by the transition, can be seen as an attempt to give renewed dreams and hope to a divided society.

REWRITING MEMORY: *CALLE SANTA FE*

Written over the course of five years, *Calle Santa Fe/Santa Fe Street* (dir. Carmen Castillo, 2007) is the outcome of a long reflection, whereby Carmen Castillo questions events that happened thirty years earlier. As opposed to the other filmmakers mentioned above, she belongs to the generation of MIR activists who battled Pinochet's dictatorship head on. After the coup, she lived secretly for ten months in a house on Santa Fe Street along with her partner Miguel Enriquez, leader of the MIR and of the resistance against Pinochet. On 5 October 1974, they were assaulted by Pinochet's police. Miguel Enriquez died, while she survived. This event – which lies at the heart of her memory – is the starting point of a quest, whereby Carmen Castillo reconstructs her

own memory, along with the memory of the MIR and that of a long struggle against Pinochet.

This reconstruction is, however, distinct from a mere gathering of testimonies or what could be a reconstitution of collective memory, since Carmen Castillo introduces a plot into her memory. Above all, she wonders:

> Were these sacrifices worth it? Did the death and the act of resistance of a free man have meaning? Thrilled by the struggle, its harshness, its stakes, were we conscious of the sacrifices? I seek, obstinate to solve the mystery of these acts of freedom.

The use of the first-person is not an attempt to co-opt historical events, but rather the mark of a reflexive memory that opens up the past to new interpretations. Through this interrogative form, Carmen Castillo breaks with official memory, but also with what could be called 'monumental' memory: the excessive glorification of the anti-Pinochet struggle, the preservation of the purity of political ideals and the nostalgic cult of the past.

Calle Santa Fe opens with the evocation of memories attached to the house on Santa Fe Street. These memories – 'mnēmē' – find a visual transposition in the subjective images filmed from inside the house: images of happiness, dramatically interrupted by the assault of Pinochet's army.[5] They incarnate the neuralgic point of memory, the loss of innocence, which is ultimately the loss of meaning. In her apartment in Paris, Carmen Castillo surveys what remains of her years in the MIR: pictures, archives and tracts that symbolise the scattered fragments of her memory, all fixed and painful images of a past viewed from the distance of exile.

However, in making the decision to come back to Santa Fe Street, she redirects her memory. Her geographical return is the starting point of the 'anamnēsis' and seals the beginning of a reflexive process, in which the past will be re-evaluated in the light of the present, through a personal work of memory and the gathering of testimonies. When Carmen Castillo arrives on Santa Fe Street, her personal memories flow back to give way to collective memories. The narrative then diverges into three lines, in which the 'I' and the 'we' relentlessly interfere with one another. The first narrative line consists of the story of Carmen Castillo's life: her love of Miguel, her rupture with her country, the choice to abandon her daughter, her exile in Canada, England and France and her various returns to Chile. Her account focuses on the intimate side of her life, conveying her emotions and rejecting political analysis.

The second narrative line is formed by the collection of testimonies around the MIR. Carmen Castillo gathers the memories of the former activists who battled Pinochet's dictatorship, as well as the memories of their parents and children who suffered from the dramatic consequences of political

commitment. In asking others the same questions she asks herself – were these sacrifices worth it? How could we abandon our children? How to survive when the others, 'the best', have passed away? – she makes all these voices resonate together. When the issue of the abandonment of children by MIR activists is addressed, Macarena Aguiló appears as one character and testifies to the effects of her parents' political commitment on her life. Sitting at an editing table, she also speaks briefly about the project of *El Edificio de los Chilenos*. By introducing Macarena Aguiló's project into her own documentary, Carmen Castillo acknowledges that other personal films nourish her reflection. She also moderates the heroic representation of the anti-dictatorial fight by taking into account the point of view of activists' children, showing the ongoing relevance of this private and controversial aspect of the MIRists' lives for their families. The involvement of Macarena Aguiló serves as an example of how *Calle Santa Fe* weaves links of recognition and attempts to meet the conditions of a shared and just memory.

The third narrative line focuses on the reconstruction of what happened on 5 October. Since Carmen Castillo fainted during the assault, she is unable to recount directly the event that led to Miguel Enriquez's death and condemned her to exile. By knocking on doors and questioning neighbours, she discovers that a man, Manuel, braved the bullets in order to carry her to an ambulance and accompany her to the hospital. Her meeting with Manuel is an inflection point of the narrative. It marks the beginning of her rewriting and the healing of her memory:

> *Carmen Castillo (voice-over)*: Obsessed by evil, I have long considered Chile to be full of nothing but torturers and fascists. The humble words of Manuel 'It was nothing, it was normal' shake up my memory.

The past, which seemed fixed and frozen, begins to warm up: 'Anonymous gestures' (at the hospital, doctors and nurses repelled soldiers to help her) and 'enlightened faces of the Righteous' come back to her. Other testimonies – especially the deeply moving account of Luisa Vergara – lead her to call her personal memory into question:

> *Carmen Castillo (voice-over)*: All these years, the 80s, the time of open resistance to the dictatorship . . . Already critical of the military politics of the MIR . . . I have neglected these fighters.

By gathering testimonies, Carmen Castillo creates a collective memory, the recognition of which leads to the issue of remembrance. Like memory, commemorations are submitted to critical scrutiny. Carmen Castillo evokes the idea of recovering the house, but changes her mind and opts instead to

put up a plaque for Miguel Enriquez in front. She avoids the temptation to freeze her memory once again and to replace amnesia with a cult of the past by considering the points of view of the new generation of activists. As one young militant points out, the MIR must not exist as a monument, but instead through current praxis. Taking back the house is not useful for fights in today's context. The best way to commemorate those who are not here is to renew their legacy. From her discussion with the young militant, Carmen Castillo learns that an excess of memory can be harmful, and that sometimes one must learn to be detached from one's own story: life stories make sense in the light of collective becoming, much as personal memory makes sense in the light of collective memory.

In the last shots of the film, Carmen Castillo walks in a rally side by side with some former MIR women. Young activists chant slogans. These images of struggle are superimposed upon a travelling shot of a street, as if the making of the film had given impulse to the present by reintroducing movement in the fixed time-images of the past:

> This Saturday, 5 October 1974 still inhabits the present, concludes Carmen Castillo. With it, I live, I think, I act. I know that as far as we will be alive, our dead won't be dead. These assembled fragments of our memory have opened a door for me. Outside, it is sunny, and other voices are reinventing together the enchantment of the world.

CONCLUSION: AN INDEPENDENT MEMORY, AWAY FROM POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

En Algún Lugar del Cielo, *Calle Santa Fe*, *Mi Vida con Carlos* and *El Edificio de los Chilenos* all react to the amnesia of the transition using an autobiographical form. To prevent efforts to erase traces, they address Pinochet's violent repression and question the meaning of the lives of those who fought with Salvador Allende and against the dictatorship, while avoiding two common figures of militant testimonies: the revolutionary hero and the victim of the dictatorship (Richard 2010: 157). By escaping the ideological confrontations that lead to repression or to an excess of memory, these filmmakers are the living examples that a just memory usually leads the subject to reparation, and that if 'reconciliation' is ever to be achieved, it requires that Chilean people attain a truthful relation to the past and therefore take paths that are different from those promoted by the transition. As Germán Berger-Hertz's mother says in *Mi Vida con Carlos*: 'It is imperative that our society realize its past if it wants to get over it, and not bury it as it has done until now.'

Through their independence with regard to all kinds of political projects,

these autobiographical documentaries succeed in shaking up fixed representations of the past and conveying important political lessons. They point out the faults of the 'Concertación's strategy of limited truth and justice in the tension between the human rights associations and the armed forces' threats' (Ros 2012: 118) and communicate the hope for a more equal, united and free country than that conceived by the transition. The paucity of traces of the dictatorship's violence and of those who fought against it has reinforced the role of personal memories. Independent documentary filmmakers recover them to build a just version of contemporary history and to make visible the 'invisible Chile'. As Carmen Castillo says, the memory of the vanquished cannot be erased.

NOTES

1. The Concertación is a coalition of centre-left parties opposed to the dictatorship.
2. MIR: Revolutionary Left Movement. Pinochet's coup, which toppled Allende's government, was followed by a severe repression of all kinds of resistance, especially the MIRists.
3. The term *perfomative* 'indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action' (Austin 1962: 6).
4. As Paul Ricœur notes, Freud also speaks of 'Vershönung' (reconciliation) of the patient with the repressed material (2004: 70).
5. As Paul Ricœur reminds us, the ancient Greeks used two terms to designate memory: 'mnēmē' ('memory as appearing, ultimately passively, to the point of characterising it an "affection" (pathos), the popping into mind of a memory') and 'anamnēsis' (memory as 'an object of a search named recall or recollection') (2004: 4).

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CHAPTER 8

'We All Invented Our Own Algeria':[1] Habiba Djahnine's *Letter to My Sister* as Memory-Narrative

Sheila Petty

Filmmaking in the Maghreb is often considered to be a relatively recent phenomenon, having been virtually born alongside Maghrebi nations' independence from France (Tunisia and Morocco in 1957; Algeria in 1962). And while each country's film industry has a distinct history, there are some similarities, one of which is an auteur-style production context, where filmmakers are generally responsible for all aspects of production, including financing and creation (Armes 2009: 5). The predominant film style in the 1960s and 1970s following independence veered toward realism and didacticism alongside a total commitment to the liberation struggle in '*cinema moudjahid* or "freedom-fighter cinema"' (Austin 2012: 20) where cinema, as a form of communication as well as an art form, was used to pit recently formed nations against colonial France (Martin 2011: 7). Martin also argues that 'the redistribution of discourse after independence, for instance, had to both renegotiate residual discourse of the colonialists and residual discourse of the freedom fighters (in Algeria especially) and revive and revise indigenous forms of discourse' (15). Guy Austin has noted that following the Black Decade of the 1990s when film and video images were scarce, in the early 2000s, Algerian cinema has slowly assumed 'the role of a vector of memory', whether it be personal, gendered, regional, ethnic, sexual or otherwise (Austin 2012: 159). Marginalised, or glossed over by dominant colonial ideologies, and more recently by Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) or Front Islamique du Salut (FIS)[2] dictums, women and Berber cultures, in particular, have provided the subject matter for many contemporary Algerian filmmakers whose films evoke the recent, as well as the deep-rooted, past, effecting a sort of return to the

source, in order to understand the present and make sense of the dispossession and loss of identity that permeates contemporary Algerian history (Austin 2012: 158–9).

For women documentary filmmakers in the Maghreb, recovering fragments of submerged histories and memories goes beyond reclaiming the gaze. It is also about listening as a revolutionary gesture, and 'giving voice' to those silenced by official histories and telling their own stories in their own voices (Martin 2011: 57; Donadey 1999: 111–12). Writer and filmmaker Assia Djebar is arguably the first Algerian woman filmmaker to 'give voice to' Algerian women in film, thus paving the way for future women filmmakers. In her 1977 *La Nouba des Femmes du Mont-Chenoua/The Nuba of the Women of Mount Chenoua*, Djebar's point of departure is breaking away from the silence of the Algerian *mujahidat* (women freedom fighters) – recognising them and their right to silence and/or words (Martin 2011: 56), acting as correctives to French and Algerian national histories. Interestingly, it has been well-documented by others that women's roles in the liberation of Algeria were seldom, if ever, the subject of Algerian films. In fact, it was the Egyptian filmmaker Youssef Chahine who provided one of the first depictions of female fighters in *Jamila the Algerian/Jamila al Jazairiyya* in 1958 (Austin 2012). And although the women in Gillo Pontecorvo's 1966 *Battle of Algiers* serve the revolution, they barely speak while the men organise and give directions. In *The Nuba of the Women of Mount Chenoua*, the main character Lila (described by Stephanie Van de Peer as Djebar's alter ego) interviews women involved in the Algerian War of Independence. With her camera, and in the women's domestic space, she represents, through words and images, 'the unspeakable' by, about and for women (Van de Peer 2012: 178). In this context, the 'unspeakable' refers to women's involvement in political fights, kept secret during the height of their struggle against colonialism and overlooked thereafter in official history. But in postcolonial Algeria, the 'unspeakable' points at other silenced issues surrounding the civic position of women, their role as carriers of culture and indigenous memory – as demonstrated in *Zahra's Mother Tongue* (dir. Sissani, 2011), for instance – and their active involvement in current political movements.

How do today's Algerian women filmmakers represent this notion of 'the unspeakable' and find ways of expressing traumatic experiences and repressed testimonies using the documentary form? This chapter will explore how activist filmmaker Habiba Djahnine creates an Algerian memory film with her 2006 documentary *Lettre à ma soeur/Letter to My Sister*.[3] It will also examine how Djahnine uses aspects of the performative documentary mode for personal and autobiographical explorations of Algerian history and culture, creating a personal and political memory-narrative that acts as a posthumous response to a letter written to her by her sister Nabila before her assassination on 15

February 1995 in Tizi Ouzou, Algeria. The chapter will also touch on the context of the Black Decade in Algeria and its subsequent impact on women's voices and expression, using *Letter to my Sister* as a case study.

The current political and cultural landscape of Algeria is the product of many factors, including French colonialism, the War of Independence, Arab, Islamic and Berber cultural traditions, as well as military oversight of the region. The building of a nation state and the national integration of political, economic, religious and cultural sectors have remained challenging at best. During the colonial period, the French dismantled almost all indigenous Algerian social structures. Antagonisms between the French and the Algerians led to the War of Independence and culminated with Algeria's independence in 1962. But in the years that followed, Algeria still remained heavily dependent on France for social and economic technical expertise. The dynamics of Algerian independence, decolonisation and nationalism are extremely complex, and all the more so when gender relations are involved. These dynamics almost act as threads woven together, and as one begins to unstitch the fabric, as Habiba Djahnine has done, one finds interrelated problematics that permeate her work and are worthy of further study.

OUT OF THE BLACK DECADE

Habiba Djahnine uses the documentary form to write and film a letter to her sister, and retraces the circumstances surrounding her sister's assassination by Islamic extremists. Nabila Djahnine, a feminist architect with alleged links to the international Trotskyist movement, was shot and killed by two men in a drive-by shooting on 15 February 1995 during protest marches. President of the Algerian association Thighri N'Tmettouth (Cry of Women), Djahnine was a staunch promoter of women's rights, as well as an advocate of the Berber (Kabyle) language and culture. In the film, Habiba returns to Tizi-Ouzou to speak with the people her sister knew and worked with, as well as those who were touched by her advocacy. As she drives her car through the picturesque Kabylie mountain landscapes, she constructs, through a voice-over commentary, a letter to her deceased sister to counteract the years of silence since her death. The imperative she sets for herself – 'I needed to speak with those who remained behind' – results in a stitching together of remembrances or testimonies of Nabila's final months. Habiba's film-letter to Nabila becomes a response, like a diary or journal in images, words and sounds, to a letter Nabila sent to Habiba in 1994, in which she describes the tumultuous state and disintegration of the nation after 1991. The challenge for both sisters is how to name and describe the violence; how to create and recreate what seemed painfully impossible ten years earlier and resurrect a voice after so many years of silence

and terror. Filming such a topic would normally be forbidden in Algeria, as it would be seen to challenge the state's stability and would pose a risk to the filmmaker's life. Indeed, Nabila's assassination by Islamic extremists was, in fact, meant to send a dissuasive message to the feminist movement in Algeria.

Nabila was a symbol of resistance and 'a hope of agency' for women in a culture that navigates gender issues with much unease and where, according to Guy Austin, 'gender is one of the most vexed questions in modern Algeria' (2012: 61, 122). Why was assassination the only response to resistance and emancipation, rather than dialogue? Nabila was an activist who worked with the local women, educating them on issues often considered taboo in Muslim society, such as male and female contraception, and providing basic knowledge on sexually transmitted diseases. Nabila wanted change throughout society, including women's rights, which remain largely impaired by the regressive 1984 Family Code, patriarchal domination and sharia law in a modern Algeria where gender relations still often function through violence and repression.

Nabila's activist actions disrupted the two codes that still prevail for women in traditional Algerian society: the code of silence and the code of invisibility. As she notes in her video interview at the end of the film: 'anything that disrupts is destroyed'. Here, she is referencing the years of the Black Decade during the 1990s – or 'the war against civilians', as Benjamin Stora has termed it – a period that saw honour crimes and violence against women, and the assassination of the Berber poet Tahar Djaout by the Armed Islamic Group because of his views on secularism and the fear that his writings would adversely affect Islamic sectors (Stora 2001: 15). Despite women's active participation in the War of Independence, women's rights were deeply curtailed both during and following the Algerian War as FLN policy aligned with hard-line Islamist doctrine to further entrench patriarchal systems (Austin 2012). Furthermore, the justification of patriarchy was considered a 'religious obligation', with 'modern women' targeted specifically for violent acts, because they were seen as a menace toward the patriarchal status quo (MacMaster 2009: 19–20).

Under the influence of Wahhabism (conservative branch of Sunni Islam) and Arab nationalisms – two dominant ideologies in North Africa – any liberal and democratic movements in favour of women's rights have been banned. Much like women who participated in WWII, women who took part in the War of Independence were expected to return to their homes and assume the traditional roles they held before the outbreak of the wars. The government did, however, create the National Union of Algerian Women (Union Nationale des Femmes Algériennes or UNFA), which held its first march on 8 March 1965 to celebrate International Women's Day. Feminists and rural workers were lukewarm to the Union, and by 1964, a new organisation called Al Oiyam (Values) was created to promote fundamental Islamic values. The resurgence of Islam was viewed as retaliation against French colonisation and

the pre-independence period, when the French promoted women's education and discouraged women from wearing the veil.

Between the early 1960s and the early 1980s, some gains were made for women's rights. For example, the Khemisti Law, drafted by the wife of a former foreign minister and presented in 1963, raised the minimum age of marriage to sixteen for women and eighteen for men. In 1976, a National Charter, voted in through a national referendum, recognised women's rights to education in a wider context that reaffirmed socialist ideology and solidified the FLN's position as the unique national movement defending the identity and independence of the Algerian people against the French colonisers.

During the 1960s and 1970s, a new Family Code had been debated by the Algerian Government in an effort to overhaul the confusing family law, comprised of a blend of the sharia and French colonial-imposed legislation. By 1975, all colonial overtones were eliminated, which left sharia, but resulted in legal uncertainty in divorce and child custody cases. In 1984, a new Family Code was passed, and as Marnia Lazreg argues, the history leading up to its passage 'reveals the dynamics and contradictions of tradition, revolution, gender and civil rights' (1994: 151). According to Lazreg: 'a first draft was formulated in 1981 in secrecy' (151). This proposal allowed six grounds for divorce on the part of women, as well as granting them the entitlement to work outside the home. Women living in polygynous marriages were also accorded rights. In the revised code of 1984, grounds for divorce initiated by women were severely cut, as were the restrictions on polygyny. On the positive side, the minimum marriage age was increased to eighteen for women and twenty-one for men. But the fact that women had to marry to achieve legal independence, whereas men gained personal autonomy at age eighteen, reinforced women's inferior status, and the entire framework was still anchored in sharia. Protest demonstrations were organised, but had little impact, since they occurred after implementation of the new code. Lazreg (1994) writes: 'Whatever the deficiencies of the family code, it did serve the function of raising working women's consciousness. It made them realize that they had taken the implementation of their rights for granted' (157).

The 1984 Family Code ultimately worked to cement legal inequalities between men and women – a situation that spurred many women, including Nabila Djahnine, to refuse the unspoken codes of silence and invisibility. In 1985, ten years before Djahnine's assassination, 'a group of about forty women – intellectuals, professionals and housewives – formed the Association for Equality between Women and Men under the Law', and called for the abolition of the Family Code (Lazreg 1994: 197). Other associations were formed, some with more feminist leanings than others, all with the mandate of lobbying for women's rights, but it was the Association for Equality that openly took part in the October 1988 demonstrations 'for the democratization of the

political system' (Lazreg 1994: 199). Guy Austin writes: 'known as Black October, this was the moment when popular trust in the state, eroded for years, finally collapsed' (2012: 121). At least 500 demonstrators were killed by the end of the month, leading President Chadli Bendjedid to introduce immediate reforms, including increased freedom of expression for the press and cultural industries. But, as Austin indicates, 'the seeds of civil war were sown' (122). Resentment against the state was on the rise, and younger generations who were uneasy with the FLN's hold on power countered by supporting the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to the extent that the Algerian Army intervened, causing FIS supporters to attack government targets. Intense fighting during the 1990s led to more than 100,000 deaths, many of which were villagers attacked by extremists. The government managed to gain control by the late 1990s, and by 2000 the FIS's armed wing, the Islamic Salvation Army, was disbanded.[4] Nonetheless, the violence and torture perpetuated during this period was significant and went far beyond the mere physical; the collective consciousness of women was held imprisoned by a continuous fear that refused to disappear.

Language, a central aspect of Algerian and Kabyle identity, also played a key role in events of, and leading up to, the Black Decade. Martin Stone has argued: 'Language is a primary political, ideological, social and psychological issue in Algeria . . . connected with the country's search for its identity and is a unifying force in a land of enormous regional and ethnic diversity' (1997: 18). At the time of independence, French and Arabic dominated the northern part of the country, while French and Berber were spoken in Kabylia. Berbers make up about one-fifth of the Algerian population and the government's subsequent efforts at Arabisation and homogenisation of the nation were seen by the Kabyle as a form of Arab imperialism and provided one of the many catalysts, along with social unrest, increasing unemployment and housing shortages, for the conflicts that would ensue. During Black October in 1988, when students and workers rioted against Chadli Benjedid's regime, the most visible and vocal opponents were Berber university students, who protested against the Arabisation of government and the education system. Following riots causing death and injury in Tizi Ouzou, the government agreed to instruction in the Berber language, rather than Arabic, at certain universities. However, by 1990, the Berbers were again forced to rally in large numbers to protest a new language law requiring use of Arabic by 1997. The Kabyle were targeted by the FLN, because of their opposition to Arab cultural invasion and their resistance to Wahhabism, but also because they were considered by the French to be a people easily assimilated and indoctrinated. Despite their participation in the War of Independence, Kabyles, who reclaimed their Berber identity and rights, were often considered traitors. And as the FLN extended its reach across Algeria as the dominant political power and single voice, freedom of

expression became more and more difficult. Arabisation of education has been an emotional and dominant issue in Berber political participation, and language control and identity construction continue to be of major concern to Berbers in Algeria and throughout the Maghreb.[5] It is in this context of a silenced majority (women) and silenced community (the more liberal-leaning and culturally distinct Kabyle population) that Djahnine shoots her documentary, a film that is as much about a personal loss as about ongoing social struggles. This is why language, as well as the memory of feminist movements, play a key role in constructing the narrative of *Letter to My Sister*.

WRITING AND FILMING THE MEMORY–NARRATIVE[6]

During the 1990s, Habiba Djahnine was considered a prominent feminist in Algeria. After the Black Decade and Civil War, however, many women activists like Habiba Djahnine shifted their focus to culture, with Djahnine immersing herself in writing and filmmaking. In Kabyle society, women are accorded a privileged status and are considered to be stewards of their language, culture and traditional values. They are the 'memory carriers' described by Benjamin Stora (1992), who also uses this term to portray a new group of 'children of Algerian immigrants' (Durmelat 2011: 96). Interestingly, by the 1990s, some filmmakers, who are also children of Algerian immigrants, used their cameras to depict 'their parents' aging generation and reconstructed their past experiences' to try to understand and come to terms with a complex past that was often misunderstood (Durmelat 2011: 100). Djahnine, although not the child of Algerian immigrants, is nonetheless a memory carrier in her own right. She joins the ranks of other Algerian filmmakers living and working (or exiled) in France, including Merzak Allouache and Abdelkrim Bahloul. Austin asserts that for these filmmakers based outside of Algeria, returning to the land of their birth and family is a defining act (Austin 2012: 179). Habiba feels she must return to the source of her family roots after eleven years and resurrect Nabila's memory '*from the site of trauma*' (Austin 2012: 179 [emphasis in original]). Trauma, as a 'memory image', according to Russell Kilbourn, often involves witnessing after the fact and re-experiencing an event, individually and/or collectively (2010: 82, 133). This is the project of Djahnine, as she challenges Benjamin Stora's belief that memories remain segregated in Algerian films since the war (Stora 1992: 252). In fact, the film is intended to speak to several audiences simultaneously, and Djahnine herself has clearly stated that *Letter to My Sister* functions on both personal and public levels.[7]

A number of recent Maghrebi and sub-Saharan African documentaries have emerged that can be described as performative documentaries, in which historical evocation and emotive connection to the subject matter is as important

to the filmmaker as factual referencing.[8] The filmmaker plays a self-reflexive role in the text, which often shapes the content, generating, as Bill Nichols has argued, 'a distinct tension between performance and document, between the personal and the typical, the embodied and disembodied', suggesting 'that while performative documentary might possess historical grounding, the aesthetic goal is not to provide a description of history, but rather an evocation of it' (Nichols 1994: 100). The documentary work of Djahnine references historical events in Algeria, but rather than provide mere descriptions, she portrays their consequences on society. Ratiba Hadj-Moussa contends:

> Instead of using history as the reconstitution of Algerian identity, or more precisely instrumentalising history for the benefit of a (necessary) mythological nation building, contemporary films use singular and collective experiences to reconfigure history, where experience is conceived as a kind of history. (2008: 188)

If the Algerian Civil War was an 'invisible war', lacking in images, then films focused on that period excavate and reconstitute the unspoken, or the unimaged, not the unimagined. Hadj-Moussa points out that it is imperative to further probe how such films 'situate the loci from which they "speak" ' (189). Benjamin Stora has described the Black Decade as 'a war without images, "an invisible war" fought within a "culture of silence" ' (Austin 2012: 143). Nabila's challenge to this silence was to speak out for women, and her own experience and death became a chapter of Algerian history. Further, Habiba broke this silence by making a film about her sister's activism and murder. This documentary offers images and sounds that compensate for the lack of images of the Algerian feminist movement and for the silenced voice of Algerian women and their committed struggles.

Letter to My Sister as a 'memory film' – to use Russell Kilbourn's apt term – is much more than just about memory as a theme, representation or narrative structuring device, but is 'the very *form* of the narrative' (Kilbourn 2010: 82 [emphasis in original]). And rather than dehistoricising Algerian and Kabylia experience, and thus identity, by focusing on space and insisting that time is cyclical amongst the Berbers, Djahnine disrupts the linearity of time, while each '*enactment* of memory' in her film is linked to a specific moment in both time and space within her subjects' lived experiences of history (Austin 2012: 188; Kilbourn 2010: 82 [emphasis in original]). In *Letter to My Sister*, Djahnine uses landscape shots for moments of pause between scenes, and they are meant to situate the viewer and introduce the location of the following scene. Each scene is bookended by a landscape vista, often mountainous, that recalls the area where the sisters grew up and were educated. As moments of pause or rest, they also afford the spectator the time to ponder the significance

of the scenes she or he has just viewed. The very first shot of the film is a ten second extreme long shot of a cemetery with a serene mountain vista in the background. The filmmaker then cuts to medium shots and medium close-ups of herself, her colleague and her cameraperson being greeted by two local men in front of a building, the cemetery and mountains still visible in the background. The viewer is left to wonder if this cemetery is Nabila's final resting place. The men explain that the building was a school where Nabila gave a lecture to a packed room of women. She had promised to return. Later, the school was transformed into a mosque with a prayer room. Habiba explains that she is making a film about Nabila and will be back the following weekend to interview the local women. After the local men enter the mosque to pray, the camera fixes its 'gaze' on the building for ten seconds, ending the scene. Habiba thus establishes the memory of her sister Nabila as the frame of the film. Nabila 'opens' the film as subject (although the spectator wonders at first if the film is really about her or about her sister, or both) and returns to 'close' the film in the final shots, comprised of a video interview of her discussing how 'women have always fought back'. These final images offer extreme close-ups of Nabila, as she dares to voice the unspeakable in direct camera address, forcing an engaged spectator to consider that women are human beings and should have rights equal to those of men. As such, she is represented as a fearless advocate of human rights, just as Habiba, by making this film, stands up for the freedom to express oneself, through artistic creation or otherwise, without fear of violence or repression.

Habiba's journey in the car through the Kabylie mountains back to Tizi-Ouzou as she narrates the letter acts as the organising principle or thread of the film. Along the way, Habiba gathers testimonies of those friends, family members and colleagues who knew Nabila in an effort to understand the question that continues to haunt them all: why did she have to die? Engaging with trauma is a key feature of many films made after the Black Decade, and narrating suffering acts as a form of shriving of the violence enacted on, and endured by, Algerians. In a scene near the end of the film, Habiba and her eldest sister, sitting beside each other on a mountain top, discuss their parents' unspeakable suffering and eventual deaths within a year of Nabila's assassination. When Habiba visits the elderly Kabyle women who prepare a meal for her, they dedicate a song that they improvise on the spot to the memory of Nabila. The women, for whom poetic creation is spontaneous, soon transform the words into a homage to Habiba for keeping the memory of her sister Nabila alive:

> O my soul, improvise a poem. For her, so dear to my heart. Today her sister has come. Listen to our message. She has come to ask, what her sister did. Her soul is in paradise. She who stands up for women's rights; Today we remember her, as if she is here with us.

As the final words are sung, the film cuts from medium shots of the small group of women singing to a long shot of a solitary Kabyle woman wending her way down a road in the background. Again, the shot lasts ten seconds, allowing the viewer the time to ponder the significance of the women's words. The singular and the collective are sutured, as Habiba is simultaneously spectator and recipient of the homage (Maazouzi 2013: 4–5). In a recent article on the work of Habiba Djahnine, Djemaa Maazouzi argues that as the village women improvise the 'achewiq' (song improvised in memory of someone), their collective voice joins with the other women's voices in the film to provide a 'polyphonic' description of the incredible heritage that Nabila bestowed on the women (2013: 5). Maazouzi further describes how the present, embodied in the women's performance for the camera, is infused with the ancestral past. This notion supports Hadj-Moussa's claim that in recently released Algerian films, the colonial past is peripheral at best, while '"ancestors" nevertheless continue to haunt recent films' (2008: 187–8), thus re-emphasising the deep-rootedness of the local culture against all odds.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND VIOLENCE, FEAR AND REPRESSION – AN ALGERIA 'POSSIBLE' FOR ALL[9]

As Djahnine stated during the pre-screening lecture about the film at the Cinémathèque Québécoise in Montreal in April 2012: 'after fifteen years of civil war and enforced silence, "words finally came" '. Nabila is an emblematic symbol of freedom of expression and women's rights to equality in a nation that is still coming to terms with these issues. She dared to express the revolt felt by each person interviewed in the film, as Habiba retrospectively dared to 'give voice to' Nabila, and thus to each Algerian citizen desperate for a transformed Algeria. The film asserts a position of independence against the three main political forces in the country: the former French colonial rulers, the Algerian Government and Islamic extremists. But for Djahnine, violence is never a solution to societal disputes. As a filmmaker, she contributes to modern Algerian history through her memory film, in which remembrances by those who knew, loved and demonstrated alongside Nabila during her activist days are painstakingly pieced together to create a document of freedom of expression: freedom to express what had heretofore been unspeakable and unspoken in Algerian society. In the end, remembrance and image superimpose to become the memory of one's 'own Algeria'. Memory, the act of remembering, memory enactment and the inclusion of memories or fragments of memories of ancestors and family members is an important feature not only in this film or in Algerian independent documentaries, but also in much contemporary documentary film production. The filmmaker excavates the

ofttimes buried histories of families and nations, and in the process, creates a symbiotic relationship between memory and cultural identity. As a result, the film as document acts as a memorial to objects and persons lost with the promise to never forget.

Letter to My Sister draws on many issues germane to the post-1990 independent documentary: matters of language, culture and freedom of filmic expression, which all speak to larger concerns of identity construction in unsettled postcolonial contexts and within a globalising world. Habiba Djahnine contributes to this wider debate by creating a film that promises a new Algeria, even after years of colonial and Algerian Civil War violence. Through words, images, poetry and performance, she transcends codes of silence and invisibility, thus proving that freedom of expression is possible for all.

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NOTES

1. 'We All Invented Our Own Algeria' ['On avait tous inventé notre Algérie'], lecture by Habiba Djahnine, Cinémathèque Québécoise, Montreal, 27 April 2012.
2. The National Liberation Front (FLN) was founded on 2 November 1954 and established itself as the main nationalist group in Algeria to fight for independence. It is still the largest political party in Algeria. The Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) was founded in Algiers on 18 February 1989 with the objective of establishing an Islamic state ruled by sharia law.
3. Algerian activist filmmaker Habiba Djahnine was born in Tizi Ouzou, capital city of the Kabylia region of Algeria, in 1968. She is the founder and director of Béjaia Doc, a documentary workshop in Béjaia, where she provides film training to young Algerians. The courses focus on all aspects of the film industry, including film history, production, distribution and screenwriting. All students must complete a film on the life of their own community. As a documentary filmmaker, she has directed *Lettre à ma sœur/Letter to My Sister* (2006), *Autrement citoyens, des associations en mouvement sur la société civile en Algérie/Otherwise Citizens* (2009) and *Retour à la montagne/Return to the Mountains* (2010). She has also published short stories and poetry – most notably, the volume of poetry entitled *Outre-Mort* in 2003. She is also co-author of *Associations algériennes, parcours et expériences* (2008). Her most recent documentary, *Avant de franchir la ligne d'horizon/Before Crossing the Horizon Line* (2011), retraces twenty years of activism and political repression in Algeria. In 2012, she was awarded the Prince Claus Award for her 'challenging and insightful documentaries on contemporary realities' focusing on Algeria.
4. Information available at http://www.mongabay.com/history/algeria/algeria-the_women%27s_movement.html, accessed 18 December 2013; also, http://www.mongabay.

com/history/algeria/algeria-islam_and_the_algerian_state.html#5gDLjQr9HBy EiOAF.99, accessed 18 December 2013.
5. Information available at http://www.mongabay.com/history/algeria/algeria-berber_ separatism.html, accessed 18 December 2013.
6. I am indebted to my former graduate student, David Gane, who coined this term after Kilbourn's 'memory film'.
7. 'We All Invented Our Own Algeria' ['On avait tous inventé une Algérie'], lecture by Habiba Djahnine, Cinémathèque Québécoise, Montreal, 27 April 2012.
8. See, for example, Sissani (2011).
9. I am inspired by Djemaa Maazouzi's '"Néant et lumière", l'Algérie possible de Habiba Djahnine'.

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CHAPTER 9

From the Ashes: The Fall of Apartheid and the Rise of the Lone Documentary Filmmaker in South Africa

Liani Maasdorp

South African documentary filmmaking has changed substantially since 1990. Repressive state control of the media under the apartheid regime from 1948 to 1990 led to filmmaking that either overtly eschewed the political or made a strong statement on political and social issues. In both cases, personal stories and artistic expression were neglected. Thanks to the official transition to democracy that started in South Africa around 1990, space has been created for a new era in fiction and non-fiction filmmaking.

Since its launch in 1976, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has been the predominant funder of non-fiction productions in South Africa. By 2009, however, it had become clear that the SABC was experiencing a catastrophic financial crisis. Whereas local documentary filmmakers were largely reliant on funding from the public broadcaster until 2008, they subsequently had to find either new sources of funding or cheaper ways of making films. Once filmmakers became less reliant on the SABC for funding, their adherence to conventional broadcast documentary forms started falling away. This has encouraged an independent documentary filmmaking practice that entails a move away from expository to observational, participatory and performative modes of representation, from the formulaic to the artistically expressive, from broadcast to feature duration, and from filmmakers working with a crew to those working alone and multitasking. We could therefore argue that the cancellation of contracts and cessation of commissions from the SABC accelerated changes in the South African documentary film.

Over the past ten years, the content, form and production approaches of South African documentary films have evolved.[1] In the past, many South

African films were under an hour, often either twenty-four or forty-eight minutes long, in order to accommodate a local television broadcast time slot. They tended to be rhetorical in approach and focused on issues or topical questions that were explored through sit-down interviews linked by voice-over narration and accompanied by visual evidence. *The Manuscripts of Timbuktu* (dir. Maseko, 2008) and *Tribes and Clans* (dir. Mahlalela, 2009) are two examples of recent films that demonstrate the continuing influence of the conventional public broadcast documentary form. International films, on the other hand, have tended to be feature length (seventy to ninety minutes being particularly popular), narrative in approach and focused on characters. Of course, some South African filmmakers have been making character-driven, narrative, feature-length documentaries for years. Most of them have been aiming their work at international festivals and broadcast, and have made use of international or co-production funding. François Verster, Miki Redelinghuys and Riaan Hendricks are among them. For most South African filmmakers engaged in bringing non-fiction stories to the screen, however, exhibition opportunities have been scarce and their filmmaking practice has been dominated by the demands of local broadcasters.

In most cases, a central motivator in the decision to take on multiple roles has been a lack of mainstream broadcast (particularly SABC) funding. Besides cost saving, other benefits to this way of working include allowing filmmakers to forge close filmmaker-subject bonds, tell personal stories, follow subjects over long periods of time, shoot and edit when it suits them and produce projects for which they cannot get mainstream funding. There are also drawbacks, however, including working with a small budget or no budget at all, having to divide attention and energy among several tasks, some of which the filmmaker is not entirely *au fait* with, and lacking input from creative collaborators.

This chapter aims to explore how South African documentary practice has evolved since the 1990s, leading to the emergence of film practices based on a single individual. Beyond the inherent benefits and drawbacks of working alone, it mainly questions the consequences of this work method on filmmakers' practices and film aesthetics. Films referred to in this chapter include *The Mothers' House* (dir. Verster, 2006), *Surfing Soweto* (dir. Blecher, 2010), *Dawn of a New Day* (dir. Grunenwald, 2011), *Imam and I* (dir. Shamis, 2011), *Saying Goodbye* (dir. Mostert, 2012) and *Incarcerated Knowledge* (dir. Valley, 2013). Although these are not the only films pertaining to this filmmaking model, they reflect how more individualised and personal film documentary practices are intrinsically linked to the character of independent documentary filmmaking in South Africa today, as they contribute new critical views on the contested issue of post-apartheid national identity. In order to understand the significance of the current post-1990 practice of lone documentary filmmaking, this chapter will first trace some of South Africa's political and broadcast history.

A FILM PRACTICE IN TRANSITION: SOUTH AFRICAN DOCUMENTARY BEFORE AND AFTER 1990

In South Africa, political and social imperatives have long dominated non-fiction filmmaking. When the National Party (NP) came to power in 1948, it put in place a system of segregation and repression known as apartheid. Part of the apartheid project relied on state control of the media, including censorship of documentary films through the Censorship Board. Because of this, South African non-fiction filmmaking was characterised for many years by two strong, opposing streams – namely, state-sanctioned films (including 'anthropological' and 'propagandistic' films) on the one hand and resistance films on the other (Verster 2007: 109). Propaganda films tended to present the views and beliefs of the ruling minority, denying a voice to the majority of South Africans. Struggle or resistance films were largely aimed at communicating news about the suffering and resistance activities of the repressed majority out to the rest of the world quickly and efficiently. Neither of these streams was concerned with intimate, personal stories, or with 'artistic quality', as this was 'less important than content' (Verster 2007: 110).

Since its introduction in 1976 until its financial collapse in 2008–9, the SABC was the principal funder, producer and distributor of non-fiction programmes in South Africa. The state broadcaster initially produced and commissioned content that was in line with apartheid government policy, and the form of these documentaries was largely influenced by the requirements of television broadcast. As elsewhere, the public broadcast documentary generally favours the expository mode described by Nichols (1991: 33–40) and includes 'verbal narration' (Wolfe 1997: 149), interviews with experts and visual evidence. The tendency is to 'extensively and quickly intercut between interviews . . . using pictures to "cover" dialogue or narration' (Verster 2007: 118). 'Covering' with visuals can be linked to a desire to hide discontinuity and make the filmmaker invisible – hallmarks of the continuity system of editing (Maasdorp 2011: 21–3). This kind of documentary typically 'approaches its subject matter with transparent style' and is hegemonic in form (Cagle 2012: 47). Viewers become accustomed to the formula used, and so their attention is diverted from the form of the text to its content. This type of documentary usually 'advances an argument, marshals evidence, or makes assertions and reaches conclusions about issues in the real historical world' (Ward 2005: 77). It does not acknowledge the bias of the producer of the text, nor does it call its own reliability into question. It was through the illusion of dispassionate, objective inquiry that the typical SABC broadcast documentary presented a biased, state-sanctioned view of South Africa for many years.

The apartheid government kept its iron hold on the country until the late 1980s, when it had increasing difficulty maintaining control in the face of

international political pressure, economic sanctions and local civil unrest. The release of political prisoner Nelson Mandela in 1990 after twenty-seven years of captivity, and his inauguration in 1994 as the first post-apartheid President of South Africa, heralded the country's shift toward democracy. This change extended to the media and was so marked in documentary practice that François Verster identified several distinct trends that differentiate post-1990 documentary filmmaking from that of the preceding era. He observed, in particular, a move towards more personal films and a greater interest in the exploration of identity (Verster 2007: 110–23). Around a decade later, financial problems experienced by the SABC led to a budget crisis in 2008–9, further enhancing the evolution of the South African documentary film. Loss of their previous primary source of funding forced filmmakers to work more independently and cost-effectively, hence explaining the growing tendency to work alone. However, what was initially perceived as a catastrophic blow to documentary production in South Africa has generated unforeseen benefits.

LONE FILMMAKING: A STRATEGY BORNE OUT OF FINANCIAL FRUSTRATION

The SABC's annual report, presented to Parliament in December 2009, reflected a R910 million loss (around USD121 million at that time) over the 2008–9 financial period (Muller 2009: n. p.). By this time, 'the cash-strapped broadcaster had stopped paying producers and commissioning new programming'.[2] International funding and co-productions are, of course, two alternatives to local broadcast commissions. The reality, however, is that for first-time filmmakers and those making films on topics that established funders are not initially interested in supporting, the only alternative is often to take on multiple roles in order to get the film made. In these cases, instead of working with a crew, the director also becomes producer, cinematographer or editor of the documentary. Established filmmakers such as François Verster, Miki Redelinghuys and Riaan Hendricks have been filming and/or editing their own work for years. Izette Mostert, Dylan Valley, Khalid Shamis, Sara Blecher and Ryley Grunenwald – to name a handful of up and coming directors – took on multiple tasks to get their first independent films made when they could not secure adequate local or international funding for their projects.

Both Mostert and Valley did other, more commercial work to earn a living, while they produced personal projects in their spare time. Valley shot and edited *Incarcerated Knowledge* (2013), a film that follows Peter John Christians from the day he is released from prison as he struggles with the conditions of his parole and tries to realise his dream of becoming a hip-hop artist. Working alone enabled Valley to visit Peter repeatedly over the course of five years, a

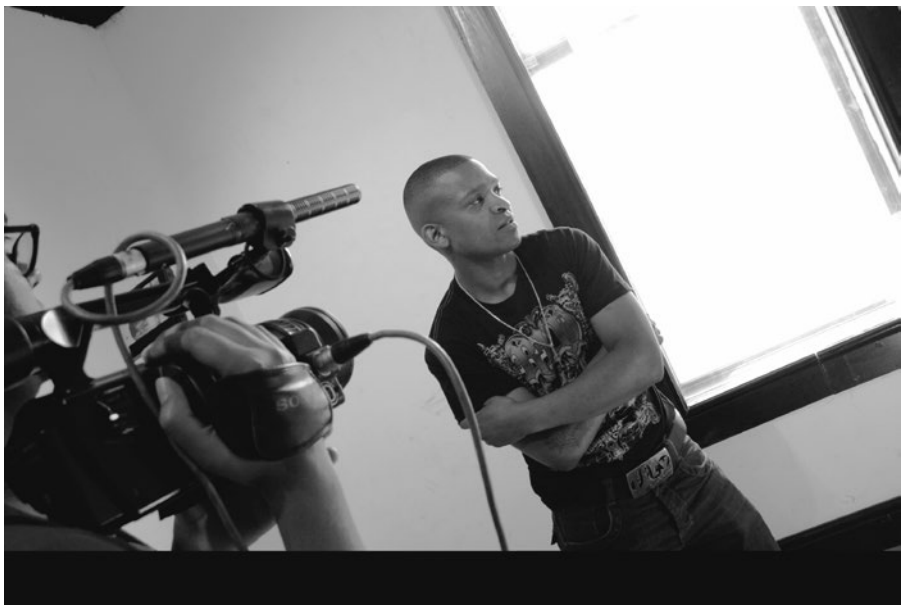

Figure 9.1 Dylan Valley films the subject of *Incarcerated Knowledge* (2013), Peter John Christians. (Source: Thaheer Mullins.)

production strategy that would have been prohibitively expensive if he had worked with a full crew. Similarly, Mostert had been commissioned by the SABC to make a film in the past, but had been unable to secure another commission after the broadcaster's financial collapse. That is when she came across the story of Sean Davison, who while living in South Africa was accused of murder in New Zealand after assisting his 85-year-old mother to die there when she was terminally ill with cancer. Davison was about to return to New Zealand for the trial. Leaving his wife and two small children behind, he had decided to face the legal process and risk incarceration. Mostert made *Saying Goodbye* (2012) in her spare time and had no funding for equipment or crew. In both Valley and Mostert's cases, working alone enabled them to produce their films with little or no external funding and also to develop a trust relationship that allowed them intimate access to subjects facing crisis moments in their lives.

Because it was made with a very limited production budget, *Saying Goodbye* was shot by different people with varying levels of proficiency. In a scene between Davison and his wife a couple of days before he leaves for New Zealand, the camera is unmanned. Mostert seems to have set the camera up on a tripod and left it rolling while she conducted the interview. The composition is not perfect and gets progressively worse as the interviewees move and the camera sags. It is in this scene, however, that the consistently stoical Davison becomes emotional at the prospect of leaving his young family in South Africa,

while he faces the possibility of immediate incarceration in New Zealand if he is found guilty. If Mostert had not grabbed a camera and rushed to Davison's home when he summoned her that day, she would not have captured this scene, which is arguably the emotional core of the film. Here, a benefit and drawback of solo filmmaking are inextricably linked. The film's emotional charge is greater but its quality is worse because Mostert worked alone. *Incarcerated Knowledge*, in turn, suffers from the absence of some pivotal events in Peter's life. This is most likely a result of Valley's inability to spend long stretches of time with his subject, because he was filming during down times between paying jobs. Although Mostert was present for Peter's release from prison and for his brother's wedding, the viewer must learn through text on screen, for example, that Peter was denied permission to attend the wedding after his parole officer paid a surprise visit to his home while he was out. The text interrupts the viewer's engagement with the film, while observational footage could have increased tension and the viewer's empathy with the subject. Financial constraints therefore forced both Mostert and Valley to compromise on various aspects of their respective productions in order to get the films made.

In contrast to Valley and Mostert's part-time production strategy, Ryley Grunenwald devoted all her time for five months to filming *The Dawn of a New Day* (2011). This was her first documentary as a director, as she had worked predominantly as a cinematographer in the past. The production saw her shooting, producing and recording sound by herself on a volunteer-manned medical ship. The film follows a plastic surgeon, Dr Tertius Venter, from his home in South Africa to the close quarters of a volunteer-run hospital ship, *Africa Mercy*, anchored off the coast of Benin in West Africa. Here, much-needed specialised surgeries are provided free of charge to local patients. There was only one bed available on the ship, and only for a volunteer who was prepared to work on the ship. Because of her film experience, the job Grunenwald was given was not in the scullery or as a deckhand, but rather to film short fund-raising videos for the ship's communications department. In this case, therefore, being able to multitask not only enabled her to shoot, direct and produce her documentary, but also gave her access to the location where the events took place. It is clear from the film that Grunenwald forged close relationships with both Venter and his wife. Although this resulted in interviews in which the subjects reveal their emotions and fears, it also provided a biased representation of the characters, because Grunenwald was highly invested in them and shied away from an incisive critique of their choices.

Working with a crew – as is usually done when filming a typical SABC broadcast documentary – costs more, so the trade-off is often to spend less time with the subject. By saving money on a crew, lone filmmakers can film over longer periods, allowing them to capture character growth and develop story

arcs that a documentary filmed over a short period simply cannot. Working alone clearly supports the interpersonal connection between filmmaker and subject. Crews can be distracting and intimidating, especially to marginalised subjects. In Valley, Mostert and Grunenwald's films, their respective subjects share intimate information: Peter confesses to premeditated murder, Sean recounts the guilt and internal conflict inherent in assisting suicide and Tertius' wife reveals how much their family has lost and how conflicted she is about staying home for months every year while her husband volunteers on the ship. These moments signify a level of trust and intimacy that the one-person filmmaking model is particularly effective at engendering. This is especially true of films such as Dylan Valley's *Incarcerated Knowledge* and François Verster's *The Mothers' House* (discussed in the following section), both filmed over several years. Izette Mostert's *Saying Goodbye* and Ryley Grunenwald's *Dawn of a New Day*, while filmed over shorter periods, introduce characters before following them through life-changing experiences.

EXPLORATIONS OF IDENTITY: ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AND THE DEMOCRATISATION OF FILMMAKING IN SOUTH AFRICA

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the desire to follow characters and stories into the world rather than sticking to the confines of the studio went hand in hand with the development of technology that allowed the recording of synchronous sound while filming on small, handheld 16mm cameras. Film movements such as *cinéma vérité* in France, direct cinema in the United States and free cinema in the United Kingdom owe their existence to these simultaneous ideological and technological developments. The release of digital video (DV) during the 1990s and filmmakers' ability to work alone are linked in a similar way. Access to cheaper video equipment and new technology, such as DV, digital single lens reflex (DSLR) cameras and even mobile phone cameras that are capable of recording high definition (HD) video, have played a major role in democratising filmmaking. In South Africa, the release of DV shortly after the first democratic elections was serendipitous. Small cameras that are easy to operate make it possible for directors to do their own filming, give cameras to their subjects or film their own stories. This came together with an evolution from the conventional expository mode of representation to the observational, participatory and performative modes used by François Verster, Sara Bletcher and Khalid Shamis, respectively.

Both Verster and Bletcher made several films that were screened on SABC before the broadcaster stopped commissioning local documentary productions in 2009. Verster has been shooting much of his own footage since DV first

became readily available, and his approach has evolved from working with a crew in the expository mode, as he did when making the Emmy Award-winning *The Lion's Trail* (2002), to doing more and more of his own filming and editing. His later films are characterised by the observational mode, and focus on characters and personal stories about individuals. *The Mothers' House* (2006), for example, shows life in the Moses family household, where Verster spent four years filming Miché, her mother Valencia and grandmother Amy. It is a coming-of-age film, with the precocious daughter, Miché, providing the emotional core of the story. Valencia was an activist who fought against apartheid oppression. At the beginning of the film, she is unemployed, HIV positive and struggling to deal with a history of conflict with her mother. This, in turn, influences her ability to connect with and nurture her own daughter. Over the course of the film, Miché develops from an innocent 10-year-old to a drug-addicted 14-year-old. Verster's long-term commitment to filming his subjects allowed him to capture rare intimate moments. He is privy to both mother's and daughter's confessions, including Valencia's fears about being pregnant while HIV positive and Miché's eventual drug use.

The Mothers' House demonstrates how filmmakers working on their own and gaining greater access and increased intimacy with their subjects are able to present sociopolitical topics at a personal level and thus reach a new level of commentary on South African society in the post-apartheid era. In this film, many stereotypes are deconstructed. The anti-apartheid activist is shown not merely as a positive 'black hero', but as a complex human being with weaknesses and failings. She is emotionally affected by her struggles, experiences and by being raised in poverty by a mother who herself was damaged by life under a repressive state. The film personalises the problems of poverty, reconciliation and HIV. The myth of the 'rainbow nation' is also questioned. According to Lucia Saks, political change occurred at tremendous speed after apartheid ended (2010: 1–2), yet life for most South Africans has not changed much since the first democratic elections in 1994. Just over ten years later, around the time *The Mothers' House* was released, Verster observed that social and economic change was lagging behind, and 'previous models of identity and selfhood [had] collapsed without being replaced in any significant way' by new ones (2007: 108). Valencia is unable to transition from her role as freedom fighter to one as working single mother. She does not have access to infrastructure that can help women like her. Her identity, as that of the nation as a whole, is in flux. South Africans have had to re-imagine both national and personal identity in a radical way, and this process is still ongoing. Saks argues that the media have a vital role to play 'in producing and maintaining new forms of identity and community' (2010: 2). In the case of documentary film, this entails a move away from a collective, political view to one that is more subjective and centred on individuals and their stories. The evolution from

the expository to the observational mode of representation in documentary has contributed to this development.

However, when Sara Blecher wanted to tell the story of young men in Soweto who make an adrenalin sport of riding on the outside of trains, she favoured the participatory mode of representation. It is worth noting that she made two distinctly different films. She had been working for an SABC investigative journalism weekly, *Special Assignment*, for whom she first made a journalistic piece that was broadcast in 2006, and then, over the following three years, she continued making an independent, character-driven narrative film. During the latter production, a participatory approach ensured both access and cost saving. Blecher gave each of the three main characters a small digital camera so that they could film themselves and each other. This footage was combined with footage filmed by a professional camera operator to produce *Surfing Soweto* (2010). Thanks to the unprecedented access provided through the young men's self-portraits, the film is a striking commentary on poverty and the effects of years of apartheid government neglect of educational and recreational opportunities for youth in townships. Where the *Special Assignment* film is informative and highlights important social issues, Blecher's independent film tells the story from the inside out, from the perspectives of the three main characters. *The Mothers' House* and *Surfing Soweto* demonstrate that when filmmakers are freed from the conventions of mainstream broadcast they make more authentic films, and that working alone can be instrumental in exploring individual and national identity.

The performative mode of representation, in which filmmakers include themselves in their films or tell their own stories, is one of the newer modes of representation described by Nichols. In his view, films made using this mode 'stress subjective aspects of a classically objective discourse' (Nichols 1994: 95). For Bruzzi, on the other hand, documentaries can be seen as performative in the sense that they 'only come into being as [they] are performed' (2006: 186). Khalid Shamis' *Imam and I* (2011) is performative in both Nichols' and Bruzzi's sense, because he is at once in front of and behind the camera, and lives each event as he is filming it. When visiting family in South Africa from England, where he grew up in exile, Shamis felt compelled to record as much as he could about his grandfather's life, fearing that his grandfather's contemporaries would not be around much longer. It soon became clear that the story of Imam Abdullah Haron, a Muslim religious leader who died in captivity during the apartheid era, was worth sharing in the form of a film, but only as it took shape through Shamis' personal experience. Shamis therefore became the director, producer, editor and subject of *Imam and I* (2011). In this film, he employs the performative mode to tell a part of South African national history through his family story, and more importantly to question national identity through his exploration of his own identity.

Shamis uses narration, delivered in his own voice, to explain his motivation for making the film, to sketch his background and to establish that he is the grandson of the Imam. His voice-over is different from the ones used in typical SABC broadcast documentaries, because it is not delivered from outside the story by a third party, but from inside, by the subject himself. The film reflects Shamis' desire to discover his own identity through his relationship with his grandfather and the rest of his South African family. Through revealing his position explicitly in the film, he addresses concerns around the subjectivity of the filmmaker. His involvement in the subject matter releases him, at least to some extent, from an expectation of objectivity. He 'acknowledges the artificiality' inherent in the making of film, 'even non-fiction film' (Bruzzi 2006: 186). Mainstream broadcast documentaries, for the most part, aim to maintain 'an uncomplicated, descriptive relationship between subject and text' (Bruzzi 2006: 187). When Shamis uses the performative mode, however, he not only complicates the relationship between filmmaker and actuality, but also engages the spectator in an active conversation. Because the performative mode is alienating, there is a tendency for the audience to approach the film in a more critical way. The filmmaker opens up the question of his own subjectivity, and so viewers' questions regarding the accuracy of the representation may follow, while the personal and intimate experience represented in the film encourages reflection on the larger issue of national identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

Shamis' use of the performative mode is of particular significance in the context of South Africa's complex political past. He assumes the role of a voice for the voiceless. Where Verster and Blecher speak for others, however, Shamis speaks for himself. He speaks where, under apartheid, his grandfather was silenced. He investigates what was previously covered up. When he visits the cell the Imam died in, he becomes the interrogator, while the warden who was on duty that night becomes the accused. Shamis' personal and subjective approach to his subject matter in the film represents the shift in political power in the country.

CONCLUSION: A SUSTAINABLE STRATEGY FOR INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY FILMMAKING OR A LONELY ROAD TO NOWHERE?

The analyses and perspectives collected in this chapter have shown that there are many benefits for documentary filmmakers who work alone. In addition to logistical benefits, this work method also seems to encourage greater artistic expression and explorations of national and individual identity. It is, however, by no means an uncomplicated approach. Of the filmmakers featured in this

chapter, only François Verster has progressively moved towards working on his own, embracing the creative freedom the strategy entails. The others seem to have been motivated by necessity to work alone initially, but have since moved towards working with crews, albeit small ones.

Although the one-person filmmaking model is not unique to South Africa, it is one that is particularly appropriate to the problematic social and economic legacy of the apartheid regime. It allows filmmakers to comment on national identity through their explorations of personal stories. Films about individuals play a significant role in revitalising debates around national identity and redressing past inequalities in access to media platforms. In a country where people were segregated for almost half a century based on arbitrary political decisions and racial discrimination, representations of individual experience are pivotal to forging bridges between people of the post-apartheid South African nation and fostering new ways of perceiving the 'Other'. By making films about marginalised subjects, these filmmakers follow a recurring objective of independent documentaries: to give a voice to the voiceless. In this instance, however, the filmed protagonists, who now enjoy political rights and equality, are no longer voiceless on a political level, but rather on the level of representation. There is therefore a pressing need to express these long-silenced voices. By telling others' stories as well as their own, South African independent documentaries provide unique insight into personal experiences for their audiences and thus contribute to a new critical understanding of the contested issue of national identity in the post-apartheid era.

Ethical, personal and artistic questions are, however, raised by the intimacy gained with the subject through this strategy, as well as by the production and financial challenges this work method entails. The question, then, is whether the prevalence of solo filmmaking in South Africa today is indicative of a sustainable model in the South African context. Perhaps it would be more fair to say that it is a characteristic of the transition South African documentary filmmaking has been experiencing, due to, first, greater freedom of expression since the change to democracy from 1990 and, second, financial challenges, due to the reduction in commissions by the local state broadcaster, SABC, from around 2008–9. This work method is particularly important to South African documentary production, because it facilitated the continuation of documentary production after the SABC crash and provides an antidote to the lasting legacy of the old broadcast conventions.

Local documentary film practice, like post-apartheid South Africa itself, is still in transition. It remains to be seen whether the tendency to work alone will fall by the wayside as new models for funding and production are established.[3] It is quite possible that this work method is merely a temporary and not wholly satisfactory solution to the constraints of independent documentary creation, a tool in the establishment of new styles and strategies in a context characterised

by rapid political, social and financial change. It nevertheless remains a viable solution to current financial and ideological challenges. For that very reason, it may still be used by future independent filmmakers who work on the margins of mainstream documentary practice in South Africa.

NOTES

1. The idea for this chapter grew from a seminar featuring four South African documentary filmmakers that I chaired for the South African Guild of Editors (SAGE) at the 2012 Encounters South African International Documentary Festival in Cape Town. 'Encounters' is the pre-eminent documentary festival in South Africa. It screens a selection of South African and international films every year, and can be seen as a barometer of local documentary film production.
2. See www.supportpublicbroadcasting.co.za, accessed 6 January 2013.
3. Co-productions, corporate funding and grants, for example, could potentially fill the gap left by the lack of funding from the SABC. Digital distribution platforms are likewise providing more and more alternatives to conventional television broadcast.

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CHAPTER 10

A Personal Vision of the Hong Kong Cityscape in Anson Mak's Essayistic Documentary Films *One Way Street on a Turntable* and *On the Edge of a Floating City, We Sing*

Mike Ingham

Standing in sharp contrast to the predominantly journalistic, expository or vérité documentaries which Hong Kong is recognised for producing, is one of its rare experimental, essayistic documentaries. Anson Hoi Shan Mak's highly idiosyncratic filmic record of a quasi-Bloomian pilgrimage through traditional districts of Hong Kong, entitled *One Way Street on a Turntable* (2007), premiered at the Hong Kong International Film Festival in 2007 to mixed critical reviews.[1]

As Timothy Corrigan has implicitly acknowledged in his recent book on essay films, it is an important contribution to recent documentary critical discourse. By privileging Mak's work and placing it in the company of such essay films as those of Buñuel, Marker, Godard and Wenders, Corrigan is surely paying tribute to its qualities as a thought-provoking and original documentary piece. He notes:

> Essayistic explorations of space have examined exotic lands and local neighbourhoods, moved across distant jungles, wandered the crowded space of cities . . . Anson Hoi Shan Mak's *One Way Street on a Turntable* works to locate itself between movement and 'rootedness', permeated by reflections on Walter Benjamin. (Corrigan 2011: 105)

With Corrigan's fresh study of the genre in mind, it is pertinent to consider definitions and characteristics of the essay film. As with the literary essay, the cinematic essay permits a wide-ranging field for its subject matter, and, far from avoiding what would have been considered stylistic dissonances in the past, frequently embraces them. A typical essayistic film thus adopts a deliberate strategy

of discontinuity and truncation (for example, the use of separately titled episodes or chapters) in preference to the seamless narrative continuity of much commercial cinema. Still designated in generic terms as 'documentary cinema', despite the inadequacy of this broad classification in accommodating such a radical form, the film essay has evolved into a plural, crossover form in its own right.

Like the traditional mainstream documentary, the essay film often focuses on specific issue(s), rather than a fictional plot. In his notes on the cinematic essay, Peter Thompson asserts that straight documentary makers concentrate on the 'subject', which is more 'passive' than the 'active subject' of the fiction film. By contrast, film essayists opt to treat the subject as a *theme* 'in which the subject is a particular development or an interpretation of that theme, and one that has a determining influence upon the form of the film' (Thompson 2005: 5). This thematic subject becomes a more active element in the film's form and aesthetic, which arise less from a preconceived generic framework and more from the 'meditation on ideas in conflict' (2005: 5) that is the crux of the essay film. In this chapter, I will argue that the radicality of Anson Mak's film essays manifests itself both in a highly original aesthetics and in a critical perspective on Hong Kong. The independent filmmaker's discourse is articulated in a subtle way, but her political stance is, however, expressed firmly, especially in the more recent *On the Edge of a Floating City, We Sing* (2012).

Despite the films' undoubted essayistic features, as we look more closely at Mak's work in this chapter, we will reflect on whether or not it corresponds entirely to this categorisation of essay film, to which Corrigan has confidently, and approvingly, assigned it. Erik Knudsen, in describing his aspiration for a 'transcendental realism' mode in documentary, has questioned the validity of conforming to existing empirical rationalist categories of documentary with their 'dominant paradigms' and reductive discourse structures of cause and effect. Instead he calls for an exploration of more poetic non-fiction filmmaking that is intended 'to reveal qualities of spirituality and transcendence . . . a cinematic narrative that is essentially driven by the experiential rather than by meaning, representation or the illustrative' (Knudsen 2008: 108). As we explore Mak's innovative – in Hong Kong terms at least – piece of filmmaking, we will keep an open mind and also reflect on Stevie Smith's poetic injunction: 'No categories please!'

'TAKE A PLACE LIKE THIS': PERSONAL EXPERIENCES VERSUS COLONIAL DISCOURSES OF HONG KONG IN *ONE WAY STREET ON A TURNTABLE*

Right at the beginning of *One Way Street on a Turntable*, Mak invites us to 'Take a place like this', imitating the jargon of Government Information

Service Film Unit documentaries of the 1960s. Her deconstructive juxtaposition of clips from these paternalist grand narratives interspersed with her own sometimes ironic, sometimes melancholic perceptions of the city's ambience is poetically discursive, frequently essayistic and always revealing of another Hong Kong far removed from the sanitised constructions of institutionalised authority. The clips she employs are taken from the Film Unit's decade-long propagandistic and essentially positivist output, designed, as Philip Robertson has trenchantly observed, to validate the colonial presence and boost economic development:

> Far from being devoid of ideology, the work of the Film Unit reads at the level of documentary rhetoric as a sustained, skillfully-crafted [sic] argument about progress, modernity and history . . . This rhetoric argues for the maintenance of a particular political system and advances a specific ideology. (1997: 83–4)

Viewed in this way, the Hong Kong Film Unit becomes a case study in the discourse of colonialism. Mak uses clips from the first of the classic Film Unit feature films, *This is Hong Kong* (Wright, 1961), produced by the Film Unit

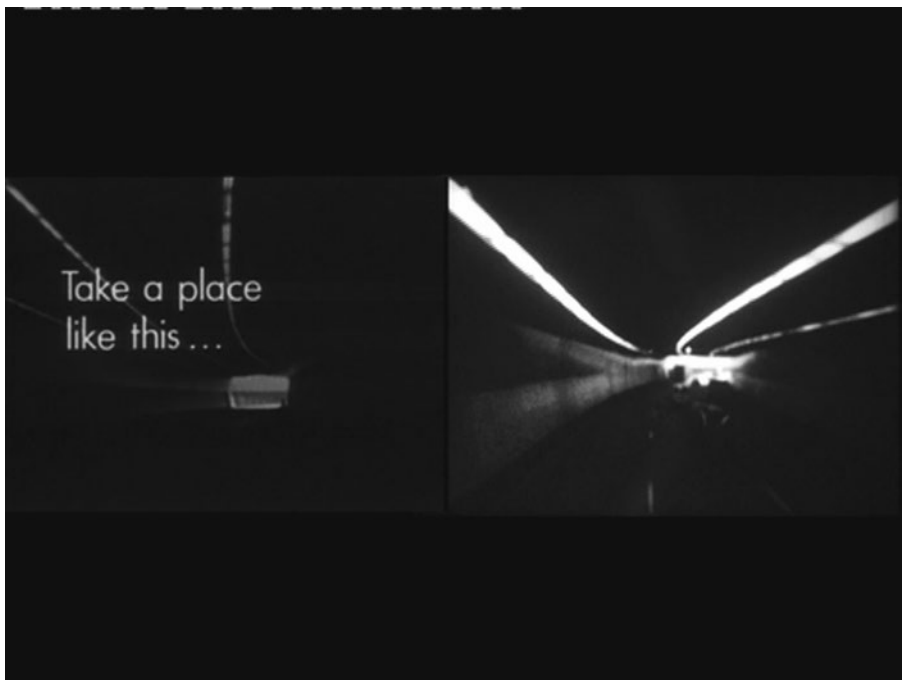

Figure 10.1 Split screen with archival colonial documentary (left) and Super 8 footage (right) in *One Way Street on a Turntable* (dir. Mak, 2007).

in collaboration with Cathay Film Services. The film deploys the classical Griersonian formula in documentary films: first of all, montage was placed against a mixture of real footage and re-enacted, staged material with a narrative voice-over mediated by an authoritative voice-of-god narrator. The ideologically driven narration at the end of the film presents how the 'partnership between Britain and Hong Kong has turned Hong Kong from a barren rock to a beautiful and most loved city'. Written and directed by Wynona 'Noni' Wright, a highly regarded and award-winning female director and producer from Cathay Film Services, it is the colonial version of *Industrial Britain* (1931), presenting aspects of trade and industrial growth, as well as concerns related to housing problems. The other source for Mak's often tongue-in-cheek 'quotes' is the Film Unit's *Made in Hong Kong* series – in particular, a section from a colour film documentary called *The Belongers* (1973), directed and edited by Mike Lockey and produced by James Lee. The breezy, optimistic narration begins to sound smug, bombastic and almost patronising in Mak's looped repeats, especially of the captioned theme, 'Take a place like this', which, of course, is exactly what the British merchant-adventurers did in 1841. The colour optimism of these extracts is starkly contrasted with the downbeat, grainy, black and white footage shot on Super 8 by director of photography, Wong Ping-hung.

Taking the 'place like this' more aesthetically by alternating takes from her own footage with takes from the archival footage available in the public domain in playfully and often whimsically adroit montage, Mak conveys something of the sense of a literary palimpsest technique, as theorised by Gérard Genette and practised by various postmodernist writers (1997: ix). The ironic repetitions and parodic use of what is implicitly presented as cliché-ridden footage from a bygone era is juxtaposed in intertextually allusive montage with Mak's vision of a Hong Kong that is in sharp contradistinction to such glib representations of the city and its 'belongers'. According to Robertson's well-researched and critically argued essay, the positivistic, frequently tendentious representation of these films was later to metamorphose into a pro-establishment, frequently cheerleading operation as simplistic paeans to progress, whether as corporate and sponsored video or as neo-Griersonian public information and social issue films within Radio Television Hong Kong, better known as RTHK (Robertson 1997: 80–2). The truth claims of such works have rarely been addressed, Robertson argues, because we are dealing with a discourse of knowledge and power, in Foucauldian terms, underpinning the imperialist and postcolonial capitalist, monetarist enterprise.

This witty interplay between Mak's own film and the quoted film has a *trompe l'oeil* effect, by which we are sometimes confused as to which shots belong to Mak's work and which to the 'found footage' of the Film Unit source films. Mak mischievously treats the 'quotations' as if they were especially

whimsical extracts from an amusing homespun amateur movie worthy of repeated viewing, in order to marvel at the naïveté of such perspectives on our complex city. The slyly deconstructive insertion of captions superimposed on the found footage indicating Holy Canossian College, near Kowloon Tong, 'my secondary school', and 'Wang Tau Hom Chuen, 1963–8, my Dad's home', immediately expropriates these images and renders them personal to the filmmaker; she repeats this strategy with re-inscriptions on a number of other shots related to her own family history and that of her actress. Other manipulated shots and images deliberately and seamlessly intercut images of luxury cars like Rolls Royces and Mercedes in fashionable Central. These are mediated over the 'voice-of-god' narrator's references to modernity and wealth with images of less much glamorous commercial delivery vans in today's Kwun Tong, the eastern Kowloon industrial area. Thus, manipulation of found footage can be seen as a critical authorial device in Mak's markedly authored and self-reflexive film.

'NO SPACE TO RENT?': A CRITICAL BENJAMINIAN VOICE AND THE HONG KONG CITYSCAPE

This allusive and intertextual quality of the film is accentuated by another voice and vision from the past, but with a critical circumambulatory impulse, as opposed to a linear propagandist one. Significantly, the work is styled as 'an interactive moving image book', and in apposite postmodernist style the Hong Kong University Comparative Literature-educated Mak deconstructs the very notion of an authoritative documentary voice. In so doing, she reclaims the city for the individual observer-*flâneur*.[2] Inspired by Walter Benjamin's meditations on the interaction of the individual consciousness and the city, which she quotes liberally but cogently, Mak's cinematic reflections on Hong Kong life apply the German critic's precepts and aphorisms to Hong Kong's literal and metaphorical one-way streets. *One Way Street* (*Einbahnstraße*), Benjamin's 1928 work on the role of the writer and the critic, represented his attempt to apply the techniques of literary studies to life as it is lived by people on the street. One of Benjamin's most innovative and imaginative contributions to social and cultural criticism, the collection of 'essayettes' consists of impressionistic vignettes of personal experience juxtaposed with reflections and maxims about modern life and social values, as well as the process of creative writing.

Significantly, Benjamin's criticism of the 'imperialists' and the 'greed of the ruling class' ([1928] 2009: 114) echoes, and to an extent inspires, Mak's own cultural intervention on Super 8. Like her film, his essays are not expository and deductive in their organisation, but enigmatic, almost gnostic, and often understated, though critically incisive thanks to their striking imagery. In the

piece entitled 'These Spaces to Rent', Benjamin laments the loss of critical thought in his time: 'Criticism is a question of correct distance. Criticism is at home in a world where perspectives and prospects matter' ([1928] 2009: 97). He goes on to compare advertising and the speed of modern life to the speed of a film – a speed at which criticism cannot compete.

A year after Benjamin's critical collection appeared, Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* took that notion of speed and film to a hitherto unimagined and dizzying extent. Eighty years later, Mak's film slows it down again, to patience-stretching duration in certain shots, such as that portraying mainland China's tourists posing for group photos in Bauhinia Square on the harbour side of the extension to the Convention and Exhibition Centre in Wanchai. The camera pans to focus on the space itself without picking out any human faces. However, the seemingly empty screen is not, of course, empty. It is filled with inanimate objects, as in the opening shots of Vertov's groundbreaking film, and the rhythm of movement in the film is deliberately slowed down at these points, until the film's 'actress' Yvonne Leung walks nonchalantly across and out of the frame, as if she were also a chance tourist unaware of the camera position. One ironically allusive screen text in relation to movement superimposes a caption about the anti-World Trade Organization (WTO) activists at the talks in Wanchai in 2005, escaping tear gas across a flyover, with images of a supposedly vibrant Hong Kong circa 1967. Doubleness and complementarity of word and image at this point, and others, of the film work on a dialectical basis through which spatial awareness and the meanings of places play an important part. In this dialectical method, places, buildings and objects are very much part of Mak's critical and creative opus.

This notion of going out there to find life on the street is evident in the film, which follows the principal human camera subject, Yvonne, in her exploration of aspects of a real, if fractured and incoherent, Hong Kong everyday life, with the ubiquitous injunction to 'post no bills' on its walls taken directly from a quotation in Benjamin's work. Benjamin's polemically engaged style underpins the work and informs its style, which is redolent of dissidence, even if, for that Hong Kong post-1980s generation, dissidence and disenchantment are qualities that communicate to the viewer by implication, rather than through explicit statement. The disembodied voice on the record turntable readings from Benjamin's work is fascinatingly evocative, but also slyly parodic of the smooth-talking 'voice-of-god' authoritative voice-over in those paternalist documentaries of the earlier colonialist era. Quoting mainly from the section entitled 'Kaiserpanorama' – a critical survey of late 1920s between-the-wars Germany – Mak evokes common reference points between the two societies and makes free but illuminating associations with her multiple images of the contemporary Hong Kong cityscape against Benjamin's literary images of Berlin. The Kaiserpanorama was a prototype moving-image viewing device,

preceding the advent of cinema as we know it, and involving an individual viewing experience, as opposed to a collective one. The meaning of Benjamin's title was clearly related to his sense of a dangerously isolated but courageously individualistic perspective.

In deadpan voice-over, Mak and Leung intone Benjamin's words about Berlin life, attitudes and politics, which, thanks to the accompaniment of on-screen images, sound remarkably apposite to those of contemporary Hong Kong. As a result, private and public, personal and social histories intersect and intertwine. One extract that is intended to resonate strongly with the uncertainties of Hong Kong people's situation in the new millennium is included as subtitled voice-over early in the film and establishes the critical mood with palpable parallels regarding issues such as staying or leaving:

> Anyone not ducking the perception of decline will without hesitation enlist a special justification for staying on, doing what he does, and participating in this chaos. So many insights into the general breakdown, so many exceptions for one's own sphere of activity, place of residence and moment in time. (Benjamin [1928] 2009: 61)

Over the section title 'Antiques' – also the title of one of Benjamin's meditations on beloved objects and time – Mak constructs a powerful tribute to the passing of the Hong Kong Island Star Ferry terminal at Queen's Pier on its last day of operation prior to its demolition and reconstruction as pseudo-historical kitsch close to the outlying island ferry piers. With more than a hint of typical Hong Kong irony, Mak juxtaposes the hyperbolic line from the colonial-era narrative of *Made in Hong Kong* – 'Hong Kong has everything' – with her melancholy footage of the Star Ferry clock tower and concourse area. The terminal closed its gates for good on 9 August 2006, as Mak's date- and time-sensitive video footage indicates. Despite widespread public protest about the plans to demolish Queen's Pier, followed by sit-ins and civic disobedience, there was no stay of execution. Eloquent dissolves of the final day's last passengers give way to a screen devoid of people and a 'no entry' sign on the bars preventing access. These shots are charged with understated emotion and convey the sense of the city's disappearance that Ackbar Abbas captured in his 1997 study *Hong Kong Culture and the Politics of Disappearance*.

MAK'S RADICAL DISCOURSE ON HONG KONG'S 'ALTERATIONS' AND HER PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE CITY

In other important respects, the film is also, in part, homage to women's resilience and empowerment. Its opening titles are part of a series of poetic

contemplations by the filmmaker somewhat *à la* Benjamin, but expressing a dialectic of movement and settlement, of escape and rootedness. 'Movement can be the legacy of heroic women who step beyond their own history', asserts Mak, reminding us that foot binding – a necessary case of stasis and rootedness – persisted in China from the Southern Tang Dynasty of the ninth century all the way to the end of the Qing Dynasty in the early twentieth.[3] The feminist focus is accentuated in the second half of the film, as Mak develops the narrative of her 'talent's' life experience. Again, the dialectical approach is evident: Mak was born and raised in Hong Kong, growing up and living in the Kwun Tong district prior to moving; Yvonne, the 'talent', moved to Hong Kong with her parents in 1980 and grew up as an unwelcome Chinese mainlander in the midst of Hong Kong 'belongers' in Mei Foo Housing Estate. Yvonne's voice-over is rendered in Mandarin Chinese, while Mak's own is in Cantonese, as the local ethos of the Mei Foo and Kwun Tong spaces are affirmed in stark contrast to the expatriate-oriented parts of Hong Kong.

The other sequence related to what is euphemistically termed 'urban renewal' is given the title of Benjamin's most opaque and briefest essay recounting a dream of taking his own life with a gun, an eerie premonition of his suicide in 1940 perhaps. The piece is cryptically entitled 'Closed for Alterations' and this title is used over a section subtitled 'Services suspended due to renovations', evoking what the screen legend tells us is 'Hong Kong's largest urban renewal plan' in Kwun Tong. The silent shots – also void of narrative voice-over – and restless tracking movement suggest the atmosphere of a silent film, and the notion of 'service suspended' seems to incorporate the idea of life being in suspended animation, as in Benjamin's dream narrative where he imagines silently observing his own corpse. Prior to this sequence, English and Chinese voice-over tracks are mixed, heightening the oneiric, surreal quality of the experience for the viewer, and inducing a sense of both confusion and also empathy in the viewer. As with Benjamin's invitation to participate in his *flânerie*, we are drawn into the small boutiques and side streets framed by the filmmaker's forward and lateral movements.

As if to emphasise the dichotomy of Chinese and British forms of imperialism, parallels with the 'alterations' to contemporary Kwun Tong are offered to the viewer in the on-screen narrative; the reference to the forced relocation of Hong Kong inhabitants in 1662 during the early Qing Dynasty fifty miles away from the coast, and away from their livelihood in the local salt fields, is a critique of the other imperialist narrative found in the Film Unit's work, which suggest that Hong Kong's history depends on its colonial legacy. As the film informs us, the etymology of the name Kwun Tong refers to its status as official salt fields. However, once the place was reclaimed for renovation as an industrial area in 1953, the Chinese characters were altered by use of a

Figure 10.2 Yvonne's flâneries in *One Way Street on a Turntable* (dir. Mak, 2007).

homonym to obscure their original reference. Mak's sly critique comments on this deliberate erasure of the local. The caption 'Our sense of history begins with British rule' is steeped in irony, not just regarding the colonial narrative, but all of the grand narratives, including those of the new corporate developers with their ties to Beijing.

Likewise, in relation to Mei Foo – along with Mongkok, the other grassroots residential district featured in the film – the change of name from Lai Wan station to Mei Foo is significant. Mak's assertion of identity and record of not just renewal but violation in her film echoes Amy Chan's and Janice Tam's autobiographical 2002 play *Two Girls from Ngau Tau Kok*, which also interweaves the personal and individual biography with a genealogy of place. Both Mak's film and the play assert a personal and local identity in defiance of the purveyors of grand narratives of both colonialist and Chinese corporate-nationalist stamp. Civic disobedience and defiance is fast becoming an option for responding to official cynicism among the power brokers who want to determine Hong Kong's future. Mak's film exudes such a feeling of disobedience – disobedience to the norms of conventional expository documentary, for one thing, and in a broader sense toward the notion of participation in the present or past Hong Kong establishment's grand narrative of progress. This

sense of disobedience and critical appraisal of Hong Kong's space management is further elaborated in her next documentary, *On the Edge of a Floating City, We Sing*, and is, indeed, quintessential to Mak's nostalgic yet radical essay films.

The downbeat, melancholy ending of the film is tempered with the reconciliation of: 'Come back – all is forgiven', with its haunting screen caption from Benjamin giving us a fresh angle on the theme of movement ('Movement is being moved to tears for a stranger') and lonely shots across Victoria Park taking in the now thoroughly displaced statue of Queen Victoria that sits somewhat forlornly in the park. In one elegantly composed, or perhaps fortuitous, shot, it looks as though a contemplative Yvonne is holding a miniature Queen Victoria in the palm of her hand. The slow succession of these often hypnotic images – a child on a swing in the park captured in images that fade inexorably to photo-negative white with apocalyptic undertones of post-nuclear erasure – all suggest transience, impermanence and, above all, movement. This latter section is reminiscent of deteriorating old film stock of the silent era from which the nitrate has bled. As the film comes to an end, another motif of obsolescence is presented: the turntable on which the audio recording of Benjamin has been playing is shown repeating random tracks, as the needle becomes temporarily stuck in the groove; the image parallels and echoes the earlier repetition of archive material shots from the colonial-era footage. It is a powerful visual metaphor for expressing skepticism regarding notions of clarity, coherence and linear structure that have often been assumed as axiomatic for the documentary film.

In the way that audience expectations of truth, transparency and objectivity are inevitably mediated by the self-reflexive nature of the form, we can see Mak underscoring the contemporary documentary's potential for refracting, rather than simply reflecting, the world within a postmodernist frame of reference. Randomness and contingency are seen as necessary conditions of Hong Kong life, and the filmmaker encourages the viewer to browse and view the DVD version at random. This very much echoes Benjamin's *modus operandi* in the original print version of *One Way Street*, since in his critical *flânerie* the essay pieces are free-standing and, to an extent, in arbitrary sequence.

MUSIC, CITY SPACE AND GRASSROOTS ACTIVISM: *ON THE EDGE OF A FLOATING CITY, WE SING*

Mak's latest documentary work continues, in many respects, the independent, essayistic and poetic style of *One Way Street on a Turntable*, while manifesting a stronger activist, if less experimental, approach. The 2012 film, which

refers in part to the Hong Kong fringe music scene, to alternative spaces in the East Kowloon industrial area of Kwun Tong and Ngau Tau Kok and to alternative values and attitudes in the city is entitled *On the Edge of a Floating City, We Sing*. Though a hybrid, essayistic film, it deals fundamentally with the subject of community in a very grassroots sense of the word. It challenges Hong Kong's notorious 'property developers' hegemony and shows once again how cynical corporatist policies imposed by the city's power élite, especially in respect of the official revitalisation of industrial buildings, have impacted on artists and arts groups and prompted them to seek alternative spaces, lifestyles and choices that reject the conformist metropolitan mainstream.

The film being Mak's second feature-length documentary shot in Super 8, it follows a similar path to her first and employs similar essayistic documentary devices and mixed-mode strategies. The director refers to it as 'a moving image work', avoiding a more specific designation.[4] In the Hong Kong context, the film's subtext and connotations resonate with the activist and advocacy spirit that was discernible in the Star Ferry sequence of her 2007 film. Unlike the single-issue, more linear films of Hong Kong's better-known socially dissenting documentarian, Tammy Cheung, *Floating City* is discursive, digressive and multi-focused. In consequence, the composition of the film reflects this hybridity, and it seems to draw upon three of Bill Nichols' conceptual categories – the interactive, the reflexive and the observational – as well as on Michael Renov's functional modes of recording, analysing, expressing and (indirectly) persuading in very composite ways. It is also intended to be more of an ethnographic documentary than her first full-length film.

As Mak has acknowledged in interviews, the film's trajectory is, to an extent, informed by the experiences and responses of the three principal human subjects: Ah-P of the group My Little Airport, Dejay of the group The Pancakes and activist-musician Billy Hung of Mininoise. As a result, it appears to have more in common with the conventional documentary structure, especially in its employment of the typical expedient of interview. At the same time, the director's predilection for non-human motifs, for images that frame and convey architectural shapes, spatial detail and rich textural layering, endows the film with a similar balance between its thematic elements to her earlier film. Whereas the first part is concerned more with the ecology and environmental features of the Kowloon former industrial heartland and the question of available rental space in industrial buildings under the government's scheme, the personal and collective histories of the human subjects become more prominent in the second. In the middle and latter parts, the focus shifts from the architecture of both the industrial buildings of Ngau Tau Kok and the Shek Yam housing estate in Kwai Chung to the communal life converging within these spaces and the links between personal and communal

Figure 10.3 My Little Airport playing on a footbridge in *On the Edge of a Floating City, We Sing* (dir. Mak, 2012).

histories. Thus, as with *One Way Street on a Turntable*, the human and personal dimension determines and is determined by the spatial and public dimension.

The documentary begins with a meditative voice-over juxtaposed with slow-rhythm images of a dreamily surreal Hong Kong land- and seascape framing the strip of land adjacent to the former airport site at Kai Tak near Kowloon City. There are exquisite and languorous shots capturing the reflections of buildings, cranes and, most evocative of all, clouds on the shimmering harbour waters, as we listen to Mak's ruminative and lyrical introduction to the 'Floating City' – a concept developed by local fiction writer Xi Xi in her essayistic novella on Hong Kong, *Marvels of a Floating City*:

> Look up, we see the blue sky with white clouds that spreads far-flung, inspiring deep thoughts and visions . . . Look down, we see a tiny place marked by distinct boundaries; it is no longer a piece of land but a building plot measured by inches and feet. Its meaning is completely reversed. It is constricting and privatised. It is what we struggle and feel powerless over. How come our relationship with the land is so different from that with the sky?

Mak's originality in the Hong Kong context is exemplified by the way that she dares to begin her documentary; it is a strategy that can test the endurance of some filmgoers, but delights others. The utterly arresting and poetic image that characterises the film, and has also been used as a motif for promoting

it, is an eloquent shot showing a thin strip of land sandwiched between a vast sky above and limitless water below. The floating city is poignantly evoked without further need for verbal description.

That said, Mak's opening rhetorical question following this prelude neatly sets up the argument of the film's investigation of the theme of community: in short, Mak asks what can be done in response to the rapacious depredations of corporate big business, as urban renewal eats away at the city's traditional heartland areas, such as Kwun Tong, replacing it with anodyne commercial replicas of the fashionable brand-name malls of Hong Kong-side and Tsim Sha Tsui; her primary question is: how can the artist communities that have sprung up and flourished in the spaces vacated by the decline of manufacturing industries in such areas survive? Through her interviews with Ah-P in Ngau Tau Kok and Dejay in Shek Yam Estate, Mak is able to establish a counter-discourse, which celebrates various things about the seemingly impersonal industrial building and housing estate respectively. This is done by an imaginative use of shooting location for the interviews – in one case, a pleasant new park on the Kwun Tong waterfront, which belies the normal expectations of this generally unlovely district. In the interview held at the housing estate where Dejay grew up, the talking head images are effectively offset with a collage technique of stills and text juxtaposition that is reminiscent of a teenager's scrapbook. Significantly, the L- and U-shaped designs of the housing estate flat configuration are skilfully highlighted by playful post-production editing, which juxtaposes images and employs split-screen techniques to accompany Dejay's childhood games reminiscences.

By stark contrast, the third and final interactive element is filmed in a very public place – the harbour-front square outside the Cultural Centre, a common tourist location. Here, the annual 4 June vigil to commemorate those who died during the Tiananmen crackdown in Beijing in 1989 plays a central role. As a visual symbol of the theme of freedom in this part of the film and of the spirit of Mak's documentary work in general, the iconic sculpture known as *The Flying Frenchman*, created by César Baldaccini and presented to Hong Kong as a gift from the French Government in 1992, is framed from various angles. The impressive bronze sculpture of the 'angel with a broken wing' was intended as a visual referent and tribute to the broken democracy movement of 1989, and has become a focal point for annual 4 June vigils, a place where flowers are regularly laid, as Mak's close-up informs us. The voice-over text references the controversy over the naming of the sculpture, and mentions Baldaccini's disgust with the decision of a pusillanimous Hong Kong colonial government to change the title of the work from *The Freedom Fighter* to the less pointed *The Flying Frenchman* (prompting the artist to boycott the unveiling ceremony). This was presumably done, Mak observes, to avoid the possibility whereby the resonances of the original name could upset the sensitivities

of the mainland China Government. At the 2011 vigil featured in Mak's film, further poignancy is given to the event by the explicit support expressed for the Chinese artist-activist Ai Weiwei, who was placed under house arrest, and a fresh, though unofficial, naming and unveiling ceremony for the sculpture by the activists.

The third interview subject is musician-activist Billy Hung, who is a regular figure at the event. However, unlike the previous two interviews, Billy allows his music to speak for him. The song he selects to represent him in the film is the most interesting and potentially controversial one of all three featured songs by the respective music artists. Entitled 'The Mark', Hung's raw, bluesy song makes comparisons between the marks of grief in the hearts of the singer and the marks on the streets of the capital after the brutal suppression of the democracy movement. By holding the event in such an open, public space, Billy and other participants in the vigil argue that they are also testing the limits of freedom to gather in public spaces in their own city and to exercise their rights to free expression. Mak and her researcher, Janice Leung, incorporate several 'vox pop' mini-interviews with young people joining the remembrance event and also with passers-by. At this point, the dark blue twilight sky, connoting the sense of freedom established at the outset, and the musicians and other participants who have laid claim to the space are framed in an aesthetically pleasing final medium long shot.

Mak achieves a satisfying sense of symmetry at the close of the film with a brief coda corresponding to the film's poetic introduction. An exceedingly long slow take of fresh rain on the leaves of trees and a closing shot of the

Figure 10.4 Billy Hung and friends playing music next to *The Flying Frenchman* on 4 June 2011 in Tsim Sha Tsui in *On The Edge of a Floating City, We Sing* (dir. Mak, 2012).

water, the land and sky serves to underscore her artistic aims and her idiosyncratic city vision. As with the first feature-length documentary by this indefatigably independent-minded filmmaker, these qualities are reflected in the fine harmonisation of form and content and of theory and practice in her accomplished and intellectually stimulating film-essay style.

CONCLUSION: SPATIAL STORIES, TOWARD A RADICAL AND CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD

The radical form of Anson Mak's films – ethnographically pregnant long takes combined with digital and Super 8 shots, dialectical re-montage of documentary archives and literary quotes, irony and melancholy – connects her works with the miscellaneous qualities of the film-essay form; while the critical view she expresses through this clever combination of individual and collective experiences connotes a distinctive sociopolitical critique. But even though we can feel a growing or more overt discontent in the second film – whether through Mak's own cinematographic choices or the statements of the interviewees – we are still confronted with a subtle and well-considered discourse on Hong Kong history and the city's spatial characteristics, as well as an intimation of future threats and challenges.

The filmmaker's stance of independence resonates powerfully with the alternative musical scene as represented in *Floating City*; their strategies of spatial resistance in Hong Kong's older industrial areas offers a critical response to the city's well-documented issues of 'disappearance' and 'loneliness' among its inhabitants. By narrating their personal, often nostalgic, stories, and by organising musical ceremonies to celebrate the memory of mainland China's last democratic movement, the protagonists and the filmmaker demonstrate the possibility of expressing lucid political resistance to corporate and political power in the documentary essay film.

NOTES

1. Some of them, especially overseas, were very positive. It was subsequently screened at film festivals in a number of other cities, such as Singapore, Taipei, Barcelona and Vancouver. It was also nominated for a Grand Jury Award for Best Feature-Length Documentary Film at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival in the same year. The availability of the DVD version in various Hong Kong retail outlets is a kind of testimony to its recognition as being of cultural significance in the city, although clearly the film was not to everyone's taste, and many local critics and filmgoers expressed either bafflement or antipathy. As the director herself has acknowledged, it appeared to be one of those films that Hong Kong filmgoers either loved or hated.

2. To quote the French poet Baudelaire's seminal concept of the *flâneur*, although the more rarely heard feminine form '*flâneuse*' would be more apposite here.
3. 'Hakka women', she reminds the viewer, 'did not engage in the practice [i.e. footbinding] having to earn a living in the fields; they had to earn money in order to have a room of their own'; the choice of English translation here is deliberately allusive of Virginia Woolf's famous essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) on the female author's need to move away from the mainstream and the patriarchal domain into her own space where she can write under her own terms and conditions.
4. Despite being seen as a more accessible film within Hong Kong and having done well in terms of audiences at the 2012 Hong Kong International Film Festival and at subsequent extra screenings, it has not been shown at overseas festivals. It was well received in Taiwan and shorter extracts from the film are scheduled to be shown as part of a New York art exhibition soon.

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PART III

Displacement, Participation and Spectatorship

CHAPTER 11

Documentary Filmmakers on the Circuit: A Festival Career from *Czech Dream* to *Czech Peace*

Aida Vallejo

From the 1990s onwards, festivals specialising in documentary film have spread across the globe, and their new features have changed the roles these events previously played in film culture and business. Where festivals once served primarily as exhibition sites, the recent incorporation of industry sections to their programmes has resulted in these events having a profound influence not only on film criticism, but also on production and distribution. In this context, independent filmmakers have found a professional space to develop their projects at different stages, from searching for pre-production funding to finding distributors for theatrical release or television broadcasts. In this environment, the term 'independent' documentary cinema becomes problematic, as various interests condition their production and circulation.

This chapter will reflect on the role of film festivals as nodal points for the development of the documentary, in order to identify which powers influence and challenge its independent character. Taking the professional trajectory of Czech filmmakers Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda as a case study, I will focus on the different production and distribution strategies they developed for their feature-length documentaries *Czech Dream/Český Sen* (2004) and *Czech Peace/Český Mír* (2010). These films can be considered paradigmatic examples of both highly creative approaches to documentary language and activist film practices as they tackle two controversial topics: the new consumerist society in former Communist countries and international politics in the first case, and a US initiative to establish a military radar site in Eastern Europe in the second. Their professional trajectory in the international festival circuit

raises questions about how documentary filmmakers develop various dependencies in order to obtain global circulation of their works. The inclusion of industry sections within festival programmes surely influences the funding strategies of independent productions and the way filmmakers use the festival circuit as a promotion platform and distribution space. Our purpose here is also to establish the extent to which social networks of collaboration between filmmakers, festival programmers and industry professionals affect the performance of documentaries in the festival circuit. The following case study therefore focuses on the festival careers of these two young Czech filmmakers who took their films on the international circuit, not only actively participating in the festivals' industry activities, but also helping to introduce this model to their own country.[1]

DOCUMENTARY FESTIVALS: THE NEW TOPOGRAPHIES OF INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY

Drawing on Thomas Elsaesser's idea of understanding film festivals as the new topographies of cinema in Europe (2005), we consider documentary festivals to have become key spaces in the work calendar of independent filmmakers over the last decade. Historically, the international network of documentary festivals developed in four phases. The first phase ran from the end of the Second World War to the late 1960s, when a small number of events were created as showcases for national cinema. The second phase, from the late 1960s until 1989, saw the emergence of new models promoted and controlled by film professionals. In the 1990s, corresponding to the third phase, a model based on the third sector spread with the appearance of private initiatives led by civil society and non-governmental or non-profit organisations. A fourth phase unfolded in the 2000s, during which documentary festivals and specialised film markets proliferated.[2]

Documentary film festivals have multiplied worldwide since the 1990s. The creation of the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) in 1988 initiated a new model in which thematic and genre-specific festivals developed, mostly as private initiatives adopting the third sector model. This model facilitated the incorporation of industry sections in festival programmes, a practice that has spread since the year 2000. During this process, the control previously exerted by governments over film selection was replaced by more independent programming strategies, with industry agents wielding increasing power in the festival circuit. In this regard, particular practices have developed, such as the automatic selection of films funded by the festival or, less officially, those participating in pitching forums co-organised by the festivals. Another common practice consists of the negotiation of screening fees

by distribution companies, a practice that obviously affects the festival budget, but at the same time offers filmmakers the opportunity to recover part of the investment made in producing the film.

In addition to IDFA, other influential international documentary festivals include Dok Leipzig, held in Germany since 1955; Visions du Réel in Nyon, Switzerland, since 1968; Yamagata, which emerged in Japan in 1989; and Hot Docs, founded in Toronto, Canada, in 1993. Most of them incorporate film markets and pitching forums, demonstrating the importance of commercial activities in attracting films and professionals (producers, filmmakers, distributors or commissioning editors). On the other hand, international film festivals also play a prominent role in funding documentaries through the creation of film funds, not only in documentary festivals such as the IDFA Bertha Fund (formerly Jan Vrijman Fund), but especially in international film festivals mainly dedicated to fiction films (for example, the CineMart and Hubert Bals Funds of the International Film Festival Rotterdam or the Berlinale's World Cinema Fund and the Sundance Documentary Fund).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the creation of national and supranational organisations for the promotion of documentary film, such as the European Documentary Network (EDN) founded in Copenhagen (Denmark) in 1996, has played a crucial role in promoting the inclusion of these industry activities within film festival programmes in the form of pitching forums, co-production and development workshops, festival funds, film markets, pre-selections of films, promotion activities and networking. These diverse ways of collaborating with documentary projects highlight the difficulties of reconciling artistic and commercial interests. In so doing, the festivals act as mediators between independent filmmakers and producers on the one side, and mainstream television stations and distributors on the other side,[3] juggling their access to new sources of funding, while trying to maintain the independent character associated with their films.

HOW INDEPENDENT? ART, COMMERCE AND THE FESTIVALS IN-BETWEEN

Given the necessary funding sources – and therefore economic 'dependence' – required to produce a film to professional standards, the 'independent' label associated with specific productions and distribution networks seems problematic and calls for reassessment. The three dimensions usually mentioned in the analysis of independent film – namely, the aesthetic form, thematic content and production context – are relevant within the frame of documentary festivals. Indeed, the new terms associated with documentary, such as 'non-fiction', 'creative documentary' or 'auteur documentary', illustrate the

linguistic strategies developed by these events to differentiate the new trend in documentary narrative and aesthetics from the reportage form associated with mainstream television formats. As the economic dependency of these films makes their independent character questionable, in this context we choose to talk of independent filmmakers (as they normally work as freelancers and run their own companies) rather than independent films, and use the term 'creative documentary' to qualify their films (De Jong et al. 2013). As for thematic trends, the festivals have served as an exhibition platform more open to controversial issues, offering an alternative space where topics avoided by the mainstream media can be revealed.

In relation to production contexts, interestingly, the classic understanding of independent cinema as opposed to mainstream Hollywood (especially in the US context) does not apply to documentary filmmaking – a minority practice that, like short and experimental film, has mainly developed outside major studios. Conversely, when we come to analyse documentary production, television stations could be considered the counterparts of the Hollywood film industry, because they control most of the documentary film production, distribution and exhibition. We could thus limit the post-1990 field of independent documentary to films made outside the production systems of television stations. However, as the following case study will demonstrate, this distinction is not as clear as it might first appear, given the active role played by television representatives in festivals, either as founders of the events or as producers and distributors searching for new content.

The study of the relationship between film festivals and the independent film sphere has developed since 2000 (Dayan 2000; Ramey 2010), with a growing interest in exploring and contesting the idealised concept of 'indieness' (Biskind 2004). Following Marijke De Valck's understanding of film festivals as an interconnected global circuit combining several agendas and merging the economic and cultural spheres (2007), as well as Dina Iordanova's interest in festivals related to minor genres or peripheral regions, as expressed in her Film Festival Yearbook Series (since 2009), this chapter's case study analyses the relationships between documentary filmmakers and institutions – namely, film festivals and the industry initiatives related to them. In so doing, it offers new insights into the framework in which creative documentary has developed over the last few decades, and presents first-hand information about the actual social and economic practices taking place within it. The ethnographic analysis of the professional trajectory of filmmakers Vít Klusák and Filip Remunda proposed below follows their careers on the international festival circuit, explores the institutions with which they have developed various forms of dependencies, and emphasises the contradictions that filmmakers face when working within the international festival circuit.

FESTIVAL STRATEGIES: FROM *CZECH DREAM* TO *CZECH PEACE*

Prague, September 2000

Our study begins in the Czech Republic, where cultural entrepreneurship started to flourish after a decade of political and economic instability resulting from the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989. New opportunities opened up to the young generation of filmmakers as the state left a vacuum quickly filled by the documentary (Blažejovský 2009).

In the autumn of 2000, a new academic course started at the FAMU film academy in Prague, where students Andrea Prenghyová and Filip Remunda prepared their graduate film projects. Although their documentary projects obtained public funding, the filmmakers considered the investment in cinema by the Czech state, still going through a process of economic and political transition, to be inadequate, and decided that the only sustainable funding sources came from abroad. They began searching for funding in Western Europe at a time when incorporation into the European Union was one of the main objectives on the Czech Republic's political agenda.

Taking advantage of this state vacuum as an unprecedented opportunity to create new cultural infrastructures, Remunda and Prenghyová decided to actively attract documentary funding to the Czech Republic. After visiting several international documentary pitching forums and development workshops, they founded the Institute of Documentary Film (IDF) in Prague in 2001, in order to manage the pitching forum of the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival. The collaboration between the two institutions was quite easy, since the director of the festival was Marek Hovorka, another student from FAMU, who started the event in his hometown in 1997 at the age of seventeen, and the festival's fifth edition incorporated such industry activity into its programme for the first time.

The film Filip Remunda was working on (co-directed by his classmate Vít Klusák) was a social experiment that analysed the newly established consumerist society in the Czech Republic and included a critical view of the world of marketing and advertising. They approached their topic from a highly original standpoint: that of the creation of a huge media campaign in which the filmmakers would play the role of young entrepreneurs launching a new supermarket named Czech Dream, which, in fact, would never exist. Although the adverts invading Prague on television, radio and billboards were real, on the opening day potential consumers found nothing but a panel simulating the front wall of a shopping mall in an open field, located on the outskirts of the Czech Republic's capital city. After receiving a grant for the promotion of cinematography by the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, as well

as the participation of the national TV firm Česká Televize and public university FAMU as co-producers, Remunda and Klusák created the company Hypermarket Film to produce their film in 2003. Given the active involvement of the authors with international networks and the originality of the subject, the project soon caught the attention of international partners. The following section will look at how the filmmakers signed a co-production deal with a sales agent based in the UK and secured an international distributor.

London, 2003

The creation of the MEDIA programme in 1991 – a European Union initiative promoting co-productions – has notably influenced the European film sphere beyond the EU borders: some Eastern European countries started to participate in it even before becoming EU members. In 2003, Irena Taskovski (another FAMU alumna) created the distribution company Taskovski Films Ltd based in London. She gained experience in the European film industry while working on the fiction film *No Man's Land/Ničija zemlja* (dir. Danis Tanović, 2001). Funded by Eurimages (European Cinema Support Fund), the film was a co-production of British, French, Belgian, Italian, Slovenian and Bosnian companies. Taskovski Films Ltd embraced the *Czech Dream* project by co-producing the film and becoming its sales agent. In the following years, it became a pivotal company for the international theatrical distribution of creative documentary films from Central and Eastern Europe.

The creativity and active involvement of this young generation of filmmakers does not apply exclusively to their approach to documentary filmmaking, but also to their funding strategies:

> From the beginning we knew that such a big project could be realised only on the basis of the so-called advertisement principle, which essentially means: you hang our city lights all over town and we put your logo in the credits. Most of the project costs (up to 3/4) were covered in this way. [. . .] And in fact the controversial nature of the whole thing excited the managers we approached – they explained that the bigger the scandal, the bigger the advertising effect. (Klusák and Remunda, cited in O'Connor 2004: 4)

The 2003 promotional operations announcing the fake supermarket Czech Dream shared advertising space with the government's political campaign to win the vote in favour of the country's incorporation into the EU, an image later included at the end of the film, intertwining the discourse of both campaigns. On 31 May 2003, just thirty days after the Czech Republic joined the European Union, the inauguration of the supermarket Czech Dream created

a nationwide controversy. The nature of the project prompted its authors to start promoting the film even before post-production:

> The film generated a lot of feedback right after we launched our hypermarket. Within the next month, there were something like two hundred articles about it in Czech Republic, and most of them didn't go into what we were trying to say, but how much it all cost, who paid for it, and who approved it. But soon the news spread worldwide, and we found ourselves going to big festivals and galleries with a film that wasn't even finished yet. In New York, the MOMA Gallery helped us with a presentation, putting us in touch with a Brooklyn art community, where we screened parts of the film and then had a three hour long discussion with artists from all around the world - Japan, Iran, Palestine, Cuba, Columbia, Argentina. We spoke about life in socialist Czechoslovakia, the advent of hypermarkets, the return to Marx. (Klusák and Remunda, cited in O'Connor 2004: 6)

The attention received from this controversial experiment promised successful international circulation for the film. The interaction of the filmmakers with audiences, programmers and industry professionals established a relationship of mutual dependence with the festival world, which became key for the later exhibition of their films. Accordingly, the festival strategy for the circulation of *Czech Dream* needs to be explored in more detail.

Karlovy Vary, July 2004

The incorporation of industry activities into most international film festivals has become an incentive for independent filmmakers to use them as a neutral space for negotiating with otherwise inaccessible producers or distribution companies. Choosing a festival première is therefore of key importance for the future international distribution of a film.

A year after the opening scandal, following the Czech Republic's entry into the European Union on 1 May 2004, the film *Czech Dream* began its journey through the international film festival circuit through a première at Karlovy Vary International Film Festival in July. From this point on, the film circulated and was therefore promoted in three different types of industry events that represent recent additions to festivals: promotion in international trade shows (participating in the East European Stand at Sunny Side of the Doc in La Rochelle, France); inclusion in the video library of festival markets (such as the newly created East Silver at the 2004 Jihlava IDFF) and special screenings at international festivals selected by local institutions for the promotion of Eastern European film (such as the East Silver Caravan organised by IDF).

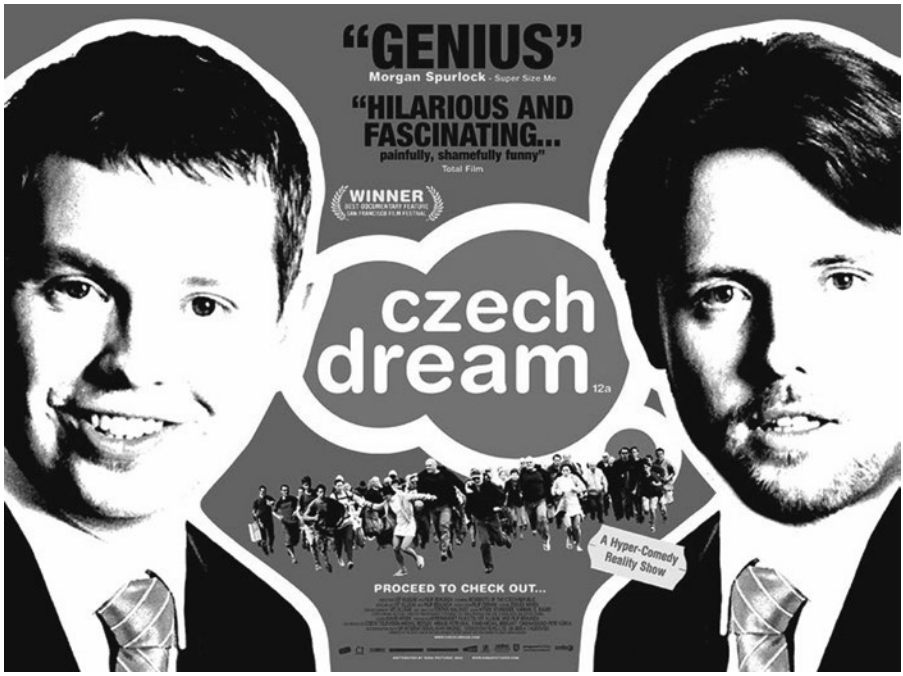

Figure 11.1 Poster of the film *Czech Dream* (dirs Klusák and Remunda, 2004) (Source: Štěpán Malovec (author).) Courtesy of Hypermarket Film.

They constitute new ways for film festivals and filmmakers alike to promote their respective works and for a film to exist. It is interesting to note that while Michael Moore received the Palme D'Or at the 2004 Cannes International Film Festival, attracting international attention to the documentary film, *Czech Dream* was entering the theatre exhibition circuit, where the documentary had started to gain visibility following the successful international distribution of Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* produced by Miramax in 2002. As Klusák and Remunda argue:

> In the Czech Republic, we promoted the film into standard distribution in cinemas, and so far we have managed to overcome the Czech viewers' prejudice against the genre of documentary cinema [. . .]. During the first month, over ten thousand viewers saw *Czech Dream*. We would be happy if our film helped open the way for other documentary films to enter the cinemas. (cited in O'Connor 2004: 5–6)

The film was later screened at several international film festivals, such as the official competition in Locarno in August 2004 (Switzerland) and in

Rotterdam in January 2005 (Netherlands), receiving numerous prizes, including Best Czech Documentary and the Audience Award at the Jihlava IDFF 2004 in Czech Republic, and the People's Choice Award at the Krakow Film Festival 2005 in Poland. On its journey to the United States, the film visited, among others, the Traverse City Film Festival 2005, directed by Michael Moore, where the filmmakers received the Best Non-fiction Film Award. Czech television exploited the image of the well-known American documentarist to promote their film. From then on, *Czech Dream* was presented at prestigious events such as the Flaherty Seminar in the US in 2006, was released in movie theatres all over the world (including in the US) and broadcasted on several European television stations, such as ZDF/Arte (Germany/France), Lichtpunt (Belgium) and YLE (Finland). Although cinema release appears to have opened up a new arena for the exhibition of independent documentary, television is still the main source of income to cover production costs and is a necessary partner for future productions – an important fact that the authors of *Czech Dream* would take into account when seeking funding for their next co-authored feature documentary: *Czech Peace.*

Jihlava, October 2008

Soon after completing their studies at FAMU, Klusák and Remunda cleverly capitalised on their previous feature documentary's success in the international festival circuit and on the relevant contacts realised during this period and embarked on a new project. As before, this new film project promised to tackle a controversial political issue aimed at international audiences.

In 2008, the US Government's proposal to install a military radar site on Czech soil had a noteworthy impact on the programme of the Jihlava IDFF. Next to other films dedicated to military topics (especially those devoted to the Yugoslavian war) came the film *Merry Christmas, Bosnia!/ Vánoce v Bosně* (2008). The short documentary, shot in 2001 by Klusák and Remunda, showcased a surrealist visit by Czech pop singers to the Czech army base in Bosnia to celebrate the Christmas holidays. The filmmakers recovered this raw footage shot in 2001 and used it in the 2008 edition of the Jihlava IDFF as advertising material for their next film project, *Czech Peace*. This film shows the personal struggle of a small village's mayor in his campaign against the installation of a US military radar site in his locality. The screening of *Merry Christmas, Bosnia!* was preceded by a short trailer for *Czech Peace*.

At the Horácké Theatre in the centre of Jihlava, where the East European Forum took place, *Czech Peace* was presented as one of the documentary projects in development competing for international co-production. The written dossier evidenced the filmmakers' experience with international distribution.

Two different versions of the film – twenty-seven minutes in DigiBeta for television and ninety-five minutes in 35 mm for cinemas – were proposed, with an estimated budget of 362,706 euros, a cost higher than the other projects presented in the pitching forum (around 200,000 euros).[4] A month later, the film participated in the IDFA Forum in Amsterdam, an obligatory event for many festival programmers and industry agents. As the filmmakers furthered their involvement in these events, their professional standards grew progressively higher, not only in terms of funding and promotion, but also in their understanding of international audiences and the cultural translation that global exhibition requires.

In subsequent years, the film was also included in other promotional events at international film festivals, mainly organised by the IDF. Since most of these activities are incorporated into the film festivals' programmes as parallel events, the project passed through an intense marketing campaign and fundraising process at different development stages, thus increasing the possibility of subsequent selection in international film festivals.

Jihlava, September 2009

After a year of active searching for funding, the authors of *Czech Peace* started to focus on promotional activities, even before the official première of the film. Once again, the Czech Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival, Prague's Institute of Documentary Film and East Silver became key partners in this process. After a long process of political negotiation and millions of euros spent in campaigns promoting the installation of the military radar site on Czech soil, Barack Obama announced that the project had been cancelled. A month later, the Jihlava IDFF inaugurated its thirteenth edition. Looking at the 2009 catalogue, it is surprising to find that *Czech Peace* is not included in the final programme after the intensive promotional campaign carried out a year earlier. Furthermore, the film was already completed, since a copy was available for screening at the East Silver market's video library. Although completed (at least in this version), the film was presented at Karlovy Vary, a festival requiring international premières, and its festival release was only scheduled for the following summer. This strategy to delay the première carried a clear economic objective, not only to secure the exposure of the film to decision-makers and film critics from the Czech Republic and abroad, but also to extend international distribution opportunities so that they could support the film's circulation in the festival circuit. Although this is an important funding source to recover the investment, produce the film and promote it through the festivals, this strategy can extend the actual cinema release or television broadcast to several years. Almost a year had passed since the cancellation of the radar project and the film had lost its topicality, which partly

explains why, despite its advanced publicity, *Czech Peace* did not have the impact of its predecessor, *Czech Dream*.

Before the official première in 2010, *Czech Peace* participated in other promotional activities, such as the East Silver TV Focus – a programme launched by IDF that same year, which sends selected films to television stations and tries to obtain broadcasting contracts. The world of independent documentary is a fragmented compound of small companies, normally created by the filmmaker to produce one specific film, in order to fit the legal framework that public and private funding as well as official distribution requires. Therefore, the organisations involved in the promotion of documentary film (such as IDF with the East Silver initiatives) are key to granting access to a very complex professional world, the inner rules and key protagonists of which take years to understand and reach. Gaining mastery in such a system is a decisive factor in making the adventure of independent documentary distribution profitable.

Michigan, July 2010

Although extensive involvement in the festival circuit can bring unexpected disadvantages, Klusák and Remunda took this risk and launched *Czech Peace*'s international festival career, while mobilising the network of contacts developed with their previous film. The international première of *Czech Peace* was managed by Michael Moore at his own Traverse City Film Festival in Michigan in July 2010. Once again, his commentary served as an efficient promotional tool to advertise the film on the Taskovski Films' website.[5] From then on, the film began travelling the international festival circuit, but this time the events leading to the selection of the film (such as the Planet doc Review in Poland and the Moscow International Film Festival in Russia) were not as notable as those leading to their previous project's selection (which included Locarno and Rotterdam). Nevertheless, instead of competitive programmes, the film was included in some of the festivals' market catalogues, such as the IDFA's Docs for Sale 2010. In October 2010, the film received special mention in the Czech section of their home festival in Jihlava. Abroad, Arab countries showed special interest in the documentary's subject – more precisely, countries possibly concerned with the American missile shield. The film won awards at the Aljazeera International Documentary Film Festival in 2011, at festivals in Qatar and Egypt (Ismailia Short and Doc Film Festival) and also at the DMZ International Documentary Film Festival in South Korea.

In February 2010, the Romanian Parliament accepted the installation of the US radar site on their territory. Meanwhile, Klusák had already finished his latest film (this time without Remunda), *All for the Good of the World and*

Figure 11.2 Filip Remunda, Michael Moore and Vít Klusák at the international première of *Czech Peace* at the Traverse City Film Festival on 30 July 2010. Courtesy of Hypermarket Film.

Nosovice (*Vše pro dobro světa a Nošovic*) (2010), which began to be shown in international film festivals. Its screening at Hot Docs was accompanied by *Czech Dream*, which was not included in their programme the year of its release. Six years after its première, the film was still circulating in the international festival circuit.

CONCLUSION: THE FESTIVAL DEPENDENCIES OF INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY

With substantial experience working at film festivals in Canada and having travelled the international festival circuit all around the world, the former director of programming for Hot Docs, Sean Farnel, notes the contradictions of too much involvement in film festivals by independent documentarists:

> As important as the festival circuit is to the life of an independent documentary, it can also be a very time consuming and unprofitable venture. Which is why I recommend limiting your active participation, for most films, to a six-month window. We also want you to make another film, so you need to get back to work! (Farnel and Fischer 2012: 227)

As we have seen in the trajectory of the films *Czech Dream* and *Czech Peace*, the active involvement of the filmmakers in film festivals and the industry activities connected to them placed them in a privileged position to achieve international recognition. But at the same time, it delayed the films' première – a side effect that, as demonstrated by the loss of topicality for *Czech Peace*'s subject matter, does not necessarily work to the benefit of the film. Indeed, although festivals offer an alternative space for exhibiting films about controversial or silenced topics, the wider dynamics of topicality and thematic trends also impact their programming strategies. The international festival circuit is influenced by multiple actors with different interests, and evolves with every new innovative and creative project. However, developing reciprocity practices takes years of networking with the festivals and with industry and commercial partners. Once filmmakers start to produce work to high professional standards, commercial strategies must be fulfilled, in order to make their business sustainable. The main consequences – delay of the film's release, and the mobilisation of contacts established during the funding and promotion stages – work in most cases to the benefit of one specific film, but not necessarily the entire *oeuvre* of an author, who needs several years to finish each new documentary.

The international hierarchies established between film festivals emphasise the necessity to combine two types of programming strategies. The first strategy requires being the first one to discover a specific and unique film in terms of topic or creative approach, and the second strategy pertains to the commitment to show the audience a film from a specific place or region. These strategies result not only from competition for the same limited resources (namely, films, filmmakers and industry professionals), but also from their awareness of their role as a unique space for the exhibition of independent works that cannot reach wide audiences through commercial exhibition networks. Analysis of the circulation of films such as *Czech Dream* and *Czech Peace* shows that these dynamics can apply in parallel. In order to optimise the profitability of their festival career, however, a controlled strategy must be developed. In so doing, filmmakers prioritise the exhibition of their films, first as a 'discovery' at the most influential festivals and then as a regular projection elsewhere. The natural tendency of authors to show their work as much (and in as many places) as possible is therefore contradicted by professional constraints developed by film festivals. As Jordi Ambrós, a commissioning editor himself, has pointed out, even though the festival circuit often recognises the artistic value of some creative works developed outside the network (therefore adding cultural value for films and filmmakers), its transformation to economic value generally requires previous participation by the film in industry activities connected to the festivals before its actual exhibition (2009). This explains why some filmmakers strive to meet the demands of the festivals and industry activities, both in terms of production and exhibition calendars, as well as

content and narrative development. The case of these two Czech filmmakers demonstrates that social and artistic commitment and commercial strategies are sometimes contradictory, and that filmmakers eventually have to work along the lines of their industry if they want to make their work economically sustainable. The increasing number of companies and institutions exerting their power over festivals and the actual capacity of these events to collaborate with them while keeping their programming independence remain some of their major challenges. While festivals try to provide filmmakers with production sources, filmmakers must find a balance between their artistic and social goals and the practical requirements of this complex institutional machinery.

Regarding production conditions, the independent character attributed to these films is not as clear as it appears, given the importance of film funds, co-production or pre-sale deals signed with television stations, which in most cases are necessary to complete the production process within an economically sustainable budget. Although film festivals have become the platform without which alternative productions, such as documentaries, could barely exist, the 'creative' and 'independent' labels associated with the films they exhibit must be questioned. On the one hand, it must be acknowledged that the creative approach is a distinctive characteristic that differentiates their programming from that of television, especially with the spread of feature-length documentaries since 2000. On the other hand, the predominance of television representatives in the industry sections incorporated into festival programmes over the past decade has influenced the funding and distribution of films that can fulfil the requirements of television broadcasting in terms of length, aesthetics or content. Reconciling these opposing interests is not an easy task for independent filmmakers. While film festivals are the natural exhibition space for films exploring new documentary aesthetics, narratives and approaches to reality, the strictures of television slots in terms of duration, topicality or narration sometimes prevail or at least limit the creative possibilities explored by filmmakers. Documentaries broadcasted on mainstream television mostly follow the TV reporting style associated with a serial structure and the expository mode coined by Nichols (1991), characterised by the use of explanatory voice-over. Meanwhile, creative documentary's definition gravitates between the exploration of aesthetic and narrative forms (offering alternatives to the expository mode), its conception as a one-of-a-kind piece (as opposed to serial structure) and its cinematographic aim (films created for the big screen). In recent years, creative strategies associated with documentary subgenres, such as the hybridisation of fiction and documentary (docu-drama, mockumentary), animation and documentary, subjectivity (autobiographic, first person documentary, video diary, home movies), appropriation (found footage) and performativity have flourished within the festival circuit. Furthermore, the festival space is currently being surpassed by the recent spread of cross-media

documentary projects that are pushing the boundaries of exhibition and expanding the creative possibilities of the genre. The notion of creative documentary, in which Remunda and Klusák's films definitely fit, seems therefore more appropriate to classify documentaries that have circulated in the festival realm than the term 'independent', because they develop various sorts of dependencies in the process.

Finally, it must be noted that the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis launched a new transitional period in the festival circuit after 2009, as a direct consequence of the sudden decrease in (mainly public) television stations' pre-sales and co-production deals signed at pitching forums. In response, festivals have searched for new partners and initiatives, such as the invitation of NGOs as potential investors in documentary projects, or crowdfunding events that have developed widely since the recent social media revolution.[6]

NOTES

1. This chapter is part of a larger ethnographic and historical study of documentary film festivals in Europe for the completion of a doctoral thesis. Research for this project was made possible by a grant issued by the Training Programme for Researchers of the Department of Education, Universities and Research of the Government of the Basque Country. Fieldwork carried out in the Czech Republic included a two-month research visit to FAMU University in 2007 and attendance at the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival and IDF offices in 2008, 2009 and 2011.
2. For a study of the historical development of documentary festivals in Eastern Europe and the industry sections included in their programmes, see Vallejo (2014).
3. For a study of the relationship between independent productions and public broadcasting in the US, see Zimmermann (1982).
4. Commissioning editors coming from north-western Europe tend to consider 100,000 euros an 'adequate rate for Eastern European films'. Declaration by Rada Šešić, an Eastern Europe documentary film expert and programmer of the IDFA and Sarajevo Film Festival, during the roundtable 'Documentary Filmmaking in the Balkans', organised during the third edition of the Documentarist Film Festival (25 June 2010, Akbank Sanat, Istanbul).
5. Information available at http://www.taskovskifilms.com/2010/10/michael-moore-presents-czech-peace-world-premiere-at-traverse-city-film-festival-2010/, accessed 12 November 2013.
6. For a study of the new funding strategies developed by European documentary festivals to face the decrease in investment by television stations since the onset of the economic crisis, see Vallejo (2013).

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CHAPTER 12

Material Traces of Lebanon: A Documentary Aesthetics of Feeling in the Art Gallery

Tess Takahashi

Since the mid-1990s, artists have explored the status of documentary reference and the material trace in the gallery with increasing frequency. In part, this line of investigation stems from a situation in which the power of documentary images has been met with a widespread cultural uncertainty about their trustworthiness. As Hito Steyerl and Maria Lind write: 'The double bind is strong: on the one hand documentary images are more powerful than ever. On the other hand, we have less and less trust in documentary representations' (2008: 1). In response to this uncertainty, artists and filmmakers alike have turned increasingly to playful structures that challenge the traditional documentary modes that Bill Nichols has described as 'discourses of sobriety', those that 'regard their relation to the real as direct, immediate, and transparent' and are 'seldom receptive to "make-believe" characters, events, or entire worlds' (Nichols 1992: 3–4). Elsewhere, I have described this trend as a 'speculative' form of documentary, one that challenges sobriety, in that it utilises experimental modes to speculate about the line between fiction and non-fiction, employing structures like ironic framing, fantasy, imaginative reenactment, lyrical interpretation, invented characters, fake documents, experimental animation and the creative deployment of found footage (Takahashi 2011). While many critics have attributed this recent explosion of speculation in the arts to epistemological anxiety spurred on by the proliferation of digital media, I should point out that such experiments with documentary, mockumentary and overt fakery are part of a long tradition within documentary cinema. What, then, is at the root of artists' recent documentary investigations of the material trace?

Speculative forms of documentary art open up room for independent critique by emphasising not only the uncertain boundary between fiction and fact, but the indefinite margin between evidence and affect housed in the material traces of traumatic historical events. In the mid-1990s, artists' interest in the status of documentary evidence coincided with the digital image's supposed loss of photographic indexicality as a guarantee of presence.[1] While anxiety about the ontological differences between digital and chemically developed photographs and film alike has largely dissipated, the material trace continues to have an uncertain, even paradoxical status in the work of many contemporary artists. These documentary artists frequently interrogate the authenticity of found objects and analogue image technologies like 8mm celluloid reels, chemically developed contact sheets and family photos. Yet even as such speculative art works routinely question the material trace's capacity to serve as evidence, the emotional force of the indexical sign never appears to be doubt.

Rather, the often fictionalised, speculative stories that regularly frame the traces of political events and national traumas in contemporary art seem tailored to amplify their affective resonance, working to produce a new contingent form of documentary assurance that relies on the spectator's strong emotional response.[2] By documentary assurance, I mean the ways in which a documentary secures its evidentiary status – a function that continues to remain important, even in work that relies heavily on fictional modes. It may seem ironic that these playful documentary artworks evoke the weight of political and emotional magnitude via their speculation about material traces associated with 'sobering' events, such as war, genocide and the displacement of whole populations. However, I believe that this coming together of epistemological uncertainty with emotional force in the form of the material trace performs two important functions: it simultaneously re-grounds its documentary assurance in feeling and opens up a safe space for independent political critique under conditions where such speech might have unwanted consequences. I call this ambivalent rhetorical form a documentary aesthetics of feeling.

Speculative forms of documentary have been employed especially by artists whose work considers recent events in the Middle East. Such forms have been used by independent documentary artists like Emily Jacir, Walid Raad, Michael Rakowitz, Julia Meltzer and David Thorne and Paris- and Beirut-based Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige. Speculative modes of political independent documentary have become the subject of an array of recent international art exhibits, including Bard College's 'The Green Room: Reconsidering the Document and Contemporary Art' (2008), the Institute for Contemporary Photography's 'Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art' (2008) and 'Documenta 13' (2012), as well as a host of smaller galleries.[3] Exemplary of this trend toward speculative forms of

documentary that incorporate fiction, irony and affect in an effort to produce a safe space for political critique is the work of artists Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige, who use speculative forms of documentary to examine the legacy of the Lebanese Civil Wars via its material traces.

DOCUMENTARY IN LEBANON: THE ANECDOTAL AND THE LATENT MEMORY

Hadjithomas and Joreige belong to a group of artists who explore the history of the Lebanese Civil Wars and their aftermath through to the present day, among them Walid Raad, Rabih Mroué, Akraam Zataari, Jayce Saloum and Jamelie Hassan. The Lebanese Civil Wars (1975–91) were a time of continual uncertainty, when a number of secular and religious factions vied for control, a situation accompanied by random violence, politically motivated detentions, individual disappearances and widespread displacement of the population. Part of the challenge of producing documentary about the Lebanese Civil Wars has to do with the complicated nature of the conflict. As Alan Gilbert notes, the roster of players included:

> Various Lebanese political parties and their militias (Lebanese Forces, Mourabitoun, Amal, Hezbollah, Communist Party, and Progressive Socialist Party, among others), armies (Lebanese, American, French and Israeli, among others) and additional Arab militias, armies and parties (Palestinian, Syrian, Iranian, Libyan, Iraqi and Saudi, among others). (2002: 38)

'If that last sentence seems somewhat dizzying', Gilbert continues,

> It only hints at the tangled historical knot that is the Lebanese Civil Wars of 1975–91. The many factions and their various backers, as well as the reasons and motivations for their decade and a half of internecine combat, may never become clear. (2002: 38)

In their exploration of the contested historical versions of the Lebanese Civil Wars and its ongoing repercussions, Hadjithomas and Joreige, like many of their peers, utilise speculative, playful, fictionalised forms of documentary that inquire about what can be known, rather than insisting on facts. Hadjithomas and Joreige employ both actual and invented documents, mixing them with fictional, often absurdist rhetorical modes. Walid Raad speaks for many in this generation of artists when he argues that his own imaginary organisation, The Atlas Group:

> Produces and collects objects and stories that should not be examined through the conventional and reductive binary of fiction and nonfiction. We proceed from the consideration that this distinction is a false one – in many ways, not least of which is that many of the elements that constitute our imaginary documents originate from the historical world. (Gilbert 2002: 40)

Some critics of this mode, like artist Jamelie Hassan, have insisted that it is dangerous to produce fictionalised accounts of the history of the Lebanese Civil Wars, for fear that such interpretations could raise doubts about the real suffering and injustices that occurred (Hassan 2005). However, Raad insists that fictional framings of actual events and invented materials do attempt to get at the real physical and psychological effects of the Lebanese Civil Wars on a traumatised population (Gilbert 2002: 40). Understandably, such intimate and immaterial affective responses rarely make it into official government histories. Rather, they live on in individual memory, as well as in cycles of popular memory and material culture. On a practical level, the lack of documentation of affective experience (the feelings of doubt, uncertainty and fear that imbue Lebanon's still recent and devastating history) has prompted many Lebanese artists, including Hadjithomas and Joreige, to examine the intersection between the material trace, immaterial affect and the function of memory. In so doing, they attempt to represent the historical memory of intimate, personal experience and translate it into the realm of the social, in order to produce a form of testimony that intervenes in the contemporary political sphere.

Hadjithomas and Joreige investigate the subversive potential of the historical remnants of the Lebanese Civil War through two recurring concepts: the 'anecdotal' and the 'latent'. The anecdote's personal, minor, unofficial status can present potential resistance to official state histories. Because it lacks the supposed rigour and careful evidence of an academic history, the anecdote is fragile and malleable, travelling through time, by word of mouth, based on individual memory and hearsay. While the anecdote can move through cycles of elaboration and across social fields like gossip, however distorted and fictionalised, it carries a grain of emotional truth that can attain the power of cultural myth. Citing Hannah Arendt, Hadjithomas and Joreige write that anecdotes are 'moments of truth . . . moments [that] arise unexpectedly like oases in the desert' (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2003b: 63). The concept of latency, like the anecdote, suggests a truth that can come to the surface unexpectedly. For Hadjithomas and Joreige, the latent implies the potential of that which lies in waiting, sometimes barely visible, unconscious or dormant. It offers a confirmation of presence that requires neither complete legibility, nor full comprehension. Like the anecdote, the latent carries a grain of emotional truth that is sensed, rather than observed or proven. Like memory, both the

anecdotal and the latent function in temporal cycles, as they arise and reveal themselves when triggered by outside events. In their documentary work in the gallery, Hadjithomas and Joreige engage the cyclical temporality of the anecdotal and the latent through the structural repetition of the digital loop as a way of exploring the traces of memory, emotion and division that continue on after the end of the conflicts.

For Hadjithomas and Joreige, the emotional resonances of the anecdotal and the latent function in ways that are both subversive and political in a space that is largely independent. In looking to other means of writing history and telling the stories that matter most, Hadjithomas and Joreige examine the physical and affective remnants of a formerly full and living experience via film, video, photographs, manipulated postcards and maps, rolls of unprocessed film, physical ruins and personal testimony. The work described in this chapter was installed in *Videoworks: Wish We Could Tell* at A-Space Gallery in Toronto in conjunction with Images Festival (20 March to 17 April 2009) and consisted of a range of Hadjithomas and Joreige's installation works made over the previous decade; all but one, *Khiam 2000–2007* (2008), were no more than a few minutes long.

In part, the gallery space of a small, not-for-profit artist-run centre, such as that of A-Space, can be considered 'independent' because its curatorial choices are not subjected to a long chain of approval, making such institutions somewhat freer to exhibit what they want. While Hadjithomas and Joreige have exhibited widely on an international scale in venues both large and small, such independent galleries remain important for documentary art. To some degree, one might assume that the supposed independence of the art world from politics is enough to produce a safe context of reception for political art. However, I would argue that the speculative formal structures employed by many documentary artists who take up Middle Eastern politics allows them to speak critically in ways that are both earnest and ironic, thereby opening up a space for independent political critique that slips under the radar of government censorship. One of the formal structures that encourages the undecidability between straightforward and satirical forms of speech is that of the loop.

THE SPECTATOR IN THE GALLERY, THE LOOP AND THE MATERIAL TRACE

The structure of the loop is thematically important for the work of Hadjithomas and Joreige, who look to the aftermath of the Lebanese Civil Wars and the cycles of memory and cultural practice that underlie present conditions. For these reasons, while they have also made documentaries and narrative features, their use of the digital loop in the independent space of the gallery constitutes

an important part of their practice. However, for many artists, the loop functions as no more than a convenient technological set-up to accommodate the peripatetic wanderings of the gallerygoer (and the limited labour of gallery staff). Since the mid-1990s, the moving image loop has become a fixture, whose iterations generally fall in two patterns.[4] First, there are those installations that approximate cinematic conditions, in which spectators sit, walk or stand in relation to a single screen, upon which an image plays in the ubiquitous looping form. Unlike traditional cinema, in the gallery the ambulatory spectator can move around and stay for whatever length of time he or she chooses, in a room that may be darkened or illuminated. However, the orientation of the spectator focuses on a single screen. All of Hadjithomas and Joreige's loops employ this mode. Second, there are single 'works' in the gallery that assemble a multiplicity of screens, objects and/or text in a space that the spectator must navigate. This second category draws on a form of mobile spectatorship that is crucially linked to our physical navigation of the ongoing proliferation of mobile screens, where our bodies and our attention moves in and around screens.[5] While the works by Hadjithomas and Joreige that I examine here are described as distinct works, their proximity to one another in a larger exhibition means that a spectator must navigate the demands of competing works and read them in relation to one another, an activity that encourages multiple interpretations.

The speculative documentary status of all of Hadjithomas and Joreige's work is complicated by anecdotal accounts of characters who are overtly fictional, such as Abdallah Farah. In this way, speculative documentary often functions as a parable in the form of a short allegorical story that illustrates a greater emotional truth. Hadjithomas and Joreige posit Farah as a pyromaniac photographer, who during the Lebanese Civil Wars allegedly recorded the devastation of Beirut by altering old tourist postcards to reflect the city's changed state. In the aftermath of the wars, Farah supposedly continued to take, but no longer develop, the photographs he shot. Rather, he made careful records of the latent images and placed the rolls in a drawer. Hadjithomas and Joreige ask: 'At what moment, and to what purpose, would Abdallah Farah choose to develop his films – to subject his images to light?' (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2002: 45) Such a revelation, they suggest, could only take place once the circumstances of the country and the conditions for encountering images became conducive for such a 'revelation' to occur. These images of concealment expose Farah's aborted process and the ongoing trauma that supposedly prevented him from displaying his photographs to the world. This withholding of images produces in the spectator feelings of curiosity, empathy and loss, even as she understands Farah as fictional.

These photographs of the material traces of Farah's inability to move forward also point metaphorically to the emotional consequences of the

Lebanese Civil Wars on a generation of artists. As Hadjithomas and Joreige write, they come from a 'region where it is not always easy to make images – or rather show images' – due to ongoing censorship and what continues to be an uneasy truce between various political and religious parties years after the end of the Lebanese Civil Wars (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2003b: 71). Through the figure of Farah, they suggest that the conditions are still not yet conducive to having certain images – straight, sober documentary images – come to light. However, the indirect authorship attributed to fictional characters like Farah allows art-making to function as a safe and independent form of political speech about the continued danger of direct expression.

The fictional story of Abdallah Farah in this 'documentary frame' has the effect of a parable, pointing to a real loss that continues through to the present. It produces an aesthetic of feeling that evokes an emotional truth. In the following section, I examine how Hadjithomas and Joreige use the gallery loop to connect the political and affective registers of experience. For them, the loop functions as a structure that reflects upon changes in material traces of past conflicts as they cycle through the points of the calendar, the rituals of politics, the time of emotional memory and the progression of history. As we shall see, the structure of the loop also allows for the spectator's reception of the work to vacillate between reading it as straightforward political critique and as personal meditation on loss.

CYCLES OF POLITICS, MEMORY AND AFFECT

In the context of fictionalised authorship, invented images and uncertain rhetorical framing, Hadjithomas and Joreige's digital loops portray the ephemeral material traces of a legacy of feeling in the larger population of Beirut. In this work, which draws on real events and situations, Hadjithomas and Joreige utilise the loop in two major ways: first, as a way of describing the cycles of politics and the ongoing political, religious and emotional divisions that have continued long after the Lebanese Civil Wars came to an end; and, second, as a way to trace the succession of individual and collective memory and affect. *Always with You* (2001–8) and *Distracted Bullets* (2005) are short video pieces that draw attention to ongoing social, religious and political divisions within Lebanon.

Always with You's six-minute loop begins with a silent tracking shot through the streets of Beirut, past a sea of red and blue election posters bearing strangely sentimental slogans and the faces of candidates running for election to Lebanon's Parliament in 2000. The posters seem to be everywhere and impossible to escape; indeed, they are 'always with you', as the campaign slogan of one candidate promises. The tracking continues, and the

once-bright posters become faded and tattered. Soon it becomes clear that this footage crosses not only the geographical space of the city, but also traverses an unidentified period of weeks or months, as one track fades into another. At the close of *Always with You*'s loop, all that remains are red and blue scraps of paper peeling away from the stone walls of buildings, mere palimpsests of a long-past election. The material traces of these now long-gone posters are captured here. At this point, the loop begins again, as does the historical cycle of political elections, the hopes they raise and the differences they make visible.

Like *Always with You*, *Distracted Bullets* points to ongoing political tensions without taking sides. *Distracted Bullets*' digital loop documents an unofficial and ephemeral form of public display that is tied to historical cycles of celebration, and reveals lingering frictions among the many political and religious factions that call Beirut home. The piece presents a series of statically framed videos of the Beit Mery Metn area of Beirut taken over five nights of celebration: the Feast of the Cross; the night Emile Lahoud was re-elected President of the Republic; New Year's Eve; the night Nabih Berri was re-elected Speaker of the Parliament; and the night Samir Geagea, head of the Lebanese Forces, was released from prison after eleven years in jail. Each event, celebrated by a different group in the city, is marked by fireworks and shooting in different, but proximate, neighbourhoods (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2005). Shot in the dark from a ridge above the city, the flares and sparks of fireworks and bullets flash and fade in distinct pockets of the city below, as other neighbourhoods remain dark and quiet, revealing ongoing religious and political tensions years after the war's official end. The guns raised to express celebration, the artists note, are most likely the very same ones used during the Civil War. The linked videos 'establish a topography of the town and its divisions', Hadjithomas and Joreige write, 'the parts of the town which joyfully celebrate and those which remain silent in the face [of] that same event' (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2005). The evidence of that celebration is fleeting, mere flashes of gunfire and fireworks that die in an instant. The title of this piece, *Distracted Bullets*, is a literal translation of the Arabic term for 'stray bullet'. The artists imagine the potential these celebratory bullets have to create unsuspecting victims and the conflict that could easily erupt. While the casual viewer may not understand the political subtleties, the cyclical, calendric display of political and religious division rings clear as the loop begins again.

Always with You and *Distracted Bullets* capture minor events and ephemeral occurrences in order to challenge the proposition that the divisions that fuelled the Lebanese Civil Wars have been resolved. These works gesture toward the cyclical nature of public political life and the simmering differences that remain in a city torn apart by civil war for much of the past forty years. In this way, they capture a larger picture of a politically and emotionally fractured society. Two other pieces by Hadjithomas and Joreige, *Lasting Images* (2003a)

Figure 12.1 Night view of fireworks and bullets in Beirut in *Distracted Bullets* (dirs Hadjithomas and Joreige, 2005). Courtesy of CRG Gallery (New York), In SItu (Paris) and The Third Line (Dubai).

and *Khiam 2000–2007*, use the loop in a related way, telescoping in from the overtly public sphere to examine the function of personal memory, the trace and the status of witnessing that individuals continue to work through today. *Lasting Images* and *Khiam*, which I examine next, explore the ways in which material traces of historical evidence bear witness to the personal, affective experience of political kidnapping and detention.

Unlike *Always with You* and *Distracted Bullets*, which were shot and screened on digital video, *Lasting Images* was shot originally on Super 8 film and screened as a digital transfer on a gallery loop. *Lasting Images* presents a different kind of ephemeral document, an original Super 8 film that was supposedly shot by Joreige's uncle, Junior Kettaneh. Kettaneh, like 17,000 other Lebanese citizens, was kidnapped during the Lebanese Civil Wars and never heard from again. The story goes that in 2001 – a decade after the war's official end – the artists discovered the undeveloped film amongst the remnants of a fire, sixteen years after Kettaneh's 1985 abduction. The images it housed remained latent until chemically developed by the artists. Due to the fire's heat, they write: 'The film came out veiled and white, with a barely noticeable presence that vanished immediately from the screen. We searched within the

layers of the film itself, attempting to create the reappearance of lasting images' (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2003a).

As one watches the short loop over and over again, the ghosts of recognisable figures appear: 'a shadow, a hand can be seen, a boat, the port of Beirut, the roof of a house, a group of three persons, soon joined by a fourth' (Hadjithomas and Joreige 2003a). In themselves, these shadowy images tell us very little about Joreige's uncle, the circumstances of his abduction or the state of the country then, now or at the time of its discovery. The original Super 8 film bears the marks of the fire, whose heat obliterated its images, just as the events of the Lebanese Civil Wars resulted in obliterated documents, halted lives and forgotten stories. Like memory, these Super 8 images are blurry and fragmentary. More important than legibility, the piece suggests, is the continued and cyclical process of searching and the sense that certain things must not be forgotten. As Joreige said in a talk at A-Space Gallery, Jalal Toufik writes that we become zombies when we can no longer see ghosts (Joreige 2009). The story that surrounds the 8mm celluloid film, as a material trace of Kettaneh's existence, makes it a particularly resonant and poignant object that produces its veiled, but powerful political critique in the form of a personal memorial.

Like *Lasting Images*, *Khiam 2000–2007* – the longest piece installed in the A-Space exhibit – also interrogates the politics of latency, the material remnant of past events and the cyclical shifts in the way we remember.

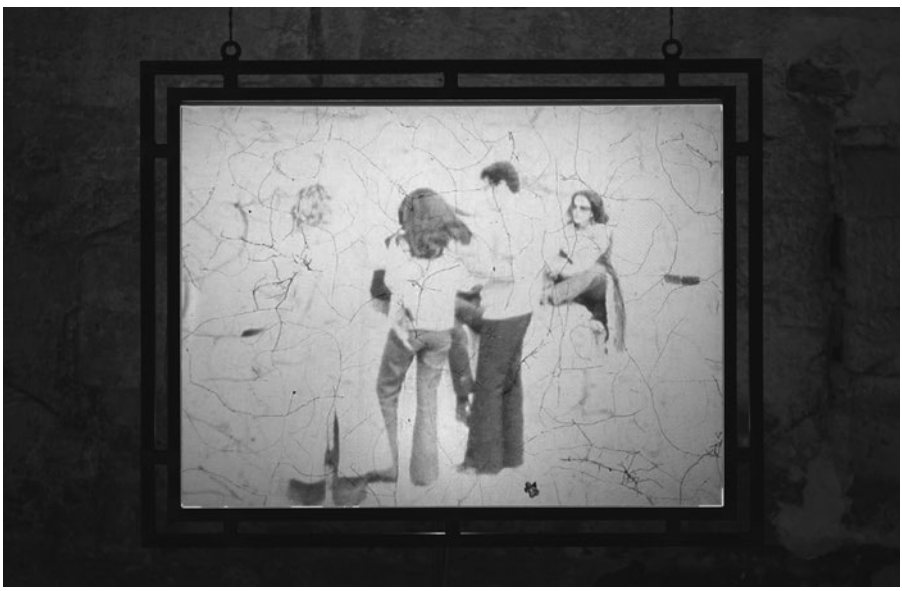

Figure 12.2 White and veiled images of a group of three people in *Lasting Images* (dirs Hadjithomas and Joreige, 2003). Courtesy of CRG Gallery (New York), In SItu (Paris) and The Third Line (Dubai).

Khiam 2000–2007, which bears the name of an Israeli-run detention camp in southern Lebanon, was presented as a double-channel work with attached headphones and a bench, one screen showing the original fifty-two minute documentary from 2000, the other a shorter loop shot in 2007. The first channel features the talking-head testimonies of six former, long-time inmates of Khiam. Significantly, five of those chosen by Hadjithomas and Joreige are Communists – a group whose history during the Lebanese Civil Wars has been largely erased. In these first interviews, held shortly after their liberation from the camp, the former detainees focus not on the political conditions of their detention, but on the importance of their own secret creative activities in a place where tools and pencils – and thus writing and art – were forbidden. The tape includes very little of the inmates' descriptions of the regular torture and interrogation they suffered. Rather, their stories detail processes like the removal of lead from a small battery to make a pencil, or the time spent rubbing an olive stone against the floor of a cell in order to polish it into the bead of a necklace. The piece ends with static close-ups of the delicate, fragile, decorative objects they created: a tiny woven basket, a crocheted flower and a comb adorned with carvings. These are supposedly the only material traces of the inmates' creativity and will to survive.

Figure 12.3 Khiam detention site in *Khiam 2000–2007* (dirs Hadjithomas and Joreige, 2008). Courtesy of CRG Gallery (New York), In SItu (Paris) and The Third Line (Dubai).

Khiam 2000–2007's second channel features a second round of interviews, taken seven years after the first. In it, the former detainees of Khiam are older, and they no longer focus on the objects that once brought joy and purpose to their lives. Instead, they focus on the absence of the physical site of the camp itself, which was destroyed in the war of 2006, leaving it a mere pile of rubble. Surprisingly, the former detainees say that they would have liked to keep the Khiam detention site exactly the same, to have the space that bore the marks of their creativity and ingenuity left intact. Hadjithomas and Joreige assert that the physical structure of the camp, only visible to the outside world between its liberation in May 2000 and destruction in July 2006, now exists as an image latent in the testimony and memory of these former detainees. In the installation of *Khiam 2000–2007* as a double loop, Hadjithomas and Joreige stage the relationship between historical time, emotional time and the material traces of the Lebanese Civil Wars. By focusing on the inmates' affective relationship to material objects and physical structures, Hadjithomas and Joreige allow their political critique of the conditions that led to the detention of these six inmates to resonate at a latent level. Through this kind of testimony, Hadjithomas and Joreige also comment on the absence of official accounts of torture and detention, which now survive only in the memories of those who lived it – and in documentaries such as these.

CONCLUSION: SPECULATIVE DOCUMENTARY AND AESTHETIC OF FEELING

The looped video works by Hadjithomas and Joreige discussed in this chapter formally and rhetorically allegorise the cycles of public and private memory under which material and affective traces of the Lebanese Civil Wars continue to circulate. It is these emotional, political and religious affinities that underlie official histories of a period characterised by, as Gilbert asserts, a complexity that makes any stable account of these conflicts impossible. However, in some ways the very instability of the official history opens up space for independent critical intervention. Documentary installations like those of Hadjithomas and Joreige, with their seemingly problematic conjunction of material trace and fiction, intellectual understanding and ephemeral feeling, invite the spectator to meditate on the bewildering emotional and epistemological status of the events of the Lebanese Civil Wars and their aftermath.

Today, in our fragmented, seemingly endless and increasingly redundant visual field, the omnipresent loops of the gallery installation, such as those used by Hadjithomas and Joreige, may seem to simply add to the visual noise we encounter on a daily basis. However, I suggest that the gallery loop not only mimics the conditions of, but counters, what Aylish Wood has described

as the 'distributed attention' of our contemporary encounters with images and information (Wood 2008: 220). On the one hand, our glances at the looping image as we move quickly through the space of the gallery can result in distraction and incomprehension. On the other hand, sustained time spent watching a short loop over and over, as one can also do in the space of the gallery, may facilitate a critical understanding that resonates at both an emotional and critical level. Either way, the latent political critique of Hadjithomas and Joreige's images can rise to the surface unexpectedly, reverberating between those registers. In this way, such speculative documentaries produce parables of the political events they reference in ways that evade government censorship.

This is the kind of space galleries provide to the documentary: not only a space where installations and loops replace theatrical spectatorship, but also a place enabling a blurring of fiction and documentary that produces new affective significances in regards to sobering historical experiences. The gallery has emerged as a space where these emotional truths, grounded in real or imagined memories, can more easily eschew governmental control. In this context, the work of Hadjithomas and Joreige prompts us to think not only about how we produce the authenticity of a material document in the digital age. Rather, the formal conjunction of material trace and uncertain framing exemplified in Hadjithomas and Joreige's video work produces in the spectator less a concern for the distinction between fact and fiction, than a prompt to consider the kinds of rhetorical and emotional value that we attach to various forms of documentary art.

NOTES

1. Carrie Lambert-Beatty describes these as 'para-fictional' modes. To a large degree, I concur with her assessment that such practices emerge from a period characterised by 'the epistemological shock that the rapid mainstreaming of the Internet has caused' (Lambert-Beatty 2009: 78).
2. While I cannot pursue them here, there are suggestive affinities with Raymond Williams' 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1977: 128–9).
3. See also the Greek National Museum's 'Testimonies: Between Fiction and Reality' (2003–4), the Australian Center for the Moving Image's 'Proof: Pictorialised, Constructed, The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes' (2004–5), the Toronto Power Plant's 'Not Quite How I Remember It' (2008), Berlin's KW Institute for Contemporary Art's 'Seeing is Believing' (2011) and the last three Documenta exhibitions (2002, 2007, 2012).
4. For an expanded discussion, see Turvey et al. (2003).
5. Certainly, various forms of mobile spectatorship have been around since the beginnings of the moving image, with early cinema spectators encountering moving images at fairgrounds in the form of the kinetoscope, where one moved from one standing device to another. Spectators also encountered situations similar to those produced by present-day moving-image installation in the form of Hale's Tours, where spectators were seated in train cars. As

historians of the function of the cinema in modernity have argued, both the seated spectatorial conditions of the theatre and the shorter, looped structures of the kinetoscope, phenokistoscope and zoopraxiscope worked to negotiate the shocks of modern city life. See also Benjamin and Adorno's writing on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1960s and 1970s, gallerygoers encountered video art on monitors in a range of configurations, much of which was thematically, formally or technologically connected to the apparent 'nowness' associated with television and new modes of surveillance. This can be seen in works that incorporated live televisual feeds, live feedback loops and taped recordings.

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CHAPTER 13

Autonomous Navigation? Multiplicity and Self-reflexive Aesthetics in Sergio Basso's Documentary Film *Giallo a Milano* and Web Documentary *Made in Chinatown*

Hilary Chung and Bernadette Luciano

In recent decades, many Italian filmmakers have been turning to the documentary medium in response to the lack of commitment by public and private broadcasters to the production of programmes of cultural significance (Bertozzi 2008: 305). Unfortunately, the contestable funding available for their production (mostly local, regional or special interest) is limited, as is documentary distribution beyond the festival circuit. The emergence and evolution of the web documentary has provided an opportunity for new channels of distribution and increasingly foregrounds the role of the user/viewer in their engagement, interaction and negotiation with the reality documented. The key distinction between linear documentary and web documentary is the latter's potential for interactivity, to the extent that some, such as photographer and multi-platform journalist Gerald Holubowicz (2011), have argued for a change of term to Interactive Documentary or idoc. The case of Italian filmmaker Sergio Basso's *Giallo a Milano/Made in Chinatown* offers a rare example where the director intentionally creates both a successful linear documentary film (2009) and a fully fledged web documentary (2010), where neither is subordinate to the other. These two 'journey' documentaries, borrowing Stella Bruzzi's term, are structured around encounters, and multiple subjective perspectives are represented as the narrative 'travels' in search of people and voices (2000: 99). While one form of travel is more fixed, with the driver/director collocating what might seem fragmentary or unrelated images or events, the web documentary allows for a passenger-/spectator-driven, random 'hitchhiking' (Gaudenzi 2009: 17) that determines the trajectory of engagement. The focus of this chapter is to explore the implications of this

straddling across the two forms for authorship and point of view, audience and political advocacy.

GIALLO A MILANO: FROM POETIC DOCUMENTARY FILM TO EXPOSITORY WEB DOCUMENTARY

The documentary *Giallo a Milano* (dir. Basso, 2009) was sparked by the violent confrontation between the police and the oldest Chinese community in Europe, in Via Paolo Sarpi in Milan, Italy, in April 2007. While Sergio Basso's film is clearly a response to an event that highlights mounting tensions between Italians and Chinese; it can also be seen as a response to the stereotyping of the Chinese in the Italian media as illegal and exploited immigrant workers crammed into sweat shops undermining the 'made-in-Italy' brand.[1]

Basso was propelled by his own disappointment at what he calls the media disinformation about the Chinese community. With a degree in Chinese Studies from the University of Venice, the experience of having lived in China and of being assistant director to Gianni Amelio's feature film based in China, *The Missing Star* (dir. Amelio, 2006), Sergio Basso is uniquely positioned to make a film, which, at face value, appears to be a documentary about the Chinese community in Milan. Yet the documentary was conceived of as a 'film', which is to be distinguished from reportage, where style and aesthetics are paramount. In content and theme, *Giallo a Milano* joins the raft of documentaries in Italy dealing with migration.[2] These films interrogate the 'new' immigration to Italy, which, over the past few decades, has turned the country from a nation of emigrants to a destination culture for immigrants and has been presented in the mass media as one of Italy's greatest challenges. Cristina Piccino notes that for their films to be both political and poetic, documentary makers need to find a personalised way and adequate interpretive tools for dealing with migration as a complex social issue (2008: 63), which, we argue, is the case with Basso's film.

When considered in terms of Bill Nichols' modes of representation, *Giallo a Milano* combines aspects of the reflexive, the poetic and the observational modes: '[R]eflexive documentary prods the viewer to a heightened form of consciousness about his ore [sic] her relation to a documentary and what it represents' (Nichols 2012: 197). It makes an awareness of the issues of realism and representation, and hence the engagement of the viewer, a central part of the film's agenda. The film begins by presenting itself self-reflexively as a crime thriller, both through the wordplay of the title and the use of black panels with stark white intertitles. The first panel reads: 'They say that to make a thriller you need 15 ingredients' and these fifteen ingredients become the designations for the series of fifteen chapters that comprise the documentary. The

perceptive viewer will grasp that what is actually being foregrounded is the process of construction of the putative thriller, rather than simply its form. Thus, at the narrative centre of the film is the process of its own construction, thereby drawing attention to the ways in which viewers' attitudes – in this case, towards Chinese immigrants in Italy – are constructed.

The complex construction of Basso's poetic documentary is accompanied by a dramaturgical aesthetic, which sustains its narrative tension. As Nichols suggests: 'The poetic mode has many facets, but they all emphasize the ways in which the filmmaker's voice gives fragments of the historical world a formal, aesthetic integrity peculiar to the film itself' (2012: 166). The film comprises fragments in multiple formats and media, including actual news footage of the violence in Via Paolo Sarpi with recreated voice-over, excerpts from a Taiwanese TV documentary, animation sequences, a clapperboard performance sequence with unrelated subtitles, home movies in Super 8 and miniDV formats and black and white family photos of the first Chinese in Italy in the twenties, brought to life with light animation. Seemingly 'staged' intimate encounters are accompanied by other footage of both members of the Chinese community and Italians who live and work among them. This is presented in observational mode in a range of settings, including a singing lesson, a massage parlour and an obstetrics and gynecology outpatient clinic. A further layer of multiplicity is provided by the documentary's subjects, which include recent Chinese arrivals, as well as second, third or fourth generation Chinese Italians (speaking many variants and hybrids of Italian and Chinese), as well as Italians who claim authority on the Chinese in Milan. Footage portraying seventeen different social contexts is presented in short segments interspersed throughout the film. Narrative and aesthetic coherence is only provided by the documentary's presentation as a crime thriller in fifteen chapters. The play on words within the Italian title *Giallo a Milano*, where *giallo* (yellow) also refers to a mystery story or thriller, enables Basso to position the Chinese presence in Milan as a mystery to be unravelled. Resolution is offered via the counter-discursive documentary gesture, which enables the heretofore silenced or unheard Chinese community to 'speak for themselves'. In this respect, Basso's film adopts a documentary strategy that, to borrow Jay Ruby's words, attempts to provide a 'voice to the voiceless', also allowing spectators to 'hear people tell their stories and observe their lives instead of being told what they think and the meaning of their behavior' (1991: 51).

However, Basso draws attention to the problematic he deliberately engages with, as his subjects only speak through him via the highly constructed nature of the documentary itself. Examples of overt constructedness abound. One of the more subtle examples occurs at the beginning of the film where a recreated voice-over is played over actual news footage, purporting to be broadcast from a non-existent news channel 'TGX' (Chapter 1 'Big trouble. Better off dead').

A Chinese clapperboard performance in Chapter 9 'A child in danger' is presented via subtitles as telling the story of Chinese immigration to Italy. The content of the performance is entirely unrelated to the subtitles.[3] Animation is used to visually represent the story of an illegal immigrant turned police informer whose identity could not be revealed, but who appears to narrate his own story in voice-over (Chapter 2 'If only the dead could speak'). Perhaps the most moving and thought-provoking technique used by Basso, which lies at the heart of his documentary practice, is represented by a number of intense emotional and/or intimate scenes, which appear so natural that they seem to be staged or re-enacted. Basso's use of complex mise en scène, including lengthy engagement with his subjects in preparation for a planned scene, and his commitment to the representation of their lives is in distinct contrast to further aspects of Nichols' definition of the poetic – namely, that 'the filmmaker's relation to those who appear before the camera generally holds less importance than the overall proposal or perspective shaped from the resulting images' (2012: 157). Significant scenes include: Shi Yang's argument with his parents at the Rotonda della Besana in Chapter 11 'An alibi', revealing both their anxiety over his homosexuality and the precarious state of their own relationship; the heart-wrenching telephone conversation between sweatshop workers Yin Rui and Yin Fang and their young son, whom they have left in China in the care of his grandparents (Chapter 5 'A motive'); and the intimate conversation between David and Isabella in their bed where they reveal to each other as well as to the camera the toll the move to Italy has taken on their relationship (Chapter 15 'A confession'). This subtle engagement of the audience is achieved through Basso's scrupulous observational approach and combines with his unequivocal political agenda to construct an audience, which is able to deconstruct both the narrative of the film and their own attitudes.

For Paula Rabinowitz, in the rhetoric of political documentary, the audience itself becomes a potential subject of agency (1994: 8), but Basso wants to do more than preach to the converted. The web documentary version, with its English title *Made in Chinatown* (2010), hosted by the influential national newspaper *Corriere della Sera* (headquartered in Milan) hugely extends potential audiences. While the dominant audience profile of the *Corriere* site is educated, middle-class and middle-aged (Alexa), it was Basso's hope that it would also be able to engage his target audience – the young future citizens and decision-makers of Italy. As a partner to the documentary film, *Made in Chinatown* extends the original documentary project into the interactive medium of the web and potentially offers greater narrative agency to the user/viewer. It was launched on 15 March 2010, after the documentary had had festival showings, but before a wider audience had access to it. Now, with plans for the production of a DVD having fallen through, this continuing web presence remains the primary access point to the documentary project.

Basso's cross-platform pitching is far more sophisticated than simply creating a web presence for his documentary film. Both projects were planned in parallel during filming, with Basso and his producer actively negotiating with *Corriere della Sera* for access to its website. With his target audience in mind, Basso created a complex interactive web documentary platform that offers access to a closed dataset of fifty-eight short video segments, each one to two minutes long, in line with industry norms for user tolerance (see, for example, Agarwal 2011). They feature both selected re-edited material from the documentary and extra footage, including additional characters, all of which is organised thematically via three navigational choices: a map of Milan, archetypes and characters. These intersect one another, meaning that it is not necessary to return to the main menu in order to navigate deeply into the site.

NON-LINEAR INTERACTIVE NARRATIVE JOURNEYS

Lev Manovich (2001) differentiates the documentary and the web documentary in terms of the relationship between narrative logic and datasets. The documentary consists of content that has been selected and edited by the filmmaker into its final, locked form with which the audience engages via a solely video interface. The form is linear by nature and only allows very limited, if any, navigation. The web documentary offers its datasets for the public to manipulate, enabling each user/active participant to follow his/her own path through the content, experiencing and engaging with it in new ways. The key differential is interactivity by the user/viewer, but equally crucial is the way in which interactivity is defined and experienced, in terms of the relationships created in non-linear narrative between the artefact, the technology, the author and the user.

Digital media theorist Aarseth's analysis of 'active feed-back functions' (1994: 60) provides a useful starting point in understanding the ways in which a user can be active when he or she engages with a non-linear narrative. The explorative function, where the user decides which path to take within preset options, is the most common mode of interactivity offered by the web documentary. To a greater or lesser extent, the configurative function may also be available, whereby the user can create or design part of the narrative.[4] Additional functions, which pertain more to the world of gaming, are the role-playing function, where the user assumes strategic responsibility for a character in a world described by the text, and the poetic function, where the users' actions, dialogue or design are aesthetically motivated. In addition, the interpretative function (the possibility to subjectively interpret a text) is always present in both linear and non-linear texts (Gaudenzi 2009: Chapter 1, 13).

Early web documentaries such as *Gaza/Sderot* (dir. Brachet, 2008) privilege the explorative function. Six characters from two cities, Gaza (Palestine) and Sderot (Israël), only 3 km apart, are profiled in forty episodes (eighty videos). Four navigational choices are offered to the user: a timeline, maps, individual character profiles and themes. Similar choices are offered by the web documentary *From Zero* (dir. Strocchi, 2009), on the aftermath of the earthquake in the Abruzzo region of Italy. While the navigational options offered were greeted enthusiastically (see, for example, Odorico 2011: 239), it is clear that, in comparison to later developments, including *Made in Chinatown*, what was offered was the navigation of a closed dataset of video modules in reasonably predictable ways. The only practically interactive option within the confines of the site is to write a comment in the blog or, beyond the site, to surf the net to seek other perspectives on the material. We suggest that, in such a scenario, the narrative agenda of the directorial point of view, while no longer linear, is still preserved within the user interface and gives the illusion of freedom for the audience. Nevertheless, Odorico does foreground a different cognitive engagement with the material by the user/viewer in their personal space, on their personal computer screen. The process of looking is transformed by physical interaction into doing and is lent a greater sense of control through his or her choice of routes through the database. This type of interactive documentary has become known as the 'docufragmentary' – a database of video clips through which 'an active viewer [is able] to reflect and to create their own network of connections' (Simoes 2011, quoted in Gaudenzi 2009: Chapter 1, 17). Simoes further explains that '[b]y experiencing a constant process of disruption, the active viewer encounters a series of fragmented sequences interconnected to each other' (2011). Gaudenzi uses the metaphor of hitchhiking to describe this mode of navigation:

> The author is . . . a narrator that experiments with levels of choices within a controlled narrative framework. The hitchhiking mode gives no guarantee of arriving at [a] destination, nor of having an interesting journey, it lies on the assumption that the journey is the most important part of the experience, and that the user enjoys constructing her itinerary and her interpretation of reality. (2009: Chapter 1, p. 17)

However, the hitchhiking analogy works less well where the navigational modes are less complex, their predictability via frequent return to the home or menu page losing the element of risk and uncertainty implied by the notion of hitchhiking. Rather, such web documentaries offer a mode of navigation more analogous to a bus journey, where the destination can be predicted, but the traveller is able to alight at any stop and re-board when he or she chooses. The narrative role of the user is delimited by the closed database within which

that segment of reality is represented. Neither the author nor the user can extend the database itself, although commentary is possible via blogs or social networking sites. In this process, the direction of the informative logic of the linear documentary is reversed, to be driven by the desire of the user/viewer to be informed and engaged. The more complex the modes of navigation of the branching structures of the narrative and the more numerous the nodes of intersection between modes of navigation without the need to return to a home or menu page, the greater the sense of empowerment of the user and the looser the author's hold on the narrative. With the privileging of user/viewer agency, the challenge for the web documentarian is to enhance the quality of the hitchhiker's 'journey' and to engage more with other non-linear narrative modes with which users are familiar, such as those of ludology or web surfing.

Henry Jenkins observes that '[g]ame designers don't simply tell stories; they design worlds and sculpt spaces' (2004: 121), and that games often derive from a tradition of 'spatial stories' (122) where stories are enacted. Central to game design, then, is a 'balancing act' to determine 'how much plot will create a compelling framework and how much freedom players can enjoy at a local level without totally derailing the larger narrative trajectory' (126). In the development of his web documentary *Made in Chinatown*, Sergio Basso deliberately engages with the narrative grammar of gaming in order to extend his audience, in particular to appeal to younger users/viewers, who are more internet savvy, but who also make up the next generation for whom issues of immigration, multiculturalism and national identity necessarily loom large. At the same time, through their greater complexity, the navigational choices that enable narrative progression within *Made in Chinatown* give a much greater impression of a 'rhizomatic' journey based on 'contiguity and chance'[5] than the examples discussed above, and thus give greater semblance of limitlessness, even within a closed database.

GIALLO A MILANO: EXPOSITION THROUGH NAVIGATION

Many contemporary documentary projects now engage in some form of cross-platform pitching, often as a condition of their funding. In most cases, this involves the creation of a web presence for the project, which tends to exist in a subordinate relationship to the documentary itself. By contrast, fully developed web documentaries are solely web-based and engage more meaningfully with the new logics of interaction.[6] The cross-media platform *Made in Chinatown* is deliberately complex in its presentation, in comparison to a platform such as *From Zero*. This partly derives from its relationship to its sister documentary film and also from the quality of the aesthetics of its design:

its use of music from the score of the film composed by Enea Bardi; its background image in red of a Chinese flag presented as a brick wall (which the site will enable the user to penetrate) and upon which text and images fade in and out; and its use of yellow and white text and hyperlink markers to indicate the different modes of interconnection between clips. The site opens by playing the trailer to the documentary (only accessible here in Italian), expressly underlining the relationship with the film. The *info progetto* [information on the project] further indicates that the web documentary is inspired by the film, but incorporates additional material not included in it. Choice of the English version of the site leads to a reworked version of the trailer, which explicitly sets a very clear agenda for the platform to 'surf among texts and video clips to discover the Chinese community of Milan' in the context of specific questions: 'What triggered this resentment between the people of Milan and the Chinese community? And how can we investigate it and give an account of it? Is it really true that the Chinese community is so closed and difficult?' (Basso 2010) In this way, in contrast to the combination of reflexive, poetic and observational documentary modes and poetic dramaturgy experienced in the film, the web documentary takes on a strongly expository mode (Nichols 2012: 31), emphasising verbal commentary and argumentative logic. By so doing, the question of how the social actors are represented, which is central to the film, is substantially downplayed.

The three intersecting navigational choices of *Made in Chinatown* are key to the complex narrative journey possibilities offered to the user. The first navigational choice via a map of Milan contributes to the obvious sense of place and underscores the interests of the platform host, *Corriere della Sera*, whose clear editorial agenda was to engage with the Milanese reader. However, as a navigational logic, being able to access clips according to the locations where the footage was shot is almost meaningless to anyone unfamiliar with the city of Milan. Some key information is lacking – an obvious example is a failure to specifically mark where Chinatown actually is, although the concentration of yellow marker pins around Via Paolo Sarpi is a good clue. Once we make our choice of location, we access first a primary sequence of clips and then a second level of navigational choice. The privileged primary thread in yellow allows progression to other clips in the primary sequence. A further choice of secondary threads in white enables us to navigate to other threads, which are 'related' in a way that is not always clear, but has been predetermined by the director. At the same time, more in the mode of game navigation, there are other choices, this time textual. There are boxes of written text that we can click on to be given background information on a theme, a person's story, historical events or the locale. Some of these are schematic, while others are highly interpretive pieces that embody a clear editorial agenda. In addition, there might be a further text box prompting the viewer as to what considerations

might arise through their engagement with the clip. It is entirely the user's choice whether or not to read these boxes of text, but the compelling colour coding strengthens the epistephiliac urge to do so. In almost ironic contrast to the scrupulously observational approach maintained throughout the film, this additional textual material functions in a manner similar to the classic disembodied 'voice of god' voice-over and testifies to Basso's almost anxious drive to 'get through' to the younger generation upon whose shoulders the development of multicultural Italian society necessarily lies. Whether we choose a primary or a secondary thread, once the choice to progress is made it is not easy to retrace one's steps. It is possible to return to the map itself by closing the embedded navigation window, but there is no instruction to this effect. If one does not return to the map, one is drawn ever deeper into a labyrinthine network of intersecting threads.

The other two navigational choices are by archetype and characters.[7] In both these cases, when we roll our cursor over an individual image, a predetermined web of linked clips appear, similarly colour coded as having either a primary (yellow) or a secondary (white) relationship to the chosen navigational logic. Yet, because at the secondary navigation level, it is always possible to switch to a related theme and to toggle between the two navigational principles of archetypes and characters, the pre-selection of the dataset has the effect of guiding rather than restricting navigation. The narrative of navigation thus contains multiple linearities, which, while they clearly bear the imprint of the director's directional logic, still afford a strong sense of autonomy. At every decision, a new navigation screen appears with myriad choices (both text and video), appearing to emulate Elsaesser's 'rhizomatic profusion', and sending the user on a journey of discovery deeper into the labyrinth.[8]

Part of the pleasure of this navigational exploration is the lack of predictability in the choices that are made. Only users with a profound knowledge of Milan's historical and topographical relationships to Chinese immigration would be able to predict which segments would be accessed from a particular geographical location. Archetypes appear to be a familiar guiding principle, but when we question what they actually signify these apparent 'archetypes' are only recognisable in their immediate context and the cross-cultural English translation distances them further from any universal meaning. The meaning only becomes clear once we click on an image and watch the clip. The most accessible navigational principle is that of characters – which provides direct access to the personal stories of individuals – although we are offered the same profusion of navigational choices at the secondary level.

The critique of conventional web documentaries that they offer only predictable navigation options for the user is underscored here. While the seemingly random navigational choices are all from a predetermined set of options, the complexity of the navigation process creates the perception of autonomy,

as the user allows himself or herself to be drawn deeper into the labyrinth. In this respect, we argue that the navigational logic of this platform shares features of video games (such as detective game *L.A. Noire*), particularly when we recall the central conceit of the documentary film to solve a mystery. As we move through the platform via multiple social actors, archetypes that are not recognisable, the map of a city that we do not know, primary and secondary threads that intersect multiply at various nodes, at an experiential level we journey through the lives of a cross section of the community around Via Paolo Sarpi and 'get to know them'. To return to Gaudenzi's analogy, this journey itself, with all its seeming unpredictability, is the most important part of the experience, and captures more fully the nuances of random hitchhiking. Yet, at a cognitive level, if we engage with Basso's unrelenting directional agenda, and perhaps leave the site to research as a competent netizen, or ideally move out of virtual reality into the real world, we achieve new levels of understanding.

The documentary film and the web documentary provide two very different modes of journeying in search of the 'giallo' in Milan. The directional and linear logic of the former supports individual exploration and experience as the only way to engage with the irresolvable problematic of what it may or may not mean to be Chinese in Italy and how 'Italians' might come to understand this. The documentary begins with a voice-over expressing a series of myths and stereotypes such as 'they never die' or 'they wreak of garlic', while, in the opening sequence of the web documentary, Sergio Basso poses the question: 'Is it really true that the Chinese community is so closed and difficult?' Both openings include declarations that 'other' the Chinese to the Italians, but that also provoke the viewer by suggesting that it is not the Chinese community that is closed, but rather the Italian majority – and by extension the viewers of the documentary film and the web documentary. By accepting Basso's challenge and navigating across characters, urban space and archetypes, the user of the web documentary may come to a personal yet necessarily partial resolution of the mystery of the 'giallo' a Milano. It is precisely this 'fragmentary' approach that allows the mystery to be solved, in as much as there is no such thing as a 'Chinese community', simply individuals trying to make a life for themselves, which is what the documentary's very intimate final sequence of a young couple in the bedroom suggests to us. The documentary film ends on that sequence, but it is only one of many possible final sequences. It is not an ending that suggests resolution or arrival at a destination. Basso's journey documentary resists closure, it is more focused on the collocation of the encounters that drive the film, of personal worlds and their subjective constructions. The ending, in fact, invites further travel, a journey with a more open itinerary, for the independent hitchhiker of the web documentary.

CONCLUSION: STRADDLING MODES – TRANSFORMATIVE ACTS OF STORYTELLING

Ultimately, Basso's combination of web documentary and documentary film reaches out to different audiences, yet maintains an unrelenting political agenda. As they interconnect and also extend each other, both must, according to Basso, find ways 'to transform this act of storytelling, trigger an action in the audience' (Basso 2012a). Just as, after watching a documentary, the citizen needs to know what real actions s/he can take in response to a given event or cause, so

> . . . after the navigation of our cross-media platforms, our potential teenage spectator will know that you [. . .] can inform yourself, you can visit the multimedia installation of Amnesty International, you can meet [. . .] refugees that may have immigrated to Italy [. . .]. There has to be a chance for our citizens to continue the experience out of the cross-media platform and to change. You have to change people with your job. (Basso 2012b)[9]

Basso sees himself as instrumental in empowering the user/viewer through their interpretation of images and experiences. As a documentary maker, Basso's independence and tendency towards 'activism' lies in the combination of his passionate commitment to his documentary film aesthetic and his ability to embrace the new technological infrastructure available on the web to reach as broad an audience as possible with his commitment to rendering visible subject matter and issues overshadowed in the popular media. Basso's style is thus distinguished by his experimentation with different documentary modes to introduce alternative journeys into his agenda. While it is not a given that web documentaries favour the expository mode, the fragmentation of footage and the navigational choices available combine to emphasise immediate verbal commentary and argument. This is all the more the case when the audience targeted is the sound bite generation, familiar with internet navigation and gaming. By offering alternative journey options, Basso strives to extend his users'/viewers' experiences into the real world. His documentaries are a departure point of multiple journeys toward political and societal change.

NOTES

1. This typecasting of the Chinese occurs not just in the press, but also in high profile films such as Matteo Garrone's *Gomorrah* (2008) and Carlo Mazzacurati's *The Right Distance* (2007), which feature stereotypical, dehumanised images of the Chinese immigrants, and in

Andrea Segre's *Shun Li and the Poet* (2011). While still engaging in a stereotypical representation of the Chinese community, Segre's film is distinctive in that it proposes a Chinese woman as protagonist of the film. Remarkably, Zhao Tao, the actress playing Shun Li, became the first non-Italian woman to win the Donatello Award (Italian Oscar) for Best Actress.

2. In 2009 and 2010, approximately 10 per cent of all documentaries in Italy focused on migrants living in Italy (Bowen 2011: 264).
3. This has fooled many (e.g. Bonsaver 2011: 309) and requires both a knowledge of Chinese and an ability to read the subtitles to uncover. The original intention had been to arrange for a reworked clapperboard performance with a new script, but budget constraints prevented this from being brought to fruition.
4. With the advent of Web 2.0 and HTML5, users can collaborate in the project by, for example, contributing footage, such that authors become moderators or editors; tagging and rating contributions in a process of collaborative editing; or simply extending the navigational experience by being able to save and edit navigational choices. These developments and their impact on user agency have the potential to blur the distinction between documentary subject and audience: subjects can become users, can post their own footage and add their own commentary.
5. See Thomas Elsaesser's discussion of the changing function of narrative in the navigational sphere (2009: 167, 177). Indeed, the explicit reference to the 'surfing' of clips in the platform agenda underscores the intention to emulate the unpredictability of web navigation.
6. For example, the pioneering *Gaza/Sderot* (2008) by award-winning practitioner Alexandre Brachet, CEO of Upian.com, or *Prison Valley* (2010) by David Dufresne and Philippe Brault.
7. Examples of 'archetypes' include 'the bridge', 'the sacred piece of paper', 'the young hero', 'the mature man'; 'characters' are identified via visual images, which, when scrolled over, provide enigmatic descriptors such as 'Longxing', 'Yin family', 'Aiqinhai band', 'Casa del Sole children'. None become comprehensible until the clips are viewed.
8. Elsaesser discusses engagement with the dynamic architecture of a site such as YouTube in terms of 'a rhizomatic profusion, beckoning in all directions and sending me on a most wonderful journey of discovery' (2009: 177).
9. Basso's current project on the plight of Bhutanese refugees in Nepal takes full advantage of Web 2.0 and reflects his continuing drive to reach his target audience, especially since younger netizens were not as likely as he had first imagined to visit the site of such an establishment entity as *Corriere della Sera*. It pairs a musical documentary film, itself innovative, with a web documentary that incorporates a fully developed computer game where the user chooses an avatar through which to experience life in the refugee camp. Refugee users are also able post their own footage. This contrasts with the limitations of the *Made in Chinatown* platform, leaving Basso (2012a) to muse on what might have been:

> We would have loved the users to be allowed to download their editing of the sequence of clips. And to be able to log in so as to be allowed to save their options, to save the path they had followed so far, in order to re-log in some other day. But that was impossible. I'd love for example, a sort of 2.0 version of the same cross-media platform with a Chinese audience, you know the second generation, university students, being allowed to upload their threads, shot from their cameras in order to enrich the cross-media platform. But this would have required a moderator and *Corriere della Sera* were not ready to invest in such a position.

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CHAPTER 14

Fukushima and the Shifting Conventions of Documentary: From Broadcast to Social Media Netizenship

Mick Broderick and Robert Jacobs

Documenting the effects of nuclear energy on the screen is itself as old as the discovery of radiation and the invention of the motion picture (Broderick 1995b). Following academic Eric Barnouw's lead with *Hiroshima-Nagasaki – August, 1945* (1970), filmmakers in the 1970s began to access and distribute previously classified nuclear footage, including suppressed images of the human effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Hirano 1996; Nornes 1996). During that decade, documentarians produced a 'surge of investigative filmmaking', where both military and civilian nuclear energy 'came under sharp scrutiny' (Barnouw 1993: 308–9.) These whistle-blowing films, aired on both American public television and by commercial broadcasters, revealed the industrial and corporate negligence in producing, stockpiling and safeguarding nuclear materials. By the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, nuclear narratives became the focus of multiple documentary approaches, ranging from point-of-view advocacy, to satirical found footage compilations ('collage junk films'), to performative and journey films (Bruzzi 2000: 39). The 1980s was the zenith of documentary production on all matters nuclear. Increasingly, the dangers of civilian nuclear power production were intrinsically linked with weapons production and the military-industrial complex, including *No Nukes* (Goldberg, Potenza and Schlossberg 1980), *Dark Circle* (Irving and Beaver 1982), *America: From Hitler to MX* (Harvey 1982) and *Sherman's March* (McElwee 1986). A decade of domestic and exported neoliberal economics under the Thatcher-Regan administrations re-energised Cold War hostilities with the Soviet Bloc; geopolitical antagonisms that were reconfigured in revisionist historical documentaries, such as *Paul*

Jacobs and the Nuclear Gang (dirs Willis and Landau, 1980), *Backs to the Blast* (dir. Bardwell, 1981), *The Atomic Café* (dirs Rafferty, Loader and Rafferty, 1982), *Half Life* (dir. O'Rourke, 1986) and *Radio Bikini* (dir. Stone, 1988).

Despite the tragic fire and mass contamination from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster impacting the Ukraine, Belarus and Europe, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the embrace of free market capitalism, fears of nuclear war and reactor accidents were quickly replaced by mounting concerns over anthropomorphic global warming and climate change. Nuclear fear was quickly transposed onto a new existential threat (Weart 2012).

By the end of the decade and into the next, international broadcast television receded from commissioning documentaries in favour of 'reality TV' and talking-head, 24/7 bulletin board news channels. Simultaneously, independent feature-length documentary films began attracting new, paying audiences in cinemas around the globe. Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* (1989), followed by *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and *Sicko* (2007) created a popular 'factual' template that hybridised narrated, performative, *vérité* and advocacy styles to critique global corporations, the military and political elites – something corporatised and globalised television increasingly failed to do. The approach was quickly adopted by neophyte documentarians as diverse as Morgan Spurlock's *Supersize Me* (2004) and Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006).

Thus, over the decades, evolving models of international broadcast television and their overt promotion of 'public sphere' engagement have sought 'balance' in their documentary, news and current affairs programming, often allowing aggrieved corporate parties (such as the Atomic Industrial Forum) a 'right of reply'. As Stuart Hall has noted, and as this chapter will confirm, the concept of balance is systemically flawed in practice, as it ignores the dominance of the status quo and inequities in power and privileged access to the media. Hall more specifically remarked: 'the symmetrical alignment of arguments may ensure the broadcaster's impartiality, but it hardly advances the truth' (1988: 360). The more controversial and anti-establishment a documentary is perceived, the greater the pressure exerted to censor, discredit or minimise its impact. Consequently, corporations regularly withdrew advertising sponsorship and/or demanded that their own experts be given equal time to better 'inform' the public. Subject to intense lobbying and corporate donation, politicians threatened to remove funding, enhance industry regulation or institute enquiries into broadcasters' conduct.

Drawing from this larger context, this chapter will more specifically demonstrate how repeated tropes and patterns of public/private interest have been contested in the arena of nuclear energy policy, most recently evident in the independent documentary responses to the earthquake, tsunami and reactor

meltdowns in Fukushima. This chapter will also discuss the problems resulting from this complex balance of power.

THE FUKUSHIMA CRISIS: CITIZEN-BASED VERSUS STATE INFORMATION

By the time of the triple tragedy of Fukushima (earthquake, tsunami, multiple nuclear meltdowns), mass exposure of international disasters had become all too frequent and ubiquitous. Globalised news formats dominated the factual programming of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, the devastating earthquake in Haiti and the Boxing Day tsunami throughout the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, mobile phone imagery and social media were increasingly essential to engendering the real-time, global emergency of these events. Post-WikiLeaks, the Arab Spring and Occupy movements further cemented the countercultural agency and viral impact of citizen-based documenting in providing alternative narratives that the monolithic broadcast media was incapable of matching (though it expediently co-opted the freely available public content for its own purposes).

On 11 March 2013, the largest recorded earthquake in Japanese history (magnitude 9 on the Richter scale) struck the coast of northern Japan, triggering a tsunami that reached up to 21 metres high and killed almost 20,000 people (Asahi 2012). Such events have occurred throughout Japanese history, but this incident – now called the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake or referred to most commonly as '3/11' in Japan – made both the dangers and possibilities of modern technologies uniquely visible. As the news spread, many citizens accessed NHK – the national broadcaster in Japan – then streaming live coverage on both the web and TV. Like the 2001 broadcasts of the unfolding attacks on 9/11 and the streamed mobile phone footage of the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami across the Indian Ocean, the Japanese and others around the world watched the event in real-time, recorded by helicopters from above the tsunami as it was coming ashore. The world watched as homes, cars and whole neighbourhoods were washed away in the deluge. However, unlike September 11 and the Boxing Day tsunami, the global live streaming of the Japanese twin natural disasters was unprecedented.

The cataclysm triggered a triple meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant in northern Japan, which was initially denied and downplayed by Japanese authorities and international energy commentators (Saito 2012). Consequently, real-time virtual experiences would play a central role, both in how people experienced and responded to the catastrophe. Fukushima nuclear reactor No. 1 had experienced a full meltdown by the end of the first day, followed by units No. 2 and No. 3, which both melted down within a

few days (McNeil and Adelstein 2011). Neither the plant owner – the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO) – nor the Government of Japan (GoJ) acknowledged this fact for three months (Nagata and Ito 2011). The Japanese Government did not release any information projecting the impact and spread of the radioactive plumes or the threat of contamination to the public for fear of fostering panic (Kyodo News Service 2012). This became the modus operandi throughout the crisis: a prioritisation of managing public anxieties over protecting public health (Jacobs 2013). However, during this period, many people had come to know that full meltdowns had occurred, thanks to online discussions about the effects of the explosions at three of the four reactors in the social media.

SOCIAL MEDIA DURING AND AFTER 3/11

Given the lack of accurate or actionable data from traditional media and governmental sources, local citizens pursued information from elsewhere (Jacobs 2012). Although most Japanese did not have smartphones in the spring of 2011, virtually all cellphones in Japan at that time were Internet-capable, providing a tool for obtaining and disseminating information during the crisis (Peary et al. 2012). The highly visible nature of the events kept the world media spotlight on Fukushima for about one week, after which global attention shifted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) campaign in Libya. During that week, mainstream Western news organisations such as CNN, the BBC and others depicted the chaos of the natural disaster and the unfolding hysteria over the worsening nuclear crisis, while mainstream Japanese media did little more than repeat official pronouncements that all was under control. Many people found their way to international media reporting via Twitter, blogs and, to a lesser extent, Facebook. An analysis of 1.5 million Tweets in Japan between 9 March and 31 May 2011 found a close relationship between Tweet contents and mainstream news media reporting and a high correspondence in the contents of Japanese and English Tweets during this period (Son et al. 2012). Many people used social media to try to find relatives, to post news about their well-being and location and conditions in their hometowns.

The actual conditions and operations inside of the Fukushima Daiichi plant were amongst the most opaque information kept from the public view. Even the GoJ was dependent on TEPCO's statements and measurements of radiation, as they were without independent assessment during the first year of the crisis. TEPCO maintained strict control of the Daiichi site, which was dangerously contaminated, and limited its communications to statements designed to assure competence and control. Several social media events broke open this opacity. The television station TNN set up a webcam located 20

Figure 14.1 Webcam image of the No. 4 reactor building. Image capture and marking by Nancy Foust.

km away and focused on the plants. The feed from this webcam provided the source of much of the footage showing the explosions during the first week of the crisis. Still images taken from the feed of this webcam provided the means of determining that the No. 4 reactor building was leaning (see Figure 14.1).

One single TEPCO worker came to provide the best access to operations inside the plant through a pseudonymous Twitter account. Known only as 'Happy', this contract worker sent out Tweets describing the strategies and activities happening inside the closed compound of Fukushima Daiichi. When 'Happy' finally reached his maximum allowable level of radiation exposure for a temporary worker and could no longer work at the plant, he gave an extensive uncensored interview to a reporter at the *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper. At that time, 'Happy' had over 87,000 Twitter followers (Asahi 2013).

As the nuclear crisis progressed and reactor buildings began to explode, the disparity between the domestic and foreign reporting began to impact the use of social media in Japan. Foreign embassies began to issue advisories for their own citizens to evacuate to much further distances than was being advised by the Japanese Government (for example, on 16 March 2011, the US Government advised US nationals to evacuate to 80 km), feeding local worries that the Japanese people were not being told the truth (Saito 2012). Those most affected by the radioactive clouds depositing fallout across northern Japan turned first to foreign news sources and then to social media to inform themselves, attempting to fill the growing gap between official and citizen knowledge. Over the next months, a growing sense of awareness arose amongst

those who had become refugees from the evacuation zones and who were being left uniformed (Jacobs 2011b).

Today, and into the foreseeable future, the situation at Fukushima Daiichi remains an unfolding disaster. Increasingly, social media and the documenting of the conditions in Tohoku and the experiences of those living in contaminated areas have become an example of citizen-driven media. That TEPCO and the GoJ have spent the past three years denying the obvious, and manipulating public discourse, continues to feed the dynamic growth and self-sufficient nature of this emergent digital culture. The tsunami that overwhelmed the coast of Fukushima Prefecture washed away most of the radiation monitoring stations located on, or near, the Fukushima Daiichi plants. The lack of real data on local radiation levels led to a swift run on available Geiger counters, making it increasingly difficult to get accurate information about radiation counts throughout northern and eastern Japan. Early and continued obfuscation by TEPCO and the GoJ encouraged Japanese citizens' deep suspicion of radiation readings being released through traditional media outlets. A small group of friends involved in new media and technology work began to discuss a means to obtain true data of the radiation levels surrounding the Fukushima Daiichi plant area, the evacuation zone and inhabited areas located nearby. They devised a 'plan to strap a Geiger counter to a car and somehow log measurements in motion. This would become the bGeigie, which would be entirely designed and built at Tokyo Hackerspace' (Safecast 2013). In April 2011, the group began a Kickstarter campaign to raise money to place a series of Geiger counters around the periphery of the Fukushima Daiichi plant, all connected to 3G technology that could provide real-time readings of radiation levels all around the plant area. The Kickstarter campaign was soon overfunded, and as time progressed, Safecast worked to create the most accurate radiation readings of the areas around the plants, the areas affected by the plumes of the explosions and around Japan as a whole. Currently, the online site only displays aggregate maps; however, the smartphone app continues to show real-time data.[1] It is now one of dozens of apps available from online app stores that provide documentation of real-time radiation readings throughout Japan.

Communities of Fukushima parents seeking information to protect the well-being of their children were among the first and later among the most politically powerful virtual communities to rise out of the crisis. Moms & Children Rescue FUKUSHIMA began posting information before the end of March 2011, eventually including information about radiation readings (from groups like Safecast), medical test procedures and interpretations, as well as both local and national government pronouncements. The site *Save Kids Japan*, run by independent Japanese journalist Mari Takenouchi, provided similar data about radiation levels. These sites would spur a movement among

Fukushima mothers that remains among the most potent citizens' political movements in the prefecture (Tabuchi 2011; Sanchanta and Obe 2011).

The Hachiko Coalition, devoted to the welfare of pets and named after a legendary Japanese pet dog, sprang into action during the first weeks of the 3/11 crisis, working to assist pet owners and engage in rescues of abandoned pets in evacuated and abandoned areas near the Daiichi plants. A mirror of its original website claims that the coalition was 'informally created during Hurricane Katrina to provide contract support to the U.S. Air Force for civilian emergency evacuation, the Hachiko Coalition was regrouped and renamed following the triple catastrophe in Japan on March 11, 2011' (Hachiko Coalition 2011). The Hachiko Coalition originally engaged in outreach and generated support through the promotion of a video on YouTube in the spring of 2011, asking people to demand that the GoJ support the rescue of pets in Fukushima. On 8 May 2011, a public vigil was held in Tokyo to raise awareness of the plight of abandoned pets, and its work is ongoing since the disaster. Here, we can see how one group of independent citizens, indicative of so many groups, has blurred traditional forms of documentary production and embraced the role of digital prosumer to reach a broad audience in an instantaneous manner to communicate their social message. The focus on the plight of animals in the Fukushima area produced another recent Japanese documentary, *The Horses of Fukushima* (dir. Matsubayashi, 2013),[2] which documents the effects of the nuclear crisis on a population of horses long reared in Fukushima Prefecture and groomed to participate in an annual horse festival. These horses, near death after the crisis began, were nurtured and returned to health in the months and years following 3/11, and the film uses their journey as a means of telling a story of decimation and recovery paralleled by the community as a whole.

Fukushima Voice has been active online since early 2012. Here, residents of Fukushima post flyers distributed by local governments and activist groups, local news articles, statements from residents and even personal medical records. Fukushima Voice attempts to recreate in cyberspace a town square, where neighbours share stories and perspectives on the crisis facing the community. The site hopes to encourage residents to make their stories and situations public in an effort to support those whose distrust of local and national governmental decisions might not rise above local gossip in Japan. The cacophony of statements generates momentum and lessens the isolation often felt by dissenters in a society where the truism 'the nail that sticks up must be hammered down' is often repeated.

As the average citizens of Fukushima, especially those who have been displaced, have outsized voices in a public sphere dominated by the mainstream media and their vested interests in the ongoing status quo (as much of the national, and especially the local, media has long been dependent on electrical

utility advertisements and has been loath to challenge governmental assertions), sites such as *Fukushima Voice* offer an amplification for those whose views and opinions have traditionally been marginalised in Japan. In the midst of the current crisis, such sites have been a key source where average Japanese citizens engage counter-narratives to the dominant narrative of control and conclusion. Here, the events are experienced as contested and unresolved. Here, the status quo is challenged and the voices of those in the midst of the crisis echo into the public domain.

Not only were citizen groups generating shared digital media to contest official announcements and lobby for social and community outcomes, but mainstream media began to embrace the opportunities afforded by online documentation. In the first days of the 3/11 disaster, Reuters began a moderated blog where readers could share information related to the crisis and read the latest news. Reuters would only fund the continued online presence of this blog for a few weeks, after which several of the most active members of this community blog purchased an online site to continue the conversation independently.[3] The group was diverse, but included some nuclear industry workers and managers. Once independently constituted, the group changed its name to SimplyInfo. From the start, it was a crowdsourced entity fuelled by the information gathered and analysed by its core members, but always open to the public. SimplyInfo members have documented many highly technical reports about conditions and possible steps to remediate the worst of the conditions confronting the ongoing effort to stabilise the site. This information (including images, radiation and pressure readings, TEPCO site reports, videos and personal testimony), currently a focus of global concern about the Fukushima site, was obtained entirely from crowdsourced data by the SimplyInfo team (Jacobs 2011a).

The work of citizen groups like SimplyInfo contests the official narratives about conditions at the Fukushima plant, as, for example, by early 2012, the emergency response by TEPCO and the Japanese Government, according to their spin, had contained the radioactive discharges and halted regional contamination. Mainstream media in Japan mostly parroted the pronouncements of these two institutions. However, online activism and documentation challenged this status quo. Railing at the denials, obfuscations and lack of resources provided to his community, Mayor Katsunobu Sakurai took to YouTube to make a desperate appeal to the world for immediate assistance (Sakurai 2012). Using a simple static video camera, Sakurai spoke directly to the viewer, earnestly seeking aid and publicly apologising for his inability to marshal the resources necessary to help his stricken community. The video quickly went viral and was rebroadcast by the international news media, contrasting starkly with the orchestrated media briefings by government and industry. This effort reveals a dramatic departure for a Japanese-elected official from

traditional protocols of position advocacy and was clearly modelled on earlier efforts by community groups to document the conditions average citizens had been enduring in the early days of the crisis. While it did succeed in reaching a broad audience, it was far more successful at documenting and expressing the situation to a global audience than it was in generating the hoped for financial support for Mayor Sakurai's community. While public financial support of governmental institutions would not materialise, independently sourced funds were to play a role in supporting traditional documentary production emerging from the Fukushima crisis.

FUKUSHIMA DOCUMENTARIES AND CROWDSOURCING

In the immediate aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake, many documentary filmmakers living in Tokyo headed north into the disaster zone to film the devastation and recovery. While most of these filmmakers went to document the impact of the earthquake and tsunami, several found themselves eventually making films about the nuclear disaster. These films were often very successful internationally, especially in the US and Europe, where concern over radiation from Fukushima reaching around the world increased yearly.

Observational, longitudinal documentaries were made, such as *Nuclear Nation* (2012) by Atsushi Funahashi. As with Mayor Sakurai's YouTube plea, in *Nuclear Nation*, the omnipresent camera observes Futaba town Mayor Katsutaka Idogawa confront government bureaucrats in a public meeting after the responsible minister has appeared, only to show his face momentarily before scurrying away, not answering questions. However, exhibiting films about the nuclear crisis that are critical of the government has proved problematic in Japan. Documentary films remain largely dependent on movie theatre chains, which have remained resistant to abandoning the old centralised self-censorship of what is permissible and what is objectionable that similarly characterised most of the early press coverage of the nuclear crisis.

Like *Nuclear Nation*, American expatriate filmmaker Ian Thomas Ash also produced a serendipitous, organic documentary work. Ash's film *A2-B-C* (2013) has no overt political agenda, but rather follows a group of Fukushima mothers as they navigate the bureaucracy to obtain and interpret thyroid screenings for their young children. Ash's work is noteworthy in that he did not set out to tell the story of the meltdown/explosions or to express a specific critique of nuclear power, but instead focused on trying to document underrepresented daily events as they unfolded, ethnographically using *vérité* style. Ash was living in Japan at the time of the catastrophic events, unlike the wave of foreign filmmakers who travelled to Japan from the US (e.g. *3/11*),

Germany (e.g. *Radioactivists* dirs Leser and Seidel, 2011) and elsewhere to document the situation in Tohoku, or to record the growing anti-nuclear protests and art being generated in response to the disaster (Liscutin 2011). Hence, Ash's remark that: 'From the beginning, I felt that the only way of *A2-B-C* to be able to be screened in Japan was to first get it accepted into festivals abroad, hopefully recognised, and to "reverse import" it back into Japan' (Ash 2013). Ash's work was entirely independently financed by a small group of patrons, allowing Ash both independence and complete creative control over the production.

In a different vein, filmmaker and former NHK reporter Jun Hori employed the frame of a classic existential narrative to produce a documentary called *Metamorphosis* (2013), in reference to Franz Kafka's short story. Hori, who had been filming for NHK in Fukushima Prefecture in the weeks before the earthquake, was astonished at the instantaneous transformation of the public perception of Fukushima from that of Japan's timeless heartland and producer of pure traditional foodstuffs into a hideous monster that was horrifying and contaminated. Hori likened this transformation to the experience of (Kafka's hero) Gregor Samsa. Hori, who resigned from NHK because of internal criticism of his anti-nuclear stance and used the footage he was filming for the NHK in his own independent work, sought to confront the Japanese with their complicity in the marginalisation of the people of Fukushima, who themselves were victims of this tragedy and not its protagonists. His film utilises a significant amount of footage taken from YouTube videos posted by Japanese citizens. Hori's use of the publicly generated YouTube footage serves several purposes: it legitimises the documentation being produced by a broad range of non-professionals engaged in independent artistic expression, and it eventuates in a work that seems to emerge not solely from the director, but rather from the Japanese public as a whole. This repositions the documentary filmmaker as one (perhaps in a privileged position) among many engaged in the documenting process, resulting in a collective tone to an individually directed work. The collectivism of Hori's work stands in stark contrast to the bifurcated nature of corporate-produced journalism that became a front for conflict between the Japanese and foreign media as the events played out.

The relationship between the domestic Japanese media sphere and foreign media has been central to how the Fukushima narrative has developed. The terse pronouncements of domestic Japanese media outlets in the initial phases of the crisis led to substantial consumption of foreign news stories in Japan. Traditional Japanese media, the national broadcaster NHK and mainstream newspapers regurgitated official corporate and government media statements about the crisis for the better part of a year. But as international interest began to wane, it only grew in Japan. Even more alarming was the broadcast media's censoring of ailing Emperor Akihito's non-partisan commentary, where he

foregrounded the long-term consequences of the radiation hazards, at odds with the government's spin of control and 'shutdown' (McAteer 2012). Japanese people wept openly when they first heard the voice of the Emperor on the radio announcing the surrender of Japan in August 1945. Since then, the public statements of the Emperor have remained neutral and non-political. The fact that the current Emperor made such a charged statement could easily have had a dramatic effect on a broad range of citizens had it been highlighted in national news accounts. The silencing of the voice of the Emperor reveals the power that the government and media have to control the public narrative, even when countered by the most revered figure in the nation.

Consequently, the predictive governmental narrative downplaying concerns could not be contained and controlled (Jacobs 2011b). In desperation to regain control, the government declared the melted reactors to be in 'cold shutdown' before the end of 2011 (Kaiser 2011). Yet independent sources confirmed levels of radiation had increased in the ocean near the plant and that a series of rolling crises caused by lax oversight and shoddy operations made untenable the continuing denials and government declaration that the crisis was over (Aldrich 2012). In the subsequent years, pro-government media in Japan has been promulgating two contradictory narratives of the ongoing calamity. On the one hand, it repeats the official pronouncements of government, but on the other it produces stories that are counter-narrative and more closely reflect events as they unfold, informed by the expanding coverage of real-time social media (Jung 2012). Even the former Prime Minister of Japan Naoto Kan, who was in power at the time, has taken to online presentations and documentary to push his case for the elimination of nuclear power and the stranglehold of the nuclear utilities on the political process (Kan 2013). More unprecedented and surprising in terms of traditional Japanese politics is the former pro-nuclear, conservative NDP leader and popular Prime Minister (2001–6) Junichiro Koizumi appearing in support of anti-nuclear platforms and more progressive candidates adopting such policies. Koizumi's pivot reflects transition inside the ossified power structures of Japanese political society.

CONCLUSION: EMERGING NETIZENSHIP AND THE MELTDOWN OF CONVENTION

The Fukushima nuclear disaster occurred just as the global nuclear power industry had imagined a resurrection based on spurious claims regarding climate change. The economics of nuclear power, although heavily reliant on governmental subsidies for construction, decommissioning and the storage of high-level waste, had remained unappealing to investors in the West for decades (MIT 2003). Nuclear industry trade groups, however, had been

working hard on public relations campaigns promoting nuclear power as a 'green' alternative to fossil fuels and were beginning to make an impact on environmental groups, whose focus had shifted from environmental pollutants to global warming. By ignoring the carbon footprint of mining and milling uranium, and of decommissioning plants and the long-term storage of waste, nuclear trade groups had been able to make claims that there was little climate impact from nuclear power, since its carbon footprint – when limited to the period of plant operation – is small (Sovacool 2008). The triple meltdowns and continuing radiological seepage from the Fukushima Daiichi has seriously impeded these claims, as the estimated clean-up cost alone will be half a trillion US dollars, resulting in an enormous additional carbon excess over decades (McCurry 2013a).

To shore up its future prospects for public support, nuclear industry spokespeople began to appear frequently in news documentaries to reiterate the collapsing narrative that the industry promulgated. Following the British Labour government's endorsement of a new national nuclear policy, in September 2011, six months after the Fukushima explosions and meltdowns, BBC Horizon aired *Fukushima: Is Nuclear Power Safe?* featuring British scientist Jim Al-Khalili, and subsequently screened it around the world. The programme dismissed the radiological hazards at Fukushima and Chernobyl and the presenter unapologetically endorsed the pursuit of nuclear power at the conclusion, foregrounding the 'special dread' that nuclear technologies evoke, as an irrational anti-scientific bias.[4] On this occasion, the public BBC broadcaster offered no right of reply for dissenting opinions.

Facing gubernatorial elections, the conservative government led by Yoshitaka Shindo has introduced draconian secrecy legislation that censors the capacity of journalists and documentarians to question government actions and lack of disclosure (McCurry 2013b). Similarly, the editorial independence of the NHK – Japan's national public broadcaster – is increasingly under threat, with revelations of directives not to discuss radiation and Fukushima (McAteer 2012). All of these actions only further impress upon netizens the need to record and document alternative narratives and histories of the unfolding Fukushima events and legacy. This upsurge in citizen awareness using social media and online documentary forms also provides a foil to some mainstream documentary films pressed into service in order to restart an imagined nuclear renaissance. For instance, the recent film *Pandora's Promise* (2013),[5] both as blowback and overt political/industry lobbying and as soft power, didactically promotes nuclear industry talking points, while dismissing as comical any critique of these positions (Cavanagh and Cochrane 2013).

The business models and dominance of multinational, globalised media conglomerates are now being challenged by netizens and social media platforms

exploiting opportunities to counter hegemonic narratives that are supported by vertically and horizontally integrated mechanisms of distribution and exhibition. The unfolding stories surrounding the tragic mismanagement of the Fukushima nuclear disaster by industry and government will undoubtedly continue to be chronicled in documentary form across a range of media and platforms, with some yet to be invented, as the legacy of deceit, contamination and prejudice is passed from generation to generation. Hopefully, these emerging modes of documentary communication will remain effective independent means of countering and challenging the manufactured consent propagated by an industry desperate to remain relevant and economically viable into the twenty-first century.

NOTES

1. For more information, see http://blog.safecast.org/maps/, accessed 15 April 2014.
2. Note from the editors: many other Japanese filmmakers have produced independent works reflecting on various aspects of the 3/11 incident. For a selected filmography, see the dedicated 2011 and 2013 Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival programmes, http://www.yidff.jp/2011/2011list-e.html#p11, http://www.yidff.jp/2013/program/13p7-e.html, accessed 15 April 2014.
3. Disclosure: Robert Jacobs has been a member of this online group since its first days of operation.
4. The collapse of a nuclear revival has been accompanied by a series of desperate responses. The widespread visibility of industry defenders in newspaper op-eds and on television news interviews has done little to counter widespread public opposition to nuclear power. Many of these articles deploy such tactics as blaming all health effects experienced by people near to Fukushima to 'radiophobia' or the notion that the fear of radiation or anxiety due to radiation are the true sources of these illnesses, rather than the physiological effects of exposure to radiation (Conca 2012; Harris 2012). Some even promote the universally discredited idea that radiation is actually good for health in small doses, known as 'hormesis' (Solomon 2011).
5. Because the Japanese nuclear industry is sensitive to overreaching the general audience in times of crisis and despite government pressures to avoid the subject, similar Japanese productions are limited to NHK news reporting.

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CHAPTER 15

Independent Documentaries and Online Uses in China: From Cinephilia to Activism

Judith Pernin

Since the late 1980s, radical transformations of the Chinese film industry and art circles have led to the emergence of a significant body of independent documentary films produced and circulated without the backing of state institutions. This was definitely a breakthrough, since state documentary studios and television stations were the sole producers and broadcasters of non-fiction films in China for more than thirty years. Reforms that gradually adjusted the film and television industries to a market economy in the 1980s and 1990s generated, as a side effect, a grey area in which individual projects could be produced without prior submission to the censorship process. The modest beginning of what has been called the 'independent Chinese documentary movement'[1] was initiated by about five individuals producing a few personal films outside of their paid jobs. From the late 1990s onwards, digital cameras and post-production software facilitated access to individual video practices. As a result, this group of filmmakers enlarged and diversified: both amateurs and professionals began shooting independent documentaries on various topics, such as rural life, the elderly, young starving artists, migrant workers and the like.[2] Producing independent works also meant breaking from the conventions of the official documentary film model by filming long and free conversations with 'ordinary people', relying on filmic narration instead of a voice-of-god supporting official ideology, and favouring the observational over the expository documentary mode. Presented by their authors as subjective works with a personal touch, these films tended to favour emotion over information.

This brief presentation indicates that the film movement was not only induced by a top-down loosening process of the censorship system, or by

the emergence of a market economy. Grassroots efforts to elaborate specific production and circulation methods for independent documentaries were crucial to shaping new practices adapted to the constraints of the Chinese film industry or, more accurately, designed to bypass them. The ever-growing number of independent documentaries, primarily shown at filmmakers' homes and therefore restricted to the private sphere, prompted later film enthusiasts to organise screenings in privately run spaces, such as bars, art galleries or on university premises. These small-scale, semi-private events organised by unofficial film-related groups established from the mid-1990s onwards eventually evolved into independent festivals in the 2000s.[3] These film activities fall under the category of the unofficial (*minjian*),[4] and are carried out in physical spaces, as well as on the Internet.

Interestingly, the rise of this film movement is concomitant to the popularisation of the Internet in China, and independent filmmakers and viewers began to get together online from the outset. The transformation of filmmaking and film viewing practices by independents runs parallel with online activity, and in some instances, the Internet has even been the primary venue for establishing unofficial film-related groups.[5] Although under tight government control, the Internet has clearly been instrumental to setting up independent film activities. Given the particularities of this film movement, as well as its autonomy from state institutions and occasional antagonism to state discourse, one wonders what kind of online practices independent filmmakers and their audiences have been willing or allowed to sustain. While few of these films are available for online viewing, it is not unusual for them to generate discussion, comment and information sharing on the Internet. Apart from serving as an additional communication platform for unofficial film-related news, the Internet also constitutes a space where ordinary netizens or those involved in independent documentary films (hereafter referred as the 'independent milieu') can share their views. These exchanges reveal much about the actors of this milieu, their audiences and networks, the discussions they generate or feed, and ultimately, the online uses around these films can give insights into their wider social uses, on or offline. For scholars, the Internet maps out discussion networks between netizens, while simultaneously operating an instant archiving of exchanges that serves as a valuable if ephemeral source on the Chinese independent documentary movement. This chapter offers a historical study of online activities sustained by this independent group since the 2000s, with the aim of defining the practices and uses generated by this film movement. The Internet is considered here as a database, but by no means should it be considered the only place where watching and discussing these films is possible. The Internet started to play an important role around the year 2000 in China, and it is only one of various means of analysing the reception and social impact of this film movement. To a great extent, exchanges around these films are kept visible on

the net, except when blocked by the censorship mechanism.[6] Even if some data loss results, this particularity of the Chinese Internet does not constitute a real obstacle to this study. Rather, it helps define this film movement and its social position: traces of sensitive content on Chinese websites can be analysed in the light of online practices on foreign platforms, while uncensored content reveals users' strategies in dealing with the censorship system.

UNOFFICIAL FILM PRACTICES ON THE CHINESE INTERNET: FROM FORUMS TO MICROBLOGS

A review of scholarly studies gives the reader a rather paradoxical view of the Chinese Internet: it can be described as an 'online public sphere' where netizens can voice their views or as an 'Intranet' where governmental control is strictest (Tai 2006; Clayton et al. 2006; Leibold 2011). Registered by Internet providers, surveyed and censored by Chinese Internet companies and websites, and isolated from the World Wide Web by the Great Firewall, the Chinese Internet can be considered an internal network, where uses revolve mainly around socialisation and entertainment. At the same time, tricks to circumvent the Great Firewall and gain access to international networks abound, and netizens circulate information and participate in debates open to all users.

The Internet was introduced in China in 1994, and users have now become a sizable group engaging in various activities, ranging from online shopping to infotainment, social networking to chatting (CNNIC 2010: 4; Leibold 2011: 1023). From the early forums to the more recent microblogs, online uses have greatly evolved, as have the platforms themselves. These platforms coexist in a competitive and complementary relationship, allowing various modes of appropriation, forms of communication and sociability, and they require different competences and skills. As in other authoritarian states, Chinese web users are famous for clever anti-censorship tactics,[7] which have resulted in a great complicity among them. Since independent documentary films are unofficial works, and because their topics often involve 'sensitive' terms deemed 'dangerous' and blocked by the Internet control system, online uses around them constitutes an interesting field of study on both independent cinephilia and social commitment in the digital era.

This chapter focuses on three types of platforms representing three 'stages' of Internet uses. All are still in use today, and are popular in the community of independent filmmakers and their audiences. They include the Rear Windows Film forum (*Houchuang kan dianying*; henceforth, RWF),[8] a few blogs written by people from the independent milieu (filmmakers, critics and programmers or festival organisers) and finally the two main microblogging websites, Sina Weibo and Twitter. Apart from daily observations carried out from 2010 to

2013, I also proceeded to keyword searches on each platform's built-in search engines for a limited period of time (March to April 2012), chosen for its relative non-eventfulness[9] to guarantee regularity of results. Keywords included 'independent cinema', 'independent documentary', film titles and the names of the most relevant filmmakers for this study. After locating the main participants in online discussions, I observed their interactions, contacts, favourite topics and conversation modes.[10] The sample study and research methods vary according to each platform, since they do not require the same competences from users. The general tendencies of regular users will be exposed and summarised, while the most active and significant ones will be described more thoroughly. The timeframe under scrutiny (1998–2012) witnessed a growing production of Chinese independent documentary films, as well as a diversification of the milieu, and as we will see, these evolutions have an impact on online uses.

THE BEGINNINGS OF ONLINE USES IN THE INDEPENDENT MILIEU: FORUMS, PIRACY AND CINEPHILIA

Launched on 19 November 1998, the RWF Bulletin Board System is surprisingly still in use today. Most early members of the independent milieu were frequent users. This forum is also worthy of interest because of its longevity and dynamism (around 29,600 posts as of July 2013), and because of its legacy: two years after launching RWF, the founders established an eponymous unofficial film 'club' in Nanjing (Rear Window Films Association; henceforth, RWFA) and the China Independent Film Festival (CIFF) in 2003. This section is a chronological examination of this forum's archives aimed at tracking down the evolution of the discussions.

Established when pirated foreign films on VCDs and DVDs began flooding Chinese cities, this forum hosted discussions prompted by restricted access to worldwide cinema. The first posts dealt with clandestinely imported films produced in the US, Hong Kong or Taiwan – recent productions or classics that forum users were trying to watch. Users would write about film plots or actors and actresses. Other popular posts were about pirated VCDs and DVDs, their technical specifications and insiders' updates on the location of semi-clandestine shops where they could be purchased.[11] One of the RWF's founders wrote a pirated film-watching diary[12] from 1998 to 2000, eventually stopping when buying DVDs became common practice. This person, who goes by the nickname of Weixidi, a phonetic translation for VCD, is also the founder of RWFA and one of the main organisers of CIFF. The RWFA project originated with conversations between him and other Nanjing-based users in 2000[13] and can be considered an extension of online activities into the locality of Nanjing.

Thereafter, the promotion of RWFA's events – unofficial film screenings, meet-ups and the publication of an unofficial film journal – was carried out on the forum. Following the successful founding of this unofficial film association, other forum users approached RWFA members for advice on how to establish their own local film 'salons' in their cities.[14] Since the establishment of the CIFF in 2003, the topics of discussion on the RWF have ranged from the usual concerns of unofficial film viewers to more specialised issues raised by users who have become independent film practitioners. Information about international and domestic unofficial film festivals is exchanged. Filmmakers, critics, organisers or volunteers of Chinese independent film festivals are brought together on the forum, which sometimes also serves as a place to settle scores between them.[15] Over the years, forum users have met and collaborated on various projects, and have sometimes bred grudges and rivalries.

To a large extent, RWF members behave similarly to those described by Laurence Allard in her study of an 'ordinary' francophone film forum (Allard 2000): RWF also 'functions as an initiation place to cinephile subculture', and allows the participants to nurture 'sociability bonds . . . formed by shared appreciation of works among spectators constituting a "public" '. Nonetheless, on the RWF forum, members are not only 'ordinary film critics' displaying 'fetishized erudition' (Allard 2000: 151–2). The core users of RWF are first and foremost the main actors of the independent milieu, and as their conversations become increasingly specialised and address various topics with a professional and independent perspective, uses on the forum have gradually departed from mere cinephilia. Similarly, most exchanges on film appreciation are characterised by a distinctive approach in their concern for unofficial spectatorship practices, including strategies to access pirated and independent films, relative indifference towards Chinese official cinema, as well as, explicitly or not, contesting censorship. Users criticise restricted film access for Chinese audiences, the absence of a rating system justifying censorship and penalties on fiction filmmakers such as Jiang Wen or Lou Ye. In this context, topics such as freedom of speech and citizens' rights are frequently raised. In fact, forum users' concern over such matters extends beyond their own interests as unofficial film lovers or practitioners. A post by film critic and curator Zhang Yaxuan defending the liberal newspaper *Southern Metropolis News*[16] is a case in point (Beach 2005). The attached open letter and petition emanated from prominent intellectuals, showing forum users' concern for a free press. It also revealed that already then, the independent milieu was related to a larger cultural sphere (*wenhua jie*), with which it shared – to a certain extent – similar interests, difficulties and status. This bond has become increasingly clear on more recent platforms, indicating perhaps a growing commitment in the independent milieu. In any case, it reveals that independent filmmakers share the social awareness of the said cultural sphere.

Figure 15.1 Rear Window Film on its original platform: A Forum.

Figure 15.2 Rear Window Film on the social network Douban.

Figure 15.3 Rear Window Film on the microblog platform Weibo.

BLOGS: PROMOTING UNOFFICIAL FILMS AND DOCUMENTING CURRENT EVENTS

Popularised in the mid-2000s, blogs differ from earlier platforms in a number of features. Less proficient in nurturing debates than the more collective forums, they nonetheless provide a publishing space that admits comments. They are more personalised and user-friendly, and allow complex interactions between texts and images, since various media can be embedded on the pages (pictures, videos, sounds). Two influential blogging platforms are of interest here. The first one belongs to the major Chinese Internet company Sina (*Xinlang*), which operates under relevant regulations and is widely popular. The other, Bullog, was established in 2006 by Luo Yonghao, a blogger dissatisfied with the censorship practices of Chinese mainstream companies. Whereas Sina is open to all users and displays officially sanctioned blogs, Bullog selects critical writings on various social issues. Some of Bullogs' bloggers possess a mirror-blog on Sina, but others choose to write there only after their previous blog has been blocked on mainstream platforms. The selection of authors and the critical edge of Bullog explain why its Chinese host servers and domain name were closed down in 2009. Since then, US-based servers have kept Bullog accessible to Chinese users who can circumvent the Great Firewall. This 'international' version, mainly dedicated to political topics,[17] was recently closed to follow new online uses on the more vivid microblogs.

Unlike forums and microblogs that give priority to socialisation through informal conversational exchanges, blogs appeal mostly to independent documentary-related users who have a background in, or a taste for, writing. As a result, fewer filmmakers are involved in this activity, and blogs related to independent documentaries on Sina tend to belong to film studies professors, critics or organisers of unofficial film festivals. As with the RWF forum, besides promoting events and films, most postings tackle crucial issues for Chinese independent cinema – for example, financial difficulties, the censorship system and selection in international film festivals. These texts belong to the unofficial cinephilia genre, and partially refer to the issue of freedom of expression.

Among the directors sustaining significant blogging activity, literature professor and independent filmmaker Ai Xiaoming is an interesting case study, for her online uses further demonstrate the bonds between the independent milieu and socially committed groups. Unlike most filmmakers, she not only writes about her own or others' films, but also focuses on the topics they deal with, which shows that self-promotion and cinephilia-oriented discussions are not her priority. The HIV blood scandal, the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, women's rights and various court cases are topics of both her documentaries and posts. Her filmic approach is rounded up, followed or preceded by extensive blog publication. Ai Xiaoming is the author of various blogs on mainstream platforms that have been regularly shut down over the years.[18] On Sina, only a page survives, published before the blog was transferred to Bullog. Because of their regularity and representativeness, we chose to focus on postings appearing from April 2010 to October 2011 on Bullog, now removed from the public eye since the closing of this platform.

Ai's posts are divided into the following categories: '365 letters' (twenty-three posts) is a collection of letters she received about the death of children in the shoddy buildings destroyed by the 2008 Sichuan earthquake, a project started on her Sina blog but halted by its premature shutdown – other sections include 'Interviews and Dialogues' (five posts); 'Citizen Forum' (nine), which introduces readers to Chinese activists' works; 'Notes and Observations' (nine) dealing with literature and engagement; 'My Documentaries' (forty-six) introducing her films and dealing with related topics; and finally 'My Photo Roman' (twenty-eight), which consists of a collection of ironical visual stories expressing critical views on human rights in China. One of them is a series of photos showing Ai Xiaoming sending a postcard to rights activist Hu Jia,[19] who, at that time, in May 2010, was imprisoned, silenced and ill.

Although it deals with independent documentary, Ai Xiaoming's blog has almost nothing to do with cinephilia, since her films are addressed for their social impact. Likewise, people leaving comments on her blog – students, scholars or activists outside academia circles – are primarily interested in

Chinese social problems, rather than in documentary film aesthetics and practice. Compared with other blogs and RWF, Ai Xiaoming's displays highly heterogeneous materials. She publishes her own texts as well as those of others, posts interviews with victims and activists and shares pictures and hyperlinks to her films, maintaining their availability for online streaming – a practice that remains rare among independent filmmakers, who favour other, more prestigious, means of circulation. If some sections can be considered pure online activism (such as 'My Photo Roman'), having little or no relation to her films, others show a deep commitment to prolonging and deepening certain issues addressed in her documentaries. Various documents, sometimes edited into her films as well, are posted on her blog, where they contribute to confirming the facts she reveals in her films: identity papers of victims, official reports, still pictures shared as evidence, interviews with activists. The diverse nature and origins of the media guarantee a certain objectivity, akin to what investigative journalists or scholars aim at. Her blog can be considered a tool that complements and, in some cases, replaces watching her documentaries, since access to them is not always easy, and both represent, with their heterogeneous contents but firm standpoint, a consistent and rationally elaborated response to social injustice. Her blogging practices – a montage of original writings, images and the posting of documents of various origins – are rare on other independent documentary film blogging sites, but are akin to more recent online uses on microblogging sites, as will be demonstrated below.

ONLINE CRITICISM AND ACTIVISM ON MICROBLOGS

Microblogs are characterised by virality, speed and increased interaction between users. Based on short messages instantly spreading information between newsfeed subscribers, microblog communication differs greatly from other online tools. It allows a higher degree of publicity and interaction than forums and blogs, and the reactivity of this medium is ensured by users' passive omnipresence, due to online portability on mobile devices. These specificities do not outdate slower tools, as these various platforms complement each other in netizens' practical application: posts on microblogs circulate content emanating from elsewhere, thus increasing their publicity. This transformation of uses, forecasted by social networking sites such as *Kaixin* and *Douban*,[20] inevitably affected microblog exchanges about Chinese independent documentaries as well.

Since 2009, Sina Weibo has served as the Chinese replacement for its American counterpart, Twitter, which has been officially blocked. The extremely popular Weibo counted 300 million registered users in February 2012. In the independent milieu, Weibo is more popular than Twitter, due in

part to the latter's restricted access and its mostly English-speaking members. Three types of users can be distinguished, depending on their choice of platform: those who have only a Twitter account, those who have only a Weibo account and those who have both. The last tends to greatly differentiate their uses on the two platforms. They tend to favour Weibo (they follow more people and post more messages on more diversified topics), and use Twitter for following banned Weibo users, as well as for exchanging content on a narrower range of subjects – that is to say, 'sensitive' news and ideas that are usually suppressed on Weibo.

Unsurprisingly, users who possess only a Weibo account use it to promote unofficial activities, just as they do on blogs, forums or dedicated websites: screening programmes, updates on film projects, short film reviews, hyperlinks to personal blogs and information on foreign film festivals are shared and commented upon. Some filmmakers, such as Xu Xin and Zhao Liang, follow hundreds of people (950 and 742, respectively), and are themselves followed by 7,621 and 7,157 users.[21] Apart from dealing with personal issues or topics related to Chinese independent cinema, they also transmit and comment on recent news (rural uprisings, food and health scandals, corruption cases). This activity allows them not only to express their personal views on various social issues, but also to circulate related documents; contested judiciary reports, letters and testimonies from victims and photographs of rural riots that might have been overlooked by the mainstream media or blocked by Sina thus quickly go viral through their exchanges. However, some messages are replaced by Sina announcements: 'content has been hidden' or 'deleted'. It appears that the most active users tend to deal with a variety of subjects, from promoting their own work (few posts) to independent issues such as cinephilia and international festivals (more posts) to current events (most of the posts).

Ai Xiaoming's microblogging activity illustrates the more unusual case of netizens who possess two accounts but favour Twitter over Weibo due to censorship restrictions. On Twitter, she follows more than 601 people, has posted more than 7,123 tweets and is followed by 35,195 users, whereas on Weibo she follows only 400 people and has published no more than forty-one messages, although 5,000 users follow her.[22] She seems to have stopped posting on her Weibo page in November 2011, whereas her Twitter page is regularly updated. Many standard messages from Sina appear on Weibo, explaining that the removed posts are not 'appropriate for public circulation'. The Weibo messages escaping censorship concern the rights of women or disenfranchised people such as migrant workers, announcements of academic events and complaints about the difficulty of accessing Internet content blocked by the Great Firewall. In contrast to the display of censorship interference on her Weibo page, her Twitter account's profile picture is a self-portrait with black sunglasses drawn on her face, reminiscent of the blind rights activist Chen

Guangcheng.[23] Appropriating the distinctive features of imperilled rights activists is a popular means of online protest for heavily censored Chinese users such as Ai Xiaoming. Rural riots, unjust death penalty cases, politically satirical comics[24] and information about jailed, tried or disappeared Chinese activists count among her most numerous posts. Her messages and re-Tweets circulate between users who openly denounce abuses, such as the artist Ai Weiwei, lawyer Teng Biao and other advocates of the informal rights defence movement.

Observing the network of contacts of microblog users shows that people tallying the highest number of followers are not necessarily the most famous filmmakers within this movement, but, like Ai Xiaoming, are those who are the most committed to both film and activism. These individuals apply the same documentary logic to their films and their online practices, collecting images and texts defending an unofficial version of current events and history, or advocating for the rights of underprivileged people, such as petitioners, migrant workers, villagers deprived of their land and so on. This practice is common on both Weibo and Twitter among all kinds of users in the independent milieu. The choice of publication platform induces a disparity of content circulated, and also of social bonds. Although current events and social issues are widely discussed by independents and ordinary netizens on Weibo, film-related topics are represented more there than on Twitter. The American website constitutes an alternative to Weibo, and therefore attracts users who are targeted by the censors and more interested in activism than in cinema. On Twitter, independent documentaries are discussed more for their topics than for sharing news revolving around cinephilia. If uses on Weibo reveal the level of social commitment of the independent milieu, Twitter highlights the strong ties between some independents and social activists with shared interest in historical and social matters or issues regarding state violence.

CONCLUSION: A COMMITTED GROUP BETWEEN CINEPHILIA AND ACTIVISM

Observing online the practices of netizens involved with independent documentaries reveals that, to a certain extent, they behave similarly to online film-oriented groups in other countries. Promoting films and related events, and exchanging views on documentaries constitute the bulk of the independents' online exchanges on forums, social networks, blogs and microblogs. Originally characterised by a cinephilia emerging from piracy practices, and gradually moving towards unofficial yet more professional activities and concerns, their online practices reflect the evolution of the group as much as the evolution of the Internet, and how these new tools are adapted to their needs and difficulties.

Like other netizens engaged in unofficial activities, they use linguistic subterfuge and visual puns or stories as means of resistance and affirmation. This study of online practices related to independent documentaries shows that from the start, these films are directly related to the pressing issue of restricted freedom – a topic that proves to be growing over the years in online exchanges among the independent milieu. Indeed, the more Internet platforms individualise and facilitate loose network interactions, the more exchanges on varied topics diversify and extend beyond the immediate concerns of this narrow group of independent documentary film practitioners. Following the evolution of online platforms, and paralleling its own growth and diversification, the independent milieu seems increasingly involved in non-cinematic discussions about issues ranging from free speech to media independence, from the rights of disenfranchised populations to the struggles of imprisoned activists. Their networks of sociability and online practices reveal differing levels of online commitment among them. Yet, even those who favour film-related discussions disseminate a form of social awareness to a wider audience, thanks to the topics of their documentaries, which often address or emphasise crucial social issues. Others are in close contact with rights activists, and their films as well as their online uses are dedicated to circulating relevant information to fellow activist netizens. In turn, other Internet users appropriate independent films to voice critical discourses on society, resist official truths and initiate or participate in online protests (Yang 2009).

The evolution of online platforms towards microblogging allows wider participation in online exchanges, since lower levels of competence are required. More exchanges are then facilitated on more varied topics, but they converge towards a practice of sharing not only discourse but also documents. This document-sharing practice is popular among all microblog users, but in the case of independent documentary filmmakers, it completes and extends their film practices into online exchanges. Speed, multiple retransmissions and coded language play an important role on Chinese mainstream platforms, since their aim is to share information constantly on the verge of disappearance due to censorship. Although Ai Xiaoming's blogging activities seemed to represent a rather isolated if radical example of documentary practices among the range of online uses in the independent milieu, today's microblogging practices allow other users to sustain a similar approach to information dissemination through comments and documents. These recent trends in online practices help narrow the divide between activist filmmakers such as Ai Xiaoming and more 'arty' and supposedly less committed ones such as Zhao Liang, for instance. It shows that social commitment, which used to bifurcate the independent documentary film movement, is in reality more a common feature than a clear dividing line. Even if their films' discourses are not equally engaged, their online practices – if any – almost always relate to sensitive social issues.

NOTES

1. Some scholars call these films 'new documentaries', but this term is misleading, since it also refers to innovative TV programmes authorised and broadcast in the mid-eighties, a few years prior to the appearance of the 'independent documentary movement'.
2. Two decades of independent documentaries have produced a body of 500 films, with around fifty regular filmmakers and many other occasional ones. Yearly production, a mere dozen films in the 1990s, has reached twenty to forty-five films since 2002.
3. As of 2013, there were around six main unofficial festivals and four archive centres dedicated to independent films in China.
4. *Minjian* refers to activities outside of direct state control – literally, belonging to the 'space of the people', thus 'unofficial'.
5. The Fanhall community, for instance, was first founded online, and has since carried out multiple initiatives, ranging from film production to film festivals, DVD releases and so on. See below for more examples.
6. Or when, for various reasons, websites are closed down, as in the case of Fanhall and Bullog, of which we will say more later. Online practices in China vary greatly due to the evolution of both technologies and censorship rules. Mobile applications with a lower public degree, such as WeChat, became more popular around 2013 to eschew stricter control on Weibo.
7. These tactics include accessing the World Wide Web by circumventing the Great Firewall through VPNs, and circulating coded humorous critical comments based on a creative use of Chinese or the English language. However, James Leibold warns against overlooking conservative or mainstream online uses. The 'sensitive words list' on *China Digital Times* tracks filtered terms. See http://chinadigitaltimes.net/china/sensitive-words-series, accessed 22 November 2013.
8. RWF's homepage: http://www.xici.net/b2467/index.asp, accessed 22 November 2013.
9. Meaning that there was no particular event related to these films, which could have altered results by swamping them with updates on the ongoing manifestation.
10. Exchanges between 'ordinary users' (who do not belong to the independent cinema milieu) have also been considered, but due to space limitations they will not be discussed here.
11. See, for instance, Weixidi, 'VCD de banben xiangshu', *RWF Forum*, 11 January 1999, http://www.xici.net/d12484.htm, accessed 22 November 2013.
12. See Weixidi, '98 guanpian riji (er)', *RWF Forum*, 14 January 1999, http://www.xici.net/#d12593.htm, accessed 22 November 2013.
13. See Weixidi, '"Houchuang kan dianying" dianying julebu', *RWF Forum*, 22 April 2000, http://www.xici.net/#d106699.htm, accessed 22 November 2013.
14. Since 2000, similar unofficial film 'salons' have been blooming in various cities, including Beijing, Guangzhou and Shanghai, where the first of its kind, Cinema Studio 101, was established as early as 1996.
15. See, for instance, Clyde-Chan, 'Zhongguo duli yingxiang niandu zhan: bagua you jian bagua', *RWF Forum*, 11 November 2011, http://www.xici.net/#d157232654.htm, accessed 22 November 2013, or Zhangyaxuan, 'Guanyu xiandai cheng yingzhan de zhongyao xiaoxi', *RWF Forum*, 20 April 2003, www.xici.net/#d10141436.htm, accessed 22 November 2013.
16. See Zhangyaxuan, '"Guanzhu Nandu an" - wenhuajie gongkai qianmingxin ji jiezhi 4 yue 15 ri wan 12 shi qianming mingdan', *RWF Forum*, 16 April 2004, www.xici.net/#d18858886.htm, accessed 22 November 2013. This petition appealed on behalf of

Chief Editor Cheng Yizhong and other journalists who had been accused of economic crimes after covering a sensitive case.

17. The site seems to have been taken down since 2012. Previous URLs include: www.bullogger.com, http://www.bullock.cn and http://bullog.org, accessed 3 February 2012.
18. Her Sina blog (http://blog.sina.com.cn/aixiaoming2011) stopped in 2009, as did the one hosted on the 163 platform (http://aixiaomingbk.blog.163.com). URL of Bullog blog: www.bullogger.com/blogs/XIAOMINGAI, accessed 3 February 2012. Current blog: http://aixiaomingstudio.blogspot.hk, accessed 22 November 2013.
19. See http://www.bullogger.com/blogs/XIAOMINGAI/archives/359784.aspx, accessed 3 February 2012. Hu Jia is an environmental rights and AIDS activist placed under house arrest from 2006 to 2007, and imprisoned for three years for incitement to subvert state power. He was freed in June 2011.
20. *Kaixin* is a Chinese equivalent of Facebook, while *Douban* links people together mainly around their shared cultural interests (books, films, music, etc.).
21. Others – and sometimes more famous ones – are not very active. For instance, Wang Bing's profile tallied only thirteen following, 324 followers and twelve posts as of July 2013.
22. Ai Xiaoming's Weibo was shut down in July 2013.
23. Rights activist and self-taught lawyer Chen Guangcheng protested against violent enforcement of the one-child policy. He was jailed and subsequently placed under house arrest in 2010, and his dramatic escape in April 2012 drew massive online support.
24. See this famous comic blog: http://hexiefarm.wordpress.com/, accessed 22 November 2013.

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Conclusion

Camille Deprez and Judith Pernin

The variety of case studies included here should not give the impression that this volume was conceived as a comprehensive overview of the issue of independent documentary in contemporary times. Rather, it aimed at prompting new interest for, and innovative academic perspectives on, the manifold significations of independent documentary production today.[1] Besides demonstrating the complexity, variability, pragmatism and paradoxes that this notion of 'independent' documentary entails, this collection of case studies also endeavoured to reveal important similarities among different practitioners in the field. In fact, the book chapters may be reshuffled to highlight other significant connections between them.

BIG NAMES, UP-AND-COMING FILMMAKERS AND A NEW APPROACH TO AUTHORSHIP

As Kristian Feigelson noted in his chapter on Chris Marker, the constant evolution of image technologies challenges documentary filmmaking practices, and it is striking to see how some celebrated authors, who started their careers well before the digital turn, have successively embraced the new possibilities offered by direct sound recording, analogue video and amateur camcorders, and subsequently by digital cameras and computerised editing devices and circulation modes. A forerunner and a doyen, Chris Marker has a few contenders in this field, as the works of Agnès Varda, Chantal Ackerman, Harun Farocki, Ogawa Shinsuke, Abbas Kiarostami and Werner Herzog

demonstrate. Instead of being inhibited by successive technological developments, these filmmakers have actively participated in the renewal of documentary in film, video and digital media, using a playful approach to technology and rethinking their work methods to interrogate the documentary form. It is perhaps this very attitude that constitutes their legacy, and that has inspired subsequent generations of documentarists such as Rithy Panh. Although thematically coherent, each of Panh's films represents an opportunity to experiment with the documentary apparatus, while simultaneously confronting Cambodia's recent history, both ethically and methodically. Either televised or theatrical documentaries,[2] his films are undoubtedly the creative works of an author whose achievements reach far beyond the realm of images. His cinematic stance on Cambodian history constitutes a personal and universal reflection on genocide.

If an experimental approach to the documentary is pervasive in recent independent films, the ideological legacy of previous filmmakers is still not accepted at face value. Following the post-1990s global power shifts and the critical reassessment of ethnography, new authors had to carefully re-evaluate their elders' teachings, especially when the relations between filmmakers and filmed subjects were involved. Between the lines of his main argument on the heritage of Jean Rouch and Pier Paolo Pasolini in the documentary made by a young French filmmaker shooting in Africa (Chapter 4), Eric Galmard argued that the subject of independent documentary remains a critical concern for postcolonial African countries today. Indeed, contemporary European filmmakers continue – in most cases and to a large extent – to apply a controlling gaze to populations and places they have supposedly ceased to rule for more than fifty years. This statement challenges the filmmakers themselves, who tend to deny this contradiction, claiming that their documentary filmmaking and discourse transcend that of the colonial rulers and therefore can be considered 'independent'. Does this mean that any documentary endeavour on others' places and people are doomed to dismissal or suspicion due to their origin and colonial legacies? That would go against the grain of the recently praised 'transnationality' of cinema (see Introduction), but this argument can leave us pondering the legitimacy of discourses based on the author's identity. It is also an argument to reconsider the subjective turn in recent independent documentary as a way of eschewing this obstacle. Later in the book, while exploring the personal and essayist voice of Hong Kong filmmaker Anson Mak, Mike Ingham clearly presented Mak's complex combination of subjective and collective views and experiences of the Asian city as a new and unparalleled sociopolitical critique (Chapter 10). In so doing, Mak powerfully reflects on the issue of colonialism, and the rise of her own and her filmed subjects' personal voices are clear attempts to reconfigure experimental documentary towards subjectivity.

A HISTORICAL DISCOURSE BASED ON PERSONAL MEMORY

As demonstrated by the second section of this book, as well as by many other works and filmmakers cited in other chapters, this emphasis on subjectivity is widely observed in recent independent documentaries. Independent filmmakers' experimental approaches often turn out to be highly experiential as well. The adoption and valorisation of personal narrative modes, although not new in themselves, seem to be recently directed mostly at historical topics – not to produce ideological discourses or provide an authoritative reading of the past, but rather to interrogate and challenge official histories through personal memories and experiences. This does not mean that adopting a subjective viewpoint reflects a lack of ambition towards documentary's 'truth claim', but rather that their discourses are elaborated on different assumptions and rely on other authenticating protocols and work methods. For instance, celebrated films such as *The Act of Killing* (dir. Oppenheimer, 2012) are examples of a highly performative approach to documentary filmmaking that goes so far as to immerse the spectator in the intimacy of an ordinary murderer's daily life and aspirations to stardom. The perpetrator's viewpoint is nevertheless far from being the most represented in recent documentaries. Rithy Panh's *Duch* and *S21* focus on building what Raya Morag calls a 'truth archive' by confronting perpetrators' discourses and acts (Chapter 6). By way of contrast, his latest very personal film, *The Missing Picture* (2013), testifies to an individual turn in a highly subjective oeuvre that never reached the level of immediacy that a first person account can convey regarding such a large-scale issue as Cambodia's genocide. In China, recent independent documentary filmmakers have focused on recording ordinary people's memories or those of the victims of successive post-1949 political campaigns in works situated at the crossroads of raw interviews, filmed autobiography and adaptation of literary accounts, such as Wang Bing's *He Fengming* and its fictional accompanying piece *The Ditch* (2011) (Veg 2012). Hu Jie's *In Search of Lin Zhao's Soul* (2005), *Though I Am Gone* (2008) and the more recent *Spark* (2013) are more akin to investigative journalism, while Wu Wenguang's Folk Memory Project (2010–) is a participative oral history series of films focusing initially on rural experiences of the Great Famine. Such endeavours take various forms, but they all contribute to building an unofficial history based on the subjective recollection of the filmed subjects (Pernin 2011). Fragile as these unofficial efforts may seem, due to their very independent character and the flimsy nature of memory, it seems that nothing can replace the power of personal accounts in shedding light on the dark corners of history, something further demonstrated by Juliette Goursat and Sheila Petty in this book (Chapters 7 and 8). In fact, these subjective narratives are not meant to reproduce the exact course of history and are

seldom explicitly claimed as authoritative historical truth. Rather, they aim at proving a plurality of historical experiences, as well as conveying an accurate account of the feeling of things past.

DOCUMENTARY ART AND ONLINE DOCUMENTARY

The aforementioned reshaping of authorship by post-1990 practices means that the documentary form is appropriated by people who are not strictly embracing cinematic perspectives. Michael Renov refers to Isaac Julien and Péter Forgács, who 'produce works for museums and galleries that extend and make more complex their documentary engagements' and thus 'have helped transform documentary culture' (Renov 2007: 17). Apart from the usual purposes of ordinary documentary producers, visual and sound artists, performers and dancers have also incorporated documents or adopted documentary practices and protocols such as interviews, or sound and video recordings. Interestingly, in China, this documentary turn is closely linked to the emergence, at the end of the 1980s, of independent film and art practitioners operating at the margins of the established art world and official audio-visual institutions. This phenomenon occurred in various fields. In performing arts, it is exemplified by directors such as Mou Sen or contemporary dance troupes such as Wen Hui's Living Dance Studio, who based their works on videos and interviews.[3] In photography and visual arts, new documentary groups developed under the shared practice of on-site recordings of spontaneous events or grassroots phenomena. Meanwhile, performance artists powerfully reconfigured the debate on art and the public sphere by dedicating as much creativity to the conception of their ephemeral acts as to their recording, combining moving and still images to other forms of documentation such as writing (Berghuis 2006; Pernin 2013; Wu 2002). The disappearance of familiar urban landscapes, the fading memory of collectivism and traumatic political campaigns, as well as a justified identity crisis in the midst of rapid transition can explain this attraction to documentary, which also encourages viewers to face overlooked social issues brought about by modernisation. Significantly, these artists have all kept their distance from artistic institutions – a move exemplifying their need to operate in a depoliticised framework (Hou 2002) and with what they considered a 'neutral' medium and language, guaranteed by the perceived objectivity of the recording machine. This wide-ranging interest in documentary, conceived not merely as a film but also as an art form, can be explained differently according to each cultural context, but it probably mainly testifies to artists' general engagement with the world and contemporary sociopolitical issues.

Apart from expanding our understanding of documentary, the artistic appropriation of the form has displaced the documentary's viewing site and

reshaped the viewer's experience. Tess Takahashi has shown that in the new independent space of art galleries, installations and loops replace more standardised modes of theatrical spectatorship, and the overlap between fiction and documentary – usually clearly separated in conventional cinema and traditional media – is emphasised, thus generating unprecedented affective resonances with momentous historical experiences (Chapter 12).

At the other end of a documentary spectrum – usually defined by two seemingly antagonist poles (artistic creativity and factuality) – stand online documentary practices. This term, which encompasses diverse phenomena evolving rapidly, mainly targets the exchange of documentary video, still images or other documents and their discussion by amateurs, anonymous authors and occasionally by professional filmmakers. The ubiquity of documentary images – enabled by the digitisation of various production and consumption steps – means that viewing, making and debating around documentary nowadays occurs in an entirely new setting. This does not equate to a radical alteration of practices or to an ontological change of the photographic image, but rather to a transformation of scale, which in turn can radically affect our relation to documentary images and especially our belief in their authenticity. As Gunthert notes: 'The recording's sincerity is no longer guaranteed by photographic technology, but by the author's individual inscription in his image, made visible through various noticeable features' (Gunthert 2014: 4). Subjectivity is therefore playing a growing role as a testament to image authenticity, while the popularisation of new production modes and documentary conversational practices allow playful or serious exchanges over what they represent. Any recent political turmoil makes us more aware of the vitality of the documentary image and the importance of its circulation and discussion in forging or accompanying political and social discourses and actions. This is particularly the case when official information is not trusted, as in Japan during the Fukushima catastrophe (Chapter 14) or on a daily basis in China (Chapter 15). Even if they cannot replace independent or professional journalism, these exchanges of documents and documentary images on popular social media are an essential part of how we inform ourselves and how we imagine social change today. At another level, as much as the artists' involvement with the documentary form redesigns our experiences with and expectations towards it, citizen participation in the making and circulation of documentary images redefines a whole set of social uses, by negotiating a status for independent documentary production vis-à-vis the media sphere. Although these recent developments should not be overpraised, this will probably become a very lively area for documentary studies in the future. In the meantime, we can enjoy a highly diversified choice of documentary images on the Internet, one being the web documentary, which seems to be today's hottest offering in the field. But as Bernadette Luciano and Hilary Chung noted in their cross analysis of a

feature-length documentary and its web-based counterpart (Chapter 13), the adaptation of the former to an 'internet format' does not necessarily equate with progress in terms of narration and aesthetics, even if the emphasis on transmediality, participation and interactivity should make us hope for more interesting developments.

In any case, it shows that the industry has promptly incorporated these recent changes occurring at the margins of the usual places of documentary consumption, perhaps due to the vitality of other sectors of documentary film production, circulation and exhibition. As Chapters 1, 3 and 10 demonstrated, the models of television documentary production and broadcasting have been both challenged and renewed in many places since the 1980s, creating new possibilities and also new dependencies for filmmakers. At the same time, new actors, incentives and production mechanisms have appeared, targeting mainly 'creative' and independent works. The emergence of crowdfunding, specific funds allocated by national public agencies for the development of new transmedia documentary forms and the proliferation of events and rhizomatic networks of structures and individuals of various statuses, all dedicated to documentary films, indicate a tremendous reconfiguration of the documentary field. This not only provides scholars and viewers alike with hours of enjoyment and potential research subjects, but also challenges our imagination and understanding of independence in the documentary field.

INDEPENDENCE AT RISK

Despite differences in terms of geographical, political, economic, social and cultural contexts, this collection of case studies has presented common concerns, some of which require further transversal investigation. For example, while independent documentaries across continents unite in opposing multiple forms of political censorship, they face greater difficulties when confronting more insidious forms of control. As in many countries around the world over the past twenty-five years, Indian citizens increasingly challenge the state, as demonstrated by the anti-corruption popular movement led by social activist Anna Hazare in 2011–12 and the following rise of the new anti-corruption Aam Admi Party during the national elections campaign in 2014, both widely covered by participants on social media platforms (using chats, posts or videos). Facing increasing challenges from its citizens, the state is compelled to prove it works for the benefit of the people. This is why, in the area of film censorship, Public Service Broadcasting Trust (PSBT) – a funding institution related to the national TV network Doordarshan – now invites independent filmmakers to submit their projects for funding without restrictions in theme or style. State funders want to show both Indian and international audiences

that their film catalogue contributes to documentary creativity, free expression and transparent governance. This situation clearly demonstrates that pressures between the state and independent documentary practitioners work both ways. However, censorship coming from the post-1990 liberal market economy seems more insidious and difficult to neutralise. In India, documentary films struggle in the shadow of the powerful commercial film and TV industries, which seldom produce, distribute and exhibit them, because they consider documentary subjects and styles too ingrown and edgy to attain their objective of mass popular appeal and high profitability. As a result, maintaining their independent status – or simply surviving – mainly implies inventing pragmatic strategies of cooperation with these mainstream industries. For instance, independent documentary filmmaker Paromita Vohra recently adapted the Israeli reality TV series *Connected* to the Indian context, and launched her sixty-five episodes of *Connected Hum Tum/Connected Us You* on the commercial Zee TV network in June 2013. Borrowing from the personal video diary, she handed digital cameras to six Indian urban women, typecast to represent different social classes, age categories and ways of life. They were asked to film their daily routines, often sharing personal thoughts directly with the camera, after which this rough footage was edited by the filmmaker during post-production. Consequently, Vohra and Zee representatives kept control of the final cut of each episode. With this new hybrid programme, Vohra introduced one of the most important forms of independent documentary filmmaking since the 1980s–early 1990s to sustain the recent and profitable development of reality shows on Indian commercial TV networks. In this case, one cannot deny the innovative component of the programme, while noting the ambiguity of its independent status.

In order to protect film independence at the local and national levels, action is also often required on the international scene. Facing the overwhelming competition of Hollywood blockbusters, new TV series and their powerful networks of distribution and circulation, most countries are compelled to implement efficient strategies of resistance to protect their local markets. In terms of international cultural policy, several nations gathered during the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle in 1999 to oppose US cultural supremacy. They supported the right to 'cultural exception' (*exception culturelle*) advanced by the French in response to the growing penetration of US productions into their national markets. This expression refers primarily to supporting smaller, talented professionals in the industry, as well as film and audio-visual creativity and experimentation.[4] However, this notion more precisely applies to the European Union rejecting the liberalisation of cultural services and implies specific measures of state intervention, including distribution quotas, production and distribution of financial aid, as well as co-production agreements in the region. But it can also be applied, to a certain extent, to

countries outside of Europe. In India, for instance, resistance to US productions is sustained through prolific production in several provinces (mainly, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh), national quotas on foreign film imports and regional tax systems privileging local productions. In 2003, during the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture's (UNESCO) General Assembly, India iterated the necessity to federate nations around the notion of 'cultural diversity', rather than 'cultural exception', which was considered too defensive and Euro-centred (Deprez 2010). Thus, India not only determinedly reacts to defend its own cultural specificity, but also plays an active role in uniting actors located outside of North America and Europe – whose interests are consequently often considered secondary in the international arena – around this critical issue. Although this strategy seems to mainly benefit mainstream film and TV productions by safeguarding dynamic industries at national levels, it also creates a general environment more favourable to the development of other independent forms, including the documentary. If, as the book has argued, independent documentary continues to evolve and reinvent itself according to new and ever-challenging contexts in the post-1990 era, further stimulating reconfigurations are to be expected. More than a final response to this highly complex epistemological issue, this volume is simply a call for the indispensable re-envisioning of contemporary cultural forms.

NOTES

1. Areas or new production methods such as crowdfunding not covered in the book still offer scholars important prospects on independent documentary.
2. Rithy Panh's filmography includes fiction and documentary works produced for both television broadcast (*Site 2*, documentary, 1989; *Que la barque se brise, que la jonque s'entrouvre*, fiction, 2000) and theatrical release.
3. See, for the former, his adaptation of Yu Jian's poem 'File Zero' in 1995, and for the latter, *Report on Giving Birth* (1999) and *Report on the Body* (2002).
4. In turn, as a strategy to constantly reinvent itself, Hollywood expects to borrow and benefit from such creativity and experimentation.

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Notes on the Contributors

Mick Broderick is Associate Dean of Research for the School of Arts at Murdoch University and Deputy Director of the National Academy of Screen and Sound (NASS). He has held elected positions on the national management committees of the Australian Research Council's Cultural Research Network (CRN) in 2004–6 and the Australian Screen Production Educators Research Association (ASPERA) in 2006–7 and 2009–11. His scholarly writing has been translated into French, Italian and Japanese, and his major publications include editions of the reference work *Nuclear Movies* (1988, 1991) and, as editor, *Hibakusha Cinema: Hiroshima, Nagasaki and the Nuclear Image in Japanese Film* (1996, 1999). Recent co-edited collections include *Trauma, Media, Art: New Perspectives* (2010) and *Interrogating Trauma: Collective Suffering in Global Art and Media* (2013).

Barton Byg teaches German literary and cultural studies as well as film studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. He is founding Director of the DEFA Film Library and a founding faculty member of the UMass Interdepartmental Program in Film Studies. His publications focus on the cinema and cultural legacy of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), the films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub, documentary film and Cold War culture. His recent interdisciplinary teaching has focused on such topics as landscape and film, colour, modern poetry and the culture of memory.

Hilary Chung is Senior Lecturer at the School of Cultures, Languages and Linguistics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand, where she teaches

Asian cultural studies and comparative literature. She has research interests in socialist realism, gender identity, the poetics of diaspora and exile and issues of multiculturalism. Her publications include *In the Party Spirit: Socialist Realism and Literary Practice in the Soviet Union, East Germany and China* (1996), *Yang Lian, Unreal City: A Chinese Poet in Auckland* (2006) and numerous articles and book chapters. Her two current projects are a comparative study of the enactments of multiculturalism in Chinese diaspora theatre and a study of the representation of the Chinese migrant in European film.

Camille Deprez is a Research Assistant Professor at the Academy of Film of Hong Kong Baptist University. Her initial research areas were the Indian mainstream film – or Bollywood – and television industries. Two single-authored books, *La télévision indienne: Un modèle d'appropriation culturelle* (2006) and *Bollywood: cinéma et mondialisation* (2010), academic articles and book chapters came out of these two long-term research projects. She is a referee for the academic journal *Studies in Documentary Film* and is currently developing new funded research projects on Indian documentary film and French colonial documentary film in Asia (http://documentary-film.af.hkbu.edu.hk).

Kristian Feigelson, a sociologist, teaches film studies at the University of the Sorbonne Nouvelle (IRCAV) in Paris. Co-author of *Research on Chris Marker* (PSN, 2002), he regularly contributes to different journals, such as *Cinémaction* and *Théorème*. His latest books are *The Film Factory* (2011) and *Bollywood: Industry of Images* (2012).

Eric Galmard worked and taught in several countries (the Philippines, Cambodia and Japan) after studying literature and film. Since 2009, he has taught in the Performing Arts Department at Strasbourg University, notably lecturing in documentary cinema and Asian cinema, and is currently preparing a doctoral thesis on asynchronous speech in the contemporary documentary film, under the supervision of Professor Vincent Lowy (CREM, Lorraine University).

Juliette Goursat is Assistant Lecturer (ATER) at the ESAV (Ecole Supérieure d'Audiovisuel, Toulouse) and completed her PhD dissertation on autobiographical documentaries at the EHESS (School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences, Paris) in 2014. In 2012–13, she was an Arthur Sachs Fellow at Harvard University (GSAS, Department of Visual and Environmental Studies). She has published several articles on autobiographical films and American documentaries.

John Hughes is an independent filmmaker of award-winning documentary and drama. He was the recipient of the inaugural Joan Long Award for achievement in Film History (2006), a NSW Premier's History Award (2007) and the Stanley Hawes Award for contributions to Australian documentary (2006). He has a PhD from RMIT University in Media and Communication and was Commissioning Editor, Documentary, with SBS Independent (1999–2002). Recent documentaries include *Love & Fury* (28 minutes, 2013, ABC TV1) on Judith Wright and 'Nugget' Coombs and *Indonesia Calling: Joris Ivens in Australia* (90 minutes, 2009, ABC TV1). A book on the realist film movement in Melbourne, *The Archive Project* – following his 2006 feature documentary of the same name – was published in 2013.

Mike Ingham is an Associate Professor in the Department of English Studies at Lingnan University, Hong Kong and is also a director of English drama. He has published monographs and articles on Hong Kong documentary film, drama, adaptation and intermediality studies, as well as Hong Kong studies. Recent publications related to film include *Hong Kong Documentary Film* (co-authored with Ian Aitken, 2014); 'Hong Kong Cinema and the Film Essay: A Matter of Perception', in Gina Marchetti, Esther M. K. Cheung and Tan See-kam (eds), *Hong Kong Screenscapes: From the New Wave to the Digital Frontier* (2010); 'History in the Making: Allegory, History, Fiction and Chow Yun-fat in the 1980s Hong Kong Films *Hong Kong 1941* and *Love in a Fallen City*', in *Screening the Past* (vol. 24), *Journal of History and Cinema* (2009); *Johnnie To's PTU* in the New Hong Kong Cinema Series (2009) and *Hong Kong – A Cultural and Literary History* in the City of the Imagination Series (2007). He is currently working on the interrelationship between film and theatre in a study of keywords and key concepts.

Robert (Bo) Jacobs is an Associate Professor at the Hiroshima Peace Institute of Hiroshima City University in Hiroshima, Japan. He works on social and cultural aspects of nuclear technologies. He is the author of *The Dragon's Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age* (2010), the editor of *Filling the Hole in the Nuclear Future: Art and Popular Culture Respond to the Bomb* (2010) and the co-editor of *Images of Rupture in Civilization Between East and West: The Iconography of Auschwitz and Hiroshima in Eastern European Arts and Media*, with Urs Heftrich, Bettina Kaibach and Karoline Thaidigsmann (forthcoming). He is the co-editor of the forthcoming special issue of *Critical Military Studies* on the topic of re-imagining Hiroshima, and is an executive editor of the *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*. He is on the advisory board of the CORE museum at the Hanford nuclear site, and in the writing committee of the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Museum. His current research focuses on the social and cultural effects of radiation exposures to communities in nuclear test sites and nuclear production sites.

Bernadette Luciano, Associate Professor at the University of Auckland, specialises in Italian cinema and cultural studies. She has published articles and book chapters on Italian cinema, film adaptation, Italian women's historical novels, women's autobiographical writing and literary translation, and co-edited an interdisciplinary book on cross-cultural encounters between New Zealand and Europe. She is author of *The Cinema of Silvio Soldini: Dream, Image, Voyage* (2008) and of the co-authored book (with Susanna Scarparo) *Reframing Italy: New Trends in Italian Women's Filmmaking* (2013).

Liani Maasdorp holds a PhD on self-reflexive editing devices in a selection of South African documentary films from the University of Cape Town (UCT). She previously worked in the television industry as both director and documentary editor. Her work has been broadcast on the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), National Geographic and the Discovery Channel. She has written for academic journals and film magazines and has lectured on fiction and non-fiction film at various film schools. She is the Academic Director of the UCT TV Studio and runs the Stepping Stone outreach video training programme.

Raya Morag is an Associate Professor of Cinema Studies and Head of The Smart Family Institute of Communications in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. She is the author of *Defeated Masculinity: Post-Traumatic Cinema in the Aftermath of War* (2009); *The Defeated Male. Cinema, Trauma, War* (2011, in Hebrew); and *Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema* (2013). Morag was the guest editor for the *Studies in Documentary Film*'s special issue on Israeli Documentary Cinema (April 2013). Her work has appeared in such journals as *Cinema Journal*, *Camera Obscura*, *The Communication Review*, *Journal of Film & Video*, *International Journal of Communication* and *Framework*. Morag is a recipient of an Israel Science Foundation Grant (2013–17) for her current project on 'The Perpetrator Figure and Societal Trauma in Cinema'.

Judith Pernin is a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at CEFC in Hong Kong, associated with the Institut d'Histoire du Temps Présent (IHTP) in Paris. Her PhD dissertation on *Independent Practices of Documentary in China (1990–2010)* (coming out in a French edition in spring 2015) reflects her interest in the history of Chinese non-fiction film and incited her to open her research to other contemporary practices of documentary forms across the arts. She is a referee for the academic journal *Studies in Documentary Film* and an editorial committee member of the peer-reviewed journal *China Perspectives*. She has conducted research on memory and performance in Chinese independent

documentary films, and published various articles on the subject. She has also co-edited two special issues of *China Perspectives* on *Independent Chinese Cinema: Filming in the 'Space of the People'* (2010) and on *Remembering the Mao Era, From Creative Practices to Parallel History* (2014).

Sheila Petty is Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Acting Director of the Institut Français and Professor of Media Studies at the University of Regina (Canada). She has written extensively on issues of cultural representation, identity and nation in African and African diasporic screen media, and has curated film, television and digital media exhibitions for galleries across Canada. She is the author of *Contact Zones: Memory, Origin and Discourses in Black Diasporic Cinema* (Wayne State University Press, 2008). She is co-editor (with Blandine Stefanson) of the forthcoming *World Directory of Cinema: Africa*. Her current research focuses on transvergent African cinemas and interpretive strategies for analysing digital creative cultural practices. She is leader of an interdisciplinary research group and New Media Studio Laboratory (NMSL, University of Regina) spanning computer science, engineering and fine arts.

Tess Takahashi is Assistant Professor in the Department of Film at York University in Toronto. She is a member of the editorial collective *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies*. Her writing has appeared there, as well as in *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *Millennium Film Journal* and *Cinema Journal*. She is currently working on a book entitled *Impure Film: Medium Specificity and Intermediality in the North American Avant-Garde (1968–2008)*.

Aida Vallejo is an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Audiovisual Communication and Advertising at the University of the Basque Country, Spain. She is the founder and coordinator of the Documentary Work-group of the European Network for Cinema and Media Studies (NECS). She has published extensively on documentary and narratology, film festivals and media ethnography, and is currently working on the edition of a collective book on documentary film festivals. She has carried out fieldwork in the Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Greece, Turkey, Kosovo, Finland and Spain.

Deane Williams is Associate Professor of Film and Screen Studies at Monash University. He is the editor of the journal *Studies in Documentary Film* and his books include *Australian Post-War Documentary Films: An Arc of Mirrors* (2008), *Michael Winterbottom* (with Brian McFarlane, 2009), *The Grierson Effect* (2014, with Zoe Druick) and the three-volume *Australian Film Theory and Criticism* (co-edited with Noel King and Constantine Verevis, 2013–15). He is writing a book entitled *The Cinema of Sean Penn* for Wallflower Press.

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