OBJECT DOCUMENTARY

The Ethics of the Documentary Encounter Reframed

Minou Norouzi

Department of Media & Communications

Goldsmiths College, University of London

PhD Research as Practice

October 2018

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Minou Norouzi, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: Date: 15th October 2018

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first express my warmest gratitude to both my supervisors, Tony Dowmunt and Chris Wright, for their patience, commitment, and thoughtfulness. Being practitioners, they both possess great insight into the difficulties of balancing theory and practice so commonly faced by academic researchers coming from a practice background. They generously shared their experience and provided vital support, guiding me through my challenges. Their knowledge and expertise in their respective fields, as well as their critical input and creative contributions to this project, were invaluable. I would like to acknowledge the work of Abbas Nokhasteh for his mentorship, and Openvizor for vital financial resources in establishing the Sheffield Fringe project, which became the curatorial practice space where the theoretical concerns presented in this thesis were first played out. At each critical turn, Abbas engaged in fruitful discussions and helped develop practical solutions to the problems inherent in keeping a very small-scale organisation afloat. A huge thank you goes to Esther Harris, who worked alongside me on the Sheffield Fringe project from 2012. The project would not have continued without her input, support, and dedicated attention beyond its first edition in 2011. I owe Esther a great deal for her friendship, enthusiasm, and the saintly patience she brought to Sheffield Fringe. Though I knew where I wanted the project to go, I was ignorant as to the administrative structure necessary for running an ambitious, albeit small-scale arts project. Esther brought her experience in arts management, her creative thinking, and her own curatorial interests to the project. I would also like to thank Jennifer Fearnley, Rani Khanna, and Marie Billegrav Bryant, the co-founders of Sheffield Fringe. Particular thanks goes to Jennifer Fearnley for her creative input until 2013. Even though I do not provide a critical analysis of the Sheffield Fringe project in the written thesis, it forms a significant part of the practice element, and it is therefore important to dedicate considerable space acknowledging the project and the people who supported it. My curatorial work for Sheffield Fringe informed the writing and was crucial in giving me the space to try out ideas in practice before articulating the theoretical framework of those same ideas.

Sheffield Fringe was initiated to strengthen artists' documentary as a form of cultural production separate from market pressures. The engagement of the live audience additionally formed a vital part of this cultural production.

There are many people, institutions, and organisations to thank who were central to, or played a part in, this research project as well as in the vitality of Sheffield Fringe: Sean Cubitt, Andrea Phillips, Richard MacDonald, Joanna Zylinska, Shela Sheikh, Jonathan Whitehall and Zehra Arabadji at Goldsmiths College, University of London; Gareth Evans, Nayia Yiakoumaki, Thomas Ogden and Calvin Laing at Whitechapel Gallery (London); Sylvia Harvey; Charles Feltman; Didem Pekun; Luciano Zubillaga; Mark Nash at the Royal College of Art; Holly Stanton at Ghebaly Gallery (Los Angeles); Erika Balsom at King's College, London; Ben Cook, Mike Sperlinger, Ghislaine Leung, and Moira Ann Salt at LUX (London); Damien Sanville and Oliver Dickens at Close-Up Film Centre (London); Adam Pugh; Declan Long at NCAD, Dublin; Steve Holmgren and Christopher Allen at UnionDocs Center for Documentary Art (New York); Jess Wilcox at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum; Meyer Voggenreiter at Galerie Piece Unique (Paris); Andrew Cannon at Isabella Bortolozzi Galerie (Berlin); Walid Raad; Anna-Karin Larsson at Filmform (Stockholm); Vali Mahlouji; November Paynter at SALT Istanbul; Adam Hyman at Los Angeles Filmforum; Mark Toscano at Academy Film Archive (Los Angeles); Canyon Cinema (San Francisco); Ipek Yeğinsü at ArtCenter/Istanbul; Amanda McDowell; Mark R. Albrow, Tim Machin and Esther Johnson at Sheffield Hallam University; Sayshun Jay; Jamie Lowe; Mark Shenson; Saeed Taji Farouky; Gail Pearce; Tom Rielly and Logan McClure at TED Conferences; Angus Braithwaite; Georgia Stone and Andi Stamp (Sheffield Media Unit); John Furse and Rebekah Tolley; Charlotte Morgan, Lesley Guy, Richard Bartle, Mark Riddington at Bloc Projects and Bloc Studios (Sheffield); Steven Rand and Julia Knight at Apexart (New York); Steve Embrey; Alit Kreiz; Fred Lindberg; S1 Artspace (Sheffield); Matthew Stock; Graham Hughes at Angus-Hughes Gallery (London); Lindsay Friend at IMT Gallery (London); Ian Nesbitt and Emily Wilczek at Annexinema (Nottingham); Azra Tüzünoğlu; Mirko Nikolić; Victoria Simon at Buenos Aires Museum of Modern Art; Pauline Desouza at Diversity Art Forum; Hengameh Golestan; Afshin Dehkordi; Azar Emdadi; Madeleine Molyneaux at Picture Palace Pictures; Martin Waldmeier; Madeleine Mullett at Picturehouse

Cinemas; Jo Blair at the ICA (London); Daniel Davis and Nadine Lockyer at Anthony Reynolds Gallery (London); Rose Issa Projects (London); Joelle Te Paske at Paula Cooper Gallery (New York); Vanessa Fewster and Petra Freimund at the Austrian Cultural Forum (London); Sam Walby, Now Then Magazine; Chris Sharratt, a-n; Lucy Holt, Our Favourite Places; Jade Richardson; Mihaela Brebenel; Nikolaus Perneczky; Stephen Connolly; Mairéad McClean; Rosalind Nashashibi; Sasha Litvintseva; Judy Price; Tina Borkowski; Jonathan Perl; Duncan Brown; Ghazi Rabihavi; Natalia Pliakou; Andrea Márquez; Pablo Cuesta Pastor at Biblioteca Filmoteca Española, Madrid; Teni Bedrosian at Donald Bruce Kaufman Brentwood Branch, Los Angeles Public Library; Boris Gerrets; Renzo Martens; Lena Johanna Reisner at KOW, Berlin; Jacob D. Barreras at University of Colorado, Boulder; Ellen Greig at Chisenhale Gallery; Marilyn Brakhage; Fred Camper; Marilyn Ness, Big Mouth Productions; Dale Dobson, Maysles Films; Mylène Da Silva, Institut Lumière; Emmanuel Bolève, Cinémathèque Française; and all the artists who generously contributed to Sheffield Fringe, 2011–2018.

Rainer J. Hanshe proofread the writing at the MPhil stage. His comments, and critical feedback, helped further ground the text. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to present some of the early stage research at the North Carolina State University in 2013, and at "Political Aesthetics and Feminist Theory: Media, Art and Affect", NOISE Summer School at the Netherlands Research School of Gender Studies hosted by Utrecht University in 2014. I would especially like to thank Ora Gelley and Domitilla Olivieri for their respective invitations. Early research presentations at the "Exhibiting Video" conference at Westminster University (2012), "Visible Evidence XX", Stockholm (2013), and "ICSM Men & Masculinities Symposium" (2014) were also helpful. These knowledge exchanges with colleagues and fellow researchers enriched the experience.

I would like to thank the staff at the Goldsmiths' Graduate School, and especially Lesley Hewings for her care and support. This project could not have been possible without the financial support from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. In addition, I gratefully acknowledge financial support from the Arts Council England for the Sheffield Fringe project.

Monika and Bahram Norouzi cannot go unmentioned for their loving support that is never short of stimulating debate and practical help. This perhaps lengthy acknowledgement of all the aforementioned is testimony to the complexity of the journey and is intended to make visible the intricate support structure that may be necessary to complete it.

ABSTRACT

This practice-based research explores the objectification of the real in the context of interdisciplinary documentary practices. The exploration is undertaken through historical theoretical research, through interviews, and through my practice as a filmmaker and film curator. The research outcome comprises a written thesis, a film, and two curatorial projects. The central concern is the objectification of the real. By this I mean, perceiving the 'real' as a material resource. When artists use the real as material, does it always amount to a negative form of objectification? I explore objectification as a mode of resistance, as a way of destabilising the documentary method itself, and argue for objectification as a critical aesthetic method.

The research context circles around the so-called documentary turn where critical debates on 'truth', power, and ethics have resurfaced since the mid-1990s. My approach throughout is to move away from dualist subject/object relational thinking. Instead, the research configures a theoretical field of thought and puts into practice a method that considers both the aesthetic potential and the ethical challenges of an object-to-object relation. Whilst the research derives some concepts from an intersection of materialist philosophies, its primary drive is to reframe documentary ethics. I position documentary films and their constituents as objects in order to examine the ethics of this approach. The analysis presented aims to show that the critical method of the works explored, in part, consists of soliciting an ethical response through the production of discomfort. I argue objectification is central to this method. By reframing the relationship between films, filmmakers, and film viewers, I come to define the role of documentary making and viewing, as creating spaces for self-interrogation through a shared modality I call omnidirectional responsibility. This responsibility is considered through an inter-objective sensibility. That is, the physical engagement with the material world *as* material.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

For copies of this thesis with these items (see Fig. 24) missing please contact the author at http://www.minounorouzi.com

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The research contained in these pages was conducted initially through the practice methods of filmmaking and film curating as a starting point for further articulating knowledge findings through critical theoretical research. I mention the practice-as-research method first, not to place greater attribution to filmmaking or curating than I do to critical writing resulting from theoretical research, but in order to argue for practice as an equally valid form of knowledge production. The analysis contained in the written elements of the thesis comes together equally through research into critical theories, through interviews, and through my practice as a filmmaker and film curator. In short, the research is the outcome of an engagement with critical theory, following periods of practice-as-research. The practice elements, the film titled *Everything* (2017), and the two curatorial projects titled *Object Documentary* (2016) and *Object! On the Documentary as Art* (2017) can be found in the Appendix section of the thesis.

It is difficult to categorically delineate the ways in which my practice informs the theoretical concerns presented here. In some sense the individual elements of practice are the research 'lived' before being articulated as theoretical positions. My filmmaking, curatorial work and writing practice are then intertwined and mutually informing, with each being motivated by the desire to critically examine the ethics of documentary as a critical method in art. A significant portion of the practice element of this thesis has been rooted in my film-curatorial activities. Most of this has been consolidated through the Sheffield Fringe projects, engaging in both research and public presentation, together contributing to public access and discourse concerning the documentary method. The projects were realised variously through screenings, artist's talks, performances, exhibitions and a symposium. I have been responsible for the organisation and production of these small-scale, artist-run projects for Sheffield Fringe since 2011. My working method in framing films – the particular way I articulate my curatorial intention through films – is as a filmmaker. This means that, as well as focusing on concepts and ideas, my process of selecting and placing films privileges rhythm and the sensory, and most significantly, my interest is in the filmmakers' relationship to the objects of their study, as well as their relationship to film viewers. My research and analysis is focused on works where this relationship is discernable in ways that

may be experienced by viewers as discomforting, due to the sometimes oblique and at other times confronting manner in which the works articulate themselves. For me, curating films is in many ways an editorial task akin to the task of filmmaking. It is about how one sees, the particular details one is attuned to, and how one edits. In this sense, everything presented here is as much about what is left out as what is included. To think through one's own practice, in order to reflect on, and critically evaluate the work of others, involves aesthetic interests, political frictions, and ethical concerns that are specific to one's experience. The task of creatively writing up one's experience contains a bias. The question may arise: why this film, or that artist?

In my capacity as a film curator, I have on a number of occasions intentionally chosen to include works that raise ethical questions. This is because I am interested in contributing to the cross-pollination of ethical debates in an interdisciplinary context. My overall aim with this project is to revisit the ethical debates that started in documentary studies in the 1970s in order to reframe the ethics of the documentary method within the contemporary moment. Very broadly expressed, my work investigates documentary practices in the contexts of both art and documentary. Within these very broad fields, I explore the objectification of the real in order to help advance debates on documentary ethics in both fields. When it comes to making ethical assessments, I contend that ethical inquiries into documentary practices are – like many other aspects of our cultural and intellectual history – dominated by 'master' narratives. All too often, an analysis of the agency of the filmmaker is privileged over considering the agency of the objects of study. The aim of my research is to recalibrate this relationship through greater focus on considerations for the latter. [1] My research intervenes by arguing for the need of this recalibration as the primary ethical obligation of the viewer/critic.

The central concern of this thesis, therefore, is to analyse the ethics of working with documentary material as part of an artistic practice by paying close attention

[1] For an empirical study into documentary ethics from the point of view of the experiences of participants, see K. Nash, "Beyond the frame: researching documentary ethics", TEXT Special Issue, ASPERA: New Screens, New Producers, New Learning, April 2011, eds. Broderick & Leahy; and "Telling stories: the narrative study of documentary ethics", New Review of Film and Television Studies 2012, iFirst Article, pp. 1–14 (K. Nash, 2011a, 2012).

to and bringing into the discussion the viewer's attitude and responsibility when making critical assessments. This is what interests me in the aforementioned relationship of the filmmaker to the viewer. It is also what motivates the writing. To be sure, when I speak of documentary material I mean the 'real', however defined, being 'utilised' both as a material resource in art production, and being 'consumed' as part of the viewing process. As an artistic method or a formal device, I am particularly interested in what I term the objectification of the real. By that I mean working with and perceiving the real as an object, or a material resource. I do not place a negative value judgement on the term objectification, but instead think of it as making something, or someone an object of one's perception as a starting point from which to explore the complex relationship between self and world, or self and other, in a documentary context. [2] At times it may be noticeable that my use of the term 'object' is interchanged and interchangeable with the term 'other'. I work with this productive slippage as an attempt to amplify that the self is, that I am, and that you are always already an 'other', an object. This perceptual shift attempts to break out of a solely internalised view. Externalising the self on a horizontal plane alongside other objects may, I argue, help, and in turn may impact on assessments of ethical practice. This horizontal perspective need not negate or cancel out interiority. Contrary to any fear of negation, greater conceptual 'room' can become available for interiority and exteriority to co-exist on a simultaneous timeline. In short, subjectivity and objectivity can be axiological and mutually informing.

The research context situated itself around the so-called documentary turn, when documentary propositionally came to be seen, distributed, and theorised about as

[2] I lean on sociologist Peter Berger and Stanley Pullberg's differentiation of the terms, objectivation and objectification. Deriving their theoretical framework from the Hegelian/Marxian term *Versachlichung* (Berger & Luckmann, 1991), *objectivation* is a concept relating to all human products (material and non-material). It is a process, "whereby human subjectivity embodies itself in products that are available to oneself and one's fellow men as elements of a common world" (Berger & Pullberg, 1965: 199). According to Berger and Pullberg, to objectivate is to produce the world. *Objectification*, derived from the Hegelian *Vergegenständlichung* (Berger & Luckmann, 1991), specifically refers to "the moment in the process of objectivation in which man establishes distance from his producing and its product, such that he can take cognisance of it and make of it an object of his consciousness" (Berger & Pullberg, 1965: 200). Objectification then is a point during the objectivation process that facilitates the naming, communicating, commodifying, and similar of any particular thing, animate or inanimate. When I speak of objectification, I am referring to the common understanding of that moment of distancing, naming, thinking, relating. Objectivation *and* objectification, they stress, are *a piori*.

an art object. The main title of this thesis, "*Object Documentary*", positions 'documentary' as an object and intends to obliquely suggest the 'real' as an object like any other, or as "a thing like you and me" as Hito Steyerl may put it (Steyerl, 2010a). With this in mind, I consider the productive value of objectification as a process, and as a method of drawing attention to the slippery politics of the documentary method itself. Objectification in this context, as I formulate it, functions to counter assumption of how to 'do politics' with documentary, traditionally assumed to inform, educate, and campaign for political ends. In particular, I am interested in how objectification as a method can work against the viewer's identification-impulse as an act of surrogacy over the documentary image, and over the elements contained within it. Objectification, I argue, works against empathic identification and forces upon the viewer the issue of their complicity in the process of objectification through the very act of viewing.

In its day-to-day use, the perception of the word 'objectification' is inscribed with feminist critiques of the reductive process of seeing or treating a person as an object, a thing, or a commodity. As writer and scholar Ann J. Cahill points out, the problem of perceiving objectification as necessarily negative is to do with the "conceptual baggage that accompanied objectification", and this has "served to inhibit feminism's ability to articulate a positive, embodied […] ethics that neither marginalized nor vilified materiality" (Cahill, 2010: ix). My work shares with Cahill, and in particular with feminist writers like Trinh T. Minh-ha and Hito Steyerl, as well as with Rosi Braidotti, Karen Barad, Jane Bennett and Vivian Sobchack, a philosophical interest in reframing how we think about and relate to human and non-human agents. My work aims to attend to the objectification of the real in the context of documentary making and documentary viewing, without neglecting the ethical challenges at hand. The written component of the thesis explores this through the analysis of a number of films as case studies in support of my arguments. The theoretical framework is presented in four parts, comprising distinct elements. Whilst some of the works I write about particularly in Parts I, II, and III have received significant scholarly attention, both in the field of documentary and in critical theories about art, the aim of this research is to produce new readings. These readings clearly depart from already existing scholarly discourse by explicitly addressing objectification as a core aesthetic quality of the films with specific and intended political, as well as ethical

implications. Rather than following a narrative structure, the four parts are organised around thematic interconnections that support my overall argument. To privilege a creative approach to the writing, and in order to facilitate an associative flow, an integrated approach has been taken to reviewing literature relevant to the thesis, drawing on diverse texts from documentary studies, ethics, critical writing on art, and new materialist philosophies.

In my writing I am guided by the traditions of feminist, post-structural and post-colonial theories of language. My fondness in particular for the writing of Trinh T. Minh-ha and Ashon T. Crawley has encouraged me to follow this path. Thought – as Minh-ha puts it – and consequently, I believe, writing too, is "as much a product of the eye, the finger, or the foot as it is of the brain" (Minh-ha, 1989: 39). I speak not in jest when I say as a writer I am interested in how thought can be informed by my toes touching the surface beneath. To echo Minh-ha, any lapses, silences, or impasses unsettling an otherwise linear flow between the analytic and the poetic are desired. The writing then is intended to remain in part open "so that it may later on find, or not find, its closure" in the deferred communion with the reader (Minh-ha, 1989: 19).

The structure of the thesis represents the chronology of my research journey, though it need not be read in chronological order. Rather than for the specialist reader, the structure is designed with a general reader in mind, who may be uninitiated in the context and history of documentary ethics and in documentary's relationship to art. At times this may result in the specialist reader finding themselves overly familiar with certain aspects of the thesis. For example, Part I places the context of the research journey in the so-called documentary turn in the mid-1990s. It gives an overview of the context out of which the documentary turn emerged and begins to explore the relationship between documentary and art, and their historical relation to contemporary practices. The emphasis here it to establish how the historically conflicting ideas on what a documentary is, continue to impact on common perceptions amongst viewers and critics on the role of the documentary today, and on ethics, on what a documentary "ought" to do. For some, particularly those active in the academic context, and for those working within the sector of artists' moving image, these conflicts or divisions have eroded in recent years. But when considering a wider, more general readership and for those not

familiar with the specific history of the documentary turn and its relation to documentary history, I would hope that an overview of the historical divisions serves as a useful foundation. For, when it comes to critically evaluating ethical assumptions about what a documentary "ought" to do, it is vital to establish first how prevailing views on ethics in general, and dominant discourses on the ethics of documentary in particular, may have their roots in historical divisions about what a documentary is, its categorisation. Part I serves to establish this through a discussion of two examples of early cinema. Louis Lumière's historic work, *A Boat Leaving Harbour* [Barque sortant du port] from 1895, and Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes,* from 1971. These examples serve to show that the ontology of a work is in part signposted by its naming or categorisation and this categorisation may impact on expectations of what a work of art or a work of documentary ought to do, what its political function is and its ethical obligation. Yet, the ontology of both these works remains unresolved. For example, viewers and critics are in two minds about whether *A Boat Leaving Harbour* was intended by Lumière as narrative fiction or if it is an early work of documentary. As Dai Vaughan suggests, the inclusion of a "spontaneous moment" in form of unexpected waves pushing the rowers back towards the harbour may qualify it as the notional beginning of documentary history. In Part I, I take up the idea of the "spontaneous" and position it as a form of disobedient communication. I then formulate disobedient communication as one of documentary's core qualities and the inherent agency of documentary. In support of this, a brief analysis of Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* here has a dual purpose. For one, it demonstrates a second instance of conflicting views on ontology. Whilst Brakhage's work is commonly discussed through the prism of the avant-garde, he himself considered his films documentaries (Renov, 2007a; Brakhage, 1983). Secondly, *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* lends itself especially to a discussion of ethics and the responsibility of art. Due to graphic images of bodies undergoing autopsy and the related issue of consent, viewers may experience the film as discomforting, or as ethically 'problematic'. The discussion on conflicting views on what a documentary is, the ontology of works, their naming and categorisation is then vital in leading us into Part II, where an extended discussion on what a documentary does, or may do, is postulated through the impact of

objectification and how objectification as method works against the viewer's expectation of the role of documentary.

The discussion there is concentrated on the ways objectification as method can activate self-interrogation on the part of viewers with regard to their role in the viewing process, and in extension, raise questions about the role of documentary itself. This process, and this type of relationship between films, filmmakers and film viewers is complex and can be discomforting. The key terms I keep coming back to throughout the thesis in relation to the objectification of the real are: discomfort and ethical labour.

Part II explores the objectification impulse, as a productive antagonism, which engenders ethical labour through the production of discomfort. The case studies discussed at length are Luis Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* (1933) and Renzo Martens' *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008). I argue that, for the viewer, discomfort is both a product of and a response to the confrontation with the objectification that these works purposefully engage with. Objectification is here positioned as a productive resource in engaging viewers in a process that involves the investment of their ethical labour. But ethical labour, as I formulate it, is a process both filmmakers and viewers are engaged in. I contend this is so, because soliciting or causing discomfort, as well as engaging with and responding to discomfort, engenders a specific relationship between filmmakers and viewers. This relationship is so designed as to demand ethical labour on the part of viewers. For, the engagement with documentary material carries with it the demand for omnidirectional responsibility; that is, a shared responsibility. Like the onmidirectional microphone, I argue for this responsibility to be attuned to a conceptual and corporal dexterity that emanates in circular motion. But Part II also offers an alternative that is otherwise attuned to omnidirectional responsibility: Boris Gerrets' *Shado'man* (2014). Here objectification does not produce discomfort but extends out to give a sculptural quality to the documentary. I analyse the sculptural quality of *Shado'man* (2014) coming together through a working method that privileges the materiality of bodies, through physical encounters and detailed observations of physical actions. The analysis shows that Gerrets encounters the social as a malleable material to which he is tied through the

materiality of his own body and the shared experience of filming people on the margins of society in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

I have held the ideas expressed so far and which I expand upon throughout the thesis for some years preceding this particular research project and they are rooted in my own filmmaking practice and my experiences working in broadcast documentary production. To some degree my work is a response to my experience of working in the broadcast documentary field, where I witnessed, and was party to, the strategising and shaping of material content in ways that I questioned. This project, making the film titled *Everything* (2017), and the curatorial work consolidated through the Sheffield Fringe projects presented in the Appendix, are a response to the politics of production and distribution. These responses are extended here with specific reference to the contemporary prevalence of documentary as a critical method in art. In other words, this project brings together my response to experiences in both fields – a response that is initially enacted through the film and curatorial practice that make up this research project. This means that both the film and the curatorial presentations act as experiments where the objectification of the real as a proposition is played out in practice in order to tease out and amplify the proposition's challenge in ethical terms. Indeed, the films I have been interested in, and my own practice, do raise ethical challenges, but the greater discomfort I have felt comes from the manner in which those challenges have been discussed historically in ethical debates relating particularly to the documentary method. My contention has been that those challenges are often framed by ethical principles that are culturally, and ideologically, inscribed without adequate consideration for a lived ethics. This lived ethics I see played out through complex relationships formed between filmmakers and others (contributors, subjects, participants, protagonists, objects of study, or however we may name the other). Any definitive clarity about such relationships is inherently difficult to access for documentary viewers and critics, and I talk about this in relation to Boris Gerrets's *Shado'man* (2014) and Renzo Martens' *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008) in Part II. Not unlike relationships in the private domestic sphere, as outsiders to that relationship, we don't really know what goes on. We were not there and not part of the complex verbal and non-verbal negotiations, interactions, and practices that made up that relationship.

Likewise, the relationship between filmmakers and participants, or situations, can at times be hard to access. As viewers, we are outsiders to those relationships. Yet, as viewers and as critics we are invited to them retrospectively. We become involved through the extension of that relationship into the world. It becomes our world through the viewing process. But my proposition is that in our assessment of that originary relationship, and of ethics, we are absolutely obliged to bear in mind our position as invited guests.

The word guest is believed by some linguists to share an etymological relation to the ancient Greek word *xenos* derived from *hostis*, which can mean guest as well as stranger, or enemy. The double-sided nature of the word illustrates how a stranger can be a friendly as well as a hostile guest. Either way, the concept of reciprocity is embedded in the practice of being a host (filmmaker/curator) as well as being a guest (viewer/critic). I tried to first articulate this through *Reciprocal Relations*, a screening event that was part of a 9-day programme of talks, screenings, and exhibition that I curated, also titled *Object Documentary* (Bloc Projects Gallery, 10–18 June 2016).

Reciprocal Relations is an example of how the curatorial activity as research fed into the writing presented here. The programme was made up of a selection of films that privileged the relationship of the filmmakers to their material. The content of the films varied from opaque formulations on the politics of accelerated living, to the controversial phenomena of electro-hypersensitivity, and memory facing digital, chemical, neuronal, and environmental coercion, as well as automated language tuition as authoritative prose. Each of the films in *Reciprocal Relations* is for me an example of a very specific relationship between storyteller and listener as a form of reciprocal power. I framed the films as examples of object-to-object relations, calling the process the "objectification of the real", and I discuss in Part III one of the films included in the *Reciprocal Relations* programme, *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other* (Martin, 2015). To some, this specific framing and relation may be discomforting in principle, but placed together as a collection of films, I hoped to show that the films shared a dialogue, and its makers a strong sense of the positions from which they were speaking. Each preferring a relation that does not subjugate its object of study, the films as I see them instead form a register of what reciprocal relations in films may look like and feel like without relying on the viewer's empathic identification with what they see/hear.

The way the curatorial work and academic research are intertwined, then, is that they are mutually informing, with each motivated by the desire to draw attention to our ethical obligation – as guests in a film-viewing situation – to reserve judgements and to avoid applying universal principles according to general assumptions about the relationships we are invited into as viewers. Most of all, I feel our assessment cannot and should not be in reference to ourselves. Our ethical obligation, I argue, is to resist the identification-impulse, and to examine this impulse for what we are missing in our assessments of the originary relationship: the relationship between the filmmaker and the things he/she films.

The discussion about *Grey Gardens* (Maysles & Maysles, 1975) in Part III frames this identification-impulse as an act of misguided surrogacy over the film itself and the objects of study in it. Reaching back for this documentary film classic helps demonstrate the ways in which discussions about ethics still largely concentrate on the responsibility of filmmakers. To help reinvigorate these discussions and raise new questions, I argue that our obligation as viewers/critics is to instead examine the agency of said objects and the ways these agencies are made visible in the film.

The identification-impulse can oftentimes be tied in with feelings of empathy. I do not discuss empathy and its relationship to ethics at great length, other than arguing that one of the functions of the films I write about, as well as the films I have shown in my curatorial work, is to circumvent the possibility of empathic identification through various strategies unique to each film. The unifying element in this circumvention that I keep coming back to throughout is objectification, a perceived distancing. The reason I steer away from an analysis of empathy as an ethical relation in and of itself is because I believe that for the viewer or critic, it may be an engagement that runs the risk of absolving us of responsibility. It hinders us from an other-wise viewing, from looking differently, at the ways in which our perception of ethical relations might be culturally or historically inscribed.

In Part III, I bring into the discussion Levinas' philosophy relating to notions of alterity. His approach to and responsibility towards the other is expressed through his unique formulation of separation and in what he describes as the face-to-face encounter. Another film programme titled *Willing The Possible* presented as part of the practice element, the *Object Documentary* series at Bloc Projects (2016)

and included in the Appendix, framed the encounter between films and film viewers as exactly the kind of face-to-face contact Levinas speaks of. Though the films gathered in *Willing The Possible* are all situated in conflict zones across geographies and times, none make any singular known conflict-narrative the central object of their study. Placed together as they were, the films, I hoped, allow the possibility of collective narrative plotting as an open-ended process – a way of thinking through conflicting positions together as a productive confrontation. The intention was to help facilitate a shift of responsibility for this kind of engagement towards the viewer. The way I placed the films, and the context in which I framed them solicited the age-old question of our responsibilities as filmmakers or artists. When making films in or about past or present conflicts, what are our responsibilities? That is one of the prevailing questions. However, because of the oblique quality to the films, and for some, their unsatisfying political advocacy, I hoped the question of obligation on the side of viewers had a chance of being addressed, because it teased out the question of what to make of documentary films where an emotive conflict-narrative is absent, replaced by strategies of ambivalence, humour, contradiction, or the ordinary. The intention was to help facilitate an examination of our ethical responsibility as viewers and as critics with the kind of separation that Levinas speaks of, a confrontation of sorts. The film programme aimed to tease out an acknowledgement of this separation through the practice of confrontation, by circumventing the solicitation of the viewer's identification-impulse; to view the other, as well as his/her/its desire, as radically separate from our own.

To some extent it could be argued, that my relationship to the works and the artists I speak about in the following pages has been 'use-oriented'. It could even be argued that I objectified the works by placing them in a context that served my desire to contribute to reframing discussions on ethics in documentary. Indeed, I have intentionally chosen films that have troubled me, or that I suspected would trouble others. I have done so because my overall agenda with the curatorial work, my own film work *Everything* (2017), both presented as part of the Appendix, and the theoretical analysis of film works presented here has been to redirect classic ethical debates about the responsibility of filmmakers towards the obligation of

viewers. With these, we could say, "planned confrontations", I hope to contribute to further challenging debates.

For example, classic discussions of how to 'do politics' in and with documentary and the responsibility of filmmakers arose in a post-screening discussion with Rosalind Nashashibi. The discussion was part of a programme of her films that I curated at Close-Up Film Centre, titled *FILMN YOUR LIFE WITH FASHION* (2017). One of the concerns that arose was the lack of advocacy that one of her films, *Electrical Gaza* (2015), presents of on-going injustice towards Palestinian people and the responsibility of representing the other particularly in a European viewing context. A fruitful discussion ensued around those perhaps classical questions with insights gained on Nashashibi's relationship to the material she films and her filming process. Nashashibi's articulation and awareness of her specific position – not being from Gaza and the ensuing difficulties of crossing that geographical border – brought to the surface that which oftentimes is overlooked in inquiries about ethics and responsibility: the condition of herself also being the 'other' in relation to the place and its people. Therefore, as she explained in the post-screening discussion, her viable 'access' and approach was through her body: her eyes, her ears, her touch. In short, through a register of her physical presence in Gaza and the people that facilitated that presence: the fixer, the driver, and so forth.

To acknowledge one's own position in the world, and to speak/film from that position – by all accounts both limited and limiting – is then to honour one's position as a guest. Though not exactly expressed in this way, and perhaps for some an unsatisfying political strategy, the discussion of *Electrical Gaza*, which I attend to at length in Part IV, nonetheless teases out the idea of material presence and being a thing amongst other things, of speaking not *for* but *nearby* the other, to echo Minh-ha (Minh-ha, 1982). [3] The related discussion on a state of being I term "as the other" – for me, an expression of reciprocity, meaning to not speak *for* the other, or *about* the other but *as well as* the other – also filters into the discussion and is extended throughout the latter parts of the thesis.

[3] Being a thing amongst other things is derived from Maurice Merleau-Ponty. See, "Eye and Mind", *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology*, *the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 163.

The concluding part of the thesis, Part IV in particular, is written as a direct response to the symposium *Object! On the Documentary as Art* at Whitechapel Gallery (2017), where I invited Rosalind Nashashibi to present as part of a panel that included Erika Balsom, amongst others, in the day-long symposium. The contributions informed the writing in significant ways, but the text presented in Part IV is as much about what was not said as it is about what was said on that day. The aim for the panel was to address the aesthetic potential and the ethical challenges of considering the materiality of things, human and non-human, as a primary approach to documentary making. Erika Balsom argued polemically for the return or the "rehabilitation" of the observational documentary mode and the value of "situated" objectivity, which she expanded upon in her essay publication titled "The Reality-Based Community" (e-flux Journal #83, June 2017). Rosalind Nashashibi articulated her interest in the things and people she films, her method of access, her relationship to the real, and to the filming process as its "touchability". She expressed this touchability as her pleasure and with that brought to the centre of attention the sensible, tactile, material aspects of documentary making, not just as a form of artistic production, but also as a form of knowledge production. In Part IV I discuss Nashashibi's approach at length and in particular how this touchability translates to a sense of proximity or nearness to the other through her use of breath in the sound construction of *Electrical Gaza*.

With the analysis of a second work, a collaborative work by Nashashibi/Skaer titled *Why Are You Angry* (2017), I speculate on photography's proximity to the real and explore its "muteness" not as a lack, but rather as the "communicative power of silence". Overall, Part IV brings together the ideas of the previous chapters, building on those discussions by fleshing out an egalitarian approach to ethics in documentary. I do so by considering the filmmaking, film-viewing and film-critiquing self as a thing amongst other things.

Running the risk of moving into slippery articulations, I feel inclined to summarise the films I care to discuss here by using perhaps one of the most slippery of all terms: love. Cognisant of this term falling short of academic qualification, I want to call these films acts of love. There is painful love, and tender love, a whole spectrum of emotional connections including anger, violence, surrender and humility. Acts of love in film, as in life, can be enabling, expansive and humbling as

well as discomforting. As is the case with all inter-subjective relations – or inter-objective as I prefer to term it – in day-to-day existence, in life, so to speak, as in films, we always 'know' when love is present and when it is not, without it necessarily needing to be spelt out as such. As viewers and critics, we might just need to learn greater subtlety in locating such acts. I contend that it is our obligation to search for subtleties of expression and production techniques that may impact our interpretation of those relationships, and which may inaugurate a viewing culture that is other-wise to what we may have expected.

As I argue at length throughout these pages, discomfort can play a significant part in this process of ethical recalibration. Discomfort is where our ethical labour is invested and where assumptions of responsibility about ethical behaviour can be redirected towards ourselves, the viewer, or the critic in communion with others: the film itself, its maker, and its onscreen and off-screen participants. I refer to this as the aforementioned "omnidirectional responsibility", because the role of documentary is not to inform, educate, or campaign as a one-way stream that flows from filmmaker/curator to viewer/critic. The primary role and the power of documentary making and viewing resides, I contend, in creating spaces for self-interrogation. What is my role here? How am I complicit in maintaining this problem, that suffering? When it comes to responsibility, the viewer is as entangled with these questions as the filmmaker. In the context of critical documentary practices then, if purposeful objectification may be regarded a kind of "monstrous activism", I contend its function is to bring about a "new corporal and communicative ethics" (MacCormack, 2012: 86). Because, in life as well as in film, the ethics of objectification is afforded by the preceding respect and understanding for the dignities of others that may be best thought of as being radically separate to our own. What you may assess as undignified for me may be contrary to my feelings of dignity, or may be for me an indignity that is entirely endurable.

Let go of yourself. Let go of me.

PART I

DOCUMENTARY & THE DOCUMENTARY TURN: An Overview

This project is concerned with the process of objectification in documentary film practices, and the relationships formed with human and non-human others as self-determined agents. We may call these 'agents' objects, we may call them things, or we may call them the 'other'. Whilst each term has its own distinct history investigated, amongst other disciplines, through art history and ethics, through object studies, as well as in sociology, anthropology, and ethnographic studies, for the purpose of this study I suggest there is a value in surrendering to the slippage between the terms. Because, as this study will show, the slippage can impact productively on how we perceive the ethics of objectification as a process.

Expressed more broadly, the project aims to study the aesthetic potential, and the political stakes of the objectification impulse in order to reframe discussions on documentary ethics by paying particular attention to the obligation of viewers. The analysis therefore first considers whether or not objectification as a process and as a method involves an ethical relation in and of itself. In order to do this, we need to ask: What can be perceived of that relation in the work itself? How is that relation produced? How does it manifest, or not, particularly in relation to the relatively recent proliferation of documentary works in the art context, and the so-called documentary turn? I will discuss, for example, how to reconcile the politically charged polemic of a film like Renzo Martens's *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008), with the filmmaker's 'objectified' treatment of the people depicted. *Enjoy Poverty* exposes the organisational framework involved in the economic exploitation of the Congolese through the extraction of resources. The painful proposition the film makes is that poverty is but one of those resources available for profitable 'extraction'. I argue that the filmmaker's performed self and his contrarian proposition offer a clue to an alternative reading of ethical relations. But before taking a closer look at this specific example in Part II, I want to backtrack a little to establish the context of the documentary turn. This is in order to show that our assumption of what constitutes ethical practice in documentary, what a documentary 'ought' to do, is intimately tied up not just with historic conditioning

of documentary's socio-political purpose, but significantly, with historically conflicting ideas of what a documentary actually is and does, in art, or otherwise. Whilst divisions in relation to film practice between the categories of art and documentary have eroded in recent years, particularly in the academic context, I contend that perceived differences between the two live on and find expression through notions of ethical practice and through normative readings of documentary relations, expectant of what a documentary 'ought' to do. For the purposes of this study, it is important to make this point for the following reason. One view of the art historical moment that inaugurated the 'documentary turn' is that it represents for many practitioners a new dawn with its promise of the expanded potential for documentary form. We may also view the documentary turn as the moment when the promise of reigniting the social dimension of art found a new lease of life (Enwezor, 2004; Enwezor et al., 2002; M. Nash, 2008). The documentary turn also very usefully inaugurated renewed debates on the politics of truth, power and ethics (Steyerl, 2005). But when it comes to making ethical assessments of the practice of documentary, debates I argue still remain partially stuck in Idealist philosophy of 'man' – or for our purposes here, of the filmmaker/critic –being 'the measure of all things'. My intention with an overview of historical divisions in the classification of documentary is to suggest that the root cause for this partial stuckness can be located for some in the certainty and for others in the uncertainty of documentary's ontology; in what a documentary actually is. As scholar Kate Nash points out "deployed in the context of ethical debate, definitions [of documentary] can have significant implications for filmmaking practice" and consequently, I would argue, for film viewing and for film criticism (K. Nash, 2011b: 225), because when it comes to the viewer, perceptions of what a documentary is impact on expectations of what a documentary 'ought' to do. And this has implications on the assessment of documentary ethics.

The main thesis title, *Object Documentary,* obliquely points towards a moment in recent art history referred to as the documentary turn, when documentary entered the field of art, let us say propositionally, as an art object. It is not my intention to suggest that the integration of documentary works in the field of contemporary art was motivated by purely functional market calculations. I am merely citing the so-called documentary turn as the point at which, propositionally, documentary

became an object due to the art-institutional context in which it began to be more increasingly seen, distributed, and theorised about. [4] For instance, indicating more than market calculations, curator and scholar Mark Nash, one of a number of supporters of documentary film in the art field, saw artists working with the medium as having "the potential to inject a new realism into contemporary art" (M. Nash, 2008: 120). He was interested in "the potential that the form still has to reinvigorate the social dimension of art" (M. Nash, 2008: 120). Nash was one of the seven co-curators of documenta 11 in 2002, under the artistic direction of Okwui Enwezor, who wanted to comment on "the disinterestedness of art in its relation with social life" (Enwezor, 2004: 97), through works that questioned this very disinterestedness (M. Nash, 2008).

But beyond the commodification of documentary in the market place as an art object, the ways in which the objectification of the real can manifest are difficult to articulate. One approach is to think of documentary material from the artists' perspective, and film objects from a curatorial perspective, similar to the way that Alfred Hitchcock thought of actors: as material objects "willing to be utilized and wholly integrated" (Truffaut, Hitchcock, & Scott, 1985: 111). Hitchcock is speaking here to French film director François Truffaut about the task of directing and his method of working with actors. What transpires through their conversational exchange is that Hitchcock valued an actor's ability to be "neutral", to avoid "emoting", "to do nothing well", as he put it (Truffaut et al., 1985: 111).

The connection between Hitchcock, a fiction director, and documentary or art, may seem strenuous here. What I am interested in, and what emerges from this example, is Hitchcock's relationship to actors and a particular work method. Artistic composition here seems to be about organising objects; about sculpting material – in Hitchcock's particular case, it is the physical body as material. But in the realm of documentary, when working with 'real' things and people, how can we be mindful of the dignity of 'subjects' when our artistic habit is to work with 'objects'? An interview with Jeremy Deller, who had been nominated to represent Britain at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, illustrates this paradox through

[4] When I refer to documentary, I am specifically talking about moving image documentary. For a wider and earlier discourse that includes documentary photography and its relation to art, see G. Kester, "Towards a New Social Documentary," *Afterimage* Vol. 14, No. 8 (March 1987). Also A. Sekula, "Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary," *The Massachusetts Review,* Vol. 19, No. 4, Photography (Winter, 1978): 859–883.

language. Deller is well known for his collaborations with non-actors in works such as *The Battle Of Orgreave* (2001), *Procession* (2009), *Many Ways To Hurt* (2010), to name but a few. When asked if he sees collaboration as an artistic medium, he said: "Yes. Or people as an artistic medium. And collaboration is a form of that" (Milliard, 2013). If we understand "artistic medium" to mean the material an artist uses to create work, then we may take Deller's words to mean he works with people as material. Initially this may present a paradox for the realm of documentary, which is more comfortably thought of as a social practice between 'subjects'. People are not things, material, or objects, we might say. But we may also recall Sergei Tret'iakov's proposal in "The Biography of the Object", to cast a human in place of an object, and to move through a material configuration amongst other objects.

In 1929, Russian playwright Sergei Tret'iakov wrote the manifesto-like essay titled "The Biography of the Object" in which he sought to displace the figure of the hero from the centre of the novel.[5] In his text, Tret'iakov proposes a methodology, a system of narrative construction, which reconfigures the novel as that which might be theorised as a non-human centred critical approach to the interrelatedness of *things*. The hero, he critiques, "is what holds the novel's universe together. The whole world is perceived through him. The whole world is, furthermore, essentially just a collection of details that belong to him" (Tret'iakov, 2006: 58). As an antidote to Idealist philosophy, of 'man as the measure of all things', of subject-centeredness, he proposed to think of narrative construction as a conveyor belt along which a material entity, including conceivably a human entity, is moved and transformed. People otherwise separated by social stratification, in a linearly progressing production line, are positioned on *both* sides of the production line and thereby share an egalitarian process of encountering. Presumably, Tret'iakov envisioned that a dialogic positioning rather than a linear one could bring into visibility the social relations that produce the 'thing'. So, whilst the classic hero of the novel moves through a system of objects that are "details that belong to him", Tret'iakov envisioned people moving through a system of objects in literary creations that might be called "*Coal"*, "*Iron"*, or "*Bread"*. What's more, he states: "once we run a human along the narrative

[5] According to an introduction to the essay's republication in the critical art journal *October*, the original Russian title "*Biografiia veshchi*" can also be translated as "*The Biography of the Thing*". See *October* 118 (Fall 2006): 57.

conveyer belt like an object, he will appear before us in a new light" (Tret'iakov, 2006: 62). [6]

Reconfigured with Tret'iakov's proposal in mind, Jeremy Deller's proposition, "people as an artistic medium", may no longer feel reductive in ethical terms. This study explores the paradox of people as material and the "objectification of the real" in documentary art practices through two interrelated strands: one looks at working with things and people as a material resource from the artist's perspective. The other considers the discomfort of being confronted with this process, the process of objectification, from the viewer's perspective. But what do I mean by objectification in the context of documentary? Rather than making an ontological claim, it is vital to clarify that the positioning of documentary, as 'object' in this study is propositional. The proposition is made in order to tease out and amplify the ethical challenges that come with such a proposition. What is offered in this study is not a theoretical or historical account of the ontology of objects. Instead, the aesthetic potential, political stakes, and ethical challenges that accompany the propositional thinking of documentary as an object, are interrogated. [7]

Discounting commercial or ideological interests, and expressed broadly, the gathering and distribution of documentary material in journalistic practice is traditionally thought of as having a desire to meet educational and informational ends. In documentary practice, the ends can also be thought of as being oriented towards advocacy, evoking change, or activism. In art practice, documentary *material* can also be a resource employed to meet the ends of the work itself, or the artist's ends. It is the latter field that I am investigating, and I am particularly

[6] Rather than crediting herself as filmmaker or director or artist as might be customary, Hito Steyerl decentres her own 'heroic' subject position in the making of the film titled *In Free Fall,* with the credit line "Recycling by Hito Steyerl". The film also directly references Sergei Tret'iakov's "The Biography of the Object" in its second chapter titled "Before the Crash". It was presented in 2010 as a moving-image exhibition at Chisenhale Gallery, London (Steyerl, 2010b). The topic was further explored in an associated panel discussion (*Archive Past Exhibitions Hito Steyerl | Chisenhale Gallery*, 2010).

[7] I am thankful to Mihaela Brebenel for her help in summarising the central concerns of this research project through this triangulated articulation in our collaborative effort preparing the *Object! On The Documentary as Art* symposium (Whitechapel Gallery, February 2017).

interested in the ethics of artistic practises that utilise documentary strategies, or documentary materials, as part of their artistic production. [8]

Speaking of an "aesthetic of ethics", Walead Beshty asks, "[H]ow do ethical relations create aesthetic form?" (Beshty, 2015: 19). Extending out from this question, this project asks: if the performance of objectification for political ends in documentary art practices indicates an ethical relation, is this relation necessarily always exploitative or reductive? [9] Instead, I propose it be considered as a mode of resistance to the 'governance' of the real, associated with the documentary mode (Steyerl, 2003a). Whilst the "social turn" (Bishop, 2006, 2012) and the so-called documentary turn (both understood as artistic directions in the art field) have received wide scholarly attention, the aim of this project is to investigate the object turn in documentary art practice. Albeit a 'turn' that has its foundation in the long-standing history of documentary film.

In what follows, I will draw on two theoretical contexts through which our understanding, and one could argue our misunderstanding, of *what a documentary is*, has been shaped. The contexts are the field of documentary and the documentary turn in the art field. This is in order to provide a contextual background, as well as to make connections between historical perspectives in the field of documentary studies and recent theoretical concerns about the role of documentary in the art field. As examples, I present *A Boat Leaving Harbour* (Lumière, 1895), and *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* (Brakhage, 1971). Both are particularly relevant to building my argument because the status of these works as 'documentary' has been contested. For example, although Brakhage considered *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* to be a documentary, the film is more commonly categorised as an artwork, an avant-garde or experimental film. I cite these examples as a foundation on which to base the discussion in order to demonstrate that, regardless of the status of a work, whether it is considered

[8] See Brian Winston's *Claiming the Real* (1995: 8–14) for insight into the early use of the terminologies in film history and its preceding context outside film practice. The terms "documentary works" and "documentary materials" were both used as early as 1914 by photographer and filmmaker Edward Curtis. And the term "documentary" was defined as "the creative treatment of actuality" by John Grierson in the 1930s. According to Winston, the Griersonian definition has its foundation in idealist philosophy. For further discussion of this, see Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform: John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[9] By "performance of objectification" I mean a deliberate, visible distancing from the object of study for aesthetic and political ends.

documentary or art, the ethical challenges still remain. Yet interpretations of these challenges are, I argue, tied in with and complicated by expectations on the part of cultural consumers about what a documentary 'ought' to do in either field. And these expectations are, I contend, rooted in historically conflicting ideas about what a documentary actually is, or what a documentary may be.

NAMING THINGS DOCUMENTARY: Critical Reflections

When theorising about what a documentary is in his essay "What a Documentary Is, After All", film scholar Carl Plantinga speaks of characterisation rather than definition. He does so in the context of normative documentary, or what he calls "typical or usual documentary" (Plantinga, 2005: 105). The problem, he says, is not with documentary itself, but with the "confused theories of documentary" (Plantinga, 2005: 106). To begin with, it cannot go unobserved that perceived divisions amongst the various approaches to documentary is the limiting characterisation of the term itself.

In the early to mid-1990s, documentary theorists like Michael Renov and Brian Winston observed that, as a term, genre, methodology, or practice, the ideation of what a documentary *is*, is historically conditioned. What does this mean, and how does historic conditioning affect both the reading and the reception of a film? Historically, documentary is burdened with an assumed equation to other "discourses of sobriety", like that of science, or technology, presumed to be capable of (re)producing actuality, the real (Nichols, 1991; 2001). Bill Nichols, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Hito Steyerl are but some of the theorists who point out that by now, this assumption about documentary is also known to have perpetuated the myth of 'truth' within wider ideological systems of power. Historical questions about truth and power in relation to documentary are however not the focus of this study. Instead, the nexus of this study situates itself at the particular point in very recent art history, referred to as the documentary turn. In order to contextualise this 'turn', it is necessary to revisit some of the critical literature related to the socio-political status of documentary, its naming, and its relationship to art. Through this, I hope, a clearer overview will emerge of the continuing difficulties that exist when analysing documentary ethics in the context of art or otherwise.

Having been brought to the wider public's attention, the heyday of the so- called documentary turn is often perceived to be around documenta 11 in 2002, when curators like Okwui Enwezor and Mark Nash, amongst a number of other cultural producers, started presenting documentary films at major exhibitions, alongside moving image works that were rooted in fine art practice, but could be thought of as being driven by a wish to comment on a wider social or political reality (M. Nash, 2008). [10] This type of work – previously referred to as "documentary" – was now in need of terminological reconfiguration.

Presented as art in the context of exhibitions, the reading and reception of these works as documentary, and particularly the terminology developed around it, was fraught with expectations of what a documentary *is* or *does*. These expectations can be put down to not only inherited beliefs, but to historic conditioning in regard to documentary's socio-political purpose (Renov, 1993). Critical evaluations of how documentaries function in the field of commercial television and "corporate documentarism" also enter into it (Steyerl, 2011). What complicates things further is that the reception of documentary as art is not just burdened by preconceptions of what a documentary is, but also by what a work of art is or does (Enwezor, 2004: 98; Steyerl, 2011). According to Steyerl, when reflecting on the relation of the two, "we have to face the fact that we barely know what we are talking about", because viable definitions of either 'art' or 'documentary' remain limited (Steyerl, 2011).

Long before the 'documentary turn', earlier film historical precedents can be thought of, such as filmmakers Jean Rouch, Chris Marker, or Trinh T. Minh-ha amongst others, who sought to deconstruct traditional conceptions of documentary. However, this study speaks from the particular position of the so-called documentary turn. Viewed from this specific, contemporary position, the desire for a reconfigured characterisation of 'documentary' is for example expressed by Harvard University's Sensory Ethnography Lab (hereafter SEL).

[10] An earlier instance of the documentary film being presented in the art field was documenta X, curated by Catherine David in 1997. Another instance curated by Catherine David and Jean-Pierre Rehm in 2003 was *[based upon] TRUE STORIES*, organised in collaboration with International Film Festival Rotterdam and the International Documentary Film Festival of Marseille. Manifesta 5 (San Sebastian, 2004) concentrated on works that "translate reality into enigmatic forms, owing less to rhetoric than to a carefully differentiated understanding of people's relationship to the world." See "Concept": http://www.manifesta.es/ [accessed 25.01.2016]). Also in 2004, curators Barbara Vanderlinden and Amy Huei Hua Cheng brought together artistic reflections on reality that are both "poetic and documentary in quality" for the Taipei Biennial, titled, *Do You Believe in Reality?*

If one examines the SEL's description (on their website) of the type of work they support, a desire becomes apparent to dissociate from existing terms like art, documentary, and visual anthropology so as to define a distinct disciplinary direction:

> [SEL] opposes the traditions of art that are not deeply infused with the real, those of documentary that are derived from broadcast journalism, and those of visual anthropology that mimic the discursive inclinations of their mother discipline (Sensory Ethnography Lab, n.d.). [11]

But varying perceptions about what a documentary is, its role, or the challenge to name and characterise the documentary are by no means new. [12] Indeed, throughout the history of documentary, discourses concerning its ontology have challenged production methods and periodically caused formal innovation and aesthetic shifts within the field. For example, state sponsored documentary works during the Griersonian phase in the 1930s claimed both the social purpose of public education, *and* personal expression as the distinguishing marks of documentary (Winston, 1995: 51). From the 1960s onwards, the scientific claims of objectivity within the Direct Cinema movement were acquired through technological innovations with newly available portable and lightweight filming equipment. This too caused formal shifts. Simultaneously, the inclusion of self-reflexive documentary filming modes (pioneered by the Cinéma Vérité movement during the same period) likewise eventuated critical reflections on documentary, as well as an aesthetic shift in the documentary form. In more recent years, the late Canadian documentarist Peter Wintonick, believing in the novelty of digital strategies, proclaimed: "For now, and forever, I am banishing the word documentary from our lexicon. I am replacing it with a contemporary word, one which reflects the future and the now. My new word is: docmedia" (Winston, Vanstone, & Chi, 2017: vi). Today, the documentary field proliferates with an assortment of digital methods, each producing its own form of objectivity, such as "cyber-docs, digidocs, transmedia docs, cross-docs, cross-media, 360 degree docs, netcast docs, interactive docs, 3D-docs, made-for-mobile docs" (Wintonick quoted in Winston et al., 2017: 3).

---

[11] From https://sel.fas.harvard.edu/ [accessed 20.03.2016].

[12] Nor are varying perceptions settled today, when one considers a wider, general viewership outside of the academic field.

In summary, each critical period, and each adaptation in production modes, whether motivated by ideological concerns or technical innovations, has caused an aesthetic shift that in turn eventuated shifts in various modes of reception. But perhaps, most significantly, each shift, for a time, convincingly legitimated itself through the promise of 'truth', or the delivery of 'objectivity' as methods for social reform.[13] To put the claim simply, the voices of the oppressed and the marginalised need not go unheard thanks to the continuous 'improvement' of the documentary method in the delivery of objective 'truth'. Our expectation of what a documentary *is* and *does* then is conditioned by these various formal and ideological strategies to "sell" *a* truth about one thing or another. The belief in documentary's political efficacy is the abiding claim of the field. But in documentary film production, 'reality', the 'real', 'truth', 'realism' as ideology was from the outset, and remains today an object 'for sale' in the procurement of funds through sponsors – be they government, industry, institutional networks, or social science research (Winston, 1995). In art on the other hand, this procurement can be free from both the ideological assertion of truth or objectivity, as well as being free from having to assert any kind of certainty thereof in the formal construction of works. Hito Steyerl points out that "the uncertainty principle of modern documentarism" (Steyerl, 2011), in relation to what is real, what is true, etc., persists today not just through the instability of documentary pictures themselves, but also through the historically conflicting theory of documentary. Steyerl goes on to argue that since post-structualism has furnished us with reasonable doubt in regards to the stability of truth claims, this uncertainty about what is true, what is real, what is fact, is *not* "some shameful lack, which has to be hidden, but instead constitutes the core *quality* of contemporary documentary modes as such" (Steyerl, 2011; emphasis added).

Similarly, and nearly two decades earlier, Michael Renov's critical focus was on the value of "documentary's delirious as well as its sober self" (Renov, 1993: 194). With the notion of documentary's delirious self, Renov's critical focus becomes a counter point to the association of documentary with other rational non-fiction systems, like for example that of science, politics, economics, each believed to be a "sober" discourse (Renov, 1993: 195). Around the same time,

[13] For a discussion of documentary's claim on evidentiary "objectivity" and its close relation to ideological systems of power, see Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

filmmaker and theorist Trinh T. Minh-ha echoed Renov's call for a deconstruction of the dominant historical conditioning within the documentary realm for totalising functions and meanings, i.e. what documentary *is* and what it *does*. Finding support in Walter Benjamin's concept of language, she attributes this totalisation to:

> (the) bourgeois conception of language, which holds that the means of communication is the word, its object factual, its addressee a human subject (the linear, hierarchical order of things in a world of reification); whereas, language as the 'medium' of communication in its most radical sense, 'only communicates itself *in* itself.' [14] The referential function of language is thus not negated, but freed from its false identification with the phenomenal world and from its assumed authority as a means of cognition about that world. (Minh-ha, 1990: 78)

In her essay "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning", Minh-ha denounces categorically that there is such a thing as documentary at all, never mind whether we are speaking of a technique, a genre, a material, or an approach. [15] She suggests that the difficulty in talking about the thing we call documentary may reside in the gap between *a* meaning of something and its truth. She calls this gap an "interval", and insists that this gap is necessary for meaning not to remain "fixed" and for truth not to manifest as a solid unmovable mass (Minh-ha, 1990: 76). Meaning, she says, can be political "only when it does not let itself be easily stabilized, and when it does not rely on any single source of authority, but, rather, empties or decentralizes it" (Minh-ha, 1990: 89). Aside from asking how the real is produced, when questioning production relations for instance, Minh-ha's emphasis is on how truth is being ruled (Minh-ha, 1990: 85). Recalling John Grierson's early pronouncement about documentary as the "new and vital art form," Minh-ha reminds us that since its inception, documentary was considered an art form, albeit one that had to "bother" with "being right", not "beautiful" (Minh-ha quoting Grierson, 1990: 85). [16] Steyerl also problematises the production of 'truth' in documentary as a form of governing. She draws on Foucault's concept of

---

[14] Minha-ha is quoting from Benjamin's *One-Way Street and Other Writings* (London: NLB, 1979: 109).

[15] "The Totalizing Quest of Meaning" was published earlier in a condensed version as "Documentary Is/Not a Name", in *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons,* eds. Iain Chambers, Lidia Curti (London; New York: Routledge, 1995).

[16] Minh-ha is quoting from *Grierson On Documentary*, ed. Forsyth Hardy (London: Faber and Faber, 1966: 249).

governmentality as "a specific form of exercising power, which operates through the production of truth" (Steyerl, 2003a). Steyerl comes to define "documentality" as something that "describes the complicity with dominant forms of a politics of truth, *just as* it can describe a critical stance with regard to these forms" (Steyerl, 2003a; emphasis added). [17]

What I am suggesting here with this research, and in particular with films like *Land Without Bread* [*Las Hurdes*] (Buñuel, 1933) and *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (Martens, 2008), an analysis of which follows in Part II, is this: each film in its own way performs "documentality" as a mode of resistance to a larger frame of dominance beyond the micro-scales of the documentary or art fields. This performance is itself a critical position, and is demonstrated through purposeful and deliberate objectification. These films, I argue, mirror the relations of power and the truth-seeking assertions of the 'observer' as forms of critique to the inclusion of the viewer/critic. I will touch upon some examples briefly for now, some of which I will return to in later chapters.

Luis Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* documents people afflicted by hunger and disease in a remote part of 1930s Spain. While the film mimics in its structure and delivery a standard type of ethnographic study, or as it would then be called, a travelogue, it is upon closer inspection abundant with critique and acts of destabilisation. Buñuel chose a 'voice-of-god' delivery for the narration, which can be read as being deliberately condescending, as well as being absurdist at times. This tone, it could be argued, was adopted to comment critically on the quasi-ethnographic writing in Maurice Legendre's *Las Jurdes: Etude de geographie humaine* (1927); at the time, head of the French Institute in Madrid.

As for another brief example that will be discussed at greater length in Part II, in *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty*, Renzo Martens enacts the role of a colonial style missionary and invents a multitude of strategies for the impoverished Congolese he encounters on his travels in The Democratic Republic of the Congo to turn their own poverty into an income source.

---

[17] More recently, and in light of our so-called post-truth times, when fact and fiction are said to be indiscernible, theorist Erika Balsom argues passionately for the "rehabilitation" of objectivity. She finds evidence for the possibility of this rehabilitation in the trust filmmakers place in the viewer to discern meaning, however incomplete or ambiguous the images they are presented with may be. Citing recent examples, like Jerome Everson's *Tonsler Park* (2017), for Balsom, an expanded form of the observational documentary, in particular, may re-establish the experience of reality and be a means to hold on to "cinema as window, however dirty and distorting its panes may be" (Balsom, 2017).

Another fitting example would be Johan Grimonprez's *Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?* (Grimonprez, 1992). *Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?* assembles archive footage of a remote people from the highlands of New Guinea coming into first contact with an expedition of scientists including anthropologists. The film presents an absurdist ethnographic commentary in order to critique the governance of the observed by the observer.

Indeed, clear-cut definitions of these works as either documentary or art may be difficult to uphold. But it is equally difficult to ignore that undermining documentary conventions by design is the core critical function of the aforementioned films. Critical readings about how these works function, and assessments of their ethics, may then vary depending on the field in which they circulate. In 2004, Steyerl summarised the status of documentary in art as follows:

> Since the early nineties there has been a succession of various waves of adaptations of documentary techniques in art, drawing on the fields of earlier photographic, film and textual documentarist styles (…) An interest in the formal specific characteristics of the documentary form in the art field has only recently begun (…) but has hardly taken place yet at the theoretical level. (Steyerl, 2004: 122)

At the point of this "documentary turn" then, between the mid-1990s and early 2000s, as interest intensified both at the theoretical level and at the level of artistic production, a delineation seemed desirable in order to divorce the artistic reception of these works from the reception of documentaries in the wider broadcast media context and its historically fraught scientific-truth-claiming tradition. And this is where we seem to have settled with the term "artist's film", used predominantly in the UK ("artist-made film" in the US) – a disciplinary practice which increasingly includes practitioners working with documentary as a critical practice.

However, the naming, and the categorisation of these films remains context dependent, both in terms of funding and of acquisition and distribution. For example, another of Grimonprez's works, *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (Grimonprez, 1997), is referenced as a documentary by Other Cinema, which later came to distribute the film through their Other Cinema Digital label; a video montage by the Tate, which acquired it for their collection (as did a number of other major arts institutions); and a video essay by the International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, one

of the many documentary festivals the film screened at. Under the leadership of Catherine David, documenta X helped finance the completion of the work, along with Centre Georges Pompidou, where the film premiered. Additionally, the film was broadcast by major European channels, and by NBC Universal in the US. [18]

But of course, however named, these 'documentary-like' works now circulating in a diverse range of exhibition and distribution modes have, it can be argued, a much wider history, stretching for instance from the experimental film practices of the 1920s through to the film coop movement in the 1980s. We could arguably reach as far back as the very beginning of film history for earlier examples from which current adaptations of documentary techniques draw from. As Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg point out in their essay "The Documentary Attitude", when looking beyond the so-called documentary turn at documentary's far reaching history, it is clear that documentary did not require contemporary artists to "teach it creativity and reflexivity" (Balsom & Peleg, 2016: 18). And crucially, as Balsom and Peleg state, documentary is not a category legislated by "correct and incorrect definitions", but it is a critical artistic method (Balsom & Peleg, 2016 : 18).

I will now turn to two examples, both of which demonstrate documentary's historical relationship to art, regardless of their field specific categorisation or their terming. One is Louis Lumière's 1895 *A Boat Leaving Harbour* [*Barque sortant du port*]. The second is Stan Brakhage's 1971 *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes.*

[18] See: http://www.winkleman.com/exhibitions/760/works/20079 [accessed 02.05.2016]

THE LATENT FUTURE IN A NOTIONAL BEGINNING: A Boat Leaving Harbour [Barque sortant du port] (1895)

Documentary theorist Brian Winston once observed that documentary acquired its status and its naming as a 'new' form – supposedly distinct from that of fiction – only when filmmaker Robert Flaherty began to structure the footage he filmed in a way that would satisfy the age-old want for a beginning, middle, and end. [19] But what we understand a documentary to be, he says, precedes its naming, because at the inception of film history, cinema only had documentary material to screen. Since viewers, Winston claims, soon tired of purely observational reels of film (trains coming into stations; workers exiting factories; et al.), narrative structure was introduced. "But the need for structure implicitly contradicts the notion of unstructured actuality. The idea of documentary, then and now, is sustained by simply ignoring this contradiction" (Winston, 1988: 21). Additionally, this contradiction is complicated by contested views on when and how cinema became art. [20] One such very early work of cinema, Louis Lumière's work *A Boat Leaving Harbour,* represents – for some – the notional beginning of documentary; others cite it as the beginning of the film arts more generally. As we will see, the film contains the contradiction present in "unstructured actuality", as Winston puts it.

To start with the form of *A Boat Leaving Harbour*, Lumière's interest in actuality, the recording of real life from a static, fixed camera position, for instance, on closer investigation "reveals something more profound than mere technological limitation […]. Form and content are inseparable" (Grimshaw, 2001: 18). The film depicts a group of men rowing a small boat out to sea past a jetty occupied by a group of onlookers. Two instances indicate to the viewer the participants' awareness of the camera, and this may be what qualifies the film, for some viewers, as a documentary rather than a work of fiction.

---

[19] The coining of the word "documentary" is generally credited to John Grierson, when referring to Flaherty's film *Moana* as having "documentary value" in his review of the film for the *New York Sun* in 1926. See B. Winston, "Documentary: I Think We Are in Trouble", in A. Rosenthal (Ed.), *New Challenges for Documentary* (Berkley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1988), p. 21.

[20] For a historical survey, see A.L. Rees, *A History of Experimental Film and Video* (London: BFI, 1999).

Fig. 1: *A Boat Leaving Harbour* [*Barque sortant du port*], 1895, screenshot.

First, a man at the tiller end of the boat, with his back to camera, looks over his shoulder. The second occurs when one of the women on the jetty turns around, and also appears to look towards the camera. Whether or not the scene is performed for the camera is not of interest to the discussion here, but at the end of the fifty-odd second film, the rowers are overcome by the force of waves pushing them back towards the harbour. The film ends there.

Though this example of early cinema may have been intended by Lumière as narrative fiction, because of the unintended outcome of the force of the waves, it ended up becoming something other than actions staged for the camera. As film editor and writer Dai Vaughan puts it: "What is different about *A Boat Leaving the Harbour* is that, when the boat is threatened by the waves, the men must apply their efforts to controlling it; and, by responding to the challenge of the spontaneous moment, they become integrated into its spontaneity" (Vaughan, 1999: 5). By illustrating the "invasion of the spontaneous into the human arts" the film, I argue with Vaughan, accounts for one of the first instances of 'documentary' coming to existence (Vaughan, 1999: 6).

But in order to understand why our fascination with *A Boat Leaving Harbour* has not diminished in over a hundred years since its making and exhibition, Vaughan proposes that we think of it not as "a notional first moment [of documentary,] but [...] the future already latent" (Vaughan, 1999: 6). Vaughan speculates that the shock early moving-picture audiences may have experienced was not due to the surprise of mechanical reproduction, but to the "invasion of the spontaneous" assuming the "character of a threat [... to] the whole idea of controlled, willed, obedient communication" (Vaughan, 1999: 6). If, as Vaughan speculates, the unexpected 'real' was indeed the source of the discomforting threat early cinema viewers experienced, I would like to suggest that the attraction to documentary as 'art' today is precisely the potential communicative disobedience has to engage viewers through its unsettled form.

So far, I have discussed the diverse historical perceptions of what a documentary is and what a documentary does, its contentious categorisation, and its naming and assumed socio-political purposes in order to illustrate the foundation on which contemporary perceptions of documentary resides. Additionally, I have begun to show that disobedient communication as artistic method was a core element of documentary already present at the foundation of film history. We may then have to acknowledge that strategies of resistance to the assumptions of objectivity and resistance to truth seeking are not an invention of recent artistic practices. Documentary from the outset destabilised assumptions about the real containing order, continuity, structure. In what follows, I will discuss how the objectification of the real can be thought of as one such form of disobedient communication. I then move on to the discomfort produced through the confrontation with such 'disobedience' as a form of productive ethical labour on the part of filmmakers and viewers alike. With Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes*, I turn now to an example of documentary's relationship to art as disobedient communication.

DOCUMENTARY AS DISOBEDIENT COMMUNICATION: The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes (1971)

Perhaps surprisingly, Stan Brakhage considered his films to be documentaries, even though his body of work is otherwise more widely discussed and termed under the rubric of experimental and avant-garde film. "I think of my films as documentaries. I never fantasize […]. I am always struggling to get an equivalent on film to what I actually see" (Brakhage, 1983: 199–203).

Much less frequent in his oeuvre however are films such as *Wonder Ring* (1955) and *The Pittsburgh Documents* (also referred to as *The Pittsburgh Trilogy*). These films can reasonably be classified under the term documentary, because their subject matter is the actual, visible world (Renov, 2007b). To give an example, one of the three films in Brakhage's Pittsburgh Trilogy, *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* (1971) is a graphic, meticulously observed, and at times anxious documentation of bodies undergoing autopsy. [21] *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* runs just over 30 minutes and is silent. Much of the film is framed in close-up, so there are only very few occasions when the identity of a body, or that of the personnel performing the autopsy, is at risk of being recognised. Brakhage is attentive to bodily details, and significantly to procedure. For example, he keeps returning to the image of the cut facial tissue folded over the head section of various bodies. There are reoccurring depictions of male genitalia, too. Hands, both of the dead being autopsied and of live ones handling the bodies, also feature prominently. The white-coated staff in the autopsy room are shown weighing, measuring, examining the materiality of body parts. Brakhage's meticulous observation of the various procedures during autopsy, his focus on particular details, the objectification of the real present in this meticulous observation of materiality, invites us to reflect on the nature of life, on identity, and on responsibility. These reflections arise from the choice of framing and in the repetition of images. The repetitions may be read as an invitation for viewers to see and think with Brakhage. What I see in Brakhage's images, in his way of 'seeing', is astonishment, or perhaps surprise. His images appear curious, as Brakhage searches for the 'spontaneous' that characterises documentary. I would argue then that there are a number of ways that this film is a form of disobedient

[21] The other two films in the trilogy are *Eye* and *Deus Ex*. All three films document institutional apparatuses: police work, hospital activities, and the autopsy room, and they were all shot in 1971.

communication: the often 'abstracted' closeness with which Brakhage frames his images, the unsteady camera, the repetition, the absence of any sound elements, and most significantly, the refusal to explain. *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* is mute, yet its silence is eloquent. This makes room for and invites the viewer to participate by making their own connections.

Questions about why viewers, or indeed Brakhage himself, regard the work as art or as documentary become secondary to the significant connections made in the formal construction between the duty of care when recording the real, and the handling of bodies in the case of the pathologists. A comparison between Brakhage's detailed observation and the pathologists' measuring becomes inevitable. To whom we are responsible (in our measuring and documenting) becomes magnified through the status of the autopsied bodies as non-being. And with that, the screen's contract with its viewer begins to take precedence.

Talking generally about the agency of film, Hollis Frampton proposes to consider "film not from the outside, as a product to be consumed, but from the inside, as a dynamically evolving organic code directly *responsive* and *responsible*, like every other code, to the supreme mediator: consciousness" (Frampton, 2009: 155).

A beautifully worded letter from Frampton to Brakhage contains both a critical charge and an insightful acknowledgement of the place and function of *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes*:

> […] for *the camera* would seem the perfect Eidetic Witness, staring with perfect compassion where we can scarcely bear a glance. What was to be done in that room, Stan? And then, later with the footage? I think it must have been mostly to stand aside; to 'clear out', as much as possible, with the baggage of your own expectations, even, as to what a work of art must look like; and to see, with your own eyes, what coherence might arise within a universe for which you could decree only the boundaries. […] this film is the first completely *clear* enunciation (to my hearing) of the 'family' name of a process within thought that may have other 'given' names. […] Decades ago, Ezra Pound wrote that the most intense criticism is in *new composition*. I think this work merits intense criticism; and that is what we shall all of us, willy-nilly, have to undertake. (Frampton, 2009: 158)

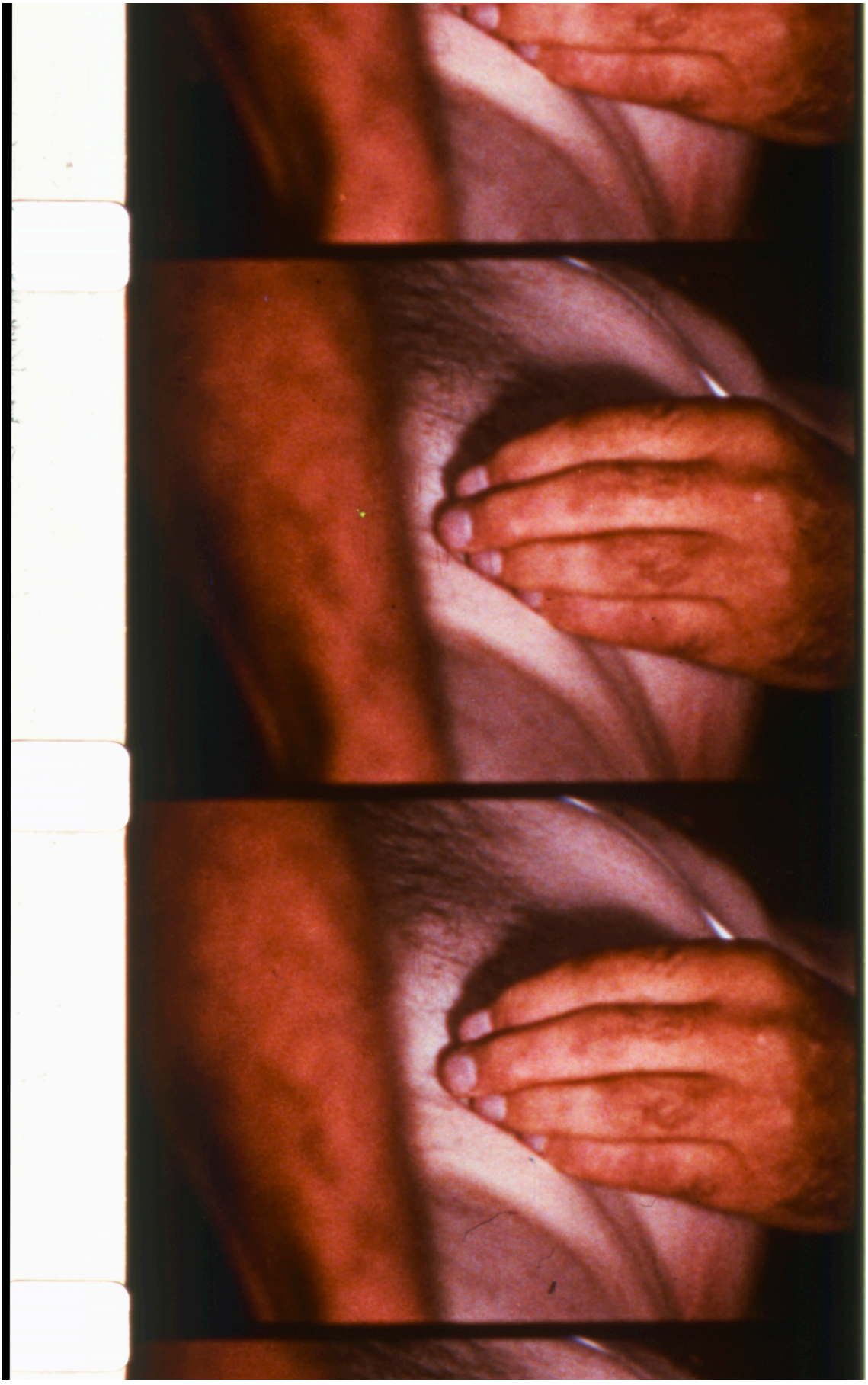


Fig. 2: *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes,* 1971, film strip.

Fig. 3: *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes,* 1971, film strip.

If the task of criticism for film viewers and filmmakers alike is to be responsive to and *through* new composition*,* then both co-inhabit the space of responsibility. Bringing into question the effect *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* would have on surviving relatives of the autopsied persons, Bill Nichols writes:

> The camera gazes. It presents evidence destined to disturb. This evidence cries out for argument, some interpretive frame within which to comprehend it. Nowhere is this need more acutely felt than in a film that refuses to provide any explanatory commentary whatsoever (though it does have a perspective and style): Stan Brakhage's *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes*. (Nichols, 1991: 81)

I would argue that the "argument", the questions the work raises, and its "interpretive frame", are all embedded in the audio-visual scheme of the film, in its perspective as well as its style. The lack of commentary, the non-diegetic silence of the work (there is no audio), may be designed to put this interpretive frame, the responsibility to respond, in the hands of the viewer. The film therefore enables a collective questioning, with Brakhage, with the work, with oneself and other viewers, as an open-ended process – a way of thinking through questions of identity, procedure, and responsibility together. Brakhage's refusal to provide any commentary, let alone an explanatory frame by which to guide the viewer is, I argue, a form of disobedient communication that for some may be discomforting, unethical even, but which for me provides exactly the "clear enunciation" Frampton speaks of: sitting in silence I can hear myself think. Albeit, under discomforting conditions. The weight of this discomfort with what I 'hear' of my thoughts in the presence of muteness and in response to what I too see with my own eyes is, I argue, my responsibility as much as it is the responsibility of the filmmaker.

To summarise what has been discussed so far, the development of critical discussions in the categorisation of documentary (its naming and its ideological function) demonstrate documentary's historical and continuing relationship to art. As we have seen, the discussion of documentary, like its companion term 'truth', or indeed the term 'real', turns out on closer inspection to be troubled by a lack of consensus or agreement as to what the term actually means, what it is constituted of, what is permissible for its qualification. Consequently, a variety of other reformulations have been sought by documentary theorists, such as "non-fiction

film" by Michael Renov, or "docmedia" by Peter Wintonick. In the art context, "documentary-style works" is also spoken of, and more recently, the term "artists' documentary" has made an appearance in curatorial statements and press releases. Films have been described as having documentary value (Grierson, 1966: 13), documentary quality (Amor, 1997; Aufderheide, 2007; Bruzzi, 2006a), or a documentary impulse (Bruzzi, 2006b; Gunning, 1999; Nichols, 2001a, 2017; Renov, 1993; Rosler, 2010). The problem with defining documentary, I would argue, resides in part with the larger problem of language and naming as a means of providing epistemological certainty. And it is perhaps through the study of documentary in the art field that the question of epistemology has been able to emerge anew, through a re-questioning of truth, power, ethics, and reality (Steyerl, 2005).

Finally, I want to take Brakhage's insistence on referring to his works as documentaries as a guiding reason to propose a continuation of the use of the term to encompass artistic practices that include the real, or reality objects, as part of their formal and expressive filmic construction, regardless of the term's historic baggage, or the context in which a work is seen. This is because I see in the difficulty of naming, and in conflicting ideations of what a documentary *is,* the discursive potential to continuously reformulate what documentary *does, or ought to do,* in either field. Ontological assumptions may continuously be unsettled through new composition, and through the cross-pollination from one field to the other. Consequently, in this unsettled status, documentary as a method has the potential to continuously renew its critical perspective on truth, power, and crucially on ethics, in relation to the contemporary moment in which it operates. Having built my argument so far on the value of the unclassifiable, and on disobedient communication as a critical potential for documentary, I want to now consider objectification in documentary and examine the value of the discomfort generated as a form of productive ethical labour. In this next section, I analyse two films: *Land Without Bread* (1933) and *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008). I will argue that objectification is central to the critical method of both works. They solicit an ethical response in the viewer through the production of discomfort with objectification. The process of soliciting and causing, as well as engaging and responding to discomfort, amounts to what is here called "ethical labour". I argue that since both filmmakers and viewers come to engage and confront each other

through ethical labour, this process is productive. And this is the central purpose of the works analysed here.

PART II

ON DISCOMFORT AND ETHICAL LABOUR: Land without Bread (1933) & Episode III: Enjoy Poverty (2008)

Documentary practice deals with the social world, live situations, 'real' *things*. The process of objectifying the real, as I formulate it, pertains to thinking of the social world as an object and putting it in the service of artistic activity. This can create an ethical challenge. Indeed thinking of the 'real' as an 'object', and of documentary material as a resource, can be discomforting. As noted earlier, beyond documentary's status in the market place as an art object, the ways in which documentary film can manifest as an object through the objectification process are challenging to pinpoint. It can be experienced affectively however; it can be felt.

Sometimes visible, sometimes implied, one of the ways an 'object relation' becomes palpable is in the relationship that creates the work. As viewers, where a discomforting relation is detected, we tend to address such occasions as 'problematic'. The first problem, it could be suggested, arises with the designation of value when defining an object vis-à-vis a subject. For example, in an effort to designate value through language, we normally speak of documentary subjects, not documentary objects. As argued in the previous chapter, the second problem arises with what exactly is meant by the word 'documentary'. Whether regarded as art works or documentaries, I propose that one paradigm by which to study the critical stance of the films discussed here is to consider how the relationship of the filmmakers to both the material and the viewer is manifest in the works themselves.

Two well-known examples that lend themselves very well to the study of the ethical aspect of discomfort include Luis Buñuel's *Land Without Bread* (1933) and Renzo Marten's *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008). Both films are discomforting to watch, because of the apparently dissociative, or unsympathetic ways with which the filmmakers appear to be dealing with the systemic conditions of poverty each of the films examine. The empathic treatment as dramatic plotting that viewers are oftentimes accustomed to in social-issue documentaries, and that

present those affected by economic, political, or social injustices, is intentionally omitted in both of these films.

What Buñuel himself describes as a "filmed essay in human geography" [22] is a surreal take on documentary or ethnographic travelogues of the time. Formally, the film mirrors the kind of documentary that features tales of distant places, and mysterious, unknown peoples, accompanied by a distanced, matter-of-fact, voice-of-god narration. [23]

Land Without Bread [*Las Hurdes*], was shot in the remote western part of Spain in 1932. It chronicles the social conditions of its time, the welfare of its people neglected, and how they fend for themselves in the inhospitable mountain region without adequate government subsidies or educational and health care provisions. [24] Their poverty is so great, "bread was unknown" in the region "until recently" (1933). [25] Given that variants of bread formed part of the staple diet of many early civilisations, this part of the narration made early in the film, that bread was *unknown*, may initially arouse the viewer's suspicion as to the narrator's reliability. It is very possible that bread may have been scarce, or unavailable, but for bread to be unknown seems improbable. The narrator seems unreliable. This lack of reliability then forms a vital part of the film's critical method (Sobchack, 1998). In ethnographic criticism, opinions are divided. Whilst some scholars like James Clifford advocate fragmentation and juxtapositions that jeopardise an explanatory unity of the real (Clifford, 1981), anthropologist and historian Nicholas Thomas warns that "ethnographic surrealism will fetishize the strange and bizarre to the point of denigration" (Thomas, 1994: 26). Buñuel's satirical objectification of the real may indeed be discomforting to some viewers, and for Thomas, *Land Without Bread* maintains a colonial stance in its reductive portrayal of the people it depicts (Thomas, 1994).

---

[22] Luis Buñuel, *Land Without Bread* (1933). Quoted from on-screen caption.

[23] The film was originally silent, but, according to Francisco Aranda, during its first screening in Madrid in 1933, it was accompanied by live music with Buñuel reciting the narration. See F. Aranda, *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography*, trans. David Robinson (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), p. 93.

[24] For a very insightful historical look into the cultural and political framework of Spain and the Las Hurdes region in relation to the work, see Jordana Mendelson, *Documenting Spain: Artists, Exhibition Culture, and the Modern Nation 1929–1939* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2005), pp. 65–92.

[25] The quote is from the film's voiceover narration at 07:25 min.

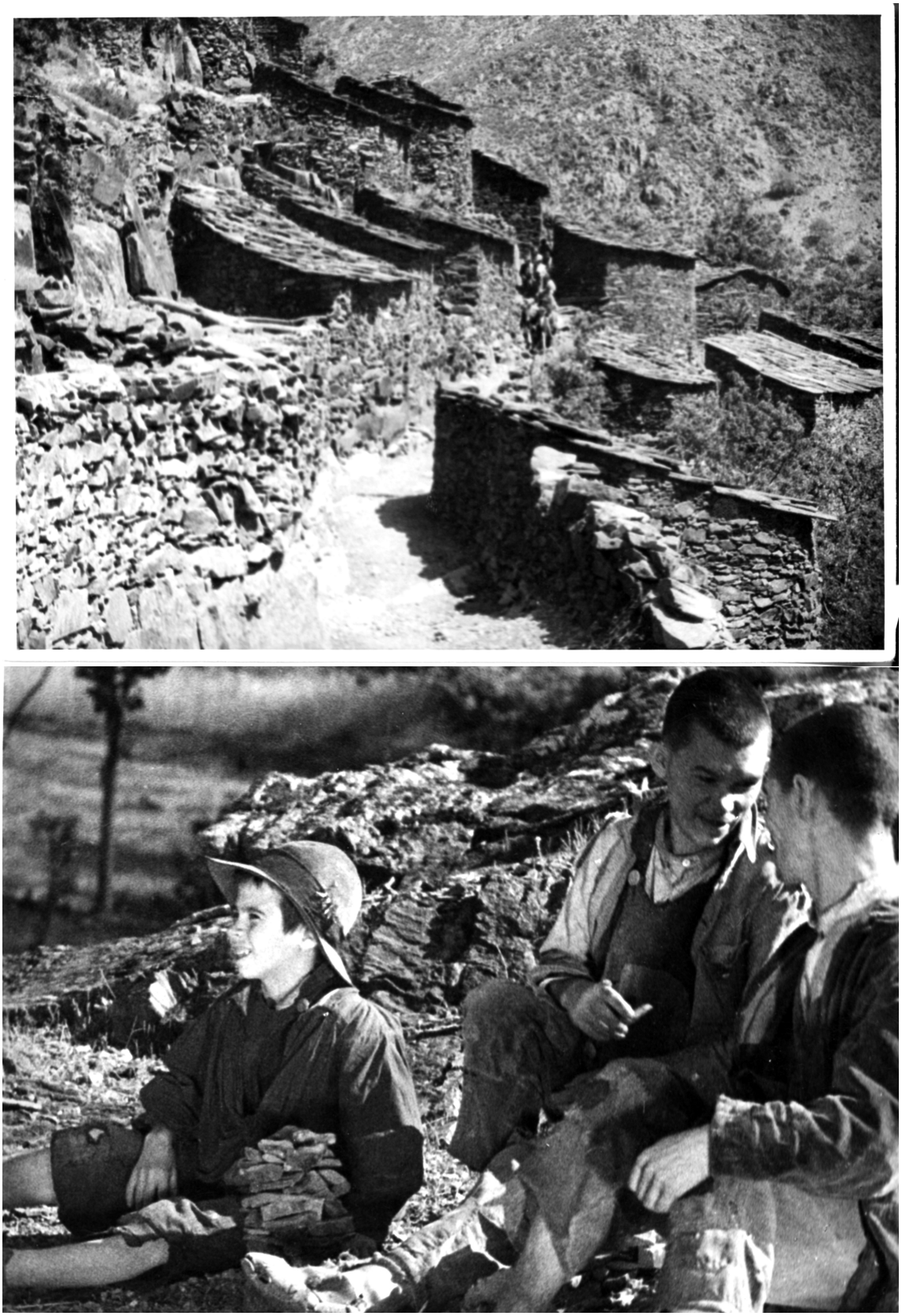


Fig. 4 & 5: *Land Without Bread [Las Hurdes],* 1933, film stills.

An introductory speech by Buñuel made at the film's initial screening in 1933 provides however another perspective. [26] Buñuel spoke of being attracted to the "terrible poetry" of human beings "fighting against a hostile environment and that they were doing it without hope to succeed." [27] Far from considering the situation in the Las Hurdes region an "embarrassment" [28] to Spain, Buñuel – ostensibly, but not literally, the narrator of the film – it seems believed its peoples' resilience to their adverse conditions, and their persistence to remain there, to be "mysterious". [29] His admiration is evident in the wording of his speech. The film was initially banned by the Spanish government. It was later dubbed into French and English under Buñuel's supervision, screening both in Paris and London in 1936 (Pavlović et al., 2009). Whilst these are the versions of the film available to us today, I am suggesting that the character and tone of the piece was already present in the silent version, through Buñuel's introductory reading. His choice of words, the juxtaposing of "terrible" with "poetry", for example, in describing the conditions of life for the Hurdanos – though dramatically expressed – point nonetheless towards a relationship borne of respect.

One could be tempted to say that viewers, uninitiated to surrealist humour and documentary or ethnographic criticism, may be forgiven for not picking up on Buñuel's sympathetic attitude towards the Hurdanos when encountering the film itself. Without his explanatory speech, the voice over narration appears cruel in its voiced description of the images. [30] There is a perplexing discord between the images and sound, which are discomforting in their contradiction, exaggeration, and purposeful disregard for linguistically expressed social manners – both speech related and filmic language. For example, set to Brahms's *Fourth Symphony*, we

---

[26] A copy of Buñuel's text is dated 1940 by Filmoteca Española, Madrid. Elsewhere, the speech is referenced as being read by Buñuel in Madrid in 1933 and also at the MacMillan Academic Theater in New York, 18 March 1940. See V. Sobchack, *Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Buñuel's Las Hurdes*, MFJ No.7/8/9 (Fall/Winter 1980–81), pp. 140–50. And I. Gibson, *Luis Buñuel, la forja de un cineasta universal 1900–1938* (Madrid: Aguilar, 2013).

[27] From an original document in Spanish sourced from the Archivo Buñuel, Filmoteca Española, Madrid. *Land without Bread*, Archivo Buñuel/1486, Filmoteca Española, Madrid.
See: http://catalogos.mecd.es/RAFI/cgi-rafi/abnetopac/O14088/IDb6959bc8/NT3 [accessed 15.11.2015]. I am grateful to Andrea Márquez for providing me with an English translation of this text, and to Luciano Zubillaga for a second opinion of the translation. An English translation of the text exists at Filmoteca Española, but the archive is unable to confirm the author. In places, this translation is slightly different to the ones quoted herein.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid.

[30] I am referring here to the English voice-over version.

hear: “At the entrance of the town we are welcome by a quire of idiots. Most of the inhabitants are sick and live in misery.” Commenting on the presumably worn appearance of a breast-feeding woman, who is seen smiling, and looking directly at the camera: “This woman is not yet 32 years old”. These statements are briskly delivered. Within the first three minutes of the film the word “barbaric“ is used twice. Once referring to the beheading of a rooster in a ritual performed for newly-weds, and again when referring to Christian pendants decorating an infant that remind the narrator of the “barbaric tribes in Africa and Oceania”.

Throughout the film, the linguistic choices and observations that narrate the images lead to a suspicion that the filmmaker is intentionally jeopardising the viewer’s trust. I believe this ‘effect’ is irrespective of the context, or historical moment of the film’s screening, or the critical schooling of its viewer. The critical position from which the filmmaker is speaking reveals itself in the language and delivery, exposing its artifice through radical parody, which we may not immediately know how to interpret. We become distanced because the objectification we are confronted with in the film circumvents our ‘pleasure’ to perceive ourselves as ‘subjects’ who ‘act’ by producing empathy. Therefor, the objectification functions by creating a distancing from empathic identification with suffering.

To return to the discord between sound and image in *Land Without Bread* that obliquely reveal the intentions of the unreliable narrator: the ‘documentary lie’, or “ethnofiction” as it is referred to elsewhere, is evident in a number of scenes. For example, Buñuel depicts a group of people with learning difficulties (“midgets and cretins”). While the voiceover informs us that “some are dangerous and will either flee from strangers, or attack them with stones”, they appear happy and cooperative. Another often cited scene shows a goat tumbling down a steep mountainside. We are told mountain goats are not usually eaten unless they come to a natural death, for example “when the hills are steep and there are loose stones on the footpath”. But the smoke of a gun at the edge of the frame is clearly visible, indicating the goat came to anything but a natural death. Overall then, the critical stance of the film towards documentary truth appears to reside in its intentional documentary lie.

If viewers are intentionally led to disbelief, would it not follow then that we should also disbelieve the object-relation displayed by the filmmaker in regards to

his relationship to the Hurdanos people? Should it not follow that the distancing, the objectification, is purposeful?

The following section in Vivian Sobchack's "Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Buñuel's *Las Hurdes*", would seem to support this view:

> What we conventionally see *documented* by the camera is misery, poverty, illness, and death. But what the film also documents – what it shows us and unconventionally makes us aware of in its unfolding – is the *documenting* of the Hurdanos, the turning them into objects from which films are made. The accurate portrait of social relations we see and hear in *Las Hurdes* is that relationship established between the 'objects' which are the Hurdanos and the 'subject' who is the narrator. Indeed, if we are able to look at the film clearly and unconventionally – as neither 'horrific' travelogue nor 'liberal' documentary expose – we must reject the narrator as our surrogate (…). In this regard, *Las Hurdes* is deeply political (rather than merely partisan) in that its primary aim is to cause the viewer to question the very bases of perception itself. (Sobchack, 1998: 73)

Beyond the film's invitation to question the very basis of perception, and by making visible to us the process of objectification (the Hurdanos turned into "objects from which films are made of"), the film, I would argue, forcefully puts the viewer on par with the narrator.

Since our empathic register for the Hurdanos is deactivated by the strategic discord of sound and image, and we find ourselves confronted with the discomforting objectification, we are left with no escape route. As Sobchak points out, what we see and hear is a portrait of the social relations "established between the 'objects', which are the Hurdanos, and the 'subject', who is the narrator". Like the narrator, we are distanced, unaffected observers – we are consumers of suffering. From this vantage point then, it may become necessary as the viewer to revaluate one's own complicity in, or complacency towards, the wider organisation of life presented, of 'documentary reality'. The very discomforting thing that *Land Without Bread* point towards is our complicity in any number of structural inequalities beyond the frame of cultural or artistic production. But, perhaps most significantly, the profoundly political aspect of the film is the discomfort generated in the viewer's inescapable confrontation with the very conditions of objectification, in which he/she is implicated by the very act of viewing. The objectification viewers witness in the film, I argue, functions to produce discomfort. Discomfort then replaces empathy as a form of ethical labour.

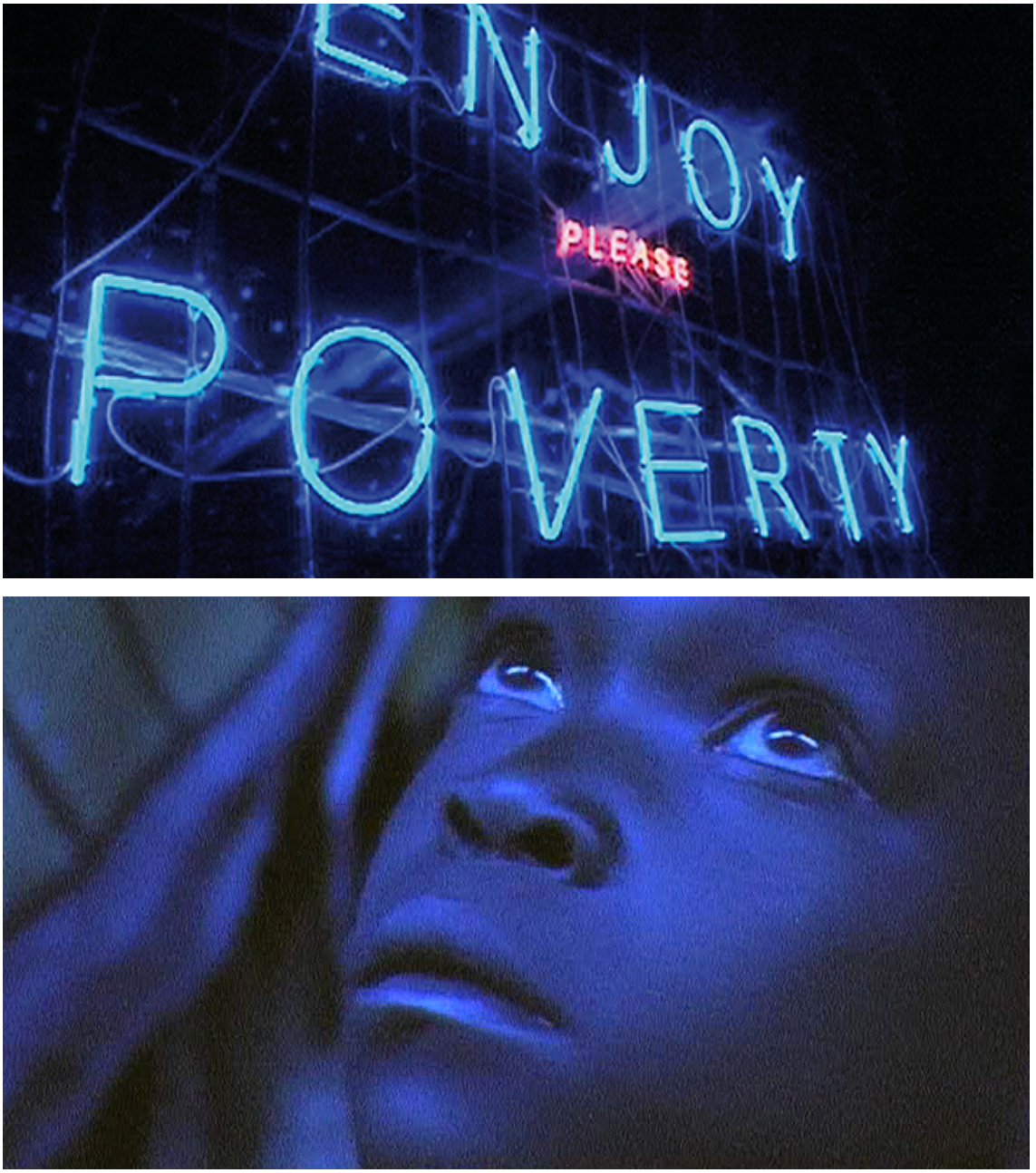


Fig 6 & 7: *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty*, 2008, film stills.

In a similar vein, Renzo Martens' *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* (2008) also appears to circumvent the possibility of empathic identification with suffering as a redemptive act for its viewer. *Enjoy Poverty* documents Martens' journey in The Democratic Republic of Congo, the mission of which is to 'teach' the Congolese how to capitalise on their greatest 'resource': their poverty. The film charts Martens' "emancipatory programme"[31] through which the Congolese would themselves economically benefit from the production and sale of images of their suffering,

[31] This phrase is used in the film's synopsis. See: http://www.renzomartens.com/episode3/film [accessed 17.08.2016]

their poverty, from images of war and disaster. *Enjoy Poverty* documents the process of this artistic intervention, which includes Martens sending down river a barge with a large neon sign that reads "Enjoy Poverty Please".

In an early scene of the film we observe that in order to accomplish this artistic intervention, Martens enlists helpers, which comprise the local community. Along the way, he documents the plight of plantation workers, including the economic injustices they are subjected to and their harsh living conditions. This is underscored by footage of life in refugee camps showing the organisational pathos of the aid industry as comparable to the foreign planation owners' exploitative treatment of the local labour force. What we see transpire is this: the corporate structure of the aid industry is organised in such a way so as to sustain and privilege their own internal operational and administrative structures over and above the actual aid they deliver. In other words, the film exposes that a greater proportion of funds are spent on organising the aid, economically benefitting the international aid industry, than on the aid itself. Various scenes in the film relating to journalistic coverage of the region demonstrate the same principle as applying to the news media. These scenes show that the sale of images of starvation, malnutrition, and death are products that economically benefit only those who are part of that industry. In formally complex ways, but summarised here in simple terms, *Enjoy Poverty* highlights a twofold exploitation of the Congolese people. First as a labour force mining resources for export, and then poverty itself is 'harvested' as goods, or products for another market – the aid and media industries. The very discomforting aspect of the viewing experience is that Martens mirrors these structural inequalities in the narrative plotting of the film. This is done in a number of ways, including through the 'performance' of his relationship with the Congolese. He situates himself as the 'subject' organising the 'objects', the Congolese, and makes visible his process of objectification. More specifically, the external structure of political and economic relations between us (the viewers and consumers of African resources) and the local population, is mirrored in the internal relation between Martens and the Congolese.

Fig 8 & 9: *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty*, 2008, film stills.

Martens depicts himself in 'colonial' attire, straw hat included. His luggage containing the dissembled parts of the neon sculpture is being 'Sherpa-ed' across a waterlogged forest area, whilst he films himself self-consciously performing a sing-along. The close resemblance to Klaus Kinski in Werner Herzog's film *Fitzcarraldo* (1982) has been pointed out by multiple commentators. Like the fictional Fitzcarraldo's grand mission to bring opera to a small town in the Amazon Basin of Peru, Martens makes his self-assigned mission very clear from the outset: he has come there to teach the Congolese to 'own' their poverty. The neon sign is just one of a number of ways Martens demonstrates his missionary task.

One example of the futility of his mission is reflected in his attempt to teach a group of young locals the logics of the news media market when it comes to image sales. Images of death and starvation, he demonstrates in a classroom-type situation, bring an economic advantage greater than their existing, much less lucrative, occupation as wedding and party photographers. With a group of his 'students', Martens visits a Médecins Sans Frontières official, where they hope to be granted access to take pictures at Médecins Sans Frontières managed hospitals. Prompted by a question raised earlier by one of the young men in his company, Martens probes the official as to why, unlike international photographers, local ones are excluded from deriving an income from pictures of children suffering malnutrition, raped women, and war casualties. The official explains that the international photographers are there to make news, not money. Probed further, the Médecins Sans Frontières official says, "This is not to humiliate you […]. Making an image is more than pushing a button". The scene is discomforting. The opposing desires and points of view on the subject of privileged access to markets, and to education, is palpable not just in the verbal exchange between Martens and the official, but more importantly in the reaction shots of the rest of the group in the room, which includes the local photographers. So the palpable power of critique is not just in what is said, but in what remains unsaid, in the silent gaps and in the faces of the local photographers. Anything but mute their expressions are a register of discontent. In the parting scene outside the Médecins Sans Frontières compound Martens declares, self-consciously framed on camera, that he thinks their mission to photograph and make a living from their poverty will fail. They may continue with their party photography. The young men part without a word. So, the failure of the group's mission is built into the scheme of the film in order to reflect on a micro-scale the larger failure of the international community and viewing public.

But the relationship between Martens and the Congolese, the objectification, seems constructed. There are a number of subtle ways in which another interpretation of the relationship between Martens and the people he encounters is manifest. For one, this relationship is palpable in shots that linger on the faces of the Congolese when they react to Martens' repeated advocacy for adapting to the logics of new markets: fishing is not lucrative enough, nor is wedding photography. His suggestions are met with perplexity, disbelief, resigned

silence, or disappointment in the case of the local photographers in the scene that concludes the Médecins Sans Frontières visit described above. Martens' editorial choice, the lingering on the reactions of the men, leads us into a different, an otherwise relationship. It reveals that what we read as an intolerable objectification is constructed *for* us.

Reflecting on the discomforting objectification *Enjoy Poverty* willingly, self-consciously, and most significantly, as I read the film, performatively engages in brings to light the paradox between ethical principles and ethical behaviour. *Enjoy Poverty* disrupts our expectation of ethical behaviour as it 'ought' to be enacted in documentary practice. The film therefore produces a stark reminder of the complex nature, and inefficacy, of ethical principles, as well as our habitual foregrounding of those principles in our reactions to the viewing experience. The discomforting aspect of the film does not allow us to forego the self-reflective critique of our consumption practices beyond the immediate framework of art or culture, which are very much tied-in with the extractions of Congolese labour and Congolese resources sketched out in the film.

The viewer's belief in documentary or art's efficacy in facilitating economic or political transformation is further challenged in the confrontation with the following scene. Displaying the neon sign, "Enjoy Poverty (Please)", at what looks like a closing party with locals, a discomforting dialogue ensues. Martens tells the locals that they better accept the condition of their lives, their suffering, and be happy: "If you're going to wait for your salary to grow so you can be happy, you'll be unhappy your whole lives." To which a man responds, "We'll gladly accept whatever you can do for us when you get back." Martens: "There is nothing prepared". If we shift away from the painful speech act, we may see expressive facial reactions and body language ranging from distaste, perplexity, and knowledge of the intended provocation. Someone asks: "Why did you come?" Martens: "To tell you, you better enjoy poverty, rather than fight it and be unhappy". Another respondent: "Will you project the film here?" Martens: "The film will be shown in Europe, not here". With a pained expression of distaste, with a discomfort that requires no translation, cultural or otherwise, the young man asking turns away simply saying: "Thank you". There is no pretence in that

relation; no pretence in the 'realness' of the situation. It is 'real' insofar as it leaves no room for the viewer's indulgence in escapist saviour fantasies.

In its most basic function, I suggest that Martens' film contests the historically-assumed political agency of documentary film. The film acts as the by now well-known but still apparently hard-hitting reminder of the role of documentary in primarily carrying "information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful" (Rosler, 2004: 179). But the information the film carries, its charge, is addressed directly to its "socially powerful" viewer. Simply put, in its undertones the film says, Africa knows, and wasn't it about time that we, the international community, acknowledged that we too know that Africa knows. [32] Awareness of Africa 'knowing' is evidenced throughout the film both by the filmmaker's wilful über-realism, that may come across as cruelty, and by the locals themselves in responses of disbelief, disappointment, astonishment, ambivalence, nervous tension, perplexity, and knowingness. Our attention and, dare I say, responsibility as viewers is, I argue, better invested in the reading of the often non-verbal acts of the Congolese. The above described scene ends with clapping after the locals agree to accept their suffering and Martens has told them that experiencing their suffering has made him a better person. "You really helped me. Thank you." Though seemingly mundane as a speech act, there is something very powerful in the culmination of that scene, and the visible discomfort, followed by the benevolent but meaningless words "thank you", first uttered by the young local, and later by Martens himself.

The performance of the filmmaker's position as the one who goes plundering for "documentary gold" [33] and comes away having contributed nothing in the way of economic help, or transformative potential, is reinforced by the Congolese's knowing participation in the film. Whether expressed by looks of surprise, dismissal, ambivalence, or collusion with Martens' performance, one thing I contend is very clearly articulated in this film: the Congolese know. The

[32] I take the expression "Africa knows" from Joshua Wanyama and Sheila Ochugboju, who run a commercial stock photo agency in Nairobi by the same name. The expressed purpose of their photo agency is to "re-brand" Africa.

[33] "Documentary gold" is an expression used informally in the UK's broadcast documentary sector. It names the dramatic value of a situation, person, issue, or event. The conditions of its existence is hoped to guarantee the filmmaker, production company, or broadcaster capital returns. These returns are not limited strictly to financial ones, but also include increased viewer ratings, or increased chances at landing future commissions for the filmmaker or production company.

discomforting predicament Martens presents shakes the foundation of our understanding of ethics; that is, the ethical principle, our expectation that the filmmaker ought to demonstrate, and show allegiance with, the other. This is set against the viewer's suggested allegiance with the brute, colonial figure of Martens himself. We are after all the consumers of the resources leading to the Congolese exploitation and suffering. Not able to, or not wishing to identify with this image, we, the viewers, are left in "uncomfortable suspension" (Tobing Rony, 1996: 17). Our discomfort as viewers with the ordeal that Martens entangles us in is, I argue, the core political strategy of the film.

Whilst Buñuel's formal strategy of undermining how *Land Without Bread* is perceived through incongruous juxtapositions that cause us to question the nature of the film, Martens goes beyond the limits of irony, arriving at what he calls the "bitterly real" (Demos & Martens, 2012: 101). Unlike Buñuel's early example of self-referential critique of the documentary travelogue, Martens' film is no parody. Both films in their own way are primarily a challenge to, and critique of, the viewer's relationship to the film object as a replication or mirror of wider systemic inequalities. Both films circumvent a radical "postcolonial subject position" (Russell, 1999: 28) through the very compounding of colonial 'objectivity' and therefore constitute critiques of colonialism. And I would suggest that the incorporation and adoption of the very same methods they are critiquing then qualifies them for a different kind of reading in regard to the objectification the films are implicated in. This type of objectification insists on the viewer's investment of ethical labour through the production of discomfort that is painful and not in empathy that is redemptive. Martens explains:

> I think the film breaks one clear rule: that audiences should be exempt from the pain that half the world's population experiences on a daily basis. We can watch it, but we should not be made part of it. Or if it should happen that a work reveals our part in it anyway, through some economic or political systems that we support or benefit from, then we are exempt from the pain, because it is assumed that, since we are willing to watch the piece, we are contributors to the critical mass that will, one day, undo the harm. This rule therefore paints an inaccurate picture of reality, and of the audience's relationship to it. We either don't see the pain, or we're part of its solution. *Episode 3* is so tailored that watching it makes you complicit with its production. Obviously that's not fun, and some viewers think I'm

> out to trick them. *Episode 3* deals with pain, but then doesn't offer the audience a way out. (Demos & Martens, 2012: 91)

Whether we regard *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* and *Land Without Bread* as art works or documentaries, ethnographic films, interventionist art, or institutional critique, one could argue that they function like horror films. They illustrate the 'monstrous' aspects in which viewers are implicated. Their critical focus is on maximising discomfort in the viewing experience. But our capacities as viewers vary as to the amount of horror we are willing to endure. I may hold the view that since it is not a horror made of fantasy, but a horror made of reality, it is our obligation to 'endure it'. But it is of equal importance to acknowledge that such enduring does not resolve the problem. It only functions in making us 'painfully aware'; that is, remaining cognisant of the problem through the painful horror we are witnessing. Martha Rosler also reminds us that documentaries are similar to horror films, for they put "a face on fear and transform threat into fantasy, into imagery. One can handle imagery by leaving it behind. *(It is them, not us.)* One may even, as a private person, support causes" (Rosler, 2004: 179). *Enjoy Poverty,* I would argue, confronts us with images not easily left behind because the film is not about *them*. It is about us. The ethical labour we are forced to invest as viewers is a direct confrontation with ourselves. Therein, I argue, lies the productive force of discomfort.

More could be said about horror, or its close relation, the monstrous, and their potential in expressing an ethics. For instance, scholar Patricia MacCormack, leaning on philosophers Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, states, "[in] being nothing more than a deviation from the phantasy of human consistency, the monstrous is everything else, limitless and excessive of the concept of the human" (MacCormack, 2012: 86). MacCormack expands the monstrous from the limitless excess of human consistency further, extending it into the concept of "becoming monster". And it is there that MacCormack finds the potency in creating "new corporeal and communicative ethics" (MacCormack, 2012: 86). But this includes a kind of "monstrous activism" that MacCormack sees being contested in theoretical debates. I would propose that in his filmic role as advocate of self-objectification – both of himself as a missionary documentarian and as one advocating that the Congolese exploit their own poverty as an viable economic resource – Martens demonstrates a kind of "monstrous activism". He repels and

likewise arouses curiosity. On the prospective necessity of the monstrous Braidotti writes:

> the fantasmagoric diversity of monstrous beings points the way to the kind of line of becoming which our crisis-afflicted culture badly needs (…). [T]he human is now displaced in the direction of a glittering range of post-human variables, however painful this may be to the collective hubris we – including Western feminists – have inherited from centuries of codified Western humanism. (Braidotti, 2000: 172)

In the documentary context, the 'monstrous' activism Martens, Brakhage, and Buñuel display through their overtly objectifying form of expression may be just what our always already crisis-afflicted culture continues to need.

Having taken this cursory excursion into considering what the ethical potential of horror might be, I propose that the difference between activating the viewer's empathic register through politically motivated works versus putting them through the pain of horror, may be that sympathy engages one only temporarily, whereas horror produces a pain not easily forgotten. Relatedly, on the dangers of empathic identification, and of imagining a proximity to suffering, Susan Sontag writes:

> Sentimentality, notoriously, is entirely compatible with a taste for brutality and worse. […] The states described as apathy, moral or emotional anesthesia, are full of feelings; the feelings are rage and frustration. But if we consider what emotions would be desirable, it seems too simple to elect sympathy. The imaginary proximity to the suffering inflicted on others that is granted by images suggests a link between the faraway sufferers (…) and the privileged viewer that is simply untrue, that is yet one more mystification of our real relations to power. (Sontag, 2004: 102)

Of course, as Sontag points out, one can become habituated to horror in real life, just as one can become habituated to horrific images. But, she likewise adds, "there are pictures whose power does not abate, in part because one cannot look at them often" (Sontag, 2004: 83).

Relatedly, I would argue that the greater value and potency of the films described resides not so much in the horrific images that we are compelled to look away from (an indeed reasonable response, and a testament to their potency), but in confronting us with the ways in which we are implicated in the production of the suffering we choose to turn a blind eye to: our consumption of Congolese resources for instance, from palm oil to gold to coltran, down to the inefficacy of our charitable giving. The discomfort that arises from this confrontation then has

the potential to remain alive and active as we remember the ordeal we experienced as viewers, even if we find we cannot look at the films often, or ever again. Discomfort then, I suggest, is a form of ethical labour, a process which both makers and viewers are engaged in together. For Martens, *Enjoy Poverty* "pre-emptively embraces its reception. That's what angers people: the fact that they see what it is to be part of a zero reaction, and that watching this film, which is indeed quite an ordeal, makes them part of that zero, not of a better world" (Demos & Martens, 2012: 98).

Critiquing methods of critique, Walter Benjamin distinguishes between commentary and critique. The commentator analyses the "material content", the critic attends to the "truth content" of a work. Leaving aside epistemological differences over the meaning of the term truth, for Benjamin, truth content vis-à-vis material content manifests itself in form, not content. Critique requires excavation he says (Benjamin, 1996: 297–360). I would then suggest that this form Benjamin speaks of is constituted in both Martens' and Buñuel's relationship to the people in their films, and perhaps more significantly, their relationship to the documentary viewer. Can the objectification that this form takes then be considered an excavation as critique? And should we not consider the discomfort, the horror even, which we are confronted with through this excavation, as productive ethical labour? Of course, other enabling strategies exist as well. The next section addresses some alternative strategies, in particular where objectification as method does not produce discomfort. In the analysis of the work that follows, the objectification impulse takes an egalitarian direction through informed and consensual collaboration.

NON-HIERARCHICAL, DE-POLEMICISED: On Shado'man (2014)

The cases discussed so far solicit discomfort to produce a response. I have called this process ethical labour. But as another form of meta-critique, the objectification impulse can also look towards and highlight more egalitarian modes of production to say something about community, responsibility, working together, and solidarity. This mode of objectification is different from the aforementioned one. Less interested in producing a response through discomfort, these films can take a sculptural approach in working with the materiality of bodies, privileging physical encounters in the now; the present moment of filming. We could say that the approach in these films is to sculpt the social as malleable material whilst being observant of the character, logic, customs, or rules that produce it. Some examples of this would be Charlotte Gainsborg's *Melior Street* (2011), Andrea Luka Zimmerman's *Estate, a Reverie* (2015), or Boris Gerrets' *Shado'man* (2014). I will concentrate now on the latter example.

In *Shado'man* (Gerrets, 2014), Boris Gerrets seeks to foreground the "dignity of humans surviving under inhumane conditions". [34] Shot in Sierra Leone, the film is a portrait of disabled people living in the streets of Freetown, shaped by Gerrets' desire to seek closeness. As Gerrets puts it, "to concentrate on understanding" those he encounters "physically, rather then psychologically or biographically".

At night in Freetown, under street lamps, in darkness, or aided by passing cars and motorcycle headlights, Gerrets spends time with those whose lives have been ones of social exclusion: the blind, the physically challenged, the rough sleepers. At no time is the political history of Sierra Leone, the war, or the personal circumstances leading to their lives in the streets, or their disabilities, made explicit. Instead, *Shado'man* depicts the fabric of a social ecosystem not too dissimilar in its expression of desire to the expressions of those who are able-bodied and privileged: the desire for tenderness, partnership, and sexual intimacy, anxieties about the future of an unborn child, how to acquire funds for a loved one's education, or the struggle to build a home with limited resources.

[34] All following text set in quotation marks is taken from Gerrets' statements on http://www.shadoman-film.com [accessed 19.06.2014].

Fig. 10: *Shado'man*, 2014, film still.

Gerrets' way of looking and seeing speaks not of sorrow or injustice, but of dignities found in being together. He sees the camera as a tool that creates a social dynamic between him and his "protagonists". In the documentary field, people appearing in films are oftentimes referred to as subjects, or as contributors. Gerrets avoids such terminology:

> I hate the word subject because I wouldn't want to be a subject myself. But I wouldn't want to be an object either. A subject is an object of study not of empathetic exchange. [It implies that there can be a detached observer but there is no such thing as a detached observer]. That's why the word subject is less suitable for me. [35]

The term protagonist is more commonly used in the dramatic arts, in theatre, but also in narrative film and in literature. It denotes the central character or actor in a story. In the documentary context, Gerrets' deliberate word choice is slightly provocative, he admits, but it stems from the way he works with people:

> I see them acting in their own lives – acting as to act, creating act – but with the added consciousness of being in front of a camera. So it's a balance between playing oneself and acting – as acting in life. It may not feel obvious to the viewer where one ends and the other begins, but it mirrors life, as we all act in social situations. The camera however creates a greater

[35] Recorded Skype conversation with Boris Gerrets (19 August 2017). All quotations that follow are taken from a transcript of the recording.

> intensity or perhaps a heightened consciousness of the situation. The camera being there is – and needs to be – always very obvious. The camera does change the reality in front of it and I want to acknowledge that. That's why I prefer the word protagonist.

For Gerrets, film and filmmaking is a "phenomenological space", or a "biotopic" exploration as he calls it. [36] This approach, or attitude to the filmmaking process, is made to be felt by viewers in a number of ways. There is a sculptural quality to *Shado'man* that takes shape in its form. It is expressed in the way Gerrets works with people, which is made visible in aesthetic terms. Even without knowledge of Gerrets' own biography, the care and humility of his physical encounter with those whom he films comes through in the film by way of its sculptural form. Gerrets trained as a visual artist, studying sculpture at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, whose notable alumni include Joseph Beuys, Andreas Gursky, and Gerhard Richter. Gerrets then became involved in performance art and physical theatre in Paris at the end of 70s, working both as a dancer and choreographer. Later, having acquired technical knowhow through making video art, his first steps in documentaries were as an editor.

An obvious way to speak of the sculptural quality of *Shado'man* would be to reference its visual composition, its aesthetics. Immaculately composed, both visually as well as in its sound design, the entire film is shot at night requiring inventive low-tech lighting solutions. I could also speak of its structure, of the way scenes are plotted through editing. For instance, a significant number of scenes start with, or pivot on, questions that the protagonists ask one another. These questions set the tone and the content of respective scenes, determining the themes of their struggles. The grounds of their understanding for one another, their hopes, are built on observations of their conversational exchanges that never feel externalised. Instead the observations we witness acquire a self-reflexive interiority through Gerrets cutting technique starting scenes with the protagonist's questions as described.

In one scene, a couple – Sarah Koroma and Sherif Mohamed Abu Kanu (Shero, as his friends call him in the film) – discuss the naming of their unborn child. The precise context that would explain the specific cultural practice of

[36] Taken from Gerrets' statement on http://www.shadoman-film.com [accessed 19.06.2014].

naming children in Sierra Leone is missing. When, how, who gets to name a child according to local custom, is not made explicit. But it does come through in the subtle tension of their conversation. The scene starts with Shero asking Sarah why she feels he has to pay her in order to get to name their child. The discussion unfolds from there, emoting the power-relation between the couple and their conflicting desires in establishing the grounds for their relationship.

Later, another scene articulates the physical struggles of living in the streets to astonishingly lucid effect while not lacking in visual poetry. With their backs to camera, we see two men, Alfred on crutches and Shero in his wheelchair, slowly making their way down a street at night. The question around which the slow-drip scene pivots is: "Alfred, you know I can't dream right?" – "Why is that?" "It's the life we lead. […] You never get a chance to dream if you can't sleep. How can you find happiness? That's the thing."

I had wondered if this specific method of starting scenes with questions that were posed by the people in the film to each other was a structuring device Gerrets had planned. But as he explains:

> They initiated everything that happened. As I was interacting with them, we had many discussions, and talked about life. One example: Sarah was pregnant, so I asked if she had a name for the child. She said no. The question was of mutual interest and I thought finding a name could be a scene. The reason that she didn't have a name for the child is cultural. You give a name one week after the child is born because you don't know if it's going to survive. Then there is the name-giving ceremony. And it is also a custom that the father determines the name of the child, so as to confirm the male bloodline. This establishes his relationship, his rights and obligations to the child and also – very importantly – the obligations of the child towards the father.
>
> Another example, this one provoked by the immediate circumstances: the scene towards the end where Lama is talking to his guide, a young boy. My question to Lama was about the child's future, now that he was responsible for him. But then out of the blue a strong wind came up and it started to rain heavily – very unusual for the dry season. So I asked them where the wind came from and this led to a discussion that circled around questions of how clouds come to be and about rain, about an imaginary iron coat and who can withstand the cold better, a child or an adult. Everything came out of the conversational dynamic that was set-up between me and this little community. My camera established the space for this dynamic to occur in this particular way.

Fig. 11 & 12: *Shado'man*, 2014, film stills.

Gerrets' sculpting of what I might call an inter-objective encounter, comes through in his specific approach of encountering others physically, relating to people in the now – the present moment of filming – rather than through explanatory contextualising of their personal histories. Left out are the biographies of the people he encounters in Freetown, Gerrets' own biography, and his relationship to Sierra Leone. What then are the material ways in which the relationship between Gerrets and his "protagonists" manifest in the film? How does that relationship make itself visible? *Shado'man*, I suggest, may be an example

of what an "aesthetic of ethics" looks like (Beshty, 2015). But the way the ethics of a material encounter manifests in *Shado'man* is not easy to pinpoint.

Aside from the elements of the structure already discussed, in aesthetic terms, the way Gerrets frames reality, or the way he works with available light sources, the sculpting of material encounters is made visible in the detailed observations of the physical effort on the part of Gerrets' protagonists to do simple things. For example, the effort involved in a blind person making a phone call, or the effort of a person with no legs climbing a staircase. There are two particular scenes that stand out in this regard.

In the first, the opening shot, we see a large assembly of disabled people at night moving from the distance of an empty street towards the camera. The entirety of this large group is named in the closing credit sequence of the film. From this we gather that the scene did not come about in a chance moment of observational filming. But even prior to confirming this through the end credits, we can locate Gerrets' sculpting in the composition of both image and sound. The opening scene is a static wide shot; the street's downhill gradient lending itself well to the framing of a large group. As part of the sound track we hear a detailed, almost musical, cacophony of metal sounds hitting the asphalt surface.

> The opening scene was one initiated by me, in order to establish the narrative terrain of the film. I thought it would be powerful because there are five people in the film who are the main protagonists. But the reality is that there are a huge number of disabled people living in the streets [of Freetown]. So I wanted to make the viewer understand that it's not just the five people [in the film] but there is a bigger problem. It was quite a logistical challenge: to get all these people to come over the hill in the empty street. We could only do it once. There was no way you could get all these people, who are all disabled, to go back and do it again.

In another scene – the concluding part of the film – Shero's exerted movements on crutches in the expanse of a street at night are observed. He is dancing. This scene is intercut with the haunting sound of a piano originating from someone playing in the street.

> I had seen people play piano in the street, but the unity of time and space in the film is very limited. Everything is happening on one street corner. People gather there because it is where the only functioning streetlights are. So I had to get the piano there instead of filming the scene in the place where I had seen people play.

Fig. 13: *Shado'man*, 2014, film still.

> Before that, I had seen Shero dancing, so I wanted to film it. To me his dance sums up the feeling I got from the whole process – that however bad things may get, this becomes the new reality. And in some way, even though they are living under very inhumane conditions, they preserve their humanity in it. This may be a contentious thing to say, but I didn't feel that they were unhappier than other people. The issues that they have are many. But the main stress factors didn't stem from the physical aspect of their disability but rather from their social environment and the lack of opportunities. On a societal level they have to cope with neglect and discrimination. On the level of the extended family, they have to meet many responsibilities. The weight is sometimes unbearable. They live in the city and their families live in the countryside, and expect to be sent money because they think they are rich and don't understand what it means to be living in the street. A lot of the money they received for working on the film went to their families, paying for a relative's education or helping their mother or father instead of building a house for themselves – which one person did.

What is particularly interesting about Gerrets' approach is learning that he built into the production of the film an economic feedback system. His protagonists also formed part of his crew and they received an income. Gerrets speaks of the financial compensation for contributors – a grey area in documentary practice – in new terms of engagement. In other words, hiring his protagonists as his crewmembers is a form of engagement that makes an active step towards what might to some extent be considered an egalitarian approach to artistic practice and to collaboration. If not entirely true in financial terms, in communitarian terms, all involved were on an equal plain as a social group. As Gerrets states, his

protagonists applied their imagination in their contributions to the film, so they must be paid as crew members.

> There was a core group of about five people who worked in front of the camera, and a couple of others who were helping me [behind the camera]. The only other outsider apart from me, meaning from outside of Sierra Leone, was Rosalie [Gerrets' daughter] who was doing sound. The idea was to create a small economic unit. Everyone was paid – including the protagonists – according to a protocol that we had worked out together. This was important because in a situation where people are really surviving on very little, money coming in can be very divisive. So we needed to have a system that satisfied everyone. Whenever I was filming, everyone was paid by the day, even those who were not in the scene. So everyone got the same fee, which by the way was the amount they had asked for. The idea of course was that, first of all I am using their imagination in the film, so they need to get paid for their intellectual property. Secondly, once the film was made, I wanted them to have an opportunity to make a step in their lives; that would allow them to change their situation.
> Working *in reality* means taking into account the whole social structure that is constantly present. People have brothers and sisters and uncles and friends and neighbours. And in the case of these people living in the streets, their credibility in their own community is at stake. They were saying 'look if you would not have paid us, everyone would say: This white man, he is not paying you, you are crazy'. So the money was also a token of respect towards them that was seen by the others and in turn made them respectable in their eyes as well. For me it was important to find a way to accommodate that dynamic and that complexity.

Gerrets' commitment to this approach sits comfortably alongside his need to exercise authorial control. In "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents", art historian and critic Claire Bishop points out the political desire of participatory art, and its desire to counter the instrumentalising and alienating effects of global capitalism's privileged social bonds. Bishop recognises the political desire of resistance to those privileged bond as an artistic gesture. But she argues that it is likewise important to critique a work for its artistic quality. She emphasises this critical task as especially crucial in the context of what was Britain's New Labour rhetoric of cultural policies aimed at social inclusion. "Reducing art to statistical information about target audiences and 'performance indicators,' the government prioritizes social effect over considerations of artistic quality" (Bishop, 2006: 180). Countering key texts such as Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), or Grant H. Kester's *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (2004), and citing examples such as Artur

Zmijewski's *The Singing Lesson 1* (2001), Phil Collins' *they shoot horses* (2004), and Jeremy Dellers' *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001), Bishop advocates for works that join a "tradition of highly authored situations that fuse social reality with carefully calculated artifice". Because aesthetics, the social and the political, she argues, should be thought through along side each other, rather than absorbing all within the ethical and into "exemplary gestures" (Bishop, 2006: 183).

While *Shado'man* does not fall strictly under the cannon of participatory or socially engaged art – though all documentaries to some extent could – Gerrets' film, as well as a number of other recent documentary works, some of which I mentioned at the beginning of this section, fulfils both the political urgency of an egalitarian social encounter alongside the production of a highly authored work. In other words, Gerrets' aesthetic vision does not stand in conflict, or to put it another way, is not compromised, by his commitment to a production process that accommodates a wider social dynamic than that of the immediate community formed around the making of the film. Quite to the contrary, his commitment to implementing a financial feedback system as well as his sensitivity towards the larger framework of his protagonists' lives, seems to have positively impacted the artistic quality of his work. This particular way of working does not appear to compromise distinct authorship.

To extrapolate the process I'm speaking of with another example of the far-reaching implications of the "social turn", one could cite artists' initiatives, which reach beyond art production and become more akin to on the ground, pragmatic social intervention. For instance, the Rebuild Foundation initiated by Theaster Gates, a Chicago born artist and educator whose practice includes object making, performance, and the development of housing and cultural spaces. The project involves the purchase and renovation of abandoned spaces in under-resourced neighbourhoods of Chicago, as well as apprenticeship programmes, community service activities, and the development of buildings to house a library, a listening room, and a cinema. Of this project, Gates says: "While I may not be able to change the housing market or the surety of gentrification, I can offer questions within the landscape. To question, not by petitioning or organizing in the activist way, but by building and making good use of the things forgotten" (Gates, n.d.).

Although the relationship between economics and ethics in art is beyond the scope of my research, I will briefly outline another example in order to further

extrapolate the communitarian objectives of projects like Gerrets' *Shado'man*, or Theaster Gates' Rebuild Foundation.

The Institute of Human Activities (IHA) is a research project initiated by Renzo Martens and developed at The Royal Academy of Fine Arts (KASK), University College Ghent, with Delphine Hesters and Jacobus Koster. [37] The ambitious aim of the project is to "prove that artistic critique on economic inequality can bypass it – not symbolically, but in material terms" (Martens & KASK, n.d.). Through the organisation of exhibitions, presentations, and seminars involving both writers, critical theorists, and cultural institutions operating amongst the global elite, alongside the formation of The *Cercle d'Art des Travailleurs de Plantation Congolaise (CATPC)* founded near Lusanga in The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Martens aims to reverse the flow of capital away from the global centres of art and inject a culture of critical art production locally. The on-going IHA project (since 2012) is both a self-confessed attempt at gentrifying a part of the Congo, as well as an attempt at developing a "new economic programme" [38] through the production and sale of art works produced by plantation workers. [39] But not unlike Renzo Martens' film *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty*, the IHA project may be in greater parts intervention as performance. The efficacy of the economic intervention may not be measurable for years to come, if ever.

About a scene in *Enjoy Poverty* that depicts an art exhibition where a plantation owner buys black & white documentary photos depicting his workers, T.J. Demos writes:

> More than a matter of local ethical scandal, this scene dramatizes a widespread paradox of contemporary art, particularly that of video and photography. It occurs when 'concerned' documentary images, intended to alleviate poverty or 'work for peace', actually operate as commodity objects and are purchased by those who encourage or benefit from the very

[37] According to the KASK School of Arts Ghent website, there are three researchers named. According to IHA's own site, the project was initiated by Martens, but neither Hesters nor Koster appear in the staff list [both accessed 10.07.2016].

[38] See: http://www.humanactivities.org/circulation/ [accessed 21.05.2016].

[39] For a detailed critical commentary of the project see T.J. Demos, "Gentrification After Institutional Critique: On Renzo Martens' Institute for Human Activities," *Afterall*, 40 (Autumn/Winter 2015): pp. 76-89. And, Vivian Ziherl, "Renzo Martens and the Institute for Human Activities' 'A New Settlement'," *art-agenda* (May 27, 2015), http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/renzo-martens-and-the-institute-for-human-activitiess-a-new-settlement/ [accessed 21.06.2016].

> industries of inequality and exploitation against which concerned documentarians justify their practice. […] This situation expresses a false proximity to the victimized that grants spectators distance from their complicity in the wider situation of generalized economic inequality. The problem is of course not new. (Demos, 2013: 109)

Demos counters Hito Steyerl's advocacy for an examination of localised art-world politics that concern questionable conditions of production and circulation, believing it to be the wrong choice. Instead, Demos advocates for a critical merging of global (art world) politics with the local "as overlapping spheres of complex entanglements" (Demos, 2013: 111) and cites the significance of Martens' work as operating on both fronts: the critique of a global image economy enmeshed with wider systems of inequality, whilst also offering himself up for critical review as the artist/documentarian benefitting from the same system.

So far, we have taken a look at objectification in documentary as a form of disobedient communication, and examined the value of discomfort as ethical labour in order to consider critically forms of objectification, which do not always equate to something negative. A contextual review of the ambiguity which surrounds the term documentary in relation to the historically conflicted ideas of documentary's socio-political role served as the foundation to extrapolate the myriad ways a discussion of ethics, and of objectification in particular, are conflicted. Nonetheless, I have advocated for the continued use of the word documentary to encompass film works that use documentary material in their construction, regardless of the form this takes, and which field works are circulating. I feel it has been productive to do so, because continuing to draw attention to the widening of the parameters of what we understand documentary to be can only be helpful in expanding our approaches to the ethics of documentary in both fields. Running up against the limits of what a documentary can be or can do in either field – I feel, will in the long run further aid the disintegration of divisions between the two fields of practice where ethical consideration are concerned. Issues surrounding the ethics of documentary – which have been articulated from the 70s onwards – can be reframed and can cross-pollinate and extend into the art field. To contribute to this cross-pollination is the particular aim of this research.

I have given an overview of the particular moment in art history, referred to as the documentary turn, in which this study situates itself, and where the two fields come to meet, both in terms of an interest in the form, and in terms of the characteristics of documentary. The documentary turn is also a confluence point of the two fields at the theoretical level, extending critical reflections on the politics and ethics of documentary. Arguments have been presented through the analysis of film works that adopt objectification as a formal strategy to discomforting effect. I have claimed that objectification is purposeful in those cases, and that it functions as a critique of the assumed political agency of the documentary medium.

I have also touched upon how objectification considered as 'monstrous' activism can help reframe idealised discussions of ethics. This has been followed by an example where objectification is not a strategy to produce discomfort, but where the formal appearance of objectification sits comfortably alongside ethical relation-building in the context of consensual collaboration, as well as through economic 'feedback systems'. I have also touched upon the far-reaching impact of the 'social turn' and its relationship to the communitarian objectives with an analysis of Boris Gerrets' film *Shado'man* in addition to touching briefly on the relationship between economics and ethics in art.

Regarding egalitarian production methodologies in documentary (e.g. contributors as crew members), I have elaborated on how this method plays out in *Shado'man* with a specific analysis of film scenes and how this approach impacts aesthetics and authorship. Of particular interest has been questioning how Gerrets' physical encounter – rather than a psychological or biographical one – manifests in the construction of the film. I have clarified what I mean by objectification becoming 'sculptural', and have shown through specific examples from the film how this manifests. I did so in order to help enumerate the notion of non-discomforting objectification, and so as to qualify the idea of "inter-objective" encounters as one that can be both ethical and which can make a positive impact on the aesthetic qualities of a work.

In what follows, I will explore ethics from two positions: one is the responsibility makers have to their documentary material. The other considers the responsibility of viewers. Critical theories on ethics from documentary studies are brought together with Levinas' conception of responsibility as a pre-existent obligation, which for Levinas comes prior to the ontological question of being.

Here, philosopher and physicist Karen Barad may help to extend Levinas' subject-centred humanist framework to consider that which is "other than human" (Barad, 2007: 392). I will conclude the following section by arguing for inter-objectivity, derived from Vivian Sobchack and described by her as the physical engagement with the material world as material (Sobchack, 2004: 286–318). This will lay ground for the way forward in Part IV, where the discussion so far comes together in the expanded ethical proposition of likewise being a thing amongst other things when producing, viewing or critiquing works. [40]

[40] On being a thing amongst other things, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind", *The Primacy of Perception and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology*, *the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, ed. James M. Edie, (Evanton: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 163.

PART III

DEXTERITY AS OMNIDIRECTIONAL RESPONSIBILITY: We See Ourselves, We See Each Other (2015)

Since documentary deals with the social world and encompasses social relations and the voluntary contributions of others, the duty of care has historically required an ethical stance with regards to the relationships formed between those involved with the documentary. This has to do with the relationship of filmmakers to their material, and to the disciplines not only of production, but of distribution and exhibition as well. When considering the attitudes and motivations of artists working with documentary material, how does their relationship to the material emerge in the construction of the work? How does the relationship become visible? And what if the other is a non-human entity, like elements of nature, a tree for instance, or historical elements such as found objects or archival photographs? In addition to responding to Walid Beshty's question posed earlier of how "ethical relations create form", I will further consider Beshty's query by asking what we might mean when we speak of an "aesthetics of ethics"? (Beshty, 2015: 19).

These questions are not new to the theoretical study and practice of documentary. Given that documentary has its foundation in assumptions of objectivity, ethical concerns have circled around the balancing of collective, social gains (general good) versus individual losses (the right to privacy) (Pryluck, 1976). In the art context however, for instance in experimental practices, documentary, if thought of as figurative art, never needed to be subjected to the burden of objectivity. We assume such works, whether referred to as documentary or art, to be the individual expression of an artistic activity, as we do with painting, or sculpture, and so forth. Such works may be considered 'personal', or 'subjective'. But tensions between (artistic) freedom and (moral) obligation remain at the core of ethical inquiries. The question remains whether these inquiries acquire a different status in art as they do in documentary?

Theorist Bill Nichols observed long ago that the discourse of documentary ethics often falls on either side of the dividing line, between denouncing as unethical or supporting as ethical particular works in accordance with political or ideological belief systems of a given time, geography, or institution. Ethical debate he says can become "an arrested form of logic. It succumbs to a position wholly

within an ideology of binary oppositions justified by the moral superiority of one term over another (good over evil, truth over falsehood, men over women, property rights over civil rights)" (Nichols, 1991: 102). Developments in critical thinking on documentary since Nichols' critique have offered a way out of these moral binaries by, for example, thinking through philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' ethics of responsibility towards the other, in particular through the face-to-face encounter (Aaron, 2007, 2014; Bergen-Aurand, 2014; Butler, 2004; Cooper, 2006; 2007; Downing & Saxton, 2010; Renov, 2004; Saxton, 2007).

For Levinas, ethics precedes ontology. Levinas' "responsibility" is defined by both the recognition of separateness from the other, and of the radical alterity of the other. According to Levinas, this responsibility is not a conscious choice but an inherent obligation that comes before questions of self and being. Issues discussed amongst documentary theorists have concerned the ways in which cinema might expose us to an other without the other being reduced to an object of perception (Saxton, 2007). But is an object of perception inherently at risk of subjugation? What about filmic expressions that are a register of reciprocal relations *between* objects? To site an example, for his short video work *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other* (Martin, 2015), Sheffield-based artist Peter Martin chooses to pair very enigmatic, appropriated, vintage photographic images depicting disparate people in their daily lives with audio taken from a *Learn A Language In Your Car* tape. He compiles phrases from that tape into an "authoritative, abstract prose" (Martin, n.d.). Both the sound objects and photographic artefacts are assembled much like I imagine a sculptor might work with wood, metal, or concrete. In the prose Martin constructs, he suggests a narrative of individual private lives, which nevertheless extends out to universal concerns, about war, commodities, memory, social customs. *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other* begins as if preparing the viewer for a lesson. Amongst more mundane sound bites like, "Sit down, please", are more loaded questions like, "What are you looking for?", followed by statements like "Listen well" and "Don't deceive yourselves." From the outset there is a felt proximity by way of this address, the inclusion of a 'we' is implied. At the same time 'we' are presented with otherwise unrelated photographs of strangers, the distant unrelated 'other'.

Fig. 14: *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other*, 2015, film still.

In *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, cultural theorist Joanna Zylinska reminds us of the relationship between ethics and politics as being one in which we are already "involved, obligated, entangled" (Zylinska, 2014: 95). Why not then as objects amongst other objects? The proposal to shift from the subject position into that of the object could indeed be a fantasy that somehow imagines a more egalitarian, or more equitable, alignment of things amongst other things as a paradigm of a 'better world', or of better, more ethical or communitarian relations. But it could also simply be a thought experiment concerning dexterity. I propose the practice of this dexterity to involve an engagement with omnidirectional responsibility.

I must here clarify that I am appropriating the term omnidirectional from its use in sound technology. An omnidirectional microphone differs from a unidirectional one in that it picks up sound equally from all directions, as opposed to a directional microphone that mostly picks up sound from the specific direction it is pointed at. The use of this particular term here is significant for my purposes as it puts at the centre the object that it is vital to get a recording of. Likewise, if

translated into a situation of being a filmmaker, a viewer or a critic, each likewise takes a central position. Each is an object amongst another, and in ethical terms, each set of eyes and ears would do well to operate like an omnidirectional microphone does. What I am suggesting is that regardless of being a filmmaker, viewer or critic one's primary obligation is to be mindful to the circular motion of responsibility that emanates outwards. This requires the dexterous corporal as well as conceptual engagement I have been calling ethical labour. And to be sure, when it comes to my terminological use of the word object versus subject, I am not saying we would be better off as equal objects as opposed to equal subjects. I merely propose that a change of terminology brings out the flaws of the subject position. Who then is a subject? Where is she/he/it? And where or how do we locate the other? The aim here is to tease out and crystallise this conceptual flip between subject/object/other and the slippery ground each occupy. Contrary to maintaining the centrality of the subject position I propose the dispersal of this centrality by inaugurating a habit of thinking not about, or *for* the other, but by beginning to think *as* the other.

But what does it mean to "think as the other"? The question arises how thinking as the other differs from thinking 'in place of', for or about the other. To think as the other would seem at first glance to be infused with an identification-impulse. But here it is not intended to signal identification with the other as an act of surrogacy, or worse, an act of sovereignty over the other. The difference between the two modes – identifying with the other and thinking "as the other" – can perhaps be extrapolated through Levinas' idea of separation: I am obligated, and responsible in spite of, or precisely because of our separateness. Philosopher Philippe Nemo explains: "The responsibility to respond to the other is, for Levinas, precisely the inordinate responsibility, the Infinite responsibility of being-for-the-other before oneself – the ethical relation" (Lévinas & Nemo, 1985: 12).

There is also shared ground between Levinas' commitment to the recognition of alterity and separation with philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's thinking on "being with" as a kind of 'being alone together', a singularity manifest alongside other singularities (Nancy, 2000). "Com-passion" he says "is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the disturbance of violent relatedness" (Nancy, 2000: XIII). "Being is singularly plural and plurally singular", and this speaks of a relatedness

that designates "an originary unity *and* its division" (Nancy, 2000: 29–41; emphasis added). Likewise, the expression "as the other" is intended to designate an ontological unity that acknowledges a plurality of simultaneous and separate agencies. Thinking as the other, then, intentionally omits some syntax and means thinking as well as the other. In its condensed form the expression brings into relief the problems inherent in thinking "for" or "about" the other. Both of which, in my estimation, privilege the subject who speaks. So thinking as the other expresses a coalition of singularities denoting both proximity and distance: an expression of ontological closeness that "emphasizes the distancing it opens up" (Nancy, 2000: 5).

One of the most striking moments in Peter Martin's *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other is* a faded picture of a couple standing in front of their home, adorned with British flags. The woman is holding an infant, and this is paired with: "She did not fall in love with him" (Martin, 2015). The projections we are invited to make through the organisation of the material may to some extent be discomforting. The distance of the abstract prose combined with the proximity of a familiar cultural scene, or a shared sense of familial relations that we might recognise from our own lives, can produce a response that moves in several directions at once. One might feel confused by the distant associations or uncomfortable about the objectification. How would the unknown woman, or the unknown man in the picture, feel about such a supposition? The material presence of the piece comes to the fore as a counter point to their actual lives. The compromised ontological dignity of the people inhabiting the images is brought into question as a matter of reflex – an ethical demand. How do we reconcile the discomfort we may feel in knowing that the material has been organised by the artist as an assembly of objects (without permission, and without considering the originating context), alongside our interest in the wider commentary emanating from the film about the world we recognise as one that we are a part of? What is the artists' obligation towards the image? Is the woman 'real'?

Fig. 15 & 16: *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other*, 2015, film stills.

But another direction one's response may move in is one that I mentioned earlier: that of com-passion as a counterpoint to violent relatedness (Nancy, 2000). This other-wise direction, from the one of discomfort, I would argue, arises from the repetitions that Martin sets up in the film's structure. These repetitions form segments including questions, statements, and instructions that repeat a word, and from the repetition of naming actions like "to walk", "to sense", "to touch". For instance, an image of a man pointing towards something undetermined sets off a sequence structured around questions including the word "where", like "Where are you going?". Another sequence circles around statements, or instructions featuring the word "one". "One cannot change that" or "One gets used to everything" – referring to an undetermined self – become expressions of evasion, "an emptying out of what is closest" (Nancy, 2000: 8). The thing that is 'closest' is the speaker, in this case Martin himself. The form his expressions take eventuate an object-on-object relation, that is, Martin becoming an undetermined object alongside other objects. This is how: the address of the prose that sequences advance through never settles. The address moves with a flow of images between "I", "we", "you", "they". Other word repetitions include "rest and resting", "I", "she", "remember" for example. Like a metronome setting a beat, these are matched with corresponding everyday representations. The sequence on "we" that ends with the statement "We are against the war" followed by "We are interested in her" leads into the "she" sequence, bringing together a disparate collection of mundane vintage photographs of women in their daily lives punctuated by loaded statements like the one mentioned earlier: "She did not fall in love with him". An everyday picture, Nancy writes,

> simultaneously reveals singularity, banality, and our curiosity about one another. The principle of indiscernibility here becomes decisive. Not only are all people different but they are also all different from one another. They do not differ from an archetype or a generality. The typical traits (ethnic, cultural, social, generational, and so forth), whose particular patterns constitute another level of singularity, do not abolish singular differences; instead, they bring them into relief. (Nancy, 2000: 8)

These singular differences that do not stem from a generality are brought into relief in *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other* through the shifts of address from you, we, I, them. The subject position is completely dispersed in a manner that may be reminiscent of Sergei Tret'iakov's decentred hero in "The Biography of

the Object". Whilst there is a singular player at work, Martin, the film does include a plurality of singularities that may make up the 'originary unity' Nancy speaks of. For the attentive viewer, this produces a proximity that is present in separateness as well as in a kind of shared historical strangeness. On this very feeling of strangeness Nancy writes:

> [The] very humble layer of our everyday experience contains another rudimentary ontological attestation: what we receive (rather than what we perceive) with singularities is the discreet passage of other origins of the world. What occurs there, what bends, leans, twists, addresses, denies – from the newborn to the corpse – is neither primarily "someone close," nor an "other," nor a "stranger," nor "someone similar." It is an origin; it is an affirmation of the world, and we know that the world has no other origin than this singular multiplicity of origins. (Nancy, 2000: 8–9)

My question has been, in art, what role can objectification as a methodology play in making visible, in affirming, this "singular multiplicity of origins"? Can objectification as a method serve to bring into relief the condition of life described by Nancy as "being singular plural"? For me this expression speaks to the dispersal of centrality just as much as it speaks of unity. And so, in its most basic function, can objectification in art for instance serve as a strategy for decentring the assumed political agency of documentary practice, rooted in the hegemonic control Steyler calls, "documentality"?

It is necessary to now clarify that my contestation with the assumed political agency of documentary is that it puts the filmmaker at the centre as subject; he/she who acts politically. Additionally, it is necessary to evoke anew Steyerl's notion of documentality. It names a condition or stance that can be both complicit with, as well as critical of, "dominant forms of a politics of truth" (Steyerl, 2003a; 2003b; 2006). The question remains whether objectification can – as rudimentary countenance or as a complex one – be considered an aesthetics of ethics. Or would this claim run risk of manifesting itself as another "politics of truth"? Worse, is any one formulation of documentary in relation to an aesthetics of ethics, irrespective of the field in which it is practiced, forever stuck in a relativist loop of "truth" assertions for individual ends – be that of the artist, filmmaker, curator, institution, or critic?

Nancy's singular plural idea of being incorporates a flow of "all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods – and 'humans,'" in an inter-related circulation that moves in all directions at once (Nancy, 2000: 3). We might call this ethical stance an omnidirectional responsibility. In ways similar to Nancy, Karen Barad extends Levinas' human-centred thoughts on our responsibility to non-human entities:

> if responsibility is not a commitment that a subject chooses but rather an incarnate relation that precedes the intentionality of consciousness, "an obligation which is anachronistically prior to every engagement," then it seems we cannot ignore the full set of possibilities of alterity – that "having-the-other-in-one's-skin" includes a spectrum of possibilities, including the "other than human" as well as the "human". (Barad, 2007: 392)

Barad asserts further that "humanist ethics won't suffice when the 'face' of the other that is 'looking' back at me is all eyes, or has no eyes, or is otherwise unrecognizable in human terms. What is needed is a posthumanist ethics, an ethics of worlding" (Barad, 2007: 392). But before exploring, in Part IV, approaches that future ethical thinking may incorporate, I will next outline questions initially raised about the ethics of documentary in the documentary field in order to critically reflect on historical debates. For, I believe these questions are relevant and transferable to the art field. This is because the basic and central question about the outcome of our artistic activity remains the same in either field: to what end? To whose end?

ETHICS AND AESTHETICS ENACTED IN DOCUMENTARY: Grey Gardens (1975)

What I hope to have shown so far is how formal innovation in both documentary and in art can bring into relief and motivate the rethinking of ethics and responsibility. The impact of aesthetic developments on ethical relations, and vice versa, continues to be of particular interest here. What I hope to attest is that the cross-pollination of practitioners between the documentary and the art fields, and discussions raised in an interdisciplinary context, can help invigorate ethical debates.[41] In addition, by reframing the meeting point between films, practitioners,

[41] The move from the broadcast sector towards the art field may be due to, amongst other things, discontent, formal restrictions, regulatory stipulations, and inhospitable working conditions in

and viewers in ethical terms, I hope to open up the possibility for an expanded sense of ethical practice. All the while, acknowledging that this expressive freedom may also push the boat further out to sea in regards to ethical challenges. Before enumerating on this further I will now provide a contextual overview of historical debates on ethics in the documentary field.

In his 1976 essay "Ultimately We Are All Outsiders", one of the first critical reflections on the ethics of documentary practice, Calvin Pryluck provides a useful clue in regards to the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Considering the aesthetic (formal, perceptible) developments of the time, and relating to the Direct Cinema movement, he asks: "If the aesthetic assumptions of documentary have changed, can it be merely stipulated that the ethical relationships remain unchanged?" (Pryluck, 1976: 24–25). His answer to this question is negative. Ethical assumptions, he says, "have aesthetic consequences, and aesthetic assumptions have ethical consequences" (Pryluck, 1976: 22).

Documentary filmmaker Alan Rosenthal presents specific case studies in his essay collection *The Documentary Conscience* (1980). As eloquently suggested by the title, amongst other documentary related topics, interviews with fellow filmmakers circle around ethical consciousness. The topics discussed are: exploitation for the purpose of the 'general good'; the public's right to know versus an individual's right to privacy; implications and long-term consequences for participants; informed consent (Rosenthal, 1980).

Of continuing resonance to this study here is a conversation with Ellen Hovde, one of the editors of *Grey Gardens* (Maysles & Maysles, 1975). At the time, the filmmakers stood accused of what some critics felt was a humiliating portrayal of the film's two main characters, Little Edie (Edith Beale) and Big Edie (Edith Bouvier Beale), formerly of considerable social standing as the relations of Jacqueline Onassis (prev. Jacqueline Bouvier, later Jackie Kennedy). The mother and daughter pair we encounter in the film are but a shadow of their upper class status and appear in flamboyant squalor, living a secluded life in their dilapidated mansion in the Hamptons, New York. Everyday challenges like poverty, social isolation, and mother-daughter co-dependence often come to performative expression in the film. Stripped from the privilege of privacy and social status, the

broadcast TV. For a discussion on the balancing of free expression and content regulation in the context of factual television programming, see Brian Winston, *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries* (London: BFI, 2000).

women's vulnerability, some critics claimed, was exploited by the filmmakers. [42] Calvin Pryluck for instance focused his critique on the ethical complexities of *Grey Gardens*. On the one hand the film gives access to audiences seeing places, people, and conditions otherwise obscured from view. On the other hand he points out the indignities of *being seen* (Pryluck, 1976). Another critic, Renee Epstein, writing for the *Soho Weekly* in 1976, also seems troubled by the indignity of being seen. She quotes feminist critic Molly Haskell, who called the film an "ethical and aesthetic abomination" and the women "travesties" (McElhaney, 2010: 94–95). [43]

But it can also be argued, as Ellen Hovde does in *The Documentary Conscience*, that the critiques are rooted in the viewer's discomfort with facing themselves (Rosenthal, 1980). Meaning, as viewers, we impose our own sense of dignity about how we want to be seen, what is private and what is public, on the film's participants. But would it not be more significant to interrogate instead our own identification-impulse as an act of misplaced 'surrogacy' over the documentary image and the object of study itself? The Beales consented to be filmed, and their consent has bearing on how questions of ethical behaviour on the part of the filmmakers are evaluated. Besides questioning the filmmakers on the existence of signed consent forms that have legal standing, such an evaluation, I contend, also needs to arise out of a given consent that is visible in the film.

From this point of view, it becomes necessary to direct the question of ethics or responsibility away from the filmmaker and towards the viewer. As a viewer, it becomes decisive, then, to ask: from what constitutive position am I doing the looking? This may lead to re-evaluating my feelings for, and attitude towards, alterity. Before elaborating on the ways the Beales' consent is inherent, making itself visible in the film, a closer look is needed to explain what I mean by an act of misplaced 'surrogacy'. Thinking through Levinas will be helpful to argue that the problem with 'stomaching' one's confrontation with *Grey Gardens* lies not only in our inability to face ourselves, as Hovde and Rosenthal suggested, but more significantly in our inability to openly face and truly privilege the "radical alterity" of the other, their separateness and their agency.

---

[42] Meanwhile, the film has acquired due respect as an exemplary work in documentary history.

[43] For key texts chronicling, in part, the film's negative critical reception at the time of its release, see Jonathan Vogels, *The Direct Cinema of David and Albert Maysles* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005), p. 146–147, and Joe McElhaney, *Albert Maysles* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), p. 94–95.

There is a famous scene in the pink room, a pivotal moment in the film, when Little Edie recalls her hopes of another life being severed by her mothers' rejection of a suitor. When she first tells the story, she does so in a light-hearted manner. The second, almost identical recollection of this life event, told later on in the film, is evoked with performative sorrow. It can be argued, Edith is not just aware of what she is 'revealing', she is also in touch with her emotional range in relation to the recollection. But perhaps more significantly, through her performativity as a 'character' in the film, one also gets a sense that Edith has an awareness of what might be needed for the film in terms of dramaturgy. With this in mind, one could argue, she is collaborating, or at least willingly cooperating with being an object of study.

A number of scenes suggest that Little Edie enjoys the company of the filmmakers and being part of the filming process. One of these scenes, which occurs towards the end of the film, has Edith perform a dance for the camera, flamboyantly dressed as she is throughout the film, and waving a small American flag. The scene culminates in her joyous pronouncement, with reference to the filmmakers and the camera: "David, where have you been all my life!". But the relationship between her and the filmmakers, the co-creating Edith so evidently felt a party to, and so wholeheartedly enjoys, is established for viewers within the first five minutes of the film. Appearing in a jungle of green space outside the house, Edith presents her "costume for the day". As she explains the intricacies of her DIY outfit, consisting of garments creatively draped around her body, we can hear one of the Maysles brothers say "mhm" and "ok" in a manner reminiscent of "don't really mind what you wear". A bemused frown escapes from Edith's face at the complacency of the Maysles' minimal expressions, and she says in response, "I have to think these things up!". The scene also establishes her mother's collusion in the co-creating process. Whispering, she says, "Mother wanted me to come out in a kimono. So we had quite a fight". This conversational interaction is briskly followed with inquiries on what has been filmed so far (Brooks, the gardener, cutting grass) and instructive questions like, "What do you want to do now? […] You want to go up and photograph from the top porch?". She then shouts out to the gardener, "I got to photograph from the top now Brooks". The "I" clearly indicates her feelings of agency over the filming process.

Fig. 17: Albert and David Maysles with Edith Beale & Edith Bouvier Beale, *Grey Gardens*, 1975.

There are other scenes too that establish Edith's active collaboration, and her awareness of documentary representation. A scene filmed on the upper deck circling around Brooks' payment for his gardening service is entangled with a discussion between mother and daughter about Edith's personal freedom, her wanting to "get away", and the financial constraints of "being supported". During a small dispute over the spelling of Brooks' surname and the date of the cheque just issued, Edie Sr. threatens to get up to complete the task in the house. Her daughter reminds her that she is barely dressed. "I'm going to get naked in just a minute. You better watch out." to which the daughter replies, "That's what I'm afraid of." Why, the mother asks. "The movie mother, the movie", Edie Jr. emphatically exclaims.

It appears Edith Jr. does not need viewers or critics to put her competence in question – as some did at the time of the film's release – in deciding to appear in the film. Nor does she require us to question her competence in deciding *how* she wants to appear. Ethics, I believe, reconsidered from the position of the viewer or critic, requires resistance to the identification-impulse and keeping at bay acts of 'surrogacy' over the documentary image and over the object of study itself. Differentiating between the relation to the other as a reflection of self, and the

confrontation with the difference of the other as radically separate from 'I', Levinas proposes:

> the movement from me to the other could not present itself as a theme to an objective gaze freed from this confrontation with the other, to a reflection. Pluralism implies a radical alterity of the other, whom I do not simply *conceive* by relation to, myself, but *confront* out of my egoism. The alterity of the Other is in him and is not relative to me; it *reveals* itself. (Levinas, 1979: 121)

What I would like to put forward is that, the women in *Grey Gardens* are neither a mirror nor a reflection, *if* we are able to resist the process of exercising surrogacy over the image; if we resist conceiving of them in relation to ourselves. Levinas sees the ethical manifest itself in our ability to face the other as a revelatory process in recognition of separateness. This confrontation with separateness is central to Levinas' thought. "Separation is the very constitution of thought and interiority, that is, a relationship within independence" (Levinas, 1979: 104).

There is yet another way we could approach the manifestation of this independence. That is, through the visual schema of *Grey Gardens.* The film is composed of unstable images. Rather than filming from a fixed camera position, the camera work is hand-held, searching throughout. The instability, the searching camera eye, accentuates the presence of the filmmaker(s), the presence of the 'I' that is doing the looking as a separate entity. The filmmakers therefore do not blend easily or indistinguishably into the fabric of the social world they observe.

In addition, the filmmakers work with a zoom lens. This means that they can work from some distance. Given the spatial configuration – bar one scene at the beach, the film is shot almost entirely in the domestic setting of the house, porches, and surrounding garden – a zoom lens would not be a technical necessity. As we see the focal distance shift within images and scenes, bringing the object of study closer, we become aware of the physical distance between the filmmakers and the women in actual space. Like the women, the filmmakers operate from the confines of the specific physical space they occupy at any one time. Though this zooming, in purely technical terms, brings us 'closer' to the object of study, it actually compounds the separation or distance felt between the observer and the observed. To some this may signify an objectification, an undignified intrusion on

private or personal space. But it could also be thought of as a Levinasian separation: a way of demarcating the women's independence from the observer, which includes both the viewer and the filmmaker(s).

It is possible to see then why a number of documentary scholars have found Levinas' ethical thinking echoed in some of the more formally inventive works coming out of the documentary field, as well as in experimental film practices. For the relationship to the revelation of "radical alterity" is perhaps where the greatest advances in ethical thinking on documentary may be located. From this vantage point, we could look at the filmmakers' approach in *Grey Gardens* bringing alterity into relief and affirming separateness; that is, a relationship with independence in thought and in agency. This relationship may not be too dissimilar to the "originary unity" that Nancy speaks of, and its simultaneous division. Because, for Levinas, the ethical precedes the ontological in the form of an obligation to the other.

This obligation may be equivalent to Nancy's notion of originary unity. Levinas' idea of our obligation to the other resides in responsibility and does not emerge from thought, but from a movement towards the other. This movement is opened up in the face-to-face relation that he calls confrontation. It is important to note that, for Levinas, the "face" is not just the face that we see, but that which confronts us: a history, a situation, an impression, or a feeling, an idea. He envisions a radical openness, a transcendent that cuts across sensibility: "the vision of the very openness of being", which has no form and cannot be configured in contemplation or practice (Levinas, 1979: 193). He says that "the comprehension of an existent consists in precisely going beyond the existent, into the open" (Levinas, 1979: 190). This, according to Levinas, leads us to a relation that is "different from experience in the sensible" (Levinas, 1979: 193).

> To manifest oneself as a face is to *impose oneself* above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenal form, to present oneself in a mode irreducible to manifestation, the very straightforwardness of the face to face, without the intermediary of any image, in one's nudity (Levinas, 1979: 200). […] The face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge. (Levinas, 1979: 198)

Levinas' term "responsibility" refers to an *a priori* ability to respond, a response-ability (Sobchack, 2004). But, over and above the ability to respond to the other,

there remains the question of how one responds, in filmic expression or otherwise. This is a question rooted in pragmatism. My concern in this regard has been to relocate, to the centre of discussions on responsibility, the viewer's attitude and response to the viewing experience. The viewer plays a part in the responsibility of ethical thinking through the reception of works. This relocation of the viewer into the centre of ethical debate does not free the filmmaker from responsibility, but shifts the discussion to include an omnidirectional practice of responsibility.

But, likewise, there are limitations to reading the documentary method through Levinas. For Joanna Zylinska, in all that Levinas' thought opens, it situates itself in the transcendental, rather than the "immanent, as differentiation-from-within" (Zylinska, 2014: 95). Levinas writes little on art and refers less even to film. When he does, his thought is occupied with the musical and literary arts, in particular with rhythm. He sees in the musicality of an image (irrespective of the material presence of sound or image) the potential of its detachment from an object. His critique of the basic procedure of art is its habit of substituting the object with its image, and not with its concept. For Levinas, a "concept is the object *grasped*, the intelligible object" (Levinas, 2000: 119). This happens for Levinas in rhythm, where the idea of rhythm is about the way a poetic order affects us. The elements of this poetic order call for one another and impose themselves on us, to participate in them, according to Levinas. "To insist on the musicality of every image is to see in an image its detachment from an object" (Levinas, 2000: 120).

In conclusion, and to very briefly illustrate with another example, Libby Saxton's essay "Fragile Face: Levinas and Lanzmann", does well in articulating this detachment through an analysis of the documentary film, *Shoah* (Lanzmann, 1985). In relation to the contested unrepresentability of the Holocaust and Levinas' wider critique of representation as something reductive, Saxton argues for Lanzmann's ethical treatment of Holocaust history coming through in the filmmaker's omission of images of the victims and in

> the disjunctive relationship between voice and image, between the atrocities described by the witnesses and the empty, derelict and deceptively tranquil murder sites […] the film screen opens onto a face in the Levinasian sense, insofar as it directs attention beyond itself towards an otherness which cannot be recuperated in images. (Saxton, 2007: 10–11)

This 'directing beyond', as in Saxton's example of the *Shoah,* is important in Levinas' thinking and can also be reflected in the practice of many contemporary artists' documentaries today. Indeed, in examining the confrontation of film objects and viewing bodies as a face-to-face encounter, images and our agency as onlookers are most productively entwined in a process of mutual consideration. As such, the encounter between film objects and viewing bodies is a face-to-face relation, too, which has inscribed within it an ethical demand for response-ability.

MUTUAL CONSIDERATIONS: 2843 Colborne St. E (2012)

Hans Belting proposes that "the act of looking is not only attracted by images but is also displayed in them, as if images had a faculty of looking themselves or could reciprocate our looks" (Belting, 2012: 187). In considering the independence or agency of images to reciprocate our looks, we may find an implicit relationship to Levinas. This may be the 'face', or the confrontation, as revelatory process that Levinas speaks of. Levinas points to rhythm, or the musicality of an image, where the movement towards the other can be located and where the potential of its detachment from an object, and its independence from its representation, resides. But what if the image is absent altogether?

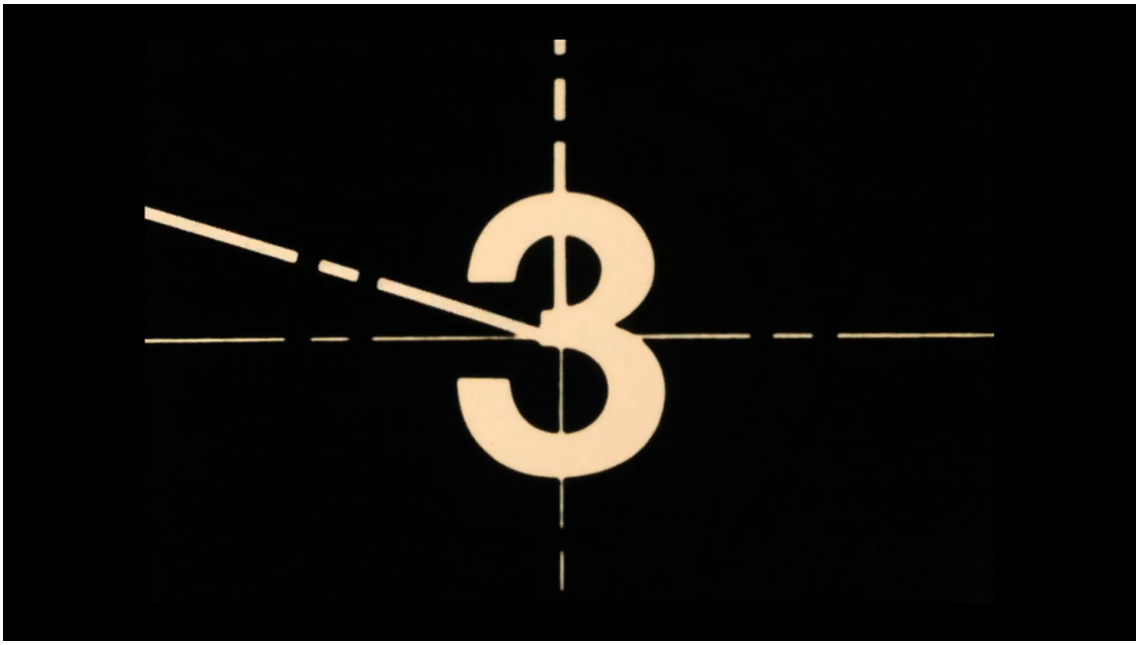


Fig. 18: *2843 Colborne St. E*, 2012, film still.

To site an example, *2843 Colborne St. E* (Weissbach, 2012), one of three films in Josh Weissbach's *The Addresses* series, is made of a transparent piece of leader, which, through a contact film printing process, produces a black screen. In a representational sense, there is no image. Instead, the audio is privileged, featuring two cross-generational conversations, between two pairs of fathers and sons. We hear a man bathing his son, floating between the tenderness of his interactions with the boy, and tense, instructive exchanges with another adult male. This man appears to be experiencing financial difficulties and is anxious about a meeting with social services. The adult son's reassurances are met with verbal abuse. Since there is no image, it is through listening that we begin to participate: I may imagine the bathroom being at the end of a narrow corridor leading to a large living room. The kitchen may be annexed there through a smallish hatch. The house may not have been refurbished since the 1980s. The nexus of Weissbach's audio concept is in the movement between spaces, conversations, and generations; between what viewers may 'fill in' in the absence of a given representation. It may take multiple viewings to note that there are no footsteps. The two conversations are not in fact happening at the same time, or in the same space. The sonic fabric gives way to a dissonance between sound objects presumed to be 'real', and images that are conjured. "The projected blackness that is not darkness," as Weissbach puts it, is partially a manifestation of Weissbach's relationship to the material (Norouzi & Weissbach, 2013). He was not present during either of the recordings. In the absence of image, the meaning of surreptitiously recorded conversations needs to be elucidated. As Weissbach explains:

> Do I close my eyes? Do I think of the space, the people I am sitting with? I am interested in the contract between the viewer and the screen. I want people to be next to each other when they are encountering the nastiness that's going on [in the film]. (Norouzi & Weissbach, 2013)

Weissbach's honouring of his relationship to the material and his insistence on "the contract between the screen and the viewer" as a relationship that directs each towards the other, manifests in his choosing to do away with the image as it would have been imagined by him, the filmmaker. He does away with the symbolic, the interpretive, indeed with representation altogether. Here, a space is opened beyond the representational for viewers to navigate their orientation. As I

navigate, what becomes apparent is the beckoning of the projected blackness itself, its alterity and independence. What is fascinating about *2843 Colborne St. E* is that the film forces the viewer to make a decision about what kind of relationship one is willing to enter into with it. Is it a representational one? Or is it one made of images from memory? Or do I let it stand on its own terms: black, undetermined. Exactly that, and nothing more, is what I face. That may be the face of it.

2843 Colborne St. E belongs to a practice which foregrounds the relationship of the viewer to the film object through its internal schema. The only material content we have to orient ourselves are the voices in the film, and our own viewing bodies. The absence of a visual framework produces a separation, which causes us to question the filmmaker's intention towards us, the viewer. Why expose us to the "nastiness"?

When considering the responsibility of the filmmaker towards viewers we might also ask, as Karen Barad does in reference to Levinas, "[w]hat if we were to recognize that responsibility is 'the essential, primary and fundamental mode' of objectivity as well as subjectivity?" (Barad, 2007: 392). Thinking through Barad's feminist-materialist call for an extension of the humanist conception of responsibility towards other-than-human things delivers me to Vivian Sobchack's term "interobjectivity". For Sobchack, interobjectivity is a physical engagement with the material world *as* material – we are both objective subject and subjective object (Sobchack, 2004: 4). She draws on philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's suggestion that the relationship of existential subjects (body) and existential objects (world) is of a reversible nature, that both are "capable of *acting upon being* and *being acted upon"* (Sobchack, 2004: 294).

Weissbach's projected blackness in *2843 Colborne St. E,* I suggest, is capable of acting as well as being acted upon. It is an existential object in and of itself separate from my own being as subjective object. It is then in the realisation and acknowledgement of one's own materiality, in the "body-subject's flesh", that a "conscious differentiation of ethics (our reflective experience of response-ability) from aesthetics (our reflective experience of sense-ability)" can be drawn (Sobchack, 2004: 295). Because, ethics and aesthetics are "mutually informing and axiological modalities of consciousness and action" (Sobchack, 2004: 294). Furthermore, Sobchack distinguishes between vision as a "perceptual *activity",* and the visible as a "perceptual *product*" (Sobchack, 2004: 179–182). Sobchack too is

interested in what modes of representation in documentary command "an ethical response from the spectator" (Sobchack, 2004: 9). In her essay "Inscribing Ethical Space" she is not interested in a universal ideal of ethical looking or recording, particularly in relation to depictions of death, but in "thickness" (Sobchack, 2004: 227). By this, she means the filmmakers particular way of looking, the "quality of the filmmaker's gaze" (Sobchack, 2004: 243).

Inter-objectivity then as a way of looking and recording is what summarises the conceptual aims of this research project: to think, be, and make as a thing amongst other things. To respond to the material world as material. From this position ethical principles become secondary to demands from the other for response-ability. This response-ability, I have been suggesting, can move in multiple directions and is a process that engages filmmakers, participants, viewers, and images themselves with one another. I have called this process ethical labour that involves acts of shared and omnidirectional responsibility. To this effect, the response-ability in a Levinasian sense of the filmmaker to the material is central, as is the viewer's to the film object equally being an other. In an interview with Levinas, philosopher Philippe Nemo asks whether the other is not also responsible for him? To which Levinas responds: "Perhaps, but that is his affair" (Lévinas & Nemo, 1985: 98).

Inter-objectivity as a way forward

The documentary turn appears to have offered a new dawn in terms of art's relation to social life. Additionally it may have offered expanded possibilities in reading the documentary as a critical method in and of itself. The aim of the discussions presented here has been to argue for an inter-objective modality of practice, which is by no means free of ethical challenges. Whilst contemporary artists have indeed inherited the ethical challenges that have presented themselves to historical documentary practices, viewers, I argue, may be gaining expanded interpretive possibilities through the ethical reframing present in notions of inter-objectivity. Perceiving the world as a thing, and ourselves as things amongst other things, does not preclude a relation between those 'things'. The negative value, instrumentalising things, is a distinction that can only ever be felt through a specific relation: the relationship of the filmmaker to the material. The

trouble is, any value judgment of this relation is interpretative, and interpretations are context dependent.

The concluding part of this research continues to suggest that the task is not to think of, for or about the other (normally understood to be the basic act of responsibility), but to think *as* the other. This does not mean proposing to think *like* the other, but *as well as*, whilst remaining cognisant of the other's alterity, and the distance between each as radically separate agencies. The space between "I" and the "other" then opens up productively. We are forced to ask, what do we do with this space; how do we move within it? This shifting of positions is a process that demands dexterity. And I would argue that the success and the gain of documentary in art is exactly this demand for dexterity in spectatorship as well as in production methodologies.

PART IV

A THING AMONGST OTHER THINGS: Introduction

Central to the proposition of this chapter is the exploration of things amongst other things building on previous considerations for inter-objective relations. In light of the on-going proliferation of documentary material in artistic production – the so-called 'documentary turn' – and the exchange of these works in the marketplace as art objects, what are the ethical and political implications of this 'object turn' in documentary film? [44] Whilst questions regarding the circulation of documentary as an art object and its relationship to the art market are related to this inquiry, the central concern continues to be the objectification of the real as a critical practice. I am interested in the politics of image production, and specifically in the objectification of the real as a process in relation to its aesthetic potential. Additionally, I consider the attendant ethical conflicts that may arise in the aforementioned process. Previously I argued for the productive value of discomfort as a form of ethical labour in its confrontation with objectification. Additionally, I argued for the objectification impulse as a form of resistance to what I believe is too easily assumed about documentary: that documentary films are by default of political use value. The *raison d'être* of the traditional documentary is that it 'acts', is politically enacted, that it has political agency, and that it mobilises. Documentary topics, participants, stories, histories, are traditionally considered and referred to as 'subjects', not 'objects'. Responsibility and the ethics of care towards one's subjects are part and parcel of journalistic code of practice. But the aim of thinking through and referring to documentary objects here is not just to equalize the status quo through language. The aim of Part IV is to reframe the ethics of documentary from a materialist standpoint in order to build on the discourse that concerns the objectification of the real within artistic practice itself. Extending this specific inquiry from a materialist perspective enables me to shift the prevailing debate in documentary studies about the ethics of representation, which began in the 1970s, towards the exploration of the

[44] This question was addressed to participants of the *Object! On The Documentary as Art* symposium at Whitechapel Gallery in London (04 February 2017), as part of the research process. I am grateful to the participants of that day for their contributions, and to my colleagues Nikolaus Perneczky and Mihaela Brebenel for their input. An earlier formulation was made public as part of *Object Documentary* series of events at Bloc Projects (Sheffield, 10-18 June 2016).

aesthetic potential, political stakes, and ethical challenges that arise from regarding documentary film as an art object in a contemporary, interdisciplinary context.

Ethical principles in the documentary field are, I argue, predicated on the assumption that I – the filmmaker (subject/active) – act upon the participant (object/passive). The way the participant acts upon the filmmaker typically receives less attention in ethical debates. As this chapter will show, being acted upon, or responding to the "language of things" as Hito Steyerl puts it, can however form a vital aspect of the filmmaking process for some artists as well as filmmakers working with the documentary. By all accounts, this idea that we may indeed be capable of responding to the language of things can equally succumb to ideological instrumentalisation, or contribute to myth-making (Steyerl, 2008: 121–130). In this chapter, I argue with and for the agency of the other, who also acts upon me, or may be ambivalent to my intentions as a filmmaker. This strategy requires me to likewise conceive of myself as an "agentic" object, or a thing (Bennett, 2010). Whilst an object with agency could be considered a subject, I purposefully avoid terming an agentic object a subject in order to maintain a horizontal configuration of status-relations, as opposed to a hierarchical one. And although there are nuanced differences in object studies between objects and the historical trajectory of the thing, I will use the terms interchangeably when referring to a being, to an entity, and to matter. [45]

This chapter looks at the process of shaping documentary material from the artists' perspective. I will propose documentary material, the individual components that make up the documentary, its constituent material, meaning what we see in the profilmic event as objects. If I am there with a camera, I am also an objective component. Additionally, the encounter between me and a situation is itself also an object. I will refer to the process of shaping or relating to all of these constituent materials as objectification without assigning a negative value judgment. I will bracket off the assumed configuration of subject (filmmaker) as active and object (contributors, things, histories) as passive and think through

[45] Each term has its own history and has been investigated, amongst other disciplines, through the art historical context and through philosophy, as well as sociology, anthropology, and ethnographic studies. See Fiona Candlin and Raiford Guis's *Object Reader* for an overview on the topic of object studies and thing theory.

documentary and its constituents, both human and nonhuman, as a "vital materiality" possessing what political theorist Jane Bennett calls "Thing-Power" (Bennett, 2010). But the purpose of this is not to "place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject" as Theodor Adorno stated long ago. "On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol. The purpose of critical thought is to abolish the hierarchy" (Adorno,1973/2007: 181). [46] Thinking through inter-objectivity, giving conceptual space to the formation of an object-to-object relation can, I contend, make visible the fault lines of hierarchies that exist in our thinking before manifesting in the social and political organisation of life.

But how can objectification as a method, if unable to entirely abolish hierarchies, contribute to contesting such subject/object hierarchies? Objectification as a method in documentary art practices, and when practiced mindfully, functions to make visible the fraught hierarchical organisation between the observer as the subject who studies, and the observed as the object of her study. In doing so, such instances (of objectification) remind us of the violence of the subject position (both that of the maker, as well as that of the viewer/critic) from where we make critical assessments about ethics, or political efficacy. The premise I am proposing here requires me to consider objectification by design as a method which confronts any belief I may have of human exceptionalism, and to consider other social, political, economic, environmental, and material forces that operate outside of the immediate and privileged site of artistic production and artistic consumption. In order to substantiate my arguments, I draw on Rosalind Nashashibi's film *Electrical Gaza* (2015), and *Why Are You Angry?* (2017) by Nashashibi/Skaer. I begin with an analysis of *Electrical Gaza* (Nashashibi, 2015).

[46] It is worth noting that when thinking through the subject as an object, there is a need to preface the proposition by acknowledging that it comes from a position of relative liberty. If viewed from a historical position, considering the slave trade for example, factoring in contemporary labour exploitation or sex trafficking, to name but a few instances where the subject (the human body) is likewise treated as an object, the proposition of considering a human being as a thing amongst other things quickly becomes difficult to support. The luxury of conceptualising the subject as an object, and to further contemplate the agency of inanimate objects, is undoubtedly a contemplation afforded by the luxury of relative privilege. It is, after all, difficult to justify arguing for the rights or agency of objects when those rights remain unfulfilled for so many 'subjects' worldwide.

THE PLEASURE OF THE REAL:
THE INCALCULABLY FAR AND THE VERY NEAR
Electrical Gaza (2015)

In their essay titled "The Documentary Attitude", Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg map the tension present in thinking about documentary across disciplines – the discipline of art and the discipline of documentary. Referencing the work of writer and film critic James Agee in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a book published in collaboration with the photographer and photojournalist Walker Evans in 1941, the essay sets up the frustrated tension between the communicative power of words and images, each an aspirational conduit for accessing and communicating the real. Balsom and Peleg describe Agee's humility in articulating the failure of words to communicate the perceivable, and Agee's privileging of the photographic as his ethical position (Balsom & Peleg, 2016). Photography, they suggest, is positioned closer to the real, to earth, flesh, to the "materiality of the real" than is the discipline of writing (Balsom & Peleg, 2016: 11). While written language may be insufficient, lacking, Balsom and Peleg also point to a similar lack in photography. The productive tension they set up is as follows: because of photography's very close proximity to the real (closer, say, than words could be), the photograph risks capitulating to the muteness of the things it depicts (Balsom & Peleg, 2016: 12). Though I am not certain it is so intended, for a documentary practitioner like myself, the suggestion of proximity to the real and the suggested risk of muteness ring home with regards to the process and practice method of documentary itself. It rings home as the productive risk of contingency and chance, which drive the documentary method.[47] For this risk which Balsom and Peleg speak of is exactly the risk that compels me to make work in the documentary mode. To be in the presence of muteness, which is not silence, and to make this encounter communicable, is indeed the pleasure of the real, and therefore the pleasure of the documentary method.[48] It is precisely because words don't come easily to me that I turn to moving image and its language to communicate both as a

[47] See Janet Harbond's essay "Contingency's Work: Kracauer's Theory Of Film And The Trope Of The Accidental" for a discussion on contingency "as a historical category, and a conceptual term that prises open the bodily encounter with the image" (Harbond, 2007: 91).

[48] In her keynote presentation at the *Object! On the Documentary As Art* symposium at Whitechapel Gallery, Erika Blasom referred to the "frisson of the real". The expression of pleasure was taken up by Rosalind Nashashibi in the presentation that followed Balsom's.

filmmaker and as a film curator. Muteness, I suggest, need not be overcome or resolved, nor need it be given voice. Muteness produces its own language system. But what is this system?

There are two very complex propositions initiated in Balsom and Peleg's "The Documentary Attitude" which I feel are productive to explore further. One proposition regards the idea of photography's proximity to the real. The other speaks of the risk of muteness in relation to photographic depiction. I want to begin with a discussion about the proximity of words to the real versus the proximity of images to the real. Could one mode of communication indeed enjoy a closer relation to the real than the other? I imagine this proposition as a friendly duel between words and images, each negotiating their distance and each, at times, competing for proximity to the real. The desire to measure this distance may be inherent. And, it may also manifest itself in the questioning of truth, which documentary is historically entangled with. "Is it real?" can at times be interchangeable with, "Is it true?" How close are we to knowing this, or that? How close am I to being able to touch something, to know another, to presence and to co-exist with a thing, *any* thing? These questions articulate a desire to measure, to hold to account, to be cognisant of a proximity to something that evades definition. Heidegger already pointed out in 1954 that the abolition of distances in space and in time through the technological advancement in transportation and through the ability to communicate across vast networks and geographies had brought no nearness. Nearness, he says, "does not consist of shortness in distance. What is least remote from us in point of distance, by virtue of its picture on film or its sound on the radio, can remain far from us. What is incalculably far from us in point of distance can be near to us" (Heidegger, 2001: 163). This incalculable distance that can at once be very near sits at the centre of this research into the "products" which emerge from the documentary method. As mentioned earlier, I may call these products (as well as their constituents) objects or things interchangeably.

Philosopher Jean Baudrillard assigns a distinctiveness to what he calls "marginal objects", which are endowed with a double meaning because "[t]hey appear to run counter to the requirements of functional calculation, and answer to other kinds of demands such as witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism." (Baudrillard, 1996: 73). I would suggest the documentary is such a marginal

object, and artist/filmmaker Rosalind Nashashibi frames the incommunicable closeness to this object or thing as the "thrill of the real". [49] One way of approaching Nashashibi's films is through the prism of observational documentary film. And although the act of looking, as a contemplative yet outward-reaching act, is a large part of Nashashibi's method, it is by no means the only way to read her works. Nashashibi shoots on 16mm film to create intimate perspectives and contemplative pacing, often adding an exacting sound design to her works. These sound elements collide with the analogue source material to conjure a visceral, physical viewing experience. In Nashashibi's work, the 'real' world 'out there' comes into sensuous contact with the viewer's equally real internal world. Nashashibi's films are rarely encountered together in a cinema context, as they are more often commissioned by arts institutions and appear as single-channel installations in museums and galleries. In a retrospective I curated for Close-Up Film Centre in London, Nashashibi talked about the burden of the classic documentary mode and it's desire for a "human element". The desire to get to know a community through its story for Nashashibi "got in the way of looking". [50] In the post screening talk with Dan Kidner, Nashashibi said, "Part of bringing an audience with me was to be a bit more self-referential". She wants her films to illustrate a feeling, her feeling of being there, and so looking *with* her is very much privileged over and above forms of expression that might follow a narrative trajectory. To echo Erika Balsom, these kinds for films "seek not to master the world but to remain faithful to it, creating for the viewer a time and space of attunement in which a durational encounter with alterity and contingency can occur, with no secure meaning assured" (Balsom, 2017) .

Though Nashashibi tackles diverse contexts, from a Scottish ballet school to the Gaza Strip, often working in closed communities, be they an extended family living in one house, or a crew of men on a cargo ship, the films share an attentiveness to the pleasure of the real. They tease out, invite, and call one to question the degree of a viewer's attentiveness to and involvement in the construction of the films.

---

[49] Rosalind Nashashibi, *Object! On the Documentary as Art* symposium, Whitechapel Gallery (04 February 2017). Organised for Sheffield Fringe.

[50] Rosalind Nashashibi, FILMN YOUR LIFE WITH FASHION, Close-Up Film Centre (09 February 2017). Organised for Sheffield Fringe.

Nashashibi frames the "pleasure" in the things she films, as their "touchability". [51] On the occasion of her show at Tulips and Roses in Brussels (2010), Jonas Zakaitis wrote:

> Imagine looking at a thing or a gesture, which is not quite recognizable, not having a history one could retrace, but still making some kind of mute sense. A thing as an absolute beginning, already orchestrating a universe around itself before anybody even realizes or speaks about it. [52]

Nashashibi's film *Electrical Gaza* (2015) is such a thing: an absolute beginning that orchestrates a real, all the while omitting the signposts of political articulation with purpose and determination. This documentary thing, *Electrical Gaza*, requires a suspension of the expectant documentary impulse to inform, educate, campaign in order to give space to the pleasure and the thrill of the real as it communicates itself on its own terms: mute, not quite recognisable, looking, presencing. A very well-articulated inaccessibility, the logic of which is complete only through participation by its viewer. Said differently, the film can only be completed with the images I bring to the viewing experience, or as Balsom puts it, with the viewer's "labour of associative thought" (Balsom, 2017). Additionally, *Electrical Gaza* requires the suspension of self-interest as a political advocate (s/he who speaks for the other) on the part of the filmmaker and the viewer.

Commissioned by the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum and shot in Gaza in just one week at the onset of the 2014 conflict – framed by the state of Israel as Operation Protective Edge – the film presents a calm, ambivalent observation of life in Gaza before and in between violent conflicts punctuated by an epic electronic orchestral score. It would be tempting, though I believe rash, to say that the film objectifies reality – that it is without politics. Indeed there are few overt signs of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, which viewers will know has challenged the place and its people since the Six Day War of 1967. Little reminds us of Gaza's occupation until 2005, and Israel's continuing control over Gaza's airspace, waters, borders, or the continuing tensions with Hamas. Given the Imperial War Museum's remit for its collection to "explore the impact of

---

[51] Ibid. In her essay "Contingency's Work: Kracauer's Theory Of Film And The Trope Of The Accidental", Janet Harbond points out the haptic quality of "contingency" by iterating its etymological origin from the Latin word "tangere", which means "to touch" (Harbond, 2007).

[52] Excerpt from the press release written by Jonas Zakaitis for the occasion of Rosalind Nashashibi's exhibition at Tulips and Roses in Brussels (2010). Courtesy of the artist.

contemporary conflict on people's lives", Nashashibi's film would at first glance appear to be a docile depiction of the Israeli-Gaza conflicts ('IWMC Rosalind Nashashibi Press Release FINAL', 2015). Wherein then lies the impact of *Electrical Gaza*? Its power, I argue, resides in the subtle ways with which the image and sound work against expectations. There is no monologue, no dialogue, no protest, no campaigning, no visible resistance. Little of what is seen offers any remembrance of the on-going conflict and intermittent wars. We see men chatting in Arabic (no translation is offered), the preparation of falafel wraps, ordinary life observed from a passing car. Footage of a gated border, busy with people locked in, or expectant of departure, is one of the reoccurring pointers towards the political situation of the region. Nashashibi explains:

> Gaza has been closed from the outside. There is a strong feeling of autonomy and activism and a corresponding fatalism and despair, another contradiction – Gazans are set apart from the rest of the world and yet know that their situation is in some way central to it. Actually I think of the Gaza Strip as having been put under a kind of enchantment by the world powers. I'm using terms from an archaic or childish language to allow the extraordinary conditions to show through with all the attendant excitement, suffering, and boredom of life under enchantment. ('IWMC Rosalind Nashashibi Press Release FINAL', 2015)

In the film, enigmatic images of kids and horses in the sea are made extraordinary by what viewers may bring to it. What I bring to it specifically is subsequent knowledge of an incident that followed and which circulated through the news media some time after Nashashibi had left Gaza. In July 2014, shortly after Nashashibi's recordings of a beachside idyll, four Palestinian boys aged between 9–11 were killed at a beach in a missile attack by the Israeli military. The incident was witnessed by a number of international news organisations stationed at a nearby hotel. Journalists found themselves within 200–300 meters viewing distance from the incident. Images of the beach and the blood drenched survivors including two teenage boys and two adults circulated widely that summer of 2014 as one of a number of major news events. What haunts Nashashibi's gently acquiescent and beautiful images of the coast is contingent on my knowledge of the subsequent missile attack entangled with images of the news event, and any number of other images, some associated, some historical, others personal or imagined, which reside in my thinking and which I bring to the film.

Fig. 19: *Electrical Gaza*, 2015, film still.

German art historian Hans Belting reminds us that images "happen or are negotiated, between bodies and media", thereby merging mental and physical images (Belting, 2005a: 311).[53] The film also speaks to me powerfully on a personal level. As a child migrant from revolutionary Iran in the late 1970s arriving in Europe, I was not able to reconcile the news images I encountered in my new home with the place we had left as a family. Europe it seemed to my childhood eyes was constructing an image of a place entirely partial to its own agenda, whilst floating in my head were the attendant images of ordinary life of a place that was, yes, going through a revolution followed by violent conflict in the Iran-Iraq war between 1980–1988, but where life likewise continued (almost) as 'normal'. Yes, there were days that we could not go to school, there were explosions and gunshots at night, uncertainty, fear, instability, a one-party rule, but images of these conditions sit amongst a greater collection of images of day-to-day social scenes, eating, celebrating, going to school, feeding the 'hobo' cat we had

[53] Belting defines "medium" not in its common sense but as "the agent by which images are transmitted", whilst "body" is the performing or perceiving body on which images depend (Belting, 2005a: 302).

adopted but who, as local custom has it, was not living indoors with us. In short, family life continued. What Nashashibi shows powerfully, and what I argue is the core of her political expression in this film, is her resistance to delivering catastrophe. The politics of the piece is expressed in the palpable dissonance where expectations of catastrophe are not met. Instead, viewers are confronted with a casual, ambivalent depiction of life in the Gaza Strip. Notions of documentary's role, and by extension the documentarian's role as a political advocate, are disrupted. And this provokes questions not just about the filmmaker's intention but more significantly it provokes questions regarding our responsibility as viewers or critics.

In light of this dissonance, classic questions about the responsibility of art, and ethical conduct, evidently surface. Where are the politics in the film? In the already mentioned post-screening discussion with writer and curator Dan Kidner, prefaced with the playful demand, "We must talk about politics, Rosie", Nashashibi quite rightly stands her ground with the defence of the experiential itself already containing politics. [54]

> Experience is the word through which politics is manifested. When you are shooting a film it's very important to transgress some boundaries, whether it be a boundary of understanding, or whether it be a physical boundary or a boundary of fear […]. I had thought about the [Gaza] coast: who is using the coast? Fishing communities, people picnicking on the beach, all the people who use that coast. And as I got more into the problem of getting into Gaza and what that meant, to cross that border, I understood that the only way I could access Gaza would be through being a physical presence there. What do I see through my body, through my eyes, through my ears, my touch? Making it really bodily. Because, I don't feel the urge to, or I don't feel the possibility to tell their stories. Any story I could tell would be a surface version of what's already out there. For me, it was important that I was registering a physical presence there. And I was filming the people who bring about that [the fixer, the driver, the translator]. That fixer is the go-between of the media and the society in Gaza. He is the guy (and his colleagues) who brings people with his connections to Hamas, with his connections to local people into Gaza. And [that is what] allows all these journalists to make all these images. By turning the camera on them, and by acknowledging my own position in the world – and I use various techniques

[54] Ranciére defines aesthetics as "the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of […] spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (Rancière, 2013: 13). There is substantial literature on the idea of the experiential being political. For further film-specific reading, see Azoulay (2012), Köhn (2016), and Sobchack (1992, 2004).

> in the film to show that [it's my position from which we are looking]. That was the way I felt that I could make something in Gaza. [55]

But if we were to employ greater specificity, in order to locate the politics within *Electrical Gaza*, I suggest that we cast our analysis at its form; at the discord between the images and the sound, and crucially at the way the film activates what we bring to the viewing experience, apropos of pre-existing mental and physical images and associations. After all, the film entirely circumvents the routine solicitation of the viewer's empathic identification, and therefore does not meet expectations of the ethical labour one would normally invest in a film that makes visible the social conditions surrounding political conflict. As a viewer I may feel that there is work still to be done, because I bring to the film knowledge of violent conflict that remains unfulfilled.

Hans Belting identifies three constituents that together make up the image: its material self (that which we can touch), what is depicted in it (that which we see), and thirdly, what the viewer brings to it. For Belting, the human body is directly implicated, not just as the bearer of the image, but also as the producer of it (Belting, 2001). The thing that may disturb my comfort levels with the work as a viewer may be exactly the thing that I produce with it, and for that I am responsible. Images, Belting invites us to remember, "are not just there, but arrive with a predetermined mise-en-scène which also includes a predetermined site for their perception which they guide by way of performance" (Belting, 2005: 9).

If we want to study documentary film as an object in the art field, and if we want to seriously consider the performance of objectification as a critical practice method, and consider the productive value of the discomfort that may reside in the lack of fulfilment that Nashashibi for instance presents, this I suggest necessitates the incorporation of wider materialist perspectives. Here is why: documentary practice deals with the social world, live situations, real *things*. Relating to the social world as an object and putting it in the service of artistic activity can create an ethical challenge. The justified fear is that such an approach could undermine the ontological dignity of thinking, knowing subjects, or worse, further compound the instrumentalisation of things, people, and resources contributing to further

[55] "Rosalind Nashashibi: FILMN YOUR LIFE WITH FASHION", transcribed from a post-screening talk with Dan Kidner at Close-Up Cinema, organised by Sheffield Fringe in association with the Whitechapel Gallery symposium "Object! On the Documentary as Art" (09 February 2017).

exploitation and suffering. For example, in an effort to designate value through language, we commonly speak of documentary subjects, not documentary objects.

But can, and should, documentary be thought of as an object? I am interested in the mental shift from the conception of a use-oriented documentary product to a more holistic conception of documentary as thing. I would argue that this marginal object I like to call a documentary thing, and as mentioned earlier, one that likewise answers to demands such as "witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism" (Baudrillard, 1996: 73), could have a relation to what Joanna Drucker calls "image events". In her critical discussion of aesthetic works (not image culture as a whole), Drucker differentiates between images and image events:

> When conceived of as "things," images lend themselves to management within mechanistically imagined frames. But when understood within contingent relations that are always constitutive, image events emerge from systems of codependency. As events, images introduce play, a differentiating spatial perspective that offers conceptual space. […] [T]he act of making experience *un*-strange returns us to a place within the ideological system, rather than sustaining an illusion of separateness from it. (Drucker, 2008 : 30)

Drucker proposes refamiliarisation as a critical approach. She argues that making-strange, de-familiarising, shocking-us-into-awareness as adopted by the avant-garde may be obsolete. Instead, she proposes that refamiliarisation "returns images and symbolic expressions to a system of cultural and symbolic production with which they are codependent" (Drucker, 2008: 30). It is an "act of recovery, and connection, not innovation, novelty or shock exposure" (Drucker, 2008: 27). *Electrical Gaza* offers such a conceptual space through a series of image events as Drucker would call them. By making un-strange, Nashashibi re-familiarises the viewer with ordinary day-to-day being, the experiential, as a locus of political expression. Simultaneously, the film rips from the viewer the redemptive potential inherent in the assumption of the political agency of documentary that otherwise might have been experienced as existing separately from the viewer. In other words, the film offers the objectified other the dignity of a wider perspective whilst it robs the viewer of his/her belief in an exceptional status as the arbiters of 'how politics is done'.

Fig. 20: *Electrical Gaza*, 2015, film still.

But I propose that there are yet other subtle ways to conceive of "things" and their attendant nearness, or their communicative closeness to the real – whether we call them images, or image events.

A thing could be thought of as the enabled other to the reified or alienated object. According to American scholar Bill Brown, "[t]he story of objects asserting themselves as things […] is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (Brown, 2004: 4). Whether thought of as a particular relation, or a self-supporting entity, Hito Steyerl astutely cautions that to think of the image (or for our purposes of documentary) as "a thing like you and me", has consequences like having to acknowledge that subjectivity may no longer be a "privileged site for emancipation" (Steyerl, 2010a). As Steyerl points out:

> to engage in the language of things in the realm of the documentary form is not equivalent to using realist forms in representing them. It is not about representation at all, but about *actualising* whatever the things have to say in the *present*. And to do so is not a matter of realism, but rather of relationalism – it is a matter of presencing and thus transforming the social,

> historical and also material relations, which determine things. (Steyerl, 2006; emphasis added) [56]

One of the very powerful ways with which Rosalind Nashashibi actualises the material relations between herself, the conditions of (film) production, and the people and the situations she films, is the sound of her own breath in *Electrical Gaza.* Suspended in the film, hovering above it like a pregnant cloud formation, the inclusion of breath hints awkwardly at Nashashibi's presence, or *a* presence. It is not important to know it is the filmmaker's own breath, as it functions to point intimately towards a proximity of things amongst other things in what would otherwise be a purely visual study in the tradition of observational documentary. Whilst the images operate at some remove, the peculiar thingness of breath returns us to the kind of presencing suggested by Steyerl. It draws attention to a suggested relation through a sonic discord. On the one hand, the breath, placed here as it is in *Electrical Gaza,* as a disembodied sound-object, would seem incalculably far from the images we see. It is not a field recording. In other ways the breath we hear is audibly close in its sonic quality, hinting at a nearby presence that could be read as an involved or an involving relation between the observer and the observed. The use of breath here feels assured in its position as subject, yet it may be discomfortingly perceived as a dislocated object, because the sound we hear is audibly dislocated from the scene where the actual breathing took place.

The inclusion of the breath appearing in the film as a disembodied sound-object may be unusual for a documentary work, because it is audibly dubbed rather than being diegetic. Nashashibi tells me its inclusion caused some resistance, both from her collaborating sound artist, as well as from the film's initial test viewers. "Can you do that?" some asked. Others emphatically adding, "You can't do that." [57]

But a case could be made for it in terms of the aforementioned Heideggarian expression of the incalculably far that is at once very near. It may be read as an embodied reminder of presence *and* proximity. So actualised through this occasional pulse-like sound, I argue that the film reaches out to involve the viewer, implicitly drawing us close to the historical relation to Gaza. And perhaps more

---

[56] Steyerl draws on Walter Benjamin's concept of a language of things, which he developed in a text titled "On Language as Such and on the Language of Man" written in 1916, but which remained unpublished during his lifetime (Benjamin, 1996 : 62–74).

[57] Conversation with the artist in her London studio (25 November 2016).

concretely expressed, for me, the breath acts as a potent visceral marker of aliveness. As Belting reminds us, just as the body is responsible for creating the image between the here (filmmaker, viewer) and the there (photograph, screen), and not just with the eye but with the look, hearing likewise is embodied, involving not just our ears, but "the entire anatomy of the body with its zones of resonance and conduits of bones and skin" (Belting, 2012: 190). In her intention as a filmmaker to communicate the vital materiality of her own body as it lives, and quite literally breathes in relation to those she films, Nashashibi's proximity and physical presence to Gaza as a contested site with all its attendant mental and physical images of suffering that viewers may hold and that are already in circulation, Nashashibi remained firm about the inclusion of her breath. In effect, making herself a thing amongst other things: breathing, co-dependent, relating. In another register, a complexity emerges from Nashashibi's particular use of breath that may suggest aliveness. The use of breath here offers perhaps the most affirmative political statement not often made about Gaza and Gazans: Alive, still alive. [58]

Black Study scholar Ashton T. Crawley's inspired text titled *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*, talks of breath, and of breathing as an utterance of what he calls "otherwise possibilities". An on-going movement that announces "infinite possibilities to what there *is"* existing amongst all else that we can detect with our sensuous capacity (Crawley, 2017: 2). Crawley theorises the process of breathing as an aesthetic production that disrupts normative, white, totalising accounts of history and knowledge production (Crawley, 2017: 43).

> […] breath as the intentioned performance of breathing […] produces an otherwise-than-history, one not dependent upon Newtonian physics of smooth, linear, contained time and space, but a performance of breathing and its eclipse as the hallucination of life and love in the face of the project of the plentitude of gratuitous violence and violation. But the breath, every breath, even stolen, breaks down the project through rememory. Remembered is the balance between the individual and the social. Generated are variations around the theme of discontinuity and openness as a way, as a form, as a politics against violent silences and enclosures, mutilations and deaths. (Crawley, 2017:75)

[58] In Filipino people often greet each other by saying "buhay na buhay" (breathing, still breathing), which roughly translates to "Very much alive". I'm grateful to my supervisor, Dr Chris Wright for this example, and our discussions on breathing and aliveness.

Crawley's is an *a*theological and *a*philosophical account of the practice of breathing as resistance to violation and to countenance of epistemic violence. Air and breathing are acts that sustain movement, and it is a shared practice. Epistemic theories of what a documentary is or ought to do, and assessments of ethics in documentary, likewise continue to be rather entangled with the prevailing idea of the medium carrying "information about a group of powerless people to another group addressed as socially powerful" (Rosler, 2004: 179). But Nashashibi's film completely circumvents this hierarchy.

The following scene from *Electrical Gaza* could be read as highlighting an intervention into said hierarchy. In this scene, a group of men are gathered in a lounge conversing in Arabic. As there is no translation offered in the film, I am forced to reflect on both the men's ambivalence toward Nashashibi's presence, as well as the filmmaker's ambivalence towards me, as the viewer (in not offering a translation). This invites another reading; not one of boredom, disinterest or ambivalence. I suggest that the men's indifference to the camera and to Nashashibi's presence can be read as a demonstration of their agency. Here, they are not a group of powerless people seen merely through the lens of Israeli oppression. They appear instead as an egalitarian social group looking inwards, occupied with themselves. But the sporadic inclusion of a sound as intimate as the filmmaker's own breath is not just a simplistic reminder of presence (the artists' or another's). It functions as a powerful, and perhaps for some, a discomforting expression of what resistance to perceived distance may look and feel like in a moving image work. Nashashibi is letting us know that she is present, and that we are present (as viewers) breathing alongside Gazans, always necessarily nearby, regardless of geographical distance, as things amongst other things.

To speak then not about, but to speak or to simply breathe nearby as a thing amongst other things, brings to mind a line from filmmaker and theorist Trinh Minh-ha's film *Reassemblage* (1982). There, Minha-ha expresses the politics of documentary representation wholesomely: "she does not speak about, but she speaks nearby" (quoted in Dienderen, 2010: 92). When weighing this alongside Minh-ha's thoughts on authorship, and her attitude to the production process in relation to the agency of the other, the possibility of being acted upon by the other – be it an event, person, or thing – and the politics present in the expression of the "nearby" becomes clearer. This "nearby" expresses the idea of proximity to the

real suggested earlier, not in terms that would relate to space, but in terms that are political, in as far as pointing towards another mode of knowledge production. Like Crawley, Minha-ha's position is concerned with countering normative, dominant western philosophical knowledge production. For example, Minha-ha speaks of the production process and authorship as an encounter within a field of energy where things are acknowledged as possessing the agency to act upon one another. Accordingly, the desire of a colour for example can have an equal stake to the desire of an artist during the process of artistic production:

> The elements of encounter (culture, personal, object) form the space of subjectivity. If I start working on the colour green, green dictates what comes next to green. Can we then talk about authorship? There is my logic next to the logic of colour, which stands on its own. This is what I mean with structure that stands on its own. They are not serving anything: not a feeling, an emotion. Green is not serving peace. It is there as a colour. Authorship is a field of energy, it's unique because of the combination, but not because it belongs to an individual. (Minh-ha quoted in Dienderen, 2010: 96)

In that sense, the encounter and the field of energy that make up the real are as much a space of objectivity as they are a space of subjectivity. In this field of energy, bodies, things, and images may have an egalitarian relation, if not a reciprocal one, too (Belting, 2012). Minh-ha's characterisation of authorship as a field of energy that does not belong solely to an individual, the filmmaker, or the viewer (as critic), likewise brings about other associations. A number of relational configurations for this field of energy come to mind: with, alongside, the aforementioned nearby. But to be clear, this "nearby", the proximity I have been highlighting, is not what is otherwise referred to simply as 'access' to an event, to persons, a community, an institution or an archive. To those unfamiliar with the documentary commissioning process, the term access literally refers to what and to whom a filmmaker has access. Guaranteed access is what qualifies a documentary project's viability in the development stage, where production funds are agreed upon. And this brings to mind associations with organisation, pragmatism, and market calculation. The proximity I am talking about here, though related to the pragmatic needs of access, has another flavour. This flavour could find expression through another terming that describes a relational configuration.

In the previous chapter, I talked about the idea of an ethics that is lived as omnidirectional responsibility. Supported by Levinas' view of ethics as an obligation that pre-exists ontology or intentionality, I argued for a mode of being I called "as the other". Ethics, responsibility, I hoped to argue, is not about thinking *for* the other or *about* the other. This mode of thinking, it would seem to me, constitutes a kind of self-appointed surrogacy that has us stuck in the performance of ethical principles rather than an ethics that is alive, lived in a space between here and there, me and you, between the filmmaker and the screen space, between the image and the viewer, but all while recognising separateness and the radical alterity that Levinas' thinking proposes. I hoped to demonstrate another mode, one I called *as* the other. This mode could imply a transmission between interrelated things. A transmission we may only be cognisant of when we experience things, entities, matter – the human as well as the non-human – as being close, irrespective of geographical or physical distance in space. When we experience being as the other. For if authorship is indeed configured through an energetic field, this field consists of a multiplicity of energies co-existing alongside, with, and/or nearby one another. We may call it a field of things amongst other things. Where otherwise singular energies or agencies are co-dependent, each impacting on the other, could "as the other" not imply an energetic conduit? Could not this conduit, pinpoint and occupy a space in a similar manner suggested by Bill Brown, whereby a thing occupies a space in language that names a subject-object relation (Brown, 2004: 4)? My "as" here does not mean "like the other", but is intended to mean "likewise", or "as well as", which may suggest proximity, or let's say, a privileging of solidarity in the face of political, social, or racial stratification. Regardless of how we name it, one crucial but perhaps overlooked aspect seems very clear to me: in this space, a relation is always already fully enacted before we may be cognisant of that relation, before we may be able to define it, before we may be able to speak of it. What I have hoped to articulate with the expression "as the other" is an egalitarian configuration in the material composition of, and proximity to, the real. In summary, one of the ways I see "as the other" affirmed is in Rosi Braidotti's expression of an "embodied and connecting containment".

In "Affirmation versus Vulnerability: On Contemporary Ethical Debates", Braidotti lays the ground for her nomadic ethics. "[A]n ethics worthy of the complexities of our times requires a fundamental redefinition of our understanding of the subject

in his/her contemporary location and not a mere return to a more or less invented philosophical tradition" (Braidottti, 2006: 236). Her nomadic ethics is rooted in the pragmatism of accountability and sustainability. She sees it located not "within the confines of a self-regulating subject of moral agency, but rather in a set of interrelations with both human and inhuman forces" (Braidottti, 2006: 237). To echo Braidotti, making oneself available to this set of interrelations in their foundational mode is to risk exposure and vulnerability. Recognising this, as Braidotti puts it,

> entails the necessity of containing the other, the suffering and the enjoyment of others in the expression of the intensity of our affective streams. An embodied and connecting containment as a moral category could emerge from this, over and against the hierarchical forms of containment implied by Kantian forms of universal morality. (Braidottti, 2006: 239)

This embodied, connection-making form of containment, Braidotti writes, entails recognising there is no distinction between self and other (Braidottti, 2006: 239). This erosion in distinction between self and other, I believe, is not intended to erase, let alone deny distinct characteristics of individual entities. It is not disputing alterity. I believe it is instead an erosion of a packing order, of hierarchies. As in Minh-ha's example, the colour green enjoys, if not an equal, at least a joint status in the desiring process. What would be so scary as to surrender to the colour green and its desire towards what sits next to it? To start with one word and surrender to the word that follows.

The purpose of my analysis here of Rosalind Nashashibi's very particular use of breath in *Electrical Gaza* was to establish the ways in which the aliveness of the breath makes apparent an embodied relation that manifests *as* the other. Nashashibi, a subject who makes of herself a disembodied object through the dubbing of the sound of her breath, brings to the fore the imposed division between self and other, between subject and object. The subject is always already the object. And I feel that, contrary to the impression of an unnecessarily abstracted theorising, this may deliver us to Crawley's very pragmatic "otherwise possibility". It may deliver us to understanding ourselves in relation to all entities as a thing amongst other things.

Having made a case for, but by no means exhausted, the expansive possibilities of thinking through the real in relation to proximity, I want to return now to Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg's aforementioned proposition of the photograph running the risk of "succumbing to the muteness" of the objects it depicts (Balsom & Peleg, 2016: 12).

Detectable in some documentary practice methods is what I would interpret as an interest in precisely that risk, and in muteness. But how should we understand the term mute? I'd like to start with suggesting that muteness gets a rough deal, associated as it is with the wordless, the unspoken, the unexpressed, often merged with the assumption of silence, or with being silenced. Beginning simply with quotidian associations, in human development, muteness can refer to the inability to speak. The causes can be physiological, having to do with injury to the brain, the tongue, the vocal cords, mouth, or to hearing loss. In psychiatry, muteness can be associated with an anxiety disorder, referred to as selective mutism, when a person may chose not to speak in specific situations, or to specific people. Selective mutism can be ascribed to social anxieties. Muteness can also occur in a temporary state of shock, or following trauma.

Additionally, risking a breezy movement akin to a passing yet perhaps consequential comment that takes briefly into account otherwise commonplace cultural inscriptions: in biblical terms, we can observe muteness receiving even shorter shrift. There, muteness can find itself being associated with demonic forces: "As they were going out, a mute, demon-possessed man was brought to Him. After the demon was cast out, the mute man spoke; and the crowds were amazed" (New Testament, Gospel According to Matthew, 9:32–33). Elsewhere in the New Testament, silence – earthy, heavenly, or the silence of 'God' – appears to take an even darker turn foreshadowing a great revelation or a future calamity: destruction, annihilation, the judgment of 'God'.

Having begun with a brief summary of 'scientific' inscriptions associated with muteness, and having moved intentionally through the theological – a dramatic cultural inscription we may have no awareness of – I want to cast a slightly wider net now on the rough hand silence has been dealt. One that might be

more immediately recognisable as relevant to this study, and which may turn out to be more damning than my breezy examples so far.

In his 1973 manifesto-like charge against the invocation of the term "masses" in the fields of sociology and politics, titled *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities,* Jean Baudrillard tries to recover the misconception of the existence of the social – evidenced in the absence of a revolution and the problem of widespread non-participation in politics at the time – by reframing the "silence" of the majority as that majorities' wilful resistance to politics, to representation. No longer representable, remaining nameless and unidentifiable, unmanipulatable, the "masses" know they are neither subjects nor objects, and silence is their weapon of active resistance (Baudrillard, 1983). The "revolution by involution" or implosion, Baudrillard warns, is "silent and involutive – exactly the reverse of all speech making and consciousness raising. It has no meaning. *It has nothing to say to us*" (Baudrillard, 1983: 49, emphasis added). But if the social does not exist, as Baudrillard claimed then, and the "masses" have nothing to say to us, then who is meant by "us"? Could it not be the case that silence is overlooked as an act of resistance, as an otherwise expression containing meaning?

My mother tells me that I did not speak until very late. Fearing the worst, concerned relatives urged her to have me seen by a medical professional. I did eventually speak, albeit well past the expected normalcy of a child's speech development. The anecdote, though otherwise unremarkable, helps clarify my approach. In particular where it relates to a preference for non-interventionist filming techniques; to an interest in unrestrained looking and non-verbal modes of being; and to an affection for chance within documentary encounters. [59]

A well-known approach to the gathering of documentary material is to ask questions, to instigate actions, to project oneself or one's agenda. Those can be loosely termed as speech making, or speech educing acts. An alternative approach, favoured by many filmmakers operating in the art context, but also to a varying extent practiced within the distinct historical branches of documentary (Direct Cinema, Cinéma Vérité, in ethnographic film, experimental and avant-garde

[59] Alongside notions of contingency, chance could be refigured here as an active player in "being acted upon" rather than an uninvolved state of passivity. Whilst I am aware of chance in documentary being potentially related to leaving oneself open to being acted upon, my current aim is not to explore that as a theme. I leave this possible expansion to a future exploration. Regarding the general, not the documentary or film specific subject of causality, determinism, chance, accident, and coincidence, see *Aristotle's Concept of Chance* (Dudley, 2012).

cinema), is to say nothing, or very little, to be there, nearby, alongside, waiting. Insights may or may not emerge from the other from questions addressed to themselves, whether communicated verbally or not.

It has long been established in the field of documentary and ethnographic studies that this method can constitute active participation. In "Whose Story Is It?" for example, David MacDougall, ethnographic filmmaker, visual anthropology and documentary scholar, notes "[j]ust as we see that the maker is the locus of a set of cultural and historical forces, so too we must see the film in the same light, and acknowledge the maker as but one aspect of its coming into being" (MacDougall, 1991: 7). In his work as filmmaker and critic, MacDougall is interested in methods of discerning the differences in "the structures we inscribe in films from the structures that are inscribed upon them, often without our [the filmmakers] knowing, by their subjects" (MacDougall, 1991: 4). Filmmaker and feminist film scholar Fatimah Tobing Rony also honours the contributions from the other through the articulation of a third-eye perspective in her analysis of early ethnographic cinema. Writing from the position of a woman of colour raised in the US, Rony says, "[p]erhaps, we the Savages, plunged in darkness, do understand each other. What we share is the ability to see with the 'third eye'" (Rony, 1996: 4).

Rony acknowledges the everyday commonplace experience of third-eye encounters. It is when we feel ourselves 'outside' of ourselves, observing a scene in which we are ourselves embroiled in like a detached scientist. She draws on Frantz Fanon and James Baldwin, amongst others, and writes from the specific experience of a person of colour developing a double consciousness: simultaneously viewing oneself and being viewed as an object. Rony describes this experience as formative, whilst simultaneous acknowledging the struggle for recognition as an egalitarian subject. Focusing her attention on fragments of early ethnographic film, like the peripheral figure of a young West African girl breaking the cinematic code by looking at the camera in Félix-Louis Regnault's 1895 photographic study during the *Exposition Ethnographique de l'Afrique Occidentale* in Paris, Rony writes, "[t]hose made into Ethnographic subjects stare back at the camera, at us, one hundred years later, and the directness of that gaze declares, "I am here, and so are

you" (Tobing Rony, 1996: 217). [60] Rony's analysis in *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*, while intersecting with critiques of representation, ultimately steers away from those critiques by articulating how the experience of the third eye can be realised as an act of resistance.

But what if we were to think of documentary and all its constituents, including the human as well as the non-human, not as "agentic" subjects, but as *things* existing on the same ontological plane? What could emerge from the promise of a distributed agency and a non-subject centred approach to documentary practices? Even if only as a thought experiment, it is worth considering, because, as mentioned earlier, subjectivity may no longer be the sole ground on which to seek emancipation (Steyerl, 2010a).

Jane Bennett's work is helpful in articulating an alternative. Like Rony, Bennett's underlying desire is for a reformulation of how we locate, assume, and assign agency. Bennett describes "Thing-Power" as "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett, 2010: 6). Whilst Bennett concentrates her analysis on the "vital", that is, the lively materialism of matter through examples such as electricity, food, discarded objects, and stem cells, which she posits are all agential, she does not exclude the human body as a site of "vital materiality". Bennett is interested in developing a vocabulary that allows for "better discernment of, the active powers issuing from nonsubjects", because "the image of […] instrumentalized matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption" (Bennett, 2010: ix).

The purpose of foregrounding a hypothetical object-to-object relation as the coexistence of things amongst other things in this thesis is therefore to foreground some of the problems of a solely subject-centred film culture, according to which principle, we, as makers, act, articulate, direct, construct. Viewers and critics too act, or react, and construct. According to this trajectory, we are in an exceptional position, sovereigns of our agency to act/re-act to the object.

But articulations of the ways in which things may also act upon us have taken but a peripheral position in documentary critique.

[60] Some may disagree with Rony's use of the term "Ethnographic subjects", arguing that "ethnographic object" would be more accurate, but we could also read the word "subject" to mean "topic" or "motif".

Whilst it is indeed manageable to conceive the productive impact of the articulation of thingness, and the productive impact of distributed agency, in relation to environmental concerns and eco-politics, as Bennett does in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, applying it to documentary practice is contentious. This is especially true if we factor in the prevailing fear that foregrounding the materiality of all entities including the human body may endorse further instrumentalisation. So, what is to be gained from following Bennett's argument in theorising situations "as encounters between ontologically diverse actants, some human, some not, though all thoroughly material"? [61] Like Bennett, it is my hope that what we gain is a shift from "the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviors" (Bennett, 2010: xi).

I share Bennett's desire for this shift. When it comes to the documentary method, I am motivated by the desire to configure a way for viewers and critics to invest their labour in locating the subtleties of expression and production techniques that may impact their assessment of ethical relations. As in Rony's aforementioned example, if the West African girl can reach past the objectified gaze and silently call upon the viewer one hundred years later, then the power issuing from there, from the girl in the photograph, may have something to do with the communicative power of silence. As a primer to exploring the productive potential of silence, I would like to first declare my fondness for "The Windup Doll", a poem by the late Iranian writer and filmmaker Forugh Farrokhzad.

Farrokhzad opens her poem with these words: "More than this, yes more than this one can stay silent" (Farrokhzad, 2004: 31). With this first line, Farrokhzad sets the scene to an image; many images, to be accurate, follow. One way to think of this piercing opening line is as though it is establishing a scene: the scene of the observer, and the act of looking and of thinking. The opening line is followed by an irreverently polemic and deeply thoughtful, detailed catalogue of all things else one can do in a moment of silence: watch, gaze, stand motionless, find, trade, mould, "be constant, like zero", before crying out aloud "for no reason at all",

[61] Bennett is using Bruno Latour's terminology here, who configured an actant as "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events" (*Vibrant Matter*, p. viii).

and in spite of all that has been seen and thought, "Ah, so happy am I!" (Farrokhzad, 2004: 35).

This is to say, by way of a rather prosaic introduction, that for me, muteness never carried any adverse qualities. Muteness, I argue, could be thought of as the communicative power of silence, which can convey and transmit thought. I argue it contains 'the other' in ways suggested by Rony. The pleasure of watching someone think – be they a child, an animal, or an adult – is not, as could be assumed, a dubious attraction to the mysterious or mythical, but a solid trust in the capacity of unspoken thought to call on other thoughts to produce themselves. The communicative power of silence, muteness as I interpret it then, accommodates an invitation to participate, and is ancillary to engagement and exchanges. The photograph must be silent Roland Barthes declared, to see it well it may be best to shut one's eyes. "The photograph touches me if I withdraw it from its usual blah-blah: "Technique," "Reality," "Reportage," "Art," etc.: to say nothing, to shut my eyes, to allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness" (Barthes, 1981: 53–55). [62]

I realise I have entered into a slippery ideation of silence. In art, concepts of silence can mislead, taking up a heroic status. Susan Sontag's famous essay "The Aesthetics Of Silence", written in 1967, catalogues and offers up for historical review some of the tropes of this heroism accompanying the uses and abuses of silence in modern art. Beginning her critique with the artist's withdrawal from his vocation, and obliquely referencing Duchamp, Rimbaud, and Wittgenstein's respective biographies Sontag notes that "[s]ilence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture; by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, audience, antagonist, arbiter, and distorter of his work" (Sontag, 2013: 13). But the more frequent iteration of silence as a trope for "seriousness" is attributed by Sontag to a kind of contempt or disregard on the side of art for the agency of its audience. The frustration of this audience with what may be experienced as "unintelligibility or invisibility or inaudibility" is attributed by Sontag to the complicity of art with the "ideal of silence" (Sontag, 2013: 14).

[62] I'm aware that this opens another discussion, and that to some extent, my analysis in this research has led its way through technique, art versus documentary, form, etc., but what I am interested in here in Barthes' quote is the expression of withdrawal, the non-verbal affective encounter that comes through in silence or muteness.

> Silence is a metaphor for a cleansed, noninterfering vision, in which one might envisage the making of art-works that are unresponsive before being seen, unviolable in their essential integrity by human scrutiny. The spectator would approach art as he does a landscape. A landscape doesn't demand from the spectator his "understanding". (Sontag, 2013: 30)

The filmic landscape of *Why Are You Angry?* (Nashashibi/Skaer, 2017), the latest collaborative work of Rosalind Nashashibi and Lucy Skaer, which was commissioned for documenta 14, does place a demand on the viewer for understanding. It does so through a complex staging of images, and a very delicate soundscape that, for the most part, avoids the spoken word. The film takes its title from Paul Gauguin's 1896 painting *Why Are You Angry? (No Te Aha Oe Riri*). In the film, Nashashibi/Skaer appropriate images of Tahitian women, restaging three of Gauguin's paintings of women in the South Pacific. Nashashibi explains:

> The idea came about to go to Tahiti to make a film from his prism, from his set of conditions. We wanted to see what we could do with what was already recognisable [from knowing the paintings]. We revisit these conditions or contents [of the paintings] as a pre-existing structure. We were interested in questioning particularly Gauguin's viewpoint, his relationship, and trying out what would result from us doing that. [63]

The first restaging we see is of Gauguin's well-known painting *Spirit of the Dead Watching* (1892). The original image features Gauguin's young Tahitian lover Teha'amana, and is thought to deal with questions of sex and sexuality. [64] Art historical disagreements as to whether Teha'amana's look – described as fearful – was caused by her fear of "tupapaus", the Tahitian mythology of the spirit of the dead as suggested by Gauguin through his own writing in *Noa Noa*, or whether she was looking fearful of Gauguin himself – the much older, colonial, white other – remain the subject of speculation. As the writer, curator, and critic Stephen F. Eisenman points out in *Gauguin's Skirt* however, any examination into, or adequate evaluation of Gauguin's relationship to Teha'amana, are burdened by a lack of

[63] Recorded Skype conversation with Rosalind Nashashibi (20 June 2017). All quotations that follow in this section are taken from a transcript of the recording.

[64] See Stephen F. Eisenman, *Gauguin's Skirt*, Thames & Hudson, 1999; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism" in *Race-ing Art History*, ed. Kymberly N. Pinder, Routledge, 2002; Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888–1893: Gender and the Color of Art History*, Thames & Hudson, 1993.

biographical documentation. In his essay "Sex in Tahiti", Eisenman discusses the liminal sexuality he finds present in both the painting, and in accounts of Gauguin's personal exploration of sexual difference, or queerness, to use a contemporary term (Eisenman, 1999: 91–152). Eisenman finds evidence in the revised version of Gauguin's autobiographical fiction *Noa Noa* of the painter's interest in androgynous bodies through his descriptions of clothing and social egalitarianism, the absence of strictly gendered labour divisions that the artist observed in Tahitian culture. Nashashibi/Skaer were also interested in the ways in which "the representation of women as a specific problem could possibly be handled differently if one managed to dodge some pitfalls, so that the body becomes culturally overwritten". [65]

> We wanted to work with the details of the paintings and the integrity that the women seem to have. He portrays them with a sense of their own autonomy we thought. In a way, what we did was copy in our contemporary moment what Gauguin did. But ours differs because there isn't this assumption of a sexual life, or a sexual story. The question of the women's acquiescence is not completely gone, but the relationship is different, in that we are in a much more globalised period and we weren't there as fantastical figures, as Gauguin would have been. And we were hiring people to do things rather than painting people who we were living amongst. We knew that we weren't going to be representing anything that was unfiltered, that was from a position of familiarity other than through our familiarity with Gauguin's depictions.

In Nashashibi and Skaer's restaging of Gauguin's image, an older woman appears, first lying naked on her stomach on a divan type bed. Later, she is replaced by a younger nude figure assuming the same pose. Neither woman standing in for Teha'amana looks afraid. We see the younger woman's hands and face studied in detail. The figure of death originally seated in the background as depicted by Gauguin is initially absent. Later, both women interchangeably appear as that figure seated in the background. Initially, the changing roles of the older and younger woman may lead to questions of obsolescence, or mortality. But Nashashibi explains:

---

[65] This is in reference to how women's bodies are seen and how we see ourselves divided into parts rather than as whole things.

> We just wanted to see the different intensities of each woman in a different role, and for them to feel those different roles. We didn't feel that there was any authenticity to those roles. We wanted that to be clear. That girl is not really scared, and that woman is not really Death. It was about the pleasure and the experimentation of trying the different roles.

The sound of this initial scene is muted, returning only as we look at a wide shot of the young nude with the older woman seated in the back as the figure of Death. Contrasting becomes inevitable. We become aware of the difference in the women's gazes. They either look straight at the camera, or past the camera with an expression of thoughtfulness, or with apparent ambivalence towards their surroundings. As the older woman gets up during the first part of this muted sequence, we see her smiling. Reading her lips we understand her saying, "Je ne sais pas".

What stands out for me in contrast to this scene is that some of the other muted segments in the film tend to be joyful interactions, either amongst the Taihitian women themselves, or with the filmmakers/camera. In other delicate ways, the soundscape of the film overall is very reflective of what we might hear when we are not entangled in speech acts, when silent: the wind gets to speak; water; waves; roosters crowing; the mechanical sounds of cars; the 16mm film gauge turning; the drone of an airplane cabin; all manner of birds; haunting live music barely audible through a distant PA system. Only once do we hear the women speak with words. They tell each other their names.

The absence of spoken word, and the decision to keep mute some sequences in the film of the women and the filmmaker's own voices, and their interactions with the Tahitian women, produces a curious effect. As a group, neither the subjects nor authors seem to me silent or mute. Doing away with speech acts, and the dropping out of sound, their expressiveness seems to become amplified. As Nashashibi explains:

> We were shooting on a 16mm Bolex film camera, so there is no synch sound that we recorded. Often I find if you put text, as in dialogue, into a film, people locate the meaning there. Text equals meaning, or verbal language equals meaning. But we were much more interested in a visual language. We were Gauguin. We weren't really there, Lucy and I *were* Gauguin. At no point did we think that we were either muting them or showing 'who they really were'. We were just Gauguin. We wanted the sound to have a loose

> affiliation to the picture. Dropping out the sound at some points to us seemed like a different pictorial mode. It's a play between the medium of painting and the unnaturalism of film. As well as that, the silence in our minds reflected on an inner world. There is a sort of dread or uncertainty to that silence. It punctures you through to a different reality. To then bring the outside noise back into the room again is a reminder of the artificiality I suppose. We were after a compositional intensity rising and dropping.

The second image restages Gauguin's *Why Are You Angry? (No Te Aha Oe Riri*). It features a group of women watched over by the central figure of an older, matriarchal figure. She is perched on her doorstep holding her hand in a gesture of calm contemplation. Intercut with the live staging of the still figures in the paintings are documentary images of the women in their daily lives: in their yards, in front of their homes, attending to a horse, attending to each other, their children, performing Tahitian dances. As is the case with some of Nashashibi's previous works, "real action and ritualised action coexist" in *Why Are You Angry?* (Honoré & Ribadeneira, 2012: 17).

Fig. 21: *Why Are You Angry?*, 2017, film still.

Nashashibi/Skaer say they set out to create their "own mythologisation of Tahitian women", and to draw attention to the conflict, and likewise to the potential, in encountering again the contemporary images of Tahitian women through the historical gaze we are familiar with through Gauguin's eyes ('Why Are You Angry?', n.d.).

But they admit that this idea of creating their own mythologisation has its limits, and that being female authors does not put them in a greater position of access or authenticity. It could also be said that the ethics of the encounter – being there with the camera – is not the same as the ethics of displaying products of that encounter in another setting. The context of its display at documenta 14 raises another question. The Athens segment of the documenta 14 exhibition came under particular attack for neglecting to engage with on the ground politics of the host city, accused as is was of performing a gestured politics that informs only the global art world. The documenta 14 Athens segment also stood accused of engaging in a "rhetoric of authenticity" (Falkenhausen, 2017). [66]

But Nashashibi/Skaer claim no authenticity in their representation of Tahitian women in *Why Are You Angry?*. Their work claims neither a participant-observer collaborative mode, nor that they are working as artist-ethnographers. The work is also not a social outreach sponsored by documenta GmbH. Quite the opposite, to the women they worked with, they were also foreign, from an ex-colonising nation, and the women were paid workers, performing in the film. The specific position Nashashibi/Skaer were exploring in *Why Are You Angry?* is the kind of self-aware outsider situation that they as artists may share with Gauguin.

> We were interested in the exotic female as seen through European colonial eyes. There is imbedded in the figures of Gauguin this ambivalence about how they feel and that can be read as the inscrutable native – that they remain unreadable. We decided that this was a problem and that there was no way of solving it with logic or with the intellect. So our decision was to repeat a set of conditions around the tropes of the other, and the female and the exotic to see what would happen if the camera is in our hands. To see

[66] For an overview of the discussions on cultural imperialism raised during the Athens segment of documenta 14, see for example, Wilson-Goldie, K., "Learning Curves", *Artforum* (Wilson-Goldie, 2017), "We Come Bearing Gifts" – iLiana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis on Documenta 14 Athens (Varoufakis & Fokianaki, 2017), and "Get Real", Susanne Von Falkenhausen's feature article on authenticity and the ethnic other (*Frieze*, 2017). See also the still relevant discussion by Hal Foster in his short essay "The Artist as Ethnographer", in *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (University of California Press , 1995), pp.302-309.

> what bodies can be seen as whole, and what bodies can't be seen as whole. Even if within a moment in the film you could reach some sort of idea of the female figure as a whole, which isn't immediately falling into the same questions [of representation] and the same problems, it can probably only be a momentary experience, or else it's built around a lot of qualifications and layers. We don't know whether this qualification is in the sum of the film or if there are individual images that are doing that or if we are just re-opening a discussion about it.

Fig. 22: *Why Are You Angry?*, 2017, film still.

Since Gauguin's women are silent, and since the film replicates the muteness of the pictorial, or put differently, since there is no affirmation through speech in the film, it is not easy to pinpoint how the integrity of the women (their "wholeness") is communicated. Perhaps it is not coincidental that one of the only times in the film that one of the women begins to speak is through the absence of sound; however clearly readable is the aforementioned expression "Je ne sais pas". Without affirming themselves through speech, it is perhaps in their willingness to participate in the roleplaying designated by Nashashibi/Skaer, and in the ways they choose to look at or past the camera, that we begin to feel their presence as whole.

It may indeed be in this way that the "otherwise possibilities" of knowledge production are activated. It is a differentiation through silence. Silence, Sontag writes, "remains, inescapably, a form of speech (in many instances, of complaint or indictment), and an element in a dialogue" (Sontag, 2013: 21). The very distinguishing mark of this mode of being, and this mode of working with film, is its openness to not 'knowing', and to working through things in dialogue, with participants, and with viewers. It (the film) doesn't know; she/they – the subject(s) and the author(s) don't know; I (the viewer) don't know. The insistence to resist the countenance of dominant western knowledge production and the violence of certainty, not knowing and perhaps not needing to know, leads to "otherwise possibilities". These kinds of films don't purport to produce meaning for the viewer. As Nashashibi states, the use-value may be in opening or re-opening a discussion. The camera – like the eyes with which we live and see – here is not a scientific tool in the solicitation of knowledge, but replicates instead the conditions of an open-ended looking: undecided, unguarded, without epistemological certainty, without certainty of what there is. It is 'closer' to the real insofar that it configures a visual language that feels to me very similar, if not identical, to the act of unrestrained looking that is devoid of intention, devoid of the intention to persuade, or inform. To echo Sontag once more, "[t]he notions of silence, emptiness, reduction, sketch out new prescriptions for looking, hearing, etc. – specifically, either for having a more immediate, sensuous experience of art or for confronting the art work in a more conscious, conceptual way" (Sontag, 2013: 24). In her polemical essay titled "The Reality Based Community", Erika Balsom too advocates passionately for the observational documentary mode as a "space of attunement" where encounters "with alterity and contingency can occur, with no secure meaning assured" (Balsom, 2017).

EPILOGUE

A SPACE OF ATTUNEMENT: Cameraperson (2016)

Few films have embodied the core questions of ethics in documentary in more exacting ways than *Cameraperson* (Johnson, 2016) by first-time director Kirsten Johnson. Likewise, in perhaps more significant ways than any of the films I've been talking about here, *Cameraperson* wholesomely encapsulates and illustrates all the concerns of this research like no other work I've seen. This is because *Cameraperson* is a film about process, about relationships, and far more than any film to my knowledge, it makes this visible. In particular, it makes visible the experience of being in the field with the camera. Again, perhaps to an even greater extent than any of the works I've been discussing here, *Cameraperson* is hard to approach from a purely theoretical standpoint.

My interest in closing this final part of the thesis and the thesis as a whole with *Cameraperson* is because it can help us return to the intended gaps I spoke of in the introduction, that is, the gaps between the analytic and the poetic, between the theoretical and praxis. Between what documentary 'ought' to do in theory, and what it can do in praxis. But more than this, I would prefer to stay silent, to echo Forugh Farrokhzad once more. To stay silent and let the film do its work, to speak for itself. The film – and films in general – want to be seen, want to be experienced. This much seems obvious, and literature relating to the fields of visual culture, anthropology, and ethnography, as well as film studies, is plentiful in supporting this by now trite statement. But I take liberty in reiterating it in order to make it clear that this research, and the subsequent writing produced here, does not have its foundation in a theoretical position, but instead comes out of the experiential – it is a practical, materially-lived position.

It may also be necessary to acknowledge that some of the ideas I've been discussing here are perhaps difficult to conceptualise, if coming at them from a purely theoretical standpoint. *Cameraperson* is a helpful example, as it offers to my knowledge the most exacting articulation of the experience of being a filmmaker, of working specifically with the camera, and of the bodily experience of being fluid in thought.

Fig. 23: *Cameraperson*, 2016, film still.

It articulates, better than I am able to here, the attitude needed to invite a particular quality of experiences: the experience of being acted upon, and the process of making muteness and silence visible as a productive way forward from the deadlock of ethical assumptions and ethical principles. *Cameraperson* very specifically embodies the fluidity and deliberation of an ethics that is lived in the field, or is "nomadic", as Braidotti might put it. It succeeds in going beyond representation by articulating the limits of representation through the discarded footage in which the relationship between the cameraperson and the people and things she films are slowly revealed. To be sure, the 'revelations' in those outtakes are collateral, minor, subtle, not 'documentary gold' prized for its dramatic value. That's why it ended up on 'the cutting-room floor'.

Variously described as an "interrogation of the power of the camera", a "cinémemoir", "video album" and "cinematic remix", the film consists of outtakes from documentaries Johnson has been involved with as a jobbing camerawoman spanning her 25-year engagement with documentary. Johnson's accolades, as the cameraperson of many well-known films circulating in the commercial documentary field, are impressive. Films include Laura Poitras' *Citizenfour* (2014), *The Oath* (2010), and *Risk* (2016), her latest film on Julian Assange; *Derrida* (2002) and *The Invisible War* (2012) by Kirby Dick respectively; and *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) by Michael Moore. The contents of the films Johnson has been involved with have impressively ranged the entire spectrum of the social justice

documentary gambit to inform, investigate, uncover. Topics have ranged from Evangelical Christians advocating for a sexual revolution though chastity; the notorious 1971 heist by activists leading to the exposure of abuses by the FBI against political dissidents; economic hardship resulting in the hunger experienced by very many contemporary Americans; the rape of soldiers in the US military; a group of women campaigning for peace and helping to place in power the first female head of state in Liberia; the history of US women sent into ground combat; genocide in Sudan; environmental justice causes; reproductive rights in the US; and terminal illness. Yet, Johnson's own film displays none of the hallmarks of the advocacy agenda normally associated with the documentary genre coming forth in this list.

One of the most telling scenes in *Cameraperson* illustrates the cameraperson-subject relationship. In it, philosopher Jacques Derrida expresses concern for Johnson's safety as she films him crossing a busy New York street. This interaction could easily be discarded as casual 'off-camera' banter, typical for documentary filming situations. But in its casualness it reveals a key misconception about the documentary filming process and specifically about the cameraperson. Referring to the physical position of being behind the lens, Derrida jokingly analyses: "She [Johnson] sees everything around you. Yet she is totally blind. That's the image of the philosopher who falls in the well while looking at the star [Derrida points at himself]". Derrida is indeed the 'star', though not one of those in the night's sky, as the original image suggested by Derrida describes. Yet his assessment of the situation, and of the process of filming, is to my estimation entirely misjudged. Johnson is neither blind, nor does she see everything. Quite to the contrary, her looking is very specific in drawing a relationship between her and what she focuses her attention and her lens on. This scene follows another 'off-camera' conversation from a separate shoot where we hear Johnson explain that though filming in public (without a tripod) requires no prior permission, she tends to make eye contact with those she films in an implicit gesture of seeking consent. "I always try to have some kind of relationship to people, like I look them in the eye like, 'You see me shooting you, don't you?'" (Johnson, 2016).

Elaborating on the relationship between 'me' and 'you' and the ethics that comes through in the title of the work, *Rolling Stone* reviewer David Fear astutely

comments, “It’s significant that the title doesn't separate the two words; watching this film, you get the sense that for Johnson, there's no clear point where ‘camera’ ends and ‘person’ begins” (Fear, 2016). Johnson adds, "[t]here's not really a word for what the relationship between you and the people you're filming is," she says. "I really appreciate that people check themselves on calling people ‘characters.’ Even ‘subject’ is a challenging word. What the accurate term is, I’m not sure […] You plus a camera is different. You’re not just human when you have a camera with you” (quoted in Deutsch, 2016).

In ways that are significant to this study, the title of Johnson’s film and Fear’s commentary on its implication connect with the ideas and concerns articulated here at the level of theory. For one, it connects to Rosalind Nashashibi’s desire to seeing and being seen as whole though her experiment with the representation of the nude ‘exotic’ female ‘other’. The connection is also present in the theoretical articulation of a mode of working that envelops and connects the self *as* the other. It is present also in Braidotti’s articulation of a connected, embodied containment of the other as a foundational mode of being and in her call for a recalibrated ethics.

Throughout this thesis, there is a discernable tension between the terms ‘object’ and ‘other’. The tension exists because, at times, the question arises as to whether or not the term ‘object’ could be substituted with the term ‘other’. Part of the aim with this project has been to work with this tension as a productive slippage, and to tease out the overlapping of the terms. In the end, the expression “as the other” that I have been labouring to articulate is an attitude towards, and a feeling for, a process within an existing relationship, a bond that we may not understand cognitively, and which some of us, including myself, may be ill-equipped at explaining linguistically. Johnson articulates this relationship through images in *Cameraperson* more adequately than words can. In this relationship, filmmaker/subject, subject/object, or self/other are paradoxically differentiated, but are also an inseparable thing enveloped in a co-dependent encounter that is carried through from the past and ripples on into the future.

To describe *Cameraperson* as an examination of the power of the camera, or an interrogation into the role of the cameraperson, is to undermine the complexity of how the particular translates to the universal. The universal of the film is the most

sensitive articulation, to my eyes, of an ethical, as well as political position. This position is the filmic articulation of the conditions of a situation, and of an image that no filmmaker, no participant, and no viewer can fully understand or control, and which no one owns or can fully explain. The film presents "evidence of relationships", as Johnson puts it. "[A]n image is always a relationship, and it's not just a relationship in the moment that it's taken in. It's a relationship that moves on into the future and it creates more relationships" (quoted in Coyle, 2016). In ways not too dissimilar to Johnson's filmic articulation, it has been my desire throughout these pages to articulate the means by which the films I have been discussing call on the thoughts of others to produce themselves in unspoken dialogue with one another, and to illustrate how. That these means, however oblique or contrarian, can be tangible and visible. In providing a space for self-interrogation, these films open up and call on the viewer to become involved as a thing among other things.

In many ways this thesis attempted to move beyond the articulation of the relationship between the camera (person) and the object (of study) by bringing into the discussion the viewer's position in that relationship. My writing here has moved between the perhaps 'violent' manifestation of the relationship between filmmakers and viewers (Buñuel, Martens, Brakhage, Weissmann, Martin, and to some extent the Maysles) to a perhaps more holistic manifestation of that relationship (Gerrets, Nashashibi, Nashashibi/Skaer, Johnson). I considered the potentially violent aspects of objectification as a means by which to force the viewer into a space of self-interrogation as to their role in the documentary encounter. Principally, any assessment of ethics cannot exclude the viewer/critic being complicit in the conditions that produce injustice, or suffering. And my primary obligation, therefore, is to review my own role in making ethical assessments in the viewing process. I argue that these assessments should not be confined to what the filmmaker is doing, but to what I am doing as a viewer or critic. *Cameraperson* lays bare the conditions of a lived ethics. It shows deliberations, the interactions, the hesitations, the accidental, the mismanaged, the 'mistakes' and misunderstandings that make up the real and that were left out of the diverse films that it is composed of. And in so doing it shows 'realness' itself. It shows that objectification, to perceive and to work with the materiality of the real, can be measured affectively in the gaps of expression; in what is not shown; in what is not said.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aaron, M. (2007). *Spectatorship: The Power of Looking on*. London: Wallflower Press.

Aaron, M. (2014). *Death and the Moving Image: Ideology, Iconography and I*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Adorno, T. W. (1973). *Negative Dialectics* (2007th ed.). New York: Continuum.

Amor, M. (1997). Documenta X. *Third Text*, *11:40*, 95–100.

An van. Dienderen. (2010). Indirect Flow Through Passages: Trinh T. Minh-ha's Art Practice. *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, (23), 90–97.

Archive Past Exhibitions Hito Steyerl | Chisenhale Gallery. (2010). Retrieved from http://chisenhale.org.uk/archive/exhibitions/index.php?id=108

Aufderheide, P. (2007). *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Azoulay, A. (2012). *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York; Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Bachmann, I. (1961). Alles. In *Das Dreissigste Jahr* (pp.49-64). München: Piper-Verlag.

Balsom, E. (2017, June). The Reality-Based Community - Journal #83. Retrieved 17 June 2017, from http://www.e-flux.com/journal/83/142332/the-reality-based-community/

Balsom, E., & Peleg, H. (Eds.). (2016). *Documentary Across Disciplines*. Cambridge, MA: The Mit Press.

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Barthes, R. (1981). *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Baudrillard, J. (1983). *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities ... or the End of the Social and Other Essays*. (P. Foss & J. Johnston, Trans.). Semiotext(e).

Baudrillard, J. (1996). *The System of Objects*. London; New York: Verso.

Belting, H. (2001). Medium - Bild - Körper. In *Bild-Anthropologie: Entwürfe für eine Bildwissenschaft* (pp. 11–55). Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag.

Belting, H. (2005a). Image, Medium, Body: A New Approach to Iconology. *Critical Inquiry*, *31*(2), 302–319.

Belting, H. (2005b). Toward an Anthropology of the Image. In *Anthropologies of Art* (pp. 41–58). Williamstown, MA: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

Belting, H. (2012). Body and Image. In J. C. Alexander, D. Bartmański, & B. Giesen (Eds.), *Iconic Power* (pp. 187–202). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Benjamin, W. (1996). *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*. (M. Bullock & M. W. Jennings, Eds.). Cambridge, MA; London, England: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Bergen-Aurand, B. (2014). Of Redemption: The Good of Film Experience. In P. Macneill (Ed.), *Ethics and the Arts*. Dordrecht, Heidelberg, New York, London: Springer.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1991). *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Berger, P., & Pullberg, S. (1965). Reification and the Sociological Critique of Consciousness. *History and Theory*, *4*(2), 196–211.

Beshty, W. (Ed.). (2015). Towards an Aesthetics of Ethics. In *Ethics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Bishop, C. (2006). The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents. *Artforum*, (February), 179–185.

Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and The Politics of Spectatorship*. London; New York: Verso Books.

Braidotti, R. (2000). Teratologies. In I. Buchanan & C. Colebrook (Eds.), *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* (pp. 156–172). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Braidottti, R. (2006). Affirmation versus Vulnerability: On Contemporary Ethical Debates. *Symposium*, *10*, 235–254.

Brakhage, S. (USA, 1971). *The Act of Seeing with one's own eyes* [Film].

Brakhage, S. (1983). The Independent Filmmaker: Stan Brakhage. In J. McBride & American Film Institute (Eds.), *Filmmakers on Filmmaking: The American Film Institute Seminars On Motion Pictures and Television* (1st ed, pp. 191–204). Los Angeles; Boston: J.P. Tarcher.

Brown, B. (Ed.). (2004). *Things*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.

Bruzzi, S. (2006a). *New Documentary*. Routledge.

Bruzzi, S. (2006b). *New Documentary* (2 edition). London ; New York: Routledge.

Buñuel, L. (Spain, 1933). *Land Without Bread [Las Hurdes]* [Film].

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London; New York: Verso.

Cahill, A. J. (2010). *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics* (1 edition). New York: Routledge.

Citron, M. (1999). Fleeing from Documentary: Autobiographical Film / Video and the 'Ethics of Responsibility'. In D. Waldman & J. Walker (Eds.), *Feminism and Documentary* (pp. 271–286). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Clifford, J. (1981). On Ethnographic Surrealism. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, *23*(04), 539–564.

Cooper, S. (2006). *Selfless Cinema?: Ethics and French Documentary*. London, U.K: Legenda.

Cooper, S. (2007). Mortal Ethics: Reading Levinas with the Dardenne Brothers. *Film-Philosophy*, *11*(2), 66–87.

Coyle, J. (2016, August 9). In 'Cameraperson,' life seen through an intrepid lens. Retrieved 28 July 2017, from https://apnews.com/a63bb306026943ca9f1a55979cf52497/cameraperson-life-seen-through-intrepid-lens

Crawley, A. T. (2017). *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Demos, T. J. (2013). *Return To The Postcolony: Specters Of Colonialism In Contemporary Art*. Berlin: Sternberg Press.

Demos, T. J., & Martens, R. (2012). Toward a New Institutional Critique: A Conversation with Renzo Martens. *Atlántica. Journal of Art and Thought*, *52*, 90–104.

Deutsch, R. (2016, September 9). The Act of Seeing: Kirsten Johnson's 'Cameraperson'. Retrieved 28 July 2017, from http://www.documentary.org/column/act-seeing-kirsten-johnsons-cameraperson

Downing, L., & Saxton, L. (2010). *Film and Ethics: Foreclosed Encounters*. London; New York: Routledge.

Drucker, J. (2008). Making Space: Image Events in an Extreme State. *Cultural Politics: An International Journal*, *4*(1), 25–45.

Dudley, J. (2012). *Aristotle's Concept of Chance: Accidents, Cause, Necessity, and Determinism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Eisenman, S. F. (1997). *Gauguin's Skirt*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Enwezor, O. (2004). Documenta 11, Documentary, and the Reality Effect. In *Experiments with Truth* (pp. 97–103). Philadelphia: The Fabric Workshop and Museum. Exhibition Catalogue.

Enwezor, O., Basualdo, C., Bauer, U. M., Ghez, S., Maharaj, S., Nash, M., & Zaya, O. (Eds.). (2002). *Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Process of Truth and Reconciliation, Documenat11_Platform2*. Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz.

Falkenhausen, S. V. (2017, July 6). Get Real. Retrieved 3 August 2017, from https://frieze.com/article/get-real-0

Farrokhzad, F. (2004). *Remembering the Flight; Twenty Poems by Forugh Farrokhzad*. (A. Karimi-Hakkak, Trans.). Los Angeles: Ketab Corp.

Fear, D. (2016, September 9). 'Cameraperson' Review: Docu-Memoir on Life Lived Through a Lens Darkly. Retrieved 28 July 2017, from http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/cameraperson-movie-review-w437997

Foster, H. (1995). The Artist As Ethnographer? In *The Traffic in Culture: Refiguring Art and Anthropology* (pp. 302–309). Berkeley and Los Angeles; London, England: University of California Press.

Frampton, H. (2009). *On the Camera Arts and Consecutive Matters: The Writings of Hollis Frampton*. (B. Jenkins, Ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: The Mit Press.

Gates, T. (n.d.). Theaster Gates - The Candy Store and Other Dorchester Thoughts. Retrieved 5 August 2016, from

http://theastergates.com/section/31729_The_Candy_Store_and_Other_Dorchester.html

Gerrets, B. (Netherlands, 2014). *Shado'man* [Documentary Feature].

Grierson, J. (1966). *Grierson on Documentary*. (F. Hardy, Ed.). Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of Chicago Press.

Grimonprez, J. (France, 1992). *Kobarweng or Where is Your Helicopter?* [Short film].

Grimonprez, J. (Belgium / France, 1997). *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* [Feature film].

Grimshaw, A. (2001). *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gunning, J. (1999). Embarrassing Evidence: The Detective Camera and the Documentary Impulse. In M. Renov & J. Gaines (Eds.), *Collecting Visible Evidence*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press.

Harbond, J. (2007). Contingency's Work: Kracauer's Theory Of Film And The Trope Of The Accidental. *New Formations*, *61*(Summer), 90–103.

Heidegger, M. (2001). *Poetry, Language, Thought*. New York: Perennical Classics.

Honoré, V., & Ribadeneira, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Rosalind Nashashibi*. London: Mousse Publishing.

IWMC Rosalind Nashashibi Press Release FINAL. (2015). Retrieved 10 May 2017, from http://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/press-release/IWMC%20Rosalind%20Nashashibi%20Press%20Release%20FINAL.pdf

Johnson, K. (USA, 2016). *Cameraperson* [Documentary Feature].

Köhn, S. (2016). *Mediating Mobility: Visual Anthropology in the Age of Migration*. New York: Wallflower Press.

Lanzmann, C. (France / UK, 1985). *Shoah* [Documentary].

Levinas, E. (1979). *Totality And Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. (A. Lingis, Trans.). The Hague: Nijhoff.

Levinas, E. (2000). Reality and its Shadow. In C. Cazeaux (Ed.), *The Continental Aesthetics Reader* (pp. 117–128). London; New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Lévinas, E., & Nemo, P. (1985). *Ethics and Infinity*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Lumière, L. (France, 1895). *A Boat Leaving Harbour [Barque sortant du port]* [Film].

MacCormack, P. (2012). *Posthuman Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory*. Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

MacDougall, D. (1991). Whose Story Is It? *Visual Anthropology Review*, *7*(2), 2–10.

Martens, R. (Netherlands, 2008). *Episode III: Enjoy Poverty* [Documentary Feature].

Martens, R., & KASK. (n.d.). About - Institute for Human Activities. Retrieved 21 June 2016, from http://www.humanactivities.org/about-3/

Martin, P. (UK, 2015). *We See Ourselves, We See Each Other* [Single screen video].

Martin, P. (n.d.). Reciprocal Relations | Sheffield Fringe. Retrieved 5 May 2016, from http://sheffieldfringe.com/programmes/2016-object-documentary/reciprocal-relations/

Maysles, A., & Maysles, D. (USA, 1975). *Grey Gardens* [Documentary Feature].

McElhaney, J. (2010). *Albert Maysles*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Milliard, C. (2013, May 13). Jeremy Deller on His Venice Biennale Pavilion and 'People as an Artistic Medium'. Retrieved 29 August 2016, from http://uk.blouinartinfo.com/news/story/901843/jeremy-deller-on-his-venice-biennale-pavilion-and-people-as-an

Minh-ha, T. T. (USA, 1982). *Reassemblage* [16mm/DVD]. Women Make Movies. Retrieved from http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/pages/c52.shtml

Minh-ha, T. T. (1989). *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Minh-ha, T. T. (1990). Documentary Is/Not a Name. *October*, *52*, 76–98. https://doi.org/10.2307/778886

Nancy, J.-L. (2000). *Being Singular Plural*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Nash, K. (2011a). Beyond the frame: researching documentary ethics. *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Programs*, *15*(1), 1–13.

Nash, K. (2011b). Documentary-for-the-Other: Relationships, Ethics and (Observational) Documentary. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *26*(3), 224–239.

Nash, K. (2012). Telling stories: the narrative study of documentary ethics. *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, *10*(3), 318–331. https://doi.org/10.1080/17400309.2012.693765

Nash, M. (2008). Reality in the Age of Aesthetics. *Frieze*. Retrieved from https://frieze.com/article/reality-age-aesthetics

Nashashibi, R. (2015). *Electrical Gaza* [Single screen video].

Nashashibi/Skaer. (2017). *Why Are You Angry?* [Single screen video].

Nichols, B. (UK, 1991). *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nichols, B. (2001a). Documentary Film and the Modernist Avant-Garde. *Critical Inquiry*, *27*(4), 580–610.

Nichols, B. (2001b). *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press.

Nichols, B. (2017). *Introduction to Documentary, Third Edition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Norouzi, M., & Weissbach, J. (2013). *Greater Milwaukee Foundation's Mary L. Nohl Fund Fellowship for Individual Artists 2013*. Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Exhibition Catalogue.

Pavlović, T., Alvarez, I., Blanco-Cano, R., Grisales, A., Osorio, A., & Sánchez, A. (2009). Tierra sin pan (Luis Bunuel, 1933). In *100 Years of Spanish Cinema* (pp. 30–38). Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons.

Plantinga, C. (2005). What a Documentary Is, After All. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *63*(2), 105–117.

Pryluck, C. (1976). Ultimately We Are All Outsiders: The Ethics of Documentary Filming. *Journal of the University Film Association*, *28*(1), 21–29.

Rancière, J. (2011). *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*. London; New York: Continium.

Renov, M. (Ed.). (1993). *Theorizing Documentary*. New York: Routledge.

Renov, M. (2004). *The Subject of Documentary*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Renov, M. (2007). Away From Copying: The Art of Documentary Practice. In *Truth or Dare: Art and Documentary* (pp. 13–24). Bristol: Intellect Books.

Rosenthal, A. (Ed.). (1980). *The Documentary Conscience: A Casebook in Film Making*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Rosler, M. (2004). *Decoys and Disruptions: Selected Writings, 1975-2001*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press in association with International Center of Photography, New York.

Rosler, M. (2010). Take the Money and Run? Can Political and Socio-critical Art 'Survive'? *E-Flux Journal*, (#12). Retrieved from http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_107.pdf

Russell, C. (1999). *Experimental Ethnography*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Saxton, L. (2007). Fragile Faces: Levinas and Lanzmann. *Film-Philosophy*, *11*(2), 1–14.

Sensory Ethnography Lab. (n.d.). Sensory Ethnography Lab Harvard University. Retrieved 20 March 2016, from https://sel.fas.harvard.edu/

Sobchack, V. (1992). *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Sobchack, V. (1998). Synthetic Vision: The Dialectical Imperative of Luis Buñuel's Las Hurdes. In B. K. Grant & J. Sloniowski (Eds.), *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Sobchack, V. (2004). *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Sontag, S. (2004). *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Picador.

Sontag, S. (2013). *Styles Of Radical Will* (Vol. eBook). New York: Picador USA.

Steyerl, H. (2003a). Documentarism as Politics of Truth. Retrieved 25 January 2016, from http://eipcp. net/transversal/1003/steyerl2/en

Steyerl, H. (2003b). Politics of Truth: Documentarism in the Art Field. Retrieved 17 August 2016, from http://www.springerin.at/dyn/heft_text.php?textid=1353&lang=en

Steyerl, H. (2004). Politics of Truth – Documentarism in the Art Field. In *'Ficcions' documentals: exhibició produïda i organitzada per la Fundació "la Caixa" : del*

10 de març al 27 de juny de 2004 CaixaForum Barcelona. Barcelona: Fundació 'la Caixa'.

Steyerl, H. (2005). The Politics of Truth - Documentarism in the Art Field. In V. Havránek, S. Schaschl-Cooper, B. Steinbrügge, Kunsthaus Baselland, & Halle für Kunst Lüneburg eV (Eds.), *The Need To Document*. Zürich: JRP Ringier.

Steyerl, H. (2006). The Language of Things. Retrieved 17 August 2015, from http://eipcp.net/transversal/0606/steyerl/en

Steyerl, H. (2008). *Die Farbe der Wahrheit: Dokumentarismen im Kunstfeld*. Wien: Turia + Kant.

Steyerl, H. (2010a). A Thing Like You and Me. *E-Flux Journal*, *15*(4), 1–7.

Steyerl, H. (Germany, 2010b). *In Free Fall* [Single screen video].

Steyerl, H. (2011). Documentary Uncertainty. Retrieved 5 October 2015, from http://www.re-visiones.net/spip.php%3Farticle37.html

Thomas, N. (1994). Colonial Surrealism: Luis Buñuel's Land Without Bread. *Third Text*, *8* (26), 25–32.

Tobing Rony, F. (1996). *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books.

Tret'iakov, S. (2006). The Biography of the Object. *October*, (Fall), 57–62.

Truffaut, F., Hitchcock, A., & Scott, H. G. (1985). *Hitchcock*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Varoufakis, & Fokianaki, iLiana. (2017, July 6). "We Come Bearing Gifts"—iLiana Fokianaki and Yanis Varoufakis on Documenta 14 Athens. Retrieved 1 August 2017, from http://www.art-agenda.com/reviews/d14/

Vaughan, D. (1999). *For Documentary: Twelve Essays*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.

Weissbach, J. (USA, 2012). *2843 Colborne St. E* [Single screen video].

Why Are You Angry? (n.d.). Retrieved 12 May 2017, from http://www.formsofcouncil.org/en/productions/37_why_are_you_angry

Wilson-Goldie, K. (2017, December 4). Learning Curves. Retrieved 1 August 2017, from https://www.artforum.com/diary/id=67683

Winston, B. (1988). Documentary: I Think We Are in Trouble. In A. Rosenthal (Ed.), *New Challenges for Documentary*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press.

Winston, B. (1995). *Claiming the Real: The Griersonian Documentary and Its Legitimations*. London: British Film Institute.

Winston, B., Vanstone, G., & Chi, W. (2017). *The Act of Documenting: Documentary Film in the 21st Century*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Zylinska, J. (2014). *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press.

APPENDIX

Fig. 24: *Everything*, 2017, and *Object Documentary*, 2016, documentation of USB drive and exhibition booklet. For copies of this thesis with these items missing please contact the author at http://www.minounorouzi.com

FILM WORK

Everything (UK/Austria 2017)

23 min, VHS with sound

A USB drive, containing the movie file, is available inside the front cover. For copies of this thesis with this item missing please contact the author at http://www.minounorouzi.com

SYNOPSIS: Everything (2017)

"Everything" is an unsettling documentary adaptation of the fictional short story by the late Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann. Composed of misappropriated home-video tapes, the film zooms in on current leanings towards dissociative socio-political relations through a micro exploration of the slippery politics of domesticity, parenting and family relations.

The inner monologue of a man talking in very existentialist, philosophical terms about fatherhood, parenting, childhood, and his partner is the fictional background to real life taking place in an assemblage of home footage. Composed of the filmmaker's own home-video, the film explores the 'objective,' near-scientific position from which the fictional father narrates the harrowing events that lead to the disintegration of his family life. In the film, the family unit is de-centered through the depiction of multiple families whilst telling one couple's story. A haunting gesture towards what might be called a universal 'family common', the film explores the slippery politics of domesticity, parenting and family relations. The misappropriation of the real onto a fictional canvas raises ethical questions relating to the objectification of the real.

ARTIST STATEMENT

In many ways, *Everything* (2017) occasions the surfacing of a number of questions I had accumulated for a number of years regarding the ethics of documentary practice. These were questions that first arose in relation to my experience of working in the field of commercial media production, and subsequently in the development of my own artistic practice.

At the tail end of my freelance activities in the broadcast sector, I made a number of moving image works, all of which were expressions of my desire to be attentive to the material world not as something that I am tasked to organise or shape, but as material that shapes me, or more significantly, is shaped through a shared effort in social encounters. Resisting the impulse of authorial control, a defining aspect of my film practice came to consist in simply being present in space as a thing amongst other things, without a predetermined idea of outcome or strategic intervention. What initially attracted me to film making as a critical artistic practice was the possibility of working with documentary not as representation, but as a physical and material encounter similar to how I imagined a painter or sculptor may work.

My filming strategy prior to making *Everything* consisted of working with a fixed camera position and with symmetry as a compositional device. This meant I did not need to 'supervise' the image (adjust framing, track movement and so forth). It allowed me to step away from the camera. Physically separated from the camera, I was to those present visibly part of the social fabric that was being recorded. This clearly demarcated the position of each entity involved in a network of relations. In significant ways the process of making *Everything* was quite different. To start with I did no original filming for this film. Instead, I misappropriated home video, some of which I had shot years ago, some of which others had shot of my family and friends – a wedding, family outings, trips, gatherings – without any regard for their, or my own, personal relation to the histories depicted. An extreme form of objectification whose added complexity I was cognisant of. As filmmaker and scholar Michelle Citron puts it, depictions of those close to oneself for the consumption of strangers intensifies the ethical dilemma (Citron, 1999: 274). Whilst *Everything* is not an autobiographical film, there are elements of autobiography in its affective register. What could possibly

emerge from excising these individual histories from their 'real' context and reassembling them as the material on which the fictional narrative is based?

Some time ago I had read and been fascinated by "Everything", one of seven short stories by Austrian writer Ingeborg Bachmann, published in her book *The Thirtieth Year* (1961). In Bachmann's story, a man talks philosophically about fatherhood, parenting, childhood, and his wife. My documentary adaptation of Bachmann's story is composed of degraded home-video tapes. It deals with the slippery politics of parenting and family relations through the instability of the images, and the ethics of their procurement, as well as the attendant confinement present in normative conceptions of domesticity, family relations, and child development. The inner monologue of a man talking in very existentialist, philosophical terms about these themes is Bachmann's fictional background to a fragmented 'real' taking place in an assemblage of home footage.

Whilst Bachmann's fictional short story is about one family unit, the central characters of the story are decentred in this documentary adaptation through multiple depictions of father, mother and child. The use of archival home video depicting my friends and family, using multiple fathers, children, and mothers whilst telling one couple's story, is a deliberately haunting gesture towards what might be called a universal "family common". As I formulate it, a family common extends out from the traditional nuclear family to include an assembly of people who may be configured differently to simply "man-woman-child" and may not be blood relatives. More broadly, a family common could be thought of as 'community'. In the film, the use of privately collected video, and the appropriation of the real onto a fictional canvas, was intended to raise questions about the day-to-day cataloguing and the objectification of the real. What struck me in Bachmann's story was the 'objective,' near-scientific position from which the male voice observes and narrates the harrowing events that lead to the disintegration of his family life. Bachmann, it seemed to me, had written the inner monologue of a man not from his central, biographical, psychological, 'heroic' position, but through the material world. Leaves in a tree, whiskey, a clock, lovers' hands interlocking in a cinema queue, the wheels of a pram, a knife. My adaptation of Bachmann's story primarily set out to put another layer to the decentring of the main figure: the narrator.

Fig. 25 & 26: *Everything*, 2017, VHS stills.

Bachmann's text is a critique of the politics of domestic life, of the organisation and structure of family life. This is voiced primarily through the male central character in the story. I wanted to tease out and build on Bachmann's critique with multiple versions of the central characters – the man, woman and child – in order to extend this critique towards the broader idea of a "family common", meaning community. This critique is already present but not explicit in Bachmann's text. In other words, whilst Bachmann's story is about one particular man, woman, and child, I used multiple men, women, and children not necessarily related to one another in an effort to extend the socio-political frame towards the idea of a failing or failed community. In the film then, one couple's story becomes the fictional background to the fragmented multiplicity of 'real' lives taking place in the foreground. This underscores the coming together of multiple narrators. In effect, there are four: Bachmann, the man in her story, and the people within the documentary images. In my role as the filmmaker who assembles, I cannot circumvent being there as a narrator as well. But my working process was to concentrate on responding to what the material 'wants' (the images, the literary text). This should not be understood as a naïve, vitalist leaning towards the conception of the artist as 'mystic', or an immaterial 'spirit' guiding the process. No. I am talking very literally about physically responding to the encounter with the distinct material elements as a constructive exchange. Being with and amongst other material lives as a conduit, and privileging the materiality of my body. I think of this as an object-to-object relation, and what drove the filmmaking as research was the ethical complexity of this approach, and the challenge of articulating such a practice method in words.

The film informed my theoretical articulations and the way I approached the analysis of the works of others in significant ways. Once I had begun looking into critical theories that related to my initial research question, I felt I had to very purposefully go out and make the film in the objectifying mode I wanted to critique, in order to know in my own flesh what was involved and how the process would impact on both the film and on my theoretical position. In relation to the production process, what started as a form of creative self-harm actually affirmed my inescapable tendency to empty out my own desires, or preconceived ideas in relation to outcome. So the filmmaking really reinforced and affirmed that

whatever my self-assigned, 'transgressive' intentions were in 'using' the material, it ended up resulting in my being 'acted upon' by the material.

There are multiple materials/objects that make up the film. There is the author of the short story I adapted: Ingeborg Bachmann. She/the text 'guided', 'acted upon', and 'led' me. There are the representations: the home footage. It too 'guided', 'acted upon', and 'led' me. And then there are the actual people in 'real life': my friends and my family. And it is at that point – the point of considering all 'others' – that for me the experiment became conclusive. My intended transgression was successful in creating a level of discomfort that would prevent me from desiring to show the film. Because I understood in my own flesh the violence I was inflicting. This is what I mean by the aforementioned 'creative self-harm'. If I had trouble watching what I had made, how could I inflict this on others? This is a question that remains unanswered for me in practice, but I have tried to answer it through the anaysis of some of the other works presented at the level of theory. The film as an experiment created the conditions of discomfort I speculated on, and therefore engaged my ethical labour informing the writing, particularly in relation to the issue of surrogacy over the documentary material I spoke of and the viewer/critic's assessments of ethics. Placing myself in the position of viewer-critic, even in the process of making my own work, forced me to find other means of assessing these films (Buñuel, Martens, Brakhage). Principally, it involved divorcing myself from my own desires as a viewer as to what a work of art or documentary is – or what it ought to do.

Translated and adapted from the original German text, “Alles”, by Ingeborg Bachmann.

FRED

When I married Hannah it was less for her, but because she was having the baby. I didn't need to make a decision. I was moved. It was new... and it came from us. I had moments of complete absence.

Waiting for him.

I had thoughts, totally unexpected. Like coming across a mine, so explosive I should have run. Hannah got me wrong. Because I couldn't decide whether the pram should have small or large wheels.

HANNAH

Are you listening?

FRED

I don't know. You decide.

FRED

Standing around in shops, she was deciding between synthetics and real wool. Choosing hats, little jackets, nappies.

Me, and a baby.

From me, he should hear his first words; table, bed, nose, foot.

And later much more complicated words like: Resonance, Diapositive.

Structuralism.

He arrived.

And had no use for big lessons.

I wasn't prepared for the *one* thing. Naming him!

We settled in a hurry on 3 names. Which we registered.

My fathers name, her father's name and my grandfathers.

We never used any of them.

Hannah was very creative, inventing meaningless combinations of syllables.

None of the registered names seemed to fit the puny little body.

At the end of the first week, he was Fipps. (List random boys names)

He too had plans for me.

He was focusing more and more on us, reaching for us with his little arms, I was beginning to suspect this meant nothing. That it was *us*, searching for motives. It was around that time I started to worry. Hannah already felt far.

Sitting upright in the pram, teeth, whining. Upright, wabbly, sliding on his knees.

His first words.

I still didn't know what to do.

I didn't have to initiate him.

Good.

Evil.

No one really knows.

I just watched.

He didn't care which way, which person.

Hannah and I were closer to him because we put ourselves there.

He couldn't care less who was changing his nappies, holding him.

How *long* until he could actually say so himself.

He was frightened, yes. But not of avalanches, or something going wrong. He was afraid of leaves moving in a tree. Incredibly scared of flies.

How is he going to live if I leave him so totally in the dark?

He asked for things, wished for things, gave orders and talked. Just for the sake of it.

He bumped into a neighbour's kid, poked him right in the face, stepped back and seemed to have *no idea* he had another child in front of him.

In the early days he still screamed when he was feeling bad. But when he screamed now, there was something else.

Hannah's approach:

Seduction.

To get him not to behave badly.

She was in love.

She believed in his innocence.

I saw *nothing* of that innocence. *Nothing at all*.

I watched him and his little gang of friends.

Three of them were collecting water from the side of the curb.

They were standing in a circle talking.

It all looked terribly important.

They crouched and Fipps, who was in charge of the container, was about to release the water when they suddenly got up again and moved three paving stones further along.

But this place didn't seem quite right either.

They got up a second time.

The atmosphere was tense.

Finally, a meter further they found the right location for their mission.

The water was released and the three of them watched it flow.

Mission completed.

The world could rely on these little men!

The world, *everything* was being moved forward and in the same direction as always.

I was turning my hatred towards everything manmade.

The tramlines, street numbering, time.

Perfect order.

The rubbish disposal; university timetables; registry offices.

Institutions you can't run your head against.

I owed him... some place where he can make his own world.

But I gave up.

I liked to see him play but even the games seemed… Hide and seek. Cops and robbers. Hannah noticed.

We tried to talk about it.

She didn't get it.

She would just get up, mid-sentence, and wander off to the kid's room.

She started nightly prayer sessions with him.

Anything would do, a cross, a magic spell, a talisman.

We both got him there...

A worker wants his son be a doctor.

A doctor wants his son to be at least.... a doctor.

I don't get it.

I didn't want our son to be cleverer or better. I didn't want to be loved by him. He didn't have to listen to me … agree.

I just wanted him to show me with one *simple gesture* that he was *not* going to become like *us*.

I didn't see that gesture, watching him.

I'm not sure it's a man's place to observe his own child like that.

Like a scientist observing a 'case'.

I was watching the lost case that is humanity in my son.

My son.

Hannah …

She never disappointed me. She was beautiful, gentle & raw, mature, a little special, then again not, a woman ….my woman.

I just wasn't thinking when I was with her.

She would have liked to raise a whole brood.

She would have accepted *any* condition.

I … none.

I just focused on *never* getting her pregnant again.

Once, in an argument she explained, what she would like for him.

Everything:

A bright room

More vitamins

A spiderman outfit

More love

All of love

A container to store love

Enough for a lifetime because of the people outside

A good education

Languages, to support his talents

She was crying.

I laughed.

I think she never *once* considered that our child could be *'one of them'.*

That like *them* he could get hurt, offended, overstretched.

That, like them he could…

I saw it earlier … He was 3 or 4. Angry and screaming.

A tower he had built, had collapsed.

He paused and whispered to himself intently, "I'll burn your house. Break everything. All of your things." (hushed tone)

I picked him up.

Promised him we'll rebuild the tower.

He repeated his threats.

I saw Hannah disturbed a little for the first time.

She told him off.

HANNAH

Who says such things?

FRED

Later, he threw a little girl down the stairs.

That incident did scare him a bit.

He cried … promised he'll never do it again.

For a time he was hitting Hannah, for no apparent reason.

This phase passed too.

I forget to remember all the lovely things he said. How gentle he could be. How lively he was in the morning.

"Eat with both hands on the table, mind your posture, greet politely, don't speak with a full mouth".

I wasn't home much after he started school. I'd meet friends after work, or I'd lock myself into my study.

I met Lizzy.

She worked at the local coffee shop near the office.

I brought her little gifts, cinema tickets or something to eat.

She didn't speak much. I went to see her often, over a year. It was a confusing time.

I presumed Hannah was clueless. But she had seen us at a cafe and a couple of days later standing in line at the cinema.

She pretended not to know me. From me a paralytic nod … moving along in the line.

Lizzy's hand in mine.

I actually sat through the movie. Ran home after the screening as if that would in some way make it better.

I nervously prepared my defense.

Hannah was silent.

Listening as if what I was saying had nothing to do with her.

Finally when she did speak …

Shy

Embarrassed

She said:

HANNAH

Think of the child.

FRED

I was destroyed.

Not because of what she said, but how she said it.

Her humble reserve.

I went on my knees.

Begged her.

Promised.

Never-again.

My son.

So weird.

Father and son.

It's such a dark thing.

My sperm, undefined,

and Hannah's blood feeding the baby.

Her blood at his birth.

Blood at the end too.

Gushing out of his head.

He couldn't say much lying there on the hard stone. Just, "I want to go home".

Died?

Passed away?

We couldn't pick the words.

".... Our only child, torn from us by accident."

The printers wanted to know if we didn't prefer "Our *much* loved child"?

Hannah said it goes without saying that he was much loved and it mattered little now anyway.

Hannah.

She held the spotlight because of the baby.

I saw her.

Full of life.

Fearful.

Gentle.

Strict.

Always prepared to direct the child… then let him run.

Her best moments were around the time of the knife incident.

She was radiant.

Standing by her son.

It was in year 5.

He had attacked one of his classmates with a knife, intending to ram it into the boy's chest.

But he missed, and stabbed him in the arm.

We were called in and had to sit through an embarrassing meeting with the school governor, the teacher, parents.

We didn't manage to get him to say sorry to his classmate.

We tried to force him …visited the boy in hospital.

I don't think he actually specifically disliked the boy.

Whenever I think of the school trip and his accident, I think of the knife incident.

I assumed he was like other kids his age:

Wild

and gentle

Loud

and … silent by himself.

The school governor called me.

We met at my office.

He tried to say something in the foyer… in the street … at the cafe opposite.

No place is appropriate to tell a parent that their child is dead.

"It wasn't the teacher's fault", he told me.

I nodded.

It wasn't the head injury itself… …but ….I probably know, he said...the tumor.

I nodded.

A tumor?

“The school is deeply affected by the incident”, he said.

“There will be an inquiry”.

“The police have been notified”.

I just thought about the poor teacher.

I got up before we had ordered.

Left money.

Wandered out into the street.

Back to the office.

Left again immediately.

Back to the coffee shop.

I would have rather had a drink.

5 o'clock.

I don't know what I said.

There was an indescribable scream. An incredible sound.

During the days that followed I organized everything on my own.

I kept the date of the funeral from Hannah.

It was a beautiful day.

A slight breeze.

Lots of flowers.

The school governor spoke.

For the first time I saw his classmates.

They were a silent little bunch standing there.

Hannah is no longer sitting in his room for hours.

Now I talk to him.

I will carry you on my back.

Buy you a blue balloon.

A boat trip.

I'll blow on your knee when you scared yourself falling … help you with your homework.

I went too far.

Where Hannah sees a garden, I see a minefield.

Don't go too far.

Learn to walk first.

You. Learn it yourself first.

Hannah?

Are you awake?

CURATORIAL WORK

Object Documentary

Sheffield Fringe 2016, Bloc Projects, Sheffield (10–18 June 2016)

A 9-day programme of events including an exhibition, artist talks, screenings, open studios.

Fig. 27: Sheffield Fringe 2016, *Object Documentary*, Bloc Projects, 2016, artwork. Designer: Tina Borkowski.

Participating artists: Mox Mäkelä, Timo Menke & Nils Agdler, Patricia Bandeira, Ted Kennedy, Peter Martin, Francesco Pedraglio, Leafcutter John, Emma Leach, Alison J Carr, Jumana Manna & Sille Storihle, Rosalind Nashashibi, Richard Wiebe, Pat Law, Sasha Litvintseva, Sarah Beddington, Mairéad McClean, Xiaowen Zhu, Tinne Zenner, Daniel Jacoby, Ben Balcom, Sky Hopinka, Andrée-Anne Roussel, Zachary Epcar, Patricia Azevedo & Clare Charnley, Scott Willis, Ian Nesbitt, Liz von Graevenitz, Alistair Macdonald, Michael Day, Richard Bartle, Maud Haya-Baviera, Lesley Guy & Lea Torp Nielsen & Dale Holmes, Jenni Olson, Bloc Studio Artists.

CURATORIAL STATEMENT: Object Documentary

The fifth edition of Sheffield Fringe investigated 'documentary' film as an art object. It did so on the premise that thinking of and trading documentary as an object opens up the possibility of the 'objectification' of actuality.

Documentary practice deals with the social world, live situations, 'real' *things*. Relating to the social world as an object and putting it in the service of artistic activity can create an ethical challenge. Indeed thinking of documentary as an object, and of documentary material as a resource, can be discomforting. Beyond its status in the market place as an art object, the other ways in which documentary film can manifest as an object are difficult to articulate. But they can be felt. Sometimes visible, sometimes implied, one of the ways an 'object relation' becomes palpable is in the relationship that creates the work. Where a discomforting relation is detected, we tend to address such occasions as 'problematic'. The first problem arises with the designation of value when defining an object vis-à-vis a subject: in an effort to designate value through language, we speak of documentary subjects, not documentary objects. The second problem arises with exactly what we mean by the word 'documentary'. So far, known characterizations remain narrow. Whether regarded as art works or documentaries, the critical stance of the contributions to Sheffield Fringe 2016 was a study of the relationship of the filmmakers to their material.

A print version of the exhibition booklet, including short essays, is available inside the back cover. For copies of this thesis with this item missing please contact the author at http://www.minounorouzi.com or see

http://www.sheffieldfringe.com/flipbook/

SYMPOSIUM AND SCREENING SERIES:

Object! On the Documentary as Art

Whitechapel Gallery and Close-Up Film Center, London (04 February – 08 March 2017)

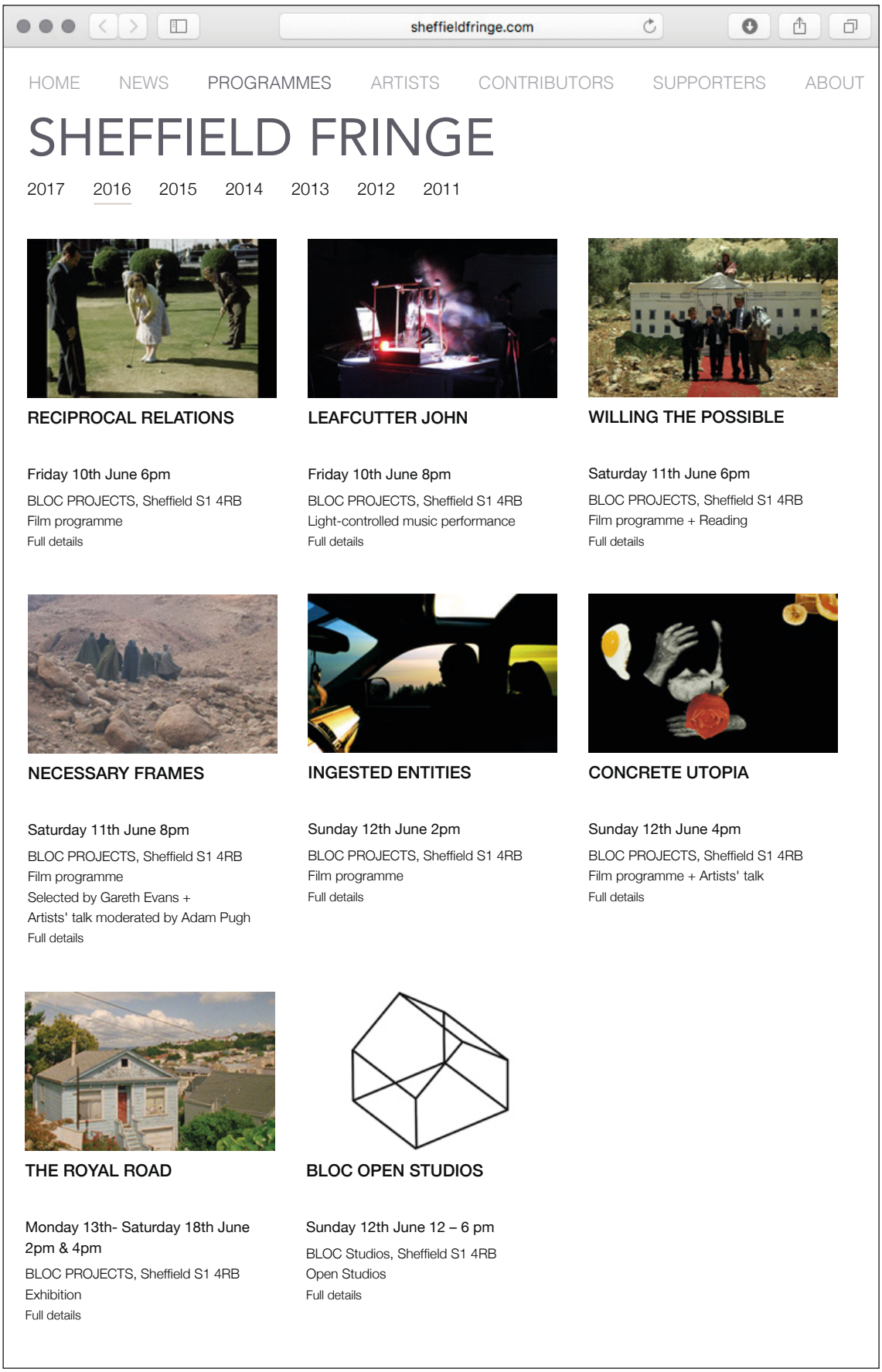
Participants: Erika Balsom, Rosalind Nashashibi, Mairéad McClean, Ben Balcom, Hannah Black, Wu Tsang, Sky Hopinka, Neïl Beloufa, Hannah Catherine Jones, Shela Sheikh, Stephen Connolly, Judy Price, Sasha Litvintseva.

Curatorial statement (with Nikolaus Perneczky and Mihaela Brebenel): This one-day symposium brought together filmmakers, artists and scholars to explore the aesthetic potential, political stakes and ethical challenges that arise from regarding documentary film as an art object. We considered documentary as a commodity in circulation, a resource in artistic production, a material trace, a document, or simply as "a thing like you and me" (Hito Steyerl).

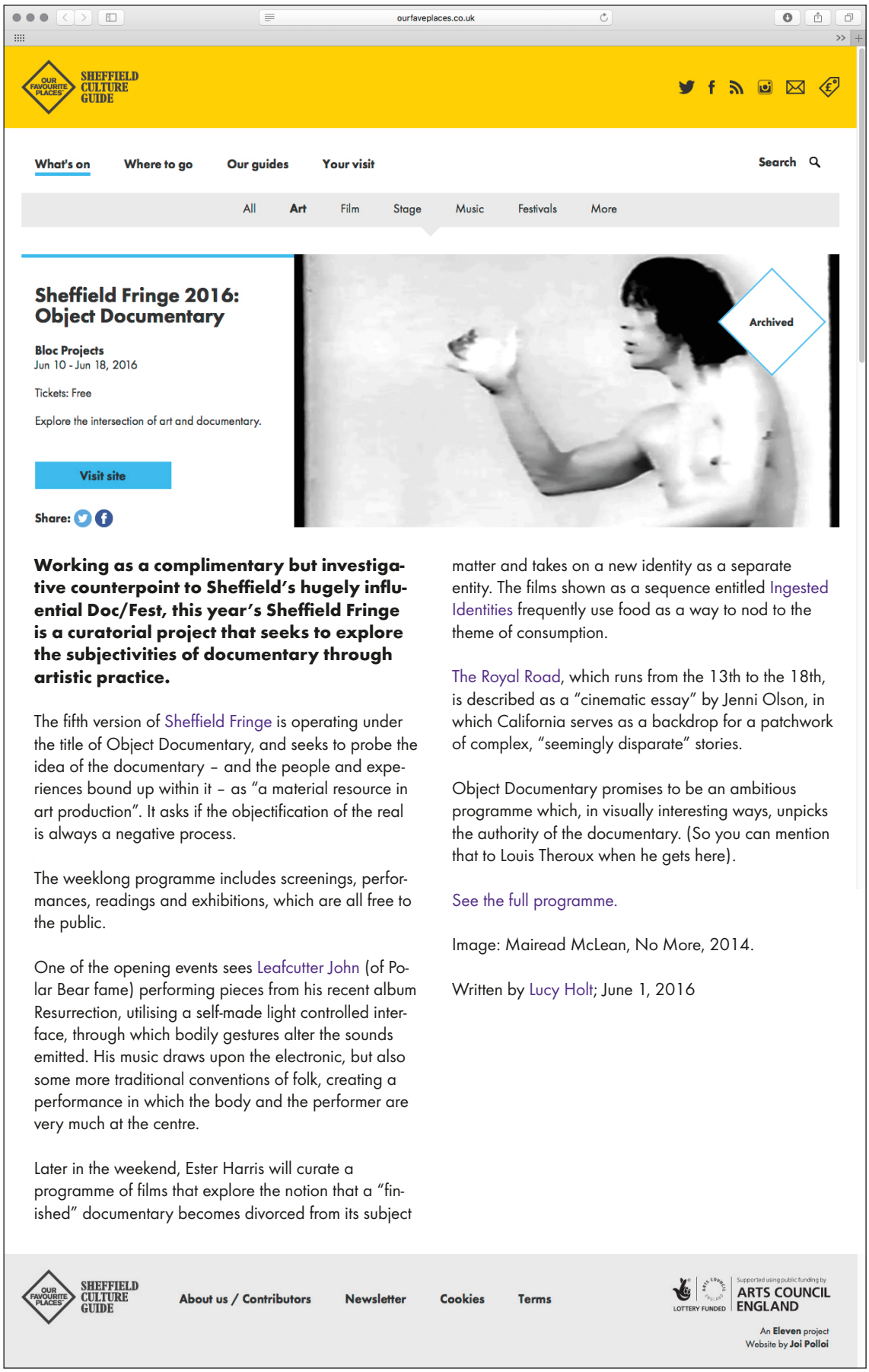
Object! On the Documentary as Art aimed to reframe the meeting point of films, makers and audiences in ethical terms. In light of the ongoing proliferation of documentary material in artistic production – the so-called 'documentary turn'– and the exchange of these works in the marketplace as art objects, what are the ethical and political implications of this 'object turn' in documentary film? What novel avenues does it open up for critical practice?

The day of presentations included screenings of artists' films and documentaries, and was complemented by a series of evening programmes at Close-Up Film Centre from February 7th to March 8th, 2017.

Produced in collaboration with Sheffield Fringe, the event was organised by Minou Norouzi, Mihaela Brebenel and Nikolaus Perneczky, with support from Openvizor, the Arts Council England and the Austrian Cultural Forum.



Web publication: Sheffield Fringe 2016, *Object Documentary,* May 2016.



Preview article: Our Favourite Places, Sheffield Culture Guide, *Sheffield Fringe 2016: Object Documentary*, 01 June 2016. Writer Lucy Holt.

art-agenda.com

art agenda

Announcements Reviews Dossier About Subscribe Search

Bloc Projects

Mairéad McClean, *No More*, 2014. Video. Courtesy of the artist.

Sheffield Fringe 2016: Object Documentary

MORE FROM BLOC PROJECTS

June 10–18, 2016

Opening: June 10, 6pm

Bloc Projects
71 Eyre Lane
Sheffield S1 4RB
UK

sheffieldfringe.com
Facebook / Twitter / Instagram

Artists: Mox Mäkelä (Finland), Timo Menke & Nils Agdler (Sweden), Patricia Bandeira (Portugal), Ted Kennedy (USA), Peter Martin (UK), Francesco Pedraglio (UK), Leafcutter John (UK), Emma Leach (UK), Alison J Carr (UK), Jumana Manna & Sille Storihle (Norway/Palestine), Rosalind Nashashibi (UK), Richard Wiebe (USA), Pat Law (UK), Sasha Litvintseva (UK), Sarah Beddington (UK), Mairéad McClean (UK), Xiaowen Zhu (China), Tinne Zenner (Denmark), Daniel Jacoby (Peru), Ben Balcom (USA), Sky Hopinka (USA), Andrée-Anne Roussel (Canada), Zachary Epcar (USA), Patricia Azevedo & Clare Charnley (UK/Brasil), Scott Willis (UK), Ian Nesbitt (UK), Liz von Graevenitz (UK),

Press announcement: art agenda, *Sheffield Fringe 2016: Object Documentary,* 08 June 2016. Writer: Minou Norouzi.

Alistair Macdonald (UK), Michael Day (UK), Richard Bartle (UK), Maud Haya-Baviera (UK), Lesley Guy & Lea Torp Nielsen & Dale Holmes (UK), Jenni Olson (USA), Bloc Studios Artists. With special contributions from Gareth Evans and Adam Pugh.

Bloc Projects is pleased to host Sheffield Fringe 2016: Object Documentary, a nine-day programme of screenings, presentations, and artists' talks exploring the intersection of art and documentary practices, curated by Minou Norouzi.

The programme launches on Friday, June 10 with screening programme Reciprocal Relations and a live light-controlled performance by **Leafcutter John**. On Saturday, June 11, **Rosalind Nashashibi, Jumana Manna & Sille Storihle, Sasha Litvintseva, Sarah Beddington,** and **Mairéad McClean's** works are presented in dialogue across two programmes, one selected by guest curator **Gareth Evans**, followed by a discussion with featured artists led by writer **Adam Pugh**. Sunday, June 12 sees two film programmes, featuring works by **Daniel Jacoby, Zachary Epcar, Ben Balcom** as well as by **Bloc Studios artists**, and an **Open Studios** event. From Monday, June 13, the gallery hosts two daily showings of **Jenni Olsen**'s 16mm film *The Royal Road*, which seamlessly explores colonial history and butch identity.

The complete Sheffield Fringe 2016 catalogue can be found here.

About Sheffield Fringe
Now in its fifth edition, Sheffield Fringe includes both emerging and established artists working with the moving image in diverse ways. Formerly an annual event, Sheffield Fringe is now held in Sheffield biennially, outside of which it operates nomadically through international exhibitions, events and research projects. Its Sheffield-based manifestation coincides with Sheffield International Documentary Film Festival (Doc/Fest), with the intention of creating a complimentary platform, and a context in which to encourage exchanges between the contemporary art and documentary film communities.

About the programme
The Sheffield Fringe 2016 programme, *Object Documentary* investigates the ethical challenges of regarding documentary film as an object and documentary material as a resource, through a diverse series of talks and screenings exploring themes ranging from international conflict resolution in varying geographies from present day Palestine to historic Scotland; the nature and creation of stories; political use-value in filmmaking; colonial histories; and reflections on memory and butch identity.

Curatorial statement: Object Documentary investigates "documentary" film as an art object, where thinking of and trading documentary as an object opens up the possibility of the "objectification" of actuality.

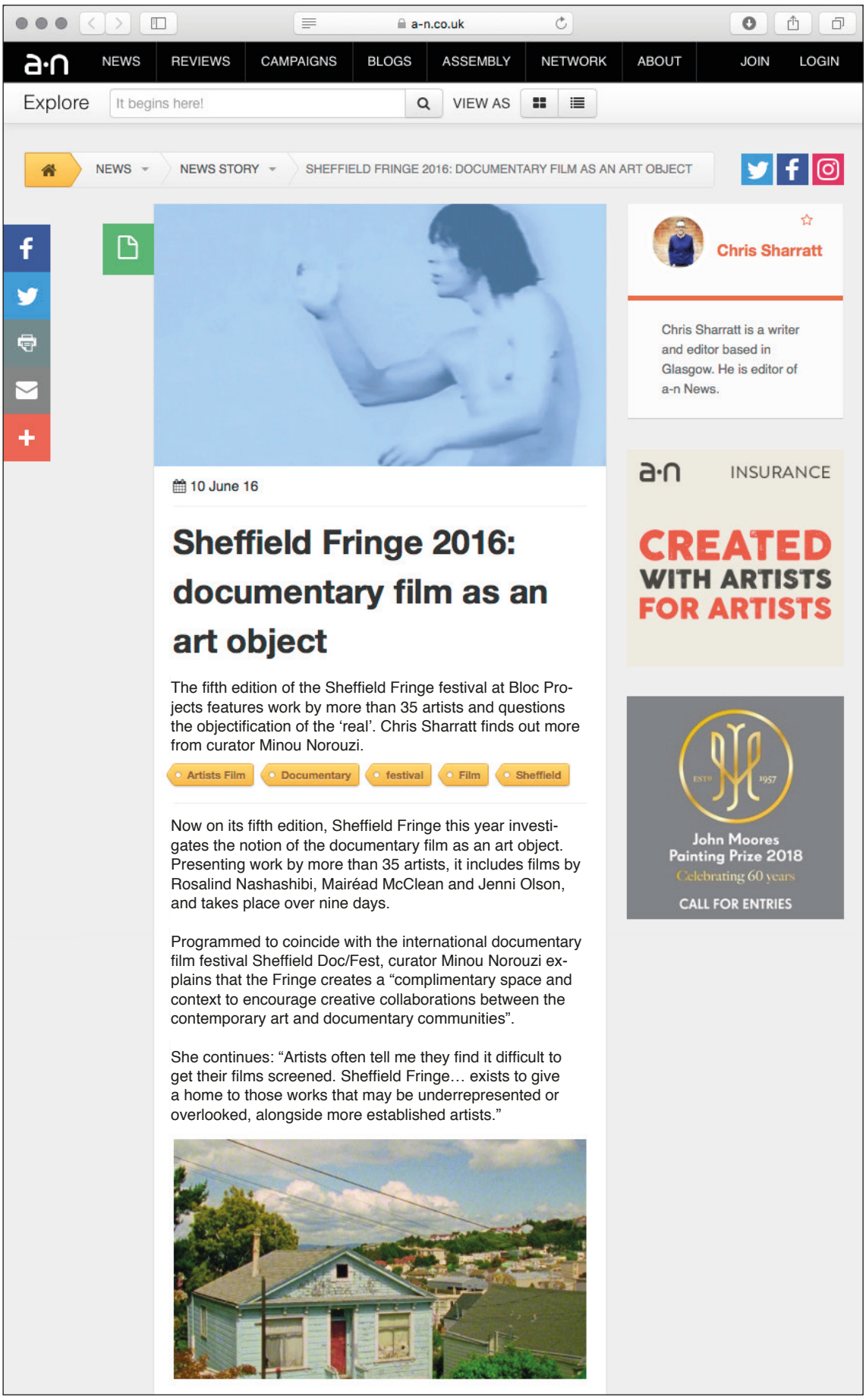
Documentary practice deals with the social world, live situations, "real" things. Relating to the social world as an object and putting it in the service of artistic activity can create an ethical challenge. Indeed thinking of documentary as an object, and of documentary material as a resource, can be discomforting. Beyond its status in the market place as an art object, the other ways in which documentary film can manifest as an object are difficult to articulate. But they can be felt. Sometimes visible, sometimes implied, one of the ways in which an

“object relation” becomes palpable is in the relationship that creates the work. Where a discomforting relation is detected, we tend to address such occasions as “problematic.” The first problem arises with the designation of value when defining an object vis-à-vis a subject: in an effort to designate value through language, we speak of documentary subjects, not documentary objects. The second problem arises with exactly what we mean by the word “documentary.” So far, known characterizations remain narrow.

Whether regarded as artworks or documentaries, the critical stance of the contributions to Sheffield Fringe 2016 lies in the relationship of the filmmakers to the material.

About Bloc Projects
Bloc Projects is an artist-led project space in Sheffield, UK presenting a regular programme of exhibitions, events, residencies, exchange projects and educational activity. Established in 2002, the organisation provides a platform for early–mid career artists to develop and present new work, encouraging experimentation, and inviting critical dialogue. Bloc Projects delivers partnerships projects, and has been a long-term member of the Art Sheffield Consortium.

Media information:
Jade Richardson, press@sheffieldfringe.com / Charlotte Morgan, info@blocprojects.co.uk



Review: a-n, *Sheffield Fringe: documentary film as an art object,* 10 June 2016. Writer: Chris Sharratt.

The theme of this year's festival, which is titled Object Documentary, has been a long time in the making. "[It] came out of a five-year plan – we were always going to question the objectification of the 'real', however defined, in our 5th edition," says Norouzi.

"In light of the proliferation of artists working with documentary material, and these works' status in the market place as art objects, it seemed pertinent to address the ethical challenges that come with that."

Norouzi, who trained at film school and was originally a documentary practitioner, explains that she has always questioned conventional approaches, and in particular the way people and stories are used and then discarded in the documentary process. While artists may take a different approach to form and content, they are not immune to such issues.

"As art practitioners, whether we are aware of it or not, we have inherited some of the questions about the ethics of documentary practice that started being raised from the 1970s onwards. So [Sheffield Fringe] wanted to contribute to existing debates in art about ethics in general by talking about the ethics of working with documentary, specifically within the art context."

The festival programme is divided into a series of themed strands: Reciprocal Relations (Friday 10 June, 6pm); Willing The Possible (Saturday 11 June, 6pm); Necessary Frames (11 June, 8pm); Ingested Entities (Sunday 12 June, 2pm); and Concrete Utopia (12 June, 4pm). An exhibition screening of Jenni Olson's 2015 film, The Royal Road, runs 13-18 June (2pm & 4pm daily).

Nearly 80% of the films featured in the programme are the result of submissions to an open call. "Whilst the Object Documentary theme was set, the concepts for the individual programmes were fluid, and came to fruition through the open call," says Norouzi.

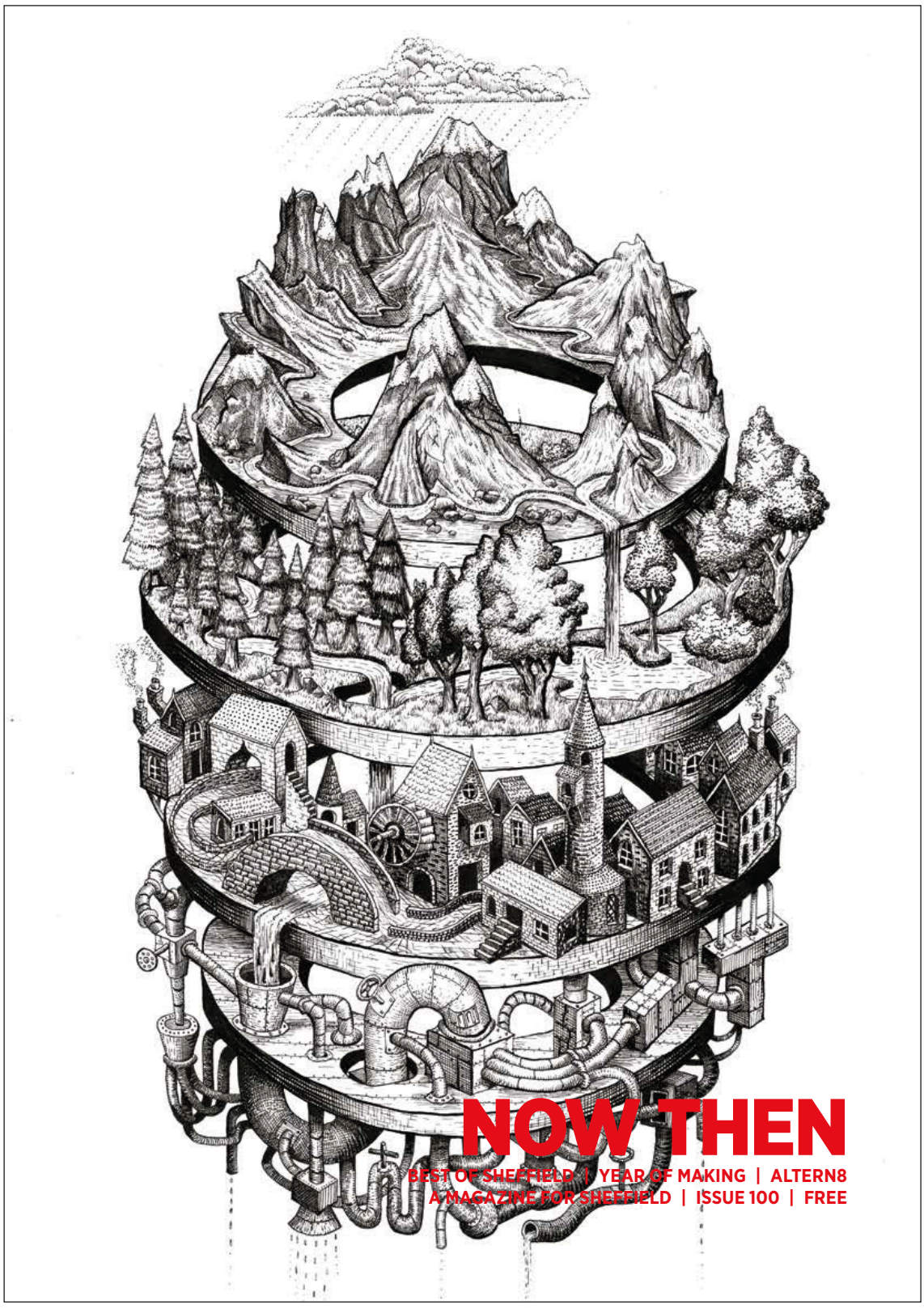
"The submitted films greatly determine the individual curatorial strands. In a way [the films] demand the curatorial context in which they want to be seen. One has to be sensitive to what a film wants; that was my mission when starting Sheffield Fringe, to be sensitive to the film's 'wants', because I often found my own films in a misplaced context."

Bearing in mind the importance of context, what then makes Sheffield Fringe, rather than Sheffield Doc/Fest, the appropriate home for this work? “I could answer simply by saying the films we show are ‘form liberated’ – they don’t follow a convention of documentary or otherwise,” says Norouzi.

“But of course there are also by now conventions within art which artists knowingly or unknowingly follow. So perhaps it’s more productive to say this: The question of what ‘art’ is or does, and even what ‘documentary’ is or does remains open ended. It’s good that there are many perspectives on the definition of both art and documentary – disagreements stimulate debate.”

Sheffield Fringe 2016: Object Documentary is at Bloc Projects, Sheffield, 10-18 June 2016. sheffieldfringe.com

Images:
1. Mairéad McClean, No More, 2014
2. Jenni Olson, The Royal Road, 2015
3. Alistair Macdonald, A Summer Voyage, 2015
4. Sasha Litvintseva, Exile Erotic, 2015



Review: Now Then Magazine, Issue 100, Cover page, July 2016.

EDITORIAL

Given that we're supposed to take a break over summer, we weren't sure if we'd be able to pull our fingers out and get this special 100th issue of Now Then together in time, let alone find the money to print it.

In truth it came right down to the line, but I'm glad we did, because it's been really fun and actually quite emotional digging through the last 99 issues, reflecting on our wins and our losses. As James, one of the founders of Now Then, attests in his piece on page 8, we've had plenty of both over the last eight years.

As a seed tossed hopefully into the grassroots in April 2008, Now Then has grown slowly but surely into something we are all proud of. We knew the soil was rich and fertile, but we were amateur gardeners at best, wielding improvised tools and faithful guesswork. Seasons came and went, and much to our surprise we are still standing.

This magazine is written by the people of Sheffield, for the people of Sheffield, so that makes you the fertiliser. You, who made your voice heard through Now Then. You, who picked it up, read it cover to cover, plastered it on your walls, told your friends. You, who submitted your artwork, your band's first EP, your photos, your opinions, your hopes for the city. You, who put your money where your mouth was, going on to become regular clients, independent allies and good friends.

It might sound overblown, but without you we might have given up on tending to these branches a long time ago. That said, we know there is still plenty of work to do, and we relish the prospect.

We have assembled a dream team line up of past featured artists for this issue, all with links to Sheffield. Elsewhere, we've got a section about Year of Making (p26-31), an extended album reviews section covering our writers' Best of Sheffield selections, interviews with Mark Archer of Altern8 and local net radio station UK Mondo, and more special 100th issue content.

As ever, get in touch if you have something to say. Over and out.

SAM
sam@nowthenmagazine.com

CONTRIBUTORS

EDITOR. SAM WALBY. **MANAGEMENT**. JAMES LOCK. **DESIGN & LAYOUT.** BOBO. **ADVERTISING.** JAMES LOCK. ERIN LAWLOR. **ADMIN & FINANCE.** MARIANNE BOLTON. FELICITY JACKSON. **COPY.** SAM WALBY. IAN PENNINGTON. FELICITY JACKSON. **PHOTOGRAPHY.** JONNY DOUGLAS. INDIA HOBSON. **DISTRIBUTION.** OPUS DISTRIBUTION. **WRITERS.** ALT-SHEFF. COUNCIL AXE. JAMES LOCK. JACK SCOTT. ROS ARKSEY. JOE KRISS. HELEN MORT. KAYO CHINGONYI. GENEVIEVE CARVER. CHRIS ARNOLD. SAM WALBY. SAM GREGORY. ANDY BROWN. CHARD REMAINS. ROBIN DOWNE. ROWAN BLAIR COLVER. DANIELLE MUSTARDE. PAUL GRAHAM RAVEN. BEN ECKERSLEY. NAT JOHNSON. GEORGE SPRINGTHORPE. ALEX FENTON-THOMAS. CHECAN LAROMANI. KRISTOPHER THOMAS. SAMANTHA HOLLAND. ERIN LAWLOR. FELICITY JACKSON.

Cover Artist: Phlegm

NOW THEN 100, JULY 2016

100 NOT OUT

Partners

Supported by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

YEAR OF MAKING SHEFFIELD 2016

Evolutionprint

SHOWROOM WORKSTATION SHEFFIELD

Photo by Laura Page Photography

SHEFFIELD FRINGE

10-18 JUNE, BLOC PROJECTS
SHEFFIELDFRINGE.COM

Running in parallel to the super-slick Doc/Fest, Bloc Projects have held their own exposition of weirder and wilder filmmaking for five years now, free brownies for attendees included. The fringe has a wider remit than its bigger sister, with most films in the programme blurring the lines between fiction, art film and straight-up documentary.

Take, for example, **Tapes From The Revolutionary** by Scott Willis, an attempt to profile an eccentric elderly leftist known for wandering Edinburgh with a camcorder. Perhaps inevitably, the self-declared communist attempts to take over Scott's film for his own purposes, refusing to co-operate unless his dry lectures on the bourgeoisie are filmed verbatim. Eventually the film's focus becomes the process of its own creation, rather than the character of Andy, and he and Scott's on-screen argument as to what direction the project should take calls into question conventional ideas about authorship in art, although, as Willis pointed out in a Q&A, he had the upper hand in the edit suite.

Walk With A Cart Through Upperthorpe (pictured above, and available at vimeo.com/159962181) by Bloc resident Ian Nesbitt charts the turbulent history of one of Sheffield's most deprived neighbourhoods through interviews with a diverse set of residents, from a recently-arrived Burmese family to 99-year-old Dotty, who blames the area's commercial decline on government inaction.

Other films were less than five minutes, like Andrée-Anne Roussel's **Chestnut Cookies**. This short featured a single panoramic shot from a Mount Moiwa cable car above the Japanese city of Sapporo, over which a young woman talked about her late sister and the cookies she used to make. The contrast between the skyscraper-strewn metropolis stretching beyond the horizon and a quiet story of grief was a simple effect but a highly poignant one. Using a similar approach, but for humorous reasons, was Michael Day's **Little Things**, all two minutes of which showed a passenger seat view of a jaw-dropping Norwegian mountain range, over which the car's occupants talked about the banal intricacies of an insurance policy, seemingly unconcerned with their extraordinary surroundings.

Also set in Japan, **Jagata** by Daniel Jacoby told a strange little tale about a Hokkaido man who has chosen to reject public life – one of the country's infamous *hikikomori* – to form a bond with a potato. Whether this bond was romantic, sexual or merely platonic remained unclear, and the man was never seen, his story told through a series of letters read by an unknown narrator. The accompanying images of monorails running backward and labourers constructing greenhouses left us in the dark as to whether 'Jagata' really exists, and how Jacoby sourced the letters.

Sam Gregory

Review: Now Then Magazine, Issue 100, Page 28, July 2016. Writer: Sam Gregory.

sheffieldfringe.com

HOME NEWS PROGRAMMES ARTISTS CONTRIBUTORS SUPPORTERS ABOUT

SHEFFIELD FRINGE

2017 2016 2015 2014 2013 2012 2011

OBJECT! ON THE DOCUMENTARY AS ART - SESSION 1

Saturday 4th February 11.30am

WHITECHAPEL GALLERY
London E1 7QX
Symposium presentations: Erika Balsom, Rosalind Nashashibi, Mairéad McClean
Full details

OBJECT! ON THE DOCUMENTARY AS ART - SESSION 2

Saturday 4th February 2pm

WHITECHAPEL GALLERY
London E1 7QX
Film programme, performance by Hannah C. Jones + discussion with Shela Sheikh
Full details

OBJECT! ON THE DOCUMENTARY AS ART - SESSION 3

Saturday 4th February 4pm

WHITECHAPEL GALLERY
Lomdon E1 7QX
Symposium presentations: Judy Price, Sasha Litvintseva, and Stephen Connolly
Full details

MAIRÉAD MCCLEAN: RERECORDED PASTS

Tuesday 7th February 7.30pm

CLOSE-UP FILM CENTRE
London E1 6HR
Film programme + McClean in conversation with art critic Declan Long
Full details

ROSALIND NASHASHIBI: FILMN YOUR LIFE WITH FASHION

Thursday 9th February 7.30pm

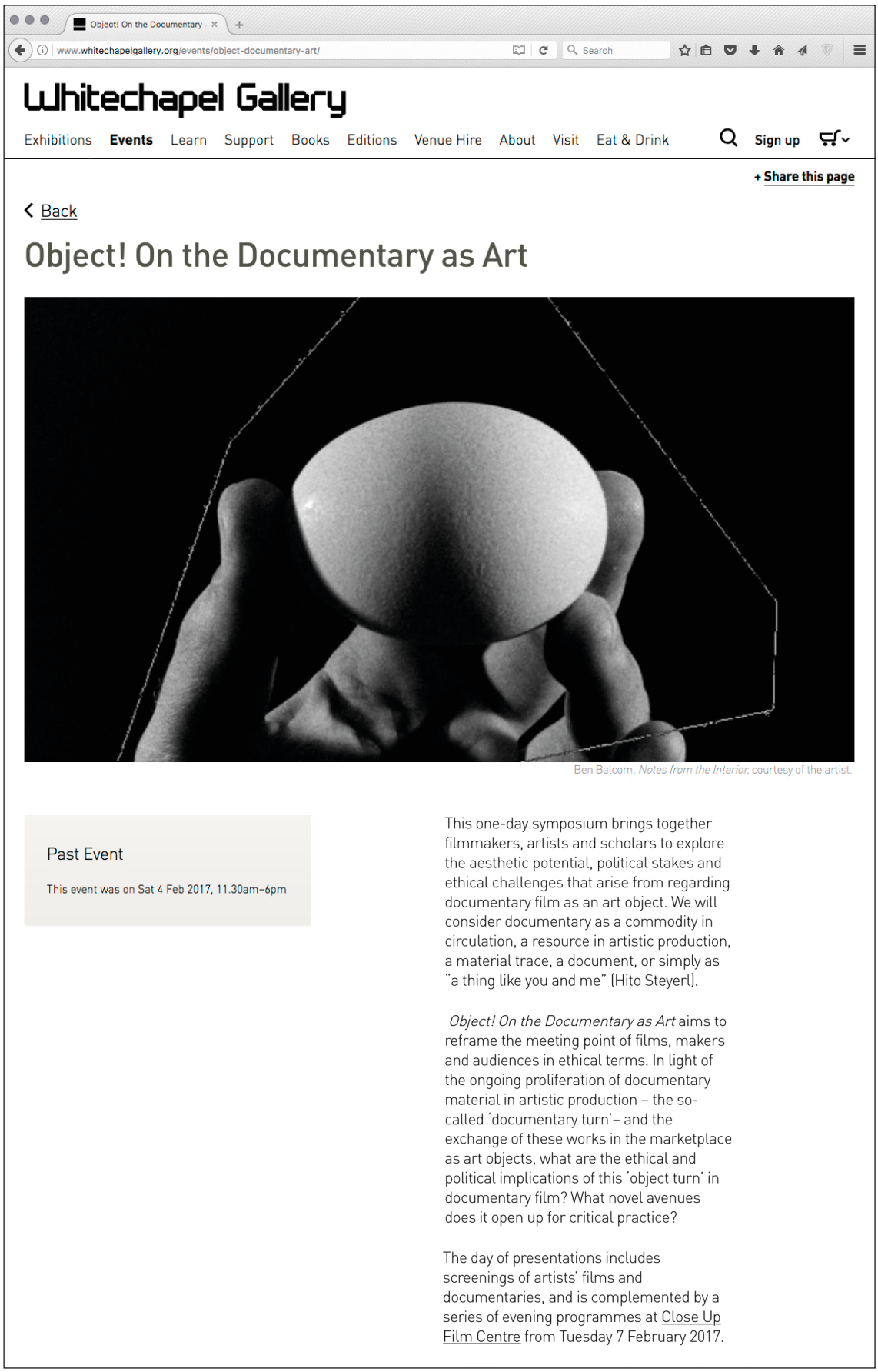
CLOSE-UP FILM CENTRE
London E1 6HR
16mm film screening, and conversation with Rosalind Nashashibi and Dan Kidner
Full details

CONCRETE FUTURES

Wednesday 8th March 7.30pm

CLOSE-UP FILM CENTRE
London E1 6HR
Film programme + Artists' talk with Jasmina Cibic, Sebastian Brameshuber, Thomas Draschan (tbc) and Mihaela Brebenel
Full details

Web publication: Sheffield Fringe 2017, *Object! On the Documentary as Art,* January 2017.



Press announcement: Whitechapel Gallery, *Object! On the Documentary as Art,* January 2017. Writers: Minou Norouzi, Nikolaus Perneczky, Mihaela Brebenel.

Produced in collaboration with Sheffield Fringe, the event is organised by **Minou Norouzi**, **Mihaela Brebenel** and **Nikolaus Perneczky**, with support from Openvizor and the Arts Council England and the Austrian Cultural Forum, London.

Programme

11:00 – 11:30 Registration

11:30 – 1:00 SESSION 1

Keynote by **Erika Balsom** (King's College London) on documentary as a critical method and its predominance in contemporary art. The keynote is followed by a panel presentation and discussion with **Rosalind Nashashibi** and **Mairéad McClean** on the aesthetic potential and ethical challenges of approaching documentary as a material object.

1:00 Lunch

2:00 – 3:30 SESSION 2

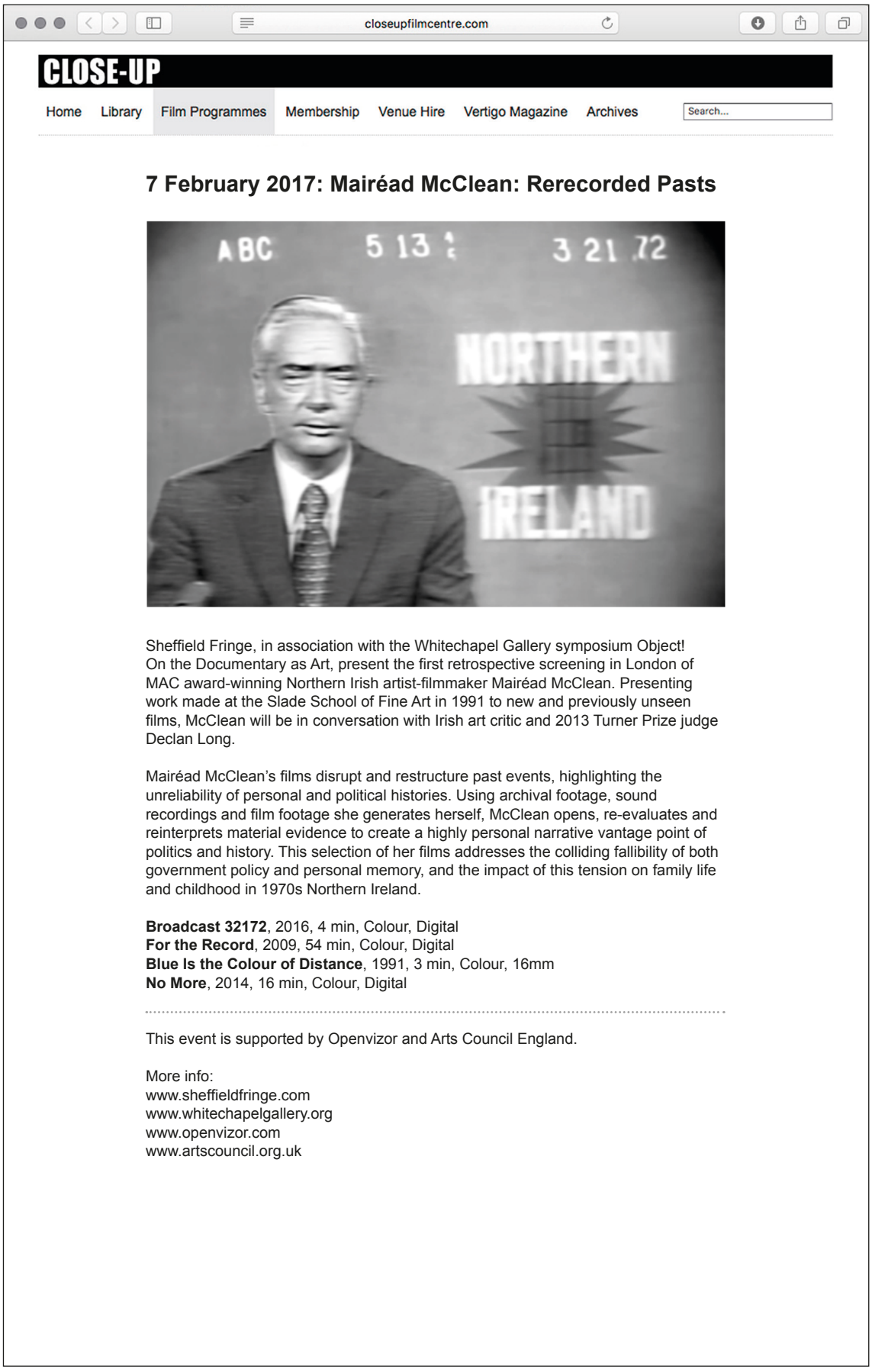
"The Feeling of Being", a programme of artists' films featuring works by **Ben Balcom**, **Hannah Black**, **Wu Tsang**, **Sky Hopinka** and **Neïl Beloufa**, followed by "Owed to Bussa / Owed to Senzeni Na", a live performance by **Hannah Catherine Jones** (aka Foxy Moron) exploring decolonisation and race-relations using vocals, Theremin and video.

3:30 – 4.00 Break

4.00 – 5:30 SESSION 3

Panel presentation and discussion with **Judy Price**, **Stephen Connolly** and **Sasha Litvintseva** on documentary images as traces, their fictions and materiality embedded equally in the production and extraction of histories.

About the organisers



Press announcement: Close-Up Film Centre, *Mairéad McClean: Rerecorded Pasts,* January 2017. Writers: Minou Norouzi, Esther Harris.

closeupfilmcentre.com

CLOSE-UP

Home Library Film Programmes Membership Venue Hire Vertigo Magazine Archives Search...

9 February 2017: Rosalind Nashashibi: FILMN YOUR LIFE WITH FASHION

Sheffield Fringe, in association with the Whitechapel Gallery symposium Object! On the Documentary as Art presents an evening of films by artist-filmmaker Rosalind Nashashibi, surveying her work from 2000-2015. Ahead of her upcoming presentation of new works at documenta 14 in April, this retrospective selection of films - rarely encountered together in the cinema context – will be screened in their original 16mm format, followed by a discussion with Nashashibi.

One way of approaching Rosalind Nashashibi's films is through the prism of observational documentary film. And although the act of looking, as a contemplative yet outward-reaching act, is a big part of the Nashashibi method, it is by no means the only way to read her works.

Nashishibi predominantly uses 16mm film to create intimate perspectives and contemplative pacing, adding to each work an exacting sound design. These sound elements collide with the analogue source material to conjure a visceral, physical viewing experience. In Nashashibi's work, the "real" world "out there" comes into sensuous contact with the viewer's equally real internal world. Considering the progressive obsolescence of small gauge film stock, together with Nashashibi's willingness to tackle subjects as diverse as a Scottish ballet school to the Gaza Strip, the films tease out the how and why of the "real," and the degree of our participation in its construction.

The State of Things, 2000, 3'30 min, Colour, 16mm
Eyeballing, 2005, 10 min, Colour, 16mm
Bachelor Machines Part 2, 2007, 5 min, Colour 16mm
This Quality, 2010, 5 min, Colour, 16mm
Carlo's Vision, 2011, 11 min, Colour, 16mm
Lovely Young People, 2012, 13'30 min, Colour 16mm
Electrical Gaza, 2015, 17'53 min, Colour, Digital

This event is supported by Openvizor, and the Arts Council England. With special thanks to LUX.

More info:
www.sheffieldfringe.com
www.whitechapelgallery.org
www.openvizor.com
www.artscouncil.org.uk
www.lux.org.uk

Press announcement: Close-Up Film Centre, *Rosalind Nashashibi: FILMN YOUR LIFE WITH FASHION,* January 2017. Writers: Minou Norouzi, Esther Harris.

closeupfilmcentre.com

CLOSE-UP

Home Library Film Programmes Membership Venue Hire Vertigo Magazine Archives Search...

8 March 2017: Concrete Futures

Tear Down and Rebuild, Jasmina Cibic, 2015, 15'27 min, Colour, Digital
Concrete Affection (Zopo Lady), Kiluanji Kia Henda, 2014, 12'30 min, Digital
Preserving Cultural Traditions in a Period of Instability, Sebastian Brameshuber & Thomas Draschan, 2004, 3 min, Colour, Digital
Sueñan los androides, Ion de Sosa, 2014, 60 min, Colour, Digital

"Since nature is uncomfortable, violent, we resort to architecture. We build monuments, houses, whole cities… And suddenly, it seems legitimate to rape the earth, to extract what we need from it. To construct a place and make it a home. A fortress where we cultivate our affections." – *Concrete Affection*

Presented by Sheffield Fringe, Concrete Futures brings together films that deal with fiction and imagination, inviting encounters with speculative futures, which are nonetheless grafted onto the present, 'documentary' moment that haunts them. Moreover, through the use of images as documents and as drivers of the imagination, Serbian, Angolan and Spanish cityscapes are connected in a type of speculative haunting.

This haunting is expressed in the superimposition of images of construction and evacuation, of tearing down and rebuilding. By tearing down or leaving behind, old sites are revealed. And by rebuilding, one does not construct anew but instead returns to the terrains that already were there. In that sense, no conquering – symbolic or concrete – of lands or, for that matter, of our imaginations and affections, will ever be truly a form of building but instead remains haunted by its own violence. The screening is followed by a discussion with Jasmina Cibic.

This programme is presented in collaboration with the Whitechapel Gallery symposium Object! On the Documentary as Art. With generous support by Openvizor, the Arts Council England, and the Austrian Cultural Forum, London

More info:
www.sheffieldfringe.com
www.whitechapelgallery.org
www.openvizor.com
www.artscouncil.org.uk

Press announcement: Close-Up Film Centre, *Concrete Futures,* February 2017. Writer: Mihaela Brebenel.