Crisis response unit: matters of aesthetics and construction in documentaries of the 2007/8 financial crash and the Great Recession

DB Daniel Brookes

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the University's requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

2019
University of Worcester

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the particularity of visual and audio aesthetics and the construction of narrative, place, and character in the documentaries that have emerged since the financial crash of 2007/8 historicises and politicises the crash and subsequent recession in types of political and historical thought particular to the development of the chosen documentary mode. On a more general level I argue that matters of aesthetics and construction in documentary, considerations often wrapped up in debates that position their existence as a removal or lessening of truth, have the capability of deepening matters of truth by its ability to communicate its invisible dimensions.

I develop this argument utilising a heuristic device that begins in the mimetic, the notional ground of the documentary, gradually moving toward avant-garde documentary via polemics, anti-mimetics, and poetics. Each chapter presents one of these distinct documentary modes that has come to respond to the financial crash, containing a history of the evolution of the mode in terms of the relationship between theory and practice, and an overview of the favoured aesthetics and construction methods of that mode. Each of the modes that I identify in each chapter has received significant amounts of criticism that neutered their potential – realism and ethnography as 'mere' observation, polemical as partisan entertainment, the poetic as ruin porn, and the avant-garde as indulgent and bourgeois play. I argue that utilisation of most of these modes still signify and retain power to expose and reveal, particularly in modes whose method is foregrounded.

Within each chapter I perform analytic readings of key films such as Lauren Greenfield's *The Queen of* Versailles (2012), Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's *Detropia* (2012), and Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow* (2017) alongside adjacent works that contain similar patterns, tropes, and ideas. Moving between historic antecedents and close analysis on the particularity of each text, I trace the connecting utilisations of particular techniques and narrative strategies between the past and present in order to suggest their ramifications in terms of the political and the traumatic.

Exploring ideas of aesthetics and construction in financial crash and recession documentary takes a different critical path than has been taken as yet in this corpus of films. In considering these documentaries as aesthetic objects rather than bearers of truth or reality, my work reflects upon the range of possibilities that have opened up in the mutating field of documentary in the twenty-first century. Individual journal essays in the current decade have begun the work of examining individual films aesthetically, or tackling small corpuses of regional documentaries for their political exigencies. However, this project is the first to combine a methodology and device that seeks to capture the breadth of the range of crash and recession documentaries.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of my own original research and all of the written work and investigations are entirely my own. Where the work of others is involved is clearly acknowledged and referenced.

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in this thesis has been submitted for another degree or qualification of any comparable award at this, or any other, university or learning institute.

Signed: Daniel Brookes

Date: 17th October 2019

Amended: 13th July 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to thank the University of Worcester for making funding available in order to carry out this study. I appreciate that in these precarious times of austerity there is less of a drive toward critical arts-humanities projects; doubly so for a project which critiques this time. Nonetheless, without this backing the project would never have been realised.

Dr. Paul Elliott was my Director of Studies and main point of contact for the four years that this project has taken to wrap up. His firm encouragement, both overt and covert, has driven me to sane completion. In a wider - and much more important - sense, Paul has been good, consistent, and humane in his dealings with me and my work and has developed me professionally and personally. Whatever the future of the project, I am greatly enriched for the time spent working alongside him.

I would like to thank Natalie Hughes for her love, patience, and multiple kindnesses during the writing of this thesis. Whether it was with a well-timed joke or listening to a half-formed idea, Natalie was unfailingly *there*. Everything was made easier as a result. Love you, N.

My parents, Tommy and Judith, instilled within me the love of education that led me down this path. Though by now they probably wish I'd just get on with having a job. Nonetheless, they remained incredibly supportive throughout.

I would also like to thank the following people for their practical help and general support during this project: Gwendoline Barlow, Paul Bennett, Dr. Linnie Blake, John Bradburn, Matthew Evans, Chris Faulkner, Joanna Jervis, Dr. Mikel Koven, Matthew Leonard, Alex Mazonowicz, Erika Melek Delgado, Garry McBerryhill, Alexandra Paulin-Booth, Eóin Phillips, Fr. Sydney Riley, Frank Riley, Liam Riley, Day Riley, Jude Riley, Kendall Shields, TOM, and Olly Winkles.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> Documentary practice and theory have always had a problem with aesthetics – or to be more precise with aestheticisation. (Bruzzi, 2006. p. 9)

Crisis response unit: matters of aesthetics and construction in documentaries of the 2007/8 financial crash and the Great Recession addresses texts responding to what might be considered, at the time of writing, the most recent major global event. The legacy of this crash and its subsequent recession has spread globally, its invisible hand invoked in substantial changes to jobs and the economy, the built environment, domestic and transnational politics, health, and education.

According to a broad consensus of politics- and economics-led reflections on the crash, the tendrils of the policy-making that led to the financial crash of 2007/8 were long-established. Thinkers on the matter suggest that its origins lie in the deregulation frenzy of the 1980s and 1990s (McLean and Nocera, 2010; Irwin, 2013; Calomiris and Haber, 2014), as far back as Richard Nixon in the 1970s (Tooze, 2018), or even earlier in the twentieth century (Duménil and Lévy, 2011). Invocations of the Great Depression of the 1920s and/or the 'stagflation' crisis of the 1970s as both critique of capitalism and suggestion of disposition toward disaster in collective human psychology (James, 2009; Samuelson, 2011; Varoufakis, 2019) are not uncommon either. Whilst it is important to have this in mind, as various films and directors that I look at will also draw on this historical context, this research begins with the financial crisis of 2007/8 and moves forward in time.

Studying the financial crash and the recession neatly intersects with a survey of recent documentary developments. The ascent and sprawl of documentary in the 21st century – in terms of box office, public reach, democratisation, and its embedding in both traditional and non-traditional

media flows – has seen this particular region of filmic production achieve near ubiquity.[1] Terrestrial television, the cosmopolitan art cinema, broadcast news, radical groups organising political resistance, and nascent YouTube stars are all involved in documentary production to a large degree. Furthermore, whether the various individuals and groups that I mention in this paragraph (and more besides) are self-consciously aware of this or not, all of these documentarians are engaged in the construction of character and narrative and the utilisation and refinement of aesthetics. Whilst not simply a device utilised to perform this kind of long-form study, the financial crash is not the subject of critique: documentary is.

As a series of analytical considerations of three interlacing issues within contemporary documentary - the historicising dimension of aesthetics and construction, the representation and manipulation of the internal and the traumatic, and the politics and politicisation of the images of crash and recession - *Crisis response team* ultimately emphasises and valourises the necessity of design consciousness and creative thinking in tackling consequential issues using documentary. The contribution that this work makes to Film Studies and documentary thought is that of a project seeking to consider at a more finely-grained level issues pertaining to aesthetics and construction in non-fictional and documentary film that move beyond postmodern surface play or the suggestion that aesthetics are a crude imposition upon factuality and reality. This thesis contends that 'construction' – of narrative, character, and situation – and the utilisation of carefully chosen visual and audio aesthetics in documentary can be considered coterminous with instantiations of that truth.

1 Even from this opening sentence, the astute reader will notice that I am already grappling with exactly what to call documentary. The complexity, sophistication, and inclination toward mutation (Corner, 2003, p. 93) of documentary renders unstable any descriptor. To regard documentary as 'form' implies a prescribed tendency and series of expectations as one might garner from fictional genre cinema in a way that disregards or closes down readings of works whose hybridity negates strict categorisation. By the same token considering documentary a 'mode' in terms of a spirit of inquiry, as Bill Nichols would have it, reads outputs through intentions in a manner not always appropriate for a necessarily reactive form of filmmaking. Neither is documentary a genre, given its tendency to overturn customary accretions and accepted practice methods in the stirring of new political paradigms and technological possibilities. Documentary in 2019 then, if not completely ineffable, is a diffuse and diverse beast.

In this thesis I will survey the vast range of documentaries that attempt to capture some aspect of either crash, recession, or both. Using cine-textual analysis in conjunction with historical-material considerations in the development of documentary aesthetics, with a particular focus on the ways in which documentary has responded to crisis, I argue that depictions of the financial crash display a literacy of historical antecedent in a range of artistic forms which comes to constitute a significant aspect of its reading. Moreover, I argue that understanding aestheticisation and constructedness in light of its ability to connect with interlinked discourses goes some way toward resolving considerations of documentary that cast 'the real' and 'aestheticisation' as oppositional poles.

In short: this thesis considers aestheticisation as a potential bearer of truth in itself rather than an aspect within the text that merely accentuates or complicates the emotional powers of the reality it is juxtaposed with. The belief that truth and artistic devices are separate entities arises most definitively in Aristotle's *Rhetoric.* Aristotle understood that in presenting an argument, truth would pass through a language that would seek to entrance or arouse pleasure in its recipient, writing

> Of the pisteis, some are atechnic ["non-artistic"], some entechnic ["embodied in art, artistic"]. I call atechnic those that are not provided by "us" [i.e. the potential speaker] but are pre-existing: for example, witnesses, testimony of slaves taken under torture, contracts, and such like; and artistic whatever can be prepared by method and by "us"; thus, one must *use* the former and *invent* the latter. (2001, p. 117-118)

Even in realms of filmmaking that prized the artistic and invented over the recreation of reality, Aristotle's view is intuited at a deeper psychological level. Chapter five considers the abandonment of the avant-garde by socialist-minded filmmakers in the 1920s in order to fight fascism via realism, rejecting the entechnics of poetics and overt aesthetics for witnessing and testimony. As I will show in the chapters to come, the rough schema of Aristotle underpins the theoretical view of much of the writing that exists on documentary aesthetics. The interests, views

and skill of the persuader, the balance of the relationship between the atechnic and entechnic, or whether it is an argument that rests on pathos, logic, timeliness, or ideology may ultimately differ and account for textual difference. Documentary is the contemporary visual form of rhetoric: reality in the form of testimony, data, and prior action conforming to the exploitations and manipulations of the persuader.

This thesis differs by contending that these manipulations can be equally illuminating in terms of accessing truth. Looking at documentaries of this historical situation utilising this method in order to consider aesthetics and constructedness of documentary is practicable and useful precisely because of the internal dimension suggested by the 'effects' of a crisis. In photographic studies and documentaries which utilise visuals and audio of traditional regions of traumatic study, such as war, there is neither a collective act of witnessing to draw testimony from and very little legacy of physical ruin to capture in the financial crash and recession. Therefore the methodology chosen is designed to capture the evocations of the internal that emerge as much through aesthetic and narrative manipulations of the filmmaker as the naked reality of the captured image or recorded sound.

Literature

The specific claims that I make depart from those of Stella Bruzzi, who viewed aestheticisation as a component of documentaries that rejected the realism that took root in documentary in the middle of the 20th century in order to self-consciously explore the real through its proposed antithesis: artificiality and construction. Bruzzi, in the monograph from which I take this introduction's epigraph, expands upon John Corner's astute observation that in the consideration of documentary there lies an apparently irresolvable issue wherein "the extent to which a concern with formal attractiveness 'displaces' the referential such as to make the subject

itself secondary to its formal appropriation." (1996, p. 123) For Bruzzi, no longer are these aesthetic matters "clandestine components" (2006, p. 9): aesthetics are acknowledged, developed, and consciously deployed.

As this research will show, from the very outset of documentary practice, aesthetic matters never were simply 'clandestine components' at any point. That the politics of aestheticisation in documentary emerge nearly at the commencement of documentary as practice is documented; that the works of early documentary practitioners communicated a truth that emerged in the 'style' of the work rather than its 'substance'[2].

Furthermore, the documentary matches fictional cinema in requiring a kind of reading that is sensitive to artistic matters as much as it requires historical understanding and an active sense of empathy in its viewer. At a general level, research that focuses on documentary aesthetic has treated the appearance of "art properties" within a text notionally of the real as a separate category or something which affects the real and substantial matter in a negative way. The broader concerns in John Corner's 2003 essay 'Television, Documentary and the category of the aesthetic' are situated in the context of television documentary, which he observes is predominately unconcerned with aesthetic experience, in the context of artistic refinement. Within this medium, Corner suggests, there is no concern "with promoting an appreciative sense of its creative crafting in the audience" (p. 93) and that strong content alone is generally considered by this medium to be sufficient. Corner surveys the history of documentary aesthetics, examining the stylish early works of Edgar Anstey and John Grierson, noting how "Grierson himself can be seen to veer around a good deal on the balance and priorities to be struck" (2003, p. 94) to suggest something of trade-off when it comes to questions of truth and aesthetics.

2 Chapter 5 deals with this, examining the early work of Joris Ivens.

On the one hand Corner is correct. Documentary concerns itself with a shared reality around which certain facts are selected and shared and remain inviolable. On the other hand, regarding aesthetics with distancing suspicion treats with light regard the capability of an aesthetic and active construction as a means to speak parallel truths; to treat that which is constructed by the director or producers not merely as decorative or poetic but in tune with the subject matter at hand to an intuitive degree wherein truth becomes a more holistic truth than dry reportage of facts. Is *Night Mail* (1936) merely a film about a postal train with notable aesthetic incursions through W. H. Auden's poetry and Benjamin Britten's music, or is there in fact a deeper synthesising of wider debates of cinematic antecedent and national character within these pointed choices that is part of a grander textual and intertextual truth that plays out in the fullness of time?

The argument that I make regarding an intermeshing of truth and aesthetic is not, of course, entirely original. Nor is it limited to John Keats' aphoristic 'beauty is truth, and truth beauty' from 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Julia Lesage invests a lot of thought into these considerations in her 1978 essay 'Political aesthetics of feminist documentary film'. Referencing John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, Lesage considers the typical forms of female presentation in the historical nude image against the unromanticised view of the same essential image in Catherine Allen, Judy Irola, Allie Light, and Joan Musante's *Self Health* (1974). Lesage notes how the *mise-en-scène* and image of a collective of women creates "a sense of warmth, intimacy, and friendliness" (2016, p. 671) that critiques patriarchal views of women's bodies by presenting the nude in an aesthetic style that acts as demystification. The style and the substance cannot, therefore, entirely be in disalignment, as the aesthetic difference in presentation of simular factualities is precisely the point. Lesage argues that these works differ from their immediate antecedent by dint of the subject which they capture and the positionality of those who capture it arising as a result of "subject and filmmaker sharing the same political goals of the project." (p. 674) As the fifth chapter of this thesis shows in more depth, Coco Fusco has claimed that the particular political character and truth positioning of radical black

British documentaries is similarly interlaced with its aesthetic. Additionally, Philip Brian Harper's 1995 essay 'The Subjective Position of Documentary Video' sharply illuminates the ways in which masculinity, race, and sexuality disentangle themselves in the works of Marlon Riggs' reconstructions of pre-existing visual moments that sought to caricature black people in *Ethnic Notions* (1987), or in the way that *Tongues Untied* (1989) tells a story about the lives of gay men in America through an ironic and anatomical unpacking of its subjects' shared gestures.

I would like to bring examples of the interlacing of truth and aesthetics closer to the particular remit of this thesis. Considering more topic specific approaches in financial crash and documentary shows that though existing research in the area has accumulated during the assembly of this thesis, there is no monograph or anthology of essays which exclusively survey financial crash and austerity documentaries as a whole, let alone through the aperture of matters of aesthetics and filmic construction. Journal essays and articles have appeared in the wake of the crash that hint at a revelatory potential in depiction of the hidden truths and ambiguities of financial crash and recession. Alasdair King's 'Documenting financial performativity: film aesthetics and financial crisis' approaches Marc Bauder's *Master of the Universe* (2013) in a post-Bruzzi mode, focusing on a Butlerian mode of inquiry that suggests that there is a 'financial performativity' (2016, p. 555) in the management class.[3] King succinctly argues that the aesthetics of Bauder's documentary, with symbolic and loaded imagery surrounding the substantive interviews with an influential banker figure, comes together in a way that suggests ambivalence or a note of suspicion to the subject's testimony. King's article parallels interestingly with Andrea Werner's 2014 analysis of the fictional *Margin Call*, approaching business and ethics of the crash with a performance-minded methodology that draws from Judith Butler's notion of performative agency and the ways in which state and

3 Performativity in documentary has continued to attract academic interest in the wake of Stella Bruzzi's writings, with various sub-regions of documentary appraised in terms of an artificial element in performance of subjects or directors, such as the first-person stunt documentary (Kenny, 2009), the long-form social documentary known collectively as the *Up!* Series (Marquis, 2013), and memoirs of personal experience (Meneghetti, 2015). Joshua Oppenheimer's own performance theory-inspired documentary *The Act of Killing* (2013) was preceded by an anthology co-edited by Oppenheimer on the performance of violence in documentary (Ten Brink and Oppenheimer, 2012). More in chapter four.

economic power has a totalising effect on the individual that "produces ontological effects that […] lead to certain kinds of socially-binding consequences." (2010, p. 147) Aestheticisation in King's view of *Master* does not necessarily elide the truth. Rather, the aestheticised and lightly ironic work performed in scenes intercut with the interview with the central figure act as parallel commentary in a critical, if slightly perfunctory, way.

As I have done in my research, there have been academics who have identified corpuses of recession documentaries in order to join together regions of collective action against austerity measures. In Eurozone countries whose national politics veered leftward in the wake of the financial crash, such as Greece and Spain, documentary capturing the crash and austerity adopted a similarly committed stance. Writers on documentary following trends in these nations followed suit, arguing passionately for documentary that shed light on collective action. Greek documentary response features primarily in a section of the third chapter, with Eleftheria Lekakis' 2017 essay 'Documentary, media activism and anti-austerity in Greece: the #greekdocs archive' identifying a corpus of fifty Greek documentaries that approach crash and austerity in a manner unabashed about negating 'neutrality' in order to capture reality through prominent political orientation and focus on a particular cultural milieu. Lekakis does not consider aesthetics, nor does Manuel de la Fuente in his 2017 essay 'Documenting the indignation: responses to the 2008 financial crisis in contemporary Spanish cinema'. The essay observes how a pair of Spanish documentaries – *Mercado de futuro* (2011) and *No estamos solos* (2015) – opt for a collective protagonist that for the author "leads the narration in opposition to the Hollywood fiction model." (2017, p. 192) De la Fuente inserts these two films into a long-established canon of political documentaries that stretch from Dziga Vertov and Joris Ivens all the way to present luminaries such as Michael Moore. Though the history is approximately accurate, de la Fuente's sense of mission overrides more finely-grained aesthetic considerations. The films Lekakis brings together, along with de la Fuente's consideration of *No estamos solos* share a style, mixing rough handheld footage of protests and

public gatherings with urgent non-hierarchical testimony and emotive music. They are earnest, adaptable, and carry a sense of spontaneity that responds to real events. They are also credulous and uncritical, powered by a strong sense of a 'good' and 'bad' side formulated prior to picking up a camera. That they lack the democratic long takes of the Direct Cinema practitioner, the dialectical force of Vertov, the avant-garde foundation of Ivens, or even the humour of Moore may make them appear more reliable as social documents to remember resistance narratives of austerity by. Nonetheless, de la Fuente does not attempt to consider the ways in which aestheticisation of Vertov's energetic montage plays a part in shaping understanding, and the pronounced ways in which the left-wing political canon he outlines differed. Frustratingly, nor do de la Fuente's two mentions of Sergei Eistenstein mention the Soviet tradition of the collective protagonist and the meanings bound up in this historical anti-Hollywood act of aestheticisation. The work that I perform in this thesis deepens the collective analysis performed by Lekakis and de la Fuente by bringing to bear textual readings that account for not merely aesthetics, but judicious consideration of the historical utilisations of visual, audio, and narrative elements.

Construction and aesthetic matters account for a considerable aspect of James Lyons' upcoming monograph *Documentary, Performance and Risk.* Lyons maintains a keen eye for compositional matters in a recent corpus of documentaries, including a chapter on financial crash documentary *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2010), that display the ways that documentary utilises sharp technique in order to direct to wider stories. Though Lyons is ultimately focused upon the ways in which documentary conveys a particular dramatic aspect rather than a more holistic account of aesthetics and their function, his work homes in on subtle moments in the edit on which senses of meaning hinge. Noting a particular sequence of an attempted eviction, Lyons writes

> in the fourth and fifth shots he is shown speechless. Spliced between another excerpt of Sandra's conversation with the now departing carpenter, imploring him 'maybe you can make another choice', these shots simply linger on the man's face, a portrait of calmly dignified, but clearly stunned resignation. The cut on the word 'choice' […] a key term in

> the lexicon of neoliberalism as it has colonized everyday speech, is particularly freighted. (p. 15, n.d)

The examination of this short sequence reveals much more than critics gave Moore's film credit for upon its initial release, revealing deeper layers that require closer reading than may have been noted on an initial watch. Lyons' analysis understands how the real in documentary is continually undergoing a process of aestheticisation and remains connected and subservient to a constellation of dialogues existing beyond the text. Moore's collision of the face of dignified resignation with the word 'choice' does not happen in the same spatio-temporal instant. Therefore I argue that the effect, if not merely the intentionality, of this collision must be considered in as much depth as existing postulations on the extra-filmic Michael Moore extending from the primary text. Furthermore, Lyons shows the subtle (and sometimes not-so subtle) ways in which spoken testimony and dialogue can be cut and shaped to create linkages and reference debates which lie parallel to what is being shown or heard. It is this kind of analysis performed in moments by Lyons, moving between the particular of the filmic moment and debates that exist in parallel to the pro-filmic moment of the text, that I bring to bear within this thesis. Lyons' analysis reveals a political potency in cine-literacy: his analysis of Moore treats the filmed event both as material subject to manipulation in the process of documentary production whilst retaining understanding of the material and historical situation. Lyons' work makes for a holistic reading of a text without wading into the thicket of specific truth claims and fact-checking that peppers critique of Moore. It is this kind of analysis that I seek to deepen and broaden in this project.

To address potential concern that would suggest that focusing on aesthetic matters in the face of the serious lived consequences of global financial crisis could be argued to be ultimately postmodern in nature, thus ignoring the serious and traumatic. It is true that the research that I have carried out considers surfaces and the ways that they are adjoined in documentary rather than weighing up the truthfulness of their assertions, the impactfulness of their emotive testimony, or

overly investigating the performativity present within the text. Furthermore I assert that, in technologically-liberated and media literate times, after the weight of documentary history has brought multiple stylistic possibilities to bear when approaching reality, documentarians choose an aesthetic in order to historicise the events depicted along the lines of the historical utilisation of that particular type of documentary. For example: a realist documentary of the financial crash, as I will argue in the first chapter, seeks not only to utilise the immediacy and 'unmediated' sensibility developed in the Direct Cinema reality boom to convey a certain intimacy and democratic positionality, but to connect to the political sensibility that Direct Cinema and cinema verite evokes, as well as incorporating wider discourses surrounding realism. A documentary filmmaker no more naturally takes to Direct Cinema-inspired realism than a visual artist takes to abstract painting. Whilst this line of argument infers that documentary practitioners approach different film-making modes as mere surfaces to create particular kinds of impact rather than maintaining an authentic cultural disposition toward them, this line of argument only goes so far. Given the factual and therefore substantial nature of documentary contained in the lived reality it often relates to and the traumatic aspect that potentially lies within, the completion of documentary works retaining any consistent aesthetic is a hallmark of commitment (though, as we will see, not always a sign of good faith).

Indeed, the seriousness that I grant the truth-carrying potential laden within acts of aestheticisation and filmic construction is an attempt to overcome the limitations of postmodern critique (or rather, critique of postmodernity). In the second chapter I outline political battles that have been fought through documentary in an age considered to be 'post-truth'. In suggesting that the aesthetic mode chosen by documentarians in the present accords with the evocation of the political moment that gave birth to the style, I am arguing for a connectivity between the past and present that links via differing conceptions of truthfulness.

Chapter outline

The heuristic device that this thesis is structured around may suggest to the reader a traditional taxonomy. This is resolutely not the case. Hybridity in contemporary documentary is rife, with no producer of documentaries of the financial crash and recession that I am aware of adhering to a known manifesto or set of stated artistic guidelines in the ways that those involved in documentary movements from the avant-gardists of the 1920s to the New Documentary makers of the 1970s and 1980s were fond of. Therefore these artificial boundaries are realistic and workable, but nonetheless porous. Case-by-case analysis, given the torrent of documentaries which respond to this event or trace its effects, is impractical and risks interminable repetition. The device is a creative structure deployed to gradually move away from an 'unfiltered' or anti-poetic view of real life by a gradual accumulation of aesthetic devices, finishing with the experimental and avant-garde documentary. These latter works, just as their realist counterparts, may feature apparently unmediated footage and real lives, but the introduction and foregrounding of aesthetic devices, political suspiciousness about realism as a representative mode, and ancillary debates regarding the artistic object transport this type of documentary into a different space.

Other historians of documentary have resisted traditional chronological approaches in their analyses. A similar grouping strategy has been deployed in Erik Barnouw's *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film* (1993), with each chapter heading related to the overarching use, tone, or mood of the documentaries examined within e.g 'Advocate', 'Guerilla', 'Painter'. Barnouw's chronicle, examining from the pre-cinematograph filmic advances of the 19th century to the sophisticated and multi-faceted mid-20th century panorama, marries aesthetic and political matters with the intentionality perceived (or overtly expressed) within. Barnouw's approach therefore differs from Richard Barsam's chronologically-focused narrative in his *Non-Fiction Film* (1992), whose history is more conventionally told. However, Barsam's depth on expressive matters become limited through use of sidebar to explain particular or geographical developments that

complicate timelines. Though my work focuses on a smaller timeline with a articulable starting point in history, rather quickly the aesthetic approaches to financial crash differ and mutate in different geographical and political spaces. Therefore, a grouping in the vein of Erik Barnouw or Bill Nichols' and his 'types' of documentary is more apposite than a conventional history in approaching this recent corpus.

Encoded in my heuristic device is a general postulation about the way that unmediated reality becomes, in the slippages of time and memory travelling away from the event, a gradually smaller aspect of the construction of the documentary about the event representing a passage from the particular to the universal. Documentaries of traumatic events, I argue, begin in realism and the charting of material effects and lived spaces and traverse toward antithesis in the experimental and the understanding of interior effects and the existence of limned or theoretical spaces. Between these epistemic extremes appear documentaries that treat reality in radically different ways.

The first chapter of this research tackles what is notionally considered the traditional 'ground' of the documentary: realism and the real. In order to establish the pre-cinematic legacy of realism, I outline the particular social context of the realist artist emerging from industrial Europe; partially counterposed to Romanticism but ultimately a form of bourgeois spectatorship with a developed consciousness of class formation that realised the need to develop a particular language to capture the experiences of capitalist economies. I suggest key theoretical developments in György Lukács and André Bazin go some way toward granting realism primacy as an artistic mode that captures 'real essences' of social issues, with documentary finally seeing a full realisation of these aims in the technological liberation of handheld cameras and lightweight sound recording that kicked off the Direct Cinema and cinema verite wave of the 1950s and 1960s. These practitioners saw aesthetics and construction as antithetical to best capture an unfiltered truth. And yet, as I argue, building on Jeanne Hall's perceptive work on Robert Drew's *Primary* (1960), realism and

works constructed around a ‘non-aesthetic’ utilise visual signifiers and narrative convention in order to orientate the viewer within a text that may not use traditional means (e.g. narration, intertitles) of spatial and chronological development.

After a brief consideration of Austin and Brian Chu’s realist documentary *The Recess Ends* (2008), in which I identify a similar kind of strategy that Jeanne Hall identifies in *Primary* that utilises classical cinematic grammar and what Roland Barthes refers to as “image rhetoric”, I then move on to outline the ways in which realism has elided ‘reality’, the documentary style that exploded in the 21st century across various media. This is important to consider given that, just as documentary form is, realism and the real are prone to change and reconstitution. I provide an outline of the utilisation of the realist documentary mode as it has merged with genre television since the 1950s, suggestive of a particular thrill at images of the real that revives fictive modes in need of refreshing. The final section of the chapter takes an in-depth look at Lauren Greenfield’s realism/reality hybrid documentary *The Queen of Versailles* (2012), a film which began as a profile of a celebrity in the vein of television shows such as *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (2008-) and, with the financial crash occurring during filming, becomes a text that observes the wealthy and those in their orbit. Greenfield’s text marries realism in terms of both ‘real, unfiltered action’ and a sense of spatial and temporal geography remaining familiar and unified. However, Greenfield amplifies the rhetorical strategies identified by Hall, utilising rhetorical devices and visual grammar to tap into historical depictions of the idle rich and the pre-revolutionary moment. Indeed, whilst the film straddles the realist/reality line throughout, it is precisely through Greenfield’s observation of visual and spoken ironies that play out in front of the lens where the critique of financial crash lies.

Chapter two moves onto the political or polemic documentary, with a particular interest in performance and experimentation with form and style in documentaries grounded in postmodern thought since the 1990s. Of particular interest here are the ways in which the potential that was felt

to exist in playful documentaries which questioned the reliability of official truths became gerrymandered and made to serve oppositional purposes. Postmodern thinkers saw official discourses collapsing and grand narratives failing, with individual disciplines able to pursue their own logics. Documentary, which had long prized the value of truthfulness ahead of overt aesthetic questions, began to exhibit a growing interest in the nuances that different visual and montage styles, notably those traditionally associated with fictional film and the detachment of art practice, could add to the medium. New Documentary films made subject of unknowability and hierarchy of meaning construction, turning critique on the media itself.

Alongside an overview of political documentary and the postmodern in order to give a sense of their independent isolation before their intersection, I consider key works in this area. The major focus is on the work of Michael Moore both as a director and a progenitor of a type of political satire that has come to inflect the work of mainstream political documentaries across the spectrum. Moore's synthesising aesthetic, a postmodern beast which mixes first-person narrative, hard-hitting political reportage, comedic sketches and parody, as well as perceived sleight of hand regarding matters of truthfulness, has seen his work become the most successful, most criticised, and most copied style of documentary in the 21st century. This chapter articulates the role of political documentary in a polarised age in which the real is rendered subservient to belief, and the ways that the documentary can be weaponised and instrumentalised. Indeed, in documentaries that I analyse by liberal documentary makers Moore, Michael Winterbottom, and right-wing political strategist Steve Bannon, the role of the financial crash and recession is to provide a locus around which to stage already-existing partisan debates that have opened up in the 'Culture Wars'.

The third chapter investigates a range of documentaries which utilise anti-realist stylistic incursions into factual film-making in way that attempts to penetrate into more abstract realms of interiority and shared feeling within cultures and sub-cultures. I term these documentaries anti-

mimetic: suspicious of the idea that real life *per se* can be represented, self-conscious of the role of the self in meaning creation, and open-minded to the interventions of parallel disciplines and differing methodologies. Applied to documentaries that trace effects of recession such as emasculating and restrictive working conditions and the decline of consumer power, phenomena that can be understood but not easily depicted without recourse to graphics and an abundance of interviews, I argue that these ethnographically-informed documentaries have a quiet power that emerges from an initially oblique approach. To this end I look at two films that appear different on the surface that nonetheless indulge in a form of self-reflexivity that folds in additional discourses in order to extend the range of their critique of the structural entities that lead to suffering in recession. Sean McAllister's *A Northern Soul* (2018) appears in the mode of the classic social realist documentary, about a man attempting to bring rap culture to children whilst dealing with his problems in the face of the financial crash. This surface reading omits McAllister's dialectical collisions when contrasting variant forms of culture that provide a parallel commentary to the ostensibly real matter of central subject Steve and his journey. Similarly, Albert Albacete's *Artesanos* (2011) appears initially as an ethnographic piece about Moroccan artisans and the objects of their craft. Aestheticisation and a constructed form that relies on the durational slowly reveals the subtext as a critique of globalisation; the slowness of authentic culture and ways of life, and the novelty of the cheap plastic trinkets that the tourists favour in a global downturn.

Chapter four grapples with the poetic documentary, a mode of documentary suggested by Bill Nichols, which takes images of reality and constructs a journey whose conveyances are felt in tones and clusters of feelings rather than in strict or conventional polemical modes for delivering facts. In these documentaries aestheticisation appears in a more traditional sense: the making pleasant and harmonious. Poetic documentaries of financial crash utilise shape and colour matching and subtle sonic treatment, with an editing strategy that does not follow conventional narrativity in order to make thematic and tonal connections. In order to understand the key text of this chapter,

Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's *Detropia* (2012) is considered against the history of the city symphony film. Where documentarians of the 1920s constructed grand elegies to the modern cityscapes of Paris, New York, Moscow, and Berlin, I argue that *Detropia* and other poetic city documentaries of recession invert this style in order to lay criticism at modernity's door. Indeed, with its talk of rewilding the city and imagery which recalls Depression photography and recasts Grant Wood's midwestern paintings as vestiges of subsistence living, *Detropia* and the poetic documentary of the ruined city appears to argue for a return to an agrarian moment which is equated with the prelapsarian.

The fourth chapter also considers sound at a much deeper level. If aesthetics of documentary are often bypassed or considered a problem, then the case of aestheticised sound as an invisible component is even greater. I investigate the soundscape of *Detropia*, uncovering a remarkable sub-stratum in which diegetic music, non-diegetic music, and treated ambience collide to evoke histories, traumas, and absences. Like the visuals in *Detropia*, I suggest that the treatment of the audio track suggests echoes of the past, a better life disappeared from a promised city symphony.

The concluding chapter investigates the avant-garde and experimental response to financial crash and recession, casting light on a corpus of work preoccupied with form, duration, and stillness. I recount a brief overview of the difficulties in considering a documentary form that divests itself of the traditional expectations of documentary and suggest that, with nods to the early avant-gardists such as Joris Ivens and Dziga Vertov, experimental documentary creates filmic effects in order to suggest the emotional power of its subject rather than its empiric reality. Crucially, in order to contextualise the filmic readings of the chapter, I chart how, after the death of radical documentary aesthetics in the West, the ideas of these avant-garde filmmakers were reborn and refreshed by their utilisation by marginal groups wishing to convey their struggle by means other than realism. Avant-garde documentary's subtext, I argue, is a critique of the realist gaze and

its elision with hegemony, with the exegesis of an avant-garde text best arriving as a product of the tensions between aestheticisation and the real. Engaging with Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow* (2017) in the lineage of recent experimental documentaries of financial imbalance and uneven development, I suggest that the productive tension in Ai's film comes from the reality aspect of migrancy and its prolonged uncertainty, and the experimental approach that Ai utilises which surveys the topography using drone cameras. Ai's work, along with the John Akomfrah gallery pieces I analyse in the chapter's conclusion, is admittedly a step removed from previous literal visions of financial crisis, though a news tickertape reasserts itself throughout the film in order to connect financial crisis and the reactionary politics that erupted in Europe shortly thereafter. Ai's approach manages to both literalise questions of uneven geography and reveal hidden and liminal states in familiar images that, taken together, suggests the utilisation of this particular style continues recent developments that utilise experimental aesthetics to engage with wider debates in human geography and post-colonial theory.

In the final section of the chapter I investigate whether this experimental focus has a horizon wherein a balance tilted in favour of aesthetics overtakes reality and suggests a 'limit' for documentary. Two pieces by Akomfrah that touch upon the financial crash and its effects (*Vertigo Sea* (2015) and *The Airport* (2016)) are analysed, considering the additional dimensions brought into play by their insertion in the gallery tradition. I argue that the topicality of the imagery suggests an urgency which reflects the ground of documentary and direct to the real in the midst of the viewer, though the absence of the real, the oblique connective logic and additional discourses bound in with its existence overtake the presentness inherent in the piece.

What is documentary truth?

I conclude the final chapter on a note which hints at an endpoint or a parameter of documentary wherein reality becomes a device or a surface. Articulating the dimensions of reality

and its relationship to documentary is an important task to consider at the outset of any major exercise in the field. This is not because parameters erect a series of invisible limitations and expectations of a text that conforms - but because unlike the other oft-stated critical necessity implied in documentary production (truth), reality is felt to be less subjective and multidimensional and more given to material evidence. The reality of Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), with its single static shot of the Empire State Building, can be confirmed by any tourist visiting New York City. But the truth, the meaning, the exegesis of *Empire* is not nearly so easy to approach and divine.

The relationship between reality and documentary, and the elusiveness of both in conforming to a catch-all definition, presents a constant thorn in the side of the scholar interested in documentary. From John Grierson's initial use in 1926 of the term 'documentary' (2016a, p. 86) to describe Robert Flaherty's *Moana* (1926) and his 1933 articulation of it as "creative treatment of actuality" (2016b, p. 216) to Bruce Elder's 1977 essay detailing representational and structural differences in displaying reality between the rising English-speaking Canadian Direct Cinema and its famous Quebecois and American antecedents, to the most recent journal articles published, the relationship between documentary and reality has routinely found new ways of morphing for nearly a century.

Developments in documentary film are often written of as a parallel product of 20th century modernism and the ways in which such modernisms attempted to represent the world. This is undeniable, and the impact of technology on representation and its very ability to colour our ontology forms some of the analysis to come. It would also be remiss to note that the first projected film (*L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1895)) was, if not documentary cinema, a documentary record of a real event. In tracing the 30 year gap between this seismic event and 1926, Richard Barsam finds that 'factual' films that depicted war and conflict were often prone to staging and outright fabulation.

If, as Barsam suggests, these early maquettes of documentary were able to “rouse public opinion and pro-war sentiment” (1992, p. 31) between the final decade of the nineteenth century and the First World War, there are significant implications for the documentary arising from a more sophisticated technological age that surely intensify in the years. Firstly, the argument of Marx and Engels from *The German Ideology* (1845), which states that “the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” not only has a ring of veracity in times where early conceptions of documentary reality were understood by early filmmakers to contain an inherently persuasive character that bypassed rational and sober interpretation which could potentially be instrumentalised and abused. Michael Chanan notes early signs of documentary power being understood for their commercial application as early as 1910, stating “an early instance of company sponsorship, the film consists in a seres of long takes of the process of manufacture from raw materials through to the finished product. Later examples sometimes take the form of '...a day in the life of . . .', like *A Day in the Life of a Coalminer* (1910) and *At Messrs' Pilkingtons Glassworks* (1913). There is a clear ideological purpose behind these films, which are intended to demonstrate how modern and efficient are the companies concerned.” (2007, p. 61)

Apparent theoretical difference in what constitutes documentary reality can bely practical similarity. Richard Barsam takes a historical-material position on a conception of documentary that is allied with events, technological developments, and close readings of filmic construction. Nonetheless, Barsam’s view does not necessarily chime badly with Michael Renov’s analysis that documentary can be conceived of as a series of different intersecting discourses, or ‘intervals’, between “truth and beauty, truth and reality, science and art, fiction and non-fiction, constative and performative, self-representation and media coverage, history and theory.” (1993, p. 11) Renov continues in a Derridean fashion, suggesting that all discursive forms (including documentary) are

“if not fictional, at least *fictive*” (p. 7) in the way they return to identifiable tropes, which serve as “rhetorical figures.” (p. 7) Barsam too also directly invokes Aristotle in suggesting the broader term “non-fiction film” is more accurate given the expansion of the field of representation beyond simple mimesis, and that documentary film operates as a kind of journalistic-cinematic hybrid that sits as a significant sub-section within it. However, whilst Barsam and Renov may analyse texts in separate ways and differ on the eventual deployment of the documentary, the long view of the written works of Renov and Barsam finds little disagreement on those texts which feature in the corpus of documentary film.

Renov and Barsam’s view of documentary speaks to an inherited social notion of what documentary constitutes, but there are also thinkers who have made propositions which cut against these inclusive gestures to draw qualitative lines in the sand about what constitutes a viable documentary text. Bill Nichols argues that social issue documentary (as opposed to personal portraiture) retains a “discourse of sobriety” (2001, p. 3) that “may rely heavily on rhetoric” (p. 165). Jill Godmillow disagrees, believing Nichols to be making overly-limiting assumptions that overlooks lesser works that nonetheless imitate forebears at the level of form and structure. For Godmillow, documentary is a troublesome term which presents certain formal expectations, includes stricter considerations of truthfulness, and includes works that simply seek to inform without testing moral boundaries of audience members. For Godmillow, the problem is how to elevate the sub-section of films of greater quality that take a particular stance toward its audience, whilst obviating both the factual and structural expectations bound up with the term documentary. Godmillow writes that “I like to call this huge class of films "films of edification," or "edifiers." At least this label avoids the classic truth claims of documentary and acknowledges the intention to persuade and to elevate to raise up the audience to a more sophisticated or refined notion of what is.” (1997, p. 81)

Though more traditional documentaries and even mainstream televisual works such as *Hard Copy* (1989-1999) appear in Godmillow's list of edifiers, tracing the lines of argument reveals Godmillow's anxiety at a perceived liberal-bourgeois passivity that has arisen at documentary's historical borrowing and application of traditional linear narrative. Documentaries, the broader swathe of these factual films, do not edify precisely because their rhetoric is closeted, they suggest closure or its possibility, and obviate difficulty in order to suggest clear paths to progress. Godmillow repeatedly admonishes the work of Ken Burns, held up by many as an award-winning avatar of social good, for upholding such Whiggishness. Burns, whose multi-part epics on the *Civil War* (1990), *Baseball* (1994), and *Jazz* (2001), are used as teaching aids in American schools, stands accused by Godmillow of producing a "dreamy, passive audience that gains a sweet, sad knowingness about the Civil War, but not a knowledge that provides insight into the economic, social, and racial structures that produced so many dead bodies, such waste of property, and such difficult political problems for the future." (p. 84)

Conversely the films known as edifiers, such as Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) foreground their rhetorical intent and abjure certain kinds of thematic and stylistic harmonisation in order to produce more finely-grained critique, theoretically shocking audiences out of the complicity of passivity and into examination of the structures that uphold their acquiescence. Godmillow's own work seeks to be "incomplete, multivalent, heteroglossic" (p. 89) in order to expose ethical dimensions rather than conceal them. Worth is a value judgment granted to texts which eschew typical formal devices such as meretricious acts of storytelling in favour of content that reveals itself both as subject matter and a product of filmic devices. In spite of the irony in attempting to counter hegemonic truths and truth-making processes with its own suggestion of a Bordieuan economy of distinction that separates good from bad, Godmillow articulates for documentary what Lukács did for art, Adorno for popular music, and Eisenstein for cinema: that the exposure of political tendency and self-reflexive inclusion of a critical dimension must also become an intrinsic part of the content. In particular, Godmillow's critique calls to mind Terry Eagleton's

summarisation of Roland Barthes' critique of natural language in literature in which "signs which pass themselves off as natural, which offer themselves as the only conceivable way of viewing the world, are by that token authoritarian and ideological." (Eagleton, 1996, p. 117) Broadly we can understand this sentiment as the anti-realist position. Naturally, this strategy, which often suggests that truth is either individual or a product of the meaning-creation process, creates inhibition and barriers for potential viewers who arrive at documentary having been promised and delivered by varying cinematic, televisual, and now internet-based strands that documentary will at least deliver something of the real in the lived, external, and material sense.

Such intense focus on either the overarching strategies of representation or content and its implicit meaning has led to the neglect of formal analysis, Bill Nichols would later argue, going as far to suggest this was an ongoing weakness within the field:

> ...interviews always revealed important qualities about how the film-makers approached their subjects and achieved their goals, but they were inevitably short on any close analysis of the actual workings of the films. The commentaries usually indicated something about the film's subject matter and whether it succeeded or failed in engaging the commentator. This format bore more resemblance to a film review than to film criticism. (p. xi, 2014)

In the same tome, editors Barry Keith Grant and Jeannette Sloniowski argue that their collection provides "the kind of concrete analyses of important texts that too frequently have been lacking in discussions of this crucial form of cinema." (p. xvii, 2014). This thesis also performs systematic and concrete analyses of important texts and, after consideration of discrete historical contexts and technological developments, each chapter is concluded with a significant analysis of an important text or texts.

On the face of it, this may seem overly-prescriptive in its heuristic taxonomy and adherence to antecedent. However, I contend that this project retains an emancipatory dimension that runs in parallel to its overtly critical function. By privileging the creative dimension of documentary, and

by suggesting that its power extends to excavating and rearranging filmed reality to access and transmit deeper matters of truth, I open up a field of critique that seeks to reappraise the inner workings of documentary in a balanced and unified method that accounts for truths not merely captured or pre-conceived. The breadth and depth of approaches and outcomes in documentary of financial crash is remarkable, and I aim to meet them with an approach that preserves this remarkability.

CHAPTER 1
THE REALIST DOCUMENTARY

This chapter will begin where, I argue, nearly all documentaries (since the invention of the lightweight handheld camera) seeking to factually explain a recent social or historical event begin: with reality and realism. The realist aesthetic arises from a social situation and artistic conventions established prior to the invention of the cinematograph, finding natural bedfellows in the mid-century boom in documentary production. After an outline of the major developments toward an aesthetic of realism in documentary in the middle of the 20th century and a discussion of the progression of realism toward the television genre of within the documentary, I will analyse Lauren Greenfield's *The Queen of Versailles* (2012) as a film in a realist mode that engages with the financial crash of 2007/8 and the subsequent recession in North America and Europe.

Typically understood, realism arises in the 19th century in visual art and literature, allied to the public sympathies surrounding the European revolutionary fever in the middle of the century that saw successful revolutions in Austria, Italy, Germany, and particular to the final section of this chapter: France. Realism initially appears counterposed to romanticism – less artistic styles or even modes of thought than they are conflicting 'structures of feeling' (Williams and Orrom, 2014, p. 861), arising in peoples existing alongside one another.[4] Realism is latterly considered "a consequence of romanticism rather than an oppositional reaction against, even where it follows a pointedly antipoetic orientation." (Greene et. al., 2012, p. 1148) Raymond Williams outlines the difficult history of the word 'realism' in *Keywords*, noting how the common utilisation of realism in the context of a direct relationship to attitudes in art and language in which one "shows things as they really are" (1985, p. 260) ultimately betray the idealism underpinning it. This becomes troublesome, argues Williams, because realism in this sense is both a general attitude and a method

4 György Lukács suggests that Miguel de Cervantes and William Shakespeare are writers of realism in their "inexhaustible diversity in contrast to the one-dimensionality of modernism" (2001, p. 1056) though for the sake of clarity and the theme of this chapter the definitions are those that arise in the age of industry and beyond.

of production. (p. 261) The latter, argues Williams, is crucial to understanding realism as a divergence from the path of romanticism. Both romanticism and realism were bourgeois creations allied to individualism, though as realism progressed and mutated throughout the latter half of the 19th century it developed a stronger consciousness of culture's ability to shape the population as well as the person. Realism did not easily adjoin to any one representational style but did ultimately pursue what Greene et. al. determine to be a more anti-poetic method that was less verbose, was self-conscious about abstraction and the metaphysical, and much more direct.

Realism was not just an adjunct of the revolution in leadership and governmental style, but is inexorably allied to the industrial revolution and the new demographic born of it. This working class - and their own developing consciousness of their acquisition of a distinctive social position as product of a radical shift in working conditions, despite being "outside the radius of literacy" (Hobsbawm, 1985, p. 330) - produced culture that was vernacular, dynamic, and socially connected. From these early European proletarian forms such as music-hall, the *commedia dell'arte* and the boxing match we derive contemporary forms of 'lowbrow' entertainment. Such cultural events were unreflective, immediate, and were disinterested in the systematic documentation of a way of life. Realist artists, however, embraced the social change of factories and machines and documented the formative era of class division while romanticism maintained "ambivalence to industrialisation's demands" (Miles, 1993, p. 21). The realist paintings of Courbet, Millet, and Breton depicted workers, displaced peoples, and people in communion with the land they worked upon, while the writings of Stendahl and Honoré de Balzac meditated on the worsening social situation of ordinary people during the restoration of the monarchy that came between revolutions. The visual artists aligned with realism developed a working language to depict a sense of a working class, with playwrights and novelists turning away from a 'poetic' language and toward emulation of everyday speech. Realism grew and bore children such as naturalism, which took realism to epistemic extremes and suggested a deterministic view of life in which human character was governed by

environment (a running theme of Emile Zola's late nineteenth century Rougon-Macquart novel cycle), and regionalism, which took root in American literature and developed the notion that geographic locations and the communities that reside in them have individual characters to be explored.

Early cinema and early documentary are difficult to ally to either of these modes. The distance and staginess of the works belie their realism whilst their adherence to - and revelation within - the mechanical rejects romanticism's necessarily backwards-looking sensibility. Hungarian philosopher György Lukács articulates the tension in his 1938 essay 'Realism in the Balance', suggesting that early twentieth century art and literary forms derived from realism, such as naturalism, expressionism, surrealism, and impressionism, were expected products of this particular historical moment – the growth of capitalism. Crucially for Lukács, these latter movements diverge from realism in their utilisation of modernity as an attack on the individual and his psyche, thereby reflecting the alienation of the individual under capitalism as proposed by Karl Marx. Realism, for Lukács, remained concerned with the wider scope of society and the "underlying essence ie. the real factors that relate their experiences to the hidden social forces that produce them." (2001, p. 1040) Early films by the Lumière brothers[5], Mitchell and Kenyon, Birt Acres, and William Heise focus on ordinary people and commonplace situations within an objective reality. The language of the filmic medium was nascent and the recourse to stylisation through montage or expression through camera style limited. Instead, it is more accurate to think of such works as either photo-journalistic works of record or products of the modernism that exploded in the 20th century and came to characterise new developments in literature, poetry, visual art, and music: the influence of the mechanical shapes the Russian futurist poetry of Vladimir Mayakovsky, the modernist novels of John dos Passos and James Joyce, the rejection of tonality in the serialist works of Arnold Schoenberg, the geometric

5 Richard Barsam thinks of the works of the Lumières as realism, describing the camera style in *Barque sortant du port* (1895) as "suggesting the same stability within flux that was literary realism for such novelists as Marcel Proust, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf." (1992, p. 23) – I do not agree that these authors are realists in the Lukács sense.

paintings of Piet Mondrian and Wassily Kandinsky, or the architecture of Le Corbusier and Frank Lloyd Wright. The mechanical – both concern with machinery and a wider sense of the composition of the object, be it material or artistic – and humanity's ability to reproduce what was once singular was laid bare in the new art of this era (Benjamin, 2001, p. 1168).

Though the politics of modernism's adherents were spread across the political spectrum, modernist forms were, according to Lukács, dogmatically "anti-realism" and "abstract subjectivism" and therefore alienated. What ennobled realism, for Lukács, was its concrete potentiality. Realism implied a sense of a reflection of the real occurring within the constructed. Realism utilised construction to show the reality behind the situation. For Lukács, writing on the cusp of the Second World War, the thrust and trend of developments in the avant-garde arts was "growing distance from, and progressive dissolution of, realism" (p. 1034) while the goal of realism was to pursue anti-imperialism and the struggle against fascism to its logical ends. After the documentary boom of the 1930s and prior to the development of lightweight cameras and synchronous sound recording in the 1950s, documentary provided an aesthetic route for realism to not only appear in cinematic production but to gain increasing levels of verisimilitude as the technologies of capture became more sophisticated. Documentary and realism maintain sustained flirtation, though the two are not entirely allied in early documentary, while romanticism, classicism, individual psychology, and the supremacy of the written and the constructed took root in mainstream fictional cinema.

The influence of Direct Cinema's key stylistic innovation would influence the future of film-making as well as conceptions of the documentary past. Direct Cinema has been so successful at capturing an aesthetic of the real that survives even in the online video works of 2019 that films prior to its existence that would appear to many to seem decidedly "unrealistic" in comparison. Nevertheless, the British contingent of John Grierson and his charges at the General Post Office

(GPO) film unit observed people and social conditions, attempting to convey an overarching sense of life rather than the psychology of any one individual. Works such as Grierson's *Drifters* (1929) are heavily reliant upon montage, and subsequent GPO works reliant upon Robert Flaherty-esque poetic realism not limited to professional actors portraying real people. Independent British units such as the Strand Film Unit of Paul Rotha and the Realist Film Unit of Basil Wright produced lower-key works less indebted to the montage of Dziga Vertov and Vsevolod Pudovkin, with titles reflective of interest in the everyday (*Children at School* (1937), *Today We Live: A Film of Life in Britain* (1937)). Grierson, whose influence remained in these groups, spoke of documentary in terms of both the social and socialism. Grierson claimed his use of cinema was "propagandist" (Barsam, 1992, p. 98) and that he and his associates were "ashamed of poverty in the midst of plenty." (Evans, 1984, p. 47) However, staging and expressive technique were heavily used, whilst other films within these film-making strands retained a paternal narration and distance that belied the relationship with the governmental institutions providing funding for these works.

The movement of Direct Cinema that flourished between 1958 and 1962, with its spartan aesthetic beholden to a view that determines pure observation of action without substantial recourse to expressive technique or additional data. Richard Leacock defines the essential framework of Direct Cinema in his recollection of working on Robert Drew's *Primary* (1960), exclaiming "what was remarkable was that we edited our own material with [Robert] Drew and his journalist yellow pads hovering over us. It worked! We made a film that captured the flavour, the guts of what was happening. No interviews. No re-enactments. No staged scenes and very little narration." (Cousins and Macdonald, 2006, p. 253) In addition to Leacock's remembrances, the formulation of Direct Cinema posits a notion that cinematic realism might be determined by multiple forms of absence at the levels of montage, non-diegesis, narrative, and expressive quality in camerawork. Direct Cinema and its foregrounding of truth quickly establishes how technological limitations prevented a certain kind of examination, most notably that related to the camera and its ability to spontaneously

move in reaction and retain closeness to its subject. Robert Drew characterised the difference between the revelatory style of Direct Cinema and broadcast journalism, stating that “contemporary televised journalism tries to reveal a sort of intellectual truth, whereas we try to reveal a sort of emotional truth: what does life consist of for a given person in a given time. It is a new kind of truth.” (Resha, 2018, p. 32) Though David Resha cynically notes that Drew’s rhetoric “shifted over time as industry circumstances and opportunities changed” (p. 32), the repetition of truth as central concern and the focus of people in situations at particular moments is key. A rapidly shifting intellectual terrain alongside industry circumstances and opportunities would see realism and documentary dis-align and align continually after this fertile half-decade.

A hidden aesthetic?

Essences, argued philosopher Edmund Husserl, show themselves to us (2001, p. 292). Sense data, rather than the positivism of science, will aid judgement. Languages conform “in a pure measure to what is seen in its full clarity.” (1964, p. 31) Throughout the first half of the twentieth century theorists had made spirited inquiry into what aspect of the plastic arts was responsible for best conveying its own particularity – the soul of the medium - with command of the argument exchanged between Hollywood’s commitment to storytelling and invisibility, Bertolt Brecht and the Weimar Germans and their extolling of alienation and visibility, and the Soviet enthusiasm for radical dialectical montage. With realism, a return to a phenomenology through documentary was promised.

An important shift within theory comes to influence documentary in the middle of the century, aligning with new-found ability to practice socially-responsive realist work that positions social class within their own milieu rather than a staged *mise-en-scène*. The wholesale adoption of a new mode, aided by technical possibilities and an expanded media panorama, now underscores a great deal of contemporary documentary practice: a movement away from the paternalistic “direct-

address” (Nichols, 2016, p. 639) of the authoritative Griersonian tradition and toward an uptake of a naïve realism that seeks to observe things as they happen and convey them as truthfully as possible, playing down matters related to expression or the complications of the presence of the observer. Crucially, the paradoxical formation of a strict aesthetic of authenticity within documentary at the end of the 1950s and commencement of the 1960s was an attempt to, as best as possible, ensure this region of film-making realise its *telos* as phenomenological: that the work of the documentarian was to convey the *eidos* of a subject or situation and simultaneously resist the clouding of interpretation. This ascetic aesthetic would come to be known as Direct Cinema, and its close relation cinema verite, with the difference being the implication and participation of the maker in cinema verite works. Considering the aesthetic of Direct Cinema is an important task to outline, not least because it purported not to really have one. I make this point here in order to drive toward the method by which the self-consciously radical and immediate praxis of Direct Cinema and cinema verite, one which redefined documentary possibility, constructed a grammar and syntax (as well as borrowing from long-established cinematic conventions) that allowed images to connect and communicate narratively without explicit intervention on behalf of a directorial voice.

Quickly, as Kevin McDonald and Mark Cousins suggest, rules were drawn up and “a kind of filmic ten commandments: thou shalt not rehearse, thou shalt not interview; thou shalt not use commentary” (2006, p. 250) were unofficially established. The realm of film already anchored in a foregrounded notion of truth drew firmer lines in the sand, with a vocal group of practitioner-theorists positing an unmediated and immediate capturing of subjects as having greater verisimilitude and valency than the distanced and manipulated productions since Flaherty. Old axioms that pit aesthetics and beauty on one side with ethics and honesty on the other, with a suggestion that any overlap was not impossible but unlikely, were thought to be on their way to resolution with the potential laden in Direct Cinema.

Direct Cinema practitioners such as Richard Leacock, D. A. Pennebaker, Robert Drew, and the Maysles Brothers would arrive from various adjacent forms such as conventional fictional cinema, news-gathering, photography, early documentary, and avant-garde film-making. A close relationship between Direct Cinema and cinema verite film-makers who began in the avant-garde and New York's experimental jazz scene and beat poetry emerges through Pennebaker's association with avant-garde film-maker Francis Thompson, John Cassavetes' early cinema, and Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* (1959). Jonas and Adolfas Mekas' *Film Culture*, a journal focused on avant-garde cinema initially with a New York-centric scope, began an annual award for independent film-makers: the first three awards went to Cassavetes' *Shadows*, Frank and Leslie's *Pull My Daisy*, and Robert Drew's *Primary*, on which Pennebaker, Leacock, and Albert Maysles also worked. The early Direct Cinema practitioners came together at this time with a keen focus not just on reflecting the spontaneous and experimental tendency of avant-garde cinema and the new jazz, but a strong rejection of the paternal tendency documentary had acquired. Dave Saunders captures Richard Leacock's enthusiasm, stating: "all the associates agreed that they must depart from the 'yak yak yak, one cigarette after another' approach of Murrow and others and strive to evoke a feeling of 'being there' with the action." (Saunders, 2007, p. 10)

The unconscious figurehead of this faith was neither Husserl nor John Grierson but André Bazin, whose considerations of montage's potential to dilute and subtract from important core truths had infiltrated film-making both fictional and factual. Though fictional cinema was at the centre of Bazin's writings, his ontological concerns about photography and its effect on the real as well as a metaphysical concern with humanity's to "bear endless witness to the beauty of the cosmos" (Matthews, 1999) suggest a wider concern with lived reality and artistic modes of capture that intersect with the mechanical. Bazin would state, recounting perceived failures in Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922), that "it is simply a question of respect for the spatial unity of an event at the moment when to split it up would change it from something real into something imaginary."

(1950, p. 50) Richard Barsam parses Bazin's intent as one which attempts to "preserve […] a deeper psychological reality, as well as the audience's freedom to choose from a variety of interpretations of reality." (1992, p. 304) Longer takes and fewer elements of mediation would be more democratic for the viewer, granting the ability to read images for longer and enable polysemous readings. In a recently devastated Continental Europe in which nation states had weaponised documentary form to close down readings in order to produce compelling propaganda, it is easy to produce a psychological reading of why an anti-didactic cinema of expanded potential may seem attractive.

Bazin did not explicitly argue for a cinema of pure realism comprised of nothing but long takes and diegesis. For Bazin, montage had limits but it also had crucial qualities. Bazin uses the example of explaining a magic trick: reality would show only the trick, whilst step-by-step montage could show us the truth behind the trick. Montage helps to explains mental processes, abstract and causal relationships, procedures, and developments by organising and compressing time in a sequential logic. The display of action, however, within both the fictional film and documentary, particularly actions predicated on the "relations between human beings and things" and related to conveying the essence of the film, has permission to utilise any fabrication "except montage." (p. 52) To use montage where uncut observation could be used instead weakens the power of the work. Cinematic power, or the soul of cinema, was to be derived via thoughtful integration of moments of reality, particularly demonstrated through a long take which displays strict continuity of action, time, and space, then juxtaposed with the explanatory shorthand grammar of montage.

After Bazin's theoretical propositions, technological realities followed, transforming Bazin's modest proposals into the centrepiece of a movement. Parallel developments in Europe, the USA, and Francophonic Canada would see the realism-enabling qualities, overcoming the technically-lacking attempts to do so earlier in the 1950s, enabled by lightweight cameras and new location-recording equipment. Roger Tilton's documentary *Jazz Dance* (1954) utilised lighter hand-held

news cameras loaded with minute-long reels, while Morris Engel's *Weddings and Babies* (1958) is an independent fiction film that makes extensive use of both hand-held footage and synchronous sound recording to produce a markedly different effect than the contemporary studio standard. *Les Raquetteurs* (1958), a documentary co-directed by Michel Brault and Gilles Groulx, deploys lightweight hand-held cameras in concert with mostly synchronous sound and no narration, though its effects are roaming and impressionistic, with its internal connections coming as much from a command of tone as much as space and time. All of these works, however, take formative steps toward the verite and Direct Cinema of the coming decade.

For a generation of film-makers the philosophy and pedagogy of cinema verite and Direct Cinema provided both a suit of armour, to defend against older practitioners and their constructed ways, and a weapon to be deployed in the search for new battles to fight. The inexpensiveness, flexibility, and anti-aesthetic meant that Direct Cinema practitioners could be first to respond to or expose dimensions of society. This is a crucial point for the overarching argument in the later part of this chapter: film-makers utilising a realist lens more often than not come first. This is partly due to their method granting the ability to define the territory in spatial-temporal terms, reporting from the thick of the action without the need for reflection whilst seeking to depict things as they are. Knowledge of new cultural regions was brought to the public attention by Direct Cinema and cinema verite works such as *The Children Were Watching* (1960) (racial integration in Louisiana schools), *The Mills of the Gods: Vietnam* (1965) (the Vietnam War seen from both sides), *Dont Look Back* (1967) (the cultural significance of Bob Dylan), or *Warrendale* (1967) (life in a home for children with emotional problems). The aesthetic of realism is immediacy, even if that sense of immediacy is crafted afterwards in the edit.

The rapidity and militancy of the uptake of cinema verite and Direct Cinema as a "new privileged grasp of reality" (Waugh, 1975) by a vanguard of film-makers and its eventual adaptation

by mainstream television, as well as the vehement opposition by its naysayers and gradual disowning of '*vérité*' as its limitations become exposed, has been tracked by Jeanne Hall in her 1991 essay 'Realism as a Style in Cinema Verite'. In a highly perceptive work that considers Robert Drew's *Primary* (1960), Hall considers not just the Direct Cinema and verite boom but realism's own aesthetic logic and exposes systems of meaning construction that inhere. Hall quotes Stephen Mamber, a continued devotee of verite into the 1970s, who passionately argued that Direct Cinema and cinema verite resisted "visual metaphor or expressive camera technique" by "refusing to make events subordinate to filming." (1974, p. 250) Mamber continues, arguing that cinema verite stands apart from "accumulated conventions" (p. 4) in order to not just capture truth in its fullest flower but to establish clear differences between fictional film and the traditional documentary film. Hall's reading of *Primary* argues that this is simply not possible:

> ...part of the project of a film like *Primary* is to prove that the film-makers' diminished control over shooting would ultimately increase spectators' access to the truth. What I've called the "match game" is part of the film's claim to realism; it is an attempt to show that *Primary* can cover not only the planned political drama on stage, but the spontaneous mini-dramas in the audience as well. But the rules of the game are based upon classical conventions of representation rather than *cinéma-verite* innovations. (p. 511)

Utilising Roland Barthes' 'Rhetoric of the Image' as theoretical weight to suggest significatory strategies in particular images that provide readers with meaning even in isolation, Hall tours through broken spatial dimensions that lead to "the creation of an imaginary relationship between the subjects of different shots" (p. 511). Hall points out recurring motifs that operate as visual shorthand for class and physical stereotypes, and disjunctures in the visual and sound match that are 'resolved' by a kind of casting that occurs in the edit suite: a sound appears from another source than that of the visual and is then resolved by typage of the kind of character who might make such a sound in the next shot. Barthes underpins Hall's reading of images, but the concern regarding broken spatial dimensions returns readings of reality to Bazin.

But Hall goes further, developing the argument by suggesting that *Primary* "foregrounds its comparison of *cinéma-vérité* and traditional documentary by conducting an open investigation of other documentary media – still photography, television, radio, newspapers – attempting to compromise their claims to truth in the process." (p. 516) Hall's point here has far-reaching implications. Firstly, that verite was considered by its practitioners to be so privileged in its relationship to the truth that it could simultaneously look outward to its subject and inward to speak of a hierarchy of representation. That Robert Drew's crew on *Primary* included future Direct Cinema pioneers in Albert Maysles and Richard Leacock goes some way to explaining how verite strategies become instrumentalised more widely as both critique against the failings of other media and establishment of territory. Secondly, that verite is ultimately contextual, a product of relations extant in systems of meaning creation. Hall identifies moments in which *Primary* makes a point of exposing the artifice of the television shot or public oration, or where Mamber's praise of a speech filmed in long shot and long take with asynchronous sound is in fact a medium shot with synchronised sound that cuts to portraiture of audience figures redolent of Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans' share-cropper imagery from the 1930s.[6] Accepting the intent behind Direct Cinema as sole basis for reading the texts is not permissible because the way that engaged viewers are able to make connections to the external is never restrained by any quality within the filmic text. Understanding an expanded narrative logic does not rob Direct Cinema of its primal power because of a third implication – that these incontestable moments of reality lend credibility to the contested moments. The signature moment of *Primary*, following a hopeful John F. Kennedy through a crowd at an intimate distance, remains the film's iconic moment precisely because of how it utilised Direct Cinema technique to break down the illumination of high politics in a manner that retains a visceral and immediate power in isolation nearly sixty years later. Surrounding that, as Hall reminds us, is a construction; a collision of several classical forms. In this sense, it is truer to Bazin than it is to its own high-minded ideals.[7] Bazin's own examination of British film *Where No Vultures Fly* (1951)

6 A recurring theme expanded upon in Chapter 4.

7 Developments elsewhere provide pause for thought. Two years later Forugh Farrokhzad's *The House is Black* (1962) makes use of verite footage in contrast with overt staging of material and the director's own poetry in her

established a similar kind of formulation where pro-forma montage images were enlivened by their juxtaposition with a moment of pure realism, stating that "this single frame in which trickery is out of the question gives immediate and retroactive authenticity to the very banal montage that has preceded it." (Bazin, 1950, p. 49)

A complete purity of Direct Cinematic vision, of an unmediated style (or non-style) that reported only unvarnished truth without rhetorical flourish or external reference, seemed an unattainable goal. Indeed, it could be argued to be an unconsciously unwanted goal given the desire on the part of the activist film-maker to make a societal impact. Constructive strategies and expressive tendencies are used consistently in Direct Cinema and cinema verite provided they elide the socially-minded tendency of the directors, where the act of making a film such as Drew's *The Chair* (1962), Frederick Wiseman's *Titicut Follies* (1967), Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Charlotte Zwerin's *Salesman* (1968) are acts of political commitment as much as they are aesthetic and technical exercises. The leakage of other filmic and non-filmic references, following Hall's argument, remains inevitable. By the time of Maysles, Maysles, and Zwerin's *Gimme Shelter* (1970), montage is so integrated into the realist form that the second half of the film has arguably more in common with Dziga Vertov than André Bazin. Later Direct Cinema works saw space and time routinely upended to produce a loosely narrative flow relating several unrelated participants in a shared venue.

examination of an Azeri leper colony. For Jonathan Rosenbaum this usage is "coterminous rather than dialectical" (p. 475). I am unsure whether Rosenbaum is correct, but Farrokhzad's deployment of certain elements of verite style in deliberate contrast with other material does not have the same flavour as her US counterparts. The utilisation of long takes and harsh visual moments is not unalike a great many contemporaries in the western hemisphere, but the sum total of *The House is Black* is of humanistic inquiry and the uncovering of small moments of joy, rather than angst at artifice and exposure of social conditions – even though artifice is deliberately juxtaposed and harrowing social conditions are revealed. Perhaps Farrokhzad's position as acknowledged influence on the great meta-cinematic auteurs of Iranian film, where directors such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Abbas Kiarostami, and Jafar Panahi eradicate lines between fiction and documentary in nearly every text, directs Rosenbaum's thinking. Rosenbaum argues that this is a stylistic collision that is coterminous and not dialectical because the film is harmonious and does not exist as critique of either its subject or rival methods of making film: unlike makers of Direct Cinema its mission statement is not overt. The impressionistic mix of montage, reality, construction, and overt poetics of *The House is Black* render it nearer to Tilton and Engel and their ur-verite.

The opening scenes of *Gimme Shelter* also offer insight into new problems besetting Direct Cinema practitioners. The film opens with the directors and subjects at an editing console, indicative of a wider trend of self-implication and self-critique creeping into verite. Direct Cinema's stance of mere observation became most fulsomely rebuffed by postcolonial critics taking aim at the ethnographic films of visual anthropology and spreading outward. Jean Rouch "denied that a film-maker can achieve objectivity" (McLane, 2012, p. 232) and spoke of the presence of the observer creating a distortion that is magnified by the presence of the camera, deciding that "this new distortion can be a positive" (Rouch et. al., 2016, p. 485) inasmuch as those filmed can see themselves in the final product and measure the distance between depiction and reality, unlike groups studied for written anthropology. Self-critique did not insulate the visual anthropologist against external critique: in the same interview in which Rouch talks of the positives of distortion, he is asked why his African films engage in "a kind of homage to the primitive, to the past, to the exotic" (p. 481) and avoid direct contact with African people in the way his French anthropological films such as his and Edgar Morin's *Chronique d'un été* (1961) do. Rouch's response argued that making political films about Africa was "imperialistic" and "that kind of film must be done by Africans." (p. 481) Rouch notes a time when a conference he was to speak at was interrupted by the Black Panther Party, accusing visual anthropology of being "the new slave traders" (p. 485) by exploiting subjects and then returning home to the spoils of book contracts and tenured academic positions. Jamie Berthe has written about how Rouch's exoticised vision of Africa as a colonial interloper did not chime with directors from the continent who had come to reclaim their experiences in their own style, leading to rejection of Rouch despite his hand in influencing and aiding African directors in their own work. Echoing Manthia Diawara's notion that 'African cinema' (as much as the term can said to be stable) was now in a "post-Sembène era" (Diawara, 2010, p. 45) defined by indigenous directors, post-independence, and anti-colonialism, Berthe claims that "it was in part through their identification with this community that many of these film-makers felt compelled to reject and condemn Rouch's work." (2018, p. 269) Slowly, the director of

cinema verite or Direct Cinema had become hamstrung by their method and the acknowledgement of their own role in an ongoing dynamic of power between a number of binaries such as west/east, male/female, white/non-white, rich/poor, etc.. The politics of observation and the realisation of a lack of neutrality in the act of capturing – and selecting - reality influenced the decline of verite at the level of "quality" documentary whilst finding a home as a major technique of journalistic inquiry. Audiences too became similarly implicated and aware of their role in the transformation of the text in the rise of reception theory that follows on from the era that corresponds with Direct Cinema and *vérité*'s decline. (Eco, 1972; Iser, 1978; Jauss 1982)

This returns us to the phenomenology outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Direct Cinema and cinema verite promised us a phenomenological view of the subject matter; that, as Edmund Husserl suggests in outlining this method, we would go "back to the things themselves" (2001, p. 168) by casting off the philosophical abstractions of style. Terry Eagleton, echoing Jacques Derrida, suggests that there is a more fundamental logical point on which the methodology of phenomenological inquiry of texts fails, one which I argue accounts for *vérité*'s gradual journey away from the pursuit of objective truths from a very early moment. Husserl's gnomic utterance in the opening paragraph, suggesting that languages conform to senses, was harshly refuted: surely language allows us to explore and elucidate the concepts chanced upon by the senses?

> Husserl tries to resolve the dilemma by imagining a language which would be purely expressive of consciousness – which would be freed from any burden of having to indicate meanings exterior to our minds at the time of speaking. The attempt is doomed to failure: the only imaginable such 'language' would be purely solitary, interior utterances which signify nothing whatsoever. (1996, p. 53)

Cinema's sixty years establishing its own idiosyncratic grammar, parallel to increasing visual and reading literacy brought about by the gifts of mechanical reproduction of the 20th century, underscored how the more successful cinema verite and Direct Cinema works were often reliant on

this shorthand. The act of making meanings clear in the realist documentary operated in much the same way that a philosopher ultimately relies on a public and shared language to navigate and disseminate even the most radical and ineffable interior concepts. The gradual abandonment of the politically-driven verite mode and the subsequent rise of New Documentary in the 1970s and 1980s, in which artifice would become comprehensively foregrounded in knowing counterpoint to the earnest travails of prior years, served to suggest that the only "thing in itself" that could be known was indeed the cinematic text. Lofty concepts such as truth had been taken possession of by the Derridean deconstructionists of the late 1960s and early 1970s, with the new consensus amongst a new wave of practitioners that it was the language of documentary that was creating meaning in texts and not Direct Cinema's apparently privileged access to reality through an ascetic mode of production.

Cinema verite and Direct Cinema as a primary driver of cinematic documentary works has not completely died out. This chapter argues that these basic building blocks and philosophies remain to some degree, though often juxtaposed with other material and compromised by perception of audience desires and growing technological possibilities. With overt stylistic concessions that acknowledge purity of vision as practical impossibility and aesthetic limitation, key names such as Frederick Wiseman and Nick Broomfield continue to broadly fall within the aims of the mode than any other, though Broomfield's participatory presence may also create categorisation difficulties. The verite style found a home on television, entered into marriage with classical storytelling and rebranded as docusoap or 'fly-on-the-wall', an ersatz verite that largely holds dominion over contemporary 'realistic' documentary formats. Attempting to serve the gods of ratings and entertainment has not been without issue, particularly in Britain where some terrestrial television remains publicly-funded and with a strong history of public service and educational-based material, thereby inviting greater scrutiny upon material that appears to breach this. Conjoining 'real' reality to material that is constructed perennially troubles the unwritten contract

between viewer and maker. Several scandals have arisen since the 1990s in which the sleight of hand in documentary production has led to wider societal questioning toward just how real the reality that is being presented is.[8]

Grasping the complex inter-relationship of recent media that utilises some aspects of *vérité*, stripped from its activist and theoretical origins, in order to serve hybrid forms in contemporary television and broadcast flows is key to the argument of this chapter. Aside from a few texts of admirably puritan vision, there are very few Direct Cinema and cinema verite texts that are not essentially Bazinist: containing moments of observation that convey the patina of something perceived to be real and unaffected by its observer put to work alongside moments in which it is clear that technique and expressiveness are being introduced. Bazin, like cinematic distributors and television commissioners, realised the need for other functions to be present in successful work, stating if "the film is to fulfil itself aesthetically we need to believe in the reality of what is happening while knowing it to be tricked" (1950, p. 48) The pursuit of the complexity of reality in documentary cinema is idealistic, and ultimately always arrested by the pragmatics of its own grammar and external forces.

First responders – *The Recess Ends* (2009)

Before continuing with this overview of the development toward "reality" as a contemporary mode that derives from realism and Direct Cinema's ethos of observation, I shall now briefly analyse a work that engages with the contemporary crisis of Great Recession that appears to approach the topic in what broadly may be considered a realist mode. Directed by Austin Chu and Brian Chu, *The Recess Ends* (2009) appears to be the first film that directly addresses the effects of

8 Examples include 'TV documentary 'faked' scenes' (*The Independent*, 21st February 1998), 'BBC admits talk shows were faked' (*The Guardian*, 12th February 1999), 'C4 admits new fake and bars film's producer' (*The Independent*, 5th February 1999), 'Bear Grylls 'faked Channel 4's Born Survivor'' (*Daily Telegraph*, 23rd July 2007), 'BBC embarrassed again as auction programme fakes scene' (*The Independent*, 23rd August 2009), 'Frozen Planet: BBC denies misleading fans' (*BBC News* online, 12th December 2011), 'BBC's Human Planet in fakery row over staged treehouses', (*Daily Telegraph*, 4th April 2018)

the global financial crash on civilians rather than institutions and governments. Commencing filming immediately after the financial crisis and released before a wider understanding of its effects could be understood and empirically measured, the Chu brothers visit all fifty US states to visually examine the progression of the recession's effects. The Chu brothers interview locals of each region, capturing the seen and said in hope of evoking the unseen and unsaid; a body politic created in adversity. *The Recess Ends* indulges in no knowing obfuscation or grants concession to wider flow or format: it was self-financed and screened in limited circles for a year beyond its completion and has not seen a wide-scale commercial release. Like the works of Leacock, Brault, Drew, and Maysles, *The Recess Ends* takes advantage of technological advancements in order to capture the *eidos*, the authentic and irreducible character, of working-class America at a particular moment of political significance ostensibly by observation.

Madge Holland sums up Austin Chu's animus, zeroing in on both an activist mindset and desire for a reality response, writing "thinking that the mainstream media wasn't adequately covering the effect of the recession on ordinary people, he decided to make a road trip and film it, letting the people and places speak for themselves" (2009). Sylvie Kim disagrees that the work is of an activist sensibility, stating that "one of the admirable traits of this documentary is its apolitical stance [...] there's clearly no agenda aside from capturing how people maintain their spirit in tough times. After all, the recession hits every average American regardless of political affiliation or beliefs. There's also a noticeable lack of demonizing of the banks and Washington. It's just not that kind of film." (Kim, 2009)

Kim's reading is only superficially correct. *The Recess Ends* is not a nakedly polemical film that serves a neat argument about the financial crash and its recession that the likes of Michael Moore, Steve Bannon, and Morgan Spurlock are known for.[9] Nonetheless, the text includes portions of interviews with anti-capitalist philosopher Grace Lee Boggs which are not only not critiqued or

9 These types of films as a response to the recession will be explored in depth in Chapter 2.

contradicted by other interview subjects, but given credibility by the ordering of interview subjects that proceed from Boggs' utterances which then return to an establishment of Boggs' voice higher up with the hierarchy of the text. The film utilises a rhetorical logic that plays on the potency of particular visual and sonic signs, arranging a journey for the viewer that subtly knits the viewer into a narrative flow generated from a patchwork of snippets from completely different moments and locations. What follows is an elucidation of this via close reading of a short excerpt (from 16.22 to 18.52) of *The Recess Ends* in order to show the film has a greater sophistication and referentiality than mere observation and open-ended questioning:

VISUAL	**SOUND**	**ANALYSIS**
Handheld footage of interior of abandoned building, debris scattered, graffiti.	non-diegetic music of melancholy/tense hip-hop	Establishment of transition away from previous spoken material, the adjoining of image and sound speaks to urban decay that has happened upon an African-American (linked by urban signifiers and music) population. Adds tonal quality of bleakness, depression.
Long shot from the perspective of a driver, looking down an industrial street. We can see a petrol station in the distance.	Music continued	Charting geographical space, establishing the consumerist and interrelated economic situation. Tonally consistent with previous shot.
Long shot down a grey street with an abandoned industrial facility in the distance, with half the shot occluded by a wall in the foreground.	Music continued	Expanding the theme of urban decay and economic decline through thematic rather geographical connection. Tonally consistent with previous shot.
int. car, shot from passenger seat of Rick Feldman of Detroit, MI, who speaks while driving directors around Detroit	Music from previous scenes stop. Sound is matched: "1/3 vacant land and equal to the size of San Francisco"	Local testimony. His confident posture and ease at conveying facts speaks to his authority even though we do not know who he is. We are being granted access to the relationship between geography and its effect on humanity. We assume there is connection between the previous shots of roads and taken from cars, and the interior

		of this car. There is not.
int. car, driver perspective of vast abandoned factory building stretching into the distance.	Feldman continues to speak but we do not see him.	The perspective switch chosen here, which is cut in a way to look upon from Feldman's perspective at what was suggested by Feldman in the previous shot. This confirms the previous utterance about decay on a vast scale.
int. car, shot from passenger seat of Rick Feldman of Detroit, MI	Sound is matched again as Feldman speaks: "you can almost take a deep breath and say 'this world is coming to an end', the empire, the industrial age"	This is speculative testimony, Feldman's opinion, but it is given filmic credibility by the juxtaposition of the previous two shots and Feldman's verbose ease as a speaker. We now suspect that what Feldman has said will thematically overlap with the next sequence.
Grace Lee Boggs, seated at home in classic interview set-up, surrounded by academic texts.	Sound is matched. Boggs speaks: "Detroit is a very interesting city because it was one of the first cities to become de-industrialised. And it's become devastated."	The film does not expressly tell us that this is an academic of note, but the rhetoric of the image speaks to her credibility and wise perspective (the *mise-en-scène*, she is old, her memory is clear). This provides a world-historic context for the captured occurrences and here the film references official rather than informal discourses of recession.
Tracy Dekline of Grand Rapids, MI in foreground as factory apparatus are in the background. Camera tracks Dekline as he walks and tells the off-camera questioner	Sound is matched as Dekline begins story of lay-offs at this factory.	Relates to previous shot by connecting academic perspective to lived experience within the time frame the film has established. The shot establishes a man in a workplace as a credible testifier able to speak truthfully about the devastation Boggs speaks of.
ext. shot of American flag fluttering over car park	Dekline narration overlaid.	A moment of irony, perhaps, or speaking to a wider theme. It is not entirely apparent where we are from this shot alone. The flag stands high above a quiet car park: America and her policy presiding over the decline of manufacture.
ext. shot of a crooked sign	Dekline narration overlaid	Connects to previous shot by

reading ‘Receiving Dock’		establishing geographical relationship. The crookedness of the sign speaks to its abandonedness, of its neglect.
int. factory, handheld footage travelling forward across factory floor through empty space.	Dekline’s narration overlaid, tells us that the factory has gone from 200 people to approximately 20 since 2008	Connects with narration. The factory floor is empty, there are no workers here. This shot validates the connective theme that Feldman, Boggs, and Dekline have outlined.
Nicole Robins, Orange County, CA in interview position.	Sound is matched. “If the auto industry fails we definitely will see the effects trickle down from everything to the body shops..”	A jarring geographical switch that serves to underline the far-reaching nature of one city’s industrial decline. Even as far away as California, we quickly understand, people will be affected. The commencement of a testimony about supply chains begins further down the chain.
ext. shot of an abandoned/closed body shop	Robins narration overlaid: “and the distributors and the vendors...”	A crude follow-on to exemplify the narration, to continue the supply chain linkage.
ext. long shot down road with a lorry driving through the left half of the shot as the American flag flutters in the right half	Robins narration overlaid: “so I think that plays...”	A thematic return to America and American industry in decline, the shot of the lorry also a visual metaphor for the supply chain referenced in Robins narration.
int. shot following man walking through a factory with his back to camera.	Robins narration overlaid: ...a huge part and not only the millions of jobs that are out there.”	Connects the remainder of Robins narration, literally, to a man at work whose job is theoretically at risk because of the overarching connection within this short section.
Janice Steele, Detroit MI interview sequence.	Sound is matched. Steele talks about the incentive to stay in the factories was its financial reward and now there’s a downturn it has to be ridden out.	Personal testimony about what attracted people to Detroit to work, and what they have to do now.
Grace Lee Boggs, interview shot with reverse zoom to reveal Boggs handing one of the tomes, near to where she is seated, to an off-camera presence. Holding a book Boggs has written, she leans forward.	Sound is matched. Boggs speaks. “In the chapter on dialectics and revolution...in this book...the American Revolution is gonna be different from all other revolutions because it’s gonna require we start giving up things rather than acquiring more things.”	An underlining of the intellectual weight evinced by Boggs. We now come understand, if we did not before, that Boggs is a writer or thinker on this very subject. The previous two minutes of scenes have, effectively, outlined Boggs’ own academic writing

		on the potential commencement of an American revolution. The montage of the Chu brothers have demonstrated material and discovered testimony that speak to how de-industrialisation and financial crash could prove Boggs' writing right.

The two minutes and thirty seconds that I have just outlined is a fair representation of the style and connective logic of *The Recess Ends*. Aside from immediate signs, such as non-diegetic music and lower third word-graphics, that deviate stylistically away from the spartan manifesto and practice of the 1958-1962 works, there is an editing strategy that follows a thematic logic divested of a sense of chronology other than to say these are all post-crash moments and thus united. Real spaces are evoked through the utilisation of lower third name-tags (i.e. "Rick Feldman, Detroit MI") but seen in compressed and edited bursts that divorce from realist strategies of spatial-temporal display. After the opening credits, a girl in New York gives a brief first person to-camera speech in the manner of the contemporary vlog or video diary that explains what recession is and the effects, including job losses and home foreclosures. The next few scenes visit Ohio as locals drive the directors around and show them foreclosed homes and speak about the absence of work. At the 15 minute mark, a young boy in an unnamed location (but against the same curtain as the girl in New York we saw just after the credits) reads a prepared statement about the recession, suggestive of an epigraph that precedes a new chapter or direction for the text to travel. This epigraphic structure remains in place throughout the film, reflective of the structure of important written works.

Much as Jeanne Hall indicates of Robert Drew's *Primary,* and remarked upon above, there is both Barthesian image rhetoric and the utilisation of a classical cinematic grammar.[10] The establishment of hierarchies within the text, the sectioning of the text into informal chapters, and historic images of financial depression act respectively as structuring device and rhetorical flourish to underscore both the urgency of the contemporary situation and a familiar representational

10 And more extensively in Chapter 4, when a more stylised and 'poetic' form of realism takes on the recession image.

methodology to understand it. “Their project may remind us of some of the famous images that grew out of the Great Depression, photographs such as the “Migrant Mother” series by Dorothea Lange in the 1930s” wrote Cari Shane in her 2010 review of *The Recess Ends* for the *Huffington Post.* Indeed it is this particular type of referentiality that indicates that *The Recess Ends* operates in the mode Paula Rabinowitz labelled ‘the sentimental contract’ (2016, p. 836) of the American Labor Film, an artistic grouping with a long lineage extending prior to the establishment of cinema and documentary practice. The camera gazes upon devastation and ruin while social actors directly address “the trouble” of economic malaise utilising pathetic proof and individual testimony rather than an appeal to logic.

Rabinowitz’s argument suggests that bourgeois culture “contained sentimentality within women’s domain” (p. 837), whilst historic depictions of the working male verged on eroticised and heroic caricatures of virility and health, thus ensuring the appearance of the tears that are “central to the labour documentary” (p. 843) carry extra weight. Viewed with Rabinowitz’s theory in mind and against the labour and labour crisis documentaries that she writes about – *Harlan County USA* (1976) and *American Dream* (1990) – suggests a gendering that determines whether a work is serious-minded or not. When women cry, it is women’s entertainment and pop culture. When men cry, it is realism, as it was in Courbet’s painting *A Burial at Ornans* (1849-1850) or the immigrant strong-man Jurgis in Upton Sinclair’s novel *The Jungle* (1906). The sentimental contract further aligns with realism by conditioning viewers into the essential correctness of non-alienated labour; that the coalfield workers of Harlan County and the car manufacturers of Michigan have an identity rooted in a male labour class invested in the industries of the region. The Chu brothers invest a great deal of time in capturing this “estranged labour” (Marx, 1844). However, some of the Chus accumulation is potentially undermined by looking into an Amish community as an example of American self-sufficiency when they are an isolated, insulated people disengaged from American industrial-capital. Moreover, *The Recess Ends* ends in platitude, with many speakers suggesting that

hard work and trying will ensure their survival and happiness, underpinned by ersatz gospel music. This reveals that the Chu brothers' aesthetic and politics intersect with realism up to a point, but is ultimately resisted by Christianity's individualistic journey to inner salvation. Documentary realism slips into romanticism, revealing their closeness.

What is not captured by an analysis of what there is in *The Recess Ends* is a sense of what is not there or what may have been removed. Utterances of speaking participants are cut perfectly for the duration and moved on from. There is none of the democratic Leacockian lingering that catches moments of doubt and allows the viewer to explore different planes and fields of vision, no extension of utterance to where a profound statement becomes weaker or undermined, and there is no sense of the immediate context of any of the utterances selected by the Chu brothers. All filmed material is subordinate to a sense of argument and deployed with a utilitarian sensibility. The pace of cutting serves only to produce dialogue that chimes consonantly with what preceded it and what will follow on from it. The film, at face value a neutral observational survey of America in the time of crisis, actively pursues a particular thesis about the American financial crisis and its effects on housing, industry, and the national psyche.

Despite deviances from Direct Cinema's realist purity – such as what Daniel Boorstin refers to as "pseudo-events" (1992, p. 39-40) – that is, events that have been set up for filming – the subjects filmed are not required to perform their story in anything other than their natural milieu. The Chu brothers, in their Walt Whitman-esque sense of American mission that promises exploration and nuance, ultimately close down and forbid the sense of looking that realist art historically brings. Their short takes remove the viewer's ability to read images at length and their utilisation of non-diegetic sound is utilised as filler between utterances rather than a signpost toward a particular nexus of poetic readings. The Chus find philosophers, thinkers, and people willing to reel off statistics, but the broadness of their scope comes at the expense of any depth and

engagement with specific issues and too soon after the crash to allow the issues and traumas to make themselves known. Like an academic work, *The Recess Ends* leans on the work of the important in both the academic field and filmic antecedent, surrounding the wisdom with speculations and connective statements that create an expanding map of connections between images, speech, and music with a sense of a wider cultural context. It is precisely because of i.) the inevitable referentiality of the text against other realist art, ii.) the activist sensibility of the text, iii.) the social concern of the text and the framing of a crisis of modernity as an attack on society rather than privileging the individual, and iv). a present but invisible method of stylisation serving the efficiency of the textual flow that I argue that *The Recess Ends* is a realist (or at the very least, sufficiently adjacent to the realist style to render it a close relation) text that constructs recession imagery sentimentally in terms of traumatic effect.

The real thing: the contestations of reality television toward realism

A full morphology of the realist documentary in the 21st century would be a book-length task in and of itself, particularly outlining the ways and extents to which its sense of mission, immediacy, and aesthetics have been adapted by contemporary media formats. This section offers a brief history in order to outline the continued evolution of the realist documentary, outlining the new accretions that keep the realist documentary format resilient to change. Realism, both as an aesthetic quality and a politically-adjoined outlook, exists in contemporary documentary, albeit in a different form. The knowledge of classical referentiality and visual rhetoric, outlined by Hall, that reality unwittingly carried forth has remained embedded within the form as it exists today. However, these visual and constructed qualities are modified in contemporary practice because of both critical developments in documentary that arose critiquing Direct Cinema's truth claims, as well as an accumulation of smaller and more fragmentary changes that arise out of shifting broadcasting parameters and the development of new realist genres. These developments are

important to consider and outline in order to appreciate Lauren Greenfield's *The Queen of Versailles* (2012), which I shall look at in the proceeding section. The addition of self-reflexivity into the realist mix identified by June Deery, in which "the effect of being on TV becomes part of the content" (2015, p. 19), shapes realism toward the curious beast of "reality". I shall use 'reality' to indicate television and cinematic work inflected by both this self-reflexivity and, more importantly, the broadcasting parameters that bring about such work.

After the critical abnegation of Direct Cinema and cinema verite following the 1980s, pursuit of a purer hit of unmediated reality and examination of social class (and indeed, a burgeoning sense of a global hierarchy) in documentary was not cast aside. The unconscious realisation of Bazin's hypothesis that realistic footage lends credibility to juxtaposed artifice led to verite style working in tandem with works taken from contemporary television flows rather than cinematic antecedent. Promises of the real enabled television executives to put reality-based spins on established genres: *COPS* (1989-) breathed new life into the police procedural, *Nummer 28* (1992) and *The Real World* (1993-) were effectively unscripted teen dramas, and *Sylvania Waters* (1992) met increasing demand for Australian soap opera in Europe by fusing reality documentary style with soap-informed narrativity, switching out fictional neighbours for real ones. These were televisual products that borrowed from Direct Cinema without a developmental period in the avant-garde or acknowledging the theoretical inclinations that led to its initial appearance. All of these shows arise not just because of the introduction of computerised editing technology which would not damage the footage on being cut whilst presenting vast arrays of possible edits on one screen, allowing for vast amounts of footage to be corralled into broadcast shape, but also by new possibilities in media, format, and flow.

Enter reality television. Anna McCarthy argues that reality television arises in a prototypical format at around the same time as cinema verite, initially seen in a short section named 'Children of the UN' on the 1954 US television show *Omnibus* (2009, p. 23). The late 50s and early 60s, again in

parallel to the greatest movement in verite and Direct Cinema, saw the admittedly low-brow prank show *Candid Camera* gain its comedic vitality from the sense that some kind of mediation had been subtracted from the comedic process, that there was a reality to the obvious set-up. Jon Dovey traces the relationship between verite form and reality television in the rise of camcorder footage integrated into television, though I note his convincing argument that this is not a strict continuation of Direct Cinema. For Dovey, Direct Cinema "sought to efface the presence of the film crew, to present unmediated reality" (1995, p. 27) while the new style of grainy home video inserted into such flows as ITV with their *You've Been Framed* (1990-) and on BBC with *Video Diaries* (1990-1996) gained some credibility by the presence of the individual shooting the footage. Nonetheless, these formats show a residual and enduring fascination with spontaneous footage that, in its noted technical quality difference from the majority of the flow of network television, communicates a sense of the real. Laurie Oullette and Susan Murray outline a theoretical schema of the difference between reality television and the previously accepted understanding of factual broadcasting, stating that "access to the real is presented in the name of dramatic uncertainty, voyeurism, and popular pleasure, and it is for this reason that reality TV is unlike news, documentaries, and other sanctioned information formats whose truth claims are explicitly tied to the residual goals and understandings of the classic public service tradition." (2009, p. 3-4)

Oullette and Murray's schema bears scrutiny but has the advantage of several years remove to observe the rapid changes as reality television became part of the television firmament. The advent of imported Dutch format *Big Brother* in 1999, with its promise of "social experiment" (BBC News, 2000) via a real-time sociological look at a cross-section of British and Irish people interacting freely and available in constant livestream, momentarily caused a nation and a handful of academic disciplines to brace themselves: would this be the reality we have been promised? With constant observation maintained by the flattening lack of expression of CCTV cameras removing what Dovey calls "the inscription of presence" (1995, p. 28)? With automation and the potential for

the power of the editor to be challenged as the online voyeur selects their own camera position? This was a new and exciting proposition to British viewers. Quite quickly it was realised that it was not quite as hoped, and not merely owing to rostrum cameramen behind two-way mirrors, technical issues with the online streams, the restoration of a direct-address via narration, active censorship of anything nefarious, and the compression of 24 hours of daily action into selective half-hour shows. Its own artificial version of the social, a parody of a middle class home, obviates the ability to connect interaction and action with environment. The "living space is also performance space" (Corner, 2001, p. 46) – not merely a place where one dwells but performs additional testimony in an adjacent space as adjacent commentary in real time. Watching the uncut and theoretically unedited coverage, free of expressive camera technique, removes the viewer from aspects of the action. By the third series, the sociological aspect of *Big Brother* was absent and increasingly replaced this with the performative and self-reflexive. *Big Brother* is, for Jane Roscoe and Craig Hight, a hybrid documentary form "distinctive because of the way it pairs documentary traits with fictional aesthetic devices." (2001, p. 38).

The complexity of *Big Brother*'s hybridity is difficult to exactly determine partially because it interacts with bastardised forms of other genres: it is a game show without clear rules about how one wins; it is a soap opera without trained actors or a script; it is a live-stream that allows the viewer to bypass the parameters placed on the show in its allotted screening; it is a show which is discussed on its corollary shows on a sister channel; it is a show that largely reveals its own method of construction. It also relies on Boorstin's 'pseudo-events': these people would not be in this situation did the show not require them to be. June Deery suggests that, despite the passage from Direct Cinema through fly-on-the-wall to reality television[11] indicating gradual movement away from realism, a fundamental link remains between the extremes of this journey. "We could say that reality TV is to real life as ice is to water: it is the same substance but it is transformed and available for further shaping." (2015, p. 33) Reality is not subordinate to production in this proposal, but is

11 For now, we assume, given reality television's ability to mutate.

nonetheless the vital ingredient that positions the genre matter fused with the real subject or situation in the realm of the real. All post-*Big Brother* reality television, as well as those shows that have subsequently been realised to be nascent gestures toward the cultural inevitability of *Big Brother*, partake in this hybridity that retains some corona of the real as part of its selling point.

Reality television of the 21st century makes no effort to cover up its method of construction to a more visually literate contemporary viewer (Creeber, 2015) not merely paying attention to the human drama. There is even a more recent format that has evolved out of reality television that combines the search for the lived real stories, including the relatable mundanities, of interesting and preferably famous people that indulges in quite obvious and ostentatious fabrication in terms of reconstruction, ellipsis, camera set-up, and presentation that is never addressed or utilised as a form of critique in the manner of the New Documentary practitioners. The contemporary format to which I refer is known as 'constructed reality' or 'scripted reality'. In theory, the constructed reality text actually removes the game show style 'pseudo-event' by searching for real people in their natural milieu. There is also, across much of constructed reality, a peculiar return to one of realism's early offshoots in regionalism. Constructed reality argues for a connection between people and place, often writ large in their titles: *Geordie Shore* (2011-), *Made In Chelsea* (2011-), *Real Housewives of Cheshire* (2015-), and *Desperate Scousewives* (2011-2012). Despite documentary convention underpinning the visual language of the show and the parameters being defined by a loosely regionalist logic, these shows have as much in common with the network television soap opera as they do documentary. Such shows are not to be confused with the docusoap format that narrativised aspects of their subjects' lives related to the organisation centre of the show indicated in the title, such as *Paddington Green* (1998-2001), *Airport* (1996-2008), or *Driving School* (1997)), though they are closely-related. Both docusoap and constructed reality have the shaping of the real at heart, but constructed reality shows set-up and attempt to fulfil classical narrative expectations based in the recreation of aspects of the participants' real lives and inter-relationship. Constructed reality is efficient: narratives are shaped beforehand and filmed based on the demands of the production

team. Constructed reality converts natural *mise-en-scène*, such as bars, restaurants, and the interiors of homes, into glamorous sets that obey traditional filming rules that are lit to enhance the visual quality. By contrast, docusoaps "amass a higher-than-average shooting ratio" (Bruzzi, p. 164, 2015) with handheld or shoulder-mounted cameras, with their narratives shaped in the editing room.

In mass-appeal reality television shows that have gained ubiquity as part of US cable television flows and their international appearance in syndication, aesthetic and spatio-temporal rigour in even these hybrid formats is no longer a goal. Within particular US shows of the last decade that construct reality such as *Duck Dynasty* (2012-2017), *Lizard Lick Towing* aka *Lick Life* (2011-2017), and *Alaskan Bush People* (2014-) exists a talking head interview strategy that, when examined closely, obliterates the logic of time to the extent that notions of realism dissipate alongside them. Subject X will appear during the establishment of their story through an appearance within the spatial reality of the fly-on-the-wall sequence. X will then be interviewed from a separate space in formal interview set-up, commenting on how they expect the situation to unfold and their immediate emotional response to the events suggested. As the story of X progresses, the edit will throw us back to this same talking head X commenting upon it as if temporally adjacent to this moment. This will repeat at the conclusion of the episodic narrative, with X now able to reflect on the situation from the same interview position that has been used from the commencement of the interview.[12] Omnipresence of this kind is obviously impossible. However, the positioning throughout the narrative in an attempt to convey the thinking behind the adjacent action works plays upon the reasonable expectation of staged material in these documentary flows.

Realist documentaries affected by the contemporary mode of reality television continually operate with such constructed shortcuts in order to quickly access that which producers deem the emotional real. Such construction, paradoxically, does not dissuade the viewer that what they have seen is emotionally false despite narrative omission, emotion-affecting music, and the negation of

12 Sharp-eyed viewers will note the same interview shot across multiple episodes of a television season.

the democratic gaze envisioned in the style's early history. The self-reflexive mode that creeps into the reality mode affects the viewer, who is now considered literate enough to balance and understand the demands placed upon television production as well as perform a reading of a narrative assembled from reactions, inferences, and a growing iconography of reality television. Much in the same way that *Primary* communicated social class and implicit communication between chosen spectators by a subtle editing strategy, shows such as *Big Brother* have been shaping narratives around close-ups of faces in order to suggest emotional truths to filmed stimuli that may only partially relate to the expressions given.

The Queen of Versailles (2012)

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to an analysis of *The Queen of Versailles* as a financial crash film that exemplifies the discourse outlined thus far: the realist techniques of Direct Cinema and cinema verite allow for an impression of immediate response to major events in our midst, but their contemporary utilisation renders the notion of spontaneous and reactive capture secondary to the incorporation of material associated with other formats, flows, styles, modes, and genres. Analysis of this type will allow this chapter to pursue ancillary questions which ask what is at stake in this collision and is this altered by political and social context? Whilst *Big Brother* and other reality television shows have had their moments where national and world-historic debates crystallise in moments, *The Queen of Versailles* is a film whose narrative is sharpened and animus realised because of the dawning of one such moment: the financial crash of 2007/8.

The Queen of Versailles negotiates a path between the observational mode of verite and modern reality television strategies from reality television through docusoap (and its mockumentary parodies) and into constructed reality. Like the realist painters of the 19th century and the written works heralded by Lukács in the early 20th century, Greenfield's work is concerned with social class

and an examination of the capitalist forces that produce social hierarchy. At a superficial level, this may not seem to be the case: the initial visual style and subject matter suggest the same preoccupations that feature in reality and constructed reality serials – the life of a glamorous and wealthy spouse chosen for a particular alignment of personality and semiotics with narrative driven by their desires, actions, and relationships to others.[13] A more careful viewing reveals not only a similar schema, with concessions to modern technique and inflection, that underpins Direct Cinema and other broadly realist and observational documentary but continued engagement with concerns around social class as a determining factor. Misgivings about the privileged status of Greenfield's wealthy and famous subjects are understandable, but Aaron Taylor notes that "many of direct cinema's canonical works are about public figures, including John F. Kennedy, Eddie Sachs, Joseph Levine, The Beatles, Jane Fonda, Marlon Brando, Bob Dylan and the Fischer quintuplets" (2011, p. 53). A reminder of this serves as a strong reminder that Direct Cinema has had celebrity, the constructed person, and the complex negotiation between public and private space at its heart. The techniques utilised within *The Queen of Versailles* to explore the Siegels in this realist method include extended lingering takes that allow for democratised 'looking', the establishment of relationship, time, and space in order to convey indexical markers of the real, utilisation of image rhetoric, referentiality to other visual art, and the establishment of thematic motifs within the montage. Director Lauren Greenfield outlines her intent thus:

> In an age of cultural obsession with the rich, chronicled by reality TV (*Keeping Up with the Kardashians, Real Housewives of Beverly Hills*), I wanted to tell a deeper, *cinéma-vérité* story of an extraordinarily wealthy family that had the ambitious goal of building the biggest house in America. And then the financial crisis got in the way… (Greenfield, 2013).

This excerpt from the liner notes of the DVD of *The Queen of Versailles* brings together some of the strands that I have articulated thus far in this chapter. Greenfield hones in on an

13 Lauren Greenfield states that her initial meeting with Jackie Siegel was when she met her as part of a trio who "were all holding blingy Versace bags—and a lot of gold. They were so interesting looking, and I made a picture of their three purses. I started talking to one of the women, Jackie Siegel, who had flown in from Florida just for the party. This picture is so symbolic of the status markers: the rings, the bags, the breasts, the gold. It was 2007, and Jackie was spending $1 million a year on clothes, and Versace was shipping her containers of clothing." (Shapiro, 2017)

interrelationship between realism (Greenfield's use of the expression *cinéma-vérité*) and reality television that is somehow apparent but unresolved. The former – realism - is more complex and nuanced with a more truthful form of representation at its heart, whilst reality television is a staple format that adjoins Direct Cinema's search for unmediated truth with greater narrative shaping and a particular focus on strata of society typically associated with surface and signifier i.e. the rich and the famous. Television shows such as *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* (2010-) and *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (2007-) feature immediately recognisable strategies of artifice such as the interview style highlighted in the previous section, the insertion of prominent and 'dramatic' non-diegetic music and a fast-paced and visible form of editing where some of the transitions between scenes feature a very non-realistic 'wipe' effect and a sound effect of a fast-moving object. Greenfield clamps down on such examples of egregious artifice in her exploration of the Siegel family, while AO Scott of the *New York Times* broadly agrees with the difference between the film's surface aesthetic and wider realist thrust, stating that "the movie starts out in the mode of reality television, resembling the pilot for a new "Real Housewives" franchise or a reboot of "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." Before long, though, it takes on the coloration of a Theodore Dreiser novel." (Scott, 2012). Interestingly, it is a text of financial crash and recession whose focus is chiefly on those at the top of the pyramid rather than the workers interviewed by the Chu brothers. We do see emptied call-centres at a Siegel business and depopulated sales suites within the Westgate skyscraper around which the opening third of the film is based, but the effects upon individual or collected labour is not available.[14]

The title of Scott's article ('Let Them Eat Crow') twists a classic aphorism attached to the cultural legend of 18th century France in order to relate the more subtle referential point within *The Queen of Versailles*: a sustained comparison with the iconography of the moments leading to the French Revolution of the 1790s. To develop a greater appreciation for the far-reaching consequences of Greenfield's extended metaphor that links the Siegel family in early 21st century

14 Westgate is the name of David's company.

USA to a pre-revolutionary France at the end of the 18th century, I must provide some enhanced context. The Palace of Versailles exists as an emblem of a post-feudalist Europe[15], a feat of architecture that surveys the shift from the high baroque to the early classical period. Versailles, in its grand halls, gardens, and salons named for ancient Gods, triumphs the supremacy of the Catholic Church through dramatic reimaginations of Roman form married with the artisanal works of craft guilds utilising the bounty returned to the Empire by the merchant guilds (*corps de métiers*). Robert Berger suggests that the mere name of Versailles "evokes, more than that of any other monument, the political institute of absolute monarchy and the aesthetic qualities of vast scale and bombastic displays" (1985, p. 1) Depending upon your position within society, Versailles exists as provocation as much as it does celebration. David Siegel, husband of the titular 'queen' glibly states from a position in a throne adorned with cherubic figures and Napoleonic bust behind him (fig. 1.5), in one of the few talking head interviews that his American Versailles is being built "because we can".[16] Given that Siegel's business is the construction of vast buildings to be divided for timeshare properties, we cannot therefore believe that Siegel is referring to the technical aspect of being able to construct America's largest private residence: the statement is consciously an assertion of status afforded by wealth, and unconsciously an expression of the post-modernist separation of signifier from cultural context. This unconscious expression of free-floating signifier is gently teased out in the first third of the film, which takes place partly in the post-modern paradise of Las Vegas, adorned with its Sphinx and pyramids and Eiffel Tower, while agents of Siegel's business show would-be customers around suites in the timeshare that potentially offer its renters the chance to temporarily feel rich. Greenfield is suggesting in these juxtapositions that Siegel's obsession with how things appear maps on to the wider malaise that comes to a head when the financial crash occurs. It is not enough for Siegel to build a large home, but it must be a facsimile of a building synonymous with great cultural power. Symbolically, Versailles exists as one of Western culture's

15 Feudalism was officially abolished in France as part of the first French Revolution, though the transition from this form of governance occurred as early as the beginning of the 1500s. (Salmon, 1979, pp 19-26)

16 During this interview David admits to some unspecified criminal malfeasance that may have helped swing the 2000 US Presidential election. Sometimes it is unclear whether the dissonances are set up by Greenfield or by the subjects themselves.

most potent metaphors. For the purposes of the critique embedded in this film, those are the following: i. a narcissistic testimony to the opulence and greed of a small caste of people that stands against an increasingly febrile social situation beyond its gates and seems to laugh in its face ii. the subsequent revolution provoked by the continuation of this situation and brought to a head in the late 18th century when the monarchy was overthrown.

Greenfield draws on the richness of cultural knowledge of the revolutionary in France in *The Queen of Versailles*, mapping the construction of a vast pleasure-dome against the situation that has unfolded during the course of filming: the global financial crisis, the recession, and the effects that this has on those outside of the upper class. Though Greenfield's camera-style is as reasonable, objective, and democratic as one can be (Kate Stables of *Sight and Sound* called the camerawork "reflective, patient" (p. 108, 2012)), the editing console makes links between disparate chronologies and spaces, establishing themes through the use of recurring motifs, and drawing on other media in order to create jarring reactions with the notionally high-brow understanding one typically brings to Versailles. Jeremy Varon writes of Greenfield's utilisation of an ironic dissonance, noting the reality television sensibility guiding *The Queen of Versailles* in tandem with nods to other media:

> Like the house of Kardashian and legions of TV housewives, the Siegels are painfully bereft of taste. Theirs is a low-rent sensibility miscast in champagne land. As old as the *Beverly Hillbillies*, this dissonance has carried the quintessentially American proposition that wealth has no need of, or bearing on, cultural distinction. If once used to skewer the pretence of the hereditary rich, this device now gives free rein to pedestrian gluttony untamed by aspirations to refinement and incapable of shame. (2014, p. 102)

Varon is kind toward Greenfield's use of dissonance, implying it serves only a familiar and folksy humour. Greenfield goes further than this. I argue that Greenfield brings the politically-engaged gaze associated with realist presentation to indicate aporia within the classicist, romantic, and anti-realist self-presentation of some of the richest people in the world. Greenfield uses prurient camerawork and dialectical editing to show and suggest the network of neglect, waste, cruelty,

detachment, self-importance, and delusion that allows those near to the epicentre of financial crash to remain rich at the expense of poorer others whose situation worsens. Mark Ledbury refers to this type of depiction as indulging in “desacralization” – a representational style used by pro-revolutionary artists that evinced “the eroding of the sacredness of institutions vital to the *ancien régime*.” (2006, p. 191) Signifiers of class – as both a measure of social hierarchy and an adjective denoting refinement and sophistication – are put to work continually in Greenfield’s use of montage and visual in a way that critiques the actions of the subjects.

The central conceit in the construction of Greenfield’s film is the presence of its titular character as a contemporary version of a French aristocratic female, at times a Marie-Antoinette figure; a figurehead of structural largesse at a time of revolt, adjacent to great influence, a presence detached from anything but the most opulent milieu, a feminine face to the scenes taking place behind closed doors, and a complex negotiation between a number of discourses involving gender, class, authenticity, and nature. Jackie Siegel, the queen of the title, invites the comparison directly. The home the Siegel family are constructing is directly modelled on the palace at Versailles and upon completion would become the largest family home anywhere in the world. Jackie’s husband David is not quite Louis XVI, but a billionaire tycoon, cosy with Republican power and rich from the cheap credit policies that fostered the financial crash at the expense of millions of Americans. There is a parallel, the film suggests, in that both preside in power at the moment of potential revolution.

fig 1.1 – Portrait of a Lady as Diana by Nicolas de Largillier (1656 – 1746)

Presentations of Jackie, such as the DVD cover art and several one-shots throughout the film, depict her in the same proportionality and style as 18th century portraiture of women. The cover (fig 1.3) image of Jackie in the foreground alongside a small dog and some intrusions of nature, with her home (not Versailles, but the smaller mansion much of the text occurs in) in the background bears direct scrutiny with portraits of aristocratic and royal women by Louis de Romain, Francois Hubert Drouais (fig. 1.2), Nicholas de Largilliere (fig. 1.1), and Jean Baptiste Greuze. In the work of each the subject is positioned centrally and viewed from at least the waist up (men in portraiture are typically depicted from the chest up) in order to depict the finery of the clothing, the sexualisation of the subject's body, with subtle focus on the maternal abdomen region, and establish relationship with the smaller animal with which they are juxtaposed.

fig 1.2 – portrait by François Hubert Drouais (1727-1775)

The inclusion of the lap dog, a range of heavily-domesticated breeds small enough to carry, reflects historic symbols of faith, fidelity, and loyalty to an unseen partner of the subject (Hall, 1979) in addition to connections with the increasing dominance displayed by humanity over the rest of nature arising from romanticism's alignment with the scientism of the Enlightenment, a common feature in Romantic works by Eugene Delacroix, Caspar David Friedrich and JMW Turner. In each example the incursions and intrusions of natural flora are revealed to be either sculpted to some degree, artificial, or entirely fantastical. These are portraits of women as trophies, prizes of the aristocrat who enact dominion over domestic spaces and radiate memory of the romanticist's naturist vision and its preservation through childbirth and motherhood.

fig. 1.3 The Queen of Versailles DVD cover

Christopher Corley writes that “French queens had no theoretical power on their own, but only as partners to their husbands, and royal portraits traditionally reflected this political philosophy” (2005) The image of Jackie is routinely fetishised, set at odds within its own home, her height and beauty juxtaposed humorously with her short and plain-looking husband who ultimately controls her access to wealth. Dena Goodman suggests that the iconic female figure adjacent to power and regime change was subject to various contestations that each representation adds its own ideological shading to. The Marie-Antoinette figure exists within “the struggle for agency and personal autonomy” with a constant battle between “the ability to be herself and act according to her own will and desires—was carried out on the public stage and within a set of dynamic forces, within what we might call history itself. She was constantly being identified, constructed, presented, and represented.” (2003, p. 3) The structure of Greenfield’s film, the first 30 minutes taking place prior to the financial crash, mirrors this social dynamism as Jackie moves between various

oppositional modes whilst never deviating from the same essential vision or behaviour: from trophy wife given free rein to spend to nuisance over-spender, from glamorous subject to tragic subject, from winner to victim, from passive and ignorant about world finance to involved and implicated in its sudden change.

There is, as Hall indicated in Drew's *Primary*, some small engagement with verite positioning itself at the peak of representational styles. By the artifice indicated in the opening in which we see Jackie and David posing for the promotional material of the film including their non-smiles when in repose, we see a crude juxtaposition that suggests a disparity between public face and private feeling that also critiques the surface style of the constructed reality and celebrity-focused docusoap. Continued observation by Greenfield leads to Jackie expanding beyond the caricature familiar of reality television stars. We learn of Jackie's unlikely background as a computer technician who fled an abusive relationship and progression to becoming a storied beauty queen and wife of a billionaire. Greenfield includes footage that indicates a caring and compassionate trait within Jackie, such as adopting an orphaned relative and attempting to raise money for a childhood friend whose home was facing foreclosure. Indeed, there are links between these inclusions that serve to humanise Jackie and the portrait of Marie-Antoinette by Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun. Mark Ledbury writes how Vigée-Lebrun's portrait "was careful to tug at the heartstrings by having the eldest son point to the empty crib of the recently deceased princess Sophie, so that the queen is represented as stoically grieving as well as skilfully maternal" (p. 211). We see Jackie receiving various beauty treatments, assuming an engagement with superfice and artifice along the lines of dozens of reality television stars. The later inclusion of these elements of Jackie's background, along with a sense of duty and familial loyalty, suggest that like the face of the Antoinette is carefully chosen and heavily worn. Self-reflexivity duels continuously with reality.

The observational mode of the camerawork captures takes at sufficient length to explore ornamental moments that serve no narrative but flesh out character. Occasionally, these moments recall the exaggerated pauses of the mockumentary comedy form utilised within shows such as *The Office* (2001-2003). For example: a scene in which Jackie, having to make financial savings that rob her of her private plane, asks the clerk of an airport car rental facility what the name of her driver is, apparently unaware that the car rental outlet is a self-drive facility. This is one of several included moments in which the pseudo-aristocratic subject is clueless about society and social mores. The realist mode preserves the awkwardness of the protracted silence and pained reaction of the clerk against Jackie's expectancy in order to present a comedic moment where the subject appears, as her whole financial way of life appears to be, hopelessly out of touch. The lingering awkwardness leading to comedy preserves the authenticity of the moment at a moment where a cut away would relieve some of the emotional pressure on the viewer but would also divest the moment of its highest power. The moment, in its stark contrast between what is said and what is expected, directly recalls the quote attributed to Marie-Antoinette (though thought to be said by another high-born aristocrat of the late 18th century) at the time of hearing that people were starving for a lack of bread: "*Qu'ils mangent de la brioche*" ("let them eat cake"). This simple formulation of Jackie asserting privilege in a tone-deaf manner repeats itself often: Jackie's friend is faced with foreclosure while Jackie asks her own children "could you live in a house this small?" Jackie asks her driver Cliff, for whom she has bought a fast food meal and invited over the threshold of her home, whether he is ready "to eat a cheeseburger in paradise." There is an added dramatic irony for the viewer, as Greenfield has included footage where she speaks to Cliff, who tells his own story of having previously been rich and now wiped out owing to a financial crash.

The establishment of potent recurring motifs with powerful semiotic value, captured as part of Greenfield's verite filming sessions, provides thematic ballast throughout. The word 'foreclosure' - the act of bank repossession when mortgage payments remain unfulfilled - is introduced to the

film through people in the orbit of the Siegel family. Some context here may help to connect the text to its world. The Institute for Policy Research (IPR) at Northwestern University suggest that at the peak of the Great Recession, “nearly four million homes were foreclosed each year, and 2.5 million businesses were shuttered.” (Schanzenbach et. al., 2014). The aforementioned Cliff lost his burgeoning empire to foreclosure, and Jackie’s childhood friend Tina is placed in peril by the same threat. In one of the few intertitles in *The Queen of Versailles*, we learn that Jackie has given Tina $5000 to help prevent her home from falling into foreclosure which briefly indicates a charitable and humane gesture on Jackie’s behalf. A double irony follows. Firstly we see Jackie speaking to Tina on the phone, who learns that the $5000 was not enough to save the house. Secondly, we learn that Westgate will be given an extension to find the $240 million they owe the construction company who built their recent luxury tower. This disparity serves to heighten the unreality of the Siegel and Westgate situation with that of the 4 million homes per year not afforded extensions and good will. When the Siegel’s Versailles goes into foreclosure at the end of the film, the irony serves as catharsis.

Other reviews have noted delicately poised ironies and binaries within Greenfield’s motif establishment. Kate Stables writes that “space, and its use and abuse, form the film’s quiet obsession. Greenfield is constantly contrasting Jacqueline’s huge closets and her delight in the Brobdingnagian scale of ‘Versailles’ with David’s retreat to a crammed, cramped home office.” (2012, p. 108) Stables’ assessment is true but Greenfield takes the strategy beyond the Swiftian satire implied in her review. There is, in the scenes where nanny Virginia is revealed to live in the abandoned Wendy house in the grounds of the Siegel mansion, a more sustained critique that utilises disparity of scale. Virginia, a Filipino national who tells Greenfield that she has not seen her family back home for 19 years, is proposed in the montage to be the functional mother of the Siegel brood. Tellingly, the home she lives in is a parodic Colonial-style mansion (fig. 1.4). Greenfield peers inside Virginia’s home at a fold-out bed upright against the wall, its space maximised but all

of its accoutrements, pictures, and ornaments have some sentimental and cultural connection to Virginia contrasted against the extravagance of the Siegel mansion interior. Greenfield captures Virginia's restrained testimony about her deceased father's hopes to one day own a proper concrete home, which never manifested until his death, noting his concrete tomb now serves as home. As Virginia leaves and returns to work, the camera follows Virginia leaving her small home and walking into the vastness of the driveways, car-ports, and wing of the Siegel mansion considered too small.

fig. 1.4 Virginia's parodic Colonial mansion home

Virginia remains upon the firing of much of the Siegels' staff after the first wave of the financial crash hits David Siegel's business empire. After the firing, the house they live in appears to become messier, making a subtle comment on the hidden labour propping up the artifice of both their life and that of American capitalist veneer. Uppermost in semiotic value is the repeated visual of faeces, which is beginning to not be picked up after the many animals wandering around the house. The metaphoric value of Greenfield's montage returning to images and mentions of animal

waste piling up on the floors of their mansion indicates not only the desires of the subject disappearing, but connects to the overarching financial reality against which these occurrences happen.

Shit has been theorised in the work of Julia Kristeva in terms of the abject, extending Freudian categories of basic repression to suggest shit exists as a kind of primal repression that humans “radically exclude” (1982, p. 2) and forcibly separate from in order to maintain humanity as a break from animality. Shit returns to haunt the Siegels, Greenfield suggests, to remind them of the fine line between their insulated wealth and the viscera of poverty. These images of faeces come to represent the repressed memories of failure and poverty in the histories of both David and Jackie, threatening to drag them back downwards into the gutter. As their wealth level decreases they are less able to cope with the shit. The first three instances where we see animal waste are within the Siegel home. The first is juxtaposed immediately after the firing of 16 members of staff. The third occurs when Jackie is wandering around the house in an expensive fur jacket while her son stands in waste that has lain in close proximity to where he plays. Arguably the point regarding the encroachment of animal waste in connection with the loss of workers who maintain order and value in the Siegel home is made in the first juxtaposition. But Greenfield is, I argue, attempting to make a wider and more symbolic point about the intrusion of the abject and the ways in which primal fears cannot be truly insulated against. The most telling utilisation of faeces as a visual is in reference to Cliff, a formerly rich man turned limousine drive after his own wealth was decimated. Greenfield’s camera looks out over the rear of his property, the azure promise of his swimming pool turned stagnant algae green, with two dozen dog stools adjacent. Cliff appears to represent a failed David at first, a poorer aspirational man in his orbit. The utilisation of shit as the haunting of poverty, joined in montage from the shit in the Siegel mansion to the excess of shit in Cliff’s yard, suggests that in fact Cliff could be the fate awaiting David. After a Christmas party, filmed deep within David’s misery about the effect the financial downturn has had on him, he falls asleep in a

chair while Greenfield keeps the edit focused on him as one of the many dogs ominously crawls over him. What seems innocuous and playful is given satirical bite and expands greatly on Mark Ledbury's notion of desacralization as the ruination of an idealised projection of the self by the aristocracy. The "progressive erosion of the seemingly god-given and even divine qualities" (Ledbury, p. 206) of Sedaine's *Le Roi et le fermier* (1762) in which the king is stripped of his entourage and splendour arguably reaches a logical continuation in *The Queen of Versailles* when the richest people in America are juxtaposed constantly with shit as an existential threat.

This formulation, where the Siegels have creatures to care for and the responsibility is passed off to hired help, repeats itself in motifs of animal neglect by the Siegel children. One of the children's lizards is found dead. A tank full of fish are found dead. Greenfield often captures the children in the way wildlife documentarists might capture absent-minded groups of animals, herded together and apparently disengaged. That they leave mess, toys, bicycles, entire playhouses (Virginia's living space was a former toy), food, and ultimately sentient creatures abandoned is suggested to be a consequence of their lifestyle collapsing in Greenfield's montage and exploration of space. David Siegel is seen barricading himself in his office during family meals in order to work after an interview in which he talks of his own Las Vegas-obsessed father's distance toward him. None of what I have outlined in this paragraph directly relates to the central matter of the Westgate company and the Siegel family attempting to cope with the financial crash, and indeed could all have been edited in from different timelines. Their inclusion within this narrative speaks to Greenfield's fascination with their potential as metaphor: for the 1% (society's rich) as disconnected from the 99% (everybody else), for generational trauma having some degree of inheritance, for capital in crisis' demands ultimately outweighing the family unit.

Just as Jeanne Hall indicates of Robert Drew in her analysis of *Primary*, Lauren Greenfield utilises the visual shorthand of typage and subtle strategies of dialectical montage. Brief examples of a few moments of this include:

- As Jackie narrates how niece Jonquil came to live with the Siegels, going from poverty to riches overnight, we see Jonquil in a vast swimming pool struggling to stay atop a lilo in a juxtaposition that suggests a fish out of water or a struggle to come to terms with the transition.

- A Jackie interview 'narrates' multiple shots of scenes at a Christmas party. She says "All I want is for us to be happy together, to get along, I want to see our family and our friends with smiles on their faces." This then cuts to David sat in an ornate wooden seat rather than the gilded throne, frog-faced, flatly intoning that "nothing makes me happy these days" with a bust of Napoleon visible over his shoulder. These are not time-adjacent moments though they are pieced together to create a comic timing and narrative sense about the deepening economic situation.

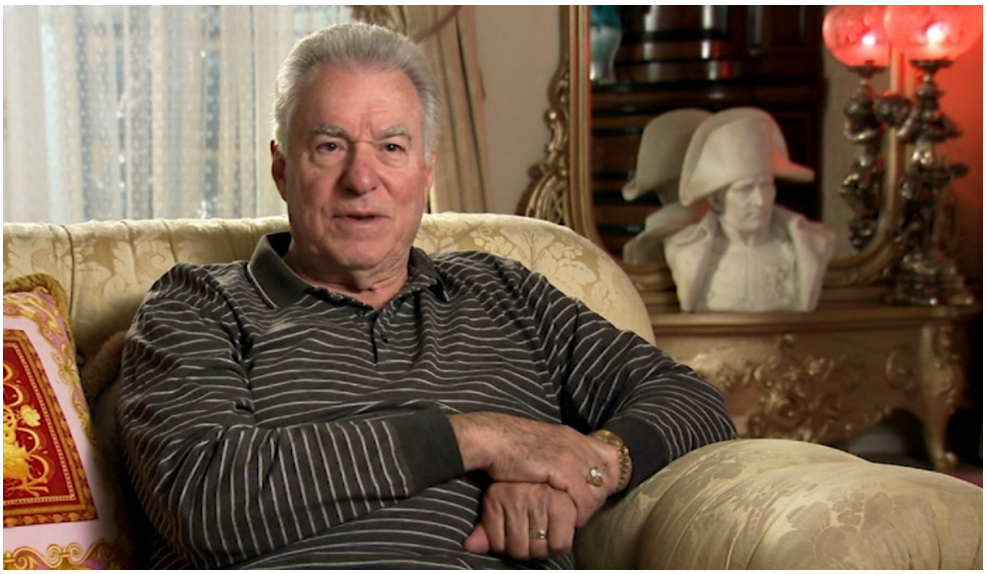

fig. 1.5 Foreshadowing the revolution?

- One of the few moments in Greenfield's montage where music is overlaid comes toward the end of the film as David further isolates himself in order to find a solution to save his business.

Greenfield overlays melancholic music to a sequence where David shirtlessly walks on a treadmill whilst paying attention to a news story about George W. Bush, the now ex-president who David apparently helped elect. This cuts to one of very few meta-cinematic moments within the film, as an off-screen hand reaches in to mop David's brow ahead of an interview segment before he asks Greenfield "are we getting near the end?"

Greenfield's heightened awareness of the politics that realism in documentary arises out of, in tandem with the mutations within the genre in the age of reality that allow for self-reflexivity and narrative economy, steers a course through a fair reflection of the events that unfold with a parallel strategy that uncovers the deeper layers to what we are seeing. Its critique is strident and enhanced by its use of realism's voyeurism and ability to latch onto exterior discourses. Though the revolutionary moment suggested by the text did not occur, leftist movements such as Occupy Wall Street and the campaign to elect socialist senator Bernie Sanders to the Democratic nomination were energised by the discourses adjacent to this text. In the next chapter we shall examine how more explicitly political accounts of this financial reality fare in effecting change.

CHAPTER 2
THE POLEMICAL DOCUMENTARY IN THE AGE OF THE CULTURE WARS

In the previous chapter on the response to financial crash based in a realist style, I engaged with a long history of realism that predated cinema itself before moving into the birth of the realist documentary explosion from which Direct Cinema evolves. The immediate history of this chapter is shorter, arguably only seriously beginning with the director that this chapter is based around. Political and polemical documentaries (that is to say, ones which expressly argue for one side of an argument) have existed throughout the history of documentary. But the method by which Michael Moore constructs his documentaries, and the aesthetic thinking underpinning them, is *sui generis.* That is, as this chapter shows, until his style became the template for certain kinds of politically-inflected, mass appeal works.

The cognitive dissonance created by Moore's work against general expectations of documentary has been widespread. After industry rumour that Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) would not only receive nomination for Best Documentary Feature at the Academy Awards but gain additional recognition in the Best Picture category, conservative media institutions reacted angrily. Displeasure toward Moore from Americans was already fomenting after Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002) suggested that US culture was inherently violent in a way that connected to both an enshrined right to own guns that arose out of colonial fears of revenge and American foreign policy in the latter half of the twentieth century. The website RevokeTheOscar.com emerged in 2003, dedicated to promoting a petition to have the Oscar that Moore won for *Bowling for Columbine* rescinded on the basis of its lack of adherence to Academy rules on what constitutes documentary. The following year David T. Hardy, owner of the *Moore Exposed* website, co-

authored the monograph *Michael Moore Is A Big Fat Stupid White Man* (2004) with Jason Clarke, a full-length rebuttal to Moore's own *Stupid White Men* (2001) tome. Dave Kopel, an attorney and founder of the Independence Institute think tank dedicated to, among other things, "free market conservation", penned an essay entitled 'Fifty-nine deceits in *Fahrenheit 9/11'* which meticulously harvested assertions from Moore's work in order to 'debunk' them. A banner year for anti-Moore sentiment concluded with the release of four documentaries dedicated to debunking Moore's work, including Alan Peterson's *FahrenHYPE 9/11* (2004), a feature-length documentary dedicated to the rebuttal of not only the politics of Moore's documentaries but the exposure of sleight-of-hand techniques in their production.[17] Notably, such works are characterised by "a tendency to use Moore's documentary strategies against him." (Kryzych, 2015, p. 80)

Publicly-funded institutions such as the BBC had weathered their own 'fake documentary' storm at the end of the previous century,[18] with the matter prone to arising at any given time in the years since. However, the response to Moore at the beginning of the new century was more protracted, organised, and intent upon damaging Moore's reputation. These attempts at character assassination only enhanced both public perception of Moore and the documentary medium itself. What was notable in the eruption of discontent surrounding *Fahrenheit 9/11* is that the documentary became a publicly-contested broadcast form once again, with Moore a figurehead in reminding the public of its power. *Variety* concluded that "one thing, perhaps, that everyone could agree on is that in "Fahrenheit 9/11," Michael Moore, for good or ill, had become instrumental in defining the national dialogue." (Glieberman, 2018) Richard Porton surveyed Moore's seismic impact on contemporary culture, including "speculation concerning *Fahrenheit*'s potential to influence the upcoming American elections" precisely because the film has "a "point of view" and is less neutral than a *National Geographic* special, and might as well be "propaganda". (2016, p. 961) Porton gently skewers a media class not gifted in, or conveniently unwilling to, handle nuanced ethical or

17 The others are *Michael & Me* (dir: Larry Elder, 2004), *Celsius 41.11* (dir: Kevin Knoblock, 2004), *Michael Moore Hates America* (dir: Michael Wilson, 2004)

18 See footnote 12..

even historically-accurate debates about what constitutes truth in reporting and documentary lest they self-implicate. In the frenzy against Moore, Porton notes unflattering comparisons made against him with German wartime propagandist Leni Riefenstahl, director of the Nazi mythos-cementing *Triumph of the Will* (1935). Presumably the same people are just as upset at Frank Capra for his *Why We Fight* series (1942-1945) as well as Humphrey Jennings' role in crafting British propaganda during the Second World War. Of course, this most recent sentence is a tongue-in-cheek joke made to serve the important point that different forms and genres and categories of art have never been immune to instrumentalisation by the politically-minded. Documentary has consistently been utilised to service committed and politicised, rather than notionally neutral and detached, ends.

Documentaries with a strong moral or political orientation that exposed grievous situations or suggested injustices were, of course, not new. Neither were documentaries that successfully converted the power of that argument into real world change. Counter-narrative and resistance to hegemony, even in works produced by heritage institutions, has consistently featured in the documentary field since inception. Alan Clarke's *To Encourage The Others* (1972) and Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) highlighted criminal cases riddled with investigative flaws and judicial malfeasance at a deep-rooted and systemic level. Both films contained reconstruction of happenings, reconstitution of facts, interpretation of events, and the introduction of doubt into the matrix of knowledge around the events they focus upon. The wave of public shock generated by the reception of these films eventually led to a pardoning and a release respectively. Though both Clarke and Morris continued as directors of repute, both encountered difficulties as targets of a protective class surrounding the institutions which came in for criticism in their films, with Morris denied an Oscar nomination for *The Thin Blue Line.*

The difference in contemporary reception to a widely-disseminated documentary of significant counter-narrative begs two question: what has changed? And why Michael Moore?

Interestingly, for a documentarian who has riled a vocal section of the right-wing, Porton also notes a critical tendency from leftist critics notionally inhabiting the same side of the political spectrum as Moore. Porton points to a raft of criticism that disregards Moore for both "shameless self-infatuation and freewheeling [polemic]" (p. 962) that gleefully rejects both the classical aesthetics and sober discourse that connotes quality documentary, particularly those that efface the manufacturer and their politics. Moore was attacked in film from the left/liberal axis with the release of Debbie Melnyk and Rick Caine's *Manufacturing Dissent* (2007). Like the work of Elder, Wilson, Knoblock, and Peterson, Melnyk and Caine indulge in the same stylistic array, craven pursuit, focused dissembling, and "well actuallys" that Moore utilises in his own work. The key difference between the conservative plethora of films and *Dissent* is that instead of suggesting Moore is anti-American, Melnyk and Caine suggest that Moore has besmirched the noble form of documentary by stretching the truth and omitting findings.

Ethical utilisation of the documentary medium has been a long-standing worry of those in its production. Ethnologist and film-maker Edward S. Curtis penned an essay that accompanied the formation of his The Continental Film Company in 1912, stating that "in making such pictures, the greatest care must be exercised that the thought conveyed be true to the subject, that the ceremony be correctly rendered" (Curtis et. al., 2001, p. 65). The question resurfaces perennially, querying every new development within the medium. Realist documentaries have, of course, come in for scathing critique. Realism, as recounted in the previous chapter, is closely-allied with the burgeoning class consciousness of the 19th century and the desire to expose the conditions that affect reality that speak to a politically-committed act on behalf of the film-maker. Realism is, therefore, expressly political. But the kinds of critiques aimed at these documentaries often speak to the ethics of the act of looking and the extent to which participation is desirable: that which is seen, provided it was not set up for witness, is often not disputed. What anxiety about the correct method of construction within, and subsequent use of, documentary suggests is evidence of a sublime power

encoded within documentary's privileged relationship with the real. Furthermore, such anxiety suggests a tacit belief that this power is eminently and endlessly corruptible through aestheticisation, juxtaposition, and timeliness. The power invested in the film taken from reality rather than narrative, in concert with state actors responding to immediate existential threats from other state actors or organised groups, is what allows propaganda to take its fullest flight. But the same footage, arranged according a particular vision, can serve oppositional ideological purposes: consider Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* and then Frank Capra's own deployment of the same footage to serve anti-Nazi ends in his *Why We Fight* series.

However, I argue that there is a cultural undercurrent that services a particular kind of extremely polarised reception of documentaries of the polemical kind that this chapter will look at. This cultural undercurrent fuels the feeling of contemporary groups particularly concerned about the nature of representation and depiction within documentary. These two groups, broadly-speaking, are those on opposing sides of what sociologist James Davison Hunter described as the "culture wars" (1991, p. xi). Though the flower children and draft-dodgers of the 1960s and rises in inner city crime and the War on Drugs in the 1970s provided cultural flashpoints that divided Americans, the ferocity of these wars rose significantly in the 1980s as a reaction to Ronald Reagan and debates around nuclear proliferation, AIDS and sexuality, and increased corporatism in culture. Jeffrey Geiger, building on Norman Denzin's work, writes that "battles about national character and the 'true' definitions of 'America' and 'American' were waged with renewed force in the media and at all levels of government." (2011, p. 189) The territory fought over in these so-called wars are a nexus of ethical issues that divide western society that are thought to transcend social class and socio-economic circumstances and often manifests as a response to the ways contemporary art forms represent topics such as religion, privacy, abortion, response to terrorism, sexuality, reconciliation with the events of national history, and immigration. For the sake of clarity I shall refer to these sides as 'progressive' and 'conservative' and briefly outline their key positions.

PROGRESSIVE	CONSERVATIVE
- leftist economics (Keynes, Marx) - regulated markets - pro-choice on abortion - pro-gun control - political correctness is a necessary corrective of language - sexuality is a spectrum - western history is colonial and reparations should be made - immigration is a net positive - climate change is real - diplomatic means must be exhausted before war or invasion - Democrat / Labour / Green	- capitalist economics (Hayek, Friedman) - free markets - pro-life on abortion - anti-gun control - freedom of speech is paramount - gender is essential - western history is a triumph of exceptionalism and its culture is supreme - immigration must be resisted - climate change is wrong - aggression equates to power - Republican / Conservative / nationalist

Within contemporary culture, the phrase has typically been promoted and instrumentalised by conservative commentators who believe that media practice and artistic production is being controlled by, and remains the purview of, the progressive, alongside the attendant belief that media has a progressive narrative that must be contested by seizing control of its production. Utilisation of 'the culture wars' as a pejorative for a perceived creeping progressive tendency in institutions is also related to utilisation of "cultural Marxism", which asserts in more aggressive tones that academia and the media is a totalitarian instrument of the left and has origins in conspiracy theory that coincide with anti-Semitism.[19] Despite their traditional deployment as pejorative, the phrase nonetheless captures the flavour of the era determined by competing structures of feeling of what constitutes culture, moral good, and truth.

For theorists such as Jean Baudrillard and Francis Fukuyama, the 1990s represented a period of stasis that all have referred to as 'the end of history', echoing similar declarations made by

19 The phrase has a murky etymology but was repeated multiple times as part of a touring speech given by William Lind of the conservative think tank Free Congress Foundation. "How does all of this stuff flood in here? How does it flood into our universities, and indeed into our lives today? The members of the Frankfurt School are Marxist, they are also, to a man, Jewish." (Lind, 2000). A crusade against perceived 'cultural Marxism' was a key driver of the manifesto of Norwegian spree-killer Anders Behring Breivik.

Alexandre Kojève in the 1960s. Though the precise utilisation of this term from each man is different,[20] all speak to the period after the Cold War in which the global dialectic produced by the USA as an emblem of capital and the Soviet Union as an emblem of Marxism was abolished. Both east and west moved toward the centre ground and consensus. However, the reawakening and amplification of the cultural binary occurs at the end of "the long 1990s". This period, from the fall of the Berlin Wall that began the reconciliation of a half century of world-threatening conflict to the events of 9/11, in which liberal capitalism was thought to have finally asserted its domination over other governance systems by bringing relative prosperity and peace, was over. The political consensus, initially united immediately after 9/11 as 88 per cent of Americans in October 2001 supported invasion of Afghanistan (Bowman, 2008) fractured eventually over the presidency of George W. Bush, the signing of the personally-intrusive Patriot Act, the difficulty of the operation in Afghanistan, and the expansion of the war into Iraq that led to 60 million people on five continents (*El Mundo*, 2003) protesting against further invasion. *The New York Times* captured the flavour of the reawakening of the western schism:

> The fracturing of the Western alliance over Iraq and the huge antiwar demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.
>
> In his campaign to disarm Iraq, by war if necessary, President Bush appears to be eyeball to eyeball with a tenacious new adversary: millions of people who flooded the streets of New York and dozens of other world cities to say they are against war based on the evidence at hand. (Tyler, 2003).

It is in the midst of this sharpening cultural separation that Moore's most pointed critiques – *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* – arrive, surfing the zeitgeist of anti-American public opinion. After decades as a thoroughly respected but commercially marginal realm of cinematic practice, documentary landed in the mainstream at the end of the long 1990s. As of 2019, *Fahrenheit 9/11* remains the highest-grossing documentary at the international box office by a

20 For Fukuyama (1992), it was the triumph of liberal capitalism in a global sense – no other options could be conceived as a dominant system. For Baudrillard it signalled the end of Utopic visions of the future as the dialectic created by a monolithic right and left was now in tatters. Kojève (1980) regards the end of history in similar terms but pessimistically, suggesting that whilst individual freedom reigns, man finds his animus in the midst of struggle. The end of history is therefore the end of man.

wide margin, its $119 million gross equalling all of the films from #63 to #100 on the top 100 grossing list since 1982 combined (Box Office Mojo, 2019). Moore was far from the only documentarian critiquing American foreign policy, though he was the only documentarian that the political establishment appeared to be afraid of. Moore's fame and record-breaking popularity is a defining factor in the urgency to mount a defence against his claims rather than those of, say, Ray Nowosielski, director of *9/11: Press For Truth* (2006), whose film makes similarly provocative claims in a much more familiar style with its director hidden out of view. Taken in the context of a cultural war, a constant tussle for America's soul, that shapes artistic response into a binaristic discourse based on your likely response to these topics aligning to a broadly progressive or conservative view, I argue, bears more fruit when trying to make sense of the situation of American political documentary of the last 20 years. Given the increasing sense that this war is of paramount importance it is perhaps easier to understand the adversarial movement taken against Moore given that his work, on the face of it, appears to not only strike first at the heart of American orthodoxy (while Nowosielski's work does not) but does it with a sense of glee and equal adherence to audience demand for entertainment as it does the documentary demand for truth.

Conservative critique of Moore's use of documentary whilst making documentaries in Moore's style about Moore's work suggested that the culture wars would see a bifurcation of aims within documentary from the conservative viewpoint. Somehow, at the same time as worrying about the ethical utilisation of the documentary medium as a means to insulate one's political position from critique, came the collective realisation of a potential for the power of the real to carry the conservative message. As ever the reality is more nuanced when confronted with the text rather than its perception in the eyes of an opponent. For instance, in *Bowling for Columbine*, ostensibly Moore's thesis against extremely liberal gun laws after a high profile school shooting, Moore reveals himself as a lifelong gun owner and member of the powerful lobby group the National Rifle Association. In *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009), faced with a contemporary crisis of the

overarching economic system and its effect upon thousands of citizens, Moore does not advocate for a rival system such as socialism. Could it be that, despite a heterogeneous set of personal opinions that ensure no easy fit on either side of the so-called culture war, Moore enjoys the notoriety afforded to him by being seen to fight on one side of it? Moore's weapon of choice is a style of film-making that instrumentalises documentary power whilst rejecting objectivity in order to take a sharp turn into the subjective and adversarial. The trajectory of Moore's work is indicative of an encampment within one side of this discourse. *Roger and Me* (1989) explores a single incident – the mass firing of several workers at a car plant in his home town. Though there is a comedic thrust that separates Moore's work from other documentaries in the labour documentary tradition, there is also a greater enunciation of class sympathy for the downtrodden rather than cultural alignment. This continues in *Pets or Meat: The Return to Flint* (1992) and *The Big One* (1997), the latter of which is openly critical of Democrat president Bill Clinton. From *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* onward, through the screed against the state of American healthcare of *Sicko* (2007) to recent films *Michael Moore in TrumpLand*[21] (2016) and *Fahrenheit 11/9* (2018), Moore's films have gained a heightened sense of mission against his opponents in the culture wars. The political career of Donald Trump, now the target of two Moore films, has been considered in the light of these ongoing culture wars, held up as the uppermost emblem of a strong response by the organised orthodoxy of America against progressive opponents (Tobin, 2019; Goldberg, 2019; Rachman, 2019) with Michael Grunwald writing that "Trump has pioneered a new politics of perpetual culture war, relentlessly rallying his supporters against kneeling black athletes, undocumented Latino immigrants and soft-on-crime, weak-on-the-border Democrats." (Grunwald, 2018) Trump's election can theorised as a victory against an opponent considered by adherents of his side of the discourse to be weak, socialist, illiberal, overly concerned with politically-correctness and diversity, and a threat to choice and markets.

21 "SEE THE FILM OHIO REPUBLICANS TRIED TO BAN" boasts the advertising on the DVD box.

This chapter will examine the construction and aesthetics of the politicised or polemical documentary responses to the financial crash and the Great Recession, with a particular focus on those featuring the documentarian as an on-screen protagonist whose journey the viewer follows. The key text that I shall look at is Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story*, which continues in the aesthetic and political vein commenced in his own *Roger and Me* (1989) through television works such as *TV Nation* (1994-1995) and *The Awful Truth* (1999-2000) and the notorious films mentioned above. This analysis has two key thrusts. Firstly, in order to underline how aesthetic and truth within Moore's works are embedded within Moore's self-presentation and secondly, to unpack how Moore's method of filmic construction works. Moore's stylistic admixture is completely heterogeneous, drawing from traditional documentary technique such as interview, factual mode, and journalistic inquiry but also encompassing the subjective and impressionistic avenues of satirical comedy, animation, contrived stunts, and the insertion of himself as a star character. Moore's latter-day films, I argue, fuse together a postmodern aesthetic that build on developments in the documentary from the 1970s and an extreme political polarity coming out of cultural developments since 9/11 and the crisis in western liberal capitalism. The financial crash and the Great Recession uphold this crisis and influence a polarity of reception in recession's international spread. Additionally, I will perform a supplementary analysis of *Maybe I Should Have* (2010) by Gunnar Sigurðsson, *Generation Zero* (2010) by Stephen K. Bannon, and *The Emperor's New Clothes* (2015), directed by Michael Winterbottom and Russell Brand. These films, clearly influenced by and not unalike Moore's, respond to the financial crash and Great Recession with similar aesthetic and constructed strategies and boldly-stated political theses, though each differ in particular ways that will allow room to consider different contexts for shared techniques and strategies.

A strange hybrid: new documentary and postmodernity in the age of alternative facts

Before performing the analysis of Moore's work, I feel that it is important to explain genre-related terms such as 'New Documentary' as well as attempting to set limitations on 'postmodernity' that allow for a full and focused inquiry into its interrelation with documentary without getting lost in the outer reaches of their effects. I shall utilise these explanations to consider in theoretical terms what is at stake when documentary practice broadly considered 'postmodern' or 'New Documentary' arise. I will also consider developments in the documentary that lay the foundation for Moore's work in both the sense of aesthetics and construction and the politics that have underpinned polemical documentaries of the past. After these considerations, I shall bring them to the specific cultural context that shapes Moore's construction and determines responses to his work.

The concept of postmodernity has multiple contestants as to its extents and utilisations across the works of Jacques Derrida, Charles Jencks, Jürgen Habermas, Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Fredric Jameson, and Francis Fukuyama. Notably, none of these thinkers denied that postmodernity was a determining factor of western culture of the late 20th century. Each agreed that its reaches suggested a mode of thought that did not just colour artistic texts but inserted itself into the cultural and political fabric, underpinning social relations and fundamentally altering the ways in which knowledge and understanding operate. Though writers who have attempted to condense understanding of postmodernity, such as Jonathan Bignell, have noted "the interdependence of theories and examples in critical approaches to the postmodern and media culture" (2000, p. 1), in each thinker are fundamental differences in attitude and ideology adjacent to analysis of the postmodern moment that limits a generic argument. In attempting to capture a sense of documentary moving from a relatively narrow act to an expanded cinema of radical potential, I opt for the version of postmodernity that undermines previous discourses that suggest that style and substance are inextricably linked by dint of systemic organisation and philosophical underpinning. Connections in art and culture between sign and signified arose out of numerous

conditions particular to pre-modern and early modern society: locality, nationality, faith, social class, work, etc. Simple examples of this include religious iconography, kabuki, or clog dancing: expressive forms in which the shaping of people, place, and belief inheres in its immediate reception. Under modernity suspicion grew toward overarching ways of explaining the world – of the science that turned empirical knowledge into the industrial revolution and man's disempowered labouring in the age of capital, of the philosophy that legitimised this, of the religion that only offered succour later – with knowledge categories breaking away from interdependence into new forms of hybridity and a singular pursuit of its own method. The proposition I am outlining here is that of Jean-François Lyotard from his *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, who stated "I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward meta-narratives." (p. xxiv, 1979) I will use this version of postmodernism rather than that of Fredric Jameson, who commented on image culture and simulacrum in ways that appear manifestly useful to documentary theory, because Lyotard's critique arrives in the spirit of playfulness that is often matched in New Documentary works. Jameson's scepticism and belief that "postmodernism expresses the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism" (2001, p. 1962) is compelling. Nonetheless, it is important to not to be overly prescriptive in order to maximise the avenues available to investigate.

That Lyotard saw postmodernism as "a form of emancipation against the hegemony of elite power" (Baggini, 2018) underscores the initial view from the left of a radical power in postmodernism. As a particular kind of knowledge-creating category operating in an interdependent sphere, documentary had been corralled into the realm of the journalistic inquiry. As such, documentary became the filmic medium by which objective knowledge of the exterior world was conveyed. Documentary supported parallel official discourses in sociology, anthropology, geography, science, and history. Whether it was the poetic tendency of John Grierson or the sober factual reporting of Pare Lorentz, documentary chiefly upheld factual discourse until its own postmodern turn. Increasing globalisation greatly accelerated the scope available to postmodern

society as it brought disparate cultures and their knowledge forms and practices into more frequent contact. The postmodern citizen would increasingly enjoy choices from all corners of the world without having to overcome the material conditions that determined the object or cultural form's existence.[22] Increasingly, as modernism entered into its late period after World War II, the forms that came to the fore were exciting hybrids of musics that had developed in cultural or historic isolation. By the 1960s music that wed black American blues music to English folk music and the classical tradition of Middle Europe was *de rigueur* rather than an interesting novelty. Documentary, too, increasingly became inflected with the postmodern, seeking alternative audio-visual means based in fictional and experimental cinemas to fuel its mission of revealing the real, utilising common perceptions of its own style to close down access to knowledge, or limning the space between real and fiction and visibility and invisibility to suggest new kinds of meaning. Postmodernity did not just come to affect styles of assembly in documentary production and gradually asserted itself as a self-effacing strategy of knowledge-creation (alongside the subsequent deniability that anything could indeed be known) as well as a mode of reception.

The connections between postmodernity and documentary grew in the 1960s, though initially the relationship did not take aim at the totality of the form immediately. Stella Bruzzi argues that, in increasing amounts, documentary came to a seemingly paradoxical pre-occupation with performance and performativity. In *Portrait of Jason* (1967), the question of performance arises throughout what appears to be a standard vérité-style interview with its titular subject, who is being given alcohol by the crew and director Shirley Clarke. Through this we see Jason modulate performance in a manner that reveals his instant appearance as a persona, created not only to navigate the pressures of interrogation by filmed interview, but as a gay black male sex worker in a

22 A benign, but nonetheless fair, example of the globalised postmodern in the everyday is the overwhelming abundance of 'Italian' restaurants chains on British high streets. Though the first iterations arrive through the immigration of people as a result of material conditions and retain a sense of the authentic through the owners and chefs, latter day chains such as Ask and Pizza Express serve notionally Italian food that is owned by a London-based equity group and may be cooked by a Polish chef and served by a Welsh waiter. The surface of what we are engaging with is derived from Italy and Italian culture, but the mechanisms delivering Italy to the consumer may have never engaged with the specificity of Italy and Italianness.

USA determined by anxieties of Christianity and Civil Rights. How much of Jason (not his real name) is a performance is a debatable question, as is the inclusion of the usually invisible hand of director and crew who are seen to provoke Jason. Does this expose Jason's performance or does it construct a new one? And does this constitute a kind of performance by the crew? Whatever the answer, that these questions are foremost rather than the material truth of Jason showed a documentary interested in performance in a way that began to re-contextualise the truth-finding goals it was felt to have. Bruzzi argues that even in verite political documentaries such as *Primary* (1960) there remains a fixation on a central character engaged in a performance as much as it purports to bring the real into focus (2000, p. 156) and consider the ways in which people move between different modes of behaviour and become aware of the presence of cameras. Furthermore, documentaries such as *Paris is Burning* (1990), *Tongues Untied* (1989), and *Herdsmen of the Sun* (1990) engage with a broader category of the social performance. These films highlight performances that make up the daily life of particular peoples either within the margins of western culture or those from different cultures whose rituals are so radically different from ours that they appear to be performance against the context of the normalised behaviours of the audience. Performance of this kind does not threaten to undermine documentary, though it does jeopardise pure observation.

There is, however, further distance for performance meeting reality to travel: the performative documentary. The performative documentary acts as an inverse of the docudrama: where the docudrama utilises performance to "draw the audience into the reality of the situations being performed", the performative documentary inserts deliberate artifice in human behaviour to "draw attention to the impossibilities of authentic documentary representation." (2006, p. 185). Bruzzi calls performative documentary a type of work that highlights "the often hidden aspect of performance, whether on the part of the documentary subjects or the filmmakers." (p. 185) In a number of the examples cited within Bruzzi's persuasive chapter, such as *Geri* (1999) and *The*

Leader, His Driver, and the Driver's Wife (1991), analysis of the film reveals performance on the part of people on both sides of the camera. Performativity, however, does not necessarily equate to unreal or inauthentic. These mutual performances highlight the dance of desires between participants in their struggle for control of the story. Lyotard's postmodernism also did not deny knowledge could exist, but constituted an "analysis of the changing nature of the ownership and production of knowledge" (Baggini, 2018) which these films display as dialectic rather than didactic and suggested that the story of production would potentially be as interesting given the vast social difference between the documentary maker's culture and that which he or she is observing. The quest for control between Nick Broomfield and JP Meyer in *The Leader* reveals as text the underlying and often unspoken subtext in other documentaries. Additional factors highlight the performative aspect: the absence of the leader Eugene Terre'Blanche, who keeps breaking plans to be interviewed by Broomfield, reveals the careful planning, human contract, and skeletal framework that documentary shooting hangs on. Meanwhile, the voice of the narrator is Broomfield, asserting the primacy of his voice-over and above the 'present' Broomfield we see on screen and hear off-camera but diegetically.

Performative documentary has an extended logic of its own: the mockumentary. The mockumentary text, or 'faux documentary', foregrounded cine-literacy about performativity and let the viewer in on the act too. This type of film, such as *This is Spinal Tap* (1984) and *The Blair Witch Project* (1998), now adjoin so easily to the entertainment industry that its ability to reflexively comment upon documentary performance and practice appear to have dissipated. Chris Hansen provides insight from a mockumentary filmmaker's perspective, suggesting the mockumentary retains ability to subtly critique in its armoury by stating that "the filmmaker is released from any role in the judgment of the character. It allows a filmmaker to present ludicrous views and tear down a figure while appearing to stand objectively on the sideline, claiming only to have caught the ludicrousness on film." (2012, p. 163) Hansen smartly observes an additional factor

in play when mockumentary utilises natural performance to serve comic ends, namely ridicule of the objective view of the director-in-the-film as a stand-in character for the real director of 'real' observational documentaries. Moore's comic intent and anthological deployment of footage sourced from anywhere, as long as it can be manipulated to have some relevance to the overarching argument, also recalls another mock-documentary form: the Mondo film. Though largely an exploitation cinema that sought shock over substance, works such as *Mondo Cane* (1962) and *Women of the World* (1963) certainly bear more than a passing resemblance to a Moore text. In both, images must ultimately correspond to text and thesis rather than the utilisation of the image and the filming determining what is said. There is also a strain of mockumentary/documentary making that rejects the overt comedic or traditional entertainment impulses in attempting to construct an egregious falsehood utilising documentary method in order to implicate certain kinds of documentary as being a highly-constructed performance: a serious mockumentary. Peter Greenaway's *The Falls* (1980) operates as a playful critique of structuralist film, a purported partial record of an event that is referred to but never specified, whose forward motion is partially governed by the alphabet rather than narrative. Texts such as *The Falls* and Greenaway's *Vertical Features Remake* (1978), in addition to Peter Watkins' films *Culloden* (1964), *The War Game* (1965) and *Punishment Park* (1972) might best be characterised as pseudo-documentary.

The developments that lead to New Documentary within documentary and parallel forms, as I have outlined, are slow and manifold and relate to parallel pan-cultural occurrences throughout art, culture, and society. The narrative of New Documentary has been conceived of, and upheld, as an extreme and polarised reaction to the earnest travails of Direct Cinema. Bruzzi quotes Errol Morris' frustration with the overbearing effect that Direct Cinema and cinema verite had on documentary practitioners ("there's no reason why documentaries can't be as personal as fiction filmmaking and bear the imprint of those who made them." (Arthur, 2016, p. 902)). The quote operates within

Bruzzi's text as a bridge between a survey of documentary history's obsession with authenticity and the range of reflexive films which subvert, query, mock, or pastiche the ethos of pure observation.

New Documentary marries this thoroughly postmodern pre-occupation with performativity with another strategy characterised variously as postmodern and post-structuralist: deconstruction. Terry Eagleton characterises Jacques Derrida's formulation of deconstruction as:

> ...the name given to the critical operation by which such oppositions can be partly undermined, or by which they can be shown partly to undermine each other in the process of textual meaning. (1996, p. 115)

Oppositions arise from first principles. Documentary's first principles are to those of truth, reality, and authenticity. The opposite, therefore, is lies, unreality, and artifice. New Documentary texts juxtapose documentary's baseline goals with their opposite to produce not only a chasm filled with questions where revelation is expected, but also to work against the medium by uncovering the ways in which meaning creation is a constructed act. It is in these moments, named aporia by Derrida, in which interpretation is resisted as the contradictions of the text are difficult to resolve. For example, in Errol Morris' *The Thin Blue Line* we see, via reconstruction, multiple accounts of minutely different versions of what happened on the night Randall Adams and David Harris were present at the shooting of Officer Robert Wood. Furthermore, the reconstructions have more in common with the filming styles of hyper-stylised modes based in film noir and the avant-garde. The layers of critique coming out of the text itself pile up: how does one determine the truth from rival plausible accounts? How reliable is memory? How much of visual thinking is influenced by the cinematic treatment of time and space? How is the presence of the camera affecting the interview? Deconstruction disarms the documentary from the ethical and situational problems that realism brings and fills the void left by a lack of narrative resolution with entertaining riddles. The answer to who shot Officer Wood is never directly answered, but all theories are entertained as a style that

purports different truths may be compossible.[23] The films allied to New Documentary did not argue that reality and meaning did not exist or could not be located, but that any truth had multiple contestants and that in turn those contestants had approaches to meaning shaped by culture, history, personality, immediate situation, and the institutions they may belong to. The absence of a hard and revelatory truth in works such as *The Thin Blue Line* or *Capturing the Friedmans* (2004) is not an act of hand-waving after the fact, but a serious proposition that knowledge and memory are different things altogether. This is why this chapter opts for Lyotard's optimism about post-modernism for now: it is unlikely that Errol Morris would have had a hand in the release of Randall Adams with a cinema verite film that merely observed. Putting an official truth into jeopardy in a self-reflexive act of filmmaking led to the momentary reconsideration of judicial forms of truth. New Documentary could make a difference.

Re-enter Michael Moore. Writing on Moore's *Roger and Me,* Linda Williams commented upon the openly partisan flavour combined with strategies against Direct Cinema's stance, noting that the film is flavoured with "the postmodern awareness that there is no objective observation of truth but always an interested participation in its construction." (1993, p. 16) Nearer the time of release, Harlan Jacobson was less kind, believing that Moore had traduced the uncodified contract that stipulates a documentarian's commitment to authenticity and objectivity. Moore had, Jacobson argued, rearranged timelines, manipulated footage, and sprung interviews on the unwitting (1989, pp. 16-26). Other critics argued Moore's crimes were more egregious. For Laurence Jarvik, Moore's appearance within the film was self-aggrandizing and his self-portrayal as a "quixotic rebel with a mike" (Tajima, 1990) was shtick. In *Roger and Me*, Moore is the 'me', the centralising figure around which the text is organised, in turn directed and shaped by an off-screen Moore. Like Moore in his oversized sports jackets, jeans, and faded baseball caps, the aesthetic of the Moore film was wrought toward a manner that conveyed affable shabbiness and self-effacement (fig. 2.1).

23 Except the one that Morris argues is most likely and that saw Adams released from jail.

Fig. 2.1 – self-effacing and subverting the expert tradition
Capitalism: A Love Story (2009)

This assertion of director as charismatic star was not a completely new proposition, with self-shooting auteurs with a certain on-screen magnetism such as Ross McElwee a formative influence on Moore's own style. McElwee's shambling persona was also reflected in documentaries which made virtue out of their inability to complete their intent. Latterly the grave and spectral presence of Werner Herzog as auteur-interviewer in his documentaries such as *How Much Wood Would a Woodchuck Chuck* (1976) and *God's Angry Man* (1981) must be regarded too, though it must be noted Herzog only began to *appear* in his own documentaries after the emergence of Moore. Moore's influence on the medium and its progression is hard to overstate, with the superstar-led film pushing documentary into the mainstream: names such as Alan Berliner, Morgan Spurlock, and Louis Theroux (who began as a mock reporter on Moore's *TV Nation*) cemented the establishment in documentary culture of a role that was equal parts leading man, roving reporter, comic foil, and relatable everyman. Marsha McCreadie, in her monograph *Documentary Superstars*, suggests that the wave of films containing an inserted director "has revived public interest in some of the issues which have been concerns of the documentary film movement from

the very beginning." (2008, p. 23) This is true: Moore's initial wave of documentaries about labour crisis in America echoed the Farm Security Administration-sponsored films that investigated capitalistic excess leading to workers without jobs, whilst Werner Herzog's documentaries *Grizzly Man* (2005), *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007), and *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010) engage in the long-standing tradition of documentary of nature and humanity from Robert Flaherty through Jean Rouch, Godfrey Reggio, and works authored, though not directed, by David Attenborough.

Documentaries with an on-screen presence that boldly stated an authorial voice were not new, though they were chiefly found on television with a scripted basis closely related to academic discourses within their chosen subject. Works such as *Civilisation* (1969), subtitled 'A Personal View, by Kenneth Clark', were clear to invoke the central figure as a determiner of meaning though given the absence of a parallel alternative view these became construed as facts. Shows in this expert tradition revive the paternal direct-address style of the early governmental documentary rather than definitively step toward New Documentary. The hosts of *Ways of Seeing* (1972), *The Ascent of Man* (1973), and *Cosmos* (1980) addressed the viewer in soft assertion of their expertise. Viewers come to understanding through a gradual process of making its subject, often complex and deeply contested, into a quasi-objective field in which the credentialed paternalism of its host obviates dissent. The relationship between the style of some of these serious documentaries and the perceived personality of the host suggests symbiosis.

Moore's adoption of a persona that was determinedly slobbish exposed a strange facet of the personality-led documentary as "something of an inverse to this classical habitus of the artist. It is the denial of capital, and an adopting of the Average Joe persona. Here, to have cultural capital is negative. To be educated is detrimental." (Starowicz, 2011, p. 48) Starowicz's characterisation articulates in neo-Marxist terms a fair sketch of Moore, but ignores the broadcast context that

Moore arises in and simply the comic potential in a host who does not actually know what they are doing and does not seem to have the ability to pursue a story. The on-screen documentarian in the postmodern had been working toward subversion of expectation of their role for decades prior to Moore. Satirical interruptions of the expert tradition documentary, in which key stylistic aspects of the educational form were exaggerated or subverted, arose shortly thereafter. Orson Welles' *F For Fake* (1973) touches on the documentary form, presenting a story of a hoaxer which in turn is a hoax, resulting in a deconstructed documentary that meditates on reality as a constructed process in filmmaking. The scale and recurrence of personality in the television medium in which Moore continued his craft in the 1990s also developed a space to craft an intimacy to his on-screen persona which other adjacent documentarists exploited. Moore acolyte Louis Theroux does not just observe and appear on-screen; he takes parts in pornography, professional wrestling, and telesales. Jonathan Meades, a writer of essay documentaries rather than director, subverts the cosy proxmic and avuncular tendency of the expert tradition documentary by defamiliarising the to-camera sections, often looking askance at an uncomfortable distance from the lens. In the opening section of *Travels With Pevsner: Worcestershire* (1998) Meades 'flies' over the county, surveying all below in a playful prod at the apparent all-knowing tendency of the expert documentary tradition. Meades' caustic delivery to camera subverts the cuddly everyman in whom the viewer trusts to give facts and in doing so reveals his documentary to be *his opinion*.

The same cannot truly be said of Michael Moore. Though documentaries such as Welles' brought us closer to the documentary practice of Moore, and the stylistic heterogeneity Moore shares with Meades as a parallel documentarian points to an accretion of strategies of postmodern practice, Moore's coy everyman persona belies the message behind the choice and construction of topics in his films, particularly in his efforts post 9/11. Moore's documentaries, despite side roads that stylistically depart from a central thrust, have a distinct sense of mission and narrativity that often result in a climactic scene in which that mission is realised and a sense of moral clarity is

reached by both Moore and the viewer. Moore suggests this is nothing but good old-fashioned movie-making, telling the Toronto Film Festival in 2014 that, as a documentarian "if you can't accept that you're an entertainer with your truth, get out of the business." (Barnes, 2014) It is true that the climax of *Sicko* (2007), in which Moore loads a boat with 9/11 first responders and sails them firstly to Guantanamo Bay and then into Havana for the treatment that they are denied at home, is funny and bears resemblance to a stunt-based documentary-style entertainment as *Jackass* (2000-2002) or *Borat* (2006). And the animated section, that recounts the historical basis for American gun ownership enshrined in the constitution, of *Bowling for Columbine* is clearly constructed to resemble hit comedy series *South Park* (1997-).[24]

But the symbolic nature of a deliberate staging of American contrast with Cuba, long enemies, particularly at the cultural sore spot of the prison at Guantanamo Bay invites scrutiny beyond hand-waving. Particularly when Moore's work is presented in a manner that invites comparison between the wounds of history and the wounds of the present. This, I argue, mitigates against a reading of pure entertainment in Moore's work and places it squarely in a small but identifiable corpus of American (in the broader sense, both the USA alongside Quebecois and Latin American) political documentaries whose opinions are manifest and boldly stated. Moore's charged polemics inspire opposition precisely because of an accumulated history of documentarians hiding behind observation or self-implication in their politicised display that led to a neutral mode becoming familiarised. Directors such as Emile de Antonio and a number of contributors to the range of cinema now collected as Third Cinema, resisted notions that realist observation must stand aside from one's views. For the manifesto writers of Third Cinema, such as Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas as, the goal of cinema was not stories about individuals but liberation and the decolonisation of culture. A bullish utilisation of documentary aesthetics represented, for Robert Stam, "a frontal assault on passivity." (1991, p. 537) This armoured form of subjectivity did not just

24 With the additional sleight-of-hand that *South Park* creator Matt Stone appears as an interview subject, but did not know about the animated section nor its resemblance to his work. Stone's appearance suggests he created it.

resist the objective impulse documentary was felt to have, but resisted postmodernity itself in its wholehearted embrace of Marxist and neo-Marxist meta-narrative that was mirrored across European and American cities and campuses. In short, life had distinct meaning in a Marxist sense: that the overthrow of capitalism was necessary. Therefore style and substance were related and reunited, resulting in a mixture of observation and agitprop visual style. In films such as Getino and Solanas' *Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), de Antonio's *In the Year of the Pig* (1969), Deny Arcand's *Cotton Mill, Treadmill* (1970) and Gilles Groulx's *24 heures ou plus* (1977)[25] there is a clear sense of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial critique that is not undermined or subverted in self-critique at the manipulations of documentary. These films explore working conditions and the social milieu, with Groulx incorporating speculations from political scientist Jean-Marc Piotte as well as a collage of effects from sloganeering documents, interviews, and graffiti in the hope of effecting societal change.

Third cinema was a reclamation of film for marginalised peoples, but the bourgeois western documentary maker found themselves increasingly implicated as a spectator of oppression. Within this shifting landscape, argued Jay Ruby, came an upsurge in ethics-based angst toward various processes of depiction and meaning-creation. The primacy of the filmmaker and the 'right' of the artist to document and represent any subject they so choose was (and still is) in the process of being upended by the increase in awareness of power structures and relations. Ruby writes that "the time when an artist could take photographs of strangers, usually poor or in some other way removed from the mainstream of America, and justify the action as the inherent right of the artist is, I believe, ending." (2005, p. 210). Ruby's concern is naked, recounting examples of instances in multiple disciplines of gross ethical breaches in exercises purporting to objective capture of events. He continues to boldly state that "the maker of images has the moral obligation to reveal the covert – to never appear to produce an objective mirror by which the world can see its "true" image." (p. 210)

25 Groulx's film was released in 1977 despite completion six years earlier, owing to suppression by the National Film Board of Canada.

This, argues Ruby, is because it upholds binaries and systems of oppression in which groups that have typically enjoyed free reign (white, male, heterosexual, cis-gendered, etc.) continue to enjoy domination over those who have not. Additionally, Ruby draws on communication theorist James Carey's writing in the 1960s, who chastised "what are lamely called the conventions of objective reporting" as they were developed to "report another century and another society." (1969, p. 35). Ruby's anxiety appears to be toward the mode of filmmaking that arises out of Direct Cinema, with its heralding of a new objectivity coming out of a cadre of white American and British filmmakers, whilst ultimately arguing for a continuation of New Documentary's legacy of revealing how the processes of meaning-creation are prone to lapse, error, or misapplication. Furthermore, Ruby infers, that this rejection of observation must exist in a manner that reflects the greater array of diversity in the composition of western countries in the 21st century.

Such self-examination is admirable but potentially of concern for theorists of documentary for three reasons. Firstly, to echo Jean Baudrillard's concerns over the 'murder of the real' and the eventual preponderance of "the simulacrum preceding the real, information preceding the event" that leads to a situation where "our problem is no longer: what are we to make of real events, of real violence? Rather, it is: what are we to make of events that do not take place?" (2000, p. 38). Even if only out of concern for maintenance of the broad categorisation of documentary do I suggest that indexical markers of the real must be retained in some form lest documentary begin to take place in purely metaphysical space. Secondly, the question of a particular type of representation being disallowed because of ethical breaches of power dynamics threatens to throw the baby out with the bathwater should the matter of self- and peer group exploration arise. Furthermore, pitting abstract ethical concerns against material realities threatens disservice to a noble tradition of looking in documentary that has contributed to a particular class of knowledge acquisition. Thirdly, and most pertinently for the direction of this chapter, is the question of détournement; of interrupting the hegemonic flows within a medium or system by hijacking them to serve a marginalised view. The

‘covert’, the hidden meanings and ineffable structures of feeling, that Ruby hopes filmmakers seek is ultimately anchored to the subjective view of an individual. Therefore there is little to prevent bad faith actors manufacturing the covert and utilising the technique of New Documentary to construct an unreality that confirms thesis based in ideology without recourse to traditional forms of evidence. In 2019, the logic of recoding curated flows with misinformation and disinformation that wears the mask of a familiar form is rife on social media and the online video panorama. Fake news, deepfakes, bots, spam, memes, and different types of video content are genuine and acute concerns that all twist the familiar into acquiescence with rival ideology. The cinematic documentary has been unable to escape this inevitability. Dinesh D’Souza’s *2016: Obama’s America* (2012) posits the ruination of the USA should Barack Obama be re-elected in 2012 utilising the patina of documentary in a highly-constructed and performative piece that speculates on *events that are yet to occur.* D’Souza’s film was no passing and trivial concern secreted onto a hyper-specific corner of the internet: as of 2019 it is the fifth highest-grossing documentary at the box office since 1982. (Box Office Mojo, 2019).

D’Souza’s film neatly returns us to the culture wars that re-ignited after 9/11. With culture contested by progressive and conservative forces, the playful hybridity that New Documentary had enjoyed - castling the king of ultimate meaning behind the rook of edifice – has in latter years been re-shaped to serve grand narratives in an act of ultimate irony. The techniques and surfaces of New Documentary – stylisation, the interview as highly-staged individual testimony, portentous music, de-contextualised and re-contextualised footage taken from elsewhere, stunts, heterogeneity, the focus on performance – now resembled a propaganda film allied to a murky cause. Contemporary films such as *Zeitgeist* (2007) and *Vaxxed: From Cover-Up to Catastrophe* (2016) bear witness to an unforeseen development in documentary as a knowledge-creating category breaking away from its support of parallel official discourses in religion and medicine to pursue a logic determined by the capability of filmic rhetoric. These films, along with the works of Stephen K. Bannon and Alex

Jones, actively rival hidebound scientific and historical discourses and seek to undermine their method utilising the critical capacity of filmmaking. In films named in this paragraph in addition to titles such as *Endgame: Blueprint for Global Enslavement* (2007) and *The Obama Deception* (2009), documentary is utilised as a weapon that neither reveals a situation through observation or critiques its own limitations and meaning-creation techniques, but exploits unknowability and plausible deniability in the filmic medium to generate support for opinions debunked, discredited, and rejected in less subjective disciplines. Communications theorists refer to this as disinformation or 'simulated documentary' rather than credible documentary, a form of media defined as:

> *Intentional falsehoods spread as news stories or simulated documentary formats to advance political goals*. We also suggest caution in adopting the term 'fake news' that has become a popular media reference on grounds that it tends to frame the problem as isolated incidents of falsehood and confusion. By contrast, *disinformation* invites looking at more systematic disruptions of authoritative information flows due to strategic deceptions that may appear very credible to those consuming them. Solving these problems requires more than just fact-checking and setting the record straight. (Bennett and Livingston, p. 124, 2018).

With one key rejoinder – that Bennett and Livingston take for granted the official discourses of cinematic distribution as being 'unsimulated', thereby creating a hierarchy of 'official documentary', suggesting the long-discredited notion of a real documentary as objective fact-finding – this is a compelling articulation of a determined class of ideological rivals understanding not just media flows but the rhetorical power of a documentary that absents the real.

What Bennett and Livingston outline aligns with a notable turn of documentary in the Culture Wars. This is what I characterise as documentary in the age of 'alternative facts', the phrase uttered by US Presidential Counselor Kellyanne Conway in 2017 when attempting reject a line of inquiry that would have cast her boss, the President of the United States, in a poor light. Conway's phrase, uttered long after multiple partisan documentaries of the postmodern New Documentary style of construction had been made, released, and even rebutted in full-length documentaries, came

to unwittingly articulate the situation of the divided audience in the age of the reignited Culture Wars. There were facts from official discourses of knowledge, such as photography and journalism and data-mining, that showed that President Trump's (conservative) inauguration was less popular than President Obama's (progressive). Alternative facts, a conjuring of the ideological-subjective, suggested that this was not true and indeed, for a certain segment of society, this meant that it was now not true. In the postmodern situation, where discourses dis-align, this was not an incompatible situation. The White House edited the photographs (*The Guardian*, 6th September 2018), exploiting the capacity of another documenting discipline. Alternative facts became official facts.

Just prior to the end of the long 90s, Stella Bruzzi had charted the downward turn in the radical potential of the performative and artificial insertion in documentary. The New Documentary, beginning as a postmodern turn in the development of documentary, was beginning to ossify and become merely a form of the medium that explored both a story and the mediation of that story in the same work. Bruzzi argued that by 2000, Nick Broomfield's style could be argued to be formulaic and easily recognisable (2000, p. 207) and the particular power bound up in merely highlighting the tensions between director and subject had been familiarised into entertainment flows rather than converted into critical documentary power. It was, I argue, the post 9/11 schism in American society, along with some more prosaic developments that saw documentarians become charismatic host figures, saw these particular kinds of documentaries become more nakedly ideological as the cloak of invisibility was shed. Opinions were now boldly stated in commercial documentaries that did not pretend to be essay films and Michael Moore was pre-eminent in the field. Critical non-realist documentaries such as Moore's are prone to the arrows of their ideological opponents precisely because of the way they seek to make counter-hegemonic truths into generally-accepted truisms without undeniable recourse to the real in the form of witnessing. In terms of explaining the post-crash moment, Moore's work brings together all of the strains that I have articulated above, synthesising aspects of the political documentary, the comic or mock

documentary, the Mondo documentary, performance, re-contextualisation, and muckraking, in order to produce a hybrid work that fits into the category of New Documentary. By this stylistic choice, these documentaries depart realism and embrace a widening aperture of aestheticisation and construction.

Capitalism: A Love Story (2009)

Capitalism: A Love Story emerged 11 months after the signing into law of the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, the $700 million bailout of economic stimulus designed to cover the shortfall lost by the banks during the financial crash of 2007/8. Foreclosures of private dwellings grew by 81 per cent in the year of the bailout, an increase of 225 per cent on the year prior to the crash (Christie, 2009) while the majority of developed nations entered into, and remained in, recession. (*The Guardian*, 2009) It is in this context that *Capitalism* is released, addressing recession and foreclosure, and attempting to situate the crisis in both a macro view of modern American history and a micro focus on the present day effects on working and non-working people. Moore's film offers diagnosis of the malady affecting America: that hyper-capitalism has debased life in America and created wealth disparity that has left even those in jobs vulnerable and exposed. In the final quarter, Moore also reveals a cure in a return to the Rooseveltian politics of the New Deal and never-implemented Second Bill of Rights of 1944.

The broad framework of the film continues Moore's approach in the politicised New Documentary style. Moore's stylistic heterogeneity and mixture of documentary modes allow the film, at least in its own logic, to firmly connect the effect upon normal people of the decisions taken in seats of power and large banks. *Capitalism* features stock aspects of documentary that may appear in a more realist text such as interviews with victims of the recession, journalistic remove (that is to say: sections shot for the film in which Moore does not appear) to focus on groups attempting to fight the capitalist entity, and interviews with experts and pundits. There are flourishes

that are more identifiably Moore, and not least the stunts orchestrated by and featuring the director. Footage is manipulated to serve effects both comedic and tragic. Vast swathes of the visual element of the film is stock or re-purposed commercial footage that offer cinematic shorthand through well-established semiotics. These sections, in their re-voicing and re-purposing, call to mind both the contemporary online documentary such as *Zeitgeist* and the Mondo documentary. Moore marshals arguments based in the empiric and the sentimental. The aesthetic rigour of no particular sub-genre of documentary is adhered to, with Moore utilising different types of footage, styles of editing, approaches to performance, types of interview, and adherences to realism from scene to scene. Moore's approach was met with cautiousness and skepticism in some quarters:

> I think it is fair to say that *Capitalism* is as valuable to the study and understanding of the recent financial crisis as Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) is to the John F. Kennedy assassination, or as one of Ann Coulter's books is to any political debate. But like any of these creations, *Capitalism* can contribute to the consideration of its moment in cultural history. It is emblematic of a time when major entertainment companies were in the profitable business of distributing and marketing controversial or politically challenging films and it marks a point when the popular understanding of the documentary genre changed. (Douglas, 2010, p. 282)

Historian AJ Douglas opts for backhanded praise, positing dually that i. in a Derridean sense that *Capitalism* can tell us more about the nature of text than the time we live in, and that the rhetoric and construction of argument is more interesting than the film's actual argument ii. the film industry has realised that there is money to be made in more partisan and controversial documentary aimed at a bifurcated market. To an extent, examples in which Douglas' discontent with the methodology that flies in the face of sober historical discourses present themselves gleefully. A section in which a number of graphs that detail some of the few examples of macro-economic data appear, though all too quick to read and understand completely, though their reading is clearly supposed to be guided by the usage of the classic cinematic disaster film standby 'O Fortuna' by Carl Orff that is overlaid. Douglas' assessment of *Capitalism: A Love Story* alongside the works of Ann Coulter and Oliver Stone speaks immediately to the polemicised nature of Moore's work,

though I would argue that the cinematic market had been dividing along these lines for the better part of a decade prior to *Capitalism*'s release. There were critics who took Moore at the level of text rather than as an instrument of the times:

> As a testament to the power of the people to effect change, the sequence is curiously perfunctory, manipulative, and unconvincing. The starkest lacuna in the sequence is the lack of engagement with the details of the Trody family's experience: the story of how they came to be in this situation, the details of their life stories, the socio-economic conditions of their existence. (Lawson, 2013, p. 60-61)

Evidently, even outside of the rarefied air of film studies, thinkers had begun to whiff bad faith or plain bad argument in the Moore method. Andrew Lawson speaks to lacuna – gaps – which he believes undermines the emotive power of a key scene in the film. These condescensions of Moore's seductive but occasionally depthless surfaces may be true up to a point. Moore does not capture the homeless Trody family's existence with the richness of the realist or even aestheticise them in the manner of the poetic or experimental documentarian. The Trody family are, in a sense, a piece of footage that suits the argument that Moore is trying to make. The viewer sees them living in the back of a van and then, as the reclamation of their home by a local community action group threatens to fail, with the unkempt children of the family in tears. These are moments of visual shorthand precisely because the example of the Trody family is shorthand for a wider situation. Unlike the realist lens of Greenfield and the Chu brothers and the poetic filmmakers we will encounter such as Heidi Ewing, and Rachel Grady, suffering relates entirely to one's material disenfranchisement. When the police and bailiff are rebuffed at the conclusion of this scene, we see the children of the Trody family leaping happily on a mattress inside the barren house. The happiness of these children is not supposed to be indicative of the emotional restoration of this family, I argue, but an articulation of a minor victory and positive direction in returning property and material to people after they unite to resist. Furthermore, while Moore looks at the pain of recession and financial crash, victimhood is a locus for community action rather than an endpoint. The construction of recession and crash in *Capitalism* is that of an adversarial phenomenon, a

simple equation that arises from the opposing values of the filmmaker and the subjects for whom he has affection. The recession phenomenon, according to the logic of the film, can be located to key people and decisions, and for Moore it can be defeated by being understood as such and organised against. The film, as previous Moore films suggest, is a fundamental part of this collective action.

Moore utilises various different strategies in order to make analogy of financial crash and Great Recession. Where Lauren Greenfield mines the metaphoric value of a comparison between the fall of the Ancien Régime and the latter-day Siegel family in *The Queen of Versailles* as far as it could go, Moore surveys the breadth of history for images that encapsulate themes of struggle, collapse, empire, dominance, class division, and revolution that he believes are attached to this period in recent history. Initially, Moore draws on imagery of the Roman Empire in its decline. After the opening credits, the title screen from William Deneen and John Eadie's *Life in Ancient Rome* (1964), made as part of the Encylopædia Britannica educational film series, appears and begins to play. The narration commences thus: "Rome was the largest and the most beautiful city of the ancient world. The magnificent facade of the empire, however, could not conceal the seeds of decay, the unhealthy dependency on slaves, the disparity between the rich and the poor." The visual continues in alignment with the sound, rearranging shots from the original text as the narration is overlaid, lulling the viewer into an extended meditation on Rome. Prior to the word 'decay' we see a shot of Roman columns of a building with a magnificent facade and then as the word 'decay' is uttered a cut transitions to a visual match on the neoclassical columns of the US Capitol building, the seat of Congress and therefore symbolising American power.

The next few seconds, as the narration continues, builds on this, contrasting social changes at the end of the Roman Empire with events in contemporary America: chariot racing and gladiatorial combat as forms of social control by mindless entertainment are contrasted with combat sports, game shows, and singing competitions. Actors portraying corrupt Roman senators

unwittingly drawing up the architecture of their downfall are juxtaposed with contemporary politicians ‘performing’ on television and the judges of the Supreme Court.

fig. 2.2 - match editing to suggest historical similarity (cont. in fig. 2.3)
Capitalism: A Love Story (2009)

Wealth disparity appears as a juxtaposition between the modern day factory worker and the Roman plebeian pouring out excreta into the street. This comparison of eras across unrelated time and space (in particular, the images drawn from contemporary America are grabs from different news media sources across the fifty years prior to this film) in side-by-side comparison via an extended act of associative editing is effective in its thematic construction and deployment of visual rhetoric.

fig. 2.3 - match editing to suggest historical similarity (cont. from fig 2.2)
Capitalism: A Love Story (2009)

The mixture of three different styles of documentary - James Ellroy's writerly narration in a form of public address, the constructed educational footage that pares Roman history down to powerful signifiers of greed and opulence, and the 'real' footage of the elites and downtrodden of today – bounds together disparate documentary styles to create a convincing connection that bypasses immediate analysis that compares the empirical and primary data about the situations of Rome and the United States. This is postmodern technique in service of ideological ends. Moore's utilisation of this associative montage could charitable designated as epigraphic or simply argued as being there for satire and impact. Nonetheless, the parallels between Rome and the United States do not arise again.

The postmodernity of the previous moment is underscored by its forward transition that attempts to connect with a different style of footage. Moore rhetorically asks, in voice-over to black screen, to consider how future civilisations will judge America of the post-crash moment: will it be vision 1 or vision 2? The first vision is taken from the internet meme of several cats able to flush the toilets of their human owner, overlaid with novelty music. The second vision is taken from home video footage of a family who have locked themselves inside their home as several police vehicles arrive to serve a foreclosure eviction on the family. The grave tone of the black screen after the articulation of empire collapse, combined with sombre speech, appears to heighten the seriousness of what we have just seen. Instead, this is a bait-and-switch, an entryway to a familiar internet joke enlivened by maximising the contrast between the two modes. But this is also classic Moore: the joke obscures the jarring transition between modes and eases forward momentum even if the question bears little scrutiny. The real transition is between the spliced footage of Rome and the United States and the realist home video of the foreclosure.

Moore rejects engagement with a style or a story beyond its use value within the construction of his argument. Moore acts as a directorial magpie, taking from from different styles for the particular kinds of impact that their utilisation can bring, and juxtaposes them in a way that strips them of the specific aesthetic contexts of their style and adjoins them to the whole. Unlike in *The Thin Blue Line* or even a contemporary New Documentary-informed film such as *The Act of Killing* (2013), where different genres, performance modes, and filming styles shape approaches to truth and reflect on the limitations of the styles they are juxtaposed with, Moore ensures that the dozen or so styles put to work in his text are generally isolated scenes that are tuned to the same frequency and serve the central argument.

For example: the home video section of a police-enforced foreclosure arrives as the police are rolling up to the house and leaves as the police enter the house to repossess it, just as an owner says “this is America.” The next scene commences, a professionally shot piece in a realist style featuring a carpenter boarding up a Miami home in order to prevent the evicted family from returning, and lingers on a note of potential class conflict between the protesting neighbours and the carpenter who is “just doing my job.” A final foreclosure tale rounds off this small suite, also filmed professionally, but with a greater sense of framing and distance that gives the scene a poetic undercurrent (fig. 2.4). In three different filming modes we see the same basic action repeated, creating an association that strips out the particularity of style. By the climax of the film, which adds more filming styles and modes that all capture the central thesis of capitalism’s grave illness in their own particular way, the effect is as if style and facts have aligned in order to unanimously declare against their target. Here we see the coming together of postmodern aesthetics and polemical underpinning, indicating a volte face from Moore’s earlier utilisation of disparate modes. Paul Arthur wrote in 1993 of postmodern aesthetics in *Roger and Me* that the deliberate ‘failure’ of the mission central to that text became a particular “aesthetic of failure” that grafts a protean cultural agenda onto traditional problems of authority” (2016, p. 903). Throughout that film, Arthur

argues, that focus on self and the inability to make the documentary created meaning through its undermining of the authority of traditional documentary voice. Sixteen years later, in a vastly changed cultural milieu, such problems of doubt are replaced by their complete opposite: unswerving certainty.

Meta-narratives of linear or logical time being able to explain the social impact of capitalism and the financial crash are also rejected in the Moore film in favour of a conceptual logic that groups themes into clusters and puts them to work together. Moore has received stern critique for the organisation of material from Harlan Jacobson, Pauline Kael (accusing Moore of "gonzo demagoguery" (1990, p. 91)), and the various filmmakers who have taken to full-length dissections of his work. It is true of *Capitalism* that the manner in which Moore organises material appears haphazard, with stylistic and factual accumulation gathered together to overwhelm the senses of viewer rather than guide in a linear or chronological fashion. To organise the footage of the film in chronological order would be an impossible task to reconstruct, so accusations of manipulation are justified at the most basic level that fails to consider the aims and realities of filmmaking. Moore's is a more impressionistic[26] mix that attempts to convey the confusion and uncertainty that the financial crash arises in. As a film responding to the post-crash moment and the feeling of social chaos, simple diagnostics lose to thematic unity and juxtaposed moral deficiencies. Moore orchestrates footage from prior to the crash to serve the narrative of the various factors that came into play to cause the crash; the stock market gambling on derivatives, companies offering credit at absurdly low rates, the FBI response to 9/11 leading to white collar crime investigators moving to counter-terrorism, and that Goldman Sachs alumni were advising key members of the government. There is always a firm sense at hand within the film about what constitutes a factual visual of the pre-crash moment, what constitutes the public effects of crash and recession, and that which is editorialised critique from Moore or others that stands outside of simple chronology.

26 In the sense of Monet, Degas, and Renoir, the capturing of the sensory through an evocative wash of colour rather than unstinting realism.

The typical structure of a Moore film often anchors its diverse stylistic array with a central mission carried out through Moore's *faux naïf* attempt to meet somebody important or perform a symbolic stunt: *Roger & Me* details the thwarted attempt to meet General Motors CEO Roger Smith whilst *Bowling for Columbine* offers two as Moore interviews the NRA head Charlton Heston and takes student victims of mass shootings to the Kmart headquarters to get a refund on the bullets that wounded them. Those that *Capitalism* offers are rather slight, though they convey a sense of the scale of the task by their ineffectuality rather than their success. Moore attempts to get inside the headquarters of several banks whose deeds engineered the financial crash. Moore brings empty sacks to Goldman Sachs and asks the bank to fill it up so he can 'return the money to the treasury'. Moore ambushes several bankers and asks them to explain the concept of derivatives. In all attempts, Moore is rebuffed, with some bankers even quipping that he should "not make any more movies." These failed acts serve to suggest the enormity of the task and the monolithic aspect of capitalism. Where a single corporation could be shamed, as it was in *Bowling for Columbine*, into not selling handgun bullets through an act of confrontation and emotional manipulation, capitalism is not for overturning through fun and games. In these scenes where Moore is in the streets of New York's financial district, the cameras gaze skyward at the enormity of skyscrapers, inverting the awed gaze of the city symphony[27] films of the 1920s to suggest these buildings are in possession of sinister and anonymising qualities that enhance the disconnect between the capitalist system and the individual.

27 More of this in Chapter four.

fig. 2.4 - disturbing the American pastoral
Capitalism: A Love Story (2009)

The relevance of this building image that mines the semiotic of capitalistic success increases when contrasted with the establishing shots of the Hacker family in Peoria, Illinois. The Hacker family farm has been foreclosed by the banks. Whenever we see their homestead, returning a number of times from different angles, it is always in a gently pastoral long shot in which the house is surrounded by a sea of crops. It is a shot that establishes connection between home and surrounding; between person and the land. The distance of the shot, taken with the compositional harmony of the shot and the stillness of the take, is suggestive of a tranquillity and peace that rests within the pastoral image.

What the Hackers do, says Moore in this collision, is natural and therefore right by its inversion of the wrongs of the contemporary city. This same essential construct of the rural setting as a retreat from the ills of the city has its roots in aesthetic discourses whose thread runs from antiquity. Virgil extolled the virtues of the Roman countryside at the height of empire-building in the Eclogues, whilst *The Course of Empire* (1833-1836) by Thomas Cole represent a series of five

paintings from the idealised rural landscape through the development of a burgeoning empire and, in the final image, its destruction through indulgence and avarice. In an American context, Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* (1854) touches on themes of the rural idyll in contrast with the city, though with more of a bourgeois and individualist sense of self-realisation. The tradition of arresting the idealised pastoral into critical modes that identify cultural fault-lines and the creep of – if not actually capitalism – urbanity's associated philosophies, with Terry Gifford noting in the poetry of Oliver Goldsmith in the 1770s that what Goldsmith called "trade's unfeeling train" usurps not only the land, but also the values of the people in it." This discourse was justified, Gifford argues of Goldsmith, because "it has an intrinsic integrity. It may idealise, but it is fundamentally 'honest' when it is attacking the degenerate 'sensual joys' provided by the commercial exploitation of land and peasantry." (Gifford, 1999, p. 45-46)

Gifford's analysis appears to hold up when applied to the utilisation in *Capitalism* though, in-keeping with Moore's postmodernist borrowings from the surface of things and not any deeper engagement, analysis outside of the scenes with the Hackers, in which city living is entirely compatible with a wholesome communitarianism that resists the intrusions of capitalism, may in fact undermine the potential of this construct. Much like the Trody family[28], the Hackers are not explored in any depth nor the particularity of their situation unpacked. The Hackers are sensationalised, their utterances parsed for the most impactful moments of anger, action, and dislocation. As the Hackers load out their farm, Moore rejects the associative editing strategy of the opening montage and several other stock footage-heavy moments to mine a darker and more suggestive seam that borders on the dialectical. In the initial scenes in which we see Randy Hacker, the family father, he is seen loading out several guns. When the film returns to the Hackers, there is a filmed eviction of the family, in which the bailiff gives the Hackers $1000 on behalf of the bank as onward severance. A final ironic injustice is meted out to the Hackers: their former home must be

28 The same can be said of the Smith family, whose matriarch LaDonna died. The death uncovered that her employer, Walmart, had taken out an insurance policy on her life worth $81000 and cashed it in. The gaze of the camera lingers on the tears of the children, their grief reawakened after 13 years. The lengthy gap between the death and this moment is never spoken of nor any context added. Moore utilises the most impactful aspect of them and disregards everything else.

presented to the bank empty and cleaners cost a deductible fee, so the Hackers set to work for the banks that have evicted them. With the image of the guns in Randy's arsenal in mind, this final humiliating act connects the images of the farm and the banks in the city thematically and closes the pastoral critique. The city and capital in this instance has won at expense of those in rural retreat. Moore intones in the voiceover that "what you're witnessing is a robbery", followed by Randy agitatedly saying "this is why people lose their mind and start shooting […] anything that happens to them, they deserve it [...] I hope something happens to them." Moore leaves this comment open-ended, though notably adjoined to an onward segue about the employee in charge of offering favourable loan conditions for those in charge of national mortgage regulation by a major lender. In addition to that unsubtle juxtaposition we have seen various Catholic priests and bishops critique capitalism as "radical evil" and acknowledging the power of its propaganda. The mention of propaganda is immediately followed a self-reflexively propagandist and mocking critique of capitalism's weaponising of Christianity by revoicing scenes from Franco Zeffirelli's *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977) in order to say capitalist slogans (e.g. "You say the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, but when exactly?", "When we deregulate the banking industry.")

Moore's crew attend the sit-in of a windows and doors company named Republic. Scenes at this company, whose predominantly Latino workforce, in conjunction with drawings of clenched fists smashing through windows, revolutionary sing-alongs, and a Catholic priest on hand to preach, recalling multiple forms imagery of the intersection between Marx and Jesus (liberation theology) as well as the legacy of the National Farm Workers Association union leader Cesar Chavez, whose face is instantly recognisable within American Hispanic communities.

fig. 2.5 - images recalling radicalism of days gone by
Capitalism: A Love Story (2009)

Drawing on the legitimacy and imagery of North American forms of radicalism founded within a religious morality such as the unionised labourers of the Hispanic communities or, in the scenes where the Trody family home is battled over, the black church tradition of the south borrows the credibility and stories from history that connect to the situation in the present. Morality and decency is shown continually to be the purview of the organised left; Moore's crew visits an engineering company in Wisconsin and a Californian bakery that are both run as worker co-operatives that pay "three times higher than a pilot starting for American Eagle." A story is uncovered about a sheriff who bans foreclosure evictions in his jurisdiction, suggesting institutional discomfort with siding with capitalism. Historical benevolence is considered in the light of the monolithic pharmaceutical industry by looking at archival footage of Jonas Salk, who left his polio cure as a good for the public domain. Moore also claims that people side with evil out of circumstance rather than are naturally inclined toward it, suggesting that graduates enter into finance as a profession in order to pay off their student loans.

Moore is also keen to point out that protesting works, admiringly framing the striking workers of the Republic plant and juxtaposing their struggle with the victory scored by the LIFFT[29] group who managed to re-home the Trody family. Throughout the final hour of *Capitalism* the gradual accumulation of quasi-revolutionary imagery and rhetoric that began with the repurposed Soviet artwork on the poster, accelerates. Each moment of resistance where a member of Congress tells those facing foreclosure to stay in their homes and resist is sharply contrasted with a lengthy elucidation of the specifics that led to the 2007/8 financial crash, reveals the rationale behind the foreclosure footage and the stories of corporate death insurance on employees. Moore's polemic develops momentum into a point of action that seeks to extend outside of the text and actively persuade the viewer to do something. The final moments of the film fades to black and Moore appears to break from his schlubbish everyman persona to articulate a kind of call-to-arms for a return to democracy, saying boldly that "I refuse to live in a country like this and I'm not leaving". We then see Moore performing one final stunt – wrapping the entrance to the New York Stock Exchange in police enforcement tape – as the upbeat 'Music for a Found Harmonium' by Penguin Cafe Orchestra breaks the spell of the narrative gloom. Moore states finally "I can't do this alone." After two hours in which Moore baldly claims the impiety of amoral free capitalism in contrast with the morally upstanding nature of socialism, the acknowledgement of a sense of political positioning appears to respond directly to bias claims by owning them.

Just how of the political moment that Moore's film is can be seen by parsing exactly what the radical and revolutionary act that Moore is attempting to get the viewer on board with is. After the anger-inducing stories of foreclosure and corporate amorality, coupled with details of sustained political and business alignment because of capitalism's intrinsic nature to provide market solutions, the answer appears to lie between an exhalting of Franklin D. Roosevelt's vaunted but never-implemented Second Bill of Rights and hope that Barack Obama will remain in office.

29 Low Income Families Fighting Together.

Moorealikes

The financial crash is the key moment in understanding that the polemicised New Documentary, the postmodern hyper-constructed anti-realist version of the form in which knowledge categories seek their own truths, had reached a limits where the exploratory playfulness suggested by Lyotard had both fundamentally corrupted and ossified into a series of stylistic expectations. Prior to the crash itself, stylised films such as *Enron: The Smartest Guys In The Room* (2005) and *Maxed Out* (2006) caught wind of a mounting financial crisis and utilised archives and constructions in order to dramatise what are often unseen or internal moments. These films were not violently rejected by one side of the political spectrum, with many on the right continuing to focus their efforts on debunking Michael Moore or constructing documentary that lends credibility to various conspiracy theories. By the release of *Capitalism*, it was apparent that Moore's strategies had been decoded, with numerous outlets utilising the phrase "preaching to the choir" in their reviews. (Feaster, 2009; Paris, 2009; Pigliucci, 2009) to describe a certain predictability in the political and stylistic alignment in his work. Criticism of Moore in the form of 'debunking' had also become similarly embedded, with scene-by-scene factual considerations not only performed by interested fringe right-wing groups but institutions such as the Wharton School and daily newspapers such as San Jose's *Mercury News*.

I shall now move on to briefly consider three more films of the financial crash and Great Recession that utilise a politicised New Documentary style. Moore's postmodern grabbings, taking the impactful aspects of a visual regardless of their cultural and philosophical value, and making them work together to construct a dense and impactful polemic have been significantly influential. Both *Maybe I Should Have* by Gunnar Sigurðsson and *The Emperor's New Clothes* by Michael Winterbottom and Russell Brand address the same subject as Moore. Both works are personality-led and heavy on performance and stunt, but the films attempt to explain the contexts of Iceland and the United Kingdom respectively. *Generation Zero* by Steven K. Bannon also tackles recession, but

from a right-wing position, suggesting an alternative reason for the financial crash and negating any notion that its effects are anything but a blip. In terms of continuing the theme of the Culture Wars, it should be noted that Bannon is the *Breitbart* editor whose consultancy and coaching aided Donald Trump, the current *bête noire* of Michael Moore, to the presidency.

The schema of *The Emperor's New Clothes* does not just shift the context to the United Kingdom, but separates the technician-director from its star. Comedian Russell Brand is the on-screen Moore and *Emperor* contains the same admixture of stunt[30], historical footage, manipulated footage of villains, expert testimony, animation, on-screen graphics conveying statistics, tone-setting music as *Capitalism*. The subtle differences enhance the social context rather than fundamentally alter the construction or aestheticisation of recession. There is a more comprehensive sense of the intellectual justification and economic architecture behind the financial crash as archival footage of Morton Friedman advocating maximal tax cuts is edited against infrastructural shortfall scenes to make his pronouncements all the more sinister. Brand performs direct-address from a studio, though this is closer to the contemporary version found in online flows that eschews paternalism for 'relatability'; a formulation that prizes youth, humour, vernacular, and performed uncertainty. In the scenes in which Brand meets ordinary workers to hear their story, Winterbottom leaves in ornamental aspects where Brand has unrelated comedic interactions with people's children and looks at internal details of the home in a style that recalls social realist films. Whilst Brand's concern appears more sincere than Moore's, the deployment of austerity testimony ultimately exists to make us feel the thesis of the film. Like Moore, Brand and Winterbottom seek redress of the system rather than its overhaul – historical capitalism is fine, with both films pointing to post-war reconstruction as a utopian vision and the early 1980s as its undoing.

30 The same stunts in some instances, such as Brand attempting to get into a major bank office and failing, and driving around in a vehicle and shouting through a loudhailer to the workers inside.

Sigurðsson's *Maybe I Should Have* explores the financial crash in an Icelandic context, relating the historic prudency of the Icelandic economic situation as a removed victim of an international crisis. Sigurðsson is an actor and comedian, though much more lugubrious and deadpan than either Moore or Brand; nonetheless Sigurðsson performs similar stunts such as trying to enter a major bank in order to 'ask questions'. Two key differences affect the general tone of Sigurðsson's film in a way that perhaps alters the construction of the crash. Firstly, unlike Brand or Moore, Sigurðsson is not a rich celebrity and as such is not insulated from the crash. The film details Sigurðsson's attempt at personal redress, taking a trip around financial institutions in Luxembourg and the Cayman Islands in order to get his money back. How accurate to Sigurðsson's experience this is remains unclear, though the insertion of this information into the film does charge the stunts and meetings with a level of meaningful stakes. Secondly, *Maybe I Should Have* does not rely on historical analogy or an overwhelming array of archival and stock footage to evoke eras and enhance arguments. Experts are utilised to explain the present situation without the weight of history suggesting thematic return, aesthetic guideline, or capitalistic inevitability.

In terms of construction, the removal of the artfully-deployed B-movie footage reveals how Brand and Moore's postmodernism arises within a particular kind of media culture that they are also producers within. Dylon Robbins, writing on the documentary of found footage, argued that films that were created through archival footage were seen as "scavenging upon history's waste, upon its forgotten and disregarded past, constituting, then, an inversion or reconfiguration of historical and thus archival priorities." (2016, p. 69) Brand and Moore (and Bannon) pull from the neglected commercial text and the lightly-regarded melodramas of the 1950s with a method that retains not just the usefulness of the visual as signifier but also speaks to their lack of historicisation. The resurrection of abject footage attempts to produce effects that appear free-floating, allied to no particular social movement or attempt by historical forces to codify it. Hal Foster argued that this kind of archival art was "concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces" (2004, p. 5)

This feels subjectively true; many of the works utilised in the above-named films are difficult to identify but the composition and motion they signify in their utilisation is always enunciated with careful clarity even when juxtaposed next to images that come from completely different styles, social milieus, or eras. The problem with this, Foster argued, was that "archival samplings push the postmodernist complications of originality and authorship to an extreme." (p. 4) In Moore and Brand there remains some presence of the filmmaker reminds us who is manipulating the footage to produce these effects. In Stephen K. Bannon's *Generation Zero*, which is built primarily on stock footage (including footage we see in Moore) whilst downplaying the hand of the author within the text, the effect is much more opaque.

Bannon's *Generation Zero* arguably has the most radical re-ordering of the Moore strategy of all, unwittingly suggesting the limits to Lyotardian ideals of knowledge-categories in pursuit of their own truth. Commencing with white text on black of a quote from Ecclesiastes 3 (also well-known as the lyrics from The Byrds' 1965 hit 'Turn! Turn! Turn!'), Bannon deploys biblical authority to show that the financial crash is merely a natural event in history. The financial crash is referenced, named The Abyss, and its first appearance cuts to a sped-up shot of a gathering storm as pensive minor-key music plays as if a major villain in an action film were approaching. Moore suggested strongly in *Capitalism* that Henry Paulson, a Goldman Sachs official turned Bush advisor, was one of the key architects of both the crash in his company's turn toward derivatives but also the chief financier lobbying politicians to bail out the banks. In *Generation Zero* Paulson is a hero who saved the day, the economy, and the world through his fast action. Melodramatic music and archival footage features much more prominently, with Bannon a non-participant in front of the lens. The culture wars are explained directly in the text as two competing visions of America – not as 'progressive' versus 'conservative', but as the version of America that won World War II, became prosperous, believed in science and technology, and landed on the moon versus a bohemian elite who have opted to indulge "the pleasure principle" and reject social conformity. The rise of socialist

egalitarian tendencies, which Bannon anchors to Woodstock, is cut next to a 1950s piece in which suburban father asks a child whether the story of Pandora's Box has any significance.

Historical footage of women in suburbia, typically depicted in cinema as a stifling and desexualising era of gender separation, serves expert testimony that the ultimate victory of the Great Depression and Second World War was the trauma of women hearing about death was removed as the dream of security in a home was realised. During this scene, Bannon repurposes a piece of footage used by Moore of a woman in a kitchen handing out ice creams to children. For Moore, this plays as an expert dismantles the notion of capitalism as a pleasant and simple example of small-town competition over who has the best ice cream. For Bannon this serves an expert suggesting that the parents of the 1950s were more generous to their children. The spirit bred in the bad version of America led to a moral vacuum, argues Bannon, which infected "a few greedy stupid silly people" whose actions led to the "taking the oil out" of an otherwise perfect system. This expert metaphor is conveyed by stock footage of a car blowing up.

In 2010, Bannon was identified by *New Yorker* in a piece about the right-wing media empire Breitbart as "a conservative filmmaker and a former Goldman Sachs banker." By 2012 and Bannon's ascendancy to leading the Breitbart organisation, the *LA Times* quoted Bannon, described as "the website's "minister of culture"", as saying "We are going to be the *Huffington Post* of the right." (Rainey, 2012) In 2018, when testifying to the US Senate Committee over potential electoral fraud committed by tech firm Cambridge Analytica, employee Christopher Wylie claimed that Bannon – who had hired the company - "saw cultural warfare as a means to create enduring change in American politics." (Hosenball, 2018). Bannon's interests have continually related to pushing a pro-bank, pro-nationalist agenda that attacks 'elites' and 'mainstream media' through fringe technology not yet dominated by major corporations to capture the attention of "segments of the

populace that were responsive to these messages that weren't necessarily reflected in other polling." (Solon, 2018).

The construction of the financial crash in Bannon's film was a method of capturing the zeitgeist in a relevant and provocative media mode, with its aestheticisation entirely based in the sensationalised stylistic heterogeneity utilised by Moore and polemic entirely allied to populist rhetoric. *Generation Zero* meets the criteria outlined by Bennett and Livingston for what constitutes disinformation, given that its "systematic disruptions of authoritative information flows due to strategic deceptions" do indeed "appear credible to those consuming them." The culture wars argued that the liberals were the elites and the establishment. By employing this trick of the mind, Bannon's work is as much counter-narrative and counter-hegemonic as Moore's. Constructing the financial crash as natural phenomenon in concert with a moral slippage based in anti-Americanism sutures the wound of history caused by 'their side' of the event entirely works for its audience, though ultimately *Generation Zero* did not receive the kind of signal-boosting from an irate opponent that could then be determined as 'cultural elites'.

An ungenerous reading of the works of Moore and Bannon might, in observing their sleights-of-hand, factual errors, and glaring omissions, consider them to be works created in bad, or at the very least dubious, faith. The unswerving political certainty in each obviates nuance and the democratic forms of viewing in documentaries of realism and the avant-garde. Both use an admixture of fictional and documentary form and aesthetics to trade on the documentary's historic utilisation as advocacy and rhetoric whilst being maximally entertaining. Neither documentary maker convey a sense of the conditions of those people featured within the text; moments of pain serve argument. Trauma footage becomes a weapon of soft power. In veering between multiple filmic strands of differing tones and styles, the feeling is that serving the victims of financial crash and recession by this mode is much more difficult than the realist gaze outlined in Chapter 1.

However, there have been interesting developments that indicate new directions of travel, bringing together heterogeneity with an attempt to convey traumatic dimensions of recent history. The next chapter investigates a smaller sub-category of financial crash documentary that also troubles ethical boundaries in documentary film-making by depicting social groups in a heterogenous film-making style. Despite political overtones also being felt in these works, it is clear that stylistic heterogeneity and modern cinematic techniques are deployed to attempt to deepen the empathic connection between viewer and subject, rather than bombard or misdirect. These films, which I have termed ‘anti-mimetic’, join together the contemplation encouraged in the durational aspect of observational realist documentary-making with subtle cinematic technique foregrounding the act of watching.

CHAPTER 3
THE ANTI-MIMETIC DOCUMENTARY

> The situation thus becomes so complicated that a simple 'reproduction of reality' is now less than ever able to say anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp works or the AEG shows almost nothing about these institutions. Actual reality has slipped into the functional dimension. The reification of human relations, such as the factory, for example, no longer surrenders the latter. (Brecht, 1992, p. 469)

Beyond the initial wave of political and financial contexts and symbols that were captured by documentarians of the 2007/8 financial crash and the Great Recession, there has been a concerted effort to document and aestheticise aspects of the crash that may initially appear abstruse or more than a step removed from the initial crash and its immediate radius of effects.

Films began to emerge that related less definitively to the events from 2007/8 onward, nonetheless suggestive of a causal link between the financial epicentre and locations that may seem unrelated. Perhaps complicating this suggestion further is that these texts did not make overt and broad political argument of the kind outlined in previous chapters. Nor did these films utilise the familiar symbolism of decaying cities as visual shorthand for the crash and its legacy. Rather, a great many films that emerged around this time attempted to reconcile with the idea that whilst visually things in society may indeed look the same, there is a tension that penetrates that which can be seen and affects what is felt and what is shared.

The documentaries that I will examine in this chapter capture *feel*: they respond to cultural and sub-cultural change as a result of the crash in a way that removes focus on physical devastation and material effects and places a greater emphasis upon a traumatic psychological dimension.[31] These films perform this task by including additional material, technique, deliberate omission, self-

31 The two can never be fully separated, as I will show you, but the specific strategies of these documentaries allow for some distinction to be made.

implication, parallel discourses, and apparently-unrelated adjacent action in such a way that colours the realist vision in the narrative of the central subject or group. These inclusions can both confirm and complicate the reality that appears as the given surface of the text.

As mentioned in both the first chapter, where I indicate that realism and truth has become the expected 'ground' of the documentary, and in the second chapter where I introduce several figures that have attempted to sue or discredit Michael Moore for manipulations, it is fair to say that introducing techniques to documentary from fictional cinema still indicates deviation from traditional expectations. In a realm of documentary adjacent to academia and sensitive to questions of ethics of depiction and the power relationships in filmic production, such deviations can represent more severe breaches of the notional contract. Within the social science-adjacent realm of ethnographic film, actively travelling toward fictive realms appears to jeopardise questions of truth and reality. However, both this chapter and the next – on the poetic documentary – highlight specific strategies within both documentary history and contemporary responses to the financial crash that incorporate a variety of techniques and narrative strategies in order to attempt to look beneath the surface.

Even within regional or national contexts away from the American epicentre of the crisis, committed individuals and groups have utilised an increasingly democratised filming and editing panorama to produce documentary responses to changes in culture. Writing on the filmic responses to recession within Greece, Eleftheria Lekakis identified a corpus of fifty documentaries that engaged not only with different aspects of the recession's effects (politics, activism, economy, immigration, work, etc.) but suggested a profound interest in telling stories both by and of alternative and more niche perspectives omitted by the legacy media outlets in newspapers and television. Lekakis argues that the networks of trust and mutuality necessary to the kind of praxis which inheres in this mode underscores how "documentaries by citizens, journalists and other

creatives have reframed the crisis and illuminated the possibilities inherent in the intersection between journalistic and activist practice when trust in mainstream media institutions has waned significantly." (2017, p. 29) Greek society, particularly its urban youth, polarised politically in the years following the crash, dramatically moving toward the left-wing of SYRIZA or the far-right of Golden Dawn. Distrust of the major media platforms, as Lekakis indiciates, arrived in parallel with this rejection of the political centre. Together the major media and the political centre of the New Democracy party and the Pan-Hellenic group represented hegemony and minimalised the window of acceptable discourse that characterised the executive and mouthpiece at the time of Greece's lurch into debt and depression. (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014; Koronaiou et. al., 2015; Tsakatika, 2016). As a response to hegemony, Lekakis argues, there must be a place for a documentary praxis that joins together the idealistic standards of rigour of journalistic inquiry with the specifics of a particular cultural milieu, social identity, or political ideology.

This chapter will focus on documentaries that examine the effects upon culture and cultural practice that recession and austerity have brought to particular geographical regions and social milieus. By culture and cultural practice, I take the definition from Raymond Williams: culture is that which is ordinary - a series of interwoven practices that come to be understood as 'normal' within a wider group of people - rather than meaning the cultural object or artwork. Complementing this, as documentarians articulate perspectives occluded from the mainstream documentary capacity of news, is Williams' notional 'structure of feeling': a "pattern of impulses, restraints, tones" (Matthews, 2001, p. 174) that comes to connote a way of thinking emerging in society, as yet fully understood and often unwritten, that are perhaps competing against or living parallel to dominant and received wisdoms.

To illuminate this I shall briefly utilise an example from the films Lekakis identifies. *Love in the Time of Crisis* (2014) by Theopi Skarlatos and Kostas Kallergis takes the subject of romantic

and sexual relationships of the post-crash generation in order to examine the ways that Greece's wave of austerity, debt, and radical politics have affected what may appear to most be a separate subject. Skarlatos and Kallergis argue that the cultural practice of romantic love is upended with the financial instability and precarity of younger people taking up the time and energy that more prosperous times allowed. The directors uncover tensions between cultural expectation toward what one should do and this emerging structure of feeling by including testimonies of people revealing their lack of personal independence in times where jobs are short. Such independence allowed, prior to the crash, one to find the physical space to be intimate within. In the post-crash era ownership of physical space is bound up with having capital at a time when young people are living with parents for longer. In extreme examples, austerity has led to increasing amounts of younger women taking up sex work, which leads to changes away from normative sexual attitudes to wrapping up sex in the realm of the transactional. Skarlatos and Kallergis utilise the financial crash and recession to uncover a structure of feeling in a certain sub-group of Greek youth – the urban, the political, the formerly-enfranchised – that cuts against typical cultural practice of courtship and marriage. In short, *Love in a Time of Crisis* argues from a leftist perspective that the neo-liberal decision-making of centrist hegemony has led to a trauma inflicted upon this generation and that the results of this are farther-reaching than the jobs, economy, and urban flight typically-rendered by the realist documentary. Stylistically, it is less remarkable than its thesis and perhaps just as redolent of the Michael Moore-adjacent works covered in the previous chapter. What Skarlatos and Kallergis do zero in on, however, is a sense of something hidden that an engaged documentary practice can begin to evoke.

But is it possible that major shifts in economy lead to trauma in individuals and groups? Paul Crosthwaite considered trauma brought about by finance, a situation which can "overturn conventional assumptions about the relationship between the material and the immaterial in social life." (2012, p. 34) Reading Skarlatos and Kallergis against Crosthwaite's assertion bears fruit given their explicit joining together of the material and abstract at a socio-political crossroads, a situation

where both material necessities such as money and emotional requirements such as intimacy and love appear to be imperilled by the same phenomenon. Crosthwaite's theoretical argument articulates the system of banking and global finance as tendrils of growth that emerge from the centralised power of the – borrowing Jacques Lacan's terms - symbolic order. This symbolic order encompasses politics and media and embeds itself in the culture the individual subject finds themselves a part of, determining the unspoken rules of that culture. The problem then, argues Crosthwaite, is that there is a difficulty in representing events such as financial crash and recession precisely for the very absences which determine them (p. 48-49), thereby making connections between the invisible phenomenon and some felt pain in a remote location difficult to connect for the artist and especially the documentarian. For Crosthwaite

> Financial crises are unusual, if not unique, in being disasters in which no thing is destroyed. There is, ultimately, nothing in the crisis to represent because that which is destroyed lacks all substance: it is simply capital in its purest, most abstract, immaterial, spectral—and thus, for Žižek, paradoxically Real—form. At the core of a financial crisis is an absence, a gap, an empty space—not the contingent loss of an earlier plenitude, however, but a constitutive lack, a lack that the loss of the crash merely renders starkly apparent. The trauma of the crisis entails a vertiginous glimpse into this abyssal dimension of social reality, an emptiness at the center of things that everyone knows to be there but that, in the ordinary course of events, is concealed by the apparent solidity and assumed exchangeability of the abstract units of value that mediate our social existence. (p. 50)

Representing the intangibility of absence and its effect upon culture, thereby implying a second level of abstraction, may therefore not be best attained with a mimetic strategy such as those utilised by the realist documentary tradition. Realism, aside from mimetically representing the real in a form that only minimally removes from its appearance in reality, attempts to show meaning construction as a product of social hierarchy. Realism does not, however, place a great deal of value in the psychological and the individual. So what can be said for the theoretical opposite of the mimetic? Trauma theorist Ruth Leys characterises the anti-mimetic model as imagining victims "as capable of yielding imitatively to the enemy but in a mode that allows them to remain spectators, who can see and represent to themselves what is happening. The result is to deny the idea that victims of trauma are immersed in and hence complicitous with the traumatic violence, and to

establish instead a strict dichotomy between the victim and the external event or aggressor." (Leys and Goldman, 2010, p. 658) Leys' definition has far-reaching implications, notably for this thesis in that it sees anti-mimesis counterposed to mimesis in terms of how much of the unconscious landscape known as the psyche can be truly communicated. Indeed, the anti-mimetic theorist suggests that trauma does not require such concepts as the unconscious given that it can be spoken of in multiple ways that avoid the Freudian root of trauma theory, including as "a material manifestation of the signifier." (Elsaesser, p. 312, 2014) In Lauren Greenfield's *The Queen of Versailles*, the emphasis on the interrelatedness of social hierarchies and the psychological complicity across society in fuelling the traumatic moment of the crash upholds a mimetic/realist approach that suggests the traumatic moment can be recovered and represented by the artist. In Skarlatos and Kallergis, the fateful moment of the financial crash is positioned as an external force over which regular young Greeks had no control and yet now take on as burden. The knowledge that things have changed exists and is shared as a structure of feeling, but representation remains ineffable and irreducible.

Ethnographic limitations?

The documentaries, like the #greekdocs identified by Lekakis, that I will examine in this chapter argue that personal and societal trauma is not recoverable or traditionally representable. However, these texts construct their responses to the financial crash and recession in terms that resonate with Crosthwaite's configuration of the traumatic as an "abyssal dimension of social reality, an emptiness." (2012, p. 50) As I will show, different directors construct this central emptiness and sense of something absented from the social sphere in diffuse ways, but utilise Leys' articulation of the traumatic event as a removed thing to which its victims suffer passively. Skarlatos and Kallergis evince the dichotomy of the anti-mimetic through a keen focus on personal testimony and witnessing, placing an emphasis on interview as a means of making exterior the phenomena which is unseen and affecting the metaphysical aspects of life. The composition and

style of Skarlatos and Kallergis' film, with many of the other documentaries outlined by Lekakis and all of those that I will focus upon in this chapter, are redolent of the observational ethnographic film and the films of visual anthropology, with the greater focus of each text mirroring the anthropological discipline's focus on recording and documenting culture and cultural practices and interpreting their significance.

Debates within ethnographic film, particularly since the financial crash, have centred around whether the discipline is capable of showing 'the invisible' - the hidden aspects of the personal and the social - by breaking away from "the mimetic dogma of the "humanized" camera." (Suhr and Willerslev, 2012, p. 282) Christian Suhr and Rane Willerslev outline contemporary debates within ethnographic film, highlighting limitations with photography and a simple cinema of observation, noting Kirsten Hastrup's resigned argument that visual anthropology evolved around observational recording and is ultimately 'stuck' within these confines and thus unable to uncover anything beyond what is witnessed. Furthermore, Suhr and Willerslev note the gradual coming together of the Direct Cinema-informed realism and ethnographic film stating that the former "arguably has shaped ethnographic filmmaking to the extent of being identical to it." (p. 283; Banks, 1992; Kiener, 2008) In short, this appears to suggest a certain inexorability of the alignment between ethnographic film and a mimetic approach.

However, Suhr and Willerslev argue that certain disruptions can be brought to the ethnographic film that can bring about a hidden dimensionality to the act of witnessing. The techniques of these disruptions primarily include multiplicities of perspective, the on-screen elucidation of the theoretical material that is informing the text, intertitles that appear to critique what the viewer has just seen, and the creative use of montage. For Suhr and Willerslev this use of montage is not the kind that seeks to replace "realist doctrines with the radical constructivism of the Soviet and postmodernist montage schools" (p. 283) such as Dziga Vertov or Trinh. T. Minh-Ha.

What is proposed in its stead constitutes something of a metaxy, drawing from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theories of a "primordial totality of vision" (2002) and utilising ideas from seemingly rival camps in the observational and the constructed in order to probe the hidden aspects of their subject through the clashing of modes – arguing that an "imposed tension between realism and constructivism can open ethnographic filmmaking's capacity for imagining other planes of seeing." (p. 283) Suhr and Willerslev examine David MacDougall's film *Ghandi's Children* (2008) along these lines, suggesting conformity to this anti-mimetic fabulation in the way the film replays material in unedited and edited forms, incorporates directorial reaction, and features an explanatory voiceover by a participant. The total of the accumulated material amounts to five short acts that cover and re-cover the essential matter of one single social event in a manner that is "a mosaic image, a phantom-like whole, which enables us to experience and compare each perspective in relation to the others. The inconsistencies, dissonances, and gaps between the various contradicting viewpoints force us to consider what yet other perspectives could reveal, thus making us create new imaginary viewpoints that expand into infinity." (p. 289) Though this schema threatens not to reveal the hidden as it expands ad absurdum, capturing no coherent structure of feeling underlying what is observed and leaving the viewer with an unending tessellation of adjoinments and contradictions, the potential to capture the hidden through the exploration of ambiguities has potential when attempting to convey aspects of the traumatic. MacDougall, a theorist of ethnographic film in addition to his practice, has written doubtfully about the potential of the single camera style endemic to ethnographic film, suggesting that "for all the ways in which photographic images oversimplify and aggressively impose their messages [...] they are intrinsically tentative, oscillating between meaning and the self-sufficiency of their subjects." (2008, p. 6) The accretion of doubt and contradiction in *Ghandi's Children* simultaneously leaves the viewer individual space to produce meaning about what they have seen and grants dignity on its subjects, upon whom no complete judgement has been passed.

What Suhr and Willerslev outline suggests a potential cinema rather than an outline of one that precedes their writing. However, ethnographic film has precedent for works that approximately maps onto their vision. *Trobriand Cricket* (1979) by Garry Kildea documents the reconstruction of a cricket game played by a section of the Trobriand people in order to critique the colonial introduction of cricket to what was seen as a savage race. What appears as a misunderstanding of the game is in fact encoded with explicit and subtle references to the critique of the Trobriand people by the colonialist government in New Guinea. Kildea simultaneously records an event, its reconstruction, and the intended artistic effects of this constructed event in a way that leaves the viewer to consider the defamiliarised content of this avant-anthropology. Andrew Irving, in reply to Suhr and Willerslev, is enthusiastic about an "anthropological approach to visual *ostranenie*" suggesting that through this "observational film can be productively transformed into ethnographically grounded modes of disruption to communicate invisible and unarticulated truths." (in Suhr and Willerslev, 2012, p. 296) This, Irving notes with a nod to performance theorist Victor Turner, suggests that montage will create psychological drama out of the otherwise smooth surfaces of observed material.

Bill Nichols, who also responded enthusiastically to Suhr and Willerslev, has previously and separately extolled the virtues of the hybrid documentary that utilises a mixed method of deliberate contrasts to reveal truth rather than close down meaning.[32] Nichols does not consider such documentaries in terms of montage though his essay works along similar lines, considering what the utilisation of multiple stylistic modes within documentary does to the truth. Nichols is careful to note that overly focusing upon self-reflexive elements can "lead to endless self-regression" (2005, p. 29), but suggests that the incorporation of self-reflexive methods that critique a previous generation's methods whilst also making a documentary about a subject in the present is part of the

32 "This is a far cry from adherence to indexical facts or to modest interruptions of a realist style by montage. It is to claim a distinctive voice for ethnographic film. The quality they so clearly identify, and rightly stress, is the way in which film, as a distinct language, opens onto a field of discursive encounter between film-maker, subject, and viewer as rich, variable, and unstable as the act of being (human) allows." (in Suhr and Willerslev, 2012, p. 298)

continuum of documentary production: cinema verite challenged the ‘Voice of God’, the interview-based film critiqued cinema verite, and the self-reflexive New Documentary critiqued all of the aforementioned. (p. 29) There is also the hope in Nichols that documentary and the visual anthropological film can push past navel-gazing concerns by utilising and incorporating awareness of the tendency of certain techniques as interview to have a privileged position within documentary narrative. This suggests the implementation on behalf of a knowing strategy that positions the self-critical alongside the authentic: revelatory material observed and joined together with self-implication of the observer, intertitles, and “portrait-like framing of a social actor that pries her away from a matrix of ongoing actives or a stereotypical background.” (p. 31) Acknowledging the myriad ways that image culture affects personhood has long been a claim of Bill Nichols, writing in 1981 that images “contribute to to our sense of who we are and to our everyday engagement with the world around us.” (p. 3) Establishing media literacy as part of life, particularly in the west, allows analysis of an ethnographic film that plays against sincere realism and observation to move past simplifying concerns that privilege certain techniques as being more authentic than others. Viewers understand the difference intuitively, Nichols latterly suggests, between a realist proximic in its social context and portraiture that generates intimacy at expense of surroundings as individuals encounter themselves in different modes constantly. Thinking along lines that constructs selfhood as a constant negotiation between various platforms and social roles gives credence to the suggestion that ethnographic documentary and its privilege of duration, the iconographic image, and realism does not just uphold an expired paradigm – it flies in the face of the lived reality of the western viewer. Your very you-ness is configured, the logic of Nichols perceptively suggests, around my perception of you; furthermore this perception is an unstable proposition in itself, given to fluctuation. Self-reflexivity, therefore, is not merely a media strategy inextricably bound up with meta-commentary, but a governing force that stabilises human interactions.

Nichols concludes his 2005 essay with a hope that "strategies of reflexivity […] may eventually serve political as well as scientific ends." (p. 31) In the years that followed Nichols' essay, works such as *Marwencol* (2010), *The Act of Killing* (2012), and *The Missing Picture* (2013) emerged, pitched in a hinterland between ethnographic films of traumatised subject and something based in modernist and postmodernist discourses of media and self-representation that seeks greater illumination through juxtaposition of modes and styles rather than self-negation. Mimesis comes head to head with anti-mimesis as traumatic subjects project their traumas onto statues (*Marwencol*, *The Missing Picture*) and genre-film reconstruction (*The Act of Killing*), bringing together an encounter with the real with its own mediation and the subject's attempt to recover trauma within their own ethnographic context. Simultaneously these films suggest trauma is recoverable and that its sufferer is the mediator of its recovery whilst also suggesting that the languages, mediums, and modes within mediums that attempt to convey trauma's elusiveness and central absences are limited and limiting.

We can see how this productive tension might play out in a contemporary work of trauma. For example, when we see Anwar in *The Act of Killing*, after several attempts negotiated between director Joshua Oppenheimer and himself to reconstruct traumatic moments he perpetrated in the style of Hollywood genre cinema, break down and cry at the conclusion of the film. Oppenheimer captures this crying in a long take in the style of the realist and ethnographic film, heightening its effect with duration and remove. It appears as a moment of traumatic recovery and we, as viewer, receive a sense of the real within the style used to capture this moment, but also with its effects amplified by its juxtaposition with artifice. Additionally, there is the knowledge of the accumulation of specific languages of media modes that Anwar has learned through the process of the film. Is this real trauma recovered, or the rejection of its possibility? Is this a post-postmodernist acknowledgement of the constructedness of text ultimately giving way to the few revelatory moments captured spontaneously? The film acknowledges style and the director in-text as meaning

creator but attempts to push past this and recover the real as it relates to its historicised dimensions in printed materials and testimonies captured long before the ethnographic filming had commenced.

Karl G. Heider contends that the ethnographic text needs to have a relationship with accounts taken from media with different methods of information gathering and dissemination such as academic material and written accounts. Heider writes that “the ethnographic enterprise demands a depth of description and of abstract generalisation that cannot be handled in pictures alone.” (2006, p. 59) An intertextual relationship, argues Heider, is of the several attributes that makes the ethnographic text operate with greater validity rather than merely accounting for its pro-filmic strategies. Heider’s schema includes a sixteen point matrix against which ethnographic texts are mapped and their validity assessed. The use of what Suhr and Willerslev call montage and that Nichols accounts as the differences within the hybrid documentary are accounted in an attribute named ‘distortion in the filmmaking process’, though Heider also acknowledges that some distortion is inevitable (p. 85) and even desirable. That there remains sufficient space for the film to acknowledge distorting effects such as affecting the behaviour of subjects or sequentially re-arranging events for narrative purposes allows for the communication of deficiencies that, paradoxically, enhances credibility.

Before going on to examine anti-mimetic documentaries of crash and recession, I must briefly talk about audiences by returning to the proposition of Eleftheria Lekakis. Lekakis, writing from the position of cultural instability within Greek youth against dominant hegemony, stated that there must be space for a documentary praxis that balances a political position against symbolic order with the expectation of objective truth. Lekakis’ notion articulates what Suhr and Willerslev downplay: that truth is contestable, meaning that exactly what it is that is hidden - the emergent structure of feeling against the dominant sensibilities of culture – is eminently a product of both empathetic viewing and political willing on behalf of the filmmaker and viewer. Nichols also misses

this in his essay, presuming that anthropological and documentary reflexivity emerges from a position of good faith when the previous chapter has shown how easily that faith can be lost and the scientific-journalistic corona implied by the ethnographical form detourned to serve nefarious ends. Given the century of ethical debates that dog the ethnographic film, assumption of good faith is ahistorical and insufficient. I shall explain this by utilising a juxtaposition from a film that I will look at in greater detail in the next section: in Albert Albacete's *Artesanos* (2011) there is a static shot, held for over 30 seconds, that looks down the corridor of a Marrakesh bazaar and observes western tourists passing by through a slit in the passageway. (fig. 3.1)

fig. 3.1 - loaded images
Artesanos (2011)

It is, I argue, not likely that this shot is not meant to make the viewer think in terms outside of the economical and cultural relationship implied in this shot. This reading is supported by the geometric aspect of the composition that frames the significance of the moment, the muted tones of the surroundings against the colours of the tourists, the removed proximic of the camera to the subjects passing through the shot suggesting solidarity with those who typically observe their passing and the suggested separation between the position of the camera and the position of the tourists, and the clashing of the historic stone of the permanent building with the fast fashions of the transitory tourists as they unappreciatively pass by a pile of hand-crafted goods. Albacete's

composition in this single take does not reveal the hidden alone – the hidden is a product of tensions between sections rather than individual moments taken alone - though it does begin to suggest its immediate realm of signifiers, thereby closing down vast signifying fields. The lack of overt narration, intertitle, or continuation of the juxtaposition between western tourists and the changing dynamics of Moroccan artisanal labour in globalism can be missed by dint of the subtlety in this shot. It is political willing that locates external discourses in shots such as these, and an act of empathetic reading of the image that locates power relations and trauma in the film that is mostly silent and observational. In ethnographic documentary such as these, it is possible to miss external discourses precisely because of the intensive focus on the local practice and a sense of 'presentness' that comes out in the focus on a small location and the lengthy duration of many of the shots. Albacete's montage, catching conversations about 'plastic toys' and wide shots of the Marrakesh marketplaces, provides subtle hints at themes rather than the overt comment of a Michael Moore. Performing an empathetic reading, however, returns texts such as *Artesanos* to the kind of ideological truth praxis outlined by Lekakis.

Culture vultures: *A Northern Soul* (2018) and *Artesanos* (2011)

The city of Kingston upon Hull was predicted to be the last in England to recover from the Great Recession (Smith, 2010), with the local council reducing spending on public services in ensuing austerity measures by 8 per cent (Stephenson, 2013) in the years following the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010. As a measure to revive the city, the council bid for - and won - the status of City of Culture for 2017, bringing a year-long program of arts and general optimism of renewal in material and civic terms to Hull. Much as the Greek documentaries identified by Lekakis do, *A Northern Soul* captures the internal and personal aspects that have arisen out of austerity in a manner that foregrounds its own ideological basis. Though Hull's decline is stated within the film as being "from the late '70s" and Brexit looms over the time of filming, it is the stagnant wages (van Reenen, 2015; Romei, 2018), public service cuts (Vize, 2018; Barford and

Gray, 2018), reduced arts funding (Harvey, 2016), and inability to progress from entry-level work to avoid cyclical poverty whilst working (Shildrick et. al. 2010) endemic to austerity Britain that shapes both McAllister's ideological stance and personal identification with its central subject Steve.

McAllister goes further than the #greekdocs in the way he merges observational and ethnographic technique and journalistic inquiry with the personal, the ideological, and socio-cultural sensitivity to articulate generational problems. McAllister, from Hull and a creative participant in Hull's City of Culture celebrations, emerges from the same social class with the same desires to pursue creativity as central subject Steve, who wants to teach music to disadvantaged children. Steve and McAllister are the socially and culturally the same, the text suggests, but a generation separates them. This generation, *A Northern Soul* argues, is characterised by its emergence at the point of crash and recession and represents the significant moment of departure from the expected course of life in dominant society.

The anti-mimetic ethnographic documentary of financial crash and recession seeks to capture the hidden aspects of the effects. In order to evoke a sense of the hidden in *A Northern Soul*, McAllister pits two conceptions of culture against one another in order to find tensions that produce meanings. On one hand McAllister considers culture as a bourgeois and bracketed off 'artistic experience' that is separate from 'normal life'; a mediated event requiring witness. On the other hand, McAllister introduces culture taken from the sense developed in Raymond Williams' *Keywords* that derives from Gustav Klemm and Johann Herder, meaning the range of expectations and practices considered ordinary in a people in a place (1985, p. 87-93).

Against Heider's notional matrix that determines whether an ethnographic film is successful or not, *A Northern Soul* scores highly[33] whilst McAllister considers his work "an ethnographic documentary that provides an accurate account of people's daily lives in a humane and dignified way" (in *The Guardian*, 27th August 2018), capturing a wide swathe of culture in this latter sense. Though McAllister do not often depict whole acts and whole interactions and the narrative is controlled in the edit, the viewer is granted access into a series of contextualising positions: we see Steve in his commute to work and occasionally in his workplace, we see Steve in social roles as a parent and a son, and we hear him speak at length in a regional accent. Steve's behaviours are constantly contextualised within their immediate social standing and a sense of their historic dimension (i.e. the events that happened prior to the film both in society and personally to Steve). The visual representation of Steve's culture feels authentic in that it appears to be shared by others who surround him. McAllister's depiction, therefore, is not the elucidation of the solipsistic even though it is particular. Culture in the bourgeois sense, however, juxtaposed with Steve, feels alien. It is in the exposure of dissonances between these two understandings of culture that tensions begin to be felt, and the hidden slowly revealed. McAllister's utilisation of Steve in contrast with other potential 'Steves' – the director himself, their parents, and the young children in the film – creates a paratext within the same text to highlight the specific effects of austerity.

Though the effects McAllister creates are best considered across the duration of the film, strategies occasionally unfold over the course of a scene at one spatio-temporal location. At the launch party for City of Culture, McAllister edits between an observational mode and the symbolic single image of portraiture, capturing Steve's uneasy posture and clothing as a clash against the middle-class wine bar on a gentrified street that the party is taking place on. The framing of Steve is tight and shot slightly from beneath, creating a sense of individual isolation that emerges from the

33 The sixteen points, briefly: appropriateness of sound, narration, ethnographic basis, explicit theory, relation to printed materials, voice or point of view, behavioural contextualisation, physical contextualisation, the ethnographer's presence, whole acts, narrative stories, whole bodies, whole interactions, whole people, distortion/manipulation, and culture change made explicit.

rigid focus. The frame opens up when McAllister's camera surveys rooms full of middle-class people enjoying the cultural experience, tonally relaxing away from the paranoid dissatisfaction of Steve.

At the launch event, Steve says, referring to the perceived wealth of his peers in the room, that "I think there's a lot of people here who don't have to worry." Steve's claim juxtaposed with visuals suggestive of gentrification and comfort. McAllister edits these semiotically-charges moments against each other to produce tension, though the tension is not an artificial tension of drama but an evocation of Steve's inner discomfort. This scene can be read against the outline of self-reflexivity in social context that I outlined engaging with Bill Nichols. Steve is painfully aware of the power of outward signifiers such as accent, posture, language, and style, indicative of one's ability to 'read' social class and, indicative of the traumatic aspect, reflexive about others' ability to read these signifiers in him. Though there is no overt tension in the room, McAllister cleverly constructs a sense of high stakes when different social classes converge in bourgeois culture, suggesting essential differences in expectation and function.

fig. 3.2 - on one level, realist observation…
A Northern Soul (2018)

Raymond Williams notes, in his history of the evolution of ‘culture’ in usage, culture in the sense of the artistic event was indistinguishable from its usage meaning ‘refined’ and ‘sensitive’ as “the idea of a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development was applied and effectively transferred to the works and practices which represent and sustain it.” (1985, p. 90-91) This latter utilisation and its lack of distinction from culture* emerges in the Victorian bourgeois romanticism of Matthew Arnold, who himself felt the cultured middle classes had to confer some of this culture upon their lower orders or else “society is in danger of falling into anarchy.” (1993, p. 22) McAllister frames the City of Culture launch as culture engulfed by Arnoldian embourgeoisement, at odds with practices in broader culture and paternalistic in its need to transmit moral and aesthetic values. By these terms, Steve *is* alien precisely because of his social class and inability to assimilate with the social mores and rituals of the bourgeois cultural event. A short interior scene best exemplifies this. The camera is close in on Steve as an unseen poet reads a florid and whimsical poem that cuts against the earnest and earthy hip-hop Steve is known for. Behind the bar Steve is stood next to, an unseen person drops a glass and it smashes and Steve is the only person who loudly celebrates the sound, quickly reining in his glee in realisation of the social situation. On the face of it there is no reason for discomfort – this is a cultural scene and Steve is undoubtedly cultural. However, a closer and empathetic reading combined with an understanding of social class reveals the multiple anxieties at stake when structures of feeling emerge within culture.

fig. 3.3 - ...with parallel observations making their own commentary
A Northern Soul (2018)

The tone of this bar scene is mostly comical but its inclusion within McAllister's schema is clearly connected to the bigger picture of recession. The separation Steve feels at the cultural event is symbolic, representative of the working class structure of feeling in British culture in austerity. Steve notes the jargon of the bourgeois, self-reflexively admonishing himself for his inability to "network". The inclusion of this footage by McAllister is a tacit acknowledgement that Steve understands the hierarchies in play and their general mapping onto discourses of social class. In the first chapter I noted that, in the rise of class consciousness and the entrenchment of social hierarchies brought about by industrialisation, proletarian forms of culture tended toward the vernacular, dynamic, and the socially-connected. Steve, as a factory worker and mentor in hip-hop, embodies this proletarian artist figure, focused on sharing his skill in an art-form whose roots and continued existence reflect their urban milieu and relative social status in their praxis.

McAllister looks further down the social spectrum in order to generate a holistic approach to a structure of feeling in Hull's broader culture, in the Williams' sense. It is noted by McAllister in narration that the lowest social classes in Hull, determined by the authorities to be those most in

need of the social outreach aspect of City of Culture, cannot afford to travel to the city centre to receive the offerings of the City of Culture's programming. Steve visits these children on his Beats Bus; a refurbished van that belongs to his employer, a major sponsor of City of Culture. In these scenes McAllister subtly alludes to exterior discourses by indicating an extra layer of irony when considering the company's mistreatment of Steve. Steve is working for the company twice, McAllister seems to suggest. During official hours he generates actual capital by his labours, and outside of this Steve generates cultural capital by being the face of their philanthropic gestures. The irony doubles when the bus is rescinded after the City of Culture year is over.

Constructed ruminations these two conceptions of culture within the film are important to consider. McAllister suggests that, as a result of Hull's downturn related to the financial crash and recession, the course of culture (in the Raymond Williams mode) continued for one particular social class in a way that allowed it to more firmly claim the territory of bourgeois culture in its publicly-funded guise. This latter form of culture, considered as a public service that educates as much as it entertains, offers a route out of poverty in the manner that was allowed for McAllister, has largely disappeared in austerity. McAllister suggests that access to culture, therefore, relates to one's enfranchisement as much as it relates to one's social class. The prurient scenes in which McAllister's camera peers around the poverty-stricken homes of Blessing and Harvey, in addition to lingering shots that capture Steve living with his own mother at the age of 42, suggest not just the effects of austerity-deepened poverty but generational disenfranchisement within British culture because of social class and a lack of access to bourgeois culture.

In multiple scenes, the enfranchising capability of cultural participation plays out quite literally. In one moment we learn that Blessing's father cannot watch his son's performance because he needs to be at work, so Steve steps in as both mentor and surrogate father. Through the course of the film we learn how rapping gives young Harvey the educational and therapeutic support needed

to help overcome his speech impediment. Cynical corporate philanthropy, driven by a small band of volunteers and soon to be removed, fills the hole in lives that have been opened up by austerity. Crucially, we can see how the text is on one hand about Steve, but also about the genuine fear that no more Steves will arise to perform such a task. McAllister frames working – and when considering the family of Harvey, underclass – life under austerity as increasingly just about getting through. A basic set of assumptions of what life should entail and what one can expect, particularly in those whom austerity has affected the greatest, are vague. Steve's ill mother sees her life with multiple illnesses purely in terms of defiance with no prospect of returning to health or acquiring a greater social standing in recession. The expected course of culture, or the "basic assumptions" that financial trauma overturns that Paul Crosthwaite speaks of, are evinced directly in a scene in which Steve tearfully points out that by age 42 he has nothing to show for it. Moving from a scene that appears to be observation, the director's voice is heard:

> **MCALLISTER**: What did you expect to have?
> **STEVE**: I dunno. A house maybe. Some savings.

The overturning of these basic assumptions appears to bear out by footage the viewer has seen prior to this interview. Steve's father and McAllister's mother and father live modestly and comfortably in retirement, neither having transcended their social class. This generational dimension is given further credibility by looking into the past and the future. When McAllister shows his parents archive footage of Hull of their youth, both parents remember their own youth when recalling Hull's former prosperity and burgeoning industrial status. Meanwhile two of Steve's young mentees, Blessing and Harvey, are candidates for mentoring precisely because of the extreme poverty of their background in which even having dreams of a house and savings appear even more distant and unlikely. McAllister's arrangement of the basic expectations of life in historical decline maps against a capitalist framework that dictates both McAllister's access to Steve and Steve's access to culture and family time. Steve's basic assumptions were, according to both McAllister's

construction and historical evidence, once met and are now not. There is a cut within the abovementioned interview and then the dialogue between director and subject continues:

> **MCALLISTER**: You're stuck in the job as well
> **STEVE**: Yeah, wasting my life in that place, fucking (sighs) earning money for some rich pricks.
> **MCALLISTER**: Where do you want to be?
> **STEVE**: I just want to be doing something by myself.

Though Steve speaks variously of traumas suffered through debt and divorce, what McAllister captures speaks less to Steve's interiority and more to a structure of feeling emerging within culture. Where McAllister's father has his pension and good memories of being a working class person, Steve is seen in financial trouble with mounting debts. More fundamentally, McAllister suggests, the logic of austerity starves Steve of comradeship and understanding. Steve is disciplined after a colleague ("on the same level as me") reports him for unsafely mending a mechanical defect, which sees his bonus stopped. Later in the film we learn that Steve, as a result of his activities teaching children, has first been forced to work 18 days out of 19 and then later receives demotion at work. Out of the hands of a state with a program of cultural enrichment and against the societal grain, corporatism is framed as parasitic, imprisoning, and alienating. Steve's employer sell the equipment for the Beats Bus and retake control of the vehicle once the year for City of Culture is over, despite the project making the cover of the corporate magazine. The tendrils of finance growing out of the symbolic order seen by Crosthwaite are most visible here, with nods to payday loan and debt culture as Steve takes on an IVA (individual voluntary arrangement) to consolidate his debt and leave him with £131 leftover per month.

In terms of composition, the tension in the scene outlined that sees realist observation switch to a directorial voice that empathises with the subject, sharpens the focus toward Steve as a member of a forgotten generation. With the realism and observation alone there is not the emotional impact gained by a subject conveying interiority toward a witness, and with the empathetic interview alone there is less of a basis in the material evidence that stacks up in recession. Colliding the two forms

allows for mutual support between the two modes rather than contradiction or postmodernist surface play, whilst being transparent about ideology and identification between subject and director.

Indeed, it is McAllister's role as an intermediary between his functional capacity as City of Culture practitioner and confidante of Steve that simultaneously bridges the footage of Steve with other filmic modes and self-effaces his own role and manipulation. Footage of McAllister rehearsing an oration for a large crowd complicates earlier footage that appears to critique the City of Culture's bohemian and bourgeois audience. McAllister's working class status may be authentic and his sense of relationship with Steve through shared history reciprocated, but the footage makes clear McAllister's ability to become chameleonic and change as the social mode requires. Manipulation becomes foregrounded. The inclusion of footage of McAllister operating happily within the bourgeois milieu is clear self-critique, making explicit the power relationship that underpins the text in a way that reframes realist objectivity as the bourgeois observation of class relations as I outlined in chapter 1 as well as, perhaps paradoxically, upholding a sense of integrity in its willingness to acknowledge such ideological dimensions. When considering the question of the anti-mimetic, the acknowledgement on the part of McAllister as having partially departed this social class and therefore being insulated from this problem at this time suggests the ultimate unrecoverability of Steve's financially traumatic experiences through any particular mode.

The stylistic collisions suggested by the theories of Nichols and Suhr and Willerslev, wherein different kinds of footage and different modes of information capture are juxtaposed, all appear to confirm the existence of such trauma in their consonance. Interview footage generates cultural memory which is confirmed by archive footage, with observation of the modern conditions of labour and culture suggestive of fundamental differences. The sense of a palpable 'structure of feeling' accumulates weight as McAllister traces the unseen losses in the far-reaching effects of

recession. The movement between realism and the personal allows *A Northern Soul* to capture hidden feelings of loss and absence that emerges from one significant event of economic history. Whilst these may be ideologically-slanted and disinterested in more veridical forms of evidencing, as Lekakis argued, legacy forms of media have not covered these stories and the dimensions of their effects do not bear out in mere statistics.

Different approaches have been utilised in the anti-mimetic and ethnographic documentary approaches to recession. *Artesanos* is a short documentary that observes the methods and social context of a few craftsmen in Morocco. Emerging from within scenes of close and lengthy observations of traditional techniques and delicate skill, the viewer learns of a subtext that these artisans are worried for their future as tourists travel in fewer numbers and spend less money. The reasons why this may happen are left to speculation, but the year of filming anchors the text around strong suggestions of the spread of recession. Indeed, the money that these tourists do spend increasingly misses the pockets of these artisans, with the bazaars and marketplaces now being flooded with Chinese plastic trinkets, situating the discourse of the film within the context of globalism. Cultural tension plays a part in *Artesanos*, though Albacete's work provides a more traditionally ethnographic view of a way of life troubled in recession. Albacete does not self-implicate in the manner that McAllister does, nor does he switch mode between different types of practice. Nonetheless, Albacete's work clearly arises from the same reactive and ideologically-informed process that Lekakis outlined, attempting to convey what is invisible at these fraught historical moments.

fig. 3.4 - watch this and only this
Artesanos (2011)

The key scene of *Artesanos* is one static shot in close-up of an artisan crafting a wooden ornament. The scene lasts for two-and-a-half minutes, with the viewer only able to see the transformation of a piece of wood into a cultural object. The camera is positioned at floor level, allowing the viewer to see that the intricate hand-carving is performed with a blade stabilised by the artisan's big toe while the mechanism of the lathe is controlled by the artisan pulling on a piece of string. Displaying the entire construction of one ornament from beginning to end in a single unbroken take conveys a wealth of information that signifies beyond the act depicted. Firstly, this is a whole, and representative, act of the selected group of people that relates to their identification. The inclusion of the whole act provides a "basic and necessary structure to behaviour" (Heider, 2006, p. 75) thereby allowing a strong sense of veridicality about its significance within this culture and, in the way that footage is organised around the behaviour in this key scene, suggests that the way of life for these people is similarly structured around this act. Remove this act, the scene says, and you remove these people and the founding spirit of this place.

Secondly, the durational aspect conveys not only a sense of the conditions of labour and the skill of the practice, but a sense of presentness that allows the viewer both a point of empathy and a consideration of the difference between artisanal labours and contemporary machine labour. Furthermore, Albacete's devotion to showing the whole act connects to the lengthy history of production by making the viewer consider the aspect of time. Aside from the presence of the camera, which sets conditions on depiction, the shot could theoretically have been made at any time in the history of these people and therefore evokes a tradition that sits at the very centre of culture. Against the material which follows this shot, such as the tourists or the discussions between artisans about the encroachment of Chinese plastic imports, the lengthy history evoked in one shot clashes suggests tragedy; not merely the replacement of one kind of object for another but the end of a certain kind of people and identity.

Thirdly, the fixing of the frame in combination with focus on duration speaks to what Matthew Flanagan calls the "film's anti-illusionist exhaustion of representational content." (2012, p. 50) Flanagan considers the liminal space between documentary and slow cinema with reference to Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), noting how the fixed frame and focus on the duration gave "sustained, contemplative attention to the registration of light and minor detail over time." (p. 50-51) Whilst this is true, and the viewer may note (with weighty symbolism) how minor incisions contribute to the shaping of a whole, the viewer is disallowed from the possibility of looking elsewhere and must consider the act from beginning to end. This absence of choice of gaze represents, on one level, the absence of choice of the artisan to do something else in contrast with the novelty and whim that comprises the products the artisans compete against. For this short period the viewer is frozen into the shaping of this object, momentarily conjoined with its crafting as an act of quiet solidarity.

Though largely adhering to ethnographic observation that prizes a realist mode of observation, Albacete utilises montage, silence, diegetic sound, and distance expressively to capture feeling and sense of the hidden. Between the footage of the ornament manufacture and a different artisan making garments, Albacete inserts a minute-long montage comprised of six static shots of minimal movement within the frame. The effect that each shot has is similar to that of Yasujiro Ozu's pillow shots, in which people are "for the moment […] are not visible, and a rooftop, a street-light, laundry drying on a line, a lampshade or a tea-kettle is offered as centre of attention." (Burch, 1979, p. 161) The first three shots (fig. 3.6) cut gradually closer from a distant shot of a bazaar/souk in the evening, each shot incrementally revealing the dense human activity between market traders and tourists as an ethereal blur. The fourth shot changes the tone completely, shooting across a number of caravans with satellite dishes on their rooftops. The fifth and sixth shot match the muted colours, slowly moving toward the workspace of the artisan. Narratively the shots add nothing, with their relationship to the spatial reality of the situation oblique. Nonetheless, the slow travel of the montage suggests an essential link between the public theatre of the Marrakesh souk and those who labour unseen to make the goods for it. Albacete's montage suggests that this culture has a particular depth and connectedness and this montage is an inner journey from the surfaces that delight the tourists to the soul that provides the substance. This sense of travel is heightened by considering Albacete's treatment of sound across the same six shots. The initial shot, viewing the souk at its most distant, captures the diegetic sound of the evening in full flow, as the hustle and bustle of people combines with traditional rhaita and drum music. In each of the six shots the same diegetic sound is overlaid, though Albacete reduces the volume at the commencement of each shot until the sixth shot where it recedes almost completely. The tonal transition is completed as Albacete finally cuts to a conversation between artisans, fretful about their future.

Though in the work of both Albacete and McAllister we see central subjects who are suffering in the austerity after the crash, testimony and prolonged witnessing of the kinds deployed

by the Chu brothers, Lauren Greenfield, and Michael Moore are not as important to the organisation of their texts. Whilst Albacete and McAllister's texts have strategies that could place them within one of the suggested modes in the previous chapters, it is the attempt at constructing a distanced neutrality combined with the insertion of material from other modes that interferes with the typical straightforwardness of the ethnographic work.

Though there have been ethnographic works that incorporate deliberate distortions, external conversations, and revisiting the same material as if to reinterpret it, they are a relative rarity in the field or have been latterly considered to have broken one of ethnography's many ethical stress tests (such as Tim Asch's *The Ax Fight* (1975), which depicts acts of Yanomamo violence which may have been exacerbated by the presence of the production crew). But it is these exterior conversations in Albacete and McAllister as it was in Asch and Kildea, which move away from the realist gaze, that unfurl truth and meaning with a degree of depth. More precisely it is the care given to balance these debates and also be seen to be doing so that gives these texts weight as they acknowledge the audience as an ultimate arbiter. In the next chapter there are similar formulations between a realist gaze and aestheticisations that indicate interlinked discourses. But as we shall also see, the balance and design of the text is not that of the ethnographic film, and as such they attach themselves to different histories which in turn produce different interpretations.

CHAPTER 4
THE POETIC DOCUMENTARY

Though the financial crash of 2007/8 and the subsequent recession affected regions and nations previously experiencing upswings in acknowledged growth and prosperity indicators, evidence from policy research group the Carnegie Foundation indicates that a great deal of the places that were hit hardest were countries and cities experiencing stagnant growth prior to the crash (Ali and Falcao, 2009). Whilst banks, national economies, and government responses to the crisis stole the headlines during the crisis itself, the effect the crash had in concentrating and intensifying poverty in places and upon people experiencing hardship was generally overlooked in the news media.

In the years leading to the crash, Detroit was experiencing paralysis caused by ongoing de-industrialisation in manufacturing. Hardest hit was the automobile sector which gave 20th century Detroit economic vibrancy and, to a great extent, its identity (‘Motown’) within the American nation. A program of investment in re-training and re-shaping of the local economy commensurate to the 335000 manufacturing jobs being lost was not carried through, with only piecemeal attempts to do taking place in the midst of the recession itself (Carey, 2009). As a result, the financial crash accelerated the shrinking of the local economy and physical space of the city. Early studies into the extent of change offer general indicators of a change happening as a result of the financial crash suggestive of change, loss, and impact upon the individual psyche and collective group. The Brookings Institute found that “in the post-recession period alone, the number of extremely poor neighborhoods increased by 45 percent. The number of people living in such communities grew at an even faster clip (57 percent) between 2005-09 and 2010-14.” (Kneebone and Holmes, 2016) According to the American Census Bureau, by 2011, two years after economists declared the Great Recession over, house prices and median household income in the Detroit metropolitan area were

lower than when the recession commenced. In the case of household income, adjusting for inflation, the difference was estimated at 11 per cent (Hoogterp, 2011). Eventually, the city of Detroit entered into an 18-month long Chapter 9 bankruptcy in July 2013, an estimated $18-20 billion in debt (Davey and Williams Walsh, 2013).

Directors of documentary have previously attested to the decline of manufacturing and general de-industrialisation in Detroit, across its parent state Michigan, and even the wider 'rust belt' area across the American midwest and north-east for many years prior to the financial crash of 2007/8. Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* (1989) charted the loss of 30000 employees over a period of 11 years at the General Motors (GM) automobile plant in Flint, Michigan, and the regional impact this has on the fortunes and psyche of those in the area. It is worth noting that at the same factory, it is estimated that between 43000 and 45000 more jobs have been lost in the years since Moore's film (Burden and Wayland, 2015; Lee, 2015), in addition to substantial losses in the other factories of the Big Three (Chrysler and Ford), suggestive of a continued decline within the region that has been subsequently mentioned in documentaries such as *Requiem For Detroit* (2010), *Deforce* (2010), *Death By China* (2012), and *American Made Movie* (2013). Likewise, in *Detropia* (2012), directors Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady capture Detroit in the midst of the Great Recession, between the financial crash and the city's entry into bankruptcy. As in other Detroit-centred films made at this time, the directors present Detroit as a city experiencing an ingrained and protracted malaise and its subject engaged in an ongoing struggle against the vicissitudes of time.

What makes *Detropia* worthy of further consideration is clear evidence that there are stylistic decisions and representative strategies in operation that elide references and features of art and film not typically associated with the kinds of journalistic or polemical documentaries that examine serious ongoing issues affecting people. Though people and their plight remain central, granting the text an immediate sense of reality and realism, *Detropia* largely eschews the kind of

factual and numeric contexts contained within the opening of this chapter. Instead, *Detropia* draws from the history of American art and photography, the international documentary cinema of the early century, and from diverse styles of auditory representation in order to make connections and critiques that visit the personal, such as trauma and memory, as well as the political and economic.

Fig. 4.1 - a tonal palette of recession?
Detropia (2012)

Ewing and Grady have drawn criticism for responding to potentially traumatic history with aesthetics rather than hard-and-fast realism. For Jason Sperb (2016, p. 218) "*Detropia* does a remarkable job of conveying the city's vastness, long winters, and harrowing decay—yet fails to say something in depth about the same histories it superficially evokes." Sperb's essay, on the 'Fordist nostalgia' that automotive cities perhaps engage in at the tail end of the automotive industry in America, holds *Detropia* to account in relation to a committed polemical film on the same subject (Daniel Falconer's *Deforce*). Falconer's film falls somewhere between the outlooks articulated in chapters one and two: realist imagery captured and edited a-poetically, with a clear sense of poliitcal conviction guiding the process of production. Were the unification of form and content not as compelling or the understandings of intersecting aesthetics across history less carefully handled,

Sperb's critical view of Ewing and Grady's more 'poetic' account of a city in jeopardy would be understandable and acceptable. At one interpretive layer *Detropia* draws upon images and associations based within material familiar to the viewing public to invoke these personal and political aspects as kind of cultural shorthand.

However, as Sperb indicates in examination of the example of Daniel Falconer's *Deforce*, despite including economic rigour alongside lengthy passages of verbal testimony from its subjects, the film ultimately "failed to connect with audiences less interested in such dry accounts and more engrossed in the sensuous sights and sounds that the poetic mode can offer." (p. 216) Sperb contrasts the fortunes of *Deforce* with those of the more successful *Detropia*, which is suggested to be a work redolent of the 'poetic mode'. In utilising this term, Sperb deliberately references Bill Nichols' taxonomies of documentary sub-categories, framing the poetic documentary as one which "sacrifices the conventions of continuity editing and the sense of a very specific location in time and place that follows from it to explore associations and patterns that involve temporal rhythms and spatial juxtapositions." (2001a, p. 102) The poetic documentary challenges documentary watchers to accept a conceptual plane that rejects much of what has come to be known as documentary in mainstream media flows. The poetic documentary works utilising connections based in tone and harmony as opposed to direct pursuit of specific and knowable truths, continual orientation in space and time throughout the film, and a style which foregrounds the ways in which it is constructed and aestheticised.

In order to position the film within a particular strand of public history that begins to acknowledge the fortunes and misfortunes of capitalism as a proponent of human change, Ewing and Grady deploy references to American art and photography suggestive of themes of capital, recession and depression, the movement of people, labour, and a particular form of American stoicism and dignity in the face of hardship. In particular, images which recall strong associations

with the Great Depression echo the distant traumatic narratives at large in that era whilst positioning the film within a particular strand of public history that begins to acknowledge the fortunes and misfortunes of capitalism as a proponent of human change. Furthermore, the Great Depression was itself a moment of American history that is read by the general population through popular documentary photographs and first-hand accounts, heightening the reality of the event whilst cementing a certain aesthetics of depression. Writing in 1933, Lorena Hickok, journalist and lead investigator of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration put in place to assist communities suffering in the wake of the Great Depression, wrote of the “terrible, crushing drabness of life” and the “nameless dread” that “hangs over the place” (Lowitt and Beasley, 1981, p. 73). This 'terrible, crushing drabness' and 'nameless dread' is mirrored and encoded within the helpless gaze of *Detropia*, with detailed close-ups on buildings indicating the details of paint-peeling and crumbling brickwork next to wide and distant shots of multiples of the previous image displaying the depth and breadth of the city's dilapidation. That *Detropia* is mostly filmed in a cold winter that brings a muted colour palette of grays and sepia is one of a number of elements of construction that suggests that the experience of the film's present is somehow embedded and connected rather than ephemeral and transitional. The use of muted colours recall early photography of the modern city and images of Depression, providing a powerful link between two different images of financial trouble and lending the contemporary crisis the symbols of the historical version. Sound is broadly diegetic, though it is often minimal. When this sound choice is matched with shots that continually remind viewers of the previous scale of the city's ambition, gazing at huge factories, large suburbs, tower blocks, and abandoned infrastructure, then the utilisation of sound works to indicate the uncanny and eerie reality of a latter-day ghost town on such a wider scale.

The critiques that Ewing and Grady make lie as much within the formal properties and organisational strategies of *Detropia* rather than in the explicit utterances of the filmed material. The relationship between one of *Detropia*'s central publicity images, with two defiant figures (a

male and female couple) framed perpendicularly with their tools of work on display against a mise-en-scene of crumbling Detroit homes and cold weather, and Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930), is one that invites closer scrutiny to the ways in which Ewing and Grady attempt to construct the mindset of people at a time of severe financial disruption. Wood's painting, set in his native Iowa, evokes the western transition of immigrants and the continued hardship of their journey and daily existence as subsistence farmers. Read as an image of the Great Depression, *American Gothic* tells us of a rural aspect to international financial crisis that the mechanised arts in their urban bases would not capture until later in the decade in *The Plow That Broke The Plains* (1936). The resigned and weary appearances of the subjects suggests that it is not an image that suggests an unanticipated downward turn. Indeed, like Detroit, Iowa had been experiencing difficulties in its chief economic sector. Since the end of the First World War a downturn in fortunes hit regional agriculture, according to Tom Morain (2005), leading people to "burning corn rather than coal in their stoves because corn was cheaper." Wanda Corn (1983, p. 272) writes of *American Gothic* that "the static composition and immaculate forms expressed the couple's rigid routines and unchanging lives", recalling Hickok's travelogues in rural America in the Depression. This schema can be mapped onto life as it is portrayed within *Detropia*, as our central characters appear to be in a closed loop of relaying bad news to union members and wandering through the rubble of the city against a visual, tonal, and sonic palette that suggests a deeply-embedded state of affairs.

It must also be noted that *American Gothic* is also a much parodied image in theatre, film and commerce, used in material as dissonant as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) and toothpaste commercials. Ruination and the destructive vagaries of capital becomes the subject of the artists in *Detropia*'s practice, whilst the famous artworks of its parent culture and its symbols become their means of conveyance. The artists' parodic take on the composition is one that draws on the power of the original image to call into question the notion of an authentic version of poverty, the value of art at a time of scarcity, as well as calling into question notions of whose

expense their lifestyle is founded upon. The image of the pair wearing the dollar sign necklace and gas masks emerge within the film as a situationist prank where the artists encourage passing motorists to vilify them, holding a sign exhorting workers to 'give us your money', perhaps ironically reflecting the New Deal-receiving smallholders in the Depression who themselves replaced indigenous people in the century previous. Social theorist Piotr Sztompka (2000, p. 458) writes that “cultural trauma affects culture. Of course any trauma by definition is a cultural phenomenon, as it involves cultural interpretation of potentially traumatizing events or situations. But it may also be cultural in the more direct sense, as touching the cultural tissue of the society. In other words cultural trauma is the culturally interpreted wound to cultural tissue itself.” Here, through the artists working in *Detropia*, we see how such a complex negotiation operates. We see Detroit residents on their way to work responding to the artists by the roadside hoping for a response, the film exploiting the tension in what constitutes culture. As was pertient in the previous chapter, Raymond Williams (1989, p. 5) writes “we use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life – the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning – the special processes of discovery and creative effort.” The cultural tissue of the society – the people in their cars passing by – are depicted as having their common meanings and way of life affected by the collective trauma of the downturn. Their responses to the 'cultural interpretation' of this downturn brought about by 'the special processes of creative effort' (the artists) that distends the familiarity of a well-known image of American solidity quickly reveals a location of trauma.

Complicating matters is the fact that these artists are white, whilst the majority of testimony in the film is black in a city in which 82.7 per cent of people identify as solely black in 2010 (US Census Bureau, 2015). The findings of the Brookings Institute did not only uncover that poverty has become more concentrated in poor areas, but that the increase of black and Hispanic people in concentrated poverty areas was greater than that of white people. By a similar token, Robert S. McElvaine (1984, p. 187) suggests that in the Great Depression “black people suffered a

disproportionate share of the burden" and that unemployment, even in the prosperous times prior to the crash, was "much higher among blacks than whites." Ewing and Grady do not overtly comment whether the section of the film containing these artists parodying historical images of hardship whilst potentially taking advantage of contemporary hardship is a comment on the displacement of gentrification, or perhaps the potential for renewal through art, or how trauma may be felt differently in different racial and socio-economic contexts, or a synthesis of all the above. In a sense the work is entirely a form of commentary that the directors have resolved not to directly comment upon. For the examination of trauma, this is not an absence of commitment but the creation of a space where voices may be heard. The insertion of the idea of gentrification in confluence with racial politics and art, and the interactions that people within the film have with this idea, are signposts directing the search for where the traumatic lies and the sites in which it becomes re-inscribed.

Offering the artists' potential glee at taking advantage of the economic disruption of the city and their provocative public art displays grants a canvas upon which the audience can project their own feelings with a clarity that contrasts with the film's protracted neutrality. Like Grant Wood's Protestant characters, the artists in *Detropia* have migrated to seek a place to practice their profession and espouse their beliefs, which are portrayed as agnostic but related to a civic-minded critique of capital. Their lifestyle, manufacturing potentially non-commercial art, is sustainable precisely because of the continued evacuation and ruination of the city. Sztompka (p. 461) recalls Robert K. Merton's analysis of how cultures adapt to anomie, listing "innovation, rebellion, ritualism, and retreatism" as primary methods. We see what Sztompka calls rebellion in our artist figures and central figure Crystal's urban exploring, a "more radical effort at changing the stressful cultural incongruence […] in order to replace the traumatic condition with a completely new cultural set-up." However, we also see what Sztompka calls "illegitimate" innovation through criminal activity, and no sense of ritualism, 'legitimate' innovation, or retreatism. This is important

to state as it offers insight into potentially how far into the cultural trauma the group of people within the film are, a non-judgemental insight into how ingrained the feelings of protracted loss are when contrasted with their return through cultural means (the artists and their performance).

The construction of trauma

In their depictions of the hardships of a severe financial crash, Ewing and Grady and Wood opt for images of upright steadfastness and the maintenance of individual dignity. A sense of humour and absurdity occasionally lurks beneath the surface (particularly where we see a Detroit officer asking local criminals to perform their petty crimes at a lower volume rather than arresting them) and a sense of black comedy prevails in *Detropia* and *Gothic* that resists attempts to earnestly read both purely as traumatic products of economic slump. Reportage of the 2007/8 crisis has observed how individual dignity, in the face of social reality, has been much more difficult to maintain. Investigative journalists have uncovered how citizens have turning to sex work to fund drug addictions (Lee, 2015), whilst *The Observer* have reported how official sites have been inundated with people at their most desperate:

> Recently a semi-riot broke out when the city government offered help in paying utility bills. Need was so great that thousands of people turned up for a few application forms. In the end police had to control the crowd, which included the sick and the elderly, some in wheelchairs. At the same time national headlines were created after bodies began piling up at the city's mortuary. Family members, suffering under the recession, could no longer afford to pay for funerals. (Harris, 2009)

Indeed, in Wood's time and region, the reality contrasted with its lasting depictions. Writing of the early 1930s, Tom Morain (2005) states:

> In Le Mars, Iowa, a mob of angry farmers burst into a court room and pulled the judge from the bench. They carried him out of the court room, drove him out of town and tried to make him promise that he would not take any more cases that would cost a farm family its farm. When he refused, they threatened to hang him. Fortunately the gang broke up and they left the judge in a dazed condition. The governor of Iowa called out the National Guard who rounded up some of the leaders of the mob and put them in jail.

In addition to these scenes depicting cultural and community upheaval, public health researchers have traced the links between individual mental health and financial downturn. Luo et.

al. (2011) have postulated that suicide rates between 1928 and 2007 rise and fall in correlation with business cycles. During the Great Depression, suicide rates rose dramatically. Elizabeth MacBride (2013), writing about 1937, details the “40,000 Americans who took their own lives that year and the next, the two-year span that suicide rate spiked to its highest recorded level ever: more than 150 per 1 million annually.” Similar studies into the Great Recession begin to add empirical flesh to the bones of the visual evidence put together by Ewing and Grady. According to Hempstead and Phillips (2015), middle-aged (40-64) male suicide during the Great Recession has increased 40 per cent, whilst Melissa McInerney et. al. (2013, p. 1101) have tracked recession-related reports that suggest the likelihood of feeling depressed in particular demographics have been raised by as much as 50 per cent, with a 20 per cent reduction in the chance of reporting good health. Given the extent and detail available that accounts for the nature, depth, and breadth of individual and group suffering at the time of the Great Depression and during the Great Recession, it is an extremely interesting decision by Ewing and Grady to suggest that their subjects are feeling well and are able to continue without any particular physical or mental health decline, despite their immediate environment being subject to long-term effects that usually suggest that this would be the case.

Evincing in majority shot-on-location material exactly what constitutes a financial downturn and its subsequent effects on people, whilst manufacturing a watchable and potentially commercial work, is not a simple task. A downturn indicates that the good times had previously been experienced and as such the infrastructure and visual signifiers of pleasure constructed in the boom period still remain (somewhat) extant, though made ironic or sinister in time. The inclusion of testimony from locals has impact and offers a sense of verisimilitude about the changes in time.

Ewing and Grady (and Wood) appear to select and construct subjects as if deflecting trauma, carrying on and accepting of their fates in an cycle of displacement and replacement. I would argue that the critiques that exist within *Detropia* stop short of structural examination or suggestion of

fundamental change to an economic system that appears to have had such a widespread impact, even if such changes prevent the same thing happening again. Scenes such as the Swiss tourists (a national identity synonymous with financial stability) who inform central subject Crystal that they are visiting Detroit to look at the ruins, the telephone conversation between another key subject George and the wife of a worker enquiring whether a particular treatment was available through the company medical package (it had been negotiated away), and the interview which restates the third subject Tommy's ultimate belief in capitalism being the best system suggest that at some level a degree of allowed and expected exploitation had been encoded within the citizens' expectations of life.

In her latter-day examinations of abuse victims and wounded soldiers in Victorian England, Judith Herman (1994, p. 9) states that “traumatic reality […] requires a social context that affirms and protects the victims” that in turn means “the systematic study of psychological trauma therefore depends on the support of a political movement” (p. 9). This suggests that both the colonial Victorian soldier and the resident of the contemporary decaying American metropolis have their identity intertwined with the political milieu in which they came about, regardless of the relative advantageousness in the scheme of things in their era. Furthermore, for Herman, psychiatrists had to be “a committed person” in “a position of moral solidarity” (p. 178). Heidi Ewing, one half of the directorial team, was raised in Detroit, and therefore operates with understanding of social context from a position of moral and socio-economic solidarity, reflecting in an interview:

> My father and his brother had a functioning manufacturing business that made parts for the auto industry, so I had an interesting front row view of what it was like to survive as a manufacturer in America. I watched as they had to come up with new products that were more difficult to mimic and hard to make, I just watched them innovate their way out of a crisis while their colleagues were going out of business. (Bell, 2012)

Ewing and Grady's lens, I argue, has more in common with the psychiatric and therapeutic than the critical. Ewing and Grady's commitment to Detroit can neither confirm nor

reject the qualities of the economic structure which brought about these losses, nor can they overtly suggest remedies for them without traducing the human-centred therapeutic nature of their poetic documentary. The role of the directors is to bear witness to multiples of testimonies without suppressing any individual voice whilst constructing a visual environment that sensitively chimes with the cultural trauma and the overlapping testimonies regarding the effects of downturn upon culture.

In both the selection of material and the manner in which it is constructed, Ewing and Grady attempt to evoke and suggest a sense of what it is like to live in Detroit in this epoch of decline and recession rather than baldly tell in the manner of an official history. As Sperb indicates, there is a difficult line to negotiate between making committed and factual works such as Deforce and films such as *Detropia* which attempt to evoke and suggest a particular nexus of moods from a seemingly neutral remove. Sperb's own language hints at a web of critique available that jeopardises any intent to communicate subtler notions of traumatisation and loss via this poetic manner: “nostalgias”, “superficially”, and “visually arresting but, in some ways, deceptive” (p. 213) are all words that suggest that the poetic mode utilised by Ewing and Grady only lightly skims the surface of event itself and the psyche of the film's inhabitants rather than capturing and preserving something more profound.

There is no obvious narrative or easy to assemble chronology to *Detropia*, rather a series of parallel spaces and images which we as viewers assume to be temporally concurrent and congruent, as well as references to techniques and organisational patterns found in different strains of documentary and visual art. Writing on narrative cinema with spliced timelines and post-traumatic subjectivity in cinema, Roger Luckhurst (2008, p. 205) states that “what narrative 'grasps together' and configures […] is meant to unify a subject around a meaningful and coherent human narrative.” This ultimately means that even if as viewers we cannot reassemble the correct order of events

within a narrative, then we can at least comprehend through the associative powers within images what the work may be ‘about’. By ensuring that the narrative functions by its relation to images of a city, something which exists as both a concrete entity of buildings and infrastructure, a population, and an abstract concept that links into individual and collective conceptions of what a city was, is, and ought to be, no particular individual voice emerges to impinge upon on another. Authority in the text is diffuse, dissipated amongst the community chosen by the directors, suggestive of a shared and equal experience regardless of potential tensions between individual accounts and the fallibility of memory.

Critics writing on trauma, particularly when regarding narratives that intersect with histories, have grappled with the difficulty of the appropriateness of representation. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (p. xiv-xv, 1992) take the view that the “mirror games” between representative strategies in aestheticisation and the actualities of history are much covered, opting instead to explore “how issues of biography and history are neither simply explored nor simply reflected, but are reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over” by the work of art. This suggests that for Felman and Laub there is a continual process of mutation that renders trauma ineffable, able to elude any dialectical process which attempts to pin it down at a confluence of theoretical or artistic approaches. What Sperb sees as deceptive, visually-arresting, and superficial nostalgias, would be for Felman and Laub a continuation of the working-through process of trauma, of bearing witness to an event and positing that the continued tension between history and representation is in and of itself part of the collected issue of the artistic construction of real events. Felman examines this idea through Camus' use of 'the plague' as a substitute for the Holocaust (p. 102), suggesting that utilisation of this metaphor posits the Holocaust as “an event without referent.” The Holocaust, for Felman, has no other name. Felman writes that

> There is thus a certain tension, a certain aporia that inheres between the allegorical and the historical qualities of the event: the allegory seems to name the vanishing of the event as part of its actual historical occurrence. The literality of history includes something which, from inside the event, makes its literality vanish. (p. 103)

For Felman, Camus' use of metaphor is not a stand-in device, the Holocaust by another name, but a deliberate attempt to acknowledge this aporia, this seemingly irresolvable tension between the severity of event and attempts to represent it by other means. Following this Derridean concept of *aporia*, the allegorical and representative devices deployed in *Detropia* are themselves elements which name the vanishing of the financial crash and the tension between fact and representation. By the time of filming, official measurements had declared the financial crash to be over and indicators of progress pointing upwards. The event of the financial crash, invisible to begin with, had vanished and was being talked about as a plot point of history and a basis for subsequent politics. It is the abstract nature and elusiveness of recording the traces of the actual event that propels the necessity of a constructed, aestheticised medium to convey its effects and psychological wounds.

Continuing, Felman suggests (p. 105) that “it is precisely because history as holocaust proceeds from a failure to imagine, that it takes an imaginative medium like the Plague to gain an insight into its historical reality, as well as into the attested historicity of its unimaginibility.” I argue that the same could be said for the effects of the 2007/8 financial crash and Great Recession, and subsequent attempts to encapsulate its extent in *Detropia*. I would like to suggest that in the 'disappearance' of this literality, techniques in documentary construction 'fill in the blanks' and give location to, or even attempt to resolve, the contradictions in drawing upon and evoking an event without being able to find or utilise certain kinds of direct and material evidence. Initially it appears that the imaginative medium of the poetic documentary simply develops insights by making connections that may appear abstruse or even superficial to critics such as Sperb. However, Felman and Laub would articulate that these constructions and aesthetic choices are constantly in dialogue with the fact that the event has vanished. What remains extant are the traces of trauma, alive in the construction of the film and the testimony of its interviewees.

Felman and Laub, writing of a Holocaust survivor discredited by historians on her imperfect recollection of the Auschwitz uprising suggest that within the account contained a deeper testimony about “the reality of an unimaginable occurrence.” (p. 60). Though such assertions may frustrate the empirically-minded critic or viewer, Janet Walker argues (2005, p. 6), developing Felman and Laub's understanding of the implications of testimony, that “it is partly our recognition that a memory is not wholly veridical that enables us to read the historical meaning that it nevertheless possesses.” By de-centring authority within the film and accepting the idea that no one person may be speaking verified historical fact, it is possible to read Ewing and Grady's incorporation of individual testimony as a means of building a shared and collective cultural feeling. No individual interviewee is able to articulate the source of Detroit's malaise and its precise nature is grappled with by all within the film. *Detropia* accumulates several different angles that intersect on abstract themes such as loss, dilapidation, interruption, the past, and the relative lack of credible positive visions of the future. In doing so, Ewing and Grady are not only able to cohere a narrative based on shared experiences and feelings within contiguous spaces, but to maintain a link to the notion that the event has disappeared and that what we see is a city of people attempting to work through a situation which re-inscribes itself daily. For Felman (p. 101), testimony is a form of historical witnessing, writing “once endowed with language through the medium of witness, history speaks for itself. All the witness has to do is efface himself, and the let the literality of events voice its own self-evidence.” Whilst Sperb appears to similarly place faith in individual testimony as appears in *Deforce*, he appears to doubt where such testimony is placed in conjunction with more complex or suggestive forms of construction such as the poetic documentary.

Detropia and the city symphony

Though historians and economists may summarise the situation of Detroit in the early 21st century as a classic example of the economic logic of late capitalism, the death throes of

modernism, or a necessary evil of globalism, *Detropia* does not directly announce what force or phenomena has visited upon Detroit to render the city in such a downward spiral and its people trapped within this dismal decline. The directors remain invisible and narration with an embodied relationship to the directorial voice, such as voiceover and on-screen text, is absent and minimal respectively.

Fortunately for writers on documentary, there is a rich seam of documentary cinema that attempts to chart a path between the abstruse notion of a collective psyche and the material reality of a shared living space. These city films, or sometimes 'city symphonies', like their counterparts in literature such as John dos Passos or music such as popular jazz, revel in the modernist moment and forge an idiosyncratic and particular language which serves the articulation of the increasing technological dimension of life, the new possibilities for pleasure and misery, often with careful acknowledgement of an economic paradigm that has outgrown the previous simple attempts to understand it. Charles Wolfe (2016a, p. 231) writes, anticipating a future admixture of the social documentary and the avant-garde aesthetic, that "a conceptual ground for the development of an experimental documentary aesthetic in the 1930s was staked out in the 1920s by artists and critics who found the seeming mechanical objectivity of the camera a source of new ideas about visual perception in an age of mass, technological culture."

Chief amongst the corpus of films that Wolfe includes within this 'conceptual ground' were the city symphonies of the 1920s. The city symphony documentary sub-genre is predominantly associated with films produced to celebrate change in the urban environment as a product of the economic growth and modernism that allowed cinema to develop, thrive, and flourish. These documentaries are typically non-narrative and imagistic, reflective of macro scale depictions of human life. The city symphonies of the initial boom period projected a sense of cosmopolitan urbanity and complex community to fulfil an important cultural function in the burgeoning arms

and diplomacy race between world wars that show their titular beacon cities as products of the triumph of the region's dominant ideology. Titles such as *Manhatta* (1921), *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927), *Moscow* (1927), *Ètudes sur Paris* (1928), and *Man With A Movie Camera* (1929) are frequently cited as the prominent examples of the sub-genre. In their incorporation of cutting-edge montage, contemporary musical accompaniment, and a lingering on both human life and human achievements in the shape of city's population, infrastructure, and buildings, these city films offered the sense that significant cities receiving the symphonic treatment were a kind of *gesamtkunstwerk* which combined contemporary aesthetics to suggest harmonious functioning of humanity in modernity.

By closer examination of scenes within *Detropia* we can begin to understand how this film from 2012 relates to such notions and perhaps offers a self-reflexive critique of them at the potential end of modernity in late capitalism. The opening sequence of *Detropia* is set within the Detroit Opera House (fig. 4.2). The first cut outside of this physical space is to a medium shot of a man wearing headphones and walking down the street away from camera, moving his arms in a manner which is synchronised so that he appears to be 'conducting' the music (fig. 4.3) he hears as the bombastic sound of the opera musicians overlaps. Further scenes return to the Detroit Opera House and other musical venues. Scenes are set, albeit opaquely, within the immediate neighbourhood of the Opera House and related to the community in its adjacent streets and communities.

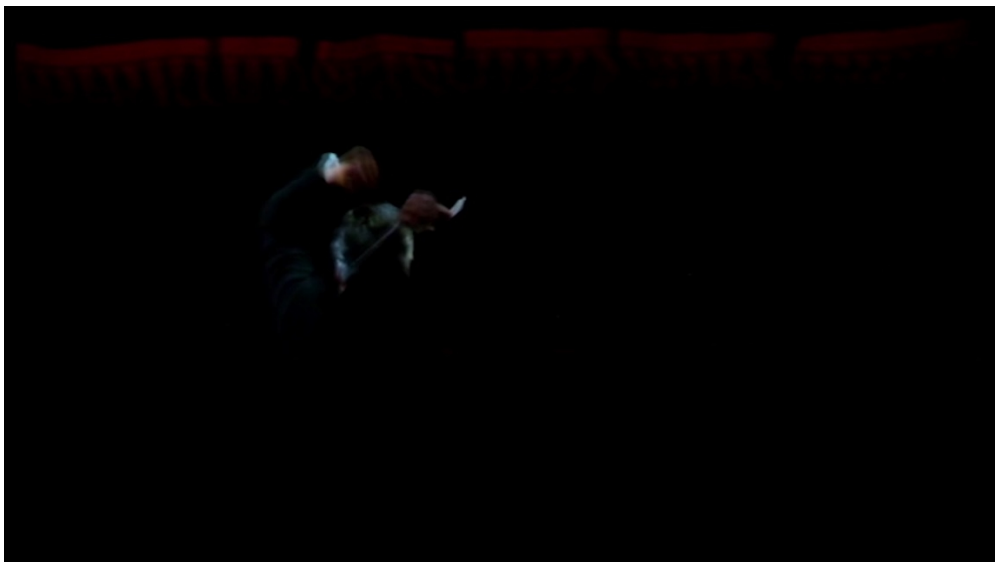

Fig. 4.2 and 4.3 - let the music commence - a transition in Detropia
Detropia (2012)

The persistent return of musical themes and their juxtaposition with images of the city and an editing style that not only creates dialectical readings through the combination of images, but deepens and complicates their interpretation in the strategic deployment of sound, invites a reading of *Detropia* in terms of the stylistic and signifying elements found within the city symphony film.

Jon Gartenberg positions the broadly positive and celebratory city symphony as part of a wider corpus of city-as-subject films that also includes less-than-ideal versions of cities wherein the dreams of modernism have become imprisoning. Films such as these, for Gartenberg, citing Robert

Steiner and Willard van Dyke's *The City* (1939) as example, represents an ongoing dialectic about cities and modernity in documentary practice and the ways in which cities can affect the individual and social psyche. Gartenberg (2014, p. 256) writes “with the onset of a worldwide depression in the 1930s, the sense of wonder about man’s ability to construct landscapes of metal and glass (as exemplified in Strand and Sheeler’s *Manhatta*) was overshadowed by concern for the human problems these very buildings had created.” The precedent for the type of film that purports to examine human displacement and the new kinds of problems to be contended with as a result of economic progress is long-established. In Britain, government-approved newsreels would often portray “positive images of poor housing conditions being briskly solved by slum clearance since 1930” (Gold and Ward, 1997, p. 64) though the earliest indicator of an independent critical function can first be found in Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey's *Housing Problems* (1935), which depicts the living conditions in East London slum areas as unable to maintain pace with human development connecting the way “notions of public health are directly related to environmental reform.” (p. 64)

City documentaries continue to be made to this day in this critical mode. Sperb (2016, p. 218) notes how contemporary artistic representations of urban spaces are “often depicted in a state of complete decay, a symbol of twentieth century’s long journey from modernist hopes for the future to postmodernist fascinations with the past.” For Sperb (p. 218), this is mirrored in *Detropia*, deciding that ““ruin porn” arguably seems to fill the void of representation which the scope of the “city symphony” once inhabited.” Nonetheless, *Detropia* operates at a deeper level than mere “ruin porn”, though its exploration of psyche is inextricably linked with idealised conceptions of the past. The closeness with which *Detropia* participates with its subjects and the suggested affection for resistance and simultaneous empathy at the difficulty of certain kinds of resistance suggests a fondness and respect that indicates Ewing and Grady posit the ownership of material culture lamented by the people of the city as the source an enriching, affirming basis for living. What Sperb sees in *Detropia* as 'postmodernist fascinations' and 'ruin porn' are in fact the limned tensions

between localised protectionist, unconsciously Marxian views of cultural and material production competing against the societally agnostic organisational basis of neoliberalism: globalisation.

As the global scale of production has expanded, depictions of the city have necessarily widened to incorporate views beyond the global north. The expanded view afforded to modern audiences that have regular access to cinemas of the developing world have expanded the language of signs and signifiers of squalor and urban difficulty, with slums, sweatshops, and sex work all understandable in multiple contexts. Technological and travel capabilities allow for city films that look for the rhythms and repetitive figures in multiple cities across the same timeframe: Michael Glawogger's *Megacities* (1998) scales up the problems of urbanity faced in the 1920s and 1930s to incorporate and examine the grander scale and greater population density of urban spaces, while Godfrey Reggio's *Noqoyqatsi* (2002) manages to be suggestive and fatalistic about contemporary living despite its wordlessness, conveying meaning through a careful relationship between potent imagery edited rhythmically to reflect a deliberately composed score. These latter-day poetic films utilise an anonymising sense of location to suggest a crudeness inherent in globalism. In these works, capitalism has a deeply homogenising effect that eradicates the local cultures and idiosyncrasies of people and place, rendering all subservient to global systems beyond individual or regional control.

Writing on the 'postmodern turn' in theorising globalisation, Douglas Kellner (1998, p. 28) suggests that “culture provided forms of local identities, practices, and modes of everyday life that could serve as a bulwark against the invasion of ideas, identities, and forms of life extraneous to the specific local region in question.” That was, Kellner concludes, until globalisation broke open the floodgates to import and export cultures and reduce the impact that one's locality and the everyday lived experience had upon identities. As documentaries of postmodern life such as *Catfish* (2010), *talhotblond* (2009), and *Winnebago Man* (2009) have indicated, one's culture and lifestyle can be

chosen and remains fluid and open-ended, with aspects of one's identity given to change and multiplicity. Though *Detropia* relates to the poetics of urbanity in Glawogger and Reggio and considers the postmodern advent of identity fluidity through its artist characters (who perform civic gestures as avatars but are framed suspiciously, looked at with contempt by the locals), the empathetic framing of modernity's prizing of 'authentic' local culture and material practice positions it as resistance.

Detropia's repurposing and inversion of tropes of a cinematic wave generated by the boom of modernity and mechanised art, with intertitles providing a form of dramatic irony and knowingness, does at least ensure that the film flirts with postmodernity in spite of its sympathetic depiction of local cultures and the symbolic and embedded links between diverse communities based in faith, culture, and community. However, there is a strain of self-reflexivity in operation. The perceived playfulness of postmodernity as a representational strategy or a lens for developing a social identity is challenged in *Detropia*, examining it in terms of its capacity for exploitation and regeneration. Edward Soja (1989, p. 1) characterises the postmodern city as "a geography of simultaneous relations and meanings that are tied together by a spatial rather than temporal logic." It is the way that Ewing and Grady anchor their film to a specific and nameable moment in socioeconomic history that reinforces that *Detropia* is not so much about this city as space but this particular moment: documentary as microhistory, implying a wider social, historical, political, and economic context through the multiple case studies the film depicts. Rurality is partly characterised by its constancy, but the city is the site on which the effects of modernity inscribe themselves first. Certainly the depictions of cities in Vertov, Ruttmann, and Strand and Sheeler have offered compelling material that inform how we think about the era and its people.

In his 1947 essay on montage, Siegfried Kracauer noted that, in *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, "editing also resorts to striking analogies between movements or forms" (2016, p. 144)

before listing sections where the editing contrasting human activity with animal activity. Kracauer also notes how Walter Ruttmann's film compares with Dziga Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, suggesting a similarity in "the rhythmic movements inherent in them." (p. 144) Perceptively, Kracauer determines that the fundamental difference in the works produced by Ruttmann and Vertov "originates in a difference of given conditions: the two artists apply similar aesthetic principles to the rendering of dissimilar worlds." (p. 144) Kracauer does not simply mean that Berlin and the composite Soviet city of Vertov are literally not the same, developing his argument by imbuing the political realities of the depressed post-war German republic ("abandoned by all vital energies" p. 145) and the post-revolutionary Soviet state ("quivering with revolutionary energy" p. 145) with the ability to shape perceptions of the subject city. Though Kracauer's critique does not stretch as far to encompass the complicating and reflexive theories about the role of filmic language or the intrusions of the constructor as developed by post-structuralists and post-modernists respectively, it is nonetheless appropriate to suggest that Ewing and Grady's Detroit depicts a particular energy borne out of the political and cultural moment. After years of decelerating manufacturing in Detroit and, particularly in light of the 2007/8 financial crash and subsequent economic depression, it is possible to read *Detropia* and the techniques deployed in its production as an attempt to suggest a similar evocation of concerns about what happens to people when progress stalls, plateaus, or reverses on a scale reflective in a sense of change within the city.

Though *Detropia* utilises aspects of the city symphony documentary in order to critique modernity, Ewing and Grady revert to formal aspects utilised by their forebears in a more straightfoward method. Ewing and Grady utilise editing techniques and images found within city documentary to match the lines and planes utilised in the upward gaze of the city, with the removal of nearly a century providing a layer of comment that works both at the level of critiquing contemporary Detroit and the capacity for documentary construction to obscure elements that complicate such critique. Like Kracauer's view of Ruttmann's Berlin, Ewing and Grady's Detroit is

a place abandoned by vital energies. The transitional montage from the introduction of Crystal to the introduction of George is taken from archive footage of a Detroit Motor Show, soundtracked with a contemporary hip-hop re-imagining of the music of Raymond Scott by Detroit musician J Dilla. Scott's pioneering electronic music of the 1950s and 1960s, characterised by sounds of brightness and naivety, was utilised in advertising of the era. Its usage here serves a dual function: directly linking to the earnestness of early advertising, the rise of consumer products and renewed spending power in the post-war period, whilst its re-purposing in the form of samples which distend and reformulate within a contemporary style suggest that this present era of decay and decline has its roots in a more profligate time. The final shot in this sequence shows “the highway of tomorrow” match cut into a point-of-view shot from George's car in the present, with a sonic jolt that cuts from the jaunty music and returns us to the diagetic sound to heighten the sense of anti-climax in modernity's journey. The 1950s motor show imagery displays a well-dressed male and female couple driving through a traffic-free technological utopia, whilst the cut shows George's attempts to traverse an anonymous suburb prevented by a stray dog (suggestive of one of many sub-themes within the film, in this case the pastoral scene reclaiming urban space).

Fig. 4.4, 4.5, and 4.6 - distended dreams - a sequence from Detropia
Detropia (2012)

The cut from fig. 4.4 to fig. 4.6 incorporates both filmic and musical technique to strengthen the transition between themes, pairing visually similar images separated by years whilst deploying music that subverts the innocent commercial intent to suggest both the haunting return of a previous memory and the foregrounding of transformative technique. The commercial advertising and its related sonics clearly shows space and time in abundance on “the highway of tomorrow.” The cut to an abandoned Detroit suburb, whilst comedic, suggests an upset in the expected development that has led to acres of open space and free time available through lack of work. The scene continues as

George drives past a former assembly plant, remarking that it is “now a place where they park dumpsters.” Ewing and Grady's inverted city symphony connects these signs and dreams of progress to a point where they become figurative and actual detritus.

A particular feature of the classic city symphony documentary of the 1920s was the way in which the utilisation of montage reflected the sophistication and dynamism of the symphonic composition, which in turn would be reflected by the accompanying musical soundtrack. For example, Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera* montage displays accelerating machine function and teeming city life, latterly scored by the Alloy Orchestra in a piece featuring relentless rhythmic percussion, sonics that forge links to contemporary city life, and suggestive non-diegetic sound, in a way that dislocates and perplexes. These sound and image collisions occasionally harmonise in their latter-day soundtracks, with glacial string sounds underpinning moments suggesting the viewer's perspective inside a pleasant streetcar at a stop sign, cut with the tranquil bliss of an older woman smelling fresh flowers and a wedding. Montage in Vertov is rapid and occasionally disorienting, switching between multiple locations and perspectives within one minute of footage. Vertov himself referred to “dynamic geometry, the race of points, lines, planes, volumes” (2016, p. 173). Regardless of whether or not the viewer is able to comprehend every image or dialectical construction, these dizzying and constant flows of information contribute to a feeling that within this cinematic space there are multiple, potentially infinite, conjoining narratives that create the same sense of constant motion (action) as within the actual city. Editing is highly suggestive in generating the feeling of the heady potential of the inter-war, post-revolutionary Soviet city[34] as a place which is at once intoxicating and familiar.

The suggestiveness of editing is also true for Ewing and Grady though often to convey radically different, if not outright opposite, effects. Vertov jarringly edits visual signs taken from different contexts and timeframes and appearance (for instance, a female factory worker on a loom

34 Vertov's montage is a composite of Moscow, Kiev, Kharkiv, and Odessa

cuts to man carrying load up chimney, generating in two shots notions of work, building, progress, and industry) thereby generating dialectic output by finding similarity in difference, Ewing and Grady bleed images that convey a downcast similarity into one another. Vertov's 'dynamic geometry' of clashing colour tonality, angles, and lines is replaced with matches on form and colour that suggest a uniform and blandening world. A broad suggestion is made across city documentaries that the operational status of buildings, whether preserved from bygone eras or freshly minted by the present one, is related to the psyche and general well-being of the local population. In turn this relationship directly affects productivity, flow, and growth. The editing in Ruttmann, Vertov, and Strand and Sheeler gazes at and returns to buildings, returning and reinforcing human achievement capacity for growth and development. Buildings punctuate every act of *Detropia*, whose buildings are not monuments of progress and hope but blots on landscapes to be razed. Sites of former renewal through culture, such as the late night blues bar for workers or the metropolitan opera house, seem apparently robbed of their transformative capacity through either their lack of clientèle or their forced relationship with commercial interests. Furthermore, in *Detropia* we are told that the city limits are shrinking and the population is declining. Population decline is being managed by the planned demolition of buildings and the mooted re-zoning of communities. The editing rhythmically returns us to vacant lots, abandoned factories, and empty streets as much as it does buildings, creating a sense of a fractured spatial relationship in contrast with Vertov and Ruttmann's developed lots and tight spaces among which a growing population is channelled.

The overturning and reversal of tropes and techniques developed in original wave of city-symphonies has a degree of suggestiveness about traumatic memory. *Detropia* suggests rather that this is a story of the post-traumatic, a narrative whose actions are not only subservient to events taking place prior to filming but are performed in a manner that suggests the spectre of these events is continually present within these actions. To utilise Barthesian language, the actions performed by the residents of Ewing and Grady's Detroit do not create moments of tension typical of narratives,

containing meanings that we expect to see resolved. We are not made to understand why Crystal wanders the corridors of abandoned buildings or where the person in front of the dilapidated ‘auto parts’ sign is going. The ellipsis of *Man With A Movie Camera* is one day, giving a sense of circularity, routine, and function to all depicted activity. The actions of a person, however obscure, ties into the meaning created by the whole: the people are the lifeblood of the city and that the city works best when it resembles the ideal modernist machine. The link between action and meaning is established continually in a manner that reifies the purpose of modernity as growth. *Detropia* subtly shifts seasons as a device indicating temporal continuity but individual actions do not affect anything. Rather, individuals are shaped by the city and the unnamed events occurring that have left the city in this state. People are not vital: they are in the way of the receding of the city limits. Severing or distending the link between action and meaning creates a sense of disassociation and dreaminess that offers the strongest metaphor regarding a collective psychological state that refers to trauma. Janet Walker (2005, p. 11) writes, as a mental response to external shock, that “trauma symptoms can encompass symbolic elaboration – the creation of scenes that pertain to actual trauma but do not correspond to it literally.”

Situating *Detropia* in a lineage of city films and city symphonies does not simply relate to the central focus being a named urban area. Rather, city documentaries and city symphonies combine footage of verifiable events, evocative music, and displays of directorial technique that gradually reveal a version of the psyche of the host city's people and thus have implications to bear on those regions in a traumatic state. These glimpses into a collective cultural psyche emerge not as a result of facts stated clearly or individual testimonies but as a result of the nexus of connotations that emerge from the utilisation of techniques and the tensions that necessarily arise when conflict arises between separate strands of technique. Analysing and foregrounding the constructive technique involved in documentary with a clear hierarchy of representation will provide necessary

grounding for consideration of what is at stake when the traumatic subject or culture is transformed by these processes.

But it is true that *Detropia* does not tightly adhere to the form of a city symphony. The subtle transitions between modes of distant reflections of the rhythms of the city and a more focused and altogether ‘traditional’ mode engaged with human experience behaviour creates a conversational dynamic that situates the individual in a wider scheme and asks not only how does the city affect individuals, but whether the reverse is still possible. Three central subjects are observed closely for their living and working conditions in relation to the situation in the city, though none of the three have an isolated narrative or journey which generates tension that we see resolved. The roles of Crystal, Tommy, and George, is to grant access to hidden or otherwise closed locations or subcultures, allowing observations to be made that appear more authentic and finely-grained. Additionally, the central subjects discuss and operate within scenes that relate to the plight of the city, indicating belief in a continuing and highly-developed link between environment and well-being. George is the president of a mechanics' union who moved to Detroit in the good times, his presence allowing us inside not only factories and tense meetings between workers, but insight into bureaucratic procedure and an authentic-seeming memory of Detroit at its economic peak. Tommy owns a declining nightclub whose clientèle were primarily local workers, though his former profession as a schoolteacher lends his insights into America's ongoing issues a degree of weight. Tommy chides an American manufacturer of an electric car to be constructed in Detroit for its cost-inefficiency compared to a Chinese-manufactured rival in a scene which attempts to put Detroit's problems in a globalist perspective. The two roles performed by Crystal within the film (vlogger and barista) grant the film a sense of both the technological milieu and the precariat job economy of the filmic present. Additionally, Crystal's role as film maker wandering in the ruins of the city expresses a degree of self-reflexivity on part of Ewing and Grady that begins to acknowledge debates around the perceived exploitation within 'ruin porn' and the influencing hand of the director

within the film. Individual testimony from other residents offers insight into the effects that the ongoing problems within the metropolitan area are having upon individuals, neighbourhoods, labour groups and their unions, infrastructure, civic function, and private enterprise. A number of individuals whose testimony is preserved are selected for the fact that they are Detroit-resident, but also as representatives of identifiable social structures with looser internal bonds such as clusters of workers in lower-paid non-union jobs, hustlers, grifters, tourists and outsiders, cultural producers, civic function, and individual proprietors.

Sound matter(s)

The way in which sound operates within *Detropia* is an important factor when considering the construction of its traumatic world. Drawing meaning out of ambiguous images or heightening the emotional content of scenes through the use of sound is a well-understood aspect of film-making. Speaking about the ability of sound to convey intangible layers of emotionally potent meaning, developmental psychologist Ann Fernald refers to sound as “touch at a distance” (WNYC, 2007). Hollywood film editor Walter Murch has testified to the invisible power of sound design in film construction, stating that:

> The desert is a vast space. When you're there the feeling […] is psychic and well as physical. The problem is that if you record the actual sound that goes with that space, it has nothing to do with the emotion of being there. (Ondaatje, 2002, p. 118)

For Murch, the utilisation of sound editing suggests that “the more you get into the emotional end of things, the more you draw upon the metaphoric use of sound.” (p. 117) Whilst an initial viewing of *Detropia* may reveal a film careful not to overplay its hand regarding how it feels about the state of Detroit in the early 21st century and its relationship to neo-liberal economics, a closer viewing reveals the way in which sound directs us away from the ambiguities of certain images and toward a nexus of feelings and viewpoints that alert our psyche to the critiques encoded in the visual. Fernald and Murch are respectively talking about sound within the nakedly fictional

cinematic experience. Here I would like to suggest that the ostensible 'reality' offered in the documentary project both intensifies the likelihood feeling of being 'touched' and affected by audio material. It is because of the verified reality that the visual material has captured creates a sense of knowing and identification with its subjects.

Counter-intuitively, it is precisely this engagement with the sphere of reality that ensures that viewers are more likely to accept artifice and metaphoric construction in the soundtrack, having at least an indexical reference link to the 'real' at all times through the visual material. Within *Detropia* there are swells of ambient music that simultaneously conveys both the distant hubbub of city life in its gauzy shapelessness and the general inertia of the city in choosing music that conveys slowness, space, and minimal utilisation of musical information. We hear disquieting near-silences in long shots that suggest a troubled state when considered in conjunction with wealthier modern cities and our shared stories of how busy they are and how much space is at a premium. Hours of visual and audio footage have been compiled, encompassing thousands of subjects, but from many of these people we often hear only single lines of speech which happen to be the most salient, prophetic, or meaningful utterance captured.

But within *Detropia* there is a particular way in which sound is used that is not typical, a method which creates an ongoing tension between what is heard and what can be seen. Sound recorded by the film makers overlaps into scenes with a degree of fluidity that sees certain parts of the audio track have both diegetic and non-diegetic contexts. In the opening minutes of the film there are moments in which the diagetic sound of one scene either changes to anticipates the cut to the next scene or lingers from one image through the transition to the following scene. In a night montage of Detroit, we see images of empty streets and benighted entertainment houses with the sounds of a street preacher proselytising. Eventually we see the preacher before the visual and audio content moves on. Ewing and Grady utilise this particular technique in a number of other scenes, as

well as incorporating other noteworthy sonic moments. The return to the dress rehearsal at the Opera House is foreshadowed by its audio appearing in the montage which prefigures it. A passage which focuses upon the people foraging for scrap metal has several different shots and angles before the ambient music arrives gently, but the sound of wrenching distended metal from building is matched as if the audience hears it from the same distance away regardless of the shot. The one minute and ten seconds long scene that transfers us away from the foragers to a night at Tommy's club is a single shot from a moving car window. The car is moving from right to left, overlooking a vast abandoned industrial complex, with much of its detritus covered in the fallen snow indicating it being untouched. The sound overlaid is a collection of opinions of unknown provenance holding court in turn on the state of Detroit and America with respect to its fallen global position. We do not know if they are experts, or members of the public taped from a radio phone-in show. The fourth voice is George, one of the chief subjects of the film, removed from the context in which it was recorded (driving around in his Cadillac) and never acknowledged as such. The disembodied nature of these voices against the haunted-looking landscape adds to the chimerical and despairing feel of the scene though it is, in essence, a completely artificial construct combining a factory in the snow and voices recorded at different occasions. Nonetheless these moments, as well as others beside, often slip by unnoticed.

Interpreting passages such as these complicates existing knowledge in texts that examine editing as an arrangement of visual material. Don Fairservice writes about the history of adding sound to the process of film-making and the improvements that synchronised sound recording brought to the art and, as a coda to his monograph on editing, in a chapter titled 'Beyond Invisibility', Fairservice briefly discusses the creative possibilities in eschewing the rules in order to “explore ways in which cinema can communicate at levels outside the immediate concerns of plot and character” (2001, p. 315) that relate only to the organisation of visual matter. Though textbooks, manuals, and blogs exist which expound the importance of capturing sound in documentary as part

of the process of transforming 'natural' material, as well as works which critically traverse the utilisation of diegetic and non-diegetic music in documentary work, specific critical writing regarding the usage of diegetic sound outside of its originating frame in the documentary is less commonplace.

Rhys Davies (2007, p. 170) suggests that there is potentially a more mundane and technical reason for Ewing and Grady's abstract sound utilisation, writing that “the fundamental difference between actual and designed sound is inexorably linked to the diegetic frame. The sound designer must tread the boundaries between actuality and what is perceived as actuality by the receiver. This is where natural sound can often be found wanting.” Natural sound is often present in *Detropia*, but treated and coloured by its re-contextualising next to the ambient music that prevails. Natural sound may change along with the diegetic frame, but the music continues unbroken, shaping commonplace sounds to a position where the mundane takes on a pensive and spectral character. Driving towards the beginnings of why the director may to choose these particular designs, Davies (p. 170) continues:

> Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of actuality, recorded at point of source of the diegetic frame is not necessarily significant to the final constructed narrative. Indeed, these sounds often conflict with the narrative because they defy perceived expectations. When their presence is not required to support a narrative and the origin of the sound is not important, then it would be appropriate to remove this and replace it with a post design which not only conforms to our expectations, but will also support the visual and didactic narrative through emotive reinforcement and fluid continuity.

From this paragraph, I suggest it might also be reasonable to make the logical jump that when the diegetic sound captured within one shot within a montage has extra layers of significance, that it can provide extra support for the wider narrative for the remainder of its shots. Adhering to this idea indicates that these sonic moments are chosen in much the same way one might choose a musical extract. When we hear the distant bombast of the street preacher or the culled-together sound montage of spoken opinions, the words that they speak are not important inasmuch as the way that the specific notes in a particular piece of music are not important to the listener. Rather, it

is the tonality, timbre, and the mood of the reframed diegetic sound that draws meaning out of ambiguous images, whilst operating as an extra-textual signifier to other places in reality and cultural representation in which these kinds of sounds may be found. It is clear that by privileging the audio of one particular scene that sits over a number of others that we are to take what is heard as colouring how we interpret the visual of the prior scenes. In the case of the street preacher being heard in montage before we see him, this could reference to common tropes of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic films and texts, as a sign of faith enduring in the vicissitudes of time and economic fortune, or subtly alluding to sociological concepts as Èmile Durkheim's notion of the sacred and the profane. Whichever reading the viewer may be inclined towards clearly has implications for the construction of trauma as a result of a particular financial event.

Implications for traumatic construction appear in the non-diegetic sound chosen for the film. Where the signifiers of jazz convey glamour, modernity, and the development of an international influence in Edmund Meisel's soundtrack to Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City*, the ambient score of *Detropia* comparatively navel-gazes, withholding musical information. The occasional visits to music captured diegetically harken to a bygone era. Iain Chambers (1997, p. 232) suggests that "music draws us into the passages of memory and its 'sudden disjunction of the present'. Parenthesising the scenes containing diegetic soul music with scenes of ambient murk is not just suggestive of being drawn into the passages of memory, but to be trapped within and haunted by a language that only speaks of the optimisms and loves of the past. Frequently in Blair French's original score to *Detropia* sound is used texturally, linking auditory information with the other senses and providing both an embodying undertone that suggests a kind of seeing without utilising one's eyes. The sounds of traffic, waves, and industry appear, submerged by the music but present, defamiliarising typical understandings of them. Certain sonic details and tonal choices also appear to recall auditory experiences more typical of the every day in the past: dial tones, the sound of older computers and modems, and analogue static. Even the composed music itself has

undergone some element of digital degrading. Collectively these choices speak of promises of technological liberation gone awry. A recurring musical theme throughout the film packages these tropes against a quiet gamelan, musically imitating one of the film's themes: the degradation of local culture in the face of Asian nations benefitting from globalism.

It is through coming to understand *Detropia* as a series of deliberate references and constructions through editing and sonic detail that Jason Sperb's critique of Ewing and Grady engaging in a superficial evocation of history becomes undone, unravelling accusations of a Fordist nostalgia and a film revelling in 'ruin porn'. Sperb references the debates that surround the film, in particular those that attack the film as being mere 'ruin porn' that does not "map out or enable a path to political action." (p. 215) Whilst true that *Detropia* is no insurrectionist manifesto, no Michael Moore-esque critique, able to pass by the uncritical eye as a passive or voyeuristic examination of time and place, it is perhaps lacking in perception to suggest that its sparing utilisation of empirical information attached to weight of feeling is superficial. It is precisely because of Ewing and Grady's command of cinematic language and deliberate deployment of images, sounds, and sequences that speak to knowledge outside of the text that frames the film in a wider socio-historical context. Ewing and Grady call upon a shared understanding of suffering in capitalist times, commencing at the intersection when capitalism intensifies and cinema is sufficiently equipped to capture and represent these advances.

CHAPTER 5
MAKING NEW: THE AVANT-GARDE DOCUMENTARY

> Everything that happens on earth has become more interesting and more significant than it ever was before. Our age demands the documented fact.
>
> - Hans Richter, 2nd International Congress of Independent Film (1930).

In his 1929 film *Rain*, Joris Ivens pieces together several shots of Amsterdam in a deluge. There is no typical single human-centred narrative; rather, the film details the arrival and passing of a downpour. Ivens captures reflections in glass and water, the way that people move differently in rainfall, close-ups and distances, and dramatic moments indicative of rain as skylights close and umbrellas are put up. The connective montage adjoins angles and tones that create a dreamy, melancholic, and impressionistic feeling. *Rain* does not capture one single instance of rainfall, adjoining footage from over several weeks. Whilst this may indicate some sleight-of-hand on Ivens' part, Ian Mundell notes that "if your aim is documentary, to represent the lived experience of a rainstorm, the leap is essential." (2005) *Rain* works both as documentary by capturing the real in the sense of the observational and the embodied – the viewer feels the rain through the sense-building of the repetition of form and visual – and as avant-garde film in its camera movement, editing strategy, and rejection of classical formal filming. In *Rain* and other avant-garde documentaries, the familiar, through the joining together of the real with experimental technique, is communicated and yet becomes transformed.

This section of the thesis looks at documentary responses to the financial crash and subsequent recession that are either wholly- or partially-inflected with strategies based within the avant-garde documentary. Avant-garde documentaries re-familiarise - make reality appear new - by incorporating technical processes and formal method that challenge the appearance of the everyday,

whilst utilising representational devices that are often abstract and unorthodox. Frequently divested of traditional properties of the realist documentary such as narrative and a sense of contingent time and space, the avant-garde documentary theoretically represents the form at its most distant from both realism, the particular strategy of representation outlined in the first chapter, and the real. Removed from the empirical and observational 'ground' of realism and distanced from an identifiable authorial voice which make a sense of politics or persona difficult to discern, I argue that the effects of recession and crash are viewed by the avant-garde documentary as having particular formal properties in and of themselves, particularly in connection with groups of humans *en masse* and visions of ocean-going.

As I will show, the avant-garde documentary has frequently been counterposed by its makers as exposing flaws in the realist mode, particularly aspects that align with hegemony to uphold the status quo and suppress marginality and engagement with unapproved politics. The formal device of this thesis has charted a direction which travels away gradually from realism; through examination of the avant-garde documentaries of the post-recession I intend to consider what is at stake for this historical moment of crash and recession when the real may appear subordinate to expressive technique and challenging form rather than such technique being a means to convey the real. In the final section of the chapter I will investigate whether there is a point where, by travelling through the experimental, documentary potentially ends, subsumed by representational strategies that more clearly indicate the artistic realm than the cinematic.

For Ivens, thinking cinematically meant thinking about documentary: all of the other filmic forms were based in text.[35] The goal of the filmmaker was to take reality and to transform it, which was as true for Dziga Vertov as it was Ivens. In Ivens' 1931 essay 'Reflections on the Avant-Garde Documentary', Ivens took aim at the major and nationalised film studios' limited purview whilst

35 "In the current state of the cinema, documentary provides the best means of discovering the cinema's true paths. It's impossible for it to fall into theater, literature, or music hall entertainment, none of which is cinema." (Ivens, 2016, p. 197)

upholding the efforts of the individual *cinéaste*. For Ivens, “the commercial cinema brings about only technical progress” while “the avant-garde cinema augments that with spiritual or intellectual progress.” (2006, p. 196). Ivens and his fellow independent film-makers intensely believed in the intersection of the avant-garde and documentary as a vehicle to communicate truth.[36] But parsing Ivens’ essay reveals that his truth has political stakes. Nations rejecting socialism were, for Ivens, “refractory on the matter of social action in documentary” while socialist nations “are able to understand the social truth of documentary.” (p. 198) Ivens was present at the 2nd (and final) International Congress of Independent Film in 1930 (Lioult, 2006, p. 1287) at which Hans Richter expounded the need for the independent film to renounce bourgeois experimentation and use cinema as a weapon to fight fascism. The congress would dissolve until after World War II as its international membership took up Richter’s challenge. The ‘reflections’ of Ivens essay indicated a transitional moment between his pre-Congress formal experimentation and his latter turn toward the political; he, Richter, Luis Buñuel, and others would move on from “pure cinema”, experimentation, and shock, and in some cases turn toward utility in service of the state.

Thomas Waugh, in the introduction to *Show Us Life*, writes that "ever since Vertov first entered the Soviet newsreel initiative, activists on the left have continued to use the documentary medium to intervene wherever they have been challenging the inherited structures of social domination." (1984, p. xii) Waugh’s observation is keen, though his work goes on to work toward “an aesthetics of committed documentary” (p. xxi) that does not fully articulate the range of aesthetic possibilities that this thesis has uncovered. Waugh does, however, account for change in individuals and regional scenes. Ivens would labour over the following decade, moving away from the apolitical sensuousness of *Rain* and toward leftist political commitment - firstly for the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union, for the workers of Belgium alongside Henri Storck, for the anti-Franco movement in Spain, and then for the United States in the post-Depression and World War II – reflective of this turn against perceived indulgence and toward

36 “it’s impossible for the film-maker of a documentary to lie, not to be true to life.” (Ivens, 2016, p. 197)

cinema as an instrument of change. Europe and North America were simultaneously rebuilding in the wake of war and undergoing rapid social changes in early twentieth-century modernity. The latent intellectual power of cinema, a tool of mechanical reproduction and of self-representation, was beginning to be understood by capitalists and theorised by a cadre of film thinkers. Propaganda was not simply related to the accretion of sentiment around time of wars: propaganda was also soft power *avant la lettre*, building a sense of connectivity between a culture, its products, and the environment it had created and representing this back to the population. As indicated in the previous chapter, the city documentary encapsulates this modernist fervour to display a nation's best face to the world in a style that mirrored the modernism and captured the spirit of newness rather than captured the plain reality. The avant-garde documentarist utilised film to evoke the strange feelings and possibilities that modernity's newness brought, be it the play and angles of the city documentary, the expansion of industry in *Turksib* (1929), or the sense of meaningfulness of increased interconnectivity in *Night Mail* (1936).

While many of these early avant-garde documentary films emerge from similar intellectual precepts, the diversity and range of the works are so pronounced that categorisation becomes partially about what such works do *not* do: tell simple narrative stories, give easy identification through character, or cohere time and space. Parker Tyler notes diverging styles within the early avant-garde whose geographically-separated practitioners all essentially concur that transforming and editing reality is the primary goal of film; that Surrealists 'exploded' human relations by allegory or "an extravagant fantasy or a nightmare performs symbolic functions through violent dislocations" (1969, p. 142) while the Soviets practitioners such as Pudovkin, Eisenstein, and Vertov had differing methods of montage but were locked in to "obey the favoured Marxist assumptions about the […] Revolution." (p. 142)

The inseparability of institutional influence in production is an important aspect that shapes a particular character that frequently returns in the avant-garde documentary. Bill Nichols, building on an explanation of the ways that documentary and avant-garde aligned in the flourish of modernism of the 1920s, notes how "a wave of documentary activity takes shape at the point when cinema comes into the direct service of various, already active efforts to build national identity during the 1920s and 1930s." (2001b, p. 582). Understanding this transition in public understanding and utilisation of documentary form, from the birth of documentary practice[37] in a necessarily avant-garde idiom to a more traditional and digestible form by the late 1930s, is key to understanding why the experimental tendency in documentary has found only sporadic favour even with the political tendencies that birthed it, divided as the left has been between democratic realism and a figurative and the highly personalised and stylised anti-realism of the polemic New Documentary. Nichols' history of the avant-garde in documentary is provocative and compelling, arguing that the previous writings by Paul Rotha and Jack Ellis echoed in chapter one of this thesis, which suggested that the first film by the Lumière brothers was photographic realism thus documentary and therefore documentary was embedded into film language from the outset, was incorrect and overly-simplistic.

Nichols argues that documentary practice only truly arrives into being in the 1920s upon the formulation of codes developed through fictive film and art practice – narrative structure, modernist practice, and rhetorical strategy – combining with a socialistic Euro-Soviet push toward 'pure cinema' that sought to utilise reality as its basis for transformation. Nichols' point is not beyond arguable but his articulation of the late 1920s as a moment of great potential and synergy, where discourses of modernism align with nation-building and identity creation for a new generation, means that the documentary image of the 1920s operates with a greater level of sophistication and referentiality than the image of attraction created by the Lumières and Mitchell and Kenyon. The artistic power bound up in the more advanced form of the type of documentary crafted by Ivens,

37 Or at least, one version of it.

Vertov, and Man Ray would become dissipated in the awkward political transitions toward the nation-building projects of Soviet Union, Germany, and the USA, converting to more simplified forms of documentary wed to nations gearing toward a war footing. Propaganda films often contained techniques, particularly from montage, that were birthed in the pre-Congress avant-garde, but the context of their deployment mitigated against the exploratory and playful mood works such as *Rain* evoke. The crushing of the liminal, the strange, and the idiosyncratic rhythms of society that avant-garde documentary revelled in by political expediency toward Stalinism and Nazism positioned the movement as forgotten pioneers whose visions of reality transformed into something more potent than simple realism could ever manage. What I will show in the next few paragraphs indicates how a return to avant-garde aesthetics in documentary occurs frequently throughout the century (and, as I will argue, into this one), particularly as a response to major social instabilities and as a tool for emergent social sub-groups to establish particularities of identity. Understanding the historical ebb and flow of documentary sympathy toward inclusion of the experimental is important to consider briefly as it establishes the schema which avant-garde documentaries of crash and recession arrive in.

During the 1930s the European avant-garde did largely not exist (Renan, 1967; Curtis, 1978) on the continent, with practitioners including Buñuel manufacturing institutional films around the globe. Avant-garde approaches to factuality by those who had fled were downplayed as experimental film-makers of note such as Joris Ivens and Alexander Hammid melded their formal approaches to a more utilitarian vision during the war. In the post-war search for stability, including increased suspicion of socialism in American media practice, and the expansion of television came documentary's turn toward the paternal. Dave Saunders considers how the addition of sound in the 1930s saw the "film image relegated" (2010, p. 42) while Nichols notes how the "the exigencies of the Great Depression depleted its [the modernist avant-garde] resources" (2001b, p. 583) and led US documentary down a different path, with institutional backing from governmental arms who

understand the potential of the form but desired to arrest it into shapes that bend its power to its paymasters. Though the avant-garde documentary disappeared in Europe during the late 1930s and 1940s, American independent film-makers increasingly embraced the form – with works such as Lewis Jacobs' *Footnote to Fact* (unfinished, 1932) Roger Barlow, Harry Hay, Hy Hirsch, and LeRoy Robbins' *Even – As You and I* (1937), and Francis Lee's *1941* (1941) – with approximately 250 clubs on the books of the Amateur Cinema League just prior to the outbreak of World War II. (McDonald, 2008)

Public perception of the documentary medium as its contours, though not its entire cinematic logic, were borrowed by television were duly shaped by this new democratic medium. Documentary quickly found itself as far from Ivens and Vertov as possible, not bound in with avant-garde production, instead gravitating toward an embrace of the heavily narrativised 'Voice of God', a documentary style frequently characterised as "assuming a power to speak the truth of the filmic text, to hold captive through verbal caption what the spectator sees." (Wolfe, 2016b, p. 264) Whilst this reading of voice can be read in alignment with what A. William Bluem saw as television documentary's dovetailing with radio documentary in the 1930s (1965, p. 59), Charles Wolfe expands the reading of the word 'voice' to indicate not only the narrated aspect of such documentaries but to also encompass "the governing perspective of a text." (2016b, p. 265) Though Wolfe smartly identifies voice utilisations subtly colouring images away from the merely paternal, in styles that ranged from the subversive and playful to the terse and caustic, he also notes how such documentaries "never call the authority of their vocal commentaries into question." (p. 275) Conveying a sense of the new by those possessing the greatest distributive means, on one hand, was not important: modernity had been habituated and its technologies understood. Two wars of increasing devastation thanks to technology and modernity's reach led to western societies embracing their most prelapsarian and comforting aspects. Paternalistic fixed-camera documentaries allowed dominant society a safe breakwater when encountering social tensions and

new cultural forms in music and art. Modernity in documentary was gradually made safe by its mediation through an increasingly corporate media that behaved like a proxy parent.

By the 1950s and throughout the 1960s radical aesthetics would be approached anew and appropriated by documentary makers uncovering stories that probed the margins of society, cultural memory, or dormant narratives that lay in plain sight.[38] Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* (1955) juxtaposes footage of Nazi death camps ten years on from their liberation with still photographs of them as active mechanisms of torture and death. Resnais' construction is not to mark the passing of time or provide simple history but a careful collision that evokes the eternal recurrence of such places, so that "the issue, then, is not what we have seen, but how we choose to perceive and remember it." (Barsam, 1992, p. 263) Film-makers returning to avant-garde representation were directly confronting passivity and making the liminal visible by exaggerating the forms chosen to represent such states. Though the wave of avant-garde film-makers of the Congresses of 1929-30 had turned away from experimentation and toward politics, they had recognised this as a duty bound up within their potential and privilege. However, for marginalised groups fighting against the media flow of the hegemonic, experimental – meaning suffused with the representational, abstract, and figurative – and radical aesthetics retained a potency that, utilised in conjunction with the real, could provoke audiences whilst communicating the new identities and realities that were developing outside of the mainstream eye. The avant-gardists that came to birth documentary practice in the 1920s were viewed by latter day avant-garde documentary makers as rejecting the habituation and status quo that the realist gaze had elided. Queer filmmaker and writer Toshio Matsumoto perceptively outlines the rationale of such an assiduously new method of representation of material reality originating after World War I, and its connection to the social upheaval amongst youth in

38 In a particular sense, Direct Cinema and cinema verite can be thought of as radical when considering both its practitioners' desire to depict the marginal and through their spartan and new aesthetic quality, though their own eventual habituation into mainstream media flows as realism that underscores why this is not what I am considering here.

urban 1960s Japan, writing:

> Those artists were absolutely unable to put any faith in the existing values and social order, thereby becoming conscious of the confrontation between their subjective internal world and the objective external world. They hoped to resolve the human condition, torn to pieces by the mechanisms of contemporary reality, from the perspective of a fundamental transformation of the subject in relation to the object, thereby creating an awareness of an absolutely new connection between materiality and consciousness, the exterior world and the interior world. For that reason, of course, **they had to set themselves as the antithesis to classical realism**.[39] That's why I see such contemporary significance in the post-World War I avant-garde. (2012, p. 149)

In pointing to classical realism as an elision between dominant thought and the passive observation of the artistic form as one which upholds oppressive norms, Matsumoto sees identification with the underpinning notion of the avant-garde: to transform reality rather than uphold it. In Matsumoto's case, the existing values and social order found key loci of tension in a generation gap exposed by a growing youth culture, and Japanese governmental support of the treaty of co-operation between itself and the USA. Matsumoto's *Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969) emerges from this tension, clearly set against the aesthetics of classical Japanese cinema and even the individualist wave of post-war auteurs dramatising such social tensions as Yasujiro Ozu and Nagisa Oshima. *Roses* connects to the avant-garde documentary tradition of Dziga Vertov, Joris Ivens, and John Grierson not necessarily by topical pre-occupation but by utilising cinematic technique in a manner that effaces the work as being of the filmic world whilst containing moments of documentary reality in order to reconfigure and distort relationality and provoke new thoughts. Matsumoto's strategy is clear, manufacturing a literal and figurative queering of basic assumptions of film form in order to generate a filmic representation of a queer 1960s Tokyo absent from public discourses. Experimental strategy in documentary representing the marginal experience of queerness in order to create new understandings of these worlds frequently return, often aligned with difficult moments within the culture: in Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* (1989) as the AIDS

39 My emphasis

crisis reached its heights, and in Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* (2003) as cultural tensions were exposed around sexuality discrimination laws returned to the American forefront.

A similar formulation of directors utilising an intersection between experimental form and documentary in order to claim an authentic voice in self-representation occurs in British art film of the 1980s. After violent inner-city riots and half a decade of Thatcherite policy-making, Coco Fusco notes a similar nexus of feelings espoused by Matsumoto – a rejection of the old order and its associated aesthetics, a desire to construct material reality in its own self-image, and a sense of a transformative capacity bound in with cinema – underpinning the work of black British film-making collectives Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective. Realism, in the way Matsumoto conceived it as a classical form that upholds a rotten status quo, is also upbraided by both groups. Fusco writes how both groups are concerned with "the terminology and mythologies they inherit from the '60s-based cultural nationalism that remains allied with a realist tradition" (2016, p. 699) For these groups, realism not only forbade the exploration of marginal cultural identities in terms of making exterior the interior (e.g. psychosexuality, the legacies of colonialism) but reduced the depiction of acceptable marginal groups to crass stereotypes and expected patterns of behaviour in which working class people liked 'working class pursuits' while black people liked 'black pursuits' - when Sankofa and Black Audio Film Collective crossed both categories and yet were schooled in art cinema, cultural theory, and adhered to particular forms of post-colonial and neo-Marxist praxis. Fusco notes the partition between the black British practitioners of the 1970s and 1980s, scare-quoting the word 'radical' to ironically note the absence of awareness in racial dimensions in these early theorists (p. 699), and the institutional gatekeepers of the avant-garde such as the British Film Institute to indicate tensions that block easy analogy between the two.

Nonetheless, the aesthetic-political alignment that precedes textual production and the resulting work itself belies an embedded connection between the 1920s film-makers and Sankofa

and Black Audio Film Collective that passes through the conduit of thinkers such as Stewart Hall, Gayatri Spivak, and Louis Althusser and film thinker-practitioners such as Jean-Luc Godard. In terms of analysing how form matches intent, Fusco notes how Isaac Julien's *Territories* (1984) "uses formal experimentation as a means of decentering thematic and structural traditions" (2016, p. 702) while Dara Waldron suggested John Akomfrah's *Handsworth Songs* (1986) utilises the avant-garde and documentary intersection in a way that is "designed to etch out a grammar for a new black British Identity, whose secondary aim is to address the hegemony of certain media forms." (2017, p. 4) Black Audio Film Collective member John Akomfrah has also indicated how his utilisation of avant-garde approaches to sound establishes a direct link with the total vision outlined at the avant-garde documentary movement's outset, stating "the avant garde[40] saw our emphasis on the audio as a thought crime, a heresy. It was all about the image for them. They frowned on the sonic, treating it as an impure intrusion into a hallowed field. […] if you watch a Dziga Vertov film you'll see the early avant garde was as interested in sound as in images." (Sandhu, 2012)

Handsworth Songs clearly utilises montage in both the intellectual manner, juxtaposing image against image for dialectical effect, as well as incorporating a suffused rhythmical dimension that walks the line between reflecting the chaos of the riots and the music of the people in the riots. In a typical Akomfrah montage, newspaper reports about the inner city riots experienced by black British citizens are torn from headlines, colourised and animated and subjected to zooms that intensify meanings produced in individual images that suggest Handsworth, Toxteth, and Brixton as equivalent to war zones in foreign lands. The faces and body language of rioters are noted in the way that media enhances their foreignness. In parallel, a dub version of the William Blake poem 'Jerusalem' plays, satirising the 'green and pleasant land' of the organic self-myth of England encoded within the poem. The clash with dub plays on that particular music form's distending and expansionist utilisation of reverb and space, whilst audibly introducing Jamaica to Britain as a

40 In this the context is not clear, but I take Akomfrah to mean contemporary avant-garde practitioners coming from the institutional and depoliticised approach that Coco Fusco notes in her article.

metaphor for historic immigration. The real is present in this self-consciously avant-garde piece, albeit a mediated real (newspaper pages, a form of realism notionally devoted to truth) presented in a way that focuses in on the particular forms presented of black culture by the white media and social order, and the ways in which these forms echo other forms. Ifeona Fulani notes how "the voice of the female narrator informs us that "there are no stories in the riots, only the ghosts of other stories." This phrase acts as a refrain recurring throughout the film, a signal of its intent to revive and examine stories from a violent and racist colonial past." (2017, p. 5) What Fulani notes here corresponds with an investigation at the level of form as well as theme. As the voice of the narrator indicates within the text, there is a deliberate representational strategy in play in what you are watching, and this strategy means that what you are seeing is representative of a larger and more intangible real that requires a particular kind of collision to awaken the viewer to it. The distended music and visible forms of editing impart critique on images that, separated from such techniques, would either become passively received or serve the status quo.

Of course, directors visiting the intersection of experimental film and documentary does not necessarily equate to its makers instrumentalising it for the purposes of specific socio-political redress. Though sometimes met with accusations of bourgeois navel-gazing, avant-garde documentary looking inwardly at film construction offers internal critique through a self-reflexive foregrounding of realism and expressive technique colliding. William Greaves' *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm* (1968) appears on first glance as a realist documentary. As the documentary develops, observation gives way to several meta-commentaristic layers that disorients the viewer's sense of reality to such a degree that reveals the text as critique of both performance and the formulation of realism in documentary. Additionally, Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) intersects the avant-garde montage with documentary realism in order to critique memory and context, suggesting that conceptual links between images are forged by a more active process of production that determines reception and closes down the democracy of looking and thinking.

However sharply felt or distanced the political within the avant-garde documentary text, and however intended this is on the part of its practitioners, a shared feature across these texts is one which reveals limitations in the kinds of unadorned and unpoetic realism outlined in chapter one. Directors whose work bisects both experimental form and documentary content for more personal, illusory, and sensory reasons such as Bruce Baillie, Jonas Mekas, and Stan Brakhage sustains this critique, though within a visual field that appears abstruse. However, the work of each also suggests limits at which it might be considered that avant-garde technique overtakes documentary and renders images of the real subordinate to expression. Whether there is a horizon over which the documentary aspect disappears will be considered later in the chapter.

Concern about observation's limitations meeting expressive technique may also recall the anti-mimetic ethnographic documentary of the third chapter. The key difference between those texts and the avant-garde[41] documentary is the way that additional technique in the anti-mimetic documentary often *supports* reality by revealing the hidden aspects within what was observed. Technique in the anti-mimetic is a corollary of the real: it confirms reality and upholds the essential subject-object relationship of the realist gaze. From the perspective of Vertov or Matsumoto, technique in the anti-mimetic services the dominant relationships that produce meaning in cinema. Avant-garde documentarists look to alter the subject-object relationship in order to create new ways of looking that bring about new thought. There is, I argue, a useful and productive tension between the representation freedom of avant-garde film and the ultimate and necessary grounding in the real that documentary comes to need. Unlike the realist documentary where truth is witnessed and conveyed through observation representing a democratic specularity; or the polemic documentary where truth is an ideological response decided before production; or the poetic documentary of the previous chapter in which reality is shaped with sound, grading, texture, and referentiality to create a tonal palette of feeling that colours and shapes truth, the avant-garde documentary reveals its

41 As stated in the introduction, these boundaries are artificial and porous – there are ethnographic films with avant-garde aspects, etc.

truth(s) when the viewer parses the tension in the binaries invoked by avant-garde and documentary meeting within the text: truth and fabrication, figurative and literal, form and content, freedom and restriction, responsibility and irresponsibility. It is within this dialectic that new thought, and meaning, is created.

Whilst Vertov, Grierson, and Ivens sought to transform reality, objective reality also provided both a baseline and a framework that spoke to the heart of documentary procedure. The potential of both avant-garde film and the real suggested a symbiotic relationship, with techniques and expressions re-familiarising the everyday and objective reality providing a substantive base which could deflect accusations of bourgeois indulgence. Viewing the avant-garde documentary as a carrier of a function that simultaneously critiques various aspects of the dominant realist view in documentary, whilst forging a language of representation individual to each text, offers insight into the proliferation of avant-garde documentary since 2001.

Blots on the landscape: uneven geographies and humans *en masse*

This section of this chapter builds on the history of avant-garde documentary that I have outlined earlier in the chapter, as one in which marginalised groups have recovered[42] a political potential in radical aesthetics combining with images of the real, in order to examine Ai Weiwei's migrancy documentary *Human Flow* (2017). Considering Ai's film as a continuation of a socio-historical narrative of struggle will allow development toward exploration of the ways that the avant-garde documentarian comes to historicise the years of crash and recession. I argue in this section that Ai continues a recent development in avant-garde documentary practice which attempts to outline the contours of uneven development and uneven geographies. Marxian approaches to human geography as a discipline rejects individual testimony, instead focusing on a topographical approach that looks for patterns, forms, rhythms, changes, and constants in habituated spaces in

42 Or have recovered for them.

order to explain the realities of economic theory, policy, and implementation. The methodology of the human geographer of uneven development, I contend, is reflected in the overall structure and formal composition of the documentaries in the area. The stories that Ai and others uncover are real, but they reject the intimacies and strategies of realism in order to utilise the formal properties of human geography to re-familiarise to the viewer stories which have become habituated or downplayed in realist media. Utilising the topographical aspect in filmic style and mirroring the investigation of the human geographer has the effect, I suggest, of reflecting a Marxian view of the financial crash and recession. By juxtaposing the effects of migrancy with a Europe in austerity and crisis as a product of forces in a greater sweep of collectivist neoliberal history colliding with a more nationalist sentiment in nationhood, I argue that Ai literalises a number of these Marxian debates pertaining to the nation state.

Documentaries exploring uneven geographies prior to the financial crash, such as Michael Glawogger's *Megacities* (1998) and Wang Bing's *West of the Tracks* (2003)[43], utilise subtle strategies of the avant-garde - such as a pre-occupation with new man-made forms and their effects on space and psychology in their capturing of traces of capitalism's explosion and its effect on people – mixed in with realism, poetics, and ethnography. The spatial dimensions of the built environment in both are explored through extensive use of extreme long shots in a wider-than-Academy standard aspect ratio.[44] These shots establish contingent space and are held for sufficient length so the viewer can begin to understand social and economic relationships unfolding within these spaces, noting inhabited places that are (in the case of Glawogger) incredibly densely populated or (in the case of Bing) eerily sparse in a manner that suggests previous activity. Without additional material or commentary, through careful examination of the forms that emerge from these shots alone suggest an extremity that arises through a particular intensification or de-intensification of capital in these locations. The opening shots of *Megacities* betray no narrative as

43 Shot between 1999 and 2001.
44 *West of the Tracks* is in 1.85:1 while *Megacities* is in 1.66:1. The Academy standard is 1.375:1

the camera travels along Mumbai streets and within crowded trains, the gaze restive as people constantly move close to the lens or around the position of the camera operator. The swarms of figures dressed in white, moving too quickly for our identification with them, constantly surrounding the lens eventually leads to a cut to a distant shot of the intersection of a busy shopping district. The title card appears over the shot, held for 19 seconds, cinematic time enough for Glawogger to construct Mumbai as a fatiguing hive of activity where the space that is available *feels* insufficient for the population within. The obverse is apparent in the case of Bing, whose deployment of a durational style mirrors parallel developments in the fictive slow cinema movement. The formal style and particular techniques utilised in Bing has been noted in terms of the way that they convey deeper layers of meaning within the text, as indicated as Manuel Ramos-Martin's examination of Wang Bing, stating of the nine hour film that

> the long takes of *West of the Tracks* are *long*, long takes. They are complex entities that, through their length, expose spectators to the exuberance of rust covering the factories-in-conflict of Tiexi. […] The workers appear in these long, long takes not so much as social actors but as nameless ghosts wandering around the space in question. (2015, p. 12)

Though evocation, in ostensibly realist observation, of a spectral quality in abandoned and decaying places makes up the poetic documentary covered in the previous chapter, these artistic moments unfold as key scenes rather than acting as connective tissue between testimony. The viewer is asked to consider both the form of a structure or site or mass of bodies in itself without additional material from the director to shape the reading, and additionally the metaphor of Bing's extensive utilisation of rust and oxidation and the way this particular linking strategy magnifies the importance of what we see. Bing's long takes ask the viewer to consider the man-made landscape of factories and ruination, literalising the topographical aspect of development. In these factories, products are made for a wealthier population elsewhere. When that population no longer desires those products, or when economic policies curtail the financial efficiency of manufacture in those factories, the effects are felt within the spaces that Bing shows us. What Glawogger and Bing show

us is, I argue, not meant to represent the particularity of this city or this factory, but the role that inhabited space plays as a part of a large interlinked global system. The overactive flows of the city works as metaphor for high capitalism at its most centralised, while the minimal flow of the abandoned factory is metaphor for the dispersal and atomization of humanity in the latter stages of capitalist economics.

Moving toward the specific era of the financial crash and recession, art historian and cultural critic TJ Demos approaches the financial crash and recession in much the same way as the political documentarists covered in Chapter 2 do: as an event occurring as part of a wider sweep of post 9/11 history, almost inextricable from other events in a nexus of cultural division and the globalisation-led freedoms of the long 90s encountering deep fractures. Questions of the financial crash and migrancy, suggests Demos, naturally conflate in the way that each addresses questions of resources and mobility.

> Since the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent wars and uprisings in the Middle East, together with the worldwide financial crisis and the continued destabilization of developing nations in the global south, globalization's celebratory ring has ceded to the imperialist realities of "empire", defined by the increasingly unequal command of resources by the privileged few occupying elite corporate multinational and governmental positions. The result is what I term *crisis globalization*, designating an era of growing economic inequality, one facing the increasing influx of migrants and refugees into the North as they seek decent standards of living and escape from repressive regimes, widespread poverty, and zones of conflict. (Demos, 2013, p. xiii).

Demos joins together financial crash and recession into a broader sweep of history bringing together problems of the global south to the global north and vice-versa. The direction of world events post 9/11 suggest an interrelatedness between the 'migrant image' of the title of Demos' monograph and an atmosphere emanating from various financial strands: from global capital to the crash itself. In this era, noting a "resurgence of documentary approaches in contemporary art" (2013, p. xvi) Demos identifies documentary makers utilising avant-garde technique in tandem with

film theory critical of realism as a means of articulating liminal aspects of political marginalisation and geographical dislocation.

For example, in examination of the Otolith Group's *Nervus Rerum* (2008) Demos posits that the directors cover the same essential territory of Palestinian dislocation as Mohammed Bakri does in *Jenin, Jenin* (2002). What is different, however, is the Otolith Group's rejection of the "traumatic realism" (2013, p. 148) of the Palestinian people in Bakri's work. Instead, Demos argues, that Otolith embrace a deliberately opaque vision "undistracted and unconcerned with individual figures" (p. 149) with the effect of the film "to eliminate possible avenues of identification between viewers and the film's subjects." (p. 150) The viewer knows the location of filming to be highly sensitive and politically charged, yet the obfuscatory camerawork and editing between stillnesses lures the gaze away from the conditions of existence and into an extended meditation of the quotidian and mundane that keeps the active viewer at arm's length. The labyrinth structure of Jenin's walls occupy Otolith's gaze, offering potent metaphor for the plight of the people residing within it and a place for Demos which "the distinction between reality and fiction loses its boundary." (p. 151) The difficulty in representing the reality of the Palestinians of Jenin is bound in with the lack of revelatory matter of the reality of the situation, while the filmic preoccupation with the geographical enclosure literalises the structural aspect to the problem without specifically identifying it. What Otolith Group, Bing, and Glawogger are showing the viewer, as I will also show in Ai, are instantiations of uneven geographies and uneven development that Demos' *crisis globalization* arises out of. The prevalence or absence of humanity in each represents not specifically humanity in and of itself. Rather, the presence of humanity in the types of space that are presented, the visual forms that the humanity takes on within the space, and the density of humanity within the space are open-ended visual metaphors: for example, as units of capital circulating in those locations, as units of resistance to the oppression in those locations, or to indicate the scale of a particular aspect of the crisis.

So, where exactly is the financial crash and recession in *Human Flow*? Ai's documentary takes an indirect view. Where the various documentary forms of the previous chapters have tackled, in some manner, the financial crash head on, Ai's disperses the tone of financial crisis in Europe as the fuel for the reactionary politics that prevents the onward travel of these refugees and migrants. Financial crash, recession, austerity, and questions about the end of the neoliberal capitalist project define the context against which this particular history of migrancy occurs. Human geographer and theorist David Harvey, writing on the origins of financial crash, rejects notions that posit simple structural deficiency and some kind of atavistic human tendency toward a growth that is ultimately destructive. For Harvey, the crash originates in the systematic assault on labour conditions in the 1980s by western governments, the dismantling of nation-based capitalist projects such as the motor industry in Detroit, and the deregulation of capital leading to reallocation of investments overseas thus decimating core industrial zones at home. (2011, p. 5) The political steps taken leads to, for Harvey, nodding to Karl Marx's *Grundrisse*, a picture in which capital must continually circulate in order to prevent blockages that prevent the accumulation of growth. Harvey, returning to his geographic and topographical root, offers a ripe visual for the formulation of this process, stating that "if we could map the continuous movement of capital across the globe, the picture would probably look something like the satellite images taken from outer space of weather systems (fig. 5.1 and 5.3) swirling across planet Earth." (2011, p. 12) Though impossible to map the territory of global commerce in its abstraction and fluidity, figurative representation of this circulation is possible. In *Human Flow*, Ai's distant images of migrants appear to resist the contortions of suffering and pain that the realist migrant documentary prefers in order for their existence to become a more open-ended sign, able to be plugged into a series of visual semantic fields and manipulated. The groups of migrants, metaphorically, operate like fronts in weather systems in the patterns they form when shot from distance, clustered together and travelling toward a body of land. Indeed, the representative device that Ai settles on the most for the potency of its metaphor is that of

bodies *en masse,* often in conjunction with an aspect of geography that contains or prevents this grouping of people from onward movement.

fig. 5.1 and 5.2 - not just shots of people
Human Flow (2017)

The journey of the individual is negated by the title. Ai wishes to consider the group as an autonomous body in itself, with idiosyncratic movement and collective decision-making. In this respect *Human Flow* relates to its most historical forebears in the avant-garde documentary in a number of ways. Like the formulation suggested by Grierson, *Human Flow* is the creative treatment of actuality; a story that the viewer thinks that they know affected by the judicious utilisation of filming technique and montage in order to re-familiarise it. As in Ivens' *Rain* and Vertov's *Man*

With A Movie Camera there is a sense that film language arises to meet the feel of the real rather than simply replicate its appearances, as well as suggesting that objects and things such as rain or the lived city have a consciousness that can be expressed. And as in Matsumoto, Julien, and Akomfrah, *Human Flow* brings together experimental tendency with documentary in order to suggest critical limitation in realism. *Human Flow* features a great deal of aerial footage of migrants, shot by drones. Ai rationalises this in terms that capture efficiency as well as the geographic, stating that "drones have a superior ability to capture scale in a very short time. [...] Drones change the point of view, show the camp in relation to the landscape." (in Silberg, 2017, p. 16). Though the migrants of Ai's documentary have different origins, either fleeing war or persecution or simply seeking better opportunities, their relationship is arranged in *Human Flow* as having a particular economic consequence. The repetition of the visual of the bodies *en masse* resists, as in Otolith Group, easy identification with specific people in way that maintains the sense of a shared position across the group. The specific formal patterns created by their collective motion, captured from distance and height by drone cameras, resembles these idealised weather patterns of mobile capital moving from location to location.

fig. 5.3 – weather formations
Human Flow (2017)

There are individual testimonies dotted throughout Ai's film, but the gaze returning to matters of space and occlusions in space strongly suggestive of a greater interest in the structural aspects of the situation. The topographical filmic construction of the situation which displays goods passing through borders while the refugees' are unable to remain, pass through, *or* settle in any nation state evinces a limned tension between neoliberal globalism and nationalism. The bitter irony of the situation is not embellished, though its thematic return as the situation in the ad hoc camp worsens suggests a deliberate rhetorical flourish by Ai. Utilising the topological in documentary as a means to approach traumatic histories have been broached previously, most notably by Margaret Olin in her examination of Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985). Olin deftly extracts the metaphoric quality of Lanzmann's gaze across various landscapes of the Holocaust, ending a comparison of the opening scene's resemblance to Orpheus crossing the Styx in Hades by stating "if topography is the subject of Shoah, the territory to be mapped is Hell." (1997, p. 2) The footage of *Shoah*, tracing through concentration camps and train-yards, is entirely in the 1980s present of its filming. For Olin, hell is here and it is on earth.

fig. 5.4 - Human Flow (2017)

Human Flow lacks the classical referentiality of *Shoah* but Ai's topographical approach renders the central metaphor essentially the same: for migrants, hell can be found in the geographical. Whether it is the bombed-out city being fled or the natural and man-made obstacles preventing safe passage, aspects of geography appear as literal barrier, as figurative difficulty, or as an ironic device to show how migrancy and statelessness upends the givens of citizenship. Being placeless, argues Ai, changes the very nature of geography: from the safety and security of one's home and region to geography's indifference and mockery as the migrant is refused the ability to settle, pass through, or both. Ai's focus on aspects of the geographical includes observations of the ways in which nature is bastardised and re-appropriated to serve particular ideological goals. At the Serbian-Hungarian border, the camera spots a soldier in a hole that appears on first glance to be a mound of grass (fig. 5.5). In your state as a migrant, Ai suggests, nature will play tricks on you. Nature will become de-natured, not there to play its part in the cycle of living, but a thing to be repurposed to maintain the migrant's status as outsider and unwanted. *Human Flow* features several visual metaphors of this kind: the rushing river washing away the few belongings of crossing migrants, or when the director himself is accosted by an American border patrol whilst walking on what appears to be an anonymous patch of brown land, only to be told he has crossed the US/Mexico border several times. The boundary between land and water, Ai dolefully notes in the opening scenes, is at least one where authorities will not prevent your crossing.

Fig. 5.5 - the dark ironies in migration
Human Flow (2017)

Ai considers the continual dark ironies in migration, where the familiar is upended, in shots that may initially appear as merely scene-setting or as a transition between moments. In the camp of Idomeni, on the Greek-North Macedonian border, refugees and their tents are crowded around a railway checkpoint for freight trains traversing the two countries. On two separate occasions we see trains, one laden with oil, the other with storage containers, granted the ability to pass through the border while the refugees in the camp must remain where they are. Borders are conceptualised by Ai as upholding the dominant view of what constitutes the correct flow of capital. Oil and goods are desired products of national and global financial speculation, whilst the refugees are the unwanted by-products of the national and global speculation of war and instability. During the period Ai captures, which we see on the occasional ticker-tape sequences that flash up on screen, individual nation states of the European Union are reversing the collective decision to retain open borders to allow the passage of people. The formation of the European Union (EU), initially as the European Economic Community, arises as part as what David Harvey refers to as “changing conditions of flexible accumulation’ in the world economy” (1989, p. 147) in the 1960s and 1970s. The fostering of this trading bloc in a collective neoliberal way served the objectives of peace and prosperity,

bringing the European average gross domestic product (GDP) to more than 70 per cent of the level of the US during the 80s and 90s, up from 50 per cent at the end of World War II. In the era of crisis globalisation, the figure has dipped beneath 70 per cent, with a continued dip after the financial crash. (Balcerowicz et. al., 2013, p. 9) that has led certain nation states wish to reverse the conditions that led to flexible accumulation - migrancy. In some EU countries political capital has been made of the instability within the European economy, as we have seen in Brexit from the right and far-right of UK politics, the elections of far-right nationalist Viktor Orban in Hungary, and the leftist and grassroots Greek resistance to the *troika.* From these events is possible to see how individual nations have rejected the neoliberal conditions of accumulation in order to make a nationhood and self-myth pitched against collectivism a primary importance. The absurdity of these political games is heightened in *Human Flow* frequently as drone cameras raised high above the land to display its continuity and sense of history, while the viewer understands that what prevents a cluster of dots that are revealed to be people from moving to other, completely identical, parts of this shot is a deliberate political arrangement.

So, what is at stake in Ai's heterogenous and topgraphical focus? Why does Ai mostly distance from the words of refugee and the economic migrant in order to consider their passage through space? Whilst *Human Flow* fulfils several typical documentary functions by revelation of the particular and persuasion of the situation's importance, I argue this distantiation not only shows that Ai's focus is on a structural level but also relates to the particular difficulty in representing the invidious political situation of the migrant. Therefore, I claim that the effect that the construction and aestheticisation in Ai's avant-garde documentary has on questions of financial crash, with its focus on uneven development generating a visual rhetoric returning frequently to different tensions that occur when nationalist conceptions of statehood collide with neoliberal globalism, positions *Human Flow* adjacent to a nexus of thinkers on the nature of the state and power, and those categorisations that emerge in its rupturing. In particular, Ai returns to a nexus of thinkers that

develop Antonio Gramsci's work in a number of methods and schools, in particular the works of Gayatri Spivak, Louis Althusser, and Nicos Poulantzas. This trio (and others such as David Harvey, who emerged in this time) confronted the role of the state in a Marxist tradition that continued the work of Antonio Gramsci's theories of the state as hegemony which rules through both a literal political force and social consensus (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci, a jailed political dissident like Ai, developed the concept of the subaltern – the lower ranks of society whose status is determined by the ruling classes who "are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State"" (p. 202) – to suggest the liminalities and marginalities that are typically excluded from conversation and depiction. Ai's work therefore, like Otolith Group's and Akomfrah's, utilises avant-garde form to expose the political impotency of the subaltern migrant figure.

For theorist Gayatri Spivak, whose development of Gramsci's notions in the early 1980s came to directly influence Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa, the subaltern is ultimately denied a position as represented in the aesthetic strategies of both realist and political art. While the working class are undoubtedly oppressed, Spivak argues, the subaltern is not even part of the class hierarchy and thus the gaze of realism, which as mentioned in chapter one is partially a product of class consciousness in the industrialised world, passes over the subaltern. The aesthetic quality that can, potentially, bring wider understanding of the role of the subaltern figure is based in the avant-garde's recalibration of subject-object relationships (as outlined by Matsumoto) - and even then with caveats. Rahul Rao notes how Spivak

> warns of the dangers of conflation of these distinct notions of representation in intellectual and political endeavours that profess an emancipatory agenda: the aesthetic re-presentation of subaltern groups as coherent subjects (what artistic avant-gardes do) can often be taken as a straightforward representation of the political interests of subalterns. When re-presentation comes to be taken as representation, the voices of the subalterns putatively being re-presented, are effaced by the avant-garde that is seen to represent them. (2013, p. 104)

Neither Ai, Bing, Glawogger, Otolith Group, nor Akomfrah profess emancipatory agenda in their documentaries. Their anti-realist distancing strategies prevent not only identification between

viewer and subject but also preclude any sense of easy resolution within the current political frameworks in order to critique the existence of those political frameworks. Though the formal conceit of bodies *en masse* suggests a similarity and thus a coherence in the migrant-subaltern figure, these avant-garde documentaries resist 'straightforward representation' of any political interests. Rather, in order to evoke the social reality particular to the subaltern, this particular kind of documentary traces the base in order to determine the superstructure. That is to say, Ai examines the physical constructs erected by capitalism as a metaphor for the framework in which class interests materialise and create social hierarchies that are limned by the subaltern. It is about the creation of the *gap* that produces the subaltern rather than the examination of the reality that concerns Ai, Bing, and others.

Lay Shang Yap brings Gramsci and Spivak to bear on Ai himself, writing on the problem with Ai's historical difficulty in representing subalterity in his visual art. Yap feels that "to lend the 'subaltern' direct representation is to immediately destroy its situational context. To bridge the gap between the hegemon and the 'subaltern' is to immediately displace the identity of the 'subaltern' onto another group, class, or individual." (Yap, 2016) In Ai's visual artworks such as *Sunflower Seeds* (2010), in which millions of ceramic sunflower seeds come to represent the experiences of subalterity in primitive pre-industrial labour we might see how this direct representation links to a simple procedure of identification that destroys context. In a more literal representation such as this, Yap's argument finds a home. The position of the subaltern is displaced onto discourses surrounding labour, trade, and indeed the artist himself. In *Human Flow*, it is the context of a social structure that creates subalterity that makes up a predominant amount of the visual field. Spivak's theories consider the matter of artistic representation directly, but the post-Gramscian thinkers focused more closely on functional aspects of the state also clearly influence the political rationale behind *Human Flow*. Althusser's concept of 'interpellation', in which the person or group recognises their own subordinate position after being 'hailed' by authority in the form of state apparatus (2001, p. 1502-

1503), comprises a thread that arises frequently in *Human Flow*. Ai's use of epigraph throughout the film utilises historical poets and thinkers who espouse freedom of the most primitive and basic kind, a freedom that transcends the notion of nation state and border.[45] This search for freedom, mirrored in the refugees and migrants, is curtailed frequently by the challenges that arise within human geography. Nation states and residents of settled places hail the refugees and interpellate them with reminders of their non-status and subalterity.

But, as Ai notes throughout his film, one's subaltern status is not something given by humans in speech acts: geography reminds refugees of their status consistently, whether it is a physical barrier such as a river that takes a team effort to cross, or a fence at a border crossing remind them that they are unwanted. Althusser's Gramscian notion emerges earlier in a 1965 Nicos Poulantzas essay, who suggests that there is some dynamism in the concept of the social hierarchies that interpellation indicates, which oscillates under the disguise of the public interest – what one decade may be the necessity to mobilise trade in order to stimulate growth could the next be the desire to preserve national borders in order to secure identity (1998, p. 86) By 1973, at the inception of the European Economic Community, Poulantzas queried "what are the new relations between one imperialist metropolis and another and what are their effects on the state apparatuses?" (p. 220), going on to suggest that "the superstructural transformations depend on the forms which the class struggle assumes in an imperialist chain marked by the uneven development of its links." (p. 249) Ai shows how, in the imperialist formation of the European Union, the superstructural (that is, the abstract effects related to the means of production and type of economy that exists) transformations are exactly those related to border closure, to procedures of escort of refugees into processing facilities, and to denial of settlement precisely because of the uneven development in the global economy that causes migration.

45 "I want the right of life / of the leopard at the spring, of the seed splitting open- I want the right of the first man." Nâzim Hikmet Ram

In the scenes that Ai captures on the borders of Greece and North Macedonia, and Serbia and Hungary, the metaphor inherent in the shots of the migrants held up brings Poulantzas' question into the present. Which will these societies ultimate prize the greatest? Their liberal democracy with its self-congratulation of progressive capitalism? Or the upholding of the parameters that generate national myth and self-identity? At the conclusion of Nicos Poulantzas' essay on the 'Internationalisation of Capital Relations' in which his postulations on the newly-formed EEC appears, he writes: "now more than ever, and as an elementary anti-imperialist measure, this cannot proceed without radically shattering these state apparatuses." (1998, p. 257) Ai's documentary rhetoric may appear to come from a more humanistic place rather than that of a classical Marxist, but it is clear that it elides with these Marxian thinkers. It is, for Ai, these state apparatuses that enact these constant miseries and losses of identity and creation of subalterity, breaking up organic wholes in order to reify myth. The accumulation of sequences of confrontation with obstacles in geography and shots mapping humans as the flow of capital through the arteries of commerce in the national body suggest humanity's unnatural and inhumane reconfiguring in current world systems and events. The avant-garde documentary's ability to reconfigure images of the familiar to reveal the liminal states and contestations behind them, when brought to bear on documentaries of the sweep of history in which crash, austerity, statelessness, and migrancy are wrapped up, clearly historicises these events in this light.

The limit of documentary?

I have argued that the avant-garde documentary emerges from, and retains for marginalised groups, the realisation of a radical political potential in the ways in which it is possible to re-orientate understanding of subject matter against simple realism. In doing so, applied to the financial crash and migrancy, this has the effect of activating political debates that lie beneath or adjacent to the subject matter. I have also suggested that it is the ways in which the real and technique in avant-garde construction collide that creates the dialectic that allows for these new

thoughts and perspectives to be realised. The types of documentary that exist when realism is given greater weight and combined with different rhetorical strategies makes up the chapters previous to this. In this light, this final section is a brief investigation into what happens when matters of technique, aesthetic, and construction overtake the real and potentially render it subordinate; a surface in the multiplicity of construction. Is there, when utilising the real and the experimental together, a horizon over which documentary disappears? And if so, what does this do for the financial crash or any other traumatic event of society?

Frederik Le Roy and Robrecht Vanderbeeken have approached notions of the edges of documentary from the other side, critiquing excess realism in the vein of Stella Bruzzi and Errol Morris' notions that lead to New Documentary. They argue that "if documentary theory maintains objectivity as the primary measure of value, it will inevitably and continuously arrive at the conclusion that the documentary genre is fundamentally flawed." (2016, p. 197) Whilst their argument erects a straw man – not since Stephen Mamber has there been a serious documentary theorist who upholds objective realism as a crucial underpinning of the medium – the suggestion that horizons of delimitation existing in documentary *because of too much realism* is, nonetheless, a provocative one. Both note a trend in documentaries of the contemporary age in which "the full cinematic apparatus is deployed" (p. 202) to capture realistic high-definition close-range pictures of various brutalities in a politically-neutral fashion that risks familiarising the viewer. This familiarisation and gentle elision with the status quo, they determine, sits ill at ease with documentary's historical and ideological underpinnings as a producer of counter-narrative and the anti-hegemonic.

Le Roy and Vanderbeeken recall Bill Nichols' notion that documentary remains a 'fuzzy concept' (2001, p. 21) that makes taxonomy difficult given that it is possible for texts to not share characteristics and still be considered documentary. However, Nichols at least suggests a broad

centrifugal power that arises from a liminality between the fictive and the unedited mundane gaze into reality, such as CCTV or the wry critique of Andy Warhol's *Empire*. Therefore, the assumption that documentary has boundaries and borderlines when considering matters of the figurative, the fictive, and the subjective must be entertained. Reconfiguring the subject-object relationship, as I have shown, contains a power to bring documentary into productive theoretical realms and expose the conditions behind the object. However, if the object exists in the metaphorical realm – that is to say we are not looking at a person or a story but an allegorical stand-in for it - and the aesthetic style in its conveyance distances the object even further, then the connections to that original subject-object configuration risk becoming obscure, distended, or diluted.

In this final section of this chapter I return to John Akomfrah and two of his films that, like *Human Flow*, approach the topic of post-crash migration in terms of topology, uneven geographies, and the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. *The Airport* (2016) touches more directly on the financial crisis within the Greek context. The connections between Ai and John Akomfrah are a fruitful comparison to continue this section. Both are artists who make work at the intersection of the experimental and documentary about the experience of migrants and immigration, which both have experienced first-hand, that invoke particular post-colonial and Marxian debates. There are, however, crucial differences between Akomfrah's work and Ai's. Firstly, though Akomfrah's earlier work found a home on television, the two films investigated here are gallery works. Akomfrah *uses* documentary in his work, trawling the archives of the BBC Natural History department and British Film Institute for images and motion that generate both associative metaphors and a sense of the real for the fictional aspects of the text to be situated within. However, I argue that the absence of a clearly-defined and filmed 'real' and a number of accompanying discourses - its positioning as gallery work, its utilisation of multiple screens playing different material in parallel, the balance of real and constructed material, and the aesthetic and rhetorical strategies deployed - to Akomfrah's work tests the limits of documentary in a number of ways. Though this thesis is uninterested in

setting parameters around what constitutes documentary, I will suggest that there is a horizon at which the technique of the avant-garde and the 'constructed-ness' of the text does not transform its reality in the types of ways that documentary typically does and instead positions footage of the real at the level of mere surface or device. I will refer back to Akomfrah's own *Handsworth Songs* to indicate a distance travelled from a politicised avant-garde documentary to an increasingly inscrutable 'art' practice that incorporates a broader range of discourses. At stake, therefore, in the loss of this dimension of the real is not 'reality' - abstract and figurative art always finds a way of returning us to the real - but a more direct connection to the underpinning theory and debates that the avant-garde collision of experimental and real brings. Works such as the two Akomfrah texts here both refer to the financial crash and the political atmosphere in recession, but I argue that their limited relation to a profilmic real renders their political potential merely one productive reading alongside matters of aesthetics, auteurism, and hermeneutics.

Is it the case that Akomfrah's work would lack social value or transformative power should it be determined to have 'stepped away' from documentary and into a realm wherein the real is equalled or supplanted by questions of form and meaning? The answer is unclear if we look to debates that emerged in the interbellum has torn the left for a century. Jochem Schulte-Strasse reminds us of the political foundations of the avant-garde artist, writing that "avant-garde aesthetic praxis, though, aimed to intervene in social reality. The avant-garde saw that the organic unity of the bourgeois institution of art left art impotent to intervene in social life, and thus developed a different concept of the work of art." (1984, p. xxxix) The avant-garde practitioners of the 1930 Congress moved toward political motivation, collectivisation, and utility, but their point of departure was a place of critique toward the complacency of institutions and an establishment of territory in ongoing debates over which of the broad modes of representation that had emerged was 'best' for the purposes of depicting the urgent matter of the social.

Proponents of realism (Lukács, 1938; Klingender, 1943; Kemenov, 1947) and the avant-garde (Motherwell, 1944; Picasso, 1945; Constant, 1949; Sedlmayr, 1950) argued strongly for their cause in terms that pitched the two visions in competition. For realists such as Kemenov, the avant-garde was “bourgeois”, “decadent”, “[hostile] to objective knowledge”, and “reactionary” (1950, p. 20-21) The argument went overground in the middle of the century, with businessmen and politicians arguing for one form or another in terms of its ability to best uphold liberal freedoms and denounce communism. McCarthyite senator George Dondero argued the avant-garde were communists and thus anti-American (1949a; 1949b), while Arthur Schlesinger argued that “the recent Soviet campaign against cultural freedom and diversity” (1970, p. 77) meant that the avant-garde was considered the most vital gasp of American individualism. It is productive to examine Akomfrah’s work in this way as it evokes the reverse of Hans Richter in 1930 for contemporary documentary debates; moving away from the more confrontational voice that underpinned his *Handsworth Songs* and toward a realm of greater abstraction and ambiguity. For the artist, real politics remain extant in the work despite acknowledging it in post-structural terms. Akomfrah’s approach to *The Airport* took not only a theoretical view of capturing the real of the Greek financial crash but also resurrected avant-gardist themes of institutional suspicion, stating that “I thought, how can I deconstruct this notion of crisis as a way of dismissing a century of government experiment?” (Clark, 2016).

Indeed, the financial crisis aspect and its critique in each film is obscure to the point where the aesthetics and construction of the Akomfrah pieces require unpacking in order to uncover it. There is no classical narrative logic in play, and both *Vertigo Sea* (2015) and *The Airport* (2016) are screened in triptych. The three screens are not always playing material that easily corresponds to the wider thematic logic of the piece. Many of the people we see on-screen in both Akomfrah pieces are actors performing staged versions of rituals, repetitions, and patterns. There is no attempt by Akomfrah to deceive the spectator into thinking that what they see is ‘real’. In *The Airport*, an

astronaut arrives back on earth at an abandoned Athens airfield. An old man in a tuxedo appears to experience moments from his past and future, while tourists and a gorilla haunt the ruin of the location. *Vertigo Sea* features a number of figures in period costume, gazing out to sea in complete stillness, interspersed with nature footage and wide topographical shots of the land juxtaposed with the sea. In neither film does anybody speak. The sound in both is intricately designed, fusing diegetics, electro-acoustic treatment, and music in order to create a sonic world that is both of the real and outside of it. The jagged and provocative editing of documentary reality that characterised *Handsworth Songs* is not present in the more recent works. That particular film's hard-edged dialectical television/cinema is exchanged for a looser and smoother flow of images, with the connections more open-ended and associative linkages forged by repetition and rhythm, though dialectical collisions are both made in the horizontal field across the three screens and through the vertical field of time as the text progresses.

Though themes re-emerge and retain a subtextual consistency, Jill Glessing notes how Akomfrah's sense of construction has altered in the years since *Handsworth Songs*, writing that "in *Vertigo Sea*, the hard edges of Eisensteinian montage are softened by a poetic lyricism influenced by a very different filmmaker, Andrei Tarkovsky." (2017, p. 38) Glessing's view is astute, with the latter pieces not only featuring Tarkovsky's glacial pacing but also smooth camera motion and edits on colour and rhythm. Rather than provoking with tempo, collision, and dissonance, Akomfrah's latter pieces are lulling, slow, with each image and take appearing to slowly morph into the next to create the impression of a distinct whole. The techniques and the method their adjoinment, taken together, evoke refracted memories of a traumatic event that is in the process of recovery. Multiple images appear and cross and combine in an associative logic that is difficult to cohere into an easy organisational unity. The three screens will combine to widen a single image at full clarity and then each screen will develop this single image in three different directions at once, creating an impossible maze of potential connections and unrealised futures.

fig. 5.6 – Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog (1817)

Within *Handsworth Songs*, the immigrant flow of Caribbean settlers through Windrush is directly connected, not merely evoked but actively displayed. *Vertigo Sea* revisits representational devices to suggest themes that arose in *Handsworth Songs*, particularly those based in ocean-going aspects surrounding migration, though Akomfrah distances these debates even further by mediating them through referentiality in other artworks. In *Vertigo Sea* a soldier figure looks out across a dark sea, the composition clearly referencing Caspar David Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1817) (fig. 5.6). The soldier is black, but dressed in the uniform of the colonial soldier. Akomfrah's juxtaposition of third world material existence with European post-Enlightenment/Empire expansion matches themes of displacement, trans-culturalism, and exile with the rational and romantic ideation that are bound in with themes of the purity of a people, the sacredness of place, and of nationalism. Crucially, the central figure has his back turned on the landscape. (fig. 5.7)

fig. 5.7 - Vertigo Sea (2015)

The composition is identical, though Akomfrah's figure is beneath the clouds rather than positioned above them. Perhaps this indicates critique on how the black – often forced - migrant in Empire does not get to look across a land and feel that they have dominion over it. Indeed, Werner Hofmann suggested Friedrich's image foretold "the precipice of the German horror" (in Gorra, p. xiii, 2006) of the vulgar nationalisation of the self-mythic. The cloak of the intellectual in Friedrich is exchanged for the British form of romantic in the military uniform of the soldier of Empire, and in doing so Akomfrah uses the referentiality of the art-image for its signifiers to plug into a critique the historical ideology that ultimately remains dominant thought and continues to produce trauma. The image is, ultimately, a mediated critique of today's post-crash landscape.

fig. 5.8 - The Airport (2016)

The same image (fig. 5.8) returns in *The Airport*, only this time the 'wanderer' figure is not a soldier or a 19th century intellectual, but an astronaut. Given the context that Akomfrah cites for the piece in terms of authorial intent, and supplemented by a close textual reading of the piece, it is difficult plug in Akomfrah's usage of Friedrich in *Vertigo Sea* and apply it to *The Airport*. The openness and ambiguity of the signifying field of *Wanderer* does ultimately allow for a reading – a figure of a potential future returned to examine the wreckage of the present surrounded by the tourists who visit Greece unaware of its history, present, and future, which also suggests a kinship with both *Angelus Novus* (1920) by Paul Klee and Walter Benjamin's 1940 critique of the same image, offering an additional layer of self-reference. But the context of Akomfrah's repeated utilisation, and in two different pieces, suggests a unifying force that irretrievably goes into the personal realms of the auteur. Furthermore, the deployment of the astronaut figure operates in closer relation with Akomfrah's own incursions into science-fiction realism with his *Last Angel of History*

(1996) suggesting a contemporary recasting of obsessions and themes that have returned in Akomfrah's work.

Crucially, the utilisation of this image, unlike the realist's utilisation of the potent signifiers in historical visual art that I outlined in chapter one, does not reflect back into reality to elide with a gaze upon the real. The impediments to an immediate level of access and understanding that inhere in Akomfrah's latter work, as well as an opaque representational strategy, suggests that the work actively obscures the ability to refer back to a particular aspects of the real. 'Real' footage exists in both works, representing a nod toward documentary strategy that cuts against readings that argue Akomfrah's latter work is pure aestheticisation. In *Vertigo Sea*, the use of natural history footage provides both a surface and a texture that underpins the fictive actions of the text. The shots of flora and fauna inserted by Akomfrah have no direct connection to the themes, nor do they contain visual signifiers that operate without their juxtaposition with the fictive images. The relationship of these documentary images to austerity and migrancy is one of atmospherics and inferral, with both pieces arguably no lesser in impact for their presence.

External debates also threaten to undermine documentary potential in Akomfrah. Works only available to view in the gallery space reflects back into the gallery as a place of visual art, continuing the conversation within its walls. The social conditioning that the gallery space performs has been theorised to affect reception of the artwork: that in the gallery space's intensification of the art qualities within a work, the connections between the documentary medium and the flow in which it is situated are weakened or even lost. Brian O'Doherty writes that "the ideal gallery subtracts from the artwork all cues that interfere with the fact that it is 'art'. The work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself. This gives the space a presence possessed by other spaces where conventions are preserved through the repetition of a closed

system of values." (1986, p. 14) Viewed in a partitioned-off space in a gallery, these matters of reception partially play into the textual matter of *Vertigo Sea* and *The Airport.*

Considering *Handsworth Songs* as television produces the opposite effects of O'Doherty's postulation. That Eisensteinian montage colliding with documentary real produces radical effects that expose the post-colonial debates operating behind the construction is a considerable matter. When considered as part of the flow of a wider terrain of commercial television wherein all cues actively interfere with the fact that what is being seen is art, the work gains a rare potency in spite of the discourses that potentially limit it. The positioning of *Vertigo Sea* and *The Airport* in a gallery space signifies the valency of the work as art prior to engagement whilst negating the existence of vulgar commercial dimensions that it exists in[46] or its juxtaposition with other objects that are not 'art'. The trajectory of avant-garde film in the 20th and 21st century has lifted the medium from salons and informal underground clubs and into the academy and the institutional. Documentary began along similar lines outside of its institutional patronage, as a pursuit of the early 20th century revitalised throughout the decades by amateur practitioners and keen individuals and collectives. Documentary practice bifurcates clearly from the avant-garde that it emerges alongside and stratifies: the avant-garde into the rareified realm of the gallery and its associated discourses of the nature of art and embourgeoisment, while the classical documentary enters into the public realms of television, internet, and cinema with associated conversations around democracy and public-centredness.

Documentary, then, perhaps implies a certain condition that surrounds its broadcast. Additionally there is the implication that the condition that surrounds the broadcast should, to some extent, deny documentary as an aesthetic experience. Such a suggestion may read as paradoxical, though considering that the majority of documentary footage and factual practice constitutes a

46 You may buy your own authorised copy of *Auto Da Fé* (2016) and *Tropikos* (2017), also viewed for the research in this chapter, online.

significant part of televisual output in a manner that is not, as John Corner writes, concerned "with promoting an appreciative sense of its creative crafting in the audience" (2003, p. 93) is, I argue, part of the power of documentary and its ability to arouse strong responses based around expectations. A thought experiment in which *Vertigo Sea* and *The Airport* were, allowing for the technical aspect of the screen triptych to be overcome, inserted into mainstream televisual flows may yield interesting responses and reveal aspects of the real which the art-first realm of the gallery space may obscure. Nonetheless, in its foregrounding of aesthetics at expense of the real and housing these findings in a church of aesthetics, even when ostensibly tackling the exact same material as the other filmmakers identified in this thesis, documentary begins recede into the background.

CONCLUSION

Throughout the writing of *Crisis response team* I have managed to survey the diverse stylistic range in the documentary work of the decade plus since the financial crash occurred. In doing so, I have mapped and loosely categorised a range of texts based on their aesthetic approaches in order construct an argument that says that the history and intellectual precepts of each approximate mode lends technical aspects, visual devices, and narrative formulation to contemporary documentary makers. More importantly than this, I argue that inserting into this lineage allows the documentary of crash and recession to speak to deeper political and emotional truths embedded in their coverage.

Re-energising these debates at this time serves documentary thought by interrogating the notion that aesthetics takes away from truth or suggests that truth is even knowable. If documentary is to produce successful counter-narrative against the hegemonic power centres that both contrived to create the financial crash and justified political measures which, for many, deepened the suffering of people, then an analysis of its toolkit at this time is appropriate. Each of the modes that I identified in each chapter had received significant amounts of criticism that neutered their potential – realism and ethnography as 'mere' observation, polemical as partisan entertainment, the poetic as ruin porn, and the avant-garde as indulgent and bourgeois play. I have argued that utilisation of most of these modes still signifies and retains power to expose and reveal, particularly those modes whose method is foregrounded.

My project develops themes that have begun to emerge in analysis of post-crash art and, for the first time, comprises a long-form consideration of the documentaries of recession. TJ Demos writes "to build on the politics of aesthetics developed in recent years, we clearly need to foster further innovative approaches to artistic theory and practice, and to carry on resisting the simplistic

distinctions between the artistic and the political" (2013, p. 247) The direction toward new media flows online, that often reject historical notions of rigour and aesthetic purity for a syncretic and hybrid method, suggests that a return to aesthetic forms dominated by practitioners of a single political mind is impossible even if it were possible. Does this mean all that we see in these flows is indeterminate and we are destined to wander a hall of mirrors unable to find the truth, or is it more likely that truth is still embedded in ways that require newer and deeper forms of understanding? Demos' viewpoint is correct precisely because of the ways the artistic and political become enmeshed and the neo-liberal ability to incorporate and neutralise aesthetically-pleasing modes of resistance.

Where I find a point of difference with Demos is his closing point that suggests that "such a political and aesthetic imperative invites writers, critics, and art historians to move beyond the familiar canons and genealogies of artistic formations and to confront a newly interconnected, global set of practices, discourses, and political concerns." (p. 249) Fostering new approaches that accounts for the liminality in theory that overlooks the global south or the migrant is well-meaning and gives intellectual weight toward the new experiences in global capital. My research, however, has not uncovered a truly global practice or mode of thought when it comes to the approaches of any aesthetic mode in documentary of the financial crash. Broadly-speaking, the foundational theories of realism still influence the art practice of realism over 160 years on from *The Gleaners* (1857) and the distortions of Jean Rouch still provoke debates in ethnographic cinema, while the poetic and polemical documentaries arise in a particular context of Western decline. Here, I have argued, these precepts still have currency. Reviving them reminds us of both the spirit that animated the birth of documentary movements and the under-appreciated and under-theorised strategies in their appearances so that they may be contextualised in the contemporary situation.

Each chapter articulates the historical position of each mode before analysing a key text or texts that fits most squarely within it. The first chapter recalled the evolution of the realist artistic mode from its outset in the 19th century in order to develop the context of an artistic gaze that, whilst socially-concerned, looks at the newly-formed working class from a bourgeois position. A notional aesthetics of realism became solidified, along with theoretical notions such as the necessity of bringing together spatial and temporal geography underlined by André Bazin, which fed into the Direct Cinema and cinema veritewave of the late 1950s and early 1960s. From here I, engaging with Jeanne Hall's work, examine the ways in which this observational style bore more than a passing resemblance to narrative conventions and image rhetoric established in fictive modes established prior to Direct Cinema in order to undermine readings of such documentaries as pure observation.

This foundation, I argued, was crucial to understand, as it is the responsive and realist wave of documentary practice (rather than, say avant-garde documentary) which lays the foundation for the insertion of documentary style into contemporary media flows. From here I outlined the ways that realism blurred into a hybrid television style known as reality, fusing genre television with observational style broadly for the purposes of entertainment. These contexts combine in an analysis of the realism/reality hybrid documentary *The Queen of Versailles* (2012), in which I unpack several narrative and representational strategies that suggests that realist documentary and reality television operates with a much more complex storytelling and image-rhetoric than imagined by many of their critics. *The Queen of Versailles*, I uncover, is not merely an observational documentary about a rich family at the epicentre of the financial crisis, but a wider parable that returns to images of revolutionary France to talk about the contemporary moment.

Chapter two tackled the political, or polemical, documentary of financial crash. Much of the discussion in the chapter relates to Michael Moore and his specific formulation of documentary. I

argued that Moore's work is, fundamentally, postmodern in the Lyotardian sense. Moore's work plays with expectations: of the expert tradition and the personality-led documentary, the aesthetic expectation of rigour, and the relationship between claim and truth are subject to scrutiny in Moore's works.

Within the chapter on political documentary I consider the political conditions in the era in which the work is made. I contend that *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2012) and a range of previous texts by Moore and others are emblematic of the Culture Wars, a conceptual map for looking at partitions in American and western society in the latter half of the 20th century and beyond. In the Culture Wars, texts take one of two sides in a binaristic discourse, and truth is related to the accumulation of orthodoxies rather than objective or emotional realities. The chapter concludes by examining work constructed in a very similar style to Moore in differing national and political contexts, finding that though the same essential political constructs remain, they are shaded by personalities that reflect the intended audience.

Modern approaches to the ethnographic film, anchored around recent debates put forward by Rane Willerslev and Christian Suhr, underpin the focus on the anti-mimetic documentary in the third chapter. Suhr and Willerslev argue for an ethnographic film that moves away from the mode affected by realism and Direct Cinema, toward a style which approaches and re-approaches cultures in different modes within the same text. It is thought that such a technique will add up to a greater ethnographic whole and reveal the deeper senses of feeling in play in the observed society. This proposition is put to the test in analysis of two ethnographic texts that supplement observation with foregrounded technique. In *A Northern Soul* (2018) the story of people of the same social class as its subject, but a generation removed, acts as a paratext on the central story in a way that reframes it - particularly in the context of austerity.

An investigation into the poetic documentary, focusing on *Detropia* (2012), forms the basis of chapter four. After particular context surrounding Detroit, a city whose legacy of decline stretches prior to the financial crash but is accelerated by it, I set the scene by examining the negative critical reception of *Detropia* against a cadre of documentaries about Detroit from the same time that take a more realist and factual approach. I argue that what appears to critics as "ruin porn" is in fact a subtle utilisation of aesthetics to communicate deeper and more internal realms of truth. The foundation of my argument comes in a section where I contrast the aesthetic of *Detropia* with the city documentary films chiefly of the 1920s and 1930s. This range of texts celebrated the growth of urban space, the architecture, and the new people that were formed in the crucible of modernity and the triumph of capital. *Detropia*, I have argued, inverts these paradigms, showing a ruined and haunted city to critique the end of modernity and the failures of capital. The chapter also considers expressive usage of sound and montage to examine and communicate ideas of a place haunted by the ghost of its former glory, with an additional focus on the sustained visual comparison between contemporary Detroit and Depression-era images of the Midwest.

The final chapter focuses on the avant-garde documentary, initially outlining the early twinning and separation that documentary and the avant-garde would have from the beginning of documentary practice in the 1920s before splitting in the 1930s. Avant-garde strategies in documentary, I argue, have routinely been resurrected since this moment as a critique of realism's elision with hegemonic forms of viewing. Notably, I have observed, these resurrections are often politicised from the perspective of, or on behalf of, marginalised societal groups who believe that the avant-garde contains within it a power that both exposes the limits of realism and acts as a carrier of particular forms of Marxian and post-colonial critique. I applied this conception of avant-garde documentary's history to Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow* (2017), arguing that Ai's utilisation of drone cameras forms part of a critique informed by Marxian arguments in human geography. The aestheticisation that Ai chooses makes more literal these debates about economic flows and trade by

depicting large bodies of people as metaphor for the concepts specific to the field, recalibrating natural borders and boundaries as symbolic aspects of post-crash debates around nation and nationhood.

I considered, in the final part of the fifth chapter, whether the intersection of avant-garde aesthetics and real matter reaches a point of imbalance toward the former in which documentary fades out of view. I examined two pieces of John Akomfrah that deal with the post-crash and migration aspect that emerges in Ai's work. Akomfrah's pieces deal with more opaque strategies in their incorporation of real footage against artificial matter created specifically for the text. Considered alongside the way in which the gallery space in which Akomfrah's work appears orientates one's view toward 'art properties' rather than matters of the real, I conclude that documentary may indeed be reduced to a surface or merely one of many considerations in works such as these.

The research model and method has allowed for an approach to the texts of financial crash that is both sensible in terms of accounting for the range of works and sensitive to the the individual strategies in each text which may appear to reject easy categorisation. Even accounting for porous boundaries there remained a handful of texts which refused to easily conform to the heuristic device, or at the very least refused to sit still very long in any one category. *Homme Less* (2015) by Thomas Wirthensohn is a curious mix of realism, reality, ethnography, and poetics, while the sheer accumulation of Michael Chanan's *Money Puzzles* (2016) ensured that it could have rested in any chapter as a nonetheless awkward fit. These films captured the exercised mood of global financial issues in radically different ways, suggesting that this research could have also focused on syncretic texts that reject the postmodern surfaces of Michael Moore, perhaps within this same chapter.

Additionally there were texts that would have perfectly adhered to the model provided

which suggested strongly a particular undercurrent that was related to a newly-felt anxiety around money and related issues, such as Chad Freidrichs' *The Pruitt-Igoe Myth* (2011) and Frederick Wiseman's *At Berkeley* (2013). The former reframed the 1950s failure of a housing project with a connective logic that circles back to similar Rustbelt debates that emerge in *Detropia*, with the two works leaning intently on images of ruination. By a similar token Wiseman's film is an epic of Direct Cinema-influenced realism, shorn of all contact with reality TV's later transformation of the genre. However, in both works the influence of the financial crash and recession was overly atmospheric and not specific or overt enough.

It would be remiss to suggest that the approach I took was without its limits. Within a corpus of documentary not limited by its relationship to one anchoring point in history, it is possible that the categories suggested by each chapter encounter sufficient difference between texts that further refinement is necessary. Though I have accounted for generic transformations that cover the distance, for instance between Direct Cinema and reality TV in the first, they are, ultimately, two different beasts with a shared heritage. Greater refinement is therefore warranted within each chapter. A further limitation that potentially arises from this research is the way that I have not overly considered authorial intention at expense of aesthetic consideration of the final text. While Sean McAllister and Michael Moore are fully aware of the broad categorisation of their work, the outputs that emerge from their next are clearly interpreted in vastly differing ways depending on the context in which they are understood.

One ancillary approach that may be warranted, I suggest, is to apply an approach which fuses the focused regional corpus-gathering of Eleftheria Lekakis with the kind of close reading and historical sensibility I have employed throughout this research. Such a route potentially opens up finer-grained readings of individual texts to specific stylistic influences that are more culturally pertinent to each text. Additionally, and with a particular sensitivity to the asymmetric ways that the

financial crash may play out in non-Western nations, this approach would open up avenues for decolonised readings that re-contextualise the financial crash. In this, approaches that expand the canon in the manner suggest by Demos feels entirely appropriate, and I find full accord with his research.

The ramifications for this thesis are modest, but widely applicable. In arguing overlap between the metaphysical categories of truth and aesthetics, or at least a heightening of potentiality in each when intersecting in this visual medium, the door becomes open to examine similar corpuses of work according to the same method. If Paul Crosthwaite is correct in his speculation that financial trauma is indeed a trauma, then applying the same lens to documentary works which capture more broadly understood and accepted traumas such as war, natural disaster, and genocide may bear interesting forms of analysis. Demos' *The Migrant Image* attempts to perform a similar task for experimental documentaries of migrancy and war-adjacent tension, uncovering an emancipatory strand that allows structures of feeling and politics felt by marginalised groups to uncover aesthetic strategies that evoke the particularity of their experience.

In the future the concerns of specific parameters of this research may die down as the effects of the 2007/8 financial crash become more distended and less distinct in character. However, the political character which shaped the crash and its responses, particularly in the west, is not just still present but has arguably sharpened. The ancillary effects that characterise chapters three to five, with the effects of modern kinds of work, the devastation of cities and the landscape, and the ongoing problems with migration and resettlement are clearly destined to continue, with documentary ready to respond. The device and methodology employed by this research could clearly continue to track documentaries that follow shaping global narratives down whichever path they lead, though they would need re-contextualising to fit a responsive narrative.

I set out to deliver a piece of research that critiqued the intersection of truth and aesthetics in documentaries of the financial crash a way that, ultimately, upheld the rationale of aesthetic and constructive strategy in such films. Debates that suggest that truth and aesthetics are separate categories are overly limiting, and choosing texts of this period reflected both a wide swathe of the most recent documentary practice as well as an accessible sense of what is real and not. There is scope for finer-grained research in this vein, and there is sufficient room for this research to continue into both previous historical depictions of traumatic public events, and the ones yet to come.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

9/11 (2002) Directed by Jules Naudet, Gédéon Naudet, and James Hanlon [Film]. New York, NY and Los Angeles, CA: CBS.

9/11: Press for Truth (2006) Directed by Ray Nowosielski [Film]. Los Angeles, CA: Banded Artists Productions.

Ali, S., Dadush, U. and Falcao, L. (2009) 'Financial Transmission Of The Crisis: What's The Lesson?' *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*. June 17. Available at: http://carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23284&prog=zgp&proj=zie (Accessed: 8th July 2019).

Althusser, L. (2001) 'From Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in. in Leitch, V., Cain, W., Finke, L., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T. and Williams, J., (eds.) *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. 1st ed. New York, NY, and London: Norton. pp. 1483-1508.

American Made Movie (2013) Directed by Nathaniel Thomas McGill and Vincent Vittorio [Film]. Lawrenceville, GA: Life Is My Movie Films.

An Inconvenient Truth (2006) Directed by Davis Guggenheim [Film]. Los Angeles, CA: Paramount Classics.

A Northern Soul (2018) Directed by Sean McAllister [Film]. London: Sharp House.

Aristotle (2001) 'From Rhetoric', in Leitch, V., Cain, W., Finke, L., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T. and Williams, J., (eds.) *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. 1st ed. New York, NY, and London: Norton, pp. 117-121.

Arnold, M. (1962) 'Democracy', in Collini, S. (ed.) *Culture and Anarchy and other writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 1-25.

Artesanos (2011) Directed by Albert Albacete [Film]. Barcelona: ECIB.

Arthur, P. (2016) 'Jargons of authenticity (three American moments)', in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 889-909.

Auto Da Fé (2016) Directed by John Akomfrah [Film] UK: Smoking Dogs Films.

Baggini, J. (2018) 'Jean-François Lyotard's work was the best of postmodernism'. *Prospect*. April 19. Available at: https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/philosophy/jean-francois-lyotards-work-was-the-best-of-postmodernism (accessed 13th June 2019)

Balcerowicz, L., Rzonca, A., Kalina, L., and Łaszek, A. (2013) Economic Growth in the European Union. Lisbon: Lisbon Council. Available at: https://lisboncouncil.net/growth/documents/LISBON_COUNCIL_Economic_Growth_in_the_EU%20(1).pdf (Accessed 17th July 2019).

Banks, M. (1992) ‘Which films are the ethnographic films?’, in Crawford, P.I. and Turton, D. (eds.) *Film As Ethnography*, Manchester: Manchester University Press. pp. 116–129.

Barford, M. and Gray, A. (2018) ‘The depths of the cuts: the uneven geography of local government austerity’, *British Politics and Policy at LSE*. October 16. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-uneven-geography-of-austerity/ (accessed 29th June 2019).

Barnes, H. (2014) ‘Michael Moore tells documentary-makers to be more entertaining’, *The Guardian*, September 9. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/sep/09/michael-moore-documentary-makers-entertaining-toronto-film-festival (accessed 13th June 2019).

Barnouw, E. (1993) *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 2nd rev. ed., New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barsam, R. (1992) *Non-Fiction Film: A Critical History Revised and Expanded,* Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press.

Baseball (1994) Directed by Ken Burns [Film] Arlington, VA: PBS.

Baudrillard, J. (2000) *The Vital Illusion*, New York, NY and Chichester: Columbia University Press.

Bazin, A. (1950) *What is Cinema? Vol. 1.* Translated by H. Gray. Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press.

BBC News (2000) 'Big Brother starts watching'. *BBC News*. July 14. Available at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/833942.stm [Accessed 29th May 2019].

Bell, C. (2012), 'Interview: Rachel Grady & Heidi Ewing Talk Detroit And Their Film ‘Detropia’, *Indiewire*, September 7th. Available at: http://www.indiewire.com/2012/09/interview-rachel-grady-heidi-ewing-talk-detroit-and-their-film-detropia-106338/ (Accessed 2nd November 2016)

Benjamin, W. (1940) ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’. Simon Fraser University. Available at: https://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html [Accessed 8th July 2020].

Benjamin, W. (2001) 'Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in Leitch, V., Cain, W., Finke, L., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T. and Williams, J. (eds) *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. 1st ed. New York, NY, and London: Norton, pp. 1166-1186.

Bennett, W. L., and Livingston, S. (2018) 'The disinformation order: Disruptive communication and the decline of democratic institutions', *European Journal of Communication*, 33(2), pp. 122–139.

Berger, R. (1985) *Versailles: The Chateau of Louis XIV*, University Park, PA and London: Penn State University Press.

Berlin: Symphony of a Great City (1927) Directed by Walter Ruttmann [Film]. Berlin, Germany and Paris, France: Deutsche Vereins-Film and Les Productions Fox Europa.

Berthe, J. (2018) ‘Beyond the entomological critique: re-thinking Rouch and African cinema’, *Studies in French Cinema*, 18(3), pp. 267-277.

Bignell, J. (2000) *Postmodern Media Cultures*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

Bluem, A. W. (1965) *Documentary in American Television: Form, Function, Method*. New York, NY: Hastings.

Boorstin, D (1992), *The Image: A Guide To Pseudo-Events in America*, New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Booth, R. (2019) 'UN report compares Tory welfare policies to creation of workhouses', *The Guardian*, 22nd May. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/22/un-report-compares-tory-welfare-reforms-to-creation-of-workhouses (accessed 27th September 2019).

Bowman, K. (2008) 'America and the War on Terror', *American Enterprise Institute*. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20140714221741/http://www.aei.org/paper/politics-and-public-opinion/polls/america-and-the-war-on-terror-paper/ (accessed 9th June 2019).

Box Office Mojo (2019) 'Documentary', *Box Office Mojo*. Available at https://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=documentary.htm (accessed 8th Jun 2019).

Brecht, B. (1992) 'Der Dreigroschenprozess. Ein soziologisches Experiment', in Hecht, W., Knopf, J., Mittenzwei, W. and Müller K-D (eds.) *Werke. Grosse Kom-mentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, Schriften I.*' Berlin and Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp. pp. 448-512.

Bruzzi, S. (2015) 'Docusoap', in Creeber, G. (ed.) *The Television Genre Book*, 3rd ed. London: Palgrave. pp. 163-165.

Burch, N. (1979) *To the Distant Observer: Form and Meaning in Japanese Cinema*, Berkeley, CA and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

Burden, M. and Wayland, M (2015) 'GM To Invest $877M In Flint Truck Plant'. *Detroit News* August 4. Available at http://www.detroitnews.com/story/business/autos/general-motors/2015/08/04/gm-invest-flint-truck-plant/31095645/ (Accessed 15th October 2016)

Butler, J. (2010) 'Performative Agency', Journal of Cultural Economy, 3:2, pp. 147-161

Calomiris, C. and Haber, S. (2014) *Fragile by Design: The Political Origins of Banking Crises and Scarce Credit*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Capturing The Friedmans (2003) Directed by Andrew Jarecki [Film] New York, NY: Magnolia Pictures

Carey, J. (1969) 'The Communications Revolution and the Professional Communicator', *Sociological Review Monographs*, volume 13, Jan. 1969. pp. 23-38.

Carey, N. (2009) 'U.S. auto workers seek to retrain for scarce new jobs'. *Reuters*, August 3. Available at https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-unemployment-retraining/u-s-auto-workers-seek-to-retrain-for-scarce-new-jobs-idUSTRE5720HY20090803 (Accessed 19th January 2018)

Carr, H.C. (2016) 'Reviews: John Akomfrah. Arnolfini, Bristol & Lisson Gallery, London, UK'. *Frieze*, 18th March. Available at: https://frieze.com/article/john-akomfrah (accessed 23rd July 2019).

Catfish (2010) Directed by Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman [Film]. New York, NY: Supermarché and Hit The Ground Running.

Chambers, I. (1997) ‘Maps, Movies, Musics and Memory’, in Clarke, D.B. (ed.) *The Cinematic City*, London: Routledge, pp. 230-240.

Chanan, M. (2007) *The Politics of Documentary,* London: BFI.

Children Underground (2001) Directed by Edet Belzberg [Film]. New York, NY: Belzberg Films.

Christie, L. (2009) 'Foreclosures up a record 81% in 2008', *CNN*. Available at: https://money.cnn.com/2009/01/15/real_estate/millions_in_foreclosure/ (accessed on 17th Jun 2019).

Chronique d’un été (1961) Directed by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin [Film]. Paris: Anatole Dauman.

Civil War (1990) Directed by Ken Burns [Film]. Arlington, VA: PBS.

Clark, A. (2016) '“We Will Be Fine. We Will Absolutely Be Fine”: A Conversation with Artist and Filmmaker John Akomfrah'. *Filmmaker*. July 18th. Available at: https://filmmakermagazine.com/99122-we-will-be-fine-we-will-absolutely-be-fine-a-conversation-with-artist-filmmaker-john-akomfrah/#.XTAy4_x7luQ (accessed 18th July 2019).

Constant (1949) 'Our Own Desires Build The Revolution', *Cobra*, no. 4, Amsterdam. p. 3.

Corley, C. (2005) 'Corley on Goodman, 'Marie Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen', *H-Women*. Available at https://networks.h-net.org/node/24029/reviews/29998/corley-goodman-marie-antoinette-writings-body-queen (accessed on 3rd June 2019).

Corner, J. (1996) *The Art of Record: A Critical Introduction to Documentary*, Manchester University Press, Manchester.

Corner, J. (2003) 'Television, Documentary and the category of the aesthetic', *Screen*, Spring 2003 pp. 92-100.

Corn, W. (1983) 'The Birth of a National Icon: Grant Wood's "American Gothic"', *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Vol. 10, pp. 252-275.

Cousins, M. and Macdonald, K. (2006) *Imagining Reality: The Faber Book of Documentary*, London: Faber and Faber.

Creeber, G. (2015) *The Television Genre Book*, 3rd ed. London: Palgrave.

Crosthwaite, P. (2012), 'Is Financial Crisis a trauma?', *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 82, pp. 34-67.

Curtis, D. (1978) *Experimental Cinema*, New York, NY: Dell Pub.

Davey, M. and Williams Walsh, M (2013). 'Billions In Debt, Detroit Tumbles Into Insolvency'. *The New York Times*, July 18. Available at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/19/us/detroit-files-for-bankruptcy.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed 15th October 2016).

Davies, R. (2007) 'Explicit commentaries and implicit designs: The evolving role of post-production sound in mainstream documentary', *Journal of Media Practice*, 8(2), pp. 161-181.

Death By China (2010) Directed by Peter Navarro [Film]. Los Angeles, CA: Area 23a.

Deery, J. (2015) *Reality TV*, Malden, MA, and Cambridge: Polity.

Deforce (2010) Directed by Daniel Falconer [Film]. Detroit, MI: Detroit Documentary Company.

de la Fuente, M (2017). 'Documenting the indignation: Responses to the 2008 financial crisis in contemporary Spanish cinema', *Romance Quarterly*, 64:4, pp. 185-195.

Demos, TJ. (2013) *The Migrant Image: The Art and Politics of Documentary during Global Crisis*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.

Derrida, J. Domingo, W., Hulbert, J., and Ron, M. (1975) 'Graphesis: Perspectives in Literature and Philosophy', Yale French Studies, No. 52, pp. 31-113.

Detropia (2012) Directed by Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady [Film]. Brighton: Moviolla.

Diawara, M. (2010) *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics*. Munich: Prestel.

Dondero, G. (1949a) 'Communists Maneuver to Control Art in the United States', 25th March, *US Congress. The Congressional Record for 1949*. pp. 3233-3235.

Dondero, G. (1949b) 'Modern Art Shackled to Communism', 16th August, *US Congress. The Congressional Record for 1949*. pp. 11584-11587.

Douglas, AJ. (2010) 'Capitalism: A Love Story - review', *The Journal of American History*, 97(1), pp. 281-282.

Dovey, J. (1995) 'Camcorder Cults', *Metro*, Volume 104, pp. 26-30.

Duménil, G. and Lévy, D. (2011) *The Crisis of Neoliberalism*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA and London.

Eagleton, T. (1996) *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Malden, MA, Oxford, Melbourne, and Berlin: Blackwell Publishing.

Eco, U. (1972) 'Towards a semiotic inquiry into the television message', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. volume 6, C.C.C.S, University of Birmingham.

Elder, B. (2016) 'On The Candid Eye Movement', in Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 492-500.

El Mundo, (2003) '...contra la guerra', *El Mundo*, February 23. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20041224094409/http://www.elmundo.es/quiosco/pdf/febrero2003/16portada.pdf (accessed 9th June 2019).

Elsaesser, T. (2014) *German cinema - terror and trauma: cultural memory since 1945*, New York, NY and London: Routledge.

Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room (2005) Directed by Alex Gibney [Film] New York, NY: Magnolia Pictures.

Ètudes sur Paris (1928) Directed by André Sauvage [Film]. Paris, France: André Sauvage.

Evans, G. (1984) *John Grierson and the National Film Board: The Politics of Wartime Propaganda 1939-1945*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Fairservice, D. (2001) *Film Editing: History, Theory and Practice*, Manchester and New York, NY: Manchester University Press.

Feaster, F. (2009) 'Michael Moore overplays his hand in Capitalism: A Love Story', *Charleston City Paper.* September 30. Available at: https://www.charlestoncitypaper.com/charleston/michael-moore-overplays-his-hand-in-capitalism-a-love-story/Content?oid=1400538 (accessed 19th June 2019)

Felman, S. and Laub, D. (1992) *Testimony: Crises Of Witnessing In Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York, NY and London: Routledge.

Flanagan, M. (2012) *'Slow Cinema': Temporality and Style in Contemporary Art and Experimental Film*. Ph.D thesis. University of Exeter. Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/12826724.pdf (accessed 3rd July 2019).

Footnote to Fact (1932) Directed by Lewis Jacobs [Film] New York, NY: Anthology Film Archives.

Foster, H. (2004) 'An Archival Impulse', *OCTOBER*, Fall 2004, pp. 3–22.

Fulani, I. (2017) 'Celluloid Documents: migrant women in Black Audio Film Collective's Handsworth Songs and Twilight City, and Sankofa Film and Video Collective's Dreaming Rivers'. *Atlantic Studies*, 15(1), pp. 1-15.

Fukuyama, F. (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, NY: Free Press.

Funeral Parade of Roses (1969) Directed by Toshio Matsumoto [Film]. Tokyo: Art Theatre Guild.

Fusco, C. (2016) 'A Black Avant-Garde?: Notes on the Black Audio Film Collective and Sankofa', in Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. pp. 698-707.

Gartenberg, J. (2014) 'NY, NY: A Century of City Symphony Films', *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 55(2), pp. 248-276.

Geiger, J. (2011). *American Documentary Film: Projecting the Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Gifford, T. (1999), *Pastoral*, London and New York, NY: Routledge.

Gimme Shelter (1970) Directed by Albert Maysles, David Maysles, and Charlotte Zwerin. [Film] Los Angeles, CA: 20th Century Fox.

Glessing, J. (2017) 'Review: John Akomfrah: Vertigo Sea', *Afterimage*, 44(4), pp. 38-39.

Glieberman, O. (2018) ‘How Michael Moore Lost His Audience’, *Variety*. September 23. Available at: https://variety.com/2018/film/columns/how-michael-moore-lost-his-audience-fahrenheit-11-9-1202953813/ (accessed 13th June 2019).

Godmillow, J. and Shapiro, A-L.. (1997) 'How Real is the Reality in Documentary Film?', *History and Theory,* 36(4), pp. 80-101.

Gold, J.R. and Ward, S.V. (1997) ‘Of Plans and Planners: Documentary Film and the Challenge of the Urban Future, 1935-52’, in Clarke, D.B. (ed.) *The Cinematic City*, London: Routledge, pp. 59-82.

Goldberg, M. (2019), 'Trump Loves A Culture War', *The New York Times*, February 6. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/opinion/state-of-the-union-abortion-trump.html (Accessed 8th June 2019).

Goodman, D. (2003) *Marie-Antoinette: Writings on the Body of a Queen*, New York: Routledge.

Gorra, M. (2006) *The Bells in Their Silence: Travels Through Germany*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971) *Selections from the prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Grant, BK and Sloniowski, J. (2014) *Documenting The Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.

Greene, R., Cushman, S., Cavanagh, C., Ramazani, J., Rouzer, P., Feinsod, H., Marno, D. and Slessarev, A. (2012). *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. 4th ed. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Greenfield, L. (2013) [Liner notes]. in *The Queen of Versailles* [DVD]. London: Dogwoof.

Grierson, J. (2016a) ‘Flaherty’s poetic Moana’ in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 86-87.

Grierson, J. (2016b) ‘The Documentary Producer’ in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 215-216

Hall, James (1979) *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Hall, Jeanne (2016) 'Realism as a style in Cinema Verite: A critical analysis of *Primary*' in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 503-525.

Hansen, C. (2012) 'The Mind Behind The Mockumentary: The Proper Care and Feeding of An American Messiah', in Miller, C. (ed.) *Too Bold for the Box Office: The Mockumentary from Big Screen to Small.* Lanham, Toronto, and Plymouth: Scarecrow Press. pp. 161-173.

Harlan County, USA (1976) Directed by Barbara Koppel [Film] New York, NY: Cinema 5.

Harper, P. B. (2016), 'Marlon Riggs: The Subjective Position of Documentary Video'. in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 829-835.

Harris, P. (2009), 'How Detroit, the Motor City, turned into a ghost town', *The Observer,* 1 November. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/01/detroit-michigan-economy-recession-unemployment (accessed 20th October 2016).

Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (2003) 'Introduction to Part IV: Freedom, Responsibility, and Power', in Harrison, C. and Wood, P. (eds.) *Art In Theory 1990-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas,* Malden, MA, Oxford, Melbourne, and Berlin: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 357-361.

Harvey, A. (2016), 'Funding Arts and Culture in a time of austerity', *Arts Council/New Local Government Network,* 13 April. Available at https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/sites/default/files/download-file/Funding%20Arts%20and%20Culture%20in%20a%20time%20of%20Austerity%20(Adrian%20Harvey).pdf (accessed 2nd July 2019).

Harvey, D. (1989), *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change.* Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Harvey, D. (2011) 'Roepke Lecture in Economic Geography—Crises, Geographic Disruptions and the Uneven Development of Political Responses', *Economic Geography*, 87 (1) (January 2011), pp. 1-22.

Heider, KG. (2006) *Ethnographic Film* (revised edition), Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Hempstead, K, and Phillips, J. (2015) 'Rising Suicide Among Adults Aged 40–64 Years', *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 48(5). pp. 491–500.

Herman, J. (1994) *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, London: Harper Collins.

Hoberman, J (1983) 'Ain't Nothing Like The Real Thing', *American Film*, 8(4). pp. 59.

Hobsbawm, EJ (1985) *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848,* London: Abacus.

Holland, M, (2009) 'A conversation with Austin Chu, co-director of The Recess Ends', *World Socialist Web Site*. 9 December. Available at https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2009/12/rece-d09.html (accessed on 21st May 2019).

Hoogterp, E. (2011) 'Great Recession leaves Michigan poorer, Census numbers show.' *M Live*. October 23. Available at: http://www.mlive.com/news/index.ssf/2011/10/great_recession_leaves_michiga.html (accessed 15th October 2016).

Hosenball, M. (2018) 'Ex-Trump aide Bannon promoted 'culture war' - Cambridge Analytica whistleblower', *Reuters*. May 16. Available at: https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-usa-trump-russia-cambridge-analytica/ex-trump-aide-bannon-promoted-culture-war-cambridge-analytica-whistleblower-idUKKCN1IH370 (accessed 19th June 2019).

Housing Problems (1935) Directed by Edgar Anstey and Arthur Elton [Film]. London: British Commercial Gas Association.

Hunter, JD. (1991) *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Husserl, E. (1964) *The Idea of Phenomenology*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Husserl, E. (2001) *Logical Investigations.* Ed. Dermot Moran. 2nd ed. 2 vols. London: Routledge.

Irwin, N. (2013) *The Alchemists: Three Central Bankers and a World on Fire*, New York, NY and London: Penguin.

Iser, W. (1978) *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ivens, J. (2016) 'Reflections on the Avant-Garde Documentary', in Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press. pp. 196-198.

Jacobson, H. (1989) 'Michael and Me', *Film Comment*, 25 (6), pp. 16-26.

James, H. (2009) *The Creation and Destruction of Value: The Globalization Cycle*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA and London.

Jameson, F. (2001) 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' in: Leitch, V., Cain, W., Finke, L., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T. and Williams, J. (eds.). *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. 1st ed. New York, NY, and London: Norton. pp. 1960-1974.

Jauss, H-R. (1982) *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*. Translated by M. Shaw. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Jazz (2001) Directed by Ken Burns [Film] Arlington, VA: PBS.

Kael, P. (1990) 'Melodrama/Cartoon/Mess', *The New Yorker*, 8th January 1990, pp. 90-93.

Kahana, J. (2008) *Intelligence Work: The Politics of American Documentary*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Keats, J. n.d. 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', Poetry Foundation [website], available at: https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44477/ode-on-a-grecian-urn (accessed 2nd October 2019).

Keiner, W. (2008) 'The absent and the cut', *Visual Anthropology*, 21, pp. 393–409.

Kemenov, V. (1947) 'Aspects of Two Cultures', *VOKS Bulletin*, Society for Cultural Relations With Foreign Countries, Moscow. pp. 20-36.

Kellner, D. (1998) 'Globalization and the Postmodern Turn'. In Axtmann, R. (ed.), *Globalization and Europe: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations*. London: Pinters. pp. 23-42.

Kenny, K. (2009) 'The performative surprise': parody, documentary and critique', *Culture and Organization*, 15:2, pp. 221-235.

Kim, S. (2009) 'Documentary 'The Recess Ends' Gets Folks Talking About The Recession', *Hyphen*. October 29. Available at: https://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/2009/10/documentary-recess-ends-gets-folks-talking-about-recession (Accessed 30th May 2019).

King, A. (2016) 'Documenting financial performativity: film aesthetics and financial crisis', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 9:6, pp. 555-569.

Klingender, F. (1943) *Marxism and Modern Art: An Approach to Social Realism*, London. pp. 47-49.

Kneebone, E. and Holmes, N. (2016) 'U.S. concentrated poverty in the wake of the Great Recession', *Brookings*. March 31. Available at: https://www.brookings.edu/research/u-s-concentrated-poverty-in-the-wake-of-the-great-recession/ (accessed 26th October 2016).

Kojève, A. (1980) *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the 'Phenomenology of Spirit'*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press.

Koronaiou, A., Lagos, E., Sakellariou, A., Kymionis, S., and Chiotaki-Poulou, I. (2015) 'Golden Dawn, Austerity and Young People: The Rise of Fascist Extremism Among Young People in Contemporary Greek Society', *The Sociological Review*, 63(2), pp. 231-249.

Kracauer, S. (2016) 'Montage' in Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 142-147.

Kristeva, J. (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press

Krzych, S. (2015) 'The Price of Knowledge: Hysterical Discourse in Anti-Michael Moore Documentaries'. *The Comparatist.* Vol. 39 (Oct 2015), pp. 80-100.

Lawson, A. (2013) 'Foreclosure Stories: Neoliberal Suffering in the Great Recession', *Journal of American Studies.* 47(1) (Feb 2013). pp. 49-68.

Ledbury, M. (2006), 'The Contested Image: Stage, Canvas, and the Origins of the French Revolution', in Robinson, P.R. (ed.) *The Origins of the French Revolution*, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lee, T. (2015) 'The Rust Belt: Once Mighty Cities in Decline', *MSNBC*. Available at: http://www.msnbc.com/interactives/geography-of-poverty/ne.html (accessed 20th October 2016).

Lekakis, E. (2017) 'Documentary, media activism and anti-austerity in Greece: the #greekdocs archive'. *Journal of Alternative and Community Media*, 2 (2017). pp. 28-44.

Le Roy, F. and Vanderbeeken, R. (2016) 'The Documentary Real: Thinking Documentary Aesthetics', *Foundations of Science* 23, pp. 197-205.

Lesage, J. (2016) 'Political Aesthetics of Feminist Documentary Film', in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, p. 668-679.

Leys, R. and Goldman, M. (2010) 'Navigating the Genealogies of Trauma, Guilt, and Affect: An Interview with Ruth Leys', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Volume 79, Number 2, Spring 2010, pp. 656-679.

Lind, W. (2000) 'The Origins of Political Correctness', *Accuracy in Academia.* February 5. Available at https://www.academia.org/the-origins-of-political-correctness/ (accessed 10th June 2019).

Lioult, JL (2006) 'Henri Storck', in Aitken, I (ed.) *Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film* (3 vols.), New York, NY and London: Routledge.

Love In The Time of Crisis (2014), directed by Theopi Skarlatos and Kostas Kallergis [Film]. Athens: Theopi Skarlatos.

Lowitt, R. and Beasley, M. (1981) *One Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on the Great Depression*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Luckhurst, R. (2008) *The Trauma Question*, New York, NY and Abingdon: Routledge.

Lukács, G. (2001) 'Realism in the Balance', in: Leitch, V., Cain, W., Finke, L., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T. and Williams, J. (eds.). *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. 1st ed. New York, NY, and London: Norton, pp. 1033-1058.

Luo, F., Florence, C.S., Quispe-Agnoli, M., Ouyang, L., and Crosby, A. (2011) 'Impact of business cycles on U.S. suicide rates, 1928-2007'. *American Journal of Public Health*. vol. 101, no. 6, pp. 1139–1146.

Lyons, J. (no date), *Documentary, Performance and Risk* (unpublished monograph).

Lyotard, J-F. (1984), *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge.* Translated by G. Bennington and B. Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

MacBride, E. (2013) 'Suicide and the Economy', *The Atlantic*, September 26. Available at: http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2013/09/suicide-and-the-economy/279961/ (accessed 28th October 2016).

MacDougall, D. (2006) *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Mamber, S. (1974) *Cinema Verite in America: Studies in Uncontrolled Documentary*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Manhatta (1921) Directed by Charles Sheeler and Paul Strand [Film]. New York, NY: Kino Video.

Manufacturing Dissent (2007) Directed by Rick Caine and Debbie Melnyk [Film]. Canada: CHUM.

Man With A Movie Camera (1929) Directed by Dziga Vertov [Film]. Kiev, Ukraine (then USSR): VUFKU.

Marquis, E. (2013) 'Conceptualizing documentary performance', *Studies in Documentary Film*, 7:1, pp. 45-46.

Marwencol (2010) Directed by Jeff Malmberg [Film]. New York, NY: Cinema Guild.

Marx, K. (1844) 'Estranged Labour', *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marxists.org [online]. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/preface.htm (accessed 4th June 2019).

Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1845) ‘'Part I: Feuerbach. Opposition of the Materialist and Idealist Outlook' in *The German Ideology*, Marxists.org [online] Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm (accessed 2nd October 2019).

Matsumoto, T. (2012) 'A Theory of Avant-Garde Documentary', translated by M. Raine, *Cinema Journal*, 51(4), pp. 148-154.

Matthews, P. (1999) Divining the real: the leaps of faith in André Bazin’s film criticism', *Sight and Sound*. Available at https://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/andre-bazin-divining-real-film-criticism-overview (accessed 7th Jun 2019).

Matthews, S. (2001) 'Change and Theory in Raymond Williams's Structure of Feeling', *Pretexts: Literary and Cultural Studies*, 10 (2), pp. 179-194.

Maybe I Should Have (2010) Directed by Gunnar Sigurðsson [Film] Reykjavik: Argout.

McAllister, S. (2018) 'Why can children watch a film with violence, but not swearing?', *The Guardian*, August 27. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/aug/27/violence-film-working-class-swearing-documentary-a-northern-soul (accessed 29th June 2019).

McCarthy, A. (2009) 'Stanley Milgram, Allen Funt and Me: Postwar Social Science and the 'First Wave' of Reality TV'. In: Murray, S. and Oullette, L. (ed.), *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, New York, NY, and London: New York University Press, pp. 23-43.

McCreadie, M. (2008) *Documentary Superstars: How Today's Filmmakers Are Reinventing The Form*. New York, NY: Allworth.

McDonald, S. (2008) *Canyon Cinema: the Life and times of an Independent Film Distributor*. Berkeley, CA: University of California.

McElvaine, R.S., (1984) *The Great Depression: America, 1929-41*, New York, NY: Times Books.

McInerney, M., Mellor, J.M., Nicholas, L.H. (2008) 'Recession depression: mental health effects of the 2008 stock market crash'. *Journal of Health Economics*, vol. 32, no. 6, pp. 1090–1104.

McKay, H. (2012), 'Conservative filmmaker behind ‘2016: Obama’s America’ says he ‘learned some lessons’ from Michael Moore, prepares for wide release', *Fox News*. July 30. Available at: https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/conservative-filmmaker-behind-2016-obamas-america-says-he-learned-some-lessons-from-michael-moore-prepares-for-wide-release (accessed 9th June 2019).

McLane, B. (2012) *A New History of Documentary Film*, 2nd ed., New York, NY and London: Continuum.

McLean, B and Nocera, J (2010), *All Devils Are Here: Unmasking the Men Who Bankrupted the World*, New York, NY and London Penguin.

Megacities (1998) Directed by Michael Glawogger [Film]. Zürich, Switzerland and Vienna, Austria: Fama Film AG and Lotus Film.

Meneghetti, M. (2015) ‘Anamnesis in acts: documentary performance as intercession in Italianamerican and American Boy’, *Studies in Documentary Film*, 9(3), pp. 201–219.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (2002), *Phenomenology of Perception*, New York: Routledge.

Miles, R. (1993) *Gothic Writing 1750-1820: A Genealogy*, New York, NY and London: Routledge.

Miliband, R. (1969) *The State in Capitalist Society*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Moon, W-L. (2018), 'Documentary and its realism', *Studies in Documentary Film*, 12(1), pp. 43–55.

Morain, T. (2005) 'The Great Depression Hits Farms and Cities in the 1930s', *Iowa Public Television*. Available at: http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways/mypath.cfm?ounid=ob_000064 (accessed 20th October 2016).

Moscow (1927) Directed by Mikhail Kaufman and Ilya Kopalin [Film]. Moscow, Russia and Leningrad (St. Petersburg), Russia (then USSR): Sovkino.

Motherwell, R. (1944) 'The Modern Painter's World', *Dyn*, 1 (6), November 1944. pp. 8-14

Mundell, I. (2005) 'Joris Ivens: Great Director profile', *Senses of Cinema*. October 2005. Available at http://sensesofcinema.com/2005/great-directors/ivens/ (accessed 10th July 2019).

Murray, L. (2010) ‘Authenticity and realism in documentary sound’, *The Soundtrack*, vol 3, no. 2. pp. 131–137.

Nanook of the North (1922) Directed by Robert Flaherty [Film] New York, NY: Pathé Exchange.

Nichols, B. (1981) *Ideology and the Image: Social Representation in the Cinema and Other Media*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Nichols, B. (2001a) *Introduction to Documentary,* Bloomington and Indiana, IN: University of Indiana Press.

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

Nichols, B. (2013) 'Foreword to New Expanded Edition', in Grant, BK and Sloniowski, J. (eds.) *Documenting the Documentary*: *Documentary Film and Video*, Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, pp. xi-xv.

Nichols, B. (2016) 'The Voice of Documentary', in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press. pp. 639-651.

Night Mail (1936) Directed by Basil Wright and Harry Waitt [Film] London: GPO Film Unit.

Noqoyqatsi (2002) Directed by Godfrey Reggio [Film]. Santa Monica, CA: Miramax and Qatsi Productions.

O'Doherty, B. (1986) *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, San Francisco, CA: Lapis Press.

Olin, M. (1997) 'Lanzmann's Shoah and the Topography of the Holocaust Film'. *Representations* No. 57 (Winter, 1997). pp. 1-23.

Ondaatje, M. (2002) *The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film*, London/New York, NY/Berlin: Bloomsbury.

Oullette, L. and Murray. S, (2009) 'Introduction', in Murray, S., and Oullette, L. (eds.), *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, New York, NY, and London: New York University Press, pp. 1-20.

Paris, B. (2009) 'In 'Capitalism,' Michael Moore proposes his own new deal', *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, October 2. Available at: https://www.post-gazette.com/ae/movie-reviews/2009/10/02/In-Capitalism-Michael-Moore-proposes-his-own-new-deal/stories/200910020150 (accessed 19th Jun 2019).

Picasso, P. (1945) 'Statement to Simone Téry', *Les Lettres Francais*, V (48), Paris.

Pigliucci, M. (2009) 'Michael Moore's Capitalism: A Love Story', *Psychology Today*, October 8. Available at: https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/rationally-speaking/200910/michael-moore-s-capitalism-love-story (accessed 19th June 2019).

Porton, R. (2016) 'Weapon of Mass Instruction: Michael Moore's Fahrenheit 9/11', in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. pp. 961-968.

Poulantzas, N. (1998) *The Poulantzas Reader: Marxism, Law, and the State*. London and New York, NY: Verso.

Rabinowitz, P, (2016), 'Melodrama/Male Drama: The Sentimental Contract of American Labor Films', in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 836-851.

Rachman, G. (2019) 'Donald Trump is updating America's historic ruthlessness', *Financial Times*, May 6. Available at https://www.ft.com/content/c0f92d52-6db3-11e9-a9a5-351eeaef6d84 (accessed 8th June 2019).

Rain (1929) Directed by Joris Ivens [Film]. Amsterdam: Capi-Holland.

Rainey, J. (2012) 'Breitbart.com sets sights on ruling the conservative conversation', *LA Times*, Aug 1. Available at: http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-xpm-2012-aug-1-la-et-breitbart-20120801-story.html [accessed 19th Jun 2019].

Ramos-Martinez, Manuel (2015) 'The Oxidation of the Documentary: The Politics of Rust in Wang Bing's Tie Xi Qu: West of the Tracks', *Third Text*, 29:1-2, pp. 1-13.

Rao, R. (2013) 'Listening to the avant-garde'. *Ethics & Global Politics* 6 (2). pp. 101-107.

Renan, S. (1967) *An Introduction to the American Underground Film*. New York, NY: Dutton.

Renov, M. (1986) 'Rethinking Documentary: Toward a Taxonomy of Mediation' *Wide Angle*, Vol. 8, No. 3 and 4. pp. 71-77.

Requiem For Detroit (2010) Directed by Julien Temple. [Film] London and Helsinki: BBC and Yleisradio.

Resha, D. (2018). ‘Selling Direct Cinema: Robert Drew and the Rhetoric of Reality’. *Film History: An International Journal* 30(3), pp. 32-50.

Revoke the Oscar [website]. Available at http://web.archive.org/web/20040207122439/http://revoketheoscar.com/ (accessed June 7th 2019).

Richter, H. (1986) *The Struggle for the Film: Towards A Socially-Responsible Cinema*, Aldershot: Scolar.

Robbins, D. (2016) 'Deterioration as Documentation: Fashioning the Cinematic Artifact in the Documentary', *Discourse*, 38 (1). pp. 68-81.

Roger and Me (1989) Directed by Michael Moore [Film] Burbank, CA: Warner Bros.

Romei, V. (2018) 'UK wage growth weakest in G7 since financial crisis', *Financial Times*, July 4. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/c4437c9e-7ec4-11e8-bc55-50daf11b720d (accessed 29th June 2019).

Roscoe, J. and Hight, C. (2001) *Faking it: Mock-documentary and the subversion of factuality*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Rosenbaum, J. (2016) ‘Coexistence of Film and Poetry in The House Is Black’, in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 473-477

Rouch, J. with Georgakas, D., Gupta, U. and Janda, J (2016) 'The Politics of Visual Anthropology', in Kahana, J, (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 478-489.

Ruby, J. (2005) ‘The Ethics of Image Making; or "They're Gonna Put Me In The Movies. They're Gonna Make a Big Star Out Of Me..."', in Rosenthal, A. and Corner, J. (eds.) *New Challenges for Documentary* (2nd ed.), Manchester and New York, NY: Manchester University Press. pp. 209-219.

Salmon, J. H. M. (1979), *Society in Crisis: France in the Sixteenth Century* (1979), London and Tonbridge: Methuen.

Samuelson, R. J. (2011) 'Rethinking the Great Depression', *The Wilson Quarterly*, 35(1) (Winter 2011) pp. 16-24.

Sandhu, S. (2012) 'Interview. John Akomfrah: migration and memory'. *The Guardian*, 20th January. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/film/2012/jan/20/john-akomfrah-migration-memory (accessed 12th July 2019).

Saunders, D. (2007) *Direct cinema: observational documentary and the politics of the sixties*. London and New York, NY: Wallflower Press.

Saunders, D. (2010), *Documentary*, London: Routledge.

Schanzenbach, DW., McCall, L., Melzer, B., Figlio, D., and Percheski, C. (2014) 'The Great Recession: Over But Not Gone?', *Northwestern University Institute for Policy Research.* Available at https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/about/news/2014/IPR-research-Great-Recession-unemployment-foreclosures-safety-net-fertility-public-opinion.html#UI (accessed 4th June 2019).

Schlesinger, A. (1970) *The Vital Center.* London and New York, NY. pp. 77-81.

Schulte-Sasse, J. (1984) 'Foreword', in Bürger, P., *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Manchester: Manchester University Press/University of Minnesota Press.

Scott, AO (2012) 'Let Them Eat Crow - Review: ‘The Queen of Versailles’ by Lauren Greenfield', *The New York Times*, July 19. Available at https://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/movies/review-the-queen-of-versailles-by-lauren-greenfield.html (accessed 3rd June 2019).

Sedlmayr, H. (1950), from ‘Darmstadt Colloquy’. in Evers, HG (ed.) *Darmstädter Gespräch: Das Menschenbild in unserer Zeit*, translated by Walker, N. Darmstadt: Neue Darmstädter Verlagsanselt. pp. 127 and 215-216.

Shane, C. (2010), 'The Recess Ends : A Tale of Two Hundred Cities', *Huffington Post*, 18 March (updated 6 December 2017) available at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/emthe-recess-endsem-a-tal_b_424517 (accessed 29th May 2019).

Shapiro, B. (2017) 'These Photographs Document The Global Obsession With Conspicuous Wealth', *Fast Company*. April 7. Available at: https://www.fastcompany.com/3069208/lauren-greenfield-wealth-generation (accessed 2 June 2019).

Shephard, A. (2017) ‘The Insidious Ideology of Ken Burns’ Vietnam War’. *The New Republic*. September 19. Available at: https://newrepublic.com/article/144864/insidious-ideology-ken-burnss-vietnam-war (accessed 8th July 2019).

Sherman's March (1986) Directed by Ross McElwee [Film]. New York, NY: First Run.

Shildrick, T. MacDonald, R., Webster, C. and Garthwaite, K. (2010) 'The low-pay, no-pay cycle: Understanding recurrent poverty', *The Joseph Rowntree Foundation*, November 17. Available at: https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/unemployment-pay-poverty-full.pdf (accessed 2nd July 2019).

Silberg, J. (2017) 'Human Flow: Ai Weiwei’s Documentary Film Records the Refugee Crisis'. *Digital Video*. 25(11), Nov 2017. pp. 16-18.

Smith, L. (2010) 'Gulf between rich and poor cities widens', *The Independent*, January 18. Available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/gulf-between-rich-and-poor-cities-widens-1870912.html (accessed 29th Jun 2019).

Soja, E. (1989) *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*, London: Verso.

Solon, O. (2018) 'Cambridge Analytica whistleblower says Bannon wanted to suppress voters', *The Guardia*n, May 16. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/may/16/steve-bannon-cambridge-analytica-whistleblower-suppress-voters-testimony (accessed 19th June 2019).

Sperb, J. (2016) 'The End of Detropia: Fordist Nostalgia and the Ambivalence of Poetic Ruins in Visions of Detroit', *The Journal of American Culture*, 39 (2), pp. 212-227.

Spivak, G. (2001) 'From A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Can the Subaltern Speak?'. in Leitch, V., Cain, W., Finke, L., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T., and Williams, J. (eds.) *The Norton anthology of theory and criticism*. 1st ed. New York, NY, and London: Norton. pp. 2197-2208.

Stables, K. (2012), 'The Queen of Versailles: review', *Sight and Sound*, September, Volume 22 (9). pp. 108-109.

Stam, R. (2016) 'Hour of the Furnaces and the Two Avant Gardes', in Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 534-544.

Starowicz, C. (2011) 'The American Personality: Fetishisation, Nostalgia, and the Working Class', *Cineaction*, 85, pp. 43-51.

Stavrakakis, Y and Katsambekis, G. (2014) 'Left-wing populism in the European periphery: the case of SYRIZA.' *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 19 Issue 2, pp. 119-142.

Stephenson, D. (2013) 'Celebrating culture in austerity', *Local Government Chronicle*, May 20. Available at: https://www.lgcplus.com/politics/celebrating-culture-in-austerity/5058687.article (accessed 29th Jun 2019).

Suhr, C. and Willerslev, R. (2012) 'Can Film Show the Invisible?: The Work of Montage in Ethnographic Filmmaking', *Current Anthropology*, Volume 53, Number 3, pp. 282-301.

Sztompka, P. (2000) 'Cultural Trauma: The Other Face of Social Change', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 449-466.

Tajima, R. (1990) 'The Perils of Popularity', *The Independent* [journal] 30(7).

talhotblond (2009) Directed by Barbara Schroeder [Film]. Hollywood, CA: Paramount Home Entertainment and Answers Productions.

Taylor, A. (2011) 'Angels, Stones, Hunters: Murder, celebrity, and direct cinema'. *Studies in Documentary Film*, 5(1), pp. 45-60.

Ten Brink, J. and Oppenheimer, J. (2012) *Killer Images: Documentary Film, Memory and the Performance of Violence*. New York, NY: Wallflower.

The Act of Killing (2012) Directed by Joshua Oppenheimer [Film]. Norway, Denmark, and UK: Final Cut For Real/DK.

The Airport (2016) Directed by John Akomfrah [Film] UK: Smoking Dogs Films.

The City (1939) Directed by Ralph Steiner and Willard van Dyke [Film]. Chicago, IL and Washington, DC: American Documentary Films Inc. and American Institute of Planners.

The Guardian, (2009) 'Recession watch: which nations' GDP is still going down?', *The Guardian Data Blog*, August 13. Available at:

https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2009/aug/13/global-economy-globalrecession (accessed 17th June 2019).

The Missing Picture (2013) Directed by Rithy Panh [Film]. Cambodia and France: Catherine Dussart Productions/Arte France/Bophana Production/Région Ile-de-France/Centre National du Cinéma et de L'image Animée/MEDIA Programme of the European Union/Procirep/Angoa-Agicoa.

The Plow That Broke The Plains (1936) Directed by Pare Lorentz [Film] Los Angeles, CA and New York, NY: Image Entertainment and Kino Video.

The Queen of Versailles (2012) Directed by Lauren Greenfield [Film] London: Dogwoof.

Tobin, J. (2019) 'The One Issue in Our Culture War is Trump', *National Review*, January 25. Available at https://www.nationalreview.com/2019/01/culture-war-trump-central-issue-covington-students-government-shutdown/ (accessed 8th June 2019).

Tooze, A. (2018) *Crashed: How a Decade of Financial Crises Changed the World*, New York, NY: Viking.

Trobriand Cricket (1979) Directed by Garry Kildea [Film] Australia: Ronin.

Tsakatika, M. (2016) 'SYRIZA's Electoral Rise in Greece: Protest, Trust and the Art of Political Manipulation', *South European Society and Politics*, 21(4), pp. 519-540.

Tyler, Parker (1971) *Underground Film: A Critical History*, London: Secker and Warburg.

Tyler, Patrick (2003) 'THREATS AND RESPONSES: NEWS ANALYSIS; A New Power In the Streets', *The New York Times*, February 7. Available at https://web.archive.org/web/20131225062538/http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/17/world/threats-and-responses-news-analysis-a-new-power-in-the-streets.html (accessed 9th June 2019).

US Census Bureau (2015), 'QuickFacts: Detroit city, Michigan', Available at: http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/2622000 (accessed 26th October 2016).

van Reenen, J. (2015), 'Austerity in the UK: past, present and future', *British Politics and Policy LSE*, March 11. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/austerity-past-present-and-future/ (accessed 29th June 2019).

Varon, J. (2014) 'It's Good to Be King: The Crisis Documentary and the American Dreamscape: Heist: Who Stole the American Dream?, You've Been Trumped and The Queen of Versailles', *New Labor Forum*, 23(1). pp. 99–112.

Varoufakis, Y. (2019) 'A Greek Canary in a Global Goldmine', *Project Syndicate*, May 17. Available at: https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/greek-bonds-equities-surge-foreshadows-disaster-by-yanis-varoufakis-2019-05?barrier=accesspaylog (accessed 25th September 2019).

Varsava, N. (2011) 'Processions of trauma in Hiroshima mon amour: Towards an ethics of representation', *Studies in French Cinema*, 11(2). pp. 111–123.

Vertigo Sea (2015) Directed by John Akomfrah [Film] UK: Smoking Dogs Films

Vertov, D. (2016) 'We: Variant of a Manifesto'. In: Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 171-173.

Vize, R. (2018) 'Public sector workers have been pummelled by austerity. It's a scandal', *The Guardian*, October 1. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/oct/01/public-sector-workers-pummelled-austerity-scandal (accessed on 29th June 2019).

Waldron, D. (2017) 'The Utopian Promise: John Akomfrah's Poetics of the Archive'. *Open Library of Humanities*, 3(1).

Walker, J. (2008), *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust*, Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press.

Waugh, T. (1984) 'Introduction: Why Documentary Filmmakers Keep Trying to Change the World, or Why People Changing the World Keep Making Documentaries' in Waugh, T. (ed). *Show Us Life: Toward a History and Aesthetics of the Committed Documentary*. Metuchen, NJ and London: Scarecrow Press, pp. xi - xxvii.

Waugh, T. (1985) 'Beyond Verite: Emilio de Antonio and the New Documentary of the Seventies', In: Nichols, B. (ed.), *Movies and Methods vol. 2*. Berkeley, CA, University of California Press). pp. 235-240.

Werner, A. (2014), ''Margin Call': Using Film to Explore Behavioural Aspects of the Financial Crisis', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 122:4, pp 643–654.

Williams, L. (1993) 'Mirrors without Memories: Truth, History, and the New Documentary'. *Film Quarterly*, 46(3). pp. 9-21.

Williams, R. (1985). *Keywords: a vocabulary of culture and society* (revised edition), New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Williams, R. (1989), *Resources of Hope: Culture, Democracy, Socialism*, London: Verso.

Williams, R., and Orram, M. (2014) 'From *Preface to Film*', In: McKenzie, S. (ed.) *Film Manifestos and Global Cinema Cultures: A Critical Anthology.* Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London: California University Press. pp. 855-865.

Winnebago Man (2009) Directed by Ben Steinbauer [Film]. Austin, TX: The Bear Media and Field Guide Media.

WNYC, (2007) 'Musical Language'. *Radiolab* [podcast]. Updated. 13 Dec. 2016. Available at http://www.radiolab.org/story/91512-musical-language/ (accessed 8th July 2019).

Wolfe, C. (2016a) 'Straight Shots and Crooked Plots: Social Documentary and the Avant-Garde in the 1930s', In: Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, pp. 229-246.

Wolfe, C. (2016b) 'Historicizing the 'Voice of God': The Place of Voice-Over Commentary in Classical Documentary', in Kahana, J. (ed.) *The Documentary Reader: History, Theory, Criticism.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press. pp. 264-280.

Yap, LS (2016) 'The Politics of Ai Weiwei', *LSE Undergraduate Political Review*, February 8th [website]. Available at: https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lseupr/2016/02/08/the-politics-of-ai-wei-wei/ (accessed 18th July 2019).