



## DOCTORAL THESIS

### Encounters in Authenticity Documentary Film and the “Authentic” Restaurant

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# **Encounters in Authenticity**

**Documentary Film and the “Authentic” Restaurant**

**by**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

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## Abstract

This PhD thesis is the product of practice-based research in which I used reflexive documentary filmmaking—along with reflection on and theorization of that practice—to engage with issues of authenticity and mediation in documentary. I confront a particular conundrum that has enduring resonance for documentary scholars and filmmakers: How do we reconcile claims and expectations of authenticity in documentary with the fact of mediation? My work puts this fundamental documentary dilemma into a new context and offers a different way of engaging with it—*experientially* and from a unique perspective. I explored this dilemma in practice through the process of making a documentary film, and I sought insight from those who also deal with issues of authenticity and mediation but in a completely different context—in the foreign national restaurant in London. The resulting film *Eating Cultures*—the *practice* component of this thesis—constructs a relationship between the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film based around the metaphors of “eating cultures” and “mediating worlds”. The written thesis then contextualizes and reflects on the practice and develops these themes—considering the documentary dilemma within the broader contemporary context of cultural globalization, making new cross-disciplinary connections with tourism and food studies scholarship, further articulating and theorizing the metaphors of “eating cultures” and “mediating worlds”, and finally suggesting additional cross-disciplinary relevance within cultural cosmopolitanism scholarship.

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## Starter

This project engages with some fundamental and perennial issues debated in documentary scholarship. At its core, this research is concerned with a kind of existential dilemma. It starts with recognition of the expectation that documentary corresponds to the real world in a way that fiction does not despite the fact that documentary can only ever be a mediated reality. My objective is to contribute to the ever-expanding discourse in this area of documentary scholarship by reflecting on issues of authenticity and mediation in documentary from a different perspective—through a constructed metaphorical relationship between the cross-cultural documentary film and the authentic foreign national restaurant. This research is largely based on an empirical and experiential exploration, which involved reflexive documentary filmmaking practice with three London restaurants (Eritrean, Pakistani and Argentinian). In filmed encounters, restaurant staff members and customers shared their experiences of working and eating in the restaurants, and I examined how culinary worlds are reconstructed and adapted for a multicultural London audience and how “authentic” is understood in these contexts. I also reflexively considered the process of the filmmaking—including the effects of the presence of the camera and the work of mediating actuality. The filmmaking portion of the research culminated in the realization of a 94-minute film entitled *Eating Cultures*, and the filmmaking was also the basis for a further investigation in the written thesis.

Filmmaking led to the formulation of two metaphors—“eating cultures” and “mediating worlds”, which are presented in the film and developed further in the



written thesis. I will consider that both restaurant and film may provide a space for sensory-rich exploration of difference and otherness and consider the touristic qualities of these encounters through the metaphor of “eating cultures”. I will also propose that both the restaurant staff and the filmmaker are “in the business of mediating worlds”. Both engage in storytelling and translation across cultural boundaries, yet they are charged with the accurate representation of an aspect of real life. How might the challenges and dilemmas faced in the restaurant and in the filmmaking be similar? Might documentary filmmakers, scholars and viewers take away some new insight by looking at the work of documentary filmmaking in relation to the work of constructing the meal in the restaurant?

The film and the written thesis are equally important—though differently operating—components in the philosophical inquiry; therefore, for the purposes of examination, they should be weighted equally. The written portion is approximately half of the length of a traditional written PhD thesis. The film should allow for a relatively open-ended engagement with the research themes, and then the writing will not only contextualize and reflect on the filmmaking practice but also complement the film by continuing and expanding ideas presented in it. This is explained more fully as part of the methodological framework in Chapter 2.

The primary and central emphasis of this thesis is on the production rather than the reception of the film *Eating Cultures*. It was beyond the scope of this

research project to deal fully and properly with audience reception of the finished film, though this is a potential future direction for the continuation of the research. Reception is, however, relevant here to the extent that it occurred during the filmmaking and influenced the filmmaking. Therefore, I will address some of the ways in which film subjects and collaborators, other research participants and advisors, and doctoral supervisors shaped the final film through their participation and feedback.

This thesis will be presented in three courses. The first course will be the film *Eating Cultures*. The second course (Chapters 1 and 2) will contextualize the research by providing theoretical and methodological frameworks. In Chapter 1, I will explore authenticity and cross-cultural encounter by making connections across disciplines with a particular focus on documentary, tourism and food studies scholarship. This should give insight into some of the theory that informed the filmmaking and served as a rough framework from which to embark on the empirical component of the research. Chapter 2 will then provide a methodological framework for the research project as a whole—situating it within the context of contemporary practice-based research in the arts and humanities in the UK; explaining the relationship between the film component and the written component; providing a rationale for my use of documentary filmmaking practice; and detailing how and why I employed reflexivity. I will also explain how my reflexive strategy was informed by conceptions of reflexivity in both documentary film studies and in visual anthropology as well as by the reflexive approaches of both avant-garde documentary filmmakers and visual

anthropologists. Finally, I will explain the influence of cinéma vérité and direct cinema on my filmmaking strategy and discuss my use of metaphor. The third course will start with an overview of the structure of my filmmaking practice followed by Chapters 3 through 5, which will reflect on the filmmaking process and further theorize the practice. Chapter 3 will deal mostly with the *pre-filming* stages of the practice—beginning by theorizing the particular context within which I found myself making the film and within which film subjects in the restaurants are also working. I will also begin to examine the problematic aspects of “eating cultures”, my identification with restaurant customers as a fellow tourist and “eater”, and my approach to recruiting film subjects and collaborators. Chapter 4 will then discuss the *filming* stages of the practice—reflecting on my filming strategies and describing the nature of my collaboration with film subjects, advisors and crew members and my identification with restaurant staff members as a fellow mediator engaged in cultural translation. Chapter 5 will deal with the *post-filming* stages of the practice and my experience of editing the film. I will discuss the structure of the film and further develop the “eating cultures” and “mediating worlds” metaphors, explaining also how I worked to articulate them in the film. To finish, the last chapter will make the case for this research project’s unique contribution to documentary film scholarship, provide some final thoughts on the contradictions and complexities presented in the film, and suggest a further cross-disciplinary connection and possible future direction for the research with respect to cultural cosmopolitanism. Before continuing with the written thesis, I suggest that the reader now watch the film *Eating Cultures* on the accompanying DVD.

**First course (The film)**

***Eating Cultures* (94 minutes)**

See attached DVD

(Other film information and updates at [www.eatingcultures.org](http://www.eatingcultures.org))

## **Second course (Contextualizing the research)**

## **Chapter 1: Wide angle perspective on authenticity and cross-cultural encounter**

In this chapter, I will reflect on the concept of authenticity with a view to drawing some new connections between documentary, tourism, and food studies scholarship. Though some of the theory discussed here could be applied to documentary generally, it may be most relevant to cross-cultural documentary or documentary that has an ethnographic element—not only or necessarily ethnographic film that has been produced in a social science context, however, but any documentary that engages across cultural boundaries. I take a fluid approach to thinking on authenticity and cross-cultural encounter, pointing to some interesting intersections of these themes in documentary and in the restaurant.

In their work on modern tourism, Adrian Franklin and Mike Crang refer to the “tourism of everyday life”, in which they suggest that we are now surrounded by “flows of global cultural materials” (Franklin and Crang, 2001: 8). Franklin develops this further in his book *Tourism*, conceiving of tourism as “a modern stance to the world, an interest and curiosity in the world beyond our own immediate lives and circles” (Franklin, 2003: 11). This offers an alternative to what he considers to be predominant theories on tourism, which emphasize travel, pleasure and an escape from the everyday. Franklin argues that tourism is not, as early tourism scholars saw it, an attempt to escape from the alienating and inauthentic experience of everyday modern life. Rather, tourism is now a

mindset that exists within our everyday lives; it is an attitude that was and is fostered by modernity; “it is about freedom and democracy, accessibility and choice” (Franklin, 2003: 10). He rejects the disparaged notion of tourism, which he notes is an attitude often held by the social elite “who find that more and more of the world that was once accessible exclusively to them is now available to all, or almost all” (Franklin, 2003: 10). Franklin is writing from the perspective of—and also probably mostly to—people living in the “modernized west” and specifically those living in urban areas. Though his writing sometimes seems to suggest it, he does not actually speak for or about all—not even all of those living in these urban western environments. There are, obviously, still many disenfranchised, without the means, or otherwise excluded from fully participating as “tourists” in their everyday lives. These everyday “flows of global cultural materials” Franklin refers to are not equally available or accessible to all. Yet, we may still consider that increasingly many people today are tourists in a globalizing world, according to Franklin’s description, with increasing exposure to “flows of global cultural materials” in their everyday lives. A certain type of documentary film—which has an ethnographic or cross-cultural element, as described earlier—is part of this global cultural material that appeals to the culturally curious tourist types Franklin has considered. If we take the view that this condition Franklin describes is part of an ongoing democratization of cross-cultural encounter, documentary might play an important role. The process by which documentary apparently democratizes the experience of other cultures resembles the process by which—as Walter Benjamin theorized it—mechanical reproduction democratized art:

Technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room. (Benjamin, 1973 (original publication 1935): 222-223)

Similarly, documentary functions as a kind of transporter as it can seem to bring the viewer closer to other people, cultures, places or situations that may not otherwise be accessible.

Quoting Lionel Trilling's earlier work *Sincerity and Authenticity*, anthropologist Edward Bruner notes that "authenticity becomes an issue only after a doubt arises" (Trilling, 1972, cited in Bruner, 1994: 403). As I will explain in more detail later in this chapter, Bruner was examining authenticity in relation to the reconstruction of historic sites, but the same concept applies generally here. In the contemporary context of cultural globalization, perhaps doubt works to fuel concerns about cultural identity and assimilation, and uncertainty leads to exploration of origins and traditions. The kind of doubt that often arises in relation to documentary is about filmmaker manipulation or film subject performance for the camera and is related to uncertainty about the relationship between the filmed and the real. In an abstract sense, perhaps the underlying worry is that the kinds of democratization described above surely cannot occur without some kind of loss.



In his writing on the mechanical reproduction of art, Benjamin also deals with authenticity—claiming that the authenticity of an artwork is "interfered with" when it is mechanically reproduced and "the quality of its presence is always depreciated" (Benjamin, 1973 (original publication 1935): 223). The "aura" or "essence"—as Benjamin describes it—of the original is necessarily lost in the process of its reproduction. An analogy could be made between mechanical reproduction of an artwork and documentary representation of a film subject. Perhaps there is a kind of loss that inevitably occurs in the representation of actuality. Making an analogy here is problematic, however, to the extent that reproduction and representation are different processes. Documentary—regardless of its degree of verisimilitude—is not a copy of actuality. In fact, this kind of thinking about documentary representation in terms of originals and copies is a perennial source of confusion that has been dealt with in various ways by documentary scholars over the years. Bill Nichols clarifies the difference between reproduction and representation:

We judge a reproduction by its fidelity to the original—its capacity to look like, act like, and serve the same purpose as the original. We judge a representation more by the nature of the pleasure it offers, the value of the insight or knowledge it provides, and the quality of the orientation or disposition, tone or perspective it instills. We ask more of a representation than we do of a reproduction. (Nichols, 2001: 20-21)

Dai Vaughan's straightforward and pithy articulation of this issue, on the other hand, is simply to point out that "film is about something, whereas reality is not" (Vaughan, 1999: 21). Yet, because documentary film is understood to have a different relation to actuality (the historical world of the viewer) than fiction film, there is a general skepticism about documentary representation. Nichols

cautions, “We believe what we see and what is represented about what we see at our own risk” (Nichols, 2001: xii). This kind of skepticism is not usually an issue for fiction film, at least not to the same degree. The unique challenge for documentary is that, despite increased skepticism about its veracity, it nevertheless usually relies on “a disposition to believe”—as documentary scholar Michael Chanan puts it—whereas “fiction evokes what is traditionally spoken of as ‘the suspension of disbelief’” (Chanan, 2000: 58). The tension between fidelity to actuality and the fact of mediation is an enduring issue for documentary practitioners and scholars.

The documentary film *Derrida* (2002) directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman provides particularly insightful examples of the problem of authenticity in documentary. Perhaps this is to be expected, considering that the subject and main character of the film is the French philosopher himself—the founder of deconstruction theory. Regardless of what the filmmakers’ original intentions were (presumably to discover and communicate something more about the man by filming him in his daily life)—the film is mainly a deconstruction of documentary, as Derrida appears to continuously undermine the filmmaking process determined not to allow the filmmakers to represent him in a narrative form. He is shown criticizing the selective and constructed nature of the filmmaking process. Criticism is not directed solely at the *filmic* representation of actuality, though, as Derrida is also seen criticizing biography and storytelling in general. The film focuses, however, on particular problems arising in the filming

itself. Derrida repeatedly disrupts, calls attention to, or jokes about the filmmaking process and its specific limitations. He directly contests the authenticity of the film in the following scene, where the film crew is apparently observing him engaging in his daily activity at home. The tone is playful, as in other similar instances where he highlights the unnaturalness of being filmed.

[As subtitled into English from French]

Derrida (chuckling):        So, this is what you call cinéma vérité? Everything is false...well, almost everything. I'm not really like this. I don't usually dress like this.

Filmmaker (off camera):    No?

Derrida:                        No, you should know that when I'm on my own at home I don't get dressed in the morning. I stay in my pyjamas and a dressing-gown...

In this particular instance, Derrida suggests that the very presence of the filmmakers negates the authenticity of the situation they are trying to capture.

In a similar way, the presence of tourists has often been associated with a negation of authenticity. In recent food studies scholarship, the foreign national or "ethnic" restaurant is sometimes likened to a tourist setting, where doubts about authenticity may emerge. In her writing on "culinary travel", Lisa Heldke comments:

The culinary traveler's own presence (in a restaurant for example) always counts as evidence of the inauthenticity of the place; paradoxically, one's discovery of a "truly authentic" restaurant contains the very seed of the destruction of its authenticity. (Heldke, 2005: 390)

A parallel might be drawn here, then, between the meal in the restaurant and

the documentary film. There is a sense that perhaps the documentary filmmaker and the food tourist are engaged in paradoxical or even futile endeavors and an assumption that their very presence renders the documentary film or the restaurant meal inauthentic. In Chapter 3, I will explore this link further and consider the documentary filmmaker as a kind of tourist, similar in some ways to the food tourist type restaurant customer.

One obvious problem lies in the essentialist distinctions between authentic and inauthentic and the judgments associated with them. Many scholars have rejected binaries like this. Upon further examination, the concept of authenticity is complex, having been theorized in various ways over the years. These theorizations—particularly in tourism studies in the last half-century or so—are especially interesting in this respect. In his 1994 essay on the reconstruction of the historic village of New Salem, Illinois in the United States (a small village where Abraham Lincoln lived for a period of time), Edward Bruner identifies four possible meanings for the term “authentic” in the context of the reconstructed historic American village. Bruner’s first meaning is based on verisimilitude or believability. By this definition, the reconstructed village could be considered authentic if it meets the modern-day visiting tourist’s expectations of what a 1830s village looked like. Bruner’s second meaning for authenticity is based on genuineness. In this sense of the word, he explains hypothetically, the New Salem reconstruction would be considered authentic if a person from the 1830s believed it looked like 1830s New Salem. His third meaning for authenticity refers

to an actual original, rather than a copy. In this sense, he notes that the reconstructed New Salem site is not authentic by definition, although elements of it might be considered authentic since one of the buildings and some of the objects are originals. Finally, his fourth meaning has to do with authority and the power to authenticate something. New Salem is authentic in this sense because it was legitimized by the state of Illinois. He raises the important question here: “Who has the right to tell the story of the site?” (Bruner, 1994: 400). Bruner’s four senses of authenticity transpose relatively well to the restaurant scenario. We can apply them, for example, to an Argentinian restaurant in London, which might be considered authentic on a number of different levels. Is the restaurant able to convince non-Argentinian diners that the food is authentic? Would Argentinian diners recognize it as authentic? Does the fact that the food is made in London rather than Argentina mean that it is not authentic by definition? What if the meat and the grill were imported from Argentina and the food prepared by Argentinian staff using traditional methods? Is the restaurant authorized as authentic by people considered to be insiders, food experts, or authorities?

Dean MacCannell’s work on what he called “staged authenticity” in tourist settings also elaborates on the concept of authenticity and identifies a kind of continuum of seemingly more or less authentic spaces. MacCannell employs and adapts sociologist Erving Goffman’s earlier notion of the organization of social space into “front” and “back” regions (Goffman, 1959, cited in MacCannell,

1973). The front region is “the meeting place of hosts and guests or customers and service persons,” and the back region is “the place where members of the home team retire between performances to relax and to prepare” (MacCannell, 1973: 590). MacCannell argues that the tourist is seeking authentic experience and is therefore attracted to back regions “because these regions are associated with intimacy of relations”. He goes on to explain that tourist settings and experiences are often highly constructed so that there may be false or staged back regions, and the “problem of false consciousness” arises (MacCannell, 1973: 589). The concern is that false back regions are being presented to tourists as if they were actual back regions. Building on Goffman’s binary of back and front, MacCannell argues that it is actually theoretically possible to identify a series of six spaces from the front to the back region in tourist settings. Each space is progressively less staged, or apparently more authentic, with the final space (stage six) being “Goffman’s back region; the kind of social space that motivates touristic consciousness” (MacCannell, 1973: 589). For MacCannell, the stage six space is merely one pole on the front-back continuum, but it is never really accessible to the tourist. In fact, he suggests that a pure, authentic back space exists only as an ideal, and that the “mere existence [of back regions], and the possibility of their violation, functions to sustain the common sense polarity of social life into what is taken to be intimate and ‘real’ and what is thought to be ‘show’” (MacCannell, 1973: 591). MacCannell wants to show that this common sense polarity is problematic. His concept of staged authenticity can be applied to both the restaurant scenario and to documentary film, where a range of front and back, staged or behind-the-scenes spaces can be identified. Also, his concern

about the false consciousness fostered by staged authenticity is reminiscent of the concern in documentary that viewers may be deceived by filmmakers presenting staged events as if they were unmediated reality. I will explore this in more detail later in this chapter as well as in Chapters 2 and 4. It is interesting to note that MacCannell's theory assumes that the tourist's presence in a space is always known. He does not deal with, for example, the possibility of a tourist's accidental and undiscovered entry into a back region. Likewise, there may be the possibility of covert filming in a back region. This is, of course, usually considered to be unethical behavior. Nevertheless, it may be possible, on this basis, to question the idea that a true back region is nonexistent and impenetrable.

Applying Bruner's and MacCannell's ideas to the problem of the inauthentic-authentic binary suggests that all might be resolved by replacing it with an inauthentic to authentic continuum or typology, but this is still too simple because it ignores some of the underlying issues. In the case of the national restaurant, for example, it is problematic to draw national borders around cuisine or culture in the first place. Food does not always respect national borders, and culture is not inherent or static but constructed and reconstructed differently by different people over time. As Stuart Hall notes, "Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything else which is historical, they undergo constant trans-formation" (Hall, 1989: 70). Further, tracing the origins of cultural identities and traditions often leads to surprising revelations. Historian Eric Hobsbawm in *The Invention of Tradition* explains:

“‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented” (Hobsbawm, 1983: 1). Chief among these relatively recent inventions is the nation-state itself, nationalism and all of the symbols and rituals created to sustain it. Hobsbawm calls attention to the paradox that “modern nations and all their impedimenta generally claim to be the opposite of novel, namely rooted in the remotest antiquity, and the opposite of constructed, namely human communities so ‘natural’ as to require no definition other than self-assertion” (Hobsbawm, 1983: 14). Cuisines are no less invented than are nations. In fact, they are nation-building tools in many cases; food is often appropriated to reinforce the idea of a nation. More generally, food plays an important role in the formation of collective identities. As Sidney Mintz and Christine Du Bois note in their article “The Anthropology of Food and Eating”, “cuisines provide added concreteness to the idea of national or ethnic identity. Talking and writing about ethnic or national food can then add to a cuisine’s conceptual solidity and coherence” (Mintz and Du Bois, 2002: 109).

It is possible to argue that every tradition was invented in some sense—more or less purposefully, in different ways and for various reasons. In fact, critics of Hobsbawm’s concept have claimed that the distinction he makes between invented traditions and genuine traditions is problematic. Richard Handler articulates this critique in his review of *The Invention of Tradition*: “Such distinctions resolve themselves ultimately into one between the genuine and the spurious, a distinction that may be untenable because all traditions (like all



symbolic phenomena) are humanly created ('spurious') rather than naturally given ('genuine')" (Handler, 1984: 1026). Despite criticism of his distinction between invented and genuine traditions, however, the real value of Hobsbawm's contribution was his effort to reveal the politics behind many of the invented traditions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Hobsbawm's work uncovered the importance of power relations in the creation and authentication of tradition. Finally, even if we accept that all traditions are invented and the result of a creative process, it should not necessarily follow that every tradition is "spurious" simply by virtue of being "humanly created" as Handler's writing implies.

Adrian Franklin posits that the notion of authenticity may no longer be useful in the contemporary global cultural context. "There is culture, cultural fusions, cultural change, hybridizations, and all are legitimate 'authentic' *cultural* processes" (Franklin, 2003: 199). Using the term "authentic" in this way, Franklin renders it redundant. Other recent scholarship in anthropology suggests a hesitation to completely abandon the notion of authenticity, favoring further re-conceptualization instead.

In her work on cultural tourism, Nicola MacLeod wants to better understand the enduring resonance of the concept of authenticity (as well as that of commodification) in tourism scholarship. She summarizes some of the major

theory, tracing the evolution of the various strands. Many theorists have tried to deconstruct authenticity and address its complexity, MacLeod explains. She chooses to adopt, as a foundation, Ning Wang's classification of authenticity in tourist experiences (MacLeod, 2006: 182-188). Building on existing tourism scholarship, in his 1999 article "Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience", Wang categorizes authenticity into three types: objective, constructive and existential. Objective and constructive authenticity are the more conventional concepts in tourism studies and are "object-related", but Wang suggests *existential authenticity* as a third category related to "activity" rather than "objects"; this third sense of authenticity can enhance understanding of tourist experiences, he says. Wang's first type of authenticity—*objective authenticity*—is "the authenticity of originals," of "toured-objects to be perceived by tourists" where "there is an absolute and an objective criterion used to measure authenticity". This is the kind of authenticity usually referred to and deconstructed in early tourism scholarship, he explains (Wang, 1999: 351). According to this sense of authenticity, the "products of tourism such as works of art, festivals, rituals, cuisine, dress, housing, and so on" are judged as authentic or inauthentic according to who made them, whether they were made in traditional ways, and so on (Wang, 1999: 350). Wang's second type of authenticity is *constructive authenticity*, which is understood as emerging over time, relative and negotiated. In this case, authenticity is "constructed as such in terms of points of view, beliefs, perspectives or powers" (Wang, 1999: 351). Within this category, perhaps the most influential work is Erik Cohen's on the concept of *emergent authenticity*. Cohen suggests, "In principle it is possible for

any new-fangled gimmick, which at one point appeared to be nothing but a staged 'tourist trap', to become over time and under appropriate conditions, widely recognized as an 'authentic' manifestation of local culture" (Cohen, 1988: 380). Finally, Wang's third type of authenticity—*existential authenticity*—has relatively little to do with the perceived authenticity of the actual places or people visited except to the extent that they allow the tourist to experience that "they themselves are much more authentic and more freely self-expressed than in everyday life" (Wang, 1999: 351-352). As MacLeod explains this further, "tourism itself can be seen not as a corrupting and commodifying influence but as a way of being that is genuine and natural". It is about relaxation, simpler life, sensual enjoyment, testing oneself, and rediscovering an essential self (MacLeod, 2006: 187-188). This sense of authenticity is problematic, however, at the very least in its one-sidedness. Because the toured objects and host community may be relegated to mere aids in the tourist's search for his or her authentic self, they have—contrary to MacLeod's claim—been commodified in some sense. Further, like objective authenticity, existential authenticity still seems to assume an authentic-inauthentic binary. On the other hand, existential authenticity seems to be similar to constructed authenticity in that it is created; in existential authenticity "the individual creates a sense of truth within themselves" (MacLeod, 2006: 187). If, however, there are no criteria for the measurement of authenticity—if potentially any and all touristic experience could be considered existentially authentic—then has the notion of authenticity not simply been rendered meaningless? At the very least, does refashioning it in this way not just lead to further confusion?

In what is often called “culinary travel” or “culinary tourism” scholarship, there also seems to be a move toward a re-conceptualization of authenticity. Lisa Heldke writes about the transactional nature of the food experience and how authenticity can be understood in this context. Drawing on John Dewey's work *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1987 (original publication 1934)), Heldke discusses the difference between the dish itself—like Dewey's art product—and the multiple perceivers' experiences of the food—like Dewey's work of art. "Authenticity comes to be a property of the work of cuisine, which is itself a transaction between dish and eater" (Heldke, 2005: 389-390). Heldke sees authenticity as a "quality of this exchange", where the value no longer lies in the dish itself and whether it was prepared exactly as it would have been in its "native context". Instead, she suggests, "we might valorize the gesture of a cook who recognizes the limited familiarity of her (non-native) diners, and cooks 'to' them in a way that enables an interaction to develop. (She might do so by choosing flavors that introduce her diners to the most unusual features of her cuisine, or by choosing flavors that show the connections between her cuisine and that of her diners)" (Heldke, 2005: 390). Heldke is emphasizing here the importance of the dialogical and dynamic aspects of cross-cultural food experience, which is very useful. It is not clear, however, how authenticity fits into this understanding. Why does she not simply dismiss authenticity altogether? Heldke seems to start to react to this question when she says:

The cook who considers her Euro-American diners' palates begins advisedly. We may go on to ask whether the resultant work of cuisine is an authentic one—but my point is that it is not rendered inauthentic in principle by the fact that the cook acknowledges the transactional nature of cooking and eating. (Heldke, 2005: 392)

Film scholars, like tourism and food studies scholars, have also struggled with binary oppositions—specifically, the binary of documentary versus fiction. Yet, much work has been done to consider documentary as a genre and categorize its various sub-types or modes. Guided largely by literary theory, Michael Chanan resists strictly defined categories for film but wants to understand documentary as part of a multidimensional screen space continuum, “where at one extreme documentary is utterly different from fictional narrative, but in the middle merges almost imperceptibly into it” (Chanan, 2000: 58). Fiction is more about *construction* and documentary about *selection*, Chanan explains, but documentary’s relation to truth or its “quality or degree of veracity” is not necessarily greater than that of fiction, just different (Chanan, 2000: 58).

Anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch’s *cinéma vérité* famously challenged documentary-fiction distinctions as he openly adopted construction—employing dramatic techniques in order to portray aspects of his research participants’ lived experiences. Influenced by 1920s Soviet cinema and the work of Dziga Vertov, Rouch came to understand the camera/filmmaker as a catalyst for some kind of revelation—a filmic truth. In stark contrast to the strictly observational strategy employed by the direct cinema movement of the 1960s in the United States, Rouch fully embraced the effects of the presence of the camera and filmmaker—often favoring participatory and performative techniques. Perhaps for Rouch, authenticity was a quality of the *exchange* between researcher and research participant in the film scenario in a similar way that, for Heldke, authenticity is a quality of the exchange between cook and diners in the restaurant scenario.

Much of the concern about authenticity in documentary over the years has more to do with objectivity than anything else. Documentary practitioners have reacted in various ways to the “crisis of objectivity,” as Chanan puts it (Chanan, 2000: 57). Visual anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker David MacDougall opts for what he calls an “unprivileged camera style” in his work:

Unprivileged camera style is a negative notion, a corrective. It is an assertion of the obvious: that filmmakers are human, fallible, rooted in physical space and society, governed by chance, limited in perception—and that films must be understood this way. (MacDougall, 1998: 205)

This concept is informed partly by earlier work in *cinéma vérité*, and MacDougall—like Rouch—emphasizes the importance of the encounter between filmmaker and film subject. In practice, though, MacDougall’s unprivileged camera style is very different from *cinéma vérité*. He avoids performative techniques and is apprehensive about, for example, cutting between shots from different camera perspectives believing that it removes the viewer from the immediacy of the real life situation (MacDougall, 1998: 200). Filmmaker Chris Marker approached the problem of objectivity from a completely different angle in documentaries that are highly experimental and essayistic—embracing abstraction in such a way that his work has more in common with poetry than with conventional narrative film. In his first feature-length documentary, *Lettre de Sibérie (Letter from Siberia)* (1957), the same visual sequence is shown four times in succession. The images are of traffic and road workers in the Yakutsk capital. Each time the visuals are exactly the same, but the voice-over narration and music change dramatically. In the first instance, the narrator—speaking in the first person as the voice of the filmmaker—says (as subtitled into English

from French), “While recording these images of the Yakutsk capital as objectively as possible, I wondered whom they would satisfy. Because of course you can’t describe the Soviet Union as anything but the worker’s paradise, or, as hell on earth”. Marker then shows the visual sequence again with a narration that describes Yakutsk as a “worker’s paradise” accompanied by music that is appropriately optimistic in tenor. The next time the visual sequence is repeated, he uses music to add a sinister tone as the narrator describes Yakutsk as if it were “hell on earth”. Then finally, the fourth time, he attempts a comparatively “objective” description without any music to suggest a particular mood. Marker concludes, however, that “objectivity isn’t the answer either. It may not distort Siberian reality, but it fixes it, and consequently distorts it all the same”—as the narrator says. Whereas MacDougall’s approach aims to bring the viewer closer to understanding the encounter that occurred between filmmaker and film subject, Marker’s approach gives the impression of distance between filmmaker and film subjects, emphasizing instead the relationship between filmmaker and viewer and the importance of mediation and interpretation. Marker’s reflexive technique overtly calls attention to the problematic role of the filmmaker as mediator of actuality. His approach is much more subversive than MacDougall’s, though some of their underlying motivations may be the same.

Returning to Adrian Franklin’s concept of the tourism of everyday life, perhaps being a cultural tourist in the contemporary global setting requires what MacDougall describes as “a willingness to enter into a sympathetic contract with

others, including the...intermediary” (MacDougall, 1998: 272-273). MacDougall is referring here to ethnographic film, but his concept is broadly applicable to other types of cross-cultural encounter and exchange and could be applied to the restaurant scenario. The documentary filmmaker and the restaurant staff members, then, might be considered as intermediaries or mediators. What are the potential benefits of entering into these kinds of mediated encounters? The idealistic view is that greater understanding or fellow feeling between and across cultures might be achieved. Anthropologist David Sutton has explored the powerful role of food in migrant cultural identity. Drawing on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 1983), Sutton proposes that—beyond the actual communities that arise among migrants through the sharing of food from home—“there is an imagined community implied in the act of eating food ‘from home’ while in exile, in the embodied knowledge that others are eating the same food” (Sutton, 2001: 126). If cultural outsiders are invited to share this food, perhaps some of them might experience a prosthetic link to this imagined community, as they consider themselves literally internalizing a part of another’s culture and lived experience. To the extent that food and documentary film could be considered mediums through which some kind of experience of other cultures can be had, watching documentary film might be regarded as a more indirect, less intimate engagement. Yet—though documentary cannot be literally ingested—it can engage the senses, perhaps even in a synesthetic manner. Like food, film and visual media have also been shown to have a close relation to memory. Media and memory studies scholar Alison Landsberg argues for what she calls “prosthetic memory”—a type of mass media generated



collective memory of past events not experienced directly, which can produce empathy. This, in turn, she proposes can be a powerful political and ethical mobilizer, even within capitalist society. Prosthetic memory allows “a sensuous engagement” that “bridge[s] the temporal chasms that separate individuals from the meaningful and potentially interpellative events of the past” (Landsberg, 2003: 148-149). Expanding Landsberg's concept and changing her term “prosthetic memory” to prosthetic *experience* would allow for exploration of more than just collective memory of past events. Despite the indirect nature of the encounter, the sensuous engagement with other cultures through visual media might create a sense of collective lived experience that bridges gaps between individuals. This effect may be intensified in documentary precisely because of its special relation to the actual historical world of the viewer.

There are plenty of reasons not to take an optimistic view here, though. Inevitably many people are casually taking in “flows of global cultural materials” (Franklin and Crang, 2001) without the appropriate context or without adopting a critical viewpoint. The underlying interests of the mediators and the systems that support them need to be considered, as has always has been the case. For now, documentary accommodates a wide variety of approaches and is produced in a variety of different contexts, but this can be detrimental to the form. At a superficial level, there is little difference between documentary and reality TV, for example. In fact, even documentary scholars struggle to articulate the distinction despite many of them having strong disdain for reality TV and serious

concern about its dubious ethics. Jean Rouch's cinéma vérité involved a great deal of filmmaker intervention; and, like the reality TV producer, Rouch constructed situations and interactions that would not otherwise have occurred. Yet, few would deny Rouch's work documentary status. Documentary film scholar Brian Winston discusses the distinction between documentary and reality television in detail, and he starts from the position that: "What distinguishes 'reality' television in every case is the initial actions of the producer—was the situation there to be filmed or was it created?" (Winston, 2008: 262). He takes into account later, however, the ways in which his distinction between reality TV and documentary is challenged by films like Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin's film *Chronique d'un Été (Chronicle of a Summer)* (1961). Filming situations in *Chronique* were set up by the filmmakers in advance, as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter. Finally, Winston concludes, the distinction has to be made on the basis of intentions:

There is no avoiding the fact that the intervention that characterises 'reality' television is of a piece with documentary's previous practice, albeit carried to a new level. The problem once was that the lives documentary examined might be changed with harmful effects but that, except occasionally in the case of investigations and exposures, this was never the intention. Now, with 'reality' television, the intention is very much more to change lives and, although it is still not to harm (as we must presume is the case most of the time), the dangers of doing so are massively increased. (Winston, 2008: 267-268)

Winston gives various examples of harm done to reality TV participants and then reality TV producers' inadequate justifications. These kinds of dangers are undoubtedly behind some of the concerns about defining documentary more carefully. There is a sense that it is too easy for producers to work under the auspices of documentary and exploit people purely for commercial or political

gain. Yet, a great deal of documentary is already made within the context of the cinema and television industries, where profitability is a high priority.

Documentary made in academic contexts is not immune from such considerations either, as universities are not independent from their funding sources (government or private).

In the restaurant industry, profitability is also a primary concern—something that is seemingly obvious in this context, where a direct payment occurs for a product and service rendered. The fact that running a restaurant is first and foremost a profit-seeking enterprise further complicates thinking about the restaurateur as a cross-cultural mediator. By contrast, although it undoubtedly also involves profit seeking, running a museum may be considered an enterprise that prioritizes other aims like education ahead of profit. Therefore, perhaps commercial interests complicate claims or expectations of authenticity more in the restaurant scenario. A restaurateur might use the word “authentic” merely to attract customers without proper consideration of or adherence to traditional recipes, ingredients, methods, etc. On the other hand, even for the restaurateur who sincerely aspires to authenticity, the need to be profitable affects the way that the restaurant operates. Neither of these two examples takes into account the underlying problem of essentialism discussed earlier in this chapter. The point here, however, is that—just as in documentary—the interests and intentions of the mediator are relevant. Is there intent to deceive and exploit? Is there harm done? This line of thinking also has not taken into account the fact

that the work of the restaurateur—like the work of the documentary filmmaker—always and inherently involves some degree of construction. The restaurateur creates a menu and an atmosphere, directs staff about how to behave, and so on. Perhaps we are in danger of naïvely judging the work of the restaurant staff as fakery without understanding the complex and creative aspects of their mediation—similar to what Winston warned, in his book *Lies, Damn Lies and Documentaries*, was happening at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the public attitude toward documentary film where there was a “dangerously expanded notion of ‘fakery’” (Winston, 2000: 2). There are occasionally those “mendacious documentarists”, as Winston calls them, who deliberately lie and engage in ethically suspect behavior. They should be exposed and denounced, Winston says (Winston, 2000: 157), but “the everyday interventions of film-making” should not be confused with unethical practice and lumped together as fakery (Winston, 2000: 9). This is to misunderstand the mediation that occurs in documentary filmmaking or to mistakenly believe that documentary should or could show an unmediated reality.

The issues around authenticity and mediation discussed in this chapter served as a backdrop and starting point for my practical inquiry, which culminated in the making of the film *Eating Cultures*. In filmmaking, I undertook an empirical exploration of many of these themes trying to understand, for example, how the meal in the restaurant is constructed and how that might be related to the way in which documentary film is constructed. I also looked at how people working

and eating in restaurants actually understand and engage with authenticity. Many people in the restaurants articulated, on the one hand, relatively uncomplicated understandings of authenticity in the *objective* sense of the word, as Wang would characterize it (Wang, 1999). Authenticity was broadly understood as residing in recipes, methods, ingredients, staff, equipment, décor or atmosphere. Yet, many of the film encounters belie or problematize these uncomplicated understandings of “authentic” and subtly undermine an essentialist discourse. An interesting example of what Wang refers to as *constructive authenticity* appears in the first episode of the film, for instance. In the Eritrean restaurant Mosob, owner Benyam explains that they added some starters to their menu based on feedback from their customers, who are accustomed to having starters in restaurants. Starters are not traditional in Eritrean food, Benyam explains, so his sister invented something they refer to as “East African sushi” (Figure 1) using traditional bread and sauces and then rolling and cutting it into small pieces. This would not be recognized as authentic Eritrean food by those who are familiar with the history of the food and how it is generally eaten in Eritrea. Yet, now other Eritrean restaurants in London and further afield in places like Chicago have taken up this idea—following Mosob’s lead, Benyam says—and are also serving these starters. If enough people adopt them as Eritrean food, perhaps one day these starters will be widely considered authentic in the way that Cohen theorizes emergent authenticity works. “Since authenticity is not a primitive given, but negotiable, one has to allow for the possibility of its gradual emergence” (Cohen, 1988: 379).



Figure 1: "East African sushi", from *Eating Cultures*

In the filmmaking, I also engaged with issues of authenticity in documentary as well as a range of other issues related to cross-cultural encounter and mediation in the restaurant and the documentary film scenarios; therefore, I will reflect on and further theorize many of the themes explored in this chapter in the “third course” of this thesis.

## Chapter 2: Methodological framework

### Overview

I used reflexive filmmaking practice to engage with issues of authenticity and mediation introduced in Chapter 1 and to understand more about the process of documentary filmmaking experientially. Before, during and after the filmmaking practice, I was also engaged in critical analysis of relevant literature and film so that theory and practice were intertwined; the filmmaking practice informed the writing and vice versa. The product of my filmmaking practice is the 94-minute film *Eating Cultures*. The film conveys research findings in an embodied manner that allows the viewer to explore the themes presented in an open and experiential way. The task of my written thesis is to provide theoretical and methodological context for the practice, to critically reflect on and theorize the practice, and to articulate certain things that are better articulated in writing. Citation or direct reference to scholarship is more appropriate in the written thesis than in the film, for example. Where the film suggests or lays the foundation for arguments, the written thesis will continue or expand them.

### Background

There is a wide variety of practice research being produced in different disciplinary contexts within arts and humanities in the UK, so it should be useful to contextualize my work in this respect. Various terms are currently being used to suggest different perspectives on the role of practice in the research: practice-

based research, practice-led research, practice-as-research. Precise definitions of the terms are unclear, and the terms are often used interchangeably.

Approaches to documentation of practice also vary as does weighting of practice and written components in PhD research. This reflects the diversity of practice research being produced. Approaches to practice research in dance or theatre departments, for example, will often be different from approaches in screen media departments. In his 2006 article on research degrees in visual arts departments, Victor Burgin—based on his understanding of the different types of students that undertake practice research in visual arts and the different kinds of work they are conducting—suggests that there should be three types of terminal degrees in visual arts: “PhD (history and theory emphasis)”, “PhD (practice emphasis)”, and “Doctor of Fine Arts”—in order of decreasing emphasis on writing and increasing emphasis on practice. The Doctor of Fine Arts would be assessed nearly completely on practice and only require submission of short essays, notes and bibliographies (Burgin, 2006: 106-107). Burgin’s recommendations have not been universally adopted, but I mention his typology because I think it helps locate my particular research project on a spectrum. My work fits Burgin’s description of “PhD (practice emphasis)” in which he says a “student would produce both a long written essay—albeit half the length required for the history and theory emphasis—and a substantial body of practical work. For assessment there would be equal emphasis on the writing and the visual work...the writing contextualises the practical work—offering critical insights into the history of the art practice in question, and critically interrogating the various theories that may inform and legitimate it” (Burgin, 2006: 107). I



have decided to use the term “practice-based” because practice was at the core of my research and most of my writing was completed during and after the practice so that the written thesis was heavily informed by the practice.

Whatever term is used, however, Burgin’s description of the relationship of practice and writing in the “PhD (practice emphasis)” seems to apply best to my research.

### **Rationale for documentary filmmaking practice as research**

The documentary filmmaking process, film scholar Paul Ward explains, is a “complex interaction between text, context, producer and spectator” (Ward, 2005: 11). Problematically, the process is differently accessible to each of the parties involved. Perhaps as a result of this, documentary scholarship often focuses on the finished film. The filmmaker’s experience of making the film and his or her reflection on that experience is often not available for scholarly analysis. Academic analysis of the process of filmmaking occurs mainly at a theoretical level or by practitioners in hindsight. Much of documentary film editor and theorist Dai Vaughan’s writing comes from a practitioner perspective, for example, but his writing draws on his experience retrospectively and anecdotally for the most part. He does so to great effect; therefore, his writing is recognized as particularly insightful within documentary studies. Perhaps, though, a fuller understanding of the “complex interaction” that Ward refers to may be accomplished through practice that is done in parallel with critical reflection and analysis. It is precisely within the process of documentary

filmmaking that issues of mediation and authenticity arise, are debated, and are dealt with in particular ways.

The university is maybe the most appropriate setting for filmmaking practice that focuses on process and involves critical reflection and analysis. In his 2006 article on film and media practice as research, Desmond Bell makes a convincing argument for a research model for creative practice as research that focuses on the “generative act”. For Bell, this is where the artist/researcher’s focus should be. He makes a distinction between the “art object” and the “knowledge object”. The “art object” is the primary focus of the artist, he says. When creative practice enters into a research context, however, the primary focus is the “knowledge object”, which is based on understanding “the generative performance of the art work” (Bell, 2006: 98). Bell’s argument here helps clarify the difference between art practice and art practice as research. Artists and filmmakers outside of academia may always prioritize the “art object” or the finished film over the “knowledge object”, but artists and filmmakers operating as researchers within the academy are in the unique position to attend to the creation process.

The “art object” in practice research (the film in my case), however, is not necessarily merely a tool that allows the researcher to reflect on the creation process. The artifact of the practice often becomes part of the articulation of research findings and has a unique role to play in this respect. Visual

anthropologists also often use film—alongside written reflection and theorization—in this way, though they are not usually studying the filmmaking process itself but using film to explore a separate subject. David MacDougall talks about another kind of knowledge that film engages with, which the written word cannot engage with in the same way. It is visual, sensory, tacit, embodied, affective knowledge; “knowledge by acquaintance” (MacDougall, 1998: 81); knowledge that is *perceptual* before *conceptual* (MacDougall, 2006: 5); knowledge where “meaning is not merely the outcome of reflection upon experience but necessarily *includes* the experience” and where “the experience *is* the knowledge” and “cannot survive the translation process” (MacDougall, 1998: 79). This is the kind of knowledge I wanted viewers of *Eating Culture* to also engage with. The film should allow the viewer to experience my filmmaking encounters in a way that would not be possible for them to do through a written description. Through the film, then, “showing becomes a way of saying the unsayable” (MacDougall, 2006: 5). Visual anthropology methodology, therefore, heavily informed my filmmaking practice; I will elaborate on this in Chapter 4.

### **Situating my approach to reflexivity**

I have claimed that my filmmaking practice was reflexive; this requires some clarification. Documentary film scholar Bill Nichols famously identifies six modes of representation in documentary: poetic, expository, participatory, observational, reflexive and performative (Nichols, 2001: 99). According to Nichols’s classification, my film practice might fit best under the participatory

mode, but as Nichols explains the modes often overlap. It may be possible to identify instances during which I operated under each of Nichols's six modes, but the modes I employed most often were participatory, reflexive and observational. My focus on understanding and revealing the process of documentary filmmaking required showing my engagement with film subjects and—as Nichols says of the participatory mode—giving the viewer “a sense of what it is like for the filmmaker to be in a given situation and how that situation alters as a result” (Nichols, 2001: 116). In this respect, it is slightly difficult to separate the participatory from the reflexive mode, which is also concerned with the effects of the filmmaker and the filmmaking process on the subject being filmed. The reflexive mode goes a bit further, perhaps, than the participatory mode in self-consciously examining the constructed nature of documentary film. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to highlight my use of the reflexive mode. A problem arises in attempting to describe my practice as reflexive according to Nichols's typology, however, because the reflexive mode appears to be at odds in some respects with a particular anthropological approach to reflexivity that has also been key in informing my method.

Many of the films that Nichols considers prototypical of the reflexive mode are avant-garde or experimental documentary films that incorporate reflexivity in very different ways than conventional ethnographic film does. Nichols cites Chris Marker's *Sans Soleil* (1983) as a prototypical example of the reflexive mode, for example. In *Sans Soleil*, the film subjects appear distant—not usually engaging

with the camera or filmmaker beyond the occasional knowing glances or acknowledgment of the presence of the camera. They do not seem to have been permitted or encouraged to be more interactive. Their inclusion is mostly in service of the filmmaker's deconstruction of representation and the medium of documentary filmmaking. It is not really a film about the particular worlds and experiences of the film subjects. As Nichols says of the reflexive mode—in contrast to the participatory mode—"rather than following the filmmaker in her engagement with other social actors, we now attend to the filmmaker's engagement with us, speaking not only about the historical world but about the problems and issues of representing it as well" (Nichols, 2001: 125). Perhaps the underlying epistemological perspective in avant-garde filmmaking has tended to be more postmodern than that of conventional ethnographic filmmaking. We can, of course, find examples of avant-garde or postmodern ethnographic filmmaking practice as well. Trinh T. Minh-ha's films are maybe the best and most widely known examples here. The reflexivity in her films is not that different from Marker's. In her film *Reassemblage* (1982), she does not show any of her direct engagement with film subjects—Senegalese villagers. She denies the viewer that except in little bits of insight she provides through the narration. It is an intentional denial, of course, which—as part of her broader deconstructive approach—has the powerful effect of forcing viewer attention onto the ethnographic representation of Senegal and the ethnographic filmmaking enterprise itself. *Reassemblage* calls attention, for example, to the potentially dehumanizing or objectifying effects of ethnography on the people studied and filmed. Trinh, arguably, deals less with Senegal and more with

ethnography and ethnographic filmmaking—something she claims the ethnographer normally neglects doing. “The eager observer collects samples and has no time to reflect upon the media used,” she says in the narration.

Visual anthropologists are generally, however, much more concerned with trying to articulate something about the particular lived experiences of those they film. Their use of reflexivity usually serves to properly contextualize their research and reveal the researcher’s own influence upon it, but deconstruction of the medium or the discipline is not usually a primary aim. This approach perhaps corresponds more closely to Nichols’s participatory mode than to his reflexive mode. Yet, reflexivity is of paramount concern to contemporary ethnography.

Informed by both the avant-garde and anthropological conceptions of reflexivity, my approach became something in between the two. I am very concerned with the relationship between filmmaker and viewer, which Nichols attributes to the reflexive mode and filmmakers like Chris Marker and Trinh T. Minh-ha. I also share some of the aims of these filmmakers in that my primary focus is on understanding the medium of documentary film better and communicating that to the viewer. On the other hand, in *Eating Cultures*, I embraced interaction with film subjects and their worlds and wanted to show the viewer as much of that as possible. I might prefer to align my approach with visual ethnography to the extent that I feel a reflexive approach should do more than deconstruct or

subvert; it should acknowledge and engage with the subjectivities of the filmmaker, film subject and audience. In her writing about reflexivity, visual anthropologist Sarah Pink argues that “by focusing on how ethnographic knowledge about how individuals experience reality is produced...we may arrive at a closer understanding of the worlds that other people live in” (Pink, 2007: 24).

The work of anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker Jean Rouch was particularly influential for me as well. Like Rouch, I am interested in the relationship and commonalities between cinema and ethnography, and I want to use film in a research context as a tool of inquiry. Further, my underlying motivations and philosophy are very similar to his to the extent that, as Brian Winston sees it, Rouch did not approach filmmaking as a means of creating art works and thought less about exhibition possibilities or commercial success than about his primary driving goal of developing “a research agenda into the issues of authenticity and the validity of the documentary idea” (Winston, 2008: 182). Rouch’s way of working toward this aim, however, differs significantly from mine in that the exploration of dramatic techniques was central to his filmmaking. Of all of Rouch’s films, *Chronique d’un Été (Chronicle of a Summer)* (1961) had the greatest influence on my approach. Perhaps this is partly due to sociologist and co-director Edgar Morin’s influence on the film. *Chronique* is especially relevant for anyone concerned with authenticity in documentary; the film is presented as *cinéma vérité*—“an experiment in filming the truth” (as subtitled into English

from French). This experiment in documentary frames the subject matter of the film—the lives of people in Paris in the summer of 1960. *Chronique* engages film subjects, filmmakers, and by extension viewers in the task of testing how well the medium of documentary could express or represent life in Paris in 1960. My film frames its subject matter in a similar way as a kind of experiment in documentary filmmaking, and I hoped for a similar type of engagement of film subjects, filmmaker and viewers. Like *Chronique*, my film ultimately presents the medium of documentary film and its relation to truth and actuality as problematic and suggests some of documentary's specific limitations. Rouch and Morin, however, generally engaged in more in-depth conversations with film subjects about their personal lives and engineered more controlled filming scenarios often designed to bring together people who would not have otherwise met or interacted. In my filmmaking, I focused more on observing and interacting with film subjects *in action*, so to speak, in their work environments and in the normal everyday operation of restaurants. In fact, though, Rouch and Morin experimented with a variety of methods in *Chronique*. Rouch was heavily invested in developing a filming method that would allow for a fuller engagement with film subjects in action in daily life. They termed this mode of filmmaking “pédovision”—as Morin explains in his account of the filmmaking process “Chronicle of a Film” (Morin, 2003 (original publication 1962): 240)—but Rouch was still at an experimental stage with the equipment and the technique. Inspired by the pioneering efforts of Robert Flaherty, Dziga Vertov and Jean Vigo (Rouch, 2003 (original publication 1962): 267-269) and enabled by increasingly portable and synchronous image and sound recording equipment, Rouch was actually in the process of developing



“pédovision” during the filming of *Chronique*. This was a source of some friction between Rouch and producer Anatole Dauman (Argos Films), who was concerned about poor picture quality and, therefore, not very supportive of technical experimentation—according to Morin’s account. Despite this, Rouch ultimately made significant strides toward realizing “pédovision” with the help of Canadian cameraman Michel Brault. There were, however, other complications related to access and cooperation that made the implementation of “pédovision” in the workplace setting difficult. Morin explains certain constraints on their filming in the Renault factory where film subject Angélo worked. They did not film Angélo at his machine, for instance, “for fear of unfavorable reactions from the management”, which they believed could threaten their filming and cause problems for Angélo later (Morin, 2003 (original publication 1962): 238-240). Their fears were justified, as *Chronique* shows, because Angélo’s managers did harass him after the filming. In my case, generous access to the workplace for the purpose of filming would be essential for my project, as I planned for the restaurant spaces themselves to be both main subjects and main settings for *Eating Cultures*. Luckily, in my restaurant filming, I did not encounter as much difficulty with access and cooperation as Rouch and Morin encountered with their Renault filming. Further, now more than 50 years after Rouch’s first experiments with “pédovision”, this kind of filming method is well established and much easier—from a technical standpoint—to achieve. Beyond the technical and situational differences, though, my approach to filmmaking diverges slightly from theirs in terms of the nature and degree of my intervention. The role of the filmmaker in *Chronique* is oftentimes that of a provocateur or even an

interrogator; whereas, in *Eating Cultures* I would establish more of an observer-participant role as filmmaker. I was more inclined to simply try and share in the lived experience of film subjects and would place much less emphasis on provocation or interrogation.

Where my film departs from *Chronique* in terms of the situations of filming, it is worth noting the influence of direct cinema in my practice. The observational style pioneered by direct cinema filmmakers in the 1960s in the United States was also influential for me in my practice as much as it is quite different from my approach in many ways. My original strategy was to use a lot of observational filming in order to try and communicate “the feeling of being there”—a direct cinema technique. Observational footage was to be interrupted at various points by reflexive material that would draw attention to and critique the filmmaking process. In practice, my filming was less strictly observational than planned because film subjects were much more keen to interact with me than I had expected. I also discovered that my interventions were often necessary in order to better understand the film subjects’ experiences. I did, however, still film with a view to communicating the feeling of being there. However successful I might have been in that respect, the assumption made explicit at the beginning of *Eating Cultures* is that documentary filmmakers often attempt to do so. This may be partly attributed to the legacy of direct cinema filmmakers like Richard Leacock, who coined the phrase “the feeling of being there”. Aside from this aspect, however, my practice departs significantly from the direct cinema

approach. Brian Winston, citing Leacock, details the strict set of rules that direct cinema filmmakers imposed on themselves in order to communicate the feeling of being there: “never ask a question; never ask anyone to do anything; never ask anyone to repeat an act or phrase that you missed; never pay anyone; etc.” (Winston, 2008: 164). I made no attempt to adhere to all these rules all the time or to “camouflage the actual presence and shaping influence of the filmmaker” (Nichols, 2001: 100), as Nichols says the observational mode does. Doing so would have been very limiting and, in some cases, counterproductive for my research. As MacDougall explains in his 1974 essay “Beyond Observational Cinema”, a purely observational method maintains a certain separation between the filmmaker and film subjects, and it has practical as well as ethical implications. A practical implication is that the filmmaker is “denied access to anything they [film subjects] know but take for granted, anything latent in their culture which events do not bring to the surface”. It is an ethically questionable approach to the extent that the filmmaker is “secretive”, “insular” and “withholds the very openness that he asks from his subjects in order to film them” (MacDougall, 1995 (original publication 1974): 124).

Between cinéma vérité and direct cinema, direct cinema is generally considered the more specious of the two approaches because of its claim of objectivity and access to unmediated reality. In a summary of the direct cinema group’s criticisms of Rouch and Morin’s film *Chronique d’un Été*, Winston notes that Leacock’s concern was that “the event was the filming. He felt that the camera

affected people ‘since the only thing that’s happening to them is the fact they’re being filmed. There’s nothing else to think about. How can they ever forget it?’” (Winston, 2008: 187). Winston does not sympathize with the direct cinema group’s criticisms of cinéma vérité because of their focus on the ways in which, as they saw it, cinéma vérité manipulated film subjects and direct cinema supposedly did not. The direct cinema filmmaker’s denial of any effects of his filmmaking practice on film subjects is one of the main problems here. Rouch and Morin’s cinéma vérité approach acknowledged manipulation as a given. Beyond that, they attached great value to the camera’s capacity as a catalyst. Morin even proposed that cinéma vérité was a means of revealing a “psychoanalytic truth”—though he later qualified this acknowledging that the notion of truth is problematic (Morin, 2003 (original publication 1962): 232, 263). If we set aside any of the truth or objectivity claims made by cinéma vérité or direct cinema filmmakers, however, we can reconsider Leacock’s criticism of cinéma vérité, which I think has some merit even if he was misguided about issues of manipulation and objectivity. Perhaps the direct cinema technique of operating in a strictly observational mode and filming people in action in daily life—in contrast to some of Rouch and Morin’s more interventional techniques in *Chronique*—better encourages film subjects to think about something else besides being filmed. We can consider the potential value of this without assuming that film subjects could or should ever completely forget about the camera or that observational filming has no effect on them. We might even consider that the passive approach of the direct cinema filmmaker during filming allowed film subjects more scope to lead filmmakers, in a sense, rather than

being lead or directed by them. The observational scenes in *Chronique*—those in which Rouch was employing “pédovision”—strongly resemble the direct cinema style. There is a scene, for example, in which the camera follows Angélo on his regular journey home from work. Interestingly, however, it seems the observational scenes in the film may have involved a degree of filmmaker direction that direct cinema would not have permitted. *Un Été + 50* (2011)—a documentary that re-examines *Chronique* 50 years later—shows extended footage with accompanying audio that was not included in the original film. For instance, in Angélo’s walk home from work, an off-camera voice—presumably Rouch—is heard instructing, “Whistle a bit, Angélo” (as subtitled into English from French) and Angélo begins whistling. The documentary also shows footage from a scene that was never included in the final film at all. In this scene, Marceline and her boyfriend Jean-Pierre are filmed sitting on a pier at the beach in Saint-Tropez having a conversation about their failing relationship. As *Un Été + 50* shows, Marceline and Jean-Pierre are asked to stop and start over several times and—by the 12<sup>th</sup> take—appear to be fatigued by what the filmmaking process has demanded of them.

My filmmaking approach for *Eating Cultures* integrated aspects of both cinéma vérité and direct cinema. In the spirit of direct cinema, I would oftentimes try to communicate the feeling of being there in the restaurants by merely observing as people worked and ate. Whenever possible, I would try to allow film subjects to lead me in the filmmaking rather than leading or directing them. Yet, for me,

communicating the feeling of being there includes communicating the feeling of being there *making the film*. Furthermore, in the spirit of Rouch and Morin's cinéma vérité, I saw the filmmaking project as an experiment "carried out collectively among authors and characters", as Morin puts it, whereby there would be an intermingling of these "authors and characters" and in which there would be no "moat on either side of the camera but free circulation and exchanges" (Morin, 2003 (original publication 1962): 233). Unlike the direct cinema filmmaker, I would not mask my presence in the film and would even appear on camera a few times, as Rouch and Morin do in *Chronique*. My on-camera appearances would be far fewer than theirs, however, because I would operate the camera myself for most of the filming—an aspect of my approach which I felt was integral to communicating the feeling of being there making the film. I would record my own gaze and, in doing so, inscribe my presence into the film, as MacDougall suggests (MacDougall, 2006: 26). In this way, I might better communicate some of my feeling of being there making the film to the viewer, who could then hopefully re-experience it—albeit in a limited way. My disposition and aim, in this respect, is expressed very well in MacDougall's comment: "Like other artists, filmmakers see many transient events that they would like to show to others. In effect, they want these events to repeat themselves for others to see. It seems an unattainable dream, and yet with a camera it is almost possible" (MacDougall, 2006: 27).

## Challenges of a reflexive approach

There are certain challenges associated with reflexive documentary filmmaking that have to do with filmmakers' commonly-held reservations. Filmmaker and scholar Keyan Tomaselli explains this: "According to conventional documentarists, there is no need to reveal Process because it would be interpreted as unnecessarily personal, self-indulgent, or because it would have the effect of jolting the viewer out of the film's continuity which denies the presence of the crew" (Tomaselli, 1996: 206). Tomaselli's comment here is part of a discussion about anthropologist Jay Ruby's call for more reflexivity in documentary in general. Ruby, borrowing and adapting Johannes Fabian's PRODUCER-PROCESS-PRODUCT diagram, claims that most documentary filmmakers present the *product* but do not reveal the *producer* or *process*. Without some knowledge of all three components together, he argues, the audience cannot properly critique and understand the product (Ruby, 2005).

The temptation here is to generalize that anthropologists, on one side, are arguing for greater reflexivity in documentary and conventional documentarists, on the other side, are dismissing it as unnecessary and counterproductive. I think the concerns Tomaselli identifies, however, are not necessarily unique to conventional documentarists. As a self-funded doctoral student producing a documentary for academic purposes, I am not bound by the same restrictions or under the same pressures as someone producing for television or theatrical release. Yet, in making *Eating Cultures*, I also had some of the reservations

Tomaselli describes and was concerned that, for example, viewers might interpret reflexive elements as unnecessary, distracting or self-indulgent. These concerns were magnified by the fact that I hoped the film might also appeal to audiences beyond academia. I avoided being too prescriptive about the audience for *Eating Cultures* from the outset, idealistically planning to make a film for anyone or everyone. Realistically, of course, I regarded my PhD supervisors, examiners and fellow media and film studies scholars—along with film subjects and collaborators—as the film’s primary audiences. I also considered that *Eating Cultures* could appeal to other academic audiences (in visual anthropology, cultural studies, food studies) and even beyond academia to those interested in documentary filmmaking; London restaurants; Eritrean, Pakistani or Argentinian food; and so on. Decisions about how to incorporate reflexive elements in *Eating Cultures*, however, were always finally made with the primary academic audiences in mind. In other words, wherever there might have been a conflict, I prioritized the aims of the PhD research over other considerations (whether the film might work well for broad audiences at festivals, for instance). As I will explain further in Chapter 5, for example, I decided to include captions and narration in which I reflect on my experience of making the film, elucidate film themes and metaphors, and so on. I did this believing that it would enhance the film’s reflexive examination of authenticity and mediation and, therefore, more effectively meet the objectives of the PhD research. I justified the decision with the film’s primary academic audiences in mind—thinking that it would be properly understood as such rather than being interpreted as self-indulgent or unnecessary. At the same time, however, in creating the captions and narration, I



avoided using specialist academic language that I considered might alienate viewers outside of my primary academic audiences.

There are also limits to what can be accomplished with a reflexive approach. Referring to documentary that attempts to confront the problems of its own representation of the social world by “breaking open the closed discourse of documentary convention”, Michael Chanan cautions about the limitations of using the “instrument” of documentary itself toward this end:

Those second-level dramas behind the making can never be fully represented—something necessarily escapes...the documentary that we see is always only one version of the documentary it could have been...You can only indicate these other putative versions by some kind of reflexivity or deconstruction, or by some kind of metaphor precisely because you can never show them. (Chanan, 2007: 239)

Chanan’s writing here suggests that even though reflexivity is one of the only ways for the medium of documentary to express something about itself, reflexivity alone is inadequate.

### **“Deep reflexivity” and metaphor**

MacDougall calls for visual anthropologists to employ what he terms “deep reflexivity”:

It is...necessary for visual anthropology to take reflexivity to a further stage—to see it at a deeper and more integral level. The author is no longer to be sought outside the work, for the work must be understood as including the author. Subject and object define one another through the work, and the “author” is in fact in many ways an artifact of the work. (MacDougall, 1998: 88-89)

In my filmmaking practice, my approach to reflexivity came from a similar perspective. I endeavored to integrate the filmmaking with the film subject in such a way as to acknowledge that they were inseparable and interdependent. The relationship between filmmaking and film subject is, in many ways, the focus of *Eating Cultures*. In order to help articulate this, I decided to also employ metaphor in combination with reflexivity as a key part of the film's expression. It was, in fact, as a result of my reflexive perspective that metaphor began to emerge during my filmmaking practice. I went into the filming guided by ideas I encountered in my literature and film review and believing that the restaurant scenario might facilitate a re-examination of the medium of documentary. During and through the practice, I began to formulate connections between the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film. The notions of "eating cultures" and "mediating worlds" arose during this formulation. We might think of this in social science terms as grounded theory to the extent that new theory developed in the practice and through analysis of encounters with film subjects. Constructing a metaphorical relationship between the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film also allowed me to use the medium of documentary film to reflexively deal with itself in an engaging way. I will undertake a more detailed reflection on my filmmaking practice and further theorize these metaphors in subsequent chapters.

### **Challenges associated with metaphor in documentary**

My next challenge was to determine how to best articulate these metaphors I

had been formulating during the filmmaking practice in the final film. Initially, I began to wonder if the contemporary documentary form and the filming style I had chosen, in particular, were working against me in some respects.

Trevor Whittock has done some of the most in-depth writing on metaphor and film in his 1990 book of the same title. He admittedly focuses on “features” (narrative fiction films) and ignores documentary and experimental film but nevertheless hopes that some of his work might be more widely applicable. I am interested in his writing on Sergei Eisenstein and metaphor, and I would like to consider how some of these ideas—employed in a different context—point to one of the key difficulties in realizing metaphor in contemporary documentary filmmaking and in my practice in particular. Whittock notes that Eisenstein only rarely wrote explicitly about metaphor but that it was implicit in a lot of his writing and practice. Eisenstein’s theory of montage, he says, is “in part anyway, a theory of metaphor” (Whittock, 1990: 70). It is important to note, though, as Whittock does, that Eisenstein did not intend for montage to be understood as necessarily metaphorical. Whittock focuses on instances where Eisenstein does connect metaphor to montage—writing about the way in which metaphorical expression may be achieved through montage juxtaposition, for example. Summarizing some of Eisenstein’s crucial points on montage as it relates to cinematic metaphor, the first two things Whittock mentions are:

1. Because of the representational nature of film, juxtaposition of montage units alone may not be successful in producing viable metaphors.
2. The units have to be suitably stylized through lighting, framing, and so on,

for the purposes of metaphor, so that the spectator is guided in his reading and integrating of them.  
(Whittock, 1990: 76)

If we consider these as guidelines for a montage technique that allows the filmmaker to realize metaphorical expression through film, it would seem that what is required is nearly complete control by the filmmaker of all elements. This level of control may be difficult to achieve in most documentary practice today. Eisenstein, in his writing and practice, was operating in a completely different context than I am now, of course. His purpose in this case was to analyze film montage as part of a wider aim to develop and understand Soviet cinema in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a political and artistic form. Yet, this very specific part of his writing—as it relates to metaphor—does seem relevant to my practice. What implications might his writing on montage and metaphor have here?

In his 1944 essay *Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today*—which Whittock cites as one of the most relevant of his essays regarding metaphor in film (Whittock, 1990: 74)—Eisenstein opposes representational and literal filmmaking technique with what he views as the more figurative technique Soviet cinema generally employs. According to Eisenstein here, Soviet film montage structure and style makes—or should make—metaphorical expression possible through “an abstraction of the lifelike representation” (Eisenstein, 1949: 242). For Eisenstein, D.W. Griffith’s film technique, for example, fails in this regard and, therefore, fails to transcend “the *limits of story* towards the *region of generalization* and

metaphorical allegory” (Eisenstein, 1949: 241). Eisenstein blames this failure partly on ideological deficiency in Griffith’s films, which he sees as never engaged in much more than “sentimental humanism” and never tackling social injustice (Eisenstein, 1949: 233-234). This is not, however, a critique based solely on ideological differences because he notes that Soviet filmmakers have, at times, also failed to achieve abstraction of the image and realize full metaphorical potential. Alexander Dovzhenko in his film *Zemlya (Earth)* (1930) failed to do this, Eisenstein believes, in his montage juxtaposition of the naked woman and the funeral near the end of the film. What Dovzhenko intended to do, Eisenstein claims, was to use the naked woman to represent “blazing fertility” and “a life-affirming beginning” and to juxtapose this with the theme of death represented by the funeral. His mistake however, as Eisenstein sees it, was to use “long shots of the interior of the peasant hut and the naked woman flinging herself about there” rather than “close-ups...isolated from naturalism and abstracted”. As a result, “the oven, pots, towels, benches, tablecloths—all those details of everyday life,” visible in the hut distract from the intended meaning of the woman’s body in the montage and interfere “with the embodiment of the conveyed metaphorical task” (Eisenstein, 1949: 242).

As I contemplate Eisenstein’s ideas about montage and metaphor, I cannot help but consider that these “details of everyday life” he refers to are particularly relevant and potentially problematic for many contemporary documentary filmmakers. Because documentary filmmaking practice today often involves

unscripted scenarios with non-actors in their everyday environments, the degree of control a filmmaker has over what is filmed or what appears in the shot may be much less than that of his or her fiction film counterpart. Directing the viewer's attention in documentary is often complicated by the relative messiness of actuality. Viewers may be distracted by any number of extraneous visual or aural components. Precisely what film subjects will say or do on camera is often not planned in advance by the filmmaker, who also has relatively little control over the manner in which things are said or done. A film subject prone to quick or frequent change of topic in conversation may, though not necessarily, pose a serious challenge to a filmmaker/editor. In the case of narrative film, the nature of the storytelling process may be very different in documentary than in fiction even though this may not always be obvious to a viewer since documentary frequently employs the devices of fictional storytelling. Dai Vaughan's statement "film is about something, whereas reality is not" (Vaughan, 1999: 21) is particularly meaningful when considering the kinds of special efforts made by documentary filmmakers to order and present actuality. Does metaphor in film, then, require a level of abstraction and construction of image that is difficult for many documentary filmmakers to achieve? Perhaps documentary filmmakers facing this predicament simply have to find different ways of expressing metaphor.

Because I was partly interested in mediating worlds and communicating the feeling of being there, I embraced the representational quality of film in *Eating*

*Cultures*. Further, I used a lot of continuity editing and did not use a lot of montage—at least not according to the standard understanding of montage editing. Yet, it is partly through a kind of juxtaposition that I attempted to express the metaphors in *Eating Cultures*. Whittock notes that Eisenstein’s conception of montage actually accommodates much more than the juxtaposition of different images sequentially through editing—“horizontal montage”. Juxtapositions of elements within the same shot, for instance, could consist of a “vertical montage” (Whittock, 1990: 73). The juxtaposition in my film between the work of preparing the meal in the restaurant and the work of making the documentary film, for example, may not—even by some further expansion of the concept—constitute montage. It is, nevertheless, juxtaposition—albeit a more gradual kind than the “horizontal” or “vertical” montage Eisenstein describes. My method would not be purely visual. It would not be through abstracted and juxtaposed images that metaphors would emerge but through the overall organizing logic of the film and through the juxtaposition of two scenarios—the running of the restaurant and the making of the documentary film. I would endeavor to allow the metaphors in *Eating Cultures* to emerge within the representational style and despite the distractions of actuality. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, I would also employ the filmmaker’s voice through narration and captions toward this aim.

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a rationale and contextualization for my methods—specifically my use of reflexive documentary filmmaking practice

and metaphor. In the “third course” of this thesis, I will reflect on and theorize my practice in greater detail.



## **Third course (Reflection and theorization)**

## Overview

This written thesis is, in part, a reflection on my experience of making the film *Eating Cultures*. I will not attempt—through some kind of exhaustive explanation—the impossible task of rendering my entire filmmaking experience accessible to the reader. Instead, this will be a necessarily selective rumination focusing on providing the kind of extra contextual detail that will enhance the reader's engagement with the film. One of my main aims here is to utilize this written medium to further articulate a metaphorical relationship between the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film, having already begun this exploration through the film medium.

It is with the benefit of hindsight that I now write about my filmmaking practice, knowing much more than I knew when I started my doctoral project nearly four years ago. I was reflective throughout the filmmaking process and kept a detailed journal collecting my thoughts in a more or less immediate fashion. It was, in fact, in anticipation of this written thesis that I wrote the journal entries; I was making notes to my future self, in a sense, so as not to forget the things I thought were important at the time. Having now had the luxury of setting aside time specifically for contemplation, I can properly reflect on the film project.

I will reflect on certain aspects of my experience before filming (in Chapter 3), during filming (in Chapter 4), and after filming (in Chapter 5) in each of the three restaurants; however, these were not three distinct stages with a clear linear progression from one stage to the next. In fact, although I initially imagined

working that way, I actually worked in a much more fluid manner with a lot of overlap between stages. Before beginning a more detailed theorization of the practice in the next chapters, I will briefly describe here the actual structure of my filmmaking process and how it was incorporated into my larger PhD project work. This may be useful for readers interested in working models for practice-based research.

### **Structure of the filmmaking**

One possible approach to conducting an audiovisual practice PhD project is to undertake the practice first and then the writing, roughly based on the conventional anthropology model of fieldwork followed by a period of writing. This is more or less the way I conducted my research project. Practice, in arts and humanities terms, however, is not equivalent to fieldwork. The concept of practice encompasses more (the filmmaker's research and planning phase before filming and screening after filming, for instance) and may also be less clearly distinguishable from the rest of the research project work. Therefore, literature and film review, draft writing and filmmaking practice were—to a certain extent—interwoven in my research. My project structure and working mode was also partially determined in response to university procedures like the upgrade from Master of Philosophy (MPhil) to Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) candidate. In addition, taking into account the fact that my project was self-funded, I had to develop a filmmaking strategy that would work on a very limited budget and that would allow for me to do much of the work on my own or with volunteer collaborators. I discovered how to work more efficiently as I went along.

First, after completing an initial literature and film review early in my doctoral study, I spent roughly five months researching for the film. One of my tasks was to broadly map out restaurants in London with a view to finally selecting and approaching three. I reviewed London restaurant guides, blogs, and other resources (produced both by professionals and aficionados) targeted at restaurant-goers. I also looked at media representations of London and how London is mapped and explained in terms of ethnic or immigrant communities, which often includes restaurants and food. I eventually visited 33 restaurants across London—spanning nearly the entire range of ethnic and national cuisines available. I began by visiting as an anonymous customer before selecting a few restaurants to return to for targeted discussions with owners and managers. During this time, I also met with a number of people in academia, food writing and journalism, and the restaurant business. It was during this time that I also formalized my research proposal for the university.

Next, I selected three restaurants to be film subjects, and two of the three (an Argentinian and an Eritrean restaurant) agreed to participate. The third restaurant I selected (Pakistani) declined participating in my film project, so I set out to find another Pakistani restaurant and confirmed their participation later. Based on early conversations and observations in the restaurants, I wrote a very rough treatment for the film at this stage.

Early in the filmmaking process and after some initial trial filming days, I decided against filming in all three restaurants simultaneously—opting instead to focus

intently on each restaurant individually. I first filmed with the Argentinian restaurant, then with the Pakistani restaurant and finally with the Eritrean restaurant—pausing for a period of a few months between each part. In doing this, I did not have to divide my attention and my time between the three restaurants during filming. This also allowed me more time to review footage between and after filming days and to assemble footage for my collaborators and supervisors to review. Before filming in each restaurant, I recruited a collaborator or collaborators to work with me—all of them based in the UK but originally from Argentina, Pakistan or Eritrea. Also before filming with each restaurant, I tried to immerse myself in research specific to the particular nation and cuisine. My collaborators assisted in this, and nation-specific research continued during and even after filming in each case. Because languages other than English were frequently spoken in each of the restaurants during filming, I needed time between and after filming days to review footage with my collaborators and translate selections as needed. After filming with the first restaurant (Argentinian), I took time to produce a relatively well-polished 25-minute assembly of footage to serve as a pilot and to partially fulfil the requirements of my upgrade from MPhil to PhD. I also revisited and revised the film treatment at this stage and developed a scenario document to serve as a working outline of the full film. An early draft of Chapter 1 served as the required academic writing sample for my upgrade. The experience of working with the Argentinian restaurant, Buen Ayre, and the feedback I received on the pilot and in the upgrade phase shaped my approach, in many ways, to filming in the Pakistani and Eritrean restaurants. For example, I spent a lot of time filming at

Buen Ayre; I had around 20 hours of footage—much of it observational in style and more than I could use. Through that experience, I had become accustomed to filming in kitchens and dining rooms and had developed some techniques for quickly and effectively filming food preparation with one camera and with limited space to move around. Responding to an early assembly of footage, my supervisors had encouraged me to stay focused on exploring the authenticity theme, and I had—after my experience in Buen Ayre—a much better idea of what kinds of questions I should ask and how to accomplish this. After producing the pilot, I had a clearer overall direction and strategy. While editing the pilot, I had also begun to look for archive footage related to Argentinian, Pakistani and Eritrean food; my search for archive footage and efforts to secure it continued off and on through the production of my first rough cut of the film. After completing the PhD upgrade process, filming continued with the Pakistani and Eritrean restaurants respectively. In each case, the filming, logging, translation and assembly edit period was slightly more condensed; I worked progressively more efficiently, having identified some good working strategies on the pilot. After filming with the Pakistani restaurant, my supervisors watched and again provided feedback on an assembly of footage. The process was repeated a third time with the Eritrean restaurant. In Chapter 5, I will discuss some of the supervisor feedback that was particularly influential during my editing process in more detail. Collaborator and colleague feedback was also instrumental in shaping the film. One of my film collaborators and advisors for the Eritrean episode, Seble, played an especially active role during this stage, for example. She reviewed my first assembly of the Eritrean restaurant footage while she was

away doing charity work in Eritrea. She then shared it with some of her Eritrean colleagues and summarized their feedback for me. One of the group's suggestions was that the assembly did not sufficiently show a contrast between what they considered traditional methods and customs and the adapted techniques in the London restaurant setting. I had tried to find archive footage that could serve this purpose but had been unsuccessful. Seble responded by volunteering to produce a video while there in Eritrea in which she would record a meal, *maadi*, as it is presented in a traditional-style restaurant in Asmara (Figure 2) along with other footage of bread being made on a traditional wood-fired *mogogo* (stove). Some of this footage would then be included in the first rough cut of the film. The full video (*An Eritrean Maadi*) is included in the attached Extra Features DVD.



**Figure 2: Scene of a traditional Eritrean meal (*maadi*), from video produced in Asmara, Eritrea by Seble Ephrem, Makonnen Woldeab, and the Eritrean Relief Association (UK)**

A few months after the rough cut was finished, I produced an updated version of the film responding to further feedback from supervisors and collaborators. My

supervisors and other colleagues reviewed the updated edit, and then I made some relatively minor changes to produce the screening version of the film. With the film ready for screening, I directed my full attention to the written thesis.

Most of my writing, I envisaged, would be done after the film was more or less finished, and I would use the written thesis to reflect on and theorize my practice—engaging with theory encountered in my literature review and also seeking out other theory to help understand the practice. I did, however, also periodically work on academic writing during the filmmaking practice—often for the purpose of presenting my work at seminars and conferences. As a result, I encountered some theory before and during filmmaking that I wanted to respond to through the filmmaking practice. The “tourism of everyday life” concept (Franklin and Crang, 2001) introduced in Chapter 1, for example, was very influential from the beginning and led me to consider the extent to which it might apply to the restaurant setting and the documentary filmmaking process, as well as to London more generally. I will develop this further in Chapter 3. Also, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the notion of emergent authenticity (Cohen, 1988) specifically came to mind during filming and informed my conversation with Benyam in the Eritrean restaurant as we were discussing their “East African sushi”. Dean MacCannell’s concept of staged authenticity and his range of front to back regions (MacCannell, 1973)—also introduced in Chapter 1—influenced the way I perceived various spaces in the Argentinian restaurant and how I decided to structure the pilot. I will explain this further in Chapters 4 and 5. The feedback I received at conferences on my in-progress film and writing also



shaped my research. I was introduced, for example, to Laura Marks's writing on intercultural film and haptic visuality (Marks, 2000) in the question and answer period after one of my conference presentations; I will apply some of Marks's theory in Chapter 4. One challenging aspect of working in this way was that it involved moving back and forth many times between different mindsets or modes. When working in filmmaking mode, especially before and during filming, I found myself physically moving around London a lot, meeting and interacting with many different kinds of people, and even eating very differently than I normally would. While the degree of physical stamina required was much higher in filmmaking mode, the level of concentration required in academic reading or writing mode was greater. The filmmaking mode involved much more improvisation and negotiation with others. In academic reading and writing mode, I felt I had more freedom to work independently and spent much more time contemplating in solitude. Yet, while I am arguing that there is a marked difference in the overall nature of the physical and mental engagement required for each activity, I am not suggesting that there should be a clear distinction between practice and theorizing. There are spaces of overlap between modes and ways in which they complement one another, but moving between them was not always easy for me. In my case, integrating the two modes also meant that there were pauses in the filmmaking process. This worked for me because I was able to produce the film in parts and because my film subject was not particularly time sensitive; however, having lapses in the filmmaking process may not work for everyone or for every project. Even in my case, I had to weigh the possible detrimental effects of breaking the momentum of the filmmaking

activity against the benefits of allowing space for thinking, theorizing, presentation and feedback.

## **Chapter 3: Recipe for a film, assembling ingredients**

### **Higher narrative levels**

In reflecting on my filmmaking experience, I will engage with what Fredric Jameson called the higher levels of narrative in documentary film and specifically with the second level of narrative, which is the drama of the filmmaker making the film (Chanan, 2004: 133). I have already engaged with this higher-level narrative in the film itself through reflexivity and reflective narration, but here I will continue and expand that. Beyond the second level are the higher-level narratives of pre-existing “clichés”, “conventions” and “categories”, as Jameson put it (Chanan, 2004: 133), and it was in the initial research phase for my film that I began to consider my work in relation to these larger narratives. I will elaborate on the context in which I found myself making this film, the higher-level narratives within which my film subjects in London restaurants were also working, and how I tried to operate within and resist pre-existing structures and categories.

### **London as the world in one city**

The “tourism of everyday life” (Franklin and Crang, 2001) theme introduced in Chapter 1 is nowhere more apparent than in a large metropolis like London. One of the dominant narratives about London revolves around its cultural diversity, and one of the most popular ways of understanding the city has been to categorize its inhabitants according to national or ethnic background. London museums have done this in their joint *Exploring 20<sup>th</sup> Century London* project,

though their emphasis is on objects rather than people. The invitation on the website is to “Discover your own ‘story of London’ through the thousands of objects brought to you by 19 London museums, libraries and archives” (Museum of London: [www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk](http://www.20thcenturylondon.org.uk)). The museum project presents many themes and narratives one might use to understand London. One of the fifteen main themes presented is Communities and another is Migration and Citizenship. Sub-themes include: African London, Bangladeshi London, Caribbean London, Chinese London, and so on. The sub-themes organize London communities largely by national or regional origin, among other things like ethnicity or religion. Within each community’s page, various objects are pictured (like a photograph from a 1985 Nigerian wedding in Willesden or an imported pack of henna dye powder purchased from a store in Southall in the early 1990s). Each community’s page also contains a written narrative with details like: historical circumstances leading to immigration to London; settlement patterns within London; and community characteristics like language(s) spoken or entrepreneurial activity in London. Food, markets and restaurants appear to play an important role in museum narratives of London. There are sections of the website dedicated to Eating Out, and many of the communities pages mention food, markets or restaurants. Many of the objects pictured also relate to markets or restaurants. The object pictured at the top of the Pakistani London page, for example, is a karahi pan acquired from Tayyab’s restaurant in east London (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Karahi pan featured on Pakistani London page of the *Exploring 20th Century London* website, courtesy of the Museum of London**

Others, in their representations of London, have followed a more strictly geographical logic and focused even more intently on ethnicity or nationality. In 2005, *The Guardian* produced a special report entitled “London: A World in One City”, which included the introductory article “Every Race, Colour, Nation and Religion on Earth” and a series of maps of London based on national statistical data. In his introductory article, Leo Benedictus presented London as “uncharted territory” and “the most diverse city ever”. “Immigrant communities...give the city its vibrancy and, more importantly, its food”, he said (*The Guardian*, 2005: [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jan/21/britishidentity1](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jan/21/britishidentity1)). It is a very informal report; the emphasis was on the maps, which visualize specific aspects of 2001 census data. There is a master map of “London’s ethnic minority communities” as well as separate, shaded maps for each ethnic group and each religious group showing population concentrations in each ward of the city. *The Guardian’s* written analysis of the maps is brief, largely anecdotal and at times even strange.

The reason given for the Chinese population being highly dispersed throughout London, for example, is that “you want to set up a Chinese restaurant that’s a little way away from the next one”—as senior demographer at the Greater London Authority, Rob Lewis, is quoted as saying (*The Guardian*, 2005: [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jan/21/britishidentity3](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2005/jan/21/britishidentity3)). What interested me when I encountered this report was the focus on mapping London and the emphasis on food—both focal points in my film research as well.

### **Culinary world travel in London**

Perhaps the prominence of food in narratives about London’s cultural diversity makes sense because markets and restaurants are sites where this diversity is most visible and accessible. Those “flows of global cultural materials”, which Franklin and Crag (2001) suggest we are now surrounded by in our everyday lives, are often food-related. There are restaurants presenting cuisines from nearly every part of the world in London, and there are many willing explorers mapping out the culinary landscape. One of the main features in online London guides (*London-Eating: The Definitive Guide to Eating in London*: [www.london-eating.co.uk](http://www.london-eating.co.uk)), (*Visit London*: [www.visitlondon.com](http://www.visitlondon.com)) and (*Time Out London*: [www.timeout.com/london/restaurants](http://www.timeout.com/london/restaurants)) is a catalogue of restaurants. In each of these cases, nation, region or ethnic association is one of the main organizing themes. *Time Out* also produces a more detailed London restaurant guide in print every year. I reviewed the 2010 edition (Muir, 2009) during my film research phase. Sectioned first by cuisine type, restaurants in the *Time Out* guide are then grouped by geographical location within London. The guide also

includes 27 maps of different London neighborhoods indicating the locations of reviewed restaurants. The introduction to the guide explains that *Time Out* reviewers have “expertise in specialist areas”, that many “have lived in foreign countries and learned much about that region’s cuisine”, and that, for example, “Malaysian and Singaporean eateries are covered by Malaysian and Singaporean expatriates” (Muir, 2009: 1). There is also a heavy emphasis on the fact that reviewers visit restaurants anonymously and try to be as objective as possible so that readers know what their own experience of eating in the restaurants might be like. The guide strongly resembles a travel guidebook in this respect. In an interview with the editor Guy Dimond in May of 2010, I proposed that the guide seemed to be designed with a kind of food tourist in mind—the kind of person interested in figuratively touring the world through London restaurants. Dimond acknowledged that was the intent. He then elaborated saying that the guide is designed both for “people who have a really good knowledge and interest of a particular cuisine type” and for “people who don’t know so much but are interested and want some kind of guidance”. A staff of paid reviewers and writers produces the annual guide, which sold for £11.99 in 2010. For the 2010 guide, the reviewers made a total of around 2,000 anonymous restaurant visits paid for by *Time Out*, and, according to Dimond, the budget for these meals alone was around £80,000. I include these figures just to point out that there is a tourism industry that exists around narratives of culinary world travel in London, and the industry extends beyond restaurants themselves and even beyond their direct associates like suppliers. Yet, many of those engaged in mapping London restaurants are not doing it professionally but as aficionados. A quick web search

yields dozens of blogs by London-based restaurant enthusiasts—descriptions and photos of their dining adventures proudly displayed like travelogues and also often categorized by cuisine nationality. Alastair Humphreys and Tom Kevill-Davies, for example, set out on a journey to eat at one London restaurant for each letter of the alphabet, where each letter represents a different nation's cuisine. For A, they went to an Afghan restaurant in Sheen in west London, for B, they went to a Bolivian restaurant in Walworth in southeast London, and so on. They recorded their experiences in photos, videos, podcasts and reviews and published it all on their website *London's World of Food: A to Z* (Humphreys and Kevill-Davies: [www.atozlondonfood.com](http://www.atozlondonfood.com)). Maybe there is a thin line between professional and aficionado, in this case, though. On the website, Alastair and Tom both described themselves as, among other things, authors and photographers, and they included links to their personal websites promoting their other work. A "food explorer", as Tom also described himself, may sometimes turn hobby into profession. Simon Majumdar started blogging about his London restaurant exploration with his brother on their blog (*Dos Hermanos: Go Everywhere, Eat Everything*: [www.doshermanos.co.uk](http://www.doshermanos.co.uk)) in 2006. When I interviewed him in May of 2010, he told me that his food blogging hobby led to a full-time career as a food writer and to actual world travel. He had gone on to write for *The Guardian* and to author a book called *Eat My Globe* about his adventures eating in 31 different countries around the world.



## **Eating cultures**

A lot of this “food explorer” activity embodies what academic David Bell might call a “cultural omnivore” perspective—a concept that he develops in his 2002 article “Fragments for a New Urban Culinary Geography”. Bell describes what he sees as a “middle-class eating disorder of ‘omnivorousness’” in which there is “the need to eat everything, to let it all in, in the hope that the ‘best bits’ can then be assembled into a new you—or, rather, a better, more accurate reflection of the real you”. Omnivorousness is “cultural mastery through incorporation”, he says (Bell, 2002: 15). The culinary world travel narrative in London seems to enable or encourage the “cultural omnivore”. Bell also writes about “ethnic quarters” in cities and how they work as “a way of producing the urban landscape as a readerly text”. “By cooking up ethnic quarters, we render them visible and accessible...available for consumption, as stages for the playing out of cultural omnivorousness” (Bell, 2002: 16). Bell’s work is clearly applicable to many of the phenomena I have been describing and have observed in London, but the tone of his writing is perhaps overly cynical and judgemental. He speaks of “compulsion”, “disorder” and “class war”, but I wonder if this kind of discourse is not just perpetuating another existing narrative—the narrative that tourist activity is vapid, exploitative consumption exercised by one class of people over a lower class of people. Underlying all of this are also concerns about what has been termed “culinary imperialism” or “food colonialism” (Narayan, 1995: para. 41-42). In her writing on Indian food in colonial and post-colonial contexts, Uma Narayan wants to critically address these concerns about the ways in which westerners engage with ethnic foods. She cites Lisa Heldke’s criticisms of

Americans who take a “colonialist stance” to eating ethnic food, where the “colonialist stance” involves exoticism and exploitation without any sincere interest or concern for the “cultural contexts” in which the food is produced and eaten (Narayan, 1995: para. 41). Narayan also cites Anne Goldman’s criticisms of food writer M.F.K. Fisher and the ways in which she presented “‘foreign’ traditions as commodities to be (literally) assimilated for her own use” (Goldman, 1992, cited in Narayan, 1995: para. 42). Narayan sympathizes with these critiques but suggests that there is something more complex happening. From her point of view as a “post-colonial Indian” taking into account the perspectives of “immigrants to western contexts”, Narayan notes that restaurants and shops are important and profitable economic enterprises:

Many immigrants would describe the proliferation of interest in ethnic cuisines positively, as an aspect of formerly colonized outsiders infiltrating and transforming western life—where, for instance, England would no longer be England without its Indian restaurants and grocery stores. While the proliferation of western interest in ethnic cuisines might run the danger of reinforcing the attitudes Heldke describes as ‘food colonialism’, the creation of such interest also involves the agency of shrewd ethnic immigrants helping to create, and cashing in on, the ‘western’ desire for culinary novelty. (Narayan, 1995: para. 47)

Competing perspectives on globalization and multiculturalism are also relevant here. Bell, in his writing on “cultural omnivorousness” is clearly on the side that rejects overly idealistic multiculturalism. Yet, he also very usefully points out that “reading ethnic quarters as either fabulous sites of multicultural difference or as spaces of continuing colonial fetishism and appropriation misses the intricacies of encounters that occur there” (Bell, 2002: 17).

My early film research left me ambivalent about what I had come to think of as food tourism in London, but it is precisely these “intricacies of encounters” Bell mentions that I wanted to engage with in my film project. I wondered what was actually happening in cross-cultural encounters in London restaurants and what I also might learn, through making a film in these settings, about cross-cultural encounter in documentary.

### **The documentary filmmaker/ethnographer as tourist**

Within the narrative of London as the world in one city, it is quite easy and natural to consider London restaurants as touristic spaces. Early in my film research, I began to identify with the tourist figure myself. To prepare for my film, I visited national and ethnic restaurants of all types across London. I wrote about and, in some cases, took photos of my food (Figure 4). I did not publish anything as a blogger would do, but I made detailed notes about my observations following each restaurant visit. I used the *Time Out* restaurant guide, among other resources, to plan my restaurant visits and to learn more about various cuisines. I also mapped my journey—marking all the restaurants I visited on a large map of London (Figure 5). I was labelling my culinary world tour of London as “research”, but it would be wrong to claim that my endeavor was somehow superior to those of other London food explorers. Because my culinary journey was part of a research project, it probably did involve a more intensive engagement than that of the average food explorer, who likely would not have access to the kinds of academic resources I did (not to mention lack of time for, of interest in, that kind of engagement). Surely, however, different food tourists

are engaging at different levels. Tourism scholar Graham Dann writes, “One cannot simply speak about tourists and tourism as if there were just one variant of each. There are many different types and forms of both” (Dann, 2002: 7).



Figure 4: Photo from meal at Bamboula restaurant in Brixton, taken during restaurant research phase



Figure 5: Map of London used to mark restaurants visited in restaurant research phase

The documentary filmmaker and the ethnographic researcher are not exempt from the accusations leveled at the tourist—of “cultural omnivorousness” or of taking a “colonialist stance”. Just as power between tourist and toured may be seen as unbalanced in favor of the tourist, the relationship between filmmaker and filmed, or researcher and researched, is also unequal. The documentary filmmaker and the ethnographer may share another important characteristic with the tourist; to the extent that each of them uses a camera, they are all producing mediated gazes. All are working within but may also work against dominant ways of seeing subjects. The tourist is not often associated with resistance but should not necessarily be discounted in this respect. Tourism scholars John Urry and Jonas Larsen note that although the tourist gaze often reproduces existing imagery received from professional tourism or media organizations, tourist photographs may, at times, “violate existing place-myths and contribute to new ones” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 187). Finally, it is possible to see the camera and the documentary filmmaking process figuratively as consuming others, and this also metaphorically connects the documentary filmmaker—and, ultimately, the documentary viewer as well—to the restaurant customer. I will explore this theme further in Chapter 5, as it was after filming that I began to develop the “eating cultures” metaphor more fully.

As I continued my film research and prepared to begin filming, I felt increasingly hesitant about identifying with the figure of the tourist. Yet, I felt that it was, to some extent, inescapable. I would be more than a tourist, or at least not a regular kind of tourist. I was, from the beginning, a filmmaker assembling

ingredients and putting together a recipe for a documentary film. I would have a different purpose and responsibility as a filmmaker and academic. I would have multiple identities, but my approach would be to try and relate to the subjects of the film, and I would begin to do this by identifying with restaurant customers as a fellow tourist. In a broader sense, I wanted to acknowledge the touristic quality of social interaction in a globalizing world. From this perspective, many different types of people acting in various capacities are implicated as tourists. According to Dann, “the tourist as a metaphor of the social world” theme has been used extensively to try and understand the postmodern condition—presumably mostly by academics. It is, however, still a useful theme, Dann says, and worth investigating further in a rapidly changing world. In fact, he argues that “more and more novel and associated metaphors are required which link the changing nature of the tourist to an ever mutable environment” (Dann, 2002: 13). I would take this into account later in my filmmaking practice—considering, for example, various instances of tourist-like behavior in the documentary filmmaking process. One particularly surprising place I encountered it during filming was in the behavior of some of the staff members in the Argentinian restaurant. I originally imagined them as “the toured”, so to speak, or the hosts—where the restaurant customers and I were more like tourists or guests consuming the meal or the performance they were providing us. I experienced a sort of role reversal, though, when waiter Nicolás began filming and taking pictures of the film crew as we worked (Figure 6). The documentary filmmaking process had seemingly encouraged a touristic response, and the film crew became the subject of the restaurant staff gaze as well. There was a slipperiness here in the nature of the

touristic encounter and the filmmaking encounter where it was, at least briefly, difficult to distinguish a simple tourist-toured or filmmaker-film subject relationship.



Figure 6: Setting up to film in the downstairs kitchen at Buen Ayre, from video recorded by Buen Ayre waiter Nicolás

### Recipe for a film

In the first part of my film research, I tried to experience London restaurants from the perspective of a regular restaurant customer. I did not announce to restaurant personnel that I was doing research for a film; like a *Time Out* reviewer, I visited anonymously in order to try and have a typical customer experience. In the case that I did eventually film with a particular restaurant, I would already have had the experience of being there as a customer and could compare that with the experience of being there as a documentary filmmaker. I

tried to observe how restaurant staff interacted with customers, how restaurant spaces were arranged, how the meal was explained and presented, the characteristics and behaviors of other customers eating in the restaurants, the atmosphere, and the décor.

During this period, I also met with and sought advice from a wide array of people as I was planning my filmmaking strategy and searching for film subjects.

Through my PhD supervisors and my affiliation with the University of Roehampton, a network of academics emerged. Among them I found researchers with similar interests in the cultural aspects of food and anthropologists with experience researching various London communities.

Sometimes this network expanded to a third level as researchers connected me to individuals within the communities they had studied. I found myself, for example, receiving Polish restaurant recommendations from the editor of a London Polish community magazine as we stood in the magazine office reviewing their Polish restaurant advertisements. I was also developing an expanding network of colleagues and friends in London who had come to the UK from other countries. I talked with many of them about food in their home countries and about how their national cuisines were being presented in London restaurants.

Some of them offered restaurant recommendations or advice about dishes.

Some visited restaurants with me, introduced me to iconic or traditional dishes, and commented on their experiences in the restaurants—making comparisons to their food experiences back home. My “cuisine insider” friends, so to speak, always elected to speak with restaurant staff in their native languages and would



often operate a bit like guides with me. Having a cuisine insider with me brought a different dynamic to the restaurant experience; I learned a lot more than I did visiting restaurants on my own but had less direct interaction with staff. All of these experiences helped me develop ideas for my film and strategies for my filmmaking. I began to envision the kinds of dining room and kitchen scenes I might encounter, to formulate questions I would ask of restaurant customers and staff, and to consider how I might work with cuisine insider collaborators.

I decided early in my film research to focus on restaurants where claims or expectations of authenticity were most relevant. Issues around authenticity are not as relevant for fusion restaurants as for national restaurants, for example; at least they are not relevant in the same way. One of the main reasons for making the film, after all, was to reflect on the notion of authenticity. I wanted to engage with authenticity theory I had encountered in my early literature review. I was hoping that, by investigating issues around authenticity in the restaurants, I might reflect on authenticity in documentary in a new way. In practice, I found it somewhat paradoxical that I was, in a sense, looking for *authentic* restaurants even as I was already aware of the problematic nature of such an endeavor. I found myself bound, to some extent, by pre-existing national and ethnic categories. I did not want to label people in ways that would deny them complex identities, nor did I want to reinforce any “us versus them” distinctions. Yet, many labels had already been imposed and were sometimes clearly self-imposed. It was difficult to discuss restaurants with people without using labels like “authentic”, “ethnic”, “immigrant”, or “foreign”. I felt the frequent urge to

flag words with quotation marks whenever using them in order to acknowledge them as problematic. This was especially the case when speaking with academics during this period of my film research. In face-to-face communication, however, I limited my use of air quotes—thinking that it might have been off-putting to use them repeatedly. When I began meeting and discussing my project with people in restaurants in the second phase of my film research, I also considered that it might seem disrespectful to use quotes in some cases. Using quotes around the word “authentic” when speaking to a restaurant owner about his or her restaurant could have been interpreted as sarcasm, for example. In fact, the way I discussed my project with academics was often different than the way I discussed it with people in restaurants and other potential collaborators, though I felt conflicted about this. I was trying to anticipate things like language and cultural barriers, and I sometimes felt the need to be brief or to simplify. People working in restaurants often did not have much extra time; however, many of the people I approached did arrange to have more extended conversations with me about their experiences managing or working in restaurants. I always introduced myself as a PhD student working on a research project that would eventually involve making a documentary film. As part of this research, I explained that I was trying to learn more about how restaurants in London were presenting national and ethnic cuisines from different parts of the world.

I began to realize, in talking with people outside of academia especially, that I was bound not only by the existing categories and narratives discussed earlier but also by the televisual form that often produces and maintains them. For

some, my documentary film project called to mind restaurant-related reality television programs they had seen. In a meeting with the manager of an Indian restaurant, after describing my research and film project to him, I asked him what he thought about the hypothetical proposition of my filming in his restaurant. He would not mind having a camera in the dining area, he said, but he would not allow a camera in the kitchen. It might be too much of a distraction for his staff, he said. He went on to tell me a story about how he had once been approached by a television producer and declined to allow them to film in his restaurant because he thought they were looking for some kind of “kitchen nightmares” scenario. He was referring to the Channel 4 reality show of the same name (*Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares*, 2004-2009), in which celebrity chef Gordon Ramsay goes to struggling restaurants and makes them over. I explained that my film would be completely different in purpose and approach, and he indicated that he understood that. Perhaps he meant for me to interpret his story about the television producer as just a tangential anecdote, but he had nonetheless made a connection between my film and reality television. I was concerned about my film project being likened to Gordon Ramsay’s program because I consider it to be among the most objectionable within the restaurant reality show genre. I find, for example, the way in which Ramsay often brutally imposes his will onto his program participants to be especially objectionable. I would have expected that my academic documentary film project would be seen as completely different to this kind of reality television, but perhaps the distinction was not as clear as I thought. Another of Gordon Ramsay’s restaurant reality shows would come up in a conversation later in my filmmaking process—in an

early meeting with my collaborator Maria, who would be a sound recordist and interpreter for filming in the Argentinian restaurant Buen Ayre. We were discussing Argentinian restaurants in London, and Maria remembered that Ramsay had featured a London Argentinian restaurant in the fifth season of his new program (*Gordon Ramsay's F Word Series 5*, 2009-2010). I then watched some of the series, which I had not been aware of, and discovered that Ramsay had just undertaken “an exciting new mission, the nationwide search for The F Word’s Best Local Restaurant”—as reads the description on the Channel 4 on-demand website. I was slightly troubled as I started to realize that the *F Word* series, though it was still very different from my documentary film project, might bear more of a resemblance to my work than *Kitchen Nightmares* did. For my project, I had visited restaurants across London and was trying to select three for my film; Ramsay’s team had visited restaurants across Britain and had selected a handful of them for his program. Some of the criteria that Ramsay gave for selecting restaurants are common markers of authenticity like “local”, “independent”, and “family-run”; these are criteria that I considered in my search as well. The *F Word* series also organized and presented restaurants by nationality. In the preliminary episodes, Ramsay first presented two Italian restaurants, then two Indian restaurants, two French restaurants, then two Chinese restaurants, and so on. In some cases, restaurants with different national labels competed. The London Argentinian restaurant competed with a Caribbean restaurant in Huddersfield, for example, and this was presented as “the Americas category”. In each episode, two restaurants competed and one was eliminated until Ramsay finally selected one winner. My intention was not,

as his was, to find the “best” or to judge restaurants. I wanted to select and film with three restaurants in which I might best explore the complexities of authenticity and cross-cultural encounter. I never envisioned restaurants in my film as competitors; however, the fact that I had conducted a search and ultimately selected three restaurants might have unintentionally suggested a kind of competition. In fact, a few people I talked to in my film research phase suggested that I should consider comparing three of the same kind of restaurant. I decided to start clarifying that my film would not be a comparison to find the most authentic or best restaurant and would not be a comparative study. As my film research phase progressed, I tried to be clearer about my project purpose and approach in order to distinguish my film project from reality television. In watching Ramsay’s program, I found many things that I wanted to specifically resist. Ramsay presented himself as a kind of master of all cuisines. He judged that restaurants were authentic and talked with restaurant staff about traditional methods and recipes without any reflection on the complexities of authenticity, the problem of national labels or the intricacies of cross-cultural exchange. Though at times Ramsay seemed to be attempting to learn something from the people filmed and appreciate their efforts, the ultimate goal was to judge them based on how well they would perform under his conditions and conform to his rules. The program was heavily structured, leaving very little space for the people filmed to speak for themselves. I hoped to be more like an observer-participant, rather than a monarch like Ramsay, in my interventions in restaurants. The ethnographic aspect of my approach would allow my film subjects much more space to speak for themselves. Where Ramsay’s approach was an overt or

extreme example of “culinary imperialism”, my approach would resemble Narayan’s description of Heldke’s “anti-colonialist mode” in which a westerner eating ethnic food should try to “acquire knowledge about the cultural contexts of ethnic foods—from cooking these foods, to reading about the history and culture of their countries of origin, to learning about the cultural contexts of ethnic food from members of ethnic food cultures” (Narayan, 1995: para. 41). This “anti-colonialist mode” of eating seems to transpose well to filmmaking. Yet, no matter how informed or collaborative my process, as the director of my film I would be a kind of monarch—albeit a monarch who would try to share some of the power with film subjects and collaborators.

### **Assembling ingredients**

I considered many factors as I finally selected three restaurants to approach to be in the film, but my initial selections were based largely on intuition about which restaurants would make the best film subjects. The film would not be a comprehensive representation of all London restaurants; it would not even represent all of my culinary world tour in London, though my choices would reflect some of my most memorable dining experiences. I did consider that my selections were balanced across the globe rather than representing cuisines from the same broad geographical area; this would better reflect the wide range of geographic locations represented in London restaurants. Ultimately, however, these would simply be three separate spaces in which to explore authenticity and cross-cultural encounter in different ways. I also considered the filmic qualities of restaurant spaces and favored dynamic, visually and aurally

interesting spaces—factors that might not be relevant in research that does not involve filmmaking. Finally, one of the most important practical considerations was access. Restaurants I selected would, of course, have to be interested in participating in my project and prepared to allow me to film.

It was in this final stage of film research before filming started that I began to shift from identifying with restaurant customers as a tourist to identifying with restaurant staff as a kind of storyteller and cultural translator. Later in my filmmaking process, as I will discuss more in Chapters 4 and 5, I would begin to examine the work of cultural translation in more depth, to develop the metaphor of “mediating worlds” and to see the restaurant staff and the documentary filmmaker as mediators. My hypothesis at this earlier stage, though, was simply that I might learn something about authenticity from the restaurant scenario that I could apply in some abstract way to documentary filmmaking. I considered that we might have something in common and that we might be facing similar kinds of dilemmas. It was from this perspective that I approached the restaurant personnel at my selected restaurants to discuss the research and film project.

All of the restaurant personnel I spoke with at this time expressed to me the importance of trying to preserve certain culinary traditions or recreate foreign dining experiences. In discussions and observations with them before filming, I tried to understand more about the culinary traditions they were trying to adhere to and what they thought made the meal in the restaurant authentic. Authenticity was generally understood as residing in recipes, methods,

ingredients, staff, equipment, décor or atmosphere. Their perceptions were based on lived, inherited or learned experience. Conversations about authenticity led to discussions about limitations, compromises and adaptations that had to be made. I was looking for people who were willing and able to engage with me about issues around authenticity. I found this kind of engagement in the Argentinian restaurant Buen Ayre, the Pakistani restaurant Mirch Masala, and the Eritrean restaurant Mosob.

I then set out to find “cuisine insider” collaborators to work with me and began specific research on each of the three nations and cuisines. Nation-specific reading and research would continue throughout the filmmaking process, but there were a few key ideas that arose in my initial research and guided me during filming. In the Argentinian scenario, one of the most interesting themes around authenticity had to do with the origins of the beef. Both restaurant owner, John, and my Argentinian collaborator, Maria, indicated this topic was important in our early conversations about authenticity. This encouraged me to explore perceptions about the link between beef and Argentinian national identity. A second important and related theme was the hegemony of beef in constructions of Argentinian cuisine. In the Pakistani restaurant scenario, the issue of national identity was also an important theme and much more complex, in some ways, than the Argentinian one. In London, restaurants run by people from or with historical roots in the various regions and nations of the Indian subcontinent are often lumped together into the category of “Indian”. There is also a perception that Indian food has been anglicized over the years as a result of the historical



conditions of British colonial rule and Indian diaspora. I wanted to further explore people's perceptions around these two themes in the Pakistani restaurant. I perceived national identity as a key theme in the Eritrean restaurant scenario as well. In this case, because Eritrea only became an independent nation in the early 1990s and is not familiar to many Londoners, the restaurant seemed to be implicated in a kind of nation-building project. A second, and possibly more important theme, was to do with preserving the traditional communal spirit of East African eating.<sup>1</sup>

My volunteer "cuisine insider" collaborators helped me prepare to explore these themes further. We worked together in various ways. In every case, I had extensive conversations with them before filming to discuss their food experiences in London and in their home countries, to identify themes they thought were important, and to identify questions they thought I should ask. Because my Argentinian collaborator, Maria, and my Pakistani collaborator, Rashid, were also interested in documentary filmmaking, they were willing to work with me as sound recordists in the restaurants. We planned that they would also act as interpreters as needed; this would not be limited to language interpretation but they would also serve as "cultural respondents"—a term my anthropologist supervisor Garry Marvin suggested. I had a second Pakistani collaborator, Saba, who would accompany me in the restaurant when Rashid was not available. She had more experience as an interpreter and translator and was a very keen "cultural respondent" as well. My Eritrean collaborator, Seble, had extensive resources and connections in the Eritrean community, both in London

and in Eritrea, through her charity work with the Eritrean Relief Association (UK). To prepare for filming, she provided a lot of reading material on Eritrean culture and history, which would have otherwise not been available to me. She also arranged for me to meet her fellow ERA-UK members, Nebiat and Yodit, who would prepare a meal of traditional Eritrean dishes for me and discuss themes they thought were important for me to explore in the Eritrean restaurant. Seble and another ERA-UK member, Guemesh, would later come to the Eritrean restaurant for a meal and give their feedback on the experience compared to their experiences of food in Eritrea. I saw my collaborators as advisors or guides who could provide independent viewpoints as they were external to the restaurants and would also have different perspectives to mine. My intention was not to present any view as an expert view. I would, instead, explore various—and sometimes conflicting—perspectives. I wanted my film representation to “reveal subtle shades of meaning, and overlapping, multifaceted, perspectives”—something that Garry Marvin says an anthropologist seeks to do (Marvin, 2006: 198).

In fact, I believe that it was the anthropologically-informed aspect of my approach that allowed access to the restaurants and participation from film subjects and collaborators in the first place. My film would be produced in a film studies context with the central purpose to better understand documentary filmmaking, and in particular cross-cultural documentary filmmaking; I did not label myself as an anthropologist. Yet, I positioned myself as a researcher, and their consent was based upon their understanding of my work as a non-

commercial, academic pursuit where the “agenda” would be “understanding”—to use Marvin’s terms. In his writing about ethnographic research with fox hunters Marvin says, “I had promised them that, as an anthropologist, my agenda was not that of exposure, but that of understanding, or rather that the anthropological exposure I would bring would be one of understanding” (Marvin, 2006: 200). Foxhunting may be a much more contentious activity than working in a restaurant, but my questioning film subjects about authenticity, revealing recipes and methods, and showing work that is normally done in private would be a kind of exposure. At stake were family and small businesses and people’s livelihoods, so I shared Marvin’s view on the researcher’s responsibility to research participants and their interests and to try and do no harm. My efforts to convey these aspects of my approach to potential research participants and their resulting trust in me made filming possible

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Another theme that arose in my research phase was related to gender. In most of the restaurants I visited, there seemed to be an underlying contradiction here. Notions of the “authentic” and the “homemade” are often bound up together, and home cooking is traditionally considered the female domain. For the most part, however, men own and manage these restaurants and also prepare the food. In my filming, I would encounter a woman preparing food only once. Nevertheless, as *Eating Cultures* shows, several of the people I filmed with would

make a connection between authentic food and the female—in particular the mother. The take-away customer at Mirch Masala expresses her belief that the food prepared in the restaurant is authentic; she bases this on the opinion of her Indian mother-in-law, whom she considers to be an authority on Indian food. She also defines “authentic” as “like your mum would cook it”. Yet, as the film shows, an all male staff prepares the food at Mirch Masala. In the Argentinian context, grilling and meat-eating have traditionally been associated more with males than females; therefore, perhaps there is no contradiction in the fact that food is prepared exclusively by men at Buen Ayre. One could argue, however, that the restaurant’s representation of the culinary world of Argentina is an overly masculine one. As the film shows, the Argentinian staff members eat a dish called *milanesa de pollo* (chicken escalope) in one of their after-hours meals. The female staff members describe it to me as a dish that Argentinians love because it induces nostalgia for home. “It’s what your mum cooks when you’re a child”, waitress Noel says; “it’s like the taste of childhood”. Yet, *milanesa de pollo* is not on the restaurant menu at Buen Ayre. In the Eritrean restaurant, brothers Benyam and Daniel emphasize the importance of the concept of the family—in particular the mother—as the center of the meal experience. They use their mother’s recipes in the restaurant. Even the name of the restaurant is intended to embody the notion of the mother; Mosob spelled backwards is “bosom”, as Benyam says. For the most part, however, I would only be able to film with male representatives of the restaurant. My attempts to film with Benyam and Daniel’s mother and sister were largely unsuccessful because both women did not feel

comfortable appearing in the film. As a general rule, they choose to maintain their privacy and insist that Benyam and Daniel should be the public face of the restaurant. Therefore, the brothers—along with cook Mohammed—have appeared in all of the media materials associated with Mosob in the past; Benyam and Daniel even appear alone in the family photo on the restaurant website. Their sister, Suliana, is actually very active in the running of the restaurant and was welcoming and helpful in the course of my filmmaking; however, she was extremely reluctant to engage with me on camera. She does appear briefly in the film—making the *injera* (bread)—but she only agreed to do so if she could remain relatively anonymous and not be asked to speak on camera. Ultimately, I would not focus explicitly on gender issues for *Eating Cultures*, but I believe that the film subtly reveals some of these contradictions. Additionally, though *Eating Cultures* shows women to be somewhat subordinate or even absent in the running of restaurants, it shows something quite different happening in the filmmaking. I collaborated with crew members and advisors of both sexes, but the women outnumbered the men and have a stronger overall presence in the film. In allowing several female voices to be prominent in the criticism and commentary on the food, perhaps *Eating Cultures* even goes some way toward confronting gender imbalance in the restaurants.

## Chapter 4: On cooking and filming

I was guided by a few key objectives as I approached filming in the restaurants. I wanted to experience and record how the meal in the restaurant is constructed and how “authentic” is understood and dealt with by restaurant staff and customers. I would continue to explore my identification with customers as a tourist, and I would also explore how the work of constructing the meal in the restaurant might be related to the work of making a documentary film. What might a documentary filmmaker have in common with staff in the restaurants? What could we discover by working alongside one another and in the process of making a documentary film together?

Making the film *Eating Cultures* was, in large part, a way of exploring relationships. I had already begun to see the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film as connected in the sense that both may involve cross-cultural encounter. My approach was similar in several ways to what video artist Julie Perini calls “relational filmmaking” (Perini, 2011). In an article for *Afterimage*, Perini reflects on her video project *Girl Next Door* (2010) in which she explores the social practice of documentary filmmaking through filmed encounters with neighbors living around her apartment in North Portland, Oregon, USA. She characterizes herself as a “relational filmmaker” and notes that relational filmmakers are interested in the relationship-building and collaborative aspects of filmmaking. In her manifesto she proclaims: “Relational filmmakers do not make films about people. Relational filmmakers make films with people” (Perini, 2011: 9). She argues for the importance of “the intersubjective encounter at the

core of the relational filmmaking process” (Perini, 2011: 10). In *Girl Next Door*, she says, it was precisely those relationships with people she filmed that “became the story the final film narrates” (Perini, 2011: 9). My work aligns with Perini’s “relational filmmaking” both in terms of my inclinations during filming and in the way my finished film operates. In Chapter 5, I will deal in more detail with the latter. In my filming, I was aiming like Perini was for a dialogical and collaborative atmosphere. This involved collaboration in a straightforward sense. I discussed my broad objectives—detailed at the beginning of this chapter—to film subjects, collaborators, advisors and crew members and then asked for their input and advice about how to accomplish those aims. The response and nature of the collaboration was different in each case. For example, at the Argentinian restaurant Buen Ayre, my collaborator Maria and I were allowed to hang out, observe and interact in a relatively unstructured way with staff members, who presented us with a performance of sorts. They performed their usual roles in a sometimes playful way and often included the film crew in their joking. At the Pakistani restaurant Mirch Masala, on the other hand, my collaborators Rashid and Saba and I had a more structured interaction with the staff. The manager, Saad, oversaw the filming process with the same concern for efficiency and organization that he displayed in managing the kitchen (Figure 7). He directed us to various food preparation in progress and instructed kitchen staff to wait for the film crew to set up and focus. In much the same way that they accommodate customers by adapting dishes to each person’s taste, the staff accommodated us to be sure that we were able to accomplish the goal of making the film.



**Figure 7: Mirch Masala restaurant manager Saad directing restaurant staff and helping film crew capture food preparation in progress, from *Eating Cultures***

Staff members at the Eritrean restaurant Mosob preferred to schedule special time outside of their normal working hours in order to host me in a more relaxed way in their restaurant. This would allow them to talk with me at length about their experiences running the restaurant. They would also allow some observational style filming during dinner service, though this was difficult for them as the film crew and bright light were discordant with the dimly-lit, intimate aesthetic and with their intended dining experience for customers. We worked together to determine how I could also accomplish a more in-depth filming of the meal experience for new customers and for Eritrean customers by using the back room in the restaurant and inviting people to the restaurant for a meal. Like Perini in her relational filmmaking approach, I felt that relationship building and collaboration was a key part of my strategy and also that this collaboration in itself was one of the aims of the filmmaking. My work extended beyond straightforward relationship building, however, to the formulation of abstract relationships with the people I was filming.



In Chapter 3, I began to explain my identification with restaurant customers as a tourist and introduced the idea of my identifying with the restaurant staff members as a mediator. From the moment I decided to make a film, of course, I was already operating as a mediator, but I would move back and forth between identifying with restaurant customers as a tourist and identifying with the restaurant staff as a mediator.

Much of what I was trying to do while exploring these relationships had to do with what anthropologist Sarah Pink calls “experiencing similarly” (Pink, 2008). Pink introduces this term in the context of her writing on audiovisual research methods, but I think the concept is more broadly applicable to documentary and to the restaurant. It applies, at least, to my documentary filmmaking approach and seems to apply to the three restaurants I worked with as well. In her chapter in *Research Methods in Cultural Studies*, Pink claims that one of the key things visual ethnographic research methods can do is to “provide researchers with opportunities to experience similarly and use their own sensory embodied knowledge as a basis from which to learn about that of others” (Pink, 2008: 148). The video recording process is integral to this approach because the researcher can use the audiovisual material later “to invoke these experiences” again for herself and to try and communicate “a sense of how it felt to be there” to other audiences (Pink, 2008: 127). This, at first, sounds quite similar to Richard Leacock and the direct cinema aim of communicating “the feeling of being there” discussed in Chapter 2; however, Pink’s approach is participatory and reflexive. She also talks about the video recording process as a method for collaboratively

reflecting on and defining experience (Pink, 2008: 136). Her approach resembles Perini's relational filmmaking in its emphasis on collaboration, but Pink seems to focus more than Perini does on empathy and shared sensory experience. I would argue that staff members in the three restaurants I worked with were also invested, to a certain extent, in their customers "experiencing similarly". I am not suggesting that this was their only motivation, and I think certain individuals prioritized this aim more than others. Benyam and Daniel in the Eritrean restaurant Mosob, for example, highly prioritized this aim. They emphasized this to me in various ways during filming. They stressed the importance of creating an experience for customers that resembles their family dining experience. Their medium for communicating this experience is the meal in the restaurant. They use their mother's recipes, treat customers as houseguests and friends, and insist that customers experience the traditional way of eating from a communal plate with their hands (Figure 8). Their approach is also collaborative in a sense. Daniel and Benyam talked to me about the restaurant guestbook and how they actively seek and review feedback from customers. Mosob's guestbook operates a bit like Pink says collaborative video recording can in that it encourages reflection on and definition of experience. They use the guestbook, Benyam says, to better understand what the restaurant has done and what it means to people. They see it as documentation that they can show others in the future as well. I strongly identified with Daniel and Benyam and their aims in this regard. In filming *Eating Cultures*, I was also focused on empathy through shared sensory experience and on reflection and definition of that experience. My attempts to "experience similarly" were a crucial part of formulating my relationships with film subjects

and collaborators, and I also filmed with a view to later convey my experience of being there to viewers.



**Figure 8: Mosob restaurant owner Daniel explaining to customers how to eat in the traditional Eritrean style with their hands and from a communal plate, from *Eating Cultures***

One of my challenges in filming was to try and represent multisensory experience through my medium, which operates only with the visual and aural senses, strictly speaking. How could I deal with the gustatory, olfactory and tactile senses, which are such important elements in the full sensory experience of the meal in the restaurant? In her book *The Skin of the Film*, this is one of the questions film scholar Laura Marks asks. She builds from Bergson's model of perception in which the image is by definition multisensory and Deleuze's optical image, which she explains is necessarily multisensory in that it "requires the viewer to complete the image by searching his or her own circuits of sense memory" (Marks, 2000: 212-213). Movement-image cinema, she says, evokes the non-aural, non-visual senses in two simple ways. First, this happens through narrative identification with characters on screen. The viewer may salivate upon

seeing or hearing a film character eating. Second, this happens through intersensory links or synesthesia. She gives the example that “rising steam or smoke evokes smells of fire, incense, or cooking” (Marks, 2000: 213). I shot footage for *Eating Cultures* that should theoretically allow for both narrative identification and synesthesia, and I also engaged film subjects in verbal description of food as they explained how food was prepared. At Mosob, for example, Daniel uses very descriptive and evocative language when he explains to me that the bread, *injera*, must have holes, called “eyes”, and that proper formation of these eyes is very important because the eyes are what soak in the sauces. As he described this to me, I composed an extreme close-up of the *injera* cooking in the pan and air bubbles popping to form eyes (Figure 9). The sound of bubbles popping is also there, though it is a bit low under the noisy kitchen fan.



**Figure 9: *Injera* bread-making, bubbles popping to form "eyes", from *Eating Cultures***

One of my strategies for communicating the experience of being there in the restaurants to film viewers was to get as close to the food as possible via close-

up shots and close miking. I would closely observe raw ingredients being combined and cooked as well as finished dishes as they were plated, presented and eaten. In doing this, I might also activate synesthesia in viewers. Close-up shots allow the viewer to see very fine detail in the texture of food. In extreme close-up, the viewer can see very clearly, for example, that the *injera*, with its eyes, looks like a sponge. Daniel's verbal description reinforces this. The texture and mouthfeel of a spongy bread may be easy for a viewer to conjure up from this. Marks also focuses in detail on the connection between film close-ups and tactile sensory experience and how the close-up may work to collapse the visual and tactile senses. This is often achieved not only as the image reveals fine textural detail but also, she says, in the movement of the camera over the physical object as if to simulate touching it. The filmmaker and later the viewer may then use "vision as though it were a sense of touch" (Marks, 2000: 127). Reflecting now on my filming, I believe I was doing something similar to this when filming extreme close-ups of customers' food in the Eritrean restaurant. I spent a lot of time in extreme-close-up mode looking at the communal platters as hands moved in and out using the bread to grab bits of stew, vegetables and sauce. Responding—perhaps instinctively more than consciously—to the movement of the hands, I moved the camera in a corresponding way over the food as if participating in the eating. This kind of shot, Marks says, can cause a "poignant awareness of the missing sense" (Marks, 2000: 129). In this respect, however, what I was doing in trying to "experience similarly" and later convey the sense of being there to film viewers was paradoxical. The closer I came to evoking the missing senses, the more obvious it would be that they were missing.

I might simply be activating a sense of longing for the lacking sense experience; perhaps I could only really cause viewers of *Eating Cultures* to become hungry watching the film. I could not actually convey the sense experience itself—taste, smell, touch. This part of the sense experience is not translatable through the medium of film. Yet, I was aspiring to do just that. Reflecting now on my practice, I would describe this as a tension between aspiration and resignation—aspiration to translate experience and resignation in recognition of the fact that it was untranslatable. Even more strangely, I had a sense that sometimes I was coming closer to translating it than other times. I felt an affinity for restaurant staff members, whom I began to think of as also engaged in the paradoxical and aspirational work of translating the untranslatable. Theirs is a different kind of translation, and the experience they are trying to communicate is untranslatable for different reasons. Through their medium (the meal in the restaurant), they have the ability to directly employ all of the senses. Yet, to the extent that sense experience is linked to memory and identity, the experience of the meal is not fully translatable from one person to another. When my collaborator Rashid tasted *lassi* (yogurt drink) at Mirch Masala, for example, he enjoyed the taste and he also remembered Pakistan and felt closer to it. I have enjoyed the experience of drinking *lassi* as well, but because I only recently tried it for the first time here in London, it was a novel experience for which I had no associated memories—certainly not of Pakistan, which I have never visited. With regard to sensory experience through film, Marks acknowledges that sensuous and synesthetic experience is richer for those who already have associated sense memories. Even when a sense experience is unfamiliar, though, she says it is still possible to

engage with it and suggests that doing so is a worthwhile endeavor (Marks, 2000: 222-223). In sharing the experience of drinking *lassi* with Rashid and hearing him talk about how it reminded him of home, I may not have felt close to Pakistan in the way that Rashid did, but I did feel a closer connection to Rashid and perhaps a kind of prosthetic link to Pakistan as a result. While I was filming this, I felt that future film viewers might experience a similar feeling, as they watched footage of Rashid drinking *lassi* and talking about his associated memory of Pakistan.



Figure 10: Sound recordist Rashid talks with me about *lassi* (yogurt drink), from *Eating Cultures*

There were problematic aspects to the various relationships I was formulating between myself and film subjects and collaborators, and there were, of course, limits to my identification with others. One problem stems from the fact that I am in London—rather than in my home country of the United States—by choice and only temporarily for the purposes of studying. Some of my film subjects and collaborators are in London under similar circumstances—as students. Others, however, have been displaced or are living in London as a result of situations

beyond their control. Where a tourist leaves home freely and may return, an exile, for example, does not and may not. Therefore, motivations and outlooks may be completely divergent. Cinema and television scholar Hamid Naficy has theorized exile experience and says that exiles often experience “an impulse to return, to reunite with the object of the fetish, the (m)otherland; to regress into the prelapsarian narcissism of childhood; to re-establish the communal self” (Naficy, 1991: 286). This experience may be amplified when there is no prospect of a return to one’s homeland, and this particular kind of nostalgic impulse, Naficy thinks, is unique to exiles and not experienced in the same way by those who chose separation from homeland or even desired to escape from it.

To the extent that my attempts to “experience similarly” through identification as a tourist were problematic for all the reasons previously described, I have also considered my relationship with customers and staff in a slightly different way. I related to customers as a fellow guest. Regardless of personal backgrounds and motivations, we were all guests in a restaurant. The restaurant staff hosted customers, and they hosted me. We were each provided an opportunity to engage in an encounter and to “experience similarly”. My encounter and relationship with hosts, however, was different. The added layer in our relationship was that our encounter was organized around a joint effort to produce a film. Restaurant customers were invited to “experience similarly” through eating; their encounters were organized around the meal. I was also engaged in a kind of eating or consumption; however, I was invited to experience not only the *eating* of the meal but also the *cooking* or the construction of the



meal. I was a special guest due to the fact that restaurant staff also acknowledged me as a mediator—a fellow cook, in a metaphorical sense. They were cooking food; I was “cooking” a film. In fact, to the extent that it was a joint effort, we were all involved in “cooking” the film. Further, both the meal in the restaurant and the film would be cross-cultural mediations and, therefore, also involve the work of cultural translation.

In addition to having a different relationship with staff members than customers had, I was allowed different access to physical spaces in the restaurants. I was often invited to restaurants before they opened or permitted to stay after they closed. I was invited into kitchens and other spaces that are normally off limits to customers. Informed by my literature review, I found myself considering various regions in the restaurants according to Dean MacCannell’s theorization of tourist settings. In Chapter 1, I looked at MacCannell’s work on staged authenticity and the organization of space in tourist settings as he theorized it by adapting Erving Goffman’s earlier work on the organization of social life (MacCannell, 1973). In the course of filming, I was able to explore this in more depth and can now reflect on it further. The Argentinian restaurant Buen Ayre works best with MacCannell’s theory. The private kitchen downstairs—where all the starters, side dishes and desserts are prepared, plates are washed, and so on—works as a back region for customers, who have no access to it. This is where most of the raw food and ingredients are kept. The entryway to this space is marked “Private/staff only”. The customer dining area is a front region in Goffman’s sense. It is the space where hosts and guests meet and where the finished meal

is presented and eaten. The grill and bar area situated alongside the dining area, however, is a more complex space with characteristics of both a front and a back region (Figures 11 & 12). It is located in the center of the restaurant, and this is where all the meat is grilled and plated and where wait staff and managers work. The grill activity is on display, as most customers have at least a partial view of it and can hear and smell the meat as it cooks. Those seated at tables alongside the bar have a clear view of everything that happens in this space and are only separated by a few feet from all the action. Despite its close proximity to the customer dining area, however, the grill often feels a bit like a back space. Where only cooked food is presented in the dining area, raw meat can be seen in the grill area, and customers can observe plating and preparation. Usually, staff members seem to be engrossed in food preparation and in their own interactions; the atmosphere is informal, sometimes even chummy. Where English is usually the language spoken between staff and customers in the dining room, staff members speak nearly exclusively in Spanish at the grill. Language becomes a kind of barrier so that this space is less accessible to anyone who does not speak Spanish. MacCannell would likely consider this a staged back region. In fact, one of his examples of a staged back region is a restaurant in Copenhagen where the inner workings of the kitchen are visible to restaurant guests (MacCannell, 1973: 596). MacCannell suggests that staged back regions in tourist settings present a problem of false consciousness; his concern is that tourists may be deceived into thinking they have entered a back region when it is actually a space that has been staged or altered (MacCannell, 1973: 598). Tourists are attracted to back regions because they are associated with authenticity and

intimacy of relations, MacCannell says; staged back spaces are “especially designed to generate feelings of intimacy” (MacCannell, 1973: 601). It seems very probable that the grill area at Buen Ayre has been designed in such a way. Here, customers are provided the opportunity to share in the food preparation experience and to witness staff teamwork and camaraderie. As he told me during filming, one of the things waiter Nicolás feels is important about an Argentinian grill is that the working atmosphere is relaxed. He reminisced about his favorite grill restaurant in Buenos Aires where “you see [staff members] working relaxed, and they are not under pressure like lots of jobs”. The arrangement of the grill and bar area alongside the dining area allows the staff to embody or perform this and customers to experience it. Yet, while it has some of the characteristics of a staged back region, MacCannell’s concern about false consciousness does not seem to apply here because this is a region that actually functions as it appears to function. This really is where and how the meat is prepared in the restaurant.



Figure 11: Buen Ayre grill man John prepares a *parrillada* (brazier), from *Eating Cultures*



Figure 12: Buen Ayre staff working at the grill and bar area, from *Eating Cultures*

In my filming, I encountered further complexity concerning regions. The presence of the film crew seemed to encourage staging and performance even in regions that might otherwise have been easily classifiable as back regions in Goffman's sense. For example, in my role as filmmaker, I was allowed access to the downstairs kitchen at Buen Ayre. As soon as Maria and I entered the space and began setting up, however, staff started to clean it up for us. Our preparation to film the owner and grill man, John, cutting steaks soon began to cause a spectacle, as I fully realized when other staff members came downstairs to watch the filming and joke about it. Instinctively, I began recording as quickly as possible to try and capture what was happening. I anticipated, as it was happening, that this might be excellent reflexive material. I later learned that waiter Nicolás was also recording video of us, and I asked if I could have a copy of it to possibly include in my film. Reviewing footage later, I was extremely pleased that, between the two cameras, I would have enough material to include this as

a scene in the final film, as I felt it could reveal a lot about the filmmaking process and the nature of the filmmaking encounter. On one hand, the moment the documentary film crew arrived in the kitchen, it was no longer a back region. Still, we had, in some sense, penetrated into a more intimate space than those upstairs spaces accessible to customers. In the kitchen, we would see food in its most raw form and talk with John about things he would not normally talk to customers about (Figure 13).



Figure 13: Buen Ayre restaurant owner John talks about *vacío* (flank), from *Eating Cultures*

It might have been possible to film, and later edit, the kitchen footage in such a way that the space comes across unproblematically as a back region, where the presence of the film crew and the effects of the filmmaking process are intentionally minimized or removed. Documentary films and other types of “factual” programs often do that. In doing that, however, MacCannell’s concern about the dangers of staged back regions and the false consciousness they promote becomes relevant. Conversely, I did not film with the aim of suggesting

that the spaces in Buen Ayre are simply staged spaces where staff members are merely performing. Instead, I filmed in such a way as to explore the complexity of the kitchen space in the face of the documentary encounter. I hope that the spaces come across as ambiguous spaces where distinctions between “real” and “show” break down and that this serves to challenge the binary of front and back regions. MacCannell was, in fact, also trying to challenge these binaries in his theorization, though he feels that his work has often been wrongly interpreted in this regard. Responding to criticism he has received over the years, MacCannell clarifies in a 2008 article that “staged authenticity was initially inserted precisely between the front-back binary to name a new kind of space that could not be assimilated into either one of the original pair” (MacCannell, 2008: 335). He insists that he has always tried to contest the “commonsense polarity of social life into what is taken to be ‘real’ and what is thought to be ‘show’” (MacCannell, 2008: 335). The trouble, I think, is that MacCannell’s concept of staged back regions focuses on the problem of false consciousness and does not seem to allow for anything productive to occur in those spaces. His view is pessimistic. As I see it, the “pretentious revelation of back region secrets” (MacCannell, 2008: 336) is not necessarily, or not only, what happens in the ambiguous regions between front and back. MacCannell is skeptical about the possibility of tourist and toured really breaking down any barriers between themselves. Tourists are apparently offered “opportunities for co-production of...experience”, “a sense of intimacy”, or “togetherness” (MacCannell, 2008: 336), but, for MacCannell, those are merely deceptions. Reflecting on the spaces I encountered in filming *Eating Cultures*, however, I feel that there is more than pretension and deception

behind the encounters that occur in these spaces. There can also be a genuine desire to convey or translate experience across boundaries. Furthermore, the performances that occur in these spaces are often joint performances in which a kind of co-production of experience is possible and a sense of togetherness may be felt from both sides.

There were other binary oppositions that proved to be problematic for me during filming and in my identification with film subjects and collaborators. One was the notion of outsiders versus insiders. I had recruited volunteer collaborators to work with me based, primarily, on their insider-ness. They were to be advisors, guides, interpreters, and in some cases crew members. I referred to them as “cuisine insiders” and “cultural respondents” in the previous chapter. Yet, I knew that thinking of them as insiders was problematic from the start. In fact, treating them as advisors was also problematic because it might seem to put them in a position to speak on behalf of all Eritreans, Pakistanis or Argentinians. I might also be putting restaurant staff members in this position—though, in their cases, they were already in danger of this as a result of working in these restaurants where national or ethnic labels had been self-imposed or imposed by others. Perhaps there is something inherent in the structures of the documentary film and the “ethnic” restaurant that makes the insider-outsider binary difficult to escape. In these contexts, hybridity or ambiguity seem to present problems. In her academic writing, theorist and filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha expresses this conundrum very well:

Any mutation in identity, in essence, in regularity, and even in physical place poses a problem, if not a threat, in terms of classification and control. If you can't locate the other, how are you to locate your-self...Furthermore, where should the dividing line between outsider and insider stop? How should it be defined? By skin color...? By language...? By nation...? By geography...? Or by political affinity...? What about those with hyphenated identities and hybrid realities? (Trinh, 1991: 73)

It was difficult not to try and classify customers in the restaurants as either insiders or outsiders as well. Because many people of South Asian descent eat at Mirch Masala, it was especially tempting to search for customers there who looked like they might have Pakistani or Indian heritage and, upon finding them, to generalize that their perceptions represented the insider view. I was not the only one in danger of reinforcing essentialist distinctions in this way. Customers from various backgrounds were eager to point out to me that an "Indian" person had recommended the restaurant or verified that it was authentic. This happened a few times in Buen Ayre as well when I talked to customers. I struggled with how to deal with insider-outsider issues in filming. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, I wanted to explore perceptions. Rather than trying to present facts or truths, I wanted to find out what people in the restaurants thought they were doing and what they thought about the food. I would try to present these perceptions in a "non-totalizing" way that would "suspend meaning and resist closure"(Trinh, 1991: 74)—a strategy Trinh advocates. I was trying to allow for differences of opinion and contradictory perceptions to be expressed. In practice, this was challenging. The difficulty was due, in part, to the fact that restaurant staff members were not presenting the meal in such a way as to acknowledge to customers that there may be any complexity or contradiction involved in presenting national cuisines. They were not, it seemed to me, trying



to “undercut the inside/outside opposition” (Trinh, 1991: 74). It would have perhaps been difficult and risky for them to do so, in fact. To reveal any kind of hybridity might not be good for business. The judgement of “inauthentic” might quickly follow. It might be in the restaurant’s best interest not to challenge essentialist discourse. Many restaurant customers and critics—even those who are aware of the complexities—are likely more comfortable operating within this discourse. In our interview in May 2010, *Time Out* restaurant guide editor Guy Dimond acknowledged the problematic nature of authenticity and national labels. He explained, though, that people generally want to know what they are eating and how to classify dishes or restaurants. “If you go to a Thai restaurant and they’re serving nachos, you know, you’re going to be disappointed,” he said. Trinh speaks of a similar kind of resistance to hybridity in anthropology, where attempts to blur boundaries between insider and outsider have historically caused anxiety or even anger (Trinh, 1991: 70).

At Mirch Masala, the first customer I talked to—though she would later describe her own hybrid identity—employed a more or less essentialist discourse in talking to me about the restaurant. “Normal English Indian restaurants are anglicized for the British palate; whereas, this is authentic,” she said. Her husband had asked her to pick up food from Mirch Masala so that their guests visiting from the north of England could have a “proper curry”. Her husband’s family is Indian, she explained. She sighed and then added—perhaps a bit reluctantly—“I’m half Mauritian, half Trinidadian, half Muslim, half Hindu, only speak English...very anglicized”. For her, the fact that this is the only restaurant

her mother-in-law will go to served to authenticate it. Her comments seemed to reinforce both the binary of insider/outsider and authentic/inauthentic. Indian restaurants are either authentic or anglicized, she seemed to suggest, and the hybrid or anglicized restaurant is necessarily inauthentic. I also had the sense that she identified as an outsider, due to her hybrid identity, as opposed to her mother-in-law, who could be considered an insider by virtue of being Indian.

My challenge would be to find a way to contest these kinds of binaries in a respectful and sympathetic way. It would require careful and sensitive probing in this area. I was a guest in these restaurants, and people were volunteering their time and cooperation, after all. I did not want to discredit the restaurants or any of the film subjects or collaborators. I had a responsibility to be respectful, but I also felt a responsibility to acknowledge complexity in the restaurants and in my own documentary filmmaking process. I am in complete agreement with Trinh:

There can hardly be such a thing as an essential inside that can be homogeneously represented by all insiders; an authentic insider in there, an absolute reality out there, or an incorrupted representative who cannot be questioned by another incorrupted representative. (Trinh, 1991: 75)

When confronted with this problem in filming, however, I was not quite sure how to deal with it without alienating film subjects and collaborators. I would, in the end, simply try to explore differing perspectives wherever possible and to pursue contradictions and complexities through, for example, my questioning. In my filming at Mirch Masala, for instance, I gently probed restaurant manager Saad about the ways in which they have adapted their recipes to accommodate some of their customers who prefer less spicy food. In Pakistan, Saad said, dishes

are normally prepared hot. Here in London, they make a lot of dishes medium or mild. For me, this conversation revealed a contradiction because—contrary to what the take-away customer said to me earlier—the restaurant does “anglicize” dishes. Yet, in the way that Saad and I discussed it, I do not think we discredited the restaurant. Saad seemed happy to explain to me that they aim to cater to each customer’s taste if possible. A customer who wants a mild dish will get a mild dish, and a customer who wants a spicy dish will get a spicy dish. I also tried to explore—in other conversations with staff, customers and collaborators there—how national identity was being linked to the food and the various, sometimes conflicting, labels and claims being made.

Finally, I was a different kind of tourist, or “eater”, than the average restaurant customer and a different kind of mediator, or “cook”, than those working in the restaurants. Urry and Larsen note that the tourist gaze often operates like that of a semiotician, “reading the landscape for signifiers of certain pre-established notions of signs derived from discourses of travel and tourism” (Urry and Larsen, 2011: 16). In my work, I would engage with pre-conceived notions but also try and complicate them. The way the filmmaker “looks”—as MacDougall describes it—is much different than the way Urry and Larsen’s semiotician-type tourist does. The filmmaker’s “looking” is difficult; it requires practice, training and “freeing one’s consciousness to perceive” (MacDougall, 2006: 7). The filmmaker, and later the film viewer, should experience and perceive without reducing what they encounter “to signs, symbols, and other domesticated meanings” (MacDougall, 2006: 14).

In the moment of filming, there is little time for reflection. It was in reviewing footage later and editing that I was able to develop my identifications with film subjects and collaborators further. Therefore, I will continue to consider and theorize my practice regarding some of these same themes in the next chapter, which focuses on my experience of editing *Eating Cultures*.

## Chapter 5: “Cooking” the film

After filming in each of the three restaurants, I logged and transcribed footage and organized it according to themes. I enlisted the help of my collaborators to review the footage and translate sections where needed. In these review sessions, we also discussed our experiences of the filming and how we thought our encounters in the restaurants came across in the footage. As I explained in the overview at the beginning of this section, this process happened in separate phases for each of the three restaurants. In each case, I eventually assembled what I felt was the best footage, organizing it into scenes or themed sections. I was also aiming, in these assemblies, to “invoke” my experiences in the restaurants again and to communicate “a sense of how it felt to be there” (Pink, 2008: 127), as discussed in Chapter 4. These assemblies served the practical purpose of allowing my doctoral supervisors to review my film work and provide feedback on it in stages. I was still in the process, however, of working out exactly how to structure the film and how I wanted to construct and present the metaphorical relationship between restaurant and documentary film.

I produced the first assembly using footage from the Argentinian restaurant Buen Ayre, where I filmed first. This assembly would then be re-worked into a pilot, which—along with a treatment and scenario document—would establish my provisional plan for the full film. These materials detailed a possible overarching structure for the film and would guide my filming in the other two restaurants. I had also begun to consider, in producing the pilot, how I might construct the

metaphorical relationship between restaurant and documentary film. I thought, at this stage, that the overarching film structure and the metaphorical relationship might both be based around the exploration of various types of spaces (physical and figurative) in the restaurant and in the documentary filmmaking process. I had been heavily influenced, in this period, by Dean MacCannell's theory of the organization of space in tourist settings, as discussed in previous chapters, and I was very interested in continuing to explore touristic space and touristic encounter in the restaurant and in documentary film. This seemed an appropriate thing to do based on the footage I had from Buen Ayre. I planned to structure the film around a movement from front to back regions in the restaurants and in the documentary filmmaking process. This would correspond to the way in which MacCannell organizes his theorization of touristic settings in stages from front to back (MacCannell, 1973: 597-598). In the film, I planned to show progressively more intimate spaces in the restaurants and in the filmmaking process; it would be arranged in three parts. Part one would deal with front regions of the restaurants, part two with back regions of the restaurants and part three with back regions of the filmmaking process. Ultimately, however, this structure was too rigid and would have been difficult to maintain throughout the entire film. Even though it worked, to a certain extent, in the pilot with the Buen Ayre footage, it would not have worked as well in Mirch Masala or Mosob, where I would experience spaces in the restaurant differently and engage with film subjects in different ways. Feedback I received from my supervisors on the pilot also revealed that my proposed structure was problematic; I had artificially divided spaces and types of engagement between

filmmaker and film subject when, in fact, these layers were intertwined and overlapping.

After producing the pilot with Buen Ayre footage, I filmed first with Mirch Masala and produced an assembly of footage and then filmed and produced an assembly for Mosob. In preparing the assemblies of footage for each restaurant, three very unique episodes began to take shape—despite the fact that I was still planning to later intercut between the three restaurants for the final film. I would eventually decide, instead, to re-edit the assemblies into episodes with a prologue and linking sequences between. I would also later add captions and narration; it is important to note that the assemblies, and even the rough cut, did not yet have captions or narration. I will return to the subject of the film's structure and formal devices later in this chapter and will detail how and why the final film took the form it did.

In the course of assembling footage and receiving feedback on the three assemblies from my supervisors, I came to some important realizations. First, my film was going to be more than just an exploration of the concept of authenticity. Claims and expectations of authenticity were what I had originally imagined connected the restaurant to the documentary film; and, after assembling footage, I still felt that authenticity would be a strong theme. The relationship between the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film, however, was

more complex than that. It was not until I had completed the final assembly that I could really reflect more on what I had learned and what I wanted to express with the film. I needed to analyze the various metaphors I had been formulating throughout the filmmaking process. Feedback from my supervisors revealed that the metaphorical relationship between restaurant and documentary film was not clear in watching the assembly edits alone. My supervisor—documentary filmmaker, Enrica Colusso—was particularly helpful in encouraging me to focus my energy on developing this. It was not until after the rough cut, however, that I would finally discover how to express the metaphorical relationship in a satisfactory way in the film. Interestingly, I was—even before the rough cut stage—already beginning to articulate the metaphors in presentations of my work at seminars and conferences. I had begun to show clips from my footage and theorize the relationship between restaurant and documentary film in a lecture format. Moving beyond the specific ideas I had tried to explore in the pilot regarding front and back regions, I began to formulate metaphors that would apply more generally to all three restaurants and to the documentary filmmaking process. As I have already started to explain in previous chapters, I eventually determined that the metaphors would be “eating cultures” and “mediating worlds”. These two metaphors would guide me as I re-edited the rough cut. I will now utilize this written form to explore and theorize them more fully.



## **Eating cultures**

In Chapters 3 and 4, I theorized the “eating cultures” metaphor, but I considered it mainly as it relates to the theme of food tourism. I have written almost exclusively, thus far, about the restaurant customer and the documentary filmmaker as “eaters”. I will expand this theme now to explore the film viewer as an “eater” where the “meal”, in this case, is the film.

As discussed in previous chapters, eating cultures is consumption—literal ingestion and figurative ingestion. This “eating” is cross-cultural and involves exploration of difference for many of the restaurant-goers I filmed because the restaurants are associated with other geographical spaces and culinary worlds, which are seen as foreign by many in London. I make the assumption that this will also apply to many, if not most, of my film viewer “eaters” because I have produced the film within a UK academic institution in English with English subtitles and narration primarily for English-speaking audiences.

The film viewer’s experience, like the restaurant customer’s experience, can be considered as touristic. Like restaurant customers, film viewers are also “guests” in a host-guest relationship where the filmmaker and the film subjects are “hosts”. The film viewer—like restaurant customers and the documentary filmmaker—may also be invited to “experience similarly” and relate to others via sensory experience, despite the fact that the film viewer will engage the senses

in different ways (through narrative identification and synesthesia, as discussed in Chapter 4). Some tourism scholarship has, in fact, connected tourist experience to cinematic experience. One such example is Bronwyn Morkham and Russell Staiff's chapter in the book *The Tourist as a Metaphor for the Social World*, in which they explore the similarities in cognitive perception and subjectivity between tourist experience and cinematic experience. Tourism and cinema both involve spectatorship, they note; the two are, in fact, "inter-related contemporary experiences that share crucial dynamics" (Morkham and Staiff, 2002: 298). One of the most interesting things for me in Morkham and Staiff's work is the way in which they connect cinematic experience to figurative traveling. Drawing on cognitive film theory, they consider how film may function as a "gateway through which the film aficionado can 'travel' to physio-cultural sites in other times, other places and other worlds" (Morkham and Staiff, 2002: 299). This corresponds very well with the notion of figurative travel in the restaurant-goer experience and culinary world travel in London, as presented in Chapter 3 and in the prologue of *Eating Cultures*. This element of figurative travel relates not only to the "eating cultures" metaphor but also to the "mediating worlds" metaphor and brings the two together quite nicely. I will discuss figurative travel as it relates to mediating worlds in more depth later in this chapter.

The underlying similarity between film viewers and tourists, as Morkham and Staiff see it, is that both "are involved in a fundamental quest to make sense of

the world they find around them” (Morkham and Staiff, 2002: 310). In other words, the film viewer and the tourist are both engaged in the work of interpreting. The same could be argued about the restaurant customer and the documentary filmmaker. In fact, this could be considered a characteristic of eating cultures more generally. “Eaters” are usually also interpreters; *ingestion* normally leads to *digestion*. Of course, it is problematic to generalize about all eaters just as we should not make generalizations about all tourists.

There are some key differences in the nature of the film viewer experience and the restaurant-goer experience. In analyzing the “eating cultures” metaphor, some inconsistencies arise. The film viewer’s experience will be layered in ways that the restaurant customer’s is not. My film, for example, invites the viewer to relate not only with film subjects eating and working in restaurants but also with me, as a filmmaker in the process of making a film. Further, in the restaurant scenario, eating cultures involves a direct encounter between restaurant customer and restaurant staff or between the customer and the food. There are only two parties involved in this encounter. The encounter between film subjects and film viewer, on the other hand, is indirect, and there is an extra party involved—the filmmaker. It is the filmmaker who has the direct encounter with film subjects. This complicates my “eating cultures” metaphor because restaurant customers and film viewers are always, at some level, different kinds of eaters. The film’s other metaphor of “mediating worlds”, however, allows for

exploration of a different kind of symbolic relationship between restaurant customers and film viewers.

### **Mediating worlds**

The way that I conceptualize “mediating worlds”, there are three parties or entities involved: (1) the mediator, (2) the “world” being mediated, and (3) the person for whom the mediated world is intended. Restaurant staff members in Buen Ayre are mediators, for example. They are mediating the culinary world of Argentina—or, more specifically, the world of a grill restaurant in Buenos Aires—to restaurant customers. Likewise, in my film, I am a mediator—along with collaborators and film subjects who helped make the film. We are mediating, for example, the world of Buen Ayre restaurant to the film viewer. Within both the restaurant and the documentary mediation, worlds are encountered indirectly. There is no direct encounter, for instance, between the actual world of a grill restaurant in Buenos Aires and the restaurant customer in London. Similarly, in most cases the film viewer will have had no direct encounter with Buen Ayre restaurant before. Regardless, there is no direct encounter between the restaurant and the film viewer while watching the film. It is important to note that this three-part “mediating worlds” formula is complicated by the fact that neither the mediator nor the person for whom the mediated world is intended is a singular entity. In the case of the mediator, for example, there are multiple individuals operating collaboratively to mediate the “world” but not all

mediators are operating at the same level. I will discuss the different orders of mediator later in this chapter.

Perhaps it is the indirect nature of the encounters that occur in mediating worlds that often leads mediators and others to experience a sense of loss. Certain things are lost on customers or viewers who lack experience of the worlds being mediated for them. In her writing on culinary tourism, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett talks about “coalescences of geology, climate, history and culture” that make up a particular culinary world and “the relative immobility of a coalescence” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: xii-xiv). Accordingly, it is not possible to transport the culinary world of Pakistan, for example, to London. What is transported will inevitably lack “the specificity of experiencing it on the spot” and the context of “the total world of which it is a part” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: xiv). Reconstructing culinary worlds out of context has certain effects. For instance, one of the major differences between Mirch Masala restaurant in London and a restaurant in Pakistan—my collaborators Rashid and Saba told me—is that a restaurant in Pakistan normally specializes in something. One restaurant may be known for kebabs, another one for biryani, another for fish, and so on. Mirch Masala, on the other hand, does not really specialize in anything and serves a wide variety of Pakistani and Indian dishes. This is, arguably, an effect of being a Pakistani restaurant operating out of context in some sense. Were Mirch Masala located in Pakistan, it might specialize in

kebabs, for example, in order to distinguish itself from other restaurants serving different dishes commonly found in Pakistan.

In editing, I often felt as if there was a loss occurring in the filmmaking process as I tried to evoke on screen the feeling of being there in the restaurant. This was especially palpable for me in the Argentinian episode, where some of the exuberance of the restaurant atmosphere does not come across on screen. As Buen Ayre owner John and I discuss in the film, the restaurant atmosphere on screen seems a bit more serene and orderly than it does in person. Had I not included part of this discussion in the film, however, the viewer would not be aware of this because he or she has, most likely, never been to Buen Ayre.

This notion of loss emerged many times—both in the restaurants and in my filmmaking practice. Film subjects and collaborators often talked with me about things lost in translation. This theme sometimes manifests itself in a literal way in the film; this happens, for example, in the scene where my collaborator Guemesh struggles to come up with a satisfactory and concise English translation of a Tigrinya phrase. Here, some of the cultural and religious meaning associated with the Eritrean phrase was literally being lost in translation so that the film could be subtitled for an English-speaking audience. *Eating Cultures* deals with all kinds of issues related to loss in the restaurant scenario as well; and, this theme was particularly strong in the Eritrean episode. For instance, as restaurant owner

Daniel explained during filming, due to time constraints and in order to speed up service, they decided to stop the tradition of taking each dish to the table in a clay pot and scooping it onto the bread in front of guests. Such a compromise might be disappointing for Eritrean diners who are familiar with the tradition, but many in Mosob's multicultural London customer base will not realize anything is missing. They may expect, however, that service should be relatively quick. In both these examples (in translation during subtitling and in meal presentation) the sense of loss is due in part to the fact that the mediation is cross-cultural and in part due to the very nature of the medium (documentary film or the meal in the restaurant in London), which seems to impose constraints on the mediator and require some kind of compromise.

Certain aspects of my encounters in the restaurants are necessarily lost because they are never actually recorded in the first place. Like the missing ingredients that cannot be imported in the restaurants, there are many things that cannot be filmed. Even though I tried to film as much as possible upon arriving to the restaurants, there were, of course, encounters, conversations, and interactions that occurred before the camera was set up or after it was put away. Even if it were possible to film everything continuously from the moment of arrival, it could be counterproductive to building the necessary rapport and trust with film subjects, who seem to value those off-camera moments. In my experience, these are moments film subjects utilize to express hesitations or questions they have about the filming or to confide things they may not want filmed.

Mediators of worlds are also storytellers, and they are necessarily selective in their mediations. Stories have a structure of some sort, and storytellers have a particular perspective. Regardless of the extent to which their storytelling processes are collaborative or interactive, they will always minimize the full range of possible perspectives on the worlds they are mediating. Restaurants, like films, often select *main characters*. Grilled beef is the main character at Buen Ayre restaurant, for example. Though there are many other foods that make up the culinary world of Argentina, many dishes did not *make the cut*, so to speak. Chef Adrian often makes special food for the staff to eat after the dinner service (Figure 14). Many of these dishes, like *milanesa de pollo* (chicken escalope), do not appear on the Buen Ayre menu, even though staff members recognize them as very common dishes in Argentina.



Figure 14: Buen Ayre staff dinner of *milanesa de pollo* (chicken escalope), from *Eating Cultures*

In my filmmaking practice, I was also, of course, operating as a storyteller—selecting where to focus, what to include and what to discard. At Buen Ayre,



waiter Nicolás—by virtue of being more willing or more interested in interacting with me than some of the other staff members—became a kind of main character in the film. He was, in fact, one of the newest and least senior members of staff working there at that time and merely one of the team of wait staff; yet, he plays a very prominent role in my filmic representation of Buen Ayre restaurant.

Many of these perceived losses I have been describing are structural—loss in the partial nature of what is recorded, what does not occur inside the frame, or what does not appear on the menu, for instance. Other types of loss have more to do with a lack or a withdrawal. The mediator has had a direct, bodily experience of a particular “world”, but the restaurant customer or film viewer often lacks this direct experience. The mediator may then experience a sense of loss because his or her mediation cannot fully address the absence of that remembered experience. The mediator may also experience a sense of withdrawal that comes from no longer being there—in the particular world that was filmed, for example. In fact, in many cases, the loss I have associated with mediating worlds will only be felt by the mediator.

In exploring the “mediating worlds” metaphor—both in this written form and in the film—I often wonder if I am presenting it in an overly pessimistic way. Maybe I have too heavily emphasized what is apparently lost in the process of mediating

worlds. Perhaps even the language I have used—loss, compromise, selectivity—presents too pessimistic an outlook on the prospect of mediating worlds. There are more optimistic ways of articulating this. Mediating worlds also involves transformation—a term that implies gain rather than loss. Transformation suggests fruitfulness, creativity and progression rather than reduction. Cooking is transformation of raw ingredients into cooked dishes. Like the meal in the restaurant, the documentary film is also created from raw ingredients—ideas, encounters, moving images, sounds—which undergo a transformation. Something new is then brought into existence in this transformation. To the extent that there is any sense of loss or withdrawal, it might be diagnosed—as my supervisor Enrica Colusso did in discussing this with me—as something resembling a postpartum depression because there is also a kind of birth that results from this process of mediating worlds. In my case, however, considering documentary filmmaking as “cooking” has helped balance any sense of loss with the enthusiasm that accompanies the creative act of preparing a meal. Cooking and eating are, after all, often joyful and celebratory experiences. Reflecting on my experiences in the restaurants, film subjects expressed a sense of enthusiasm about their mediations at least as frequently, if not more frequently, than they expressed a sense of loss to me. For the most part, restaurant staff members seemed to welcome the challenge of mediating worlds and the prospect of sharing certain aspects of their lived experience even if, at times, they expressed some resignation. Likewise, I also often enjoyed trying to evoke on screen the worlds of the restaurants and my feeling of being there making the film; I especially enjoyed the aspect of sharing this with others by showing them the

film work. To the extent that mediating worlds is about providing opportunities for others to “experience similarly” (Pink, 2008)—as discussed in Chapter 4—we might also reconsider the ideas introduced in Chapter 1 regarding the ways in which these mediations might help to democratize the experience of other cultures. There is a sense in which mediators make sensory experiences and encounters more widely accessible—albeit in a limited way. We cannot escape related concerns about objectification or commodification, however. To mediate worlds is to make them consumable; the meal and the film are products. Mediators working in restaurants are actually selling a product, but documentary filmmakers—in making worlds consumable—are, at least at an abstract level, implicated in commodification as well.

I have described the work of mediating worlds as entailing compromise—a word that, by definition, can mean to weaken or lower one’s standards. Yet, what I have labeled as compromise in the restaurants and the documentary filmmaking process could also be seen as adaptation or accommodation. In offering to prepare mild or medium, rather than hot, dishes for some customers, Mirch Masala is adapting to or accommodating its customer base in London. This does not necessarily imply a lowering of standards. Likewise, in my filmmaking, I adapted to the ways in which film subjects and collaborators in each restaurant wanted to work with me—accommodating them in order to make their participation in my film project feasible. This does not necessarily imply that I

compromised my aims and standards. Adapting, in this case, was part of a collaborative approach.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this collaborative approach is also one of the factors that complicates my “mediating worlds” metaphor. Returning now to consider the role of the mediator in more depth, it is important to note that both the restaurant and the documentary mediations are team efforts but not all team members, or mediators, are equal contributors. There are certain hierarchies within the team. In the restaurants, owners and managers run the show so to speak, and the contributions that other staff members make to the restaurant’s mediation are more or less overseen and controlled by the owners and managers. In the documentary mediation, the filmmaker operates in a similar way in the sense that the contributions of all others to the filmmaking are to some extent controlled by—or at least filtered through—the filmmaker. It is not possible to generalize about the level of authorial control the filmmaker exercises in the documentary mediation, of course, because there are a range of approaches from those where the filmmaker functions like a monarch (perhaps even of the Gordon Ramsay type discussed in Chapter 3) exercising absolute control over film subject contributions to those—often in anthropology or community-based work—where the aim is to empower would-be film subjects to exercise authorial control and make their own films. My approach, as explained in Chapters 2 through 4, was somewhere between these two extremes. There is also another sense in which mediators’ contributions are unequal in that some

mediators have a more visible role in the mediation than others. The grill man and wait staff at Buen Ayre, for example, make a very visible contribution to the customer's experience of the meal in the restaurant; whereas, the contribution made by the chef in the kitchen downstairs is largely unseen. As he laments to the film crew in *Eating Cultures*, he wishes customers knew that he spends a long time making the *provenzal* (garlic and parsley sauce that is served with chips) from scratch. This is roughly equivalent to the difference between on-screen and off-screen contributions in the team of mediators producing the film mediation; viewers will generally have greater awareness and appreciation of on-screen contributions. In *Eating Cultures*, certain film subjects and collaborators were more active and involved with the filmmaking than others, and—as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4—the nature of collaboration varied among different film subjects and collaborators. Yet, the level of involvement in the film mediation does not necessarily correspond with on-screen presence. This discrepancy is acknowledged in *Eating Cultures* in the linking sequences between episodes, as I attempted to make visible some of the typically unseen or behind-the-scenes contributions of film collaborators. Finally, the metaphor of “mediating worlds” is slightly more complex in the filmmaking than in the restaurant scenario because there is more overlap between mediator and mediated—mediator and “world”. Film subjects are both mediators and mediated in *Eating Cultures* because they inhabit and constitute the world being filmed but are also actively involved with the filmmaker in mediating this world for the viewer. Further, I have used the terms “film subjects” and “film collaborators”, but there is often no clear distinction between them. “Film subjects” generally refers to on-screen

contributors and to people eating and working in the restaurants in this case; whereas, “film collaborators” refers to those people I recruited from outside the restaurants to work with me before, during and after the filming. Because of the overlap between the two, however, I have often referred to film subjects and collaborators as one group. In many cases, I have done this in order to include and acknowledge that film subjects were also collaborators. Beyond this, because of my reflexive approach, the filmmaker and film collaborators also became film subjects—both in the sense that we are on-screen contributors and because the filmmaking process is the subject of the film. There is a profound blurring of roles here that results in a kind of collapse of mediator and “world”.

Having examined the “eating cultures” metaphor and the “mediating worlds” metaphor individually, I will now return to the notion of figurative travel, which is a theme that works with both metaphors quite nicely. To what extent do the restaurant and the film operate as “gateways”, in Morkham and Staiff’s terms, through which a kind of metaphorical travel to other “worlds” is possible? A slightly different way of thinking about this is to consider the restaurant and the film as containers. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett talks about the ways in which food is thought to be capable of holding “time, place, and memory” and about “food experiences” that “form edible chronotopes (sensory space/time convergences)” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: xiii). She goes on to suggest, as I mentioned earlier, that this is actually a problematic notion because of the “relative immobility of a coalescence” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004: xiv). A coalescence or an *actual* world

cannot be contained or transported intact. Yet, though they are not capable of transporting actual worlds, the restaurant and the film do still behave like containers in a certain sense. What actually happens in mediating worlds is that new spaces of encounter and engagement open up. Time and space begin to converge in interesting ways. At Buen Ayre, 1920s-era Argentinian tango singer Carlos Gardel appears in the same space as late 20<sup>th</sup> century football legend Diego Maradona. Argentinian tango music is often played, but it is mixed with popular and rock music from various other places and time periods. Filmic space is like this restaurant space in the sense that, as Michael Chanan summarizes the general theory of montage, it is “heterotopic: a comprehensive and relative space capable of holding together several different spaces and times belonging to different orders” (Chanan, 2007: 100). Filmmakers may, like restaurateurs, bring together a variety of elements so that a time-space convergence occurs. The most obvious way this often happens is through the incorporation of archive footage. A kind of dialogue between past and present and across geographical space is made possible in these containers.

There is, I think, often an underlying desire amongst mediators of worlds to move beyond issues of loss in order to embrace the creative possibilities of time-space convergence. In his essay *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie says that “it is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained” (Rushdie, 1991: 17). Rushdie here—as a member of the Indian diaspora writing historical fiction

about, or set in, India—is arguing for the creative potential of using fragments of lived experience and memory to construct narratives. The restaurant staff running a national restaurant and the filmmaker making a documentary also work with fragments. Traces of actual worlds and lived experience are incorporated and recombined into new wholes. Yet, where the fusion restaurant or the fiction film allow for free mixing of elements and exploration of creative possibilities, the national restaurant and the documentary seem to be inevitably bound by claims and expectations of authenticity. Hybridity presents problems in these cases, as discussed in the previous chapter. Acknowledging hybridity may be a liability for the *authentic* national restaurant or the *documentary* film in a way that it will never be for the *fusion* restaurant or the *fiction* film, where creative mixings are celebrated. Engaging a metaphorical kind of thinking where it is possible to see a relationship between the documentary and the authentic restaurant and to see documentary filmmaking as a kind of cooking helps to acknowledge the inherently hybrid and constructed nature of documentary film in a different way. The film space is not, therefore, seen merely as an inadequate container in the sense that it fails to transport intact but as a container that operates a bit like a bowl or cooking vessel holding and bringing together ingredients and allowing a space of contact.

All of this theorization has come out of reflection on my filmmaking experience, but I was still in the process of formulating these ideas while editing *Eating Cultures*. As I pondered how to best articulate these metaphors in editing and



throughout the course of my doctoral research, I found it useful to consider other documentaries that employ reflexivity and/or metaphor. I will highlight three films I found to be most relevant in this regard.

In his documentary *Swallow Your Leader* (1972), Colin Thomas takes a reflexive approach as he sets out to examine a group of working class children from Liverpool that has been brought for a weekend to a nearby country estate called Formby Hall to play and learn in an unstructured way. The narrator explains this scenario as a kind of experiment in giving children “freedom of choice” and a way of trying to work out “certain attitudes toward discipline in society”. In the narration, Thomas not only presents commentary about Formby Hall but also about the process of making a documentary film there. He uses narration to critique the filmmaking process. The narrator notes, for example, “The film tends to telescope the changing moods. The rhythm of the day cannot be captured on film”. There are also several reflexive scenes showing the effects of the filmmaking process on the scenarios being filmed. While there is no real development of a metaphorical relationship between film subjects and filmmaker in *Swallow Your Leader*, there might have been room to explore this. I realized this while watching one very interesting scene in which a group of adult “helpers”, as they are called, who have been working with the children at Formby Hall sit together around a table and talk to the film crew. Mostly they are shown criticizing the filmmaking process and pointing out its inadequacies and impositions. In the course of this discussion, though, one of the helpers protests

that it is not possible to explain, as he has been asked to do by the film crew, what is happening at Formby Hall. He says, “Much of the essence of Formby Hall lies in the fact that we don’t control what’s going on, you know, it develops through a weekend, and it may take a different turn every weekend just partly on what the kids want to do and what they don’t want to do”. This comment led me to compare the approach taken by helpers at Formby Hall with the approach Thomas has adopted in his filmmaking and, more generally, with the element of spontaneity in documentary. Thomas does not, however, make this comparison in *Swallow Your Leader*—at least not explicitly. This scene is intended to be just another reflexive critique of the filmmaking process, which fits with the overall strategy of acknowledging the filmmaking process and resisting presenting the illusion of unmediated reality to the viewer. For me, though, the scene raises questions about whether a symbolic relationship between film subject and filmmaker might have been developed. Both the film subjects and the filmmaker, in this case, are engaged in exploratory work that involves improvisation and boundary transgression. In this time period in the 1970s, both approaches were likely seen as unconventional and subversive. Is there a way of expressing commonalities between film subject and filmmaker metaphorically? It was not necessary for Thomas to pursue this in *Swallow Your Leader* because the film works very well without it. The question is, nonetheless, very interesting for me to consider in relation to my practice. In addition, asking the question helps me now reflect on what I was missing in trying to express the metaphors in my film. The way I was presenting the filmmaker’s work and the filmmaking process in

early versions of my film appeared to be merely part of an overall reflexive approach.

The second documentary film I will mention here—Patricio Guzmán’s *Nostalgia de la Luz (Nostalgia for the Light)* (2010)—is not overtly reflexive like *Swallow Your Leader*; however, I think it is reflexive in a very subtle way and that Guzmán also gradually constructs a symbolic relationship between film subjects and filmmaker. The subject of the film is the Atacama Desert in Chile, where for many years a group of Chilean women have been searching for the remains of loved ones disappeared during the Pinochet regime and where a group of scientists and astronomers are researching the origins of the universe. In exploring their relationship to the desert, Guzmán juxtaposes these two groups and suggests commonalities between them. I think it is eventually possible for the viewer to expand this comparison and consider how the documentary filmmaker is also related to the film subjects. The filmmaker—like both groups of film subjects—is also engaged in an attempt to come to terms with the past, for example. More abstractly, Guzmán’s documentary film—like the desert—has brought these otherwise disparate groups of people and elements together. Guzmán brings them together primarily via juxtaposition throughout the film, but at the end of the film he literally brings the two groups together. In this final scene, two of the women he has been filming meet one of the scientists he has been interviewing, and they are invited to gaze through the large telescope at the universe. It seems that Guzmán has engineered this direct encounter, and it is at this point in the

film that the effect of the filmmaking process on the film subjects becomes most visible. Beyond simply uniting disparate elements, Guzmán's film—like the desert—is also a space of reflection on the past. The film subjects and the filmmaker are searching for some kind of truth or understanding in these spaces. This final scene with the telescope, I think, reveals the symbolic relationship between film subjects and filmmaker; however, I do not think this was Guzmán's primary aim with the film. I believe his main aim was to facilitate reflection on Chile more broadly, on Chileans' relationship with the past and the Pinochet dictatorship. Certainly, no metaphorical relationship between film subject and documentary filmmaker is made explicit in the film. Yet, because it is relevant to my practice, I am interested in how and whether this relationship could be articulated as a metaphor. Ultimately, perhaps metaphor is not the best way to express it; maybe juxtaposition alone sufficiently reveals the connection for anyone who, like me, is interested in it.

In contrast to Guzmán, one of my primary aims with *Eating Cultures* was, in fact, to deal with documentary filmmaking practice in order to understand it better. Establishing the metaphorical relationship between film subject and filmmaker was key to this. In my rough cut, I had managed to construct a film with several reflexive scenes and to gradually juxtapose the work of creating the meal in the restaurants with the work of making the documentary film. I had hoped that, in doing this, a metaphorical relationship between the two might simply emerge for the viewer to consider and work out. According to my supervisors' feedback on

my rough cut, however, much more needed to be done to express the metaphors.

As I revisited my rough cut, I considered Agnès Varda's *Les Glaneurs et la Glaneuse (The Gleaners and I)* (2000)—a film that intentionally and clearly establishes a metaphorical relationship between film subject and filmmaker. The film is about gleaners of all kinds. Varda examines, among others, historical post-harvest gleaners like those depicted in the Millet painting *Des Glaneuses*; their modern day counterparts who still glean leftover crops from the fields or unwanted food from markets and waste bins; and people who glean various kinds of discarded items and transform them into art. Varda also considers herself, in her capacity as documentary filmmaker, as a kind of gleaner. She makes this metaphorical connection between herself and the film subjects explicit through her narration in the film, and she also explores this theme visually. She includes a scene, for example, in which she films through a car window and playfully uses one hand to pretend to grab trucks on the road. She would like to capture them, she comments in the narration. Periodically throughout the film, Varda engages in a poetic reflection considering her filmmaking as gleaning. One of the effects of what Varda has done is to allow the viewer to think about the process of documentary filmmaking in a novel way. This is similar to my aim of considering documentary filmmaking practice from a different perspective by constructing a metaphorical relationship with the

restaurant. Unlike Varda, however, I had not clearly articulated the metaphorical relationship in my rough cut.

For the rough cut, I had re-edited the original assemblies into three episodes and constructed a prologue and linking sequences between episodes. The prologue and linking sequences incorporated footage related to my filmmaking work outside of the three restaurants and things that happened before, between and after filmings in the restaurants. I had not yet added any narration or captions at this stage. In contemplating my supervisors' feedback on the rough cut, it became obvious to me that—not only was my expression of the metaphorical relationship not as strong as it could be—I was also failing to give the film viewer a clear framework for how to read my film. Because I had not made it clear enough how I intended the film to work, there was some discussion in meetings with my supervisors about whether or not the overall structure of the film needed to change. At this point, I had to reconsider and defend my episodic structure and find a way to make it work better. For several reasons, I felt strongly that an episodic structure—rather than intercutting between the restaurants or thematic organization—was the correct structure for my film. In constructing the assembly edits, I had already begun to realize that intercutting between restaurants might not be the best way to organize my film. Each restaurant was very unique, and the nature of my collaboration with film subjects was different in each case, as discussed in the previous chapter. There were often similar themes that arose in more than one restaurant, but

sometimes this was not the case. As a result, I did not always include the same themes in each of the original assemblies. The lost in translation theme—specifically in the process of adapting the family meal experience to a London restaurant—was one of the strongest themes in my encounters at Mosob, for example. This was not a major theme in the other two restaurants, however. In this respect, episodic structure seemed to best accommodate my footage. I had originally planned to intercut between the restaurants—showing points of similarity as well as disjuncture between them. In the course of the filmmaking, though, I began to reconsider comparing the restaurants in this way. Intercutting might encourage too much comparison between the restaurants. I did not want to pit the restaurants against one another as Gordon Ramsay does in *F Word* (discussed in Chapter 3). Intercutting might have suggested that I was evaluating the restaurants to determine which one was most authentic, or it might have invited film viewers to do this. Furthermore, encouraging a lot of comparison between restaurants might have detracted from the more important work of connecting restaurant to documentary film. Finally, episodic structure allowed for a more immersive viewer experience of each restaurant and for extended time in each space. This seemed appropriate considering that one of my aims was to communicate the feeling of being there—an important part of mediating worlds.

I also felt that episodes—if organized around the structure of a journey—could strengthen the metaphor of “eating cultures”, as eating cultures is related to

figurative travel and encounter with others. Therefore, the film structure is that of a journey with three main stops. It simultaneously follows the filmmaker's journey so that the progression through time in *Eating Cultures* is organized around the making of the film itself. In his writing about the journey film structure in documentary, Michael Chanan applies literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's road chronotope, in which travel makes possible encounters between people who otherwise might never have come into contact with one another—people who would normally be separated by social difference and or physical distance. In the journey documentary, the filmmaker is the traveller, who works to “engineer these accidental meetings” (Chanan, 2007: 108). In this respect, the journey film structure appealed very much to me and seemed a particularly appropriate overall form for my film to take.

For all these reasons, I decided to keep an episodic structure for *Eating Cultures*, and I focused my attention on how to make it work better. In his book *Directing the Documentary*, Michael Rabiger draws a connection between documentary film structure and the “contract with the audience” (Rabiger, 1998: 250). He advises prospective documentary filmmakers that establishing the film structure is an integral part of the relationship between filmmaker and film viewer, explaining that the contract with the audience is “the manifestation of your film's premise, goals and route” (Rabiger, 1998: 250). Part of the reason my rough cut was not working—and specifically why the structure also was being questioned—was that I had not properly attended to my relationship with the film viewer or



my contract with the audience. I had selected a “route” for the film, but I had not communicated it to the viewer from the outset. In fact, I had not clearly communicated the film’s premise or goals from the outset either. My supervisor Enrica Colusso, in her feedback, had also pointed to this deficiency in the rough cut.

Inspired in part by Agnès Varda’s approach in *The Gleaner’s and I*, I considered that I could also use my voice, as filmmaker, to explore and communicate the metaphors in my film more fully. In fact, this might be necessary in order to realize the full potential of my film. I decided to employ narration, and also captions, in order to assert my voice as the filmmaker and to add a layer to the film that would be dedicated to developing my relationship with the viewer, which I had been neglecting. I had resisted using narration or captions because they were not part of my original plan for the film. I thought that I could accomplish my aims without utilizing these devices and was concerned about the film becoming too didactic or lecture-like. I eventually decided that they would be extremely useful, and even necessary, devices to use in *Eating Cultures*. I would use narration and captions to elucidate themes, enhance reflexivity and strengthen the film’s metaphors. The captions would take the visual form of footnotes—an idea inspired by a conversation with my supervisor Michael Chanan following our meeting to discuss my rough cut. I jokingly lamented that I could not—as one could in a written thesis—put footnotes in the film. He countered that there was actually no reason why a film could not be footnoted.

Upon testing this idea, we were both satisfied—along with the rest of the supervisory team—that it could be done. More importantly, using an informal tone paired with the footnote style, I could employ captions in such a way as to distinguish them from conventional titles used in film and television to serve as simple information providers. For the most part, my captions would look and work differently; they would be the filmmaker’s notes—notes to myself and to the viewer about the filmmaking and the film’s themes. The narration would also present the filmmaker’s reflections about the experience of being there making the film; make connections between the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film; and, refer to the problematic aspects of cultural translation and mediating worlds.

The title of the film, of course, sets up the “eating cultures” metaphor. I also utilized the narration to make a connection between restaurant customers and the documentary filmmaker and to suggest shared touristic aspects of the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film. Adding narration in the prologue and at various other points throughout the film allowed me to propose the “mediating worlds” metaphor and to actually refer to restaurant staff and myself as mediators. I also used, in several places, words associated with cooking in my commentary on the filmmaking process and words associated with filmmaking in my commentary about the restaurants. In the first linking sequence, for example, I refer to my collaborators as “maybe the most important *ingredient*” in the

filmmaking process, and in the Argentinian episode I refer to the meat as the “main character”.

As I mentioned in Chapter 4, my intention was not to present any voice as an expert voice in *Eating Cultures*. There was a potential danger, I felt, that my voice as filmmaker and my film collaborators’ voices might come across as voices of authority rather than as merely certain perspectives meant to be considered alongside many others in the film. I tried to avoid this danger by frequently using my voice to point to complexity and raise questions—including about my own work—rather than to offer information or easy answers. For example, in the first linking sequence, I wanted to acknowledge what I considered to be some of the vitally important contributions my film collaborators had made to the film project. At the same time, I wanted to acknowledge the problematic insider-outsider binary that Trinh T. Minh-ha warns about (discussed in Chapter 4). Therefore, I used my narration to complicate the concept, commenting: “By virtue of nationality, at least, [my collaborators] can claim insider status, but I try not to think of them as representatives...as if I could discover one correct insider point of view”.

The definitions and etymologies presented in the footnotes are meant to help draw out themes. In particular, I used footnotes to establish authenticity as a recurring theme. The definitions of the word “authentic”, however, are not

meant to operate in an uncomplicated, factual manner. On the contrary, they should dialogue with other elements in the film in such a way as to identify the word and the concept as problematic. The word is shown as complicated, first of all, in the sense that there are multiple definitions. More importantly, however, the definitions often conflict with perspectives voiced or ideas presented in each of the episodes. The viewer is, therefore, encouraged to look more skeptically at the definitions. For example, the first definition for the word “authentic” is presented in the Eritrean episode. Authentic is defined as: “of undisputed origin”, but this definition directly follows a sequence in which a series of my conversations with restaurant owners has suggested a complex relationship between Eritrean and Italian food and culture due to years of Italian colonial rule in Eritrea.

I will provide some final thoughts on particular complexities and issues raised in *Eating Cultures* in the conclusion. I will also reflect on how this research project might fit with and contribute to other documentary film scholarship, suggest further cross-disciplinary relevance, and propose a possible future direction for the research.

## To Finish

I began this research project concerned about a kind of existential dilemma that has enduring resonance for documentary filmmakers and scholars. How do we reconcile claims and expectations of authenticity in documentary with the fact of mediation? I aimed to contribute to the ever-expanding discourse in this area of documentary scholarship by confronting issues of documentary authenticity and mediation experientially and from a unique perspective—through reflexive cross-cultural filmmaking practice with people working and eating in restaurants. Through the film and the written reflection and theorization, I constructed a metaphorical relationship between the meal in the restaurant and the documentary film and developed the themes of “eating cultures” and “mediating worlds”. I do not purport to offer any easy solution to the documentary dilemma. Instead, this research puts the dilemma into a new context and offers another way of experiencing it. By taking the documentary dilemma into different territory, new cross-disciplinary connections have been made—in particular with tourism and food studies scholarship and in the broader contemporary context of cultural globalization. Engaging experientially with the documentary dilemma—and more broadly with mediating worlds—has provided me with a fuller understanding and an embodied knowledge of the documentary dilemma that would not have been possible in a purely theoretical endeavor. This embodied knowledge has also allowed for a more grounded theoretical engagement with the documentary dilemma. Further, the practical aspect of this research has enabled me to better articulate and share this embodied knowledge through the film and in written reflection on my practice.

*Eating Cultures* closes with the suggestion that “mediating worlds” can only ever be aspirational work; it is not fully realizable. This is something that, in the film, I propose “anyone who’s ever tried mediating worlds knows”. Documentary scholars, of course, know this as well. Practitioner-scholar Dai Vaughan has articulated the aspirational and paradoxical aspects of documentary filmmaking in his writing. The sentiment expressed is a kind of resigned persistence. He refers to documentary as “an ideal, attainable or otherwise, perhaps even self-contradictory, to whose fulfillment we aspire in our specific uses of it” (Vaughan, 1976: 1). I tried to express a sentiment similar to Vaughan’s but in a different way. My contribution, in this case, is to consider the documentary filmmaking endeavor, and specifically cross-cultural documentary filmmaking practice, in terms of how it might be related to the work of constructing the meal in the restaurant and to consider both of these activities more abstractly as “mediating worlds”. Through reflexively experiencing and critically engaging with the process of mediating worlds in this way, we might better understand the mediator’s dilemma and how the mediator may respond to particular problems and persist in spite of them.

In *Eating Cultures*, staff members in each of the three restaurants are shown to be facing various obstacles in their attempts to mediate other culinary worlds in London. Many are relatively straightforward obstacles that can be dealt with by way of certain adaptations. For example, though dishes are normally prepared hot in Pakistan, many of the customers at Mirch Masala are not accustomed to

eating spicy food; in response, the restaurant accommodates them by offering to prepare mild or medium dishes as well as hot. This is a relatively straightforward negotiation that the mediator makes, but it is nevertheless potentially problematic to the extent that it could be perceived as *anglicizing* and therefore judged inauthentic. Some obstacles, on the other hand, are more difficult for restaurant personnel to tackle—or even to explain or acknowledge—because they are problems that inhere in the mediation itself. For instance, regardless of specific obstacles like the inability to source the grain *taff*, Mosob could never really convey the culinary world of Eritrea in a completely satisfactory way because it is a world continuously changing, developing and being constructed differently by different people and across the Eritrean diaspora. The condition of diaspora complicates the coherence of the cuisine, but no cuisine or culture has ever been fixed. Mosob’s “East African sushi” starters seem innovative and untraditional now, but that could change. At a certain point in time before the Italian colonial period, a stew made with *tomato*—now an integral ingredient in Eritrean food—might also have seemed a strange, invented concoction.

There were similarly straightforward and complex obstacles in my filmmaking practice as I attempted to mediate the worlds of Mosob, Mirch Masala and Buen Ayre restaurants. Some of my filming with customers at Mosob, for example, required certain adaptations and negotiations. I was, at first, very concerned when I realized that I was not going to be able to film in the main dining room long enough to allow for a chance encounter with a group of first-time non-

Eritrean customers. During my film research phase when I anonymously visited Mosob, I had the experience of encountering the food for the first time and being introduced to a manner of eating very novel for me. In the film, I hoped to show restaurant owner Daniel with his friendly and gentle manner teaching first-time diners how to eat, as he had done for me, and to communicate the slightly awkward feeling of learning to eat in an unfamiliar way with the hands and from a communal plate. As explained in Chapter 4, Daniel and I would find another way to accomplish this; we would invite a friend of mine and her friends to have a meal in the restaurant and use the small back dining room, thereby allowing the time and space needed to film without disturbing other customers. I had intended, however, to rely solely on chance encounters with customers, and this was my initial preference as I thought it best to show people who had come to the restaurant of their own accord. The way around the obstacle was relatively straightforward and effective in this case, but the negotiated solution nevertheless poses a problem to the extent that it could be judged less authentic to bring people in to the restaurant specifically for the filming. To judge this inauthentic, of course, suggests denial of the fact that every kind of documentary filmmaking involves some level of construction, as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Further, this points to an underlying and more complex issue in mediating worlds, which there is no way to resolve because it is inherent in the documentary filmmaking process. That is the inevitability that the filmmaking process necessarily affects the film subject in some way, and this occurs regardless of the degree or type of intervention the filmmaker decides to make. Among the three restaurant filming scenarios, Buen Ayre filming was the least



structured and the most observational, spontaneous and improvisational. Yet, this was also the scenario in which the effects of the filmmaking on the film subjects were called into question most often. As shown in the film and discussed in previous chapters, questions often arose about the extent to which staff members were performing for the camera or behaving in uncharacteristic ways in the presence of the camera. In this particular case, another documentary practitioner-scholar's writing applies well; David MacDougall also writes about the documentary filmmaker's dilemma and—in a manner similar to Vaughan's—suggests the contradictory nature of the filmmaker's endeavor:

Documentary filmmakers commit what Paul Henley once called “the sin of Heisenberg,” forever interfering with what it is they seek. This is not only because, as in particle physics, the process of filming transforms its object, but because the representation of anything is by definition the creation of something different. Documentary can thus only succeed by becoming part of its object, fusing itself with it, creating a new reality. It may then succeed in spite of itself, like a damaged eye that sees objects only in its peripheral vision. (MacDougall, 1998: 48)

Again, the sentiment is one of resigned persistence but this time combined with an odd kind of optimism that documentary might just succeed in spite of itself. MacDougall's reasoning for this is similar to my final formulation in *Eating Cultures*, which also attaches value to the “fusing” together and creation of a “new reality” MacDougall describes. In the film, I suggest that—despite the unrealizable and problematic aspects of it—the work of mediating worlds might still be “worth aspiring to”. The narration continues, “There are only traces there—the raw ingredients of lived experience extracted, transformed, made consumable. But, when assembled together across time and space—allowed to marinate for a while—new spaces of encounter and engagement open up”. The

emphasis is, therefore, finally redirected to the inherently hybrid and constructed nature of the restaurant and the film mediations and to the encounters made possible in the process of mediating worlds. It is left for the viewer to consider, or reconsider, these possibilities. The tension remains, as discussed in Chapter 5, between the constraints imposed by claims and expectations of authenticity, on the one hand, and the acknowledgement of hybridity or even the embracing of creative potential on the other.

In this research project, I also considered the touristic aspects of these encounters in the restaurant and documentary filmmaking process. Another way of considering these spaces—and a potential future direction for this research—might be to apply cosmopolitanism theory. Based on some initial steps I have taken in this direction, it seems further investigation in this area could be fruitful. In particular, I am interested in the strand of cosmopolitanism scholarship referred to as “cultural cosmopolitanism” (Rovisco and Nowicka, 2011) and theorization around the cosmopolitan disposition. I have begun to consider, for instance, the extent to which the cosmopolitan disposition might help to further understand the motivations of “eaters”—specifically the documentary filmmaker and viewer “eaters”. This research project has also explored the *spaces* of encounter made possible in “mediating worlds” as touristic spaces. Perhaps they could additionally, or alternatively, be considered as cosmopolitan spaces.

In his 1992 article “Comparative Cosmopolitanism”, Bruce Robbins explains the cosmopolitan disposition as “an impulse to knowledge that is shared with others, a striving to transcend partiality that is itself partial, but no more so than the similar cognitive strivings of many diverse peoples” (Robbins, 1992: 181). This is compatible, in many ways, with my disposition in making *Eating Cultures* and is perhaps more broadly compatible with a certain kind of documentary filmmaker disposition. We might also consider, for instance, some of the sentiments expressed by relational filmmakers like Julie Perini or visual anthropologists like Sarah Pink—discussed in Chapters 2 and 3—as cosmopolitan. Some of Pink’s writing is especially reminiscent of Robbins’ cosmopolitan disposition in her emphasis on “experiencing similarly” and using audiovisual ethnographic methods to share in and thereby learn about the lived experience of others (Pink, 2008).

Disposition, in this case, may also be related to research method. Therefore, beyond considering my *disposition* as cosmopolitan, I have also considered that my methodological approach resembles the approach being taken in some recent cosmopolitanism scholarship. In their survey of the field in 2011, Maria Rovisco and Magdalena Nowicka identify *cultural cosmopolitanism* as one of the main strands of cosmopolitanism scholarship, and they note that cultural cosmopolitanism often and increasingly involves an “empirically-grounded approach” (Rovisco and Nowicka, 2011: 5) focusing on “lived cosmopolitanism” in everyday life scenarios (Rovisco and Nowicka, 2011: 2).

One example of such work is Kevin Robins' 2010 article "Cosmopolitanism and Good-enough Cosmopolitanism: Encounter with Robin Denselow and Charlie Gillett", which I found particularly useful in considering my work in relation to cosmopolitanism. Robins uses cosmopolitanism as a perspective from which to examine world music (or what he re-terms "migrating music"), and he also wants to make a unique contribution to cosmopolitanism scholarship by applying it in this context. Robins incorporates into his research an interview ("encounter" as he calls it) with two "mediators" of world music—Robin Denselow and Charlie Gillett. Denselow is a British journalist and writer, who has written extensively on world music and is currently a world music critic for *The Guardian*. Gillett was a British radio DJ for the BBC World Service and is known for, among other things, playing and promoting a wide range of music from around the world. Denselow and Gillett present themselves in the interviews as non-expert, world music enthusiasts, and Robins focuses on their experiences and perceptions in a manner similar to the manner in which I engaged with the experiences and perceptions of people working and eating in restaurants. Robins says that a lot of work has been done in the social sciences to examine cosmopolitanism in an "intellectualised" way. He wants to also understand it in terms of "practical sense and reason" in a real-world context and to explore "how the quality of cultural existence and situation that many of us want to think of as 'cosmopolitan' might, in some form, be available to us now, in the present life, even if meagrely, in want of elaboration" (Robins, 2010: 415). This is concordant with my rationale for examining authenticity and mediation in a practical context in London restaurants and in the process of filmmaking. It is also reminiscent of arguments

made for documentary filmmaking as research and audiovisual ethnographic methods discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Robins considers Denselow and Gillett as world music mediators and characterizes this activity as “good-enough cosmopolitanism”—borrowing the term “good-enough” from psychoanalytic theorist Donald Winnicott and adapting it from Winnicott’s notion of the good-enough mother. “Winnicott sought to counter the image of the ‘ideal mother’ with the more realistic, and actually more necessary, figure of the ‘good-enough’ mother” (Robins, 2010: 415), he explains. Robins wants to apply something of the spirit of this to cosmopolitanism and, in doing so, also counter criticism of cosmopolitanism as utopian. The sentiment he expresses here is not unlike the sentiments presented earlier in this chapter regarding the aspirational aspect of mediating worlds and the resigned persistence on the part of the filmmaker. In this case, however, the cosmopolitan aspiration might also be linked to the aspiration of eating cultures.

Good-enough cosmopolitanism is different from the usual social scientific approaches, Robins says. It is not about “thinking *about* cultures” but about experiencing, “absorbing”, and then making sense of the experience in a different kind of way...“an enlarging sense”, “a situated, keen awareness of the world as lived”. This “can invite a more vivid kind of thinking, thinking of a kind that we have never really found in standard sociopolitical discourses” (Robins, 2010: 422). Like Bruce Robbins, Kevin Robins also considers cosmopolitanism as a disposition. For Kevin Robins, it is “a stance or disposition towards the world involving an enlarging imagination and modality of thought” (Robins, 2010:

Abstract). It is “a dimension of understanding, of recognition, across cultural spaces and across time,” (Robins, 2010: 413) and it is about expanding horizons and experiencing, perceiving or even constructing interconnectedness.

In considering the documentary dilemma obliquely by way of the restaurant, I also intended to allow fresh insight through a kind of “mobility of mind”, to use Kevin Robins’ term. My research attempted to transcend more than just cultural boundaries; it involved a broader constructing of interconnectedness between filmmaker and film subjects. In this more abstract sense, my approach fits with Robins’ notion of the cosmopolitan disposition. The intention is to engage a metaphorical kind of thinking. It encourages the transformative potential of seeing one thing as something else. Perceiving filmmaking as “cooking”, for example, draws attention to the construction and transformation that is necessarily involved in such an activity. Seeing documentary filmmaking and viewing as “eating cultures”, on the other hand, draws attention to the desire to experience and thereby understand—in the *digestion*—something more about the lived experience of others. Like mediating worlds, eating cultures is also only ever aspirational—the aim of the eater no more fully realizable than that of the mediator. Perhaps the documentary filmmaker as “eater” can only aim for good-enough cosmopolitanism. As film scholars Hamid Naficy and Teshome Gabriel conclude about difference and representation,

Consuming the other is a continual process of yearning—for meaning, for those qualities which the dominant order has exiled or lost, and for the certainties that ideologies provide in a world that is increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Since this yearning is never fulfilled, the other remains forever alluring (and threatening). But, it derives its allure not from an essential

authenticity, moral absolutism, or some higher knowledge but from its own shifting nomadic sensibilities. The other tends to thrive on the ambiguities and the limits of language. The only lasting and promising discourse, therefore, is that which is incomplete, provisional, and of a research nature. (Naficy and Gabriel, 1991: iii)

The other is always ultimately unknowable, and it is a mistake to try and locate others according to essentialist logic, Naficy and Gabriel emphasize. This is part of the tension that my film deals with and that I have further addressed in my writing. *Eating Cultures* works to complicate assumptions about authenticity, in part, through the contradictions that arise in the course of the filmmaker's journey and through the filmmaker's struggle to make sense of it all. This is sometimes expressed via the filmmaker's voice in the form of the narration and captions, as discussed in Chapter 5. Contradiction and complexity sometimes unfold gradually, as with the example of the customer expressing the view that the food at Mirch Masala is authentic because it is not "anglicized for the British palate," which is later contradicted when we learn that dishes are adapted for customers who prefer less spicy food. It was not always a case of the filmmaking revealing contradiction and complexity in the restaurant scenarios, however. At times, film subjects responded to potential over-simplifications emerging in my filmic representation. For instance, on the topic of the Eritrean bread *injera*, Daniel showed and explained to me how they make it at Mosob, and film collaborators and advisors Seble and Guemesh talked about traditional methods and contrasted them with the way the bread is made in London. I also later received the footage produced in Eritrea from Seble, in which she recorded the traditional method of *injera*-making on a wood-fired *mogogo* (stove) (Figure 15). I would eventually intercut some of this footage with the Mosob kitchen and

dining room footage to juxtapose what Seble and Guemesh were telling me about traditional methods with what Daniel was showing and explaining about Mosob's methods. In hindsight, I was initially thinking in an oversimplified way about traditional methods versus adapted methods. Daniel, in our conversation in the kitchen, picked up on this and complicated it—revealing more complexity than I had assumed. After I remarked to him about the traditional method of making *injera* on the wood-fired *mogogo* and contrasted it with Mosob's small pan on the stovetop method, Daniel pointed out that not everyone in Eritrea uses a wood-fired *mogogo* anymore. Many people use a modern, electric version of it in Eritrea now. His interjection here complicated the relatively simple binary that the film would have otherwise imposed of *injera*-making in Eritrea as traditional versus modified or modernized *injera*-making in London.



**Figure 15: Eritrean wood-fired *mogogo* (oven), from video produced in Asmara, Eritrea by Seble Ephrem, Makonnen Woldeab, and the Eritrean Relief Association (UK)**



Ultimately, as I hope the film suggests, the documentary filmmaker as “eater”—and by extension the viewer “eater”—can never fully grasp other cultures because they are not, in the first place, static or completely coherent. They are irreducible, not fully translatable; therefore, what I discovered in the filming, and what is presented to the viewer, is also irreducible in a sense. This theme arises several times throughout the film in both the restaurant and the filmmaking scenarios. There is, for example, the literal untranslatability theme presented when Eritrean translator Guemesh and I struggle to translate a Tigrinya phrase fully and concisely into English for the film subtitles, and there is the more figurative struggle to translate sensory and memory experience, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

It is important that cross-cultural film express contradiction, complexity, the unknowable, and the untranslatable because it is disingenuous, at best, not to do so. At worst, it may present a kind of “neocolonialist gaze” according to Laura

Marks:

Popular cinema and television attempt unproblematically to deliver a world of senses to the viewer; travelogues, conventional ethnographic films, art-house imports, and other films present a foreign culture with seeming transparency...Such works, directed to a viewer perfectly comfortable in the dominant culture, represent sense knowledges as commodities. (Marks, 2000: 239)

*Gordon Ramsay’s F Word*, as I argued in Chapter 3, is overtly neocolonialist.

Marks warns that ethnographic films may be as well—albeit probably in more subtle ways. Undoubtedly, many film and program-makers are unaware of this

danger and, therefore, it is an unintended outcome of their attempts to mediate worlds.

In a certain respect, associating documentary filmmaking with tourism, as I have done in this research project, helps draw attention to this danger. The tourist figure is normally thought to define others according to an essentialist discourse, as Naficy and Gabriel cautioned against, and to approach other cultures as commodities to be appropriated in a neocolonialist fashion, as Marks warns against. Tourism scholarship has increasingly complicated these generalizations. Adrian Franklin's efforts to rethink tourism as part of everyday life and as "a modern stance to the world, an interest and curiosity in the world beyond our own immediate lives and circles" (Franklin, 2003: 11) perhaps prefigures a melding of tourism with cosmopolitanism and a more general reimagining of the tourist figure. It is not clear yet, however, whether the tourist will ever be dissociated from the conundrums of authenticity and implications of commodification.

The figure of a cosmopolitan "eater" could perhaps better avoid the pitfalls of authenticity and essentialism at least. Using the tourism metaphor to understand cross-cultural encounter evokes notions of mapping and orientation, emphasizes the connection between culture and geographic location, and perhaps engenders a false sense of clear distinction between worlds or cultures. Cosmopolitanism, however, may allow for a less spatially oriented focus and greater openness to

hybridity. Therefore, the spaces of encounter that I have considered in this research project as touristic spaces should also be considered as cosmopolitan spaces. In his thinking on musical cosmopolitanism, Kevin Robins avoids the problematic link between culture and geography by emphasizing movement across space and time. He uses the concept of migration to suggest the fluidity of boundaries in world music. This is part of the reason he prefers to call it “migrating music”. For him, the work of making and mediating “migrating music” involves “taking from ‘there’ and from ‘then’. It is about gathering and combination, and the keeping of what is...thought-provoking” (Robins, 2010: 413). This is similar, in a sense, to what Salman Rushdie does in his historical fiction (discussed in Chapter 5), but this is precisely the point at which cosmopolitanism starts to seem at odds with mediating worlds and where we return to the paradox in the restaurant and the documentary filmmaking scenarios. On the one hand, they do seem to open up spaces of cosmopolitan encounter, where some level of sharing experience and transcending boundaries is made possible. They are heterotopic spaces where time-space compression occurs and where the restaurateur and the documentary filmmaker gather fragments of “real” worlds and lived experience then incorporate and recombine them into new wholes. Yet, where the fusion restaurant or the fiction film—or Rushdie or the world music DJ—might freely mix elements and explore creative possibilities, mediators in the national restaurant and the documentary film scenarios usually struggle to acknowledge and embrace hybridity.

My sense is that this paradox or tension in documentary will never be resolved and that it need not ever be; it is, perhaps, the defining characteristic of the documentary filmmaking endeavor. Nevertheless, it is a tension that must be acknowledged and addressed, and herein lies the enduring challenge for the filmmaker. In facing this challenge we may, as this research has done, look to other kinds of mediators for insight—expanding our horizons to engage in ever more innovative ways of articulating the documentary dilemma.

# Appendix

## ETHICS BOARD

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM PRO FORMA

**Title of Research Project:** Understanding the Process of Cross-cultural Documentary Filmmaking and the Concept of Authenticity

**Brief Description of Research Project:**

The goal of this research project is to understand more about cross-cultural documentary filmmaking and the concept of authenticity. As part of this study, researcher/filmmaker Holly Giesman will produce a documentary film on London restaurants presenting authentic national cuisines.

The resulting film will be published as part of the PhD research project and will be publicly screened. It may also be broadcast locally and internationally.

**Investigator Contact Details:**

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**Consent Statement:**

I agree to take part in this research, and am aware that I am free to withdraw at any point. I agree to the inclusion of my contribution in this documentary film, the nature of which has been explained to me. I understand that my contribution will be edited and there is no guarantee that my contribution will appear in the final film. I agree that my contribution may be used to publicise the documentary.

I acknowledge that I will not receive any payment for my Contribution.

I understand that this documentary (or part of it) may be distributed in any medium in any part of the world.

Name .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Please note: if you have a concern about any aspect of your participation or any other queries please raise this with the investigator. However if you would like to contact an independent party please contact the Head of Department (or if the researcher is a student you can also contact the Director of Studies.) See contact information below.

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