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REASSEMBLING DOCUMENTARY: FROM ACTUALITY TO VIRTUALITY

by

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DISSERTATION

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INTRODUCTION

I explain collective resemblances of the whole by the massing together of minute elementary acts – the greater by the lesser and the whole by the part.

Gabriel Tarde

This project is not about documentary as a definable, media-specific object but the techniques and the various assemblages that have made it possible for diverse cinematic and post-cinematic practices to delineate a common, albeit not-so-homogenous, domain (often defined along the lines of a peculiar trope of realism in cinema), which has allowed documentary to emerge as an object of theory. Rather than treat documentary solely within the critical tradition of film studies, I place it in a broader tradition of media history and theory, emphasizing the connection between documentary and new media practices. At a period of intense technological change, which has led to an increasing degree of modularity especially in digital media, "Reassembling Documentary: From Actuality to Virtuality," takes up episodic and multi-part documentaries broken into distinctly conceptualized parts, in order to examine how the relationship between documentary parts and wholes has been shaped and redefined in different historical, aesthetic, and technological media formations. More specifically, the project seeks to challenge the assumption that documentary is essentially holistic in its discursive and stylistic orientation.

Such an endeavor -- that which is predicated on establishing documentary as a type of connection between heterogeneous materialities -- entails moving away from the rhetorical and representational models of scholarship that have dominated the field up

until the mid 90s (much like the way apparatus theory dominated Film Studies for a long time), and shifting the focus from the strained relationship between image and reality towards materiality. This is not to suggest that the project aims to do away with the question of mediation, as it is often associated with representationalism or the impossibility of a direct, uncodified access to the physical world; rather, I wish to locate the meaning of mediation elsewhere, in the experiential dimensions of technical expression and the materiality of the documentary media. In order to demonstrate the continuous presence of a non-fiction media tradition that goes against documentary's association with discourses of sobriety, cinematic unity, and objective representation, I provide an in-depth analysis of the fragmented works of an experimental and international group of filmmakers, such as Harun Farocki, Werner Herzog, James Longley, Péter Forgács, Abbas Kiarostami, and Aleksandr Sokurov. By studying these works in relation to the large number of modular, episodic, and mix-media films belonging to the documentary canon, I am able to demonstrate that documentary's formal features and social content have always unfolded in tandem with the evolution of particular media technologies, which I characterize as the movement from actuality to virtuality.

In the context of documentary media, "from Actuality to Virtuality" suggests two different kinds of movements at once. The first is historical and technological, referring to documentary film's evolution from its early stages, what some historians like to call its "pre-documentary origins" in analog actuality films, to its contemporary status in the age of real-time based electronic media, broadly characterized as a form of virtual reality. As

a documentary specific term, actualities denote the first motion pictures: the short, unedited footage of vernacular events, spaces, and things, born as the love child of the realist impulse and the technological spectacle of cinema. In this initial move, then, actuality and virtuality are posed as art historical terms, or two markers bracketing the entire history of cinema and post-cinematic media, following the logic of documentality. What this logic enables is reclaiming documentary as a domain in which we can formulate cinema as one of the constituents of a broader history of new media, instead of subordinating documentary media studies to film theory. The temporal progression implied here, however, does not necessarily suggest a linear or teleological history; we are not talking about an advance from a primitive (theatrical screen-bound[1]) analog cinema of facts towards a mobile, multi-platform, multi-media environment of codes and algorithms. Recent debates in the fields of New Media Studies, New Film History and Media Archaeology have underscored that early cinema practices demonstrate significant parallels with our current practices of mediality and it is hard to imagine a history of media without discontinuity, repetition, remediation, and return. One can think, for example, of the writings of Thomas Elsaesser, Lev Manovich, and Richard Grusin in this context. Elsaesser's archaeological model of new film history rejects periodizations based on the hierarchical categorizations of media; Manovich applies his database logic to early films as well as to contemporary digital media; and Grusin's formulation of premediation and remediation (linking visual media from the renaissance invention of

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[1] Here, one only needs to remember that actualities were shown not just in theatres but in diverse locales such as nickelodeons, factories, museums, world fairs, and in agit-prop trains, etc. for extra-cinematic interest.

linear perspective to virtual reality) blurs the boundaries between past, present, and future.

The second movement suggested in the phrase "from Actuality to Virtuality" is phenomenological. Here, I am thinking of Brian Massumi's formulation of actuality and virtuality as the two ends of the spectrum or two sides of the same coin, reality, following Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Bergson. In Massumi's writings, virtuality is not an antonym for reality or materiality; instead virtuality stands for *the mode of reality implicated in the emergence of new potentials*. Actuality, on the other hand, is associated with the meaning of the word in French, *l'actualité*, denoting current events. This is also the sense in which John Grierson uses the word, in his famous definition of documentary: "the creative treatment of actuality." Actuality and virtuality, in this second context, couples the actual, perceivable audiovisual content with the unperceivable potential of media, making them equally integral to documentary reality. The potential of media can be understood in technological, historical, aesthetic, or social terms, in the sense of a new medium's ability to introduce new relations or change our experiences (*perception ratios*, to put it in the Marshall McLuhan's terms). Social media enables intensified connectivity, mobile media brings ubiquity and embodied mediality, and locative media suggest the possibility of a more immersive engagement with place and community, for example. Once again, what I am talking about is a complex yet close relationship between two terms, instead of a linear movement or dichotomy.

In addition to these theoretical frameworks that underscore my approach to documentary and new media history, my work is also informed by Bruno Latour's actor-

network theory, especially with regard to its reworking of the Deleuzian concept of assemblages to apply to the material relationships between human and non-human actors (which can be extended to include media technology as humans' companion species). Accordingly, I look at documentaries as assemblages of technological and social materialities, networks, platforms, and media, resisting any classifications that efface the temporal, aesthetic, agentic, and technological differences nested in individual parts or segments of a film or media work. I am emphasizing the word media here because we have to remember that not every documentary is a "film": the current topography of documentary stretches over a vast, somewhat warped terrain featuring a plethora of media products such as open source media projects, instructional videos, installation works, home and community videos, reality shows, surveillance tapes, and imagery from satellite, data, and geographical mapping systems as well as missiles, as Paul Virilio forcibly reminds us.

To map the technological and theoretical transformations suggested in the clusterings, interactions, and counteractions among these diverse media artifacts, especially in the digital era, my project proposes the deployment of what I call "assemblistic reading." It is a type of textual analysis that moves from the distinct parts of a documentary to the whole, shifting the attention from the hierarchy between the micro and macro elements to their mutual reconfiguration. The project is organized into four chapters, each of which performs an assemblistic reading of a different multi-part form in documentary, with individual parts conceptualized as fragments, lessons, installments, and compilations respectively. In order to avoid a linear logic, the chapters

do not follow a specific timeline, starting with actuality films and making my way gradually towards virtual media; but instead, I explore forms of assembly that might have been marginalized yet remain persistent in different technological stages of media from actuality to virtuality.

The first chapter highlights the idea of film "fragments" as a key concept in formulating the question of parts versus wholes in documentary film. Through an assemblistic reading of James Longley's episodic documentary *Iraq in Fragments*, featuring a three-part narrative about the everyday life of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds in Iraq under occupation, it examines how fragmentation was understood aesthetically, technologically and discursively in different periods of documentary history, leading up to the disjunctive media environment of the post-9/11 era[2]. Here, the director's nomenclature, or in other words, his conceptualization of each episode as "fragment," provides an exceptional opportunity to situate the film's formal strategy within a wide range of experimental practices and theoretical debates regarding fragmentation in the field, making it a prism through which the historical shifts in documentary media's discursive orientations can be distinguished. The chapter puts a special emphasis on the film's sound design as a distinct element of its assemblage, in order to ultimately argue against discursive unity and to move towards an assemblistic view of documentary, which underscores heterogeneity and non-closure.

In the second chapter, I deploy another version of assemblistic reading, taking up the compositional concept "lessons" as it is used in documentaries cross-historically.

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[2] A shorter version of this chapter has been published in *Studies in Documentary Film* with the same title.

This chapter puts three modes of aphoristic documentality in productive dialogue with one another. I call them aphoristic, since each of them is influenced by a philosophical figure that comes from the aphoristic writing tradition. Accordingly, Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness*, which is a thirteen-chapter eco-disaster film, cites Blaise Pascal, whereas Hungarian Peter Forgács's seven-part video *Wittgenstein Tractatus* is modeled after Wittgenstein's axiomatic treatise, and the French filmmaker Jean Painlevé's short, science films, which date back to the post-World War I French tradition of illustrated *object lesson*s, are inspired by Nietzsche. I read these diverse works together in order to establish a link between a cluster of documentaries that can be grouped under the category of "lesson film": a style of documentary filmmaking with its own methods of assembly, genealogy, traditions, and counter-traditions. While the first two films confound generic classifications, they share a peculiar structural affinity. Both are episodic, broken into enumerated, yet loosely connected chapters that are based on ethical lessons or axioms about the world that they portray. Notably, the idea of "film as an audio-visual lesson" is not foreign to the field of documentary, as it immediately brings to mind the French tradition of illustrated lectures, also known as "object lesson" films, and the way their taken-for-granted authoritative voice was countered, if not subverted, by the dreamlike quality of the science films made by directors like Jean Comandon and Painlevé from early 1920s on. Herzog revisits this controversial concept and applies it to the enigmatic chapters of his eco-disaster film, whereas Forgács follows the axiomatic lemmata of Ludwig Wittgenstein's treatise *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In straying away from documentary films' usually taken-for-granted discursive and structural unity,

the works of these filmmakers go against the positivist and representational epistemological tradition that approaches documentary sound-image as "object lessons." Instead, the chapter argues that they playfully return to fragments to question their logic.

The third chapter performs another coupling between two enigmatic films and analyzes the multi-part documentaries of Aleksandr Sokurov and Abbas Kiarostami, the unarguable masters of non-Western long-take cinema. These documentaries invert audience's expectations of mobility, ubiquity, and connectivity related to commonplace perceptions of video and digital technologies as well as rejecting post-continuity cinema's stylistic elements of mobile camerawork, quick cuts, oblique angles, or cut-up aesthetics. In so doing, Sokurov and Kiarostami's films invest digital documentary's energies elsewhere, precisely in a particular amalgamation of the aesthetic strategies of analog long-take cinema with digital technologies and abstract/non-narrative meditations on nature, aiming to explore its hidden patterns. The framing of nature through static camera shots, meditative long takes, and minimally edited image tracks countered with evocative digital soundtracks find its most formal display in Abbas Kiarostami's five-part experimental documentary *Five: Dedicated to Ozu* and the third installment of Aleksandr Sokurov's five-part mini-series *Confession*, which features analog video imagery and a stereo soundtrack re-mastered in Dolby Digital for its DVD release. With a special emphasis on the use of long-take cinematography and anempathetic sound, the chapter situates these films' return to tropes of nature as indifferent to human meditation within the metaphysical turn taken in recent years in the fields of Humanities and Nature Sciences, and the rekindled interest in process and object-oriented philosophies, which

seek to formulate a philosophy of nature that can respond to contemporary ecological sensibilities and posit nature as an entity capable of acting upon itself without the intervention of human or organic actors.

The last chapter shifts the focus from episodic and multi-part documentaries to a more established and persistent mode of assembly in documentary film history, the "compilation film," in order to explore the transformations that the assemblistic composition and discourse of the genre have undergone in the age of real-time based video and digital media. More specifically, the chapter investigates the impact of the transition to real-time technologies on the historicizing potential of documentary in the age of video through a comparative analysis of the Soviet filmmaker / editor Esfir Shub's newsreel-based compilation *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, which inaugurated the genre, and German directors Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's video compilation *Videograms of a Revolution*, concluding the section with a brief analysis of the status of real-time technologies in the age of digital media.

CHAPTER 1 "REASSEMBLING THE NATION: *IRAQ IN FRAGMENTS* AND THE ACOUSTICS OF OCCUPATION"

While it is premature to provide more than a myopic account of the broader aesthetic, discursive, and phenomenological implications of the events that took place on and in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the impact of the terrorist attacks on the WTC and the ensuing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is felt in many facets of our lives, ranging from trade to travel, economy and security to ideologies about religion, freedom of expression, warfare, torture, and detention. Such a profound impact that seeps through the distant channels of vernacular experience establishes 9/11 as a historical signpost, separating the new millennium from the old with an almost visible, perhaps all too visible, break: a rupture in the form of the shattered glass and "glowing bones" of WTC's North Tower, etched in the memory of artists like the political cartoonist Art Spiegelman as a *vision of disintegration*. In the realm of art and media, 9/11 led to a return to tropes of realism, marked and at times transgressed by an unprecedented degree of hypermediacy, which brought about a revival of interest in documentaristic forms of media and enabled a proliferation in the number of documentary films trying to assemble the pieces of a seemingly disintegrating world that also appeared to be more connected than ever.

What do fragmentation and reassembly in film, then, suggest in a hyper-mediated post-9/11 world in which "gestures of pure mediality"[3] are distributed and dispersed among a wide range of human, social, and technological actors? If, as Nitasha Kaul

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[3] Richard Grusin describes these gestures as exhibitions of purposeless mediality such as spectacle-like demonstrations of violence and filming random events through a multiplicity of networking devices.

argues, an era marked with terrorist acts, "A Big Bang such as planes that crash into buildings, or trains that explode, or discotheques that blow up, or a rain of bullets across a city -- brings about a quantum shift in every single aspect of individual perception" ("Who Carries"), how does the spatio-temporally fragmenting technology of film relate to a world, which is already out-of-joint? In this chapter, I engage these questions from the point of view of documentary film and offer an assemblistic reading of James Longley's *Iraq in Fragments*, a post-9/11 documentary that foregrounds fragmentation, to suggest a possible interpretive framework.

Prologue

> *Iraq is not something that you can cut into pieces. Iraq is a country. How can you cut a country in pieces? With a Saw?*

At the end of the third and final chapter of James Longley's documentary film *Iraq in Fragments*, the voice-over of Ali, a 9 year-old Kurdish boy, provides what seems at first to be a naïve commentary on the proposals of a post-war independent Kurdish state buzzing around him in his small native village located south of Arbil, in northern Iraq. While innocent, the question "How can you cut a country in pieces? With a saw?" inadvertently points to multiple severings, which the film simultaneously depicts and performs. First, the question offers a counter-argument to the preceding statement of an elderly Kurdish refugee filmed in a refugee camp in Kerkuk, who calmly asserts, "The future of Iraq will be in three pieces." Second, Ali's reaction relates to the tension created by the two competing political proposals formulated by the U.S. Government regarding Iraq's future, pitting the model of a divided, tri-partite Iraq against that of a

unified but reformed nation-state. Last but not least, Ali's idea of an Iraq cut into pieces calls attention to the fragmented nature of the film itself, offering lyrical and inconclusive vignettes from the war-torn country, as indicated in its title. Interestingly, the overlap between the social fragmentation caused by a violent rupture in the political reality of the nation and the aesthetic fragmentation presented as a formal strategy in the documentary also rekindles a central debate in film studies, which constitutes the basis of several significant theoretical divides in the field: the debate about whether films should be understood as unified wholes or sutured fragments.

A Preliminary Incision

In his discerning rumination on the age of mechanical reproduction, Walter Benjamin likened the primal scene of cinema to a war zone:

Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling (236).

Benjamin suggested that film, like all means of mechanical reproduction, was intrinsically a technology that fragmented space and time (Rutsky 33) in order to dismantle and reassemble the world, which had already been wrenched apart by modernity at the turn of the 20th century. As Mary Ann Doane argues, industrialization and the expansion of capitalism brought about a rationalization (and a subsequent atomization) of time and space, which was accompanied, if not complemented, by a restructuring of temporality and reconfiguration of space through the emerging technologies of photography and cinema ("The Emergence"). Much like the way

industrial processes divided time and space into discrete units in order to consolidate them as value, the filmic frame disrupted the spatio-temporal unity of the world by providing the indexical imprint of a once present and unique moment (16), taken out of its inviolable contingent unity and isolated as a self-subsisting fragment. Once isolated, film reassembled the fragments through the processes of projection and editing in order to establish a continuity of time, "synthetically concocted as a serial form" (Harbord 23).

However, cinema's logic of fragmentation also manifested itself at a formal level throughout various stages of its history. From the flicker effect of the discontinuous succession of instants (the rhythm of appearance and disappearance in the sudden flash or burst into motion of a spectacle and its equally abrupt disruption) that highlights the cinema of attractions' disjunctive temporality (Gunning 3-12) to the intended shock effects of the avant-garde and the destabilization of the relationship between the present and the past through editing in narrative cinema, film evolved as a medium characterized by fragmentation, rupture, and transformation. Andre Gaudreault and Jean-Marc Lamotte further suggest that there is strong evidence of fragmentation and segmentation at what they call a "photogrammic" level (single frames joined through a minimal editing procedure such as cutting or gluing) even in the pre-1900 cinema. It is possible to say that film's evolution entered yet another stage in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, when the world got introduced to a much more cataclysmic era of rupture and fragmentation, once again accompanied and complemented by media technologies, as the plethora of images of the disaster shot from multiple vantage points before and after the event instilled into

the 21st century's social imaginary shattered visions of imploded skyscrapers, shredded piles of steel, glass, and cadavers.

De-fragmenting Documentary Film

An understanding of film as a dynamic, and at times violent, fragmentation and rearrangement of the world was also shared by early documentary filmmakers, leading to the birth of montage aesthetics as well as compilation films and early city symphonies in Europe and America. Montage was based on reconstructing reality through a dialectical organization of what Dziga Vertov called "film fragments," understood as independent shots; compilation films reconstructed history through an assembly of disjunctive media such as newsreels, home movies, and different recording technologies (Ellis and McLane); and city symphony films reconstructed urban life through their fragmented episodic structure inspired by the 4- or 5-act temporal movements of symphonic music. In short, documentary film at its foundation was conceived as a form of assemblage pointing to and originating from the social and technological heterogeneity of the twentieth century world as well as its increasing mediality.

The concept of assemblages, referring to a wide variety of wholes constructed from heterogeneous parts in the writings of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, has been increasingly influential in recent years due to its applicability to theories of complexity within various fields, including social sciences, humanities, biology and the arts. In an attempt to formulate a broader theory of assemblages, Bruno Latour and Manuel Delanda have applied the concept to social entities whose properties emerge from the interactions between parts, thus redefining the social as a movement of association and assembling

between discontinuous materialities. Situating the theory in the initial opposition between wholes and parts, or between (organic) unities and (mechanical) aggregates in the context of the social, Delanda reminds us that this is a question dating back to Aristotelian essentialism (26). Unities require interpreting wholes as seamless totalities, whereas in assemblages, wholes are understood as made up of parts that are self-subsistent, which suggests that a component part of the assemblage may be detached from it at any time and plugged into a different grouping, in which its interactions/meaning change (10). Latour traces the discussion back to the sociologist Gabriel Tarde, who offered an alternative methodology to Emile Durkheim's sociology by suggesting that the collective resemblances of wholes should be explained by 'the massing together of minute elementary acts - the greater by the lesser and the whole by the part (15), therefore reversing the widely accepted hierarchy between the micro and the macro elements. Taking Tarde as a precursor and crediting Deleuze, Latour establishes a methodology, which traces associations between heterogeneous parts and pays attention to their autonomy instead of looking at the social as a fixed domain of reality.

In the field of film, and especially documentary, one also finds a long history of engagement with this line of what Nigel Thrift describes as a "materiality of thinking" (referring to a lineage of "inter-relation" theories that stretch between James and Whitehead, and which can be traced in Tarde's micrometaphysics, Deleuze and Guattari's assemblages, and Latour's actor-network theory) both at the level of theory and practice. Most notably, the Soviet Montage Theory of the 1920s and 30s postulated

editing as a process of assembly between heterogeneous images (and later sounds). Criticizing the seamless unity of the standardized continuity editing system of Hollywood, the writing and the film-making of Eisenstein and Vertov gestured towards encouraging disjunctive assemblies and intermediality in editing practices, urging filmmakers to incorporate animation, graphics, intertitles, gestural acting, and, when called for, contrapuntal use of sound (Harbord 76). Although within the Soviet movement, Esfir Shub rejected Vertov's fast-paced metrical montage editing for destroying the authenticity and the archival value of images by severing them through multiple cuts (Malitsky) Shub's historical compilation method, which she used for the first time in *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, introduced what later became another enduring mode of assemblage in documentary film.

In the early 1980s, Trinh T. Minh-ha used the concept of assemblage overtly in her first documentary *Reassemblage*, critiquing the Western representations of the Other. In the film, Minh-ha's disjunctive editing and manipulation of the soundtrack about Senegalese women, challenging the assumed compositional unity of ethnographic films, serves primarily as a critical strategy of self-reflexivity; as Peter Ian Crawford argues, the film derides many of the conventions that helped ethnographic films create a common language of unity, authenticity, and objectivity, including techniques such as the long take (with its assumption of capturing life as an uninterrupted process), and the use of wide-angle lenses, synchronous sound, and paternalistic discourses (79). However, Minh-ha's invocation of reassemblage in order to critique visual anthropology's systematic misrepresentation of social reality by presenting harmonious images and

sounds of homogenous cultural wholes[4] is also in line with assemblage theory's objection

to articulations of organic wholes, unity and continuity while dealing with the social.

Furthermore, Minh-ha's practices point to the assembled nature of the materialities that

construct documentary film by interrupting the flow of its seemingly seamless elements[5].

In her more recent work, Minh-ha adopts "a theory of intervals," inspired by

Dziga Vertov's writings in the Kinoks Revolution, which also recalls the premises of

assemblage theory ("Cinema Interval"). She states that according to Vertov, intervals are

what cine-images, cine-documents, or cine-poems are built upon, that is: "upon a

movement between the pieces, the frames; upon the proportions of these pieces between

themselves, upon the transitions from one visual impulse to the one following it" (xii).

Although intervals "constitute interruptions and eruptions in a uniform series of surface"

(xiii), they also imply a movement between interrupted elements, which is reminiscent of

Delanda and Latour's discussion of the priority of relations over related terms (conceived

as distinct elements without a necessary uniformity or totality) in assemblages. What is

at stake here is a shift in focus from Documentary Film Studies' traditional fixation with

the strained relationship between image and reality, which dominated the field up until

mid 90s, toward the relations (or intervals) and associations between filmic and profilmic

materialites. Such a shift in focus brings with it a reversal of hierarchy between the

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[4] This provides the grounds of the debate surrounding the "crisis of representation" in traditional cross-cultural ethnography (Lutkehaus and Cool 116).
[5] Michael Renov additionally talks about the violence involved in ethnography's assembling of discontinuous realities: "Of course, the very act of plucking and recontextualizing profilmic elements is a kind of violence, particularly when cultural specificity is at issue as it is with ethnographic texts" ("Introduction" 7).

dissonance of film fragments / parts and the seeming unity of a documentary film as whole.

Reassembling Iraq in Fragments

Most recently, American Director James Longley reinstates documentary film to its evocative status as contemplation on the fragmentation and reassemblage of the world (this time ruptured not by modernity or a colonial gaze but by war and the ramifications of the post-9/11 global terrorism), in his film *Iraq in Fragments*. The poetic documentary features a three-part meditation on the everyday life of Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds in Iraq under occupation and provides an affective journey through "the ruins and debris" of a nation wrenched apart among three different realities, seen as inassimilable albeit not completely autonomous. The fragmented structure of the film and its complex layering of sound underscore the divergences and flows between these parts, making a fixed entry point difficult to maintain.

The sonic contrasts among the vernacular urban noise of Baghdad streets in the segment about Sunnis, the overpowering sectarian sounds of the Shiites, and the suspenseful quiet of the rural Kurds up north open up a dissonant space in which each fragment of the film becomes a testimony to both the cultural, ethnic, and religious disquiet of the nation and the heterogeneity of its sonic landscape. Together, the fragments construe Iraq as an assemblage of discontinuous noises, sights, sounds, voices, and music, which imply that it is impossible to capture the nation (or life under occupation) in its totality. Furthermore, they suggest that the idea of the social as totality, which Latour and Delanda find problematic, is audiovisually untenable. Here, it is

important to note that although the idea of totality has frequently appeared as a matter of concern in the writings of filmmakers (as diverse as Grierson, who contemplated on the question in relation to his social idealism influenced by Kant, Hegel, and Bradley, and the Direct Cinema / Cinéma vérité pioneers, who underscored wholeness of experience in lieu of totality) early documentary forms were not necessarily against it. The dialectical approach of the Russian montage, though it promoted structural fragmentation as a part of its modernist aesthetics, aimed at national unity (uniting the emerging nation around a single revolutionary identity); as Keith Booker argues, "Modernist formal fragmentation is centripetal – one might even say utopian – in its orientation, challenging the audiences to reassemble the pieces into a coherent whole" (5). Similarly, city symphony films that widely applied disjunctive avant-garde techniques advocated a universal cosmopolitanism (Ellis and McLane), and, in the context of the New Deal documentaries such as *The City*, the films' division into heterogeneous semi-autonomous sections was presented as a trope of realism serving to emphasize a single socio-economic ideology (Arthur 113). In this regard, Longley's film represents a dramatic shift from early documentary's as well as ethnographic films' claims of totality, unity, or universality towards a new discourse.

Iraq in Fragments renders visible and audible a sensuous epistemology, without making totalizing truth claims about the nation's future. Although the title of the film might suggest that Longley aims to provide the viewer with non-conclusive impressions or vignettes from the war-torn country, the documentary does not only fragment its subject but also clearly reassembles it by foregrounding previously unacknowledged

relations and connections between the different ethnic groups and sited realities (the urban, sectarian, and rural) as well as between sights and sounds of the nation, without indicating a possible closure[6]. The documentary is celebrated by critics for its portrayal of Iraq under occupation entirely through the subjective points of view of local characters, distinguishing it from the plethora of documentaries that have covered the war in Iraq from Western perspectives. It has also received several awards for its stunning and intimate cinematography captured by two small digital Panasonic cameras and the two-person crew of Longley and a translator. However, the film's success cannot solely be attributed to its digital aesthetics or creative treatment of subjects (focusing on and narrativizing the struggles of a few characters, recalling the use of non-actors to portray the hardships of everyday life in neo-realist cinema). Throughout the film, the images and the soundtrack carry equal weight in evoking the inner and physical turmoil of the Iraqi people, which encourages an affective, bodily engagement with the audio-visual perception of the scenes. Edited entirely by Longley, the soundtrack provides a detailed acoustic map of the different geopolitical, religious, and ethno-cultural realities in Iraq and resists the holistic, homogenizing interpretations of ethnographic imagery. It presents a nonlinear, fragmented, and discontinuous collectivity through the interactions among different acoustic elements such as the voiceover, dialogue (including the

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[6] Péter Forgács's video series *Private Hungary* and Jolanta Dylewska's recent documentary film *Po-lin: Slivers of Memory* reassemble Hungary and Poland in a similar fashion. The *Private Hungary* collection so far features 15 video compilations made within the course of slightly over two decades, providing inconclusive vignettes from the early 20th century Hungary through salvaged home movies while Dylewska's film compiles amateur film "scraps" (as the film's alternative title *Po-lin: Scraps of Memory* suggest) made by Jews who had emigrated earlier to the US and came to Poland to visit relatives, documenting daily life in pre-Holocaust Polish towns, most of which do not exist any longer. By especially making visible the absence of the Jewish community and their belongings in contemporary Hungary and Poland, Forgács and Dylewska reassemble the two nations, hinting at the possibility of a different composition.

affective use of phonetic and non-phonetic diegetic voices), noise, ambient sounds, and music. This type of mapping is closer to Giuliana Bruno and Jonathan Flatley's formulations of affective mapping than Fredric Jameson's "cognitive mapping," presenting a "tender cartography" (209), which resists the unifying and totalizing dimensions of the map by (partially) exploring a world of emotions, impulses, and movements. Notably, it can be argued that cognitive mapping follows the logic of representation (providing a unified, holistic image) while affective mapping highlights movements and flows as well as discontinuity between distinct points, which provides a better framework in dealing with assemblistic modes of organization.

Relevantly, the film's organizational logic is assemblistic rather than sequential or causal. The documentary is divided into three audio-visually distinct fragments narrated through the voiceovers of (first) an eleven-year-old Sunni boy living in the center of old Baghdad, (second) the followers of Moqtada el Sadr in Najaf and Naseriyah, and (third) a pair of boys and their fathers in the Kurdish region. The connection between the three sites is established by a transitional musical bridge (laid under images of trains) instead of a narrative logic, which once again points to the privileging of an embodied affective map over a cognitive or rational one in the film. The relations of temporality are not based on causality; although each fragment can be argued to progress in a linear (chronological) fashion within itself, each of them has its own mode of temporality determined by its sited reality. The Baghdad fragment is the most linear among the three, its world marked by urbanism and modernity, its noise and machinic soundscape pointing to the governing of industrial time. In the fragment, Longley follows a single character,

as he idly navigates different parts of his neighborhood accompanied by a heightened, asynchronous soundtrack (the rich sound collages over disjunctive images); this casual mode of peregrination in the city brings the fragment close to not only city symphony documentaries, which often underscore the progression of linear, industrial time in their narrative structures, but also the urban temporality of Italian Neo-realist films. Here, the similarity between the first chapter of *Iraq in Fragments* and classical films like *Rome, Open City* and *Bicycle Thieves* does not necessarily lie in these films' narrativizing the everyday struggles of working class characters as most critics have pointed out (although James Longley admits in interviews that he likes to work with working class subjects himself); but rather in the films' particular mode of marking space via their urban soundtracks. In his recent reading of *Bicycle Thieves* (in which the main characters traverse the city in the course of three days), Robert Gordon indicates that location sound recording was not a priority in Italian cinema; and therefore, the urban soundtracks of films like *Bicycle Thieves* were meticulously constructed / assembled, in order to acoustically map the transitions between the different neighborhoods and parts of the day in the city. In this sense, the heightened and assemblage-style soundtracks blurs the distinction between documentary and fiction, especially in films like *Iraq in Fragments* and *Bicycle Thieves*, and suggest an acoustic temporality.

Conversely, the fragment about the Kurds follows a cyclical temporal structure based on the seasonal changes in the rural north, which is highlighted by the chapter title "The Kurdish Spring," and the sectarian world demarcated in the fragment about the Shiites (specifically, the followers of Moqtada El Sadr) lies inbetween these two worlds

of temporality, not only in terms of its placement as the middle chapter of the three fragments, but also in terms of the affective ambiguity of sectarian or ritual time. The space of ritual is enwrapped in both linear and cyclical time; it is marked not only with linear progression and but also with repetition and return. Furthermore, the sectarian world suggests a third possibility: spiritual or inner time, which highlights duration, embodiment, and affect rather than the structured (linear or non-linear) succession of events. The interrelations between these distinct, yet at times overlapping temporalities make it difficult to discern where the film or each fragment begins and ends. Instead they establish Iraq as a map with multiple points of entry (a loose and provocative network), similar to the rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari, which stand for non-hierarchical, horizontal multiplicities that lack privileged entry and exit points.

The compositional structure of the soundtrack similarly goes against a unifying logic. There isn't a singular editorial pattern or source behind the voiceovers; they seem to be taken from disjunctive interviews and conversations with the subjects as well as from recorded public speeches. The voice-overs are seldom connected with their source imagery. Even when coupled with the establishing shot of the speaking subject, they have a transcendent quality due to the fact that the voice and the body are not rendered synchronic. The film opens with the melancholic voiceover of Mohammed the eleven-year-old Sunni boy, talking about the past beauty of Baghdad prior to the occupation. "It was beautiful" he recounts; there were bridges, the river and fish. A dreamlike montage of Baghdad traffic, a bridge, city streets, and a shot of daily life from behind a fish tank, mirroring Mohammed's thoughts, accompanies his shy voice. In the interview featured

on the DVD, James Longley indicates that the opening images are taken from the pre-war footage he shot in Iraq in October 2002. Using his personal stock footage as a background for Mohammad's authentic memory of pre-war Iraq is one of the ways, in which Longley stretches the boundaries of nonfiction in the film. The amping up of the imagery through intensified colors (greens and reds), slow motion and motion blur effects transform the short montage into a dreamlike flashback sequence anchored by the voiceover, giving it a subjective and acoustic temporality. Here, the voiceover in Arabic functions as a sound event, establishing verisimilitude (as the voice is the only element that belongs to the reality of the filmic moment) and providing affective linkages between the images, narrative, and language.

Longley ends the flashback with a fade out and a following stationary shot of post-war Iraq, bringing the audience back to Mohammad's wartime reality. As Mohammad describes how everything has become so scary after the war, the dreamlike quality of the flashback sequence leaves its place to a darker tone; Longley shows an eyeline-match shot of helicopters in the sky, a low-angle graphic match of the overhead ceiling fan in Mohammad's house, and an extreme close-up of his eye. All three shots are connected with the amplified sound of the chopper blades, making a clear intertextual reference to the opening sequence of Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*. Here, intertextuality makes another significant statement about the interaction between documentary and fiction film. Life in the film imitates art, not only to establish an immediate identification with Mohammad as a weary lost soul in the midst of ultimate chaos, much like the battle fatigued character of *Apocalypse Now* Army Captain

Benjamin Willard (Martin Sheen), but also to suggest that what the film presents is the haunting vision of a war-torn country no less apocalyptic than Vietnam. It is also worth noting that the aestheticization of the vulnerable eye has a long history in cinema, exemplified in films like *Battleship Potemkin*, *Un Chien Andalou*, and *Psycho* (and perhaps more frequently today). In the documentary, Mohammad's heavenward gaze while tightly framed in enclosed spaces, from which one can hardly peer out, creates a hell or underground metaphor in clear contrast with the dreamlike or heavenly depiction of his pre-war memory. The fact that Mohammad's voice is disconnected from its source imagery, much like Benjamin Willard's voice, contributes to the hallucinatory affect/effect of the sequence, while the opening shots of Arabic graffiti on the walls and the superimposition of disjunctively edited images of Baghdad streets on Mohammad's face also enhance the intertextual references to the opening sequence of Francis Ford Coppola's film featuring wall graffiti and close-up shots of Martin Sheen's face superimposed with apocalyptic images of the Vietnamese inferno. These techniques together with disjunctive editing (fast cutting, superimpositions, and speed ramping) and the asynchronous heightened soundtrack let the fragment shift into an expressionistic tone at times, subverting its classical linear / urban narrative style.

The three fragments in the film have distinct acoustic ecologies, composed of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, voices, and music. The Sheik Omar neighborhood of old Baghdad, which is the center of light industry and home to the auto repair shop that Mohammed works at, is marked with urban noise and machinic sounds, along with the cadences between Mohammed's at times hardly audible, apprehensive voice and the

harsh, cynical commentaries of the adults surrounding him regarding life under occupation. Urban noise and sounds magnify Mohammed's solitude as just another inarticulate, illiterate, and futureless orphan of the economic sanctions period struggling to survive in the chaotic Sunni Capital. Therefore, the acoustic ecology of the urban fragment of Iraq is charged with social tensions. In his article about the relationship between urban sounds and memory, Fran Tonkiss suggests: "The Babel of the crowd and the wordless solitude of the individual in a noisy city capture in sound a larger urban tension between collective and subjective life" (303). Similarly, Mohammed's anxious voice, matched with the extreme close up shots of him (often framing his eyes) staring up towards the chaos of the city, the authoritarian figure of adults, or the distant sky, indicate that there is an untranslatable *interval* (a la Minh-ha) between the audibility of his speech and his actual voice, which is doubly silenced by the existing power relations within the city and the disempowerment of the Sunni's under occupation.

Unlike the dominant urban sounds of the fragment about Baghdad, the second fragment, which takes place in the Shiite stronghold of Sadr City (in Najaf and Naseriyah), is marked with sectarian sounds. This hauntingly intimate and equally intense chapter of the film is dominated by a musical, rhythmic, and rhetorical mix of religious chanting, preaching, and political rallying by the followers of Moqtada al Sadr juxtaposed with sounds of congregation, calls for prayer, and ritualistic practices. The fragment opens with the image of the Kufa Mosque and the sounds of the Shiite congregation chanting, "We are the generation of Sadr" and beating their chests (a traditional Shiite mourning rite), which punctuates the beginning of a new chapter and

constitutes a symbolic boundary between Mohammed's fearful Baghdad and Sadr's dynamic South. The chants are accompanied by the voiceover of a young Sadr cleric, who talks about the political background of the conflict that arose between the Shiites and the Sunnis under Saddam's regime (when Saddam Hussein banned the Shiite rite of self-flagellation). The chanting style immediately sets Sadr City as a distinct location, a new acoustic landscape.

In his article about sectarian sounds in Northern Ireland, Paul Moore argues that sounds are heard and perceived as events, which help construct geographies of cultural memory. Sound events, especially in communities united against a perceived threat (which, in the film's case is the forces of occupation as well as the Sunni oppression), construct symbolic boundaries between the community and what lies beyond it. Moore states:

> Particular sounds are designated as sound marks (Thorn 1998) to construct complex social and physical boundaries. […] ATQ Stewart (1986) writes about the ways in which an accepted sectarian topography dominates the geographical landscape, suggesting that no one teaches where one boundary ends and another starts, the population simply comes to know because the sounds of one community end at the point where the sounds of the other community start (267).

Sectarian sounds of Sadr City function in a similar way in that the Shiite acoustic landscape is equally distinctive for Sunni and Kurdish Muslims as it is for Western viewers. In particular, sounds of chest beating or the metallic clanging of self-flagellation recorded during the Imam Ali day in the fall of 2003 immediately interpolate a distinct religious identity (Shiite as opposed to Sunni), constituting an "us" and a "them" for both the performer and the hearer. However, the affective climax of the middle chapter comes when Longley follows a group of Sadr's Militia raiding a

marketplace to catch and punish merchants selling liquor later in spring during the holy month of Ashura. Longley opens the sequence with a little boy chanting an entrancing religious tune to an impassioned crowd in the mosque; he then moves on to the disjunctive editing of masked men (with jump cuts and repeated imagery) raiding the marketplace and beating liquor merchants. He lets the tune run under the visuals, fading in and out, and mixing it with the noise of gunshots, clamour, and eerie sound effects. Together, they create a new sound event that heightens the affective thrust of the scene and indicates to the viewer the spiritual context behind the shocking brutality of Shiite Islamic law enforcement.

The sequence also provides a good example to the creative potential of sound compositing in digital documentaries. Trinh T. Minh-Ha suggests that "Compositing in multiple layers is one of the features in digital editing, whose inventive potential is most appealing, not merely in the crafting of images, but even more so in the designing of sound" ("The Digital" 4). The digital revolution offers more dramatic changes in the composition of sound than of images, creating new depths of auditory fields. Sound editing software enables individual filmmakers to easily record and composite layers of sound singlehandedly (similarly, Longley claims that he experimented with his sound editing software everyday by capturing the images and sounds on his laptop). Much like the way films are composed of separate, independent fragments, single shots are now composed of several layers (visual and auditory), each forming an assemblage. Moore argues that sectarian events necessitate complex modes of representation since the shared sanctity of these events makes them difficult to represent. In a similar way, although

Longley lays the boy's tune under the violent event in the film to encourage an affective encounter between the Western viewers and the Iraqi subjects, he avoids providing an explanatory commentary for the unsettling brutality (as there is no outside narration in the film), which leaves the scene open to meditation and suspends final judgment. In the scene, fragmentation (through disjunctive editing and looping imagery), evocation, and meditation displaces representation in order to circumvent what Michael Renov refers to as the impasse of ethnographic authority: the filmmaker representing another culture through her own cultural lenses ("Domestic Ethnography").

Unlike the urban and sectarian soundscapes of the first two fragments, the acoustic ecology of the third fragment of the film is composed of pastoral sounds, serenity, and silence of the rural Kurds living up north, south of Arbil. Once again, the assemblage of these sounds and the Kurdish language set the fragment apart from the other two depicting the urban Baghdad and the sectarian Sadr City. The overarching calmness and silence of the Kurds are striking in that, although their lives seem to be less affected by the political turmoil and power struggles in the country than the natural rhythms of the changing seasons, their opinions about Iraq's future is as politically charged as those of the followers of Sadr. Their quiet, just like Mohammed's fearful voice, is symbolic of the shifting power relations in the country; except that, the Kurdish silence signifies hope and confidence in the outcome of the occupation while Mohammed's points to a future of disempowerment. This contrast also shows the heterogeneity of the Iraqi soundscape and how each sound element acquires a different meaning when it enters into nonlinear relationships with others.

The documentary's musical composition is also assemblistic, composed of three types of music from distinct sources: the diegetic music recorded on location and used in the background of the scenes, religious and folk songs performed by the people filmed and mixed by Longley (often amplified with percussion, sound effects and drumbeats), and nondiegetic music / sound compositions constructed by the director out of heavily processed ambient sounds. The music not only helps construct the authenticity of the locations but also bridges their distinct realities, indicating that the film's episodic structure does not simply point to a postmodern fragmentation. Instead of underscoring division and dispersion, the heavily composited sound and music in the film underscore associations and transitions among the fragments. As I mentioned earlier, there is a train sequence in-between each fragment, in which Longley lays an orchestral sounding transitional score (composed of ambient sounds and digital instrumentation) over images of trains as a sound (and image) bridge between each location, allegedly inspired by the minimalist compositions in Steve Reich's Grammy-winner album *Different Trains*. The album, which Longley claims that he was listening to during the filming of the documentary, is a conceptual piece about the Holocaust, juxtaposing Reich's childhood memories about train journeys between New York and California with the experiences of contemporaneous European children transported by trains to Nazi death camps between 1939 and 1941 in three musical movements. Composed in an assemblistic manner, the piece brings together original score and fragments of taped conversations from Holocaust survivors, train conductors, and Reich's governess, creating a hallucinatory music / soundscape punctuated with speech patterns and machinic rhythms. Similarly, Longley

experiments with a rhythmic processing of speech and sound patterns throughout the documentary, compositing, for example, a filtered version of the voice of Suleiman, the Kurdish boy from the third fragment, in a scene from the first fragment, in which Mohammed gets beaten by his boss, so as to give it a disturbing quality. In this case, acoustic evocation and assemblage supplants aural representation and fidelity, indicating that Longley's approach to sound compositing as well as fragmentation is affective rather than representational. Furthermore, his use of minimalist and repetitive digital instrumentation in the train sequence suggests that Reich's influence in the soundtrack might be more than inspirational (at a merely musical level), pointing, instead, towards another attempt at compositional intertextuality (in addition to Longley's earlier reference to Coppola's film).

As a concluding commentary in the film, we hear the voice of the little Kurdish boy in the final chapter, timidly contemplating: "Iraq is not something that you can cut into pieces. Iraq is a country. How can you cut a country in pieces? With a Saw?" This question, as I mentioned at the beginning of the article, finally allows the viewer to evaluate the political dimensions of fragmentation and assemblage in the film, and bring the discussion full circle. At a surface level, Kurdish boy's anxiety over Iraq's unity reflects the anxieties prevalent among the Iraqi public at the time, generated by the political proposals to divide Iraq into three distinct entities. It might be relevant to note that such proposals reached a culmination point around September 28, 2007 as the U.S. Senate approved a non-binding resolution sponsored by the then-Senate Foreign Relations Chairman, now-Vice President Joe Biden Jr. and the Council of Foreign

Relations president emeritus Leslie Gelb, calling for partitioning the country into three semi-autonomous regions along ethnic and sectarian lines. The resolution was met with a high degree of resentment by most Iraqi leaders (with the exception of Massoud Barzani, the President of the Kurdish Regional Government) since local political groups interpreted the proposal based on the Western models of decentralization and federalism as a threat to the unity and sovereignty of the nation. Within the context of the documentary, the opposition between the two major political proposals regarding how to restructure Iraq in the aftermath of the Operation Iraqi Freedom - whether to strive for unity or division – is significant, since it relates to the question of whether the assembled nature of film implies unity or rupture. Here, the schism in both the political and filmic frameworks seem to stem from a similar understanding of the relationship between parts and wholes, or assemblages and unities: wholes made up of heterogeneous, self-subsisting parts are viewed as mere aggregates, associated with dispersion, disintegration, and the impossibility of cohesion[7]. This line of thinking sets fragmentation and reassemblage as a problem for theory, rather than a mode of organization for analysis, since assemblistic readings run the risk of posing fragmentation as the "final position" of films, therefore overshadowing the type of connections that they set out to highlight in the first place.

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[7] Theories of modernism and postmodernism also have struggled over whether fragmentation implies continuity / unity or rupture in the context of cinema. According to Richard Dyer, theories that associate fragmentation with modernism view film as an art of fragments analogous to the common experience of fragmentation in modernity; therefore, they interpret continuity editing in narrative cinema "as an attempt to cover over the cracks between film fragments similarly to the way that mass culture seeks to weld a unity out of the fragmentation of modern societies" (5). Such a unitarian view is what postmodern film theory sets itself up against. Postmodern film theory, while acknowledging fragmentation, denies the possibility of wholeness, changing the hierarchy between parts and wholes, yet creating a new hierarchy itself.

Conversely, the question "How can you cut a country in pieces? With a Saw?" also functions as a reflexive statement for Longley, since the fragmented structure of the film, as well as the documentary's title, suggest precisely such a violent incision. However, the documentary does not provide a definitive answer. It is for this reason that critics have even condemned Longley for failing to make a clear critical statement about the way the fragments of the film divide Iraq in congruence with the political proposals embracing partition. Such a criticism can only be justified from a representational critical perspective, or in other words, if we accept the film as a mere representation of the socio-political reality that it mediates, ignoring its own assembled materiality and transformative potential, which is often based on its technological nature rather than its social or ideological attachments. Furthermore, from an assemblistic point of view, the assumed unity of a pre-partitioned Iraq only derives from a misconception, or more specifically, from the essentialist argument that a nation is a seamless, organic whole, whose parts, once isolated, can only lead to disintegration. One cannot speak of fragmentation in the actual sense from within a Latourian / Deleuzian framework, since there is only the resemblance (or perhaps, one could suggest an "assemblance") of a unity in wholes made up of heterogeneous parts: a nation is only an assemblage of its distinct (yet interacting) fragments. Ultimately, the documentary fragments and reassembles Iraq, reversing the hierarchy between its fragments and the nation as a whole, only so that, as Walter Benjamin once suggested, *in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we* [as viewers] *calmly go traveling.*

Iraq in Fragments gives us an opportunity to rethink the hierarchy of parts to the whole in documentary film theory, deemphasizing the centrality of "documentary film," which is often defined as a unified concept with a consistent discourse, in favor of the techniques and technologies utilized in its actualization as well as the parts assembled for it. Here, I am suggesting adopting an assemblistic reading not to introduce a new hierarchy between parts and wholes or deny the possibility of connections and cohesiveness in assemblages, as the fragmentary strategies of the documentary *Iraq in Fragments* itself indicate that they are part of a design that is interested in the very connections, relationships, coherences and contrasts "above" the level of the film's audio-visual fragments. Neither do I wish to dismiss the representational potential of documentary media in general; that is a potential that has been widely discussed by documentary film scholars and more profoundly contested than I could ever do within the scope of this chapter. Also, it might be relevant to note that using an "interrelational" (in Nigel Thrift's formulation) framework like assemblage theory does not seek to set representation as an illusory goal; a representational claim is open to contestation and verification based on directors' individual views or intentions. Rather, I am suggesting an assemblistic reading in order to restore the status of the parts, which is too often marginalized in the field despite the fact most documentaries are marked by fragmented or episodic narratives, a high degree of intermediality, and an admittedly eclectic mix of media instead of unity and continuity. Perhaps, thinking about the parts might also allow us to consider distinct filmic elements such as sound and music, which are often ignored in documentary film scholarship, and the diverse ways documentary media, with the

rapidly evolving and intermedial modes of reality-based audio and video production/sharing, respond to (rather than merely represent) our own dispersed reality in a post-9/11 world.

Documentary Films after 9/11

At the beginning of the chapter, I referred to a proliferation in the number of war documentaries trying to assemble the rapidly disintegrating pieces of the social and political world in the post-9/11 era. Although *Iraq In Fragment*'s formal strategy of fragmentation is quite unique among the films that came out in the aftermath of the attacks on the WTC, a striking number of documentaries offered unconventional approaches in dealing with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, challenging the patterns that had been established by the popular genre of "war documentaries" up until the last decade. It is important to note that even prior to 9/11, war had been a significant topic for documentary films, turning into a genre on its own with the newsreel coverage and propaganda films of World War II and the later Korean War. The images, sounds, and representations of war evolved in tandem with the changes in medial technologies, perhaps consequently transforming the nature of war itself. Vietnam was the first televised war, producing a large inventory of aerial war footage, shot by embedded journalists, whereas the Persian Gulf War is considered the first war on video, shot on light weight audio-visual equipment and broadcasted live. Conversely, due to the censorship imposed by the infamous pool system[8], film crews were not permitted to go

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[8] The "pool system" was adopted by the Pentagon in 1984. The system was based on the military's selection of a small number of journalists from mainstream media providers. The elite media had to accept military control of the press in return for access to war zones.

out on the front (as a result of Pentagon's desire to control the image) and therefore, as Walter Kronkite and Christiane Amanpour (the two most recognized war reporters from the period) explain in the PBS documentary *Reporting America at War,* no independent documentaries were made at the ground level during the Gulf War. The networks had resorted to computer graphics whenever footage was not available, and they presented war as a bloodless, casualty-free surgical operation (commonly referred to as the CNN effect). It was only after the mobile and satellite communication systems, which were first introduced during the Bosnian war[9], eliminated the filmmakers' dependence on the military for communication on the battleground (wired phones) that independent and out-of-the-box war documentaries proliferated. In short, despite the excess of war imagery produced throughout the history of film, war documentaries that cover ground battle in formally experimental ways without being dependant on aerial, embedded, and stock footage are a fairly new phenomenon that emerged in the past decade. Meanwhile, as new technologies transform the images of war, the war on images between independent documentaries and media networks seems to have intensified.

As early as three years after the war in Iraq began (and partly with the intensification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict), war zones became the epicenter of the transformations in contemporary documentary filmmaking. In 2006, CBS news pointed out that it was a big year for Iraq war documentaries at New York City's Tribeca Film Festival, since two out of the three Iraqi war documentaries that premiered in the festival, *The War Tapes* and *When I Came Home,* took home best documentary awards in their

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[9] Later, the fighting in Afghanistan was covered real time through satellite-enhanced news gathering too.

respective divisions. Similarly, four out of the fifteen documentary films that advanced in the voting process for 2007's Academy Awards were about the war in Iraq, including *The Ground Truth*, *Iraq in Fragments*, *My Country, My Country*, and *The War Tapes*. In his review of "documentaries after 9/11", Ib Bondebjerg indicates that in the several years following the "war on terror," several films like these and television programs were produced, taking alternative approaches by going beyond the scope of mainstream news reportage on war and into the everyday lives of people (civilian and non-civilian) affected by the wars. While they point to a documentary *glocalization* of the global media sphere (as they are often made by Western filmmakers in collaboration with locals from war zones), they also represent a difference by "independently reporting" on and providing vignettes from previously much neglected human stories (219-220).

Bondebjerg's observation about the status of post-9/11 war documentaries as products of the global media sphere is interesting in that it brings to mind John Hess and Patricia Zimmermann's speculations about an emerging "new world image order" in their influential manifesto on transnational documentaries, more than a decade earlier. Patricia Zimmerman has turned this statement into a call later on, claiming that in the face of the transnationalized economic sphere of commercial media and global politics, the world urgently needs a new image order. Since public spaces are suffocated by media transnationals larger than most nation-states, it is up to the independent documentary to prevent public spaces from becoming "zones of fantasy" for corporations and to transform them into "zones of contestation, insurgency, and community" (14). In this context, post-9/11 war documentaries seem to both confirm the rapid development of a

global media sphere and respond to Zimmermann's call for a new image order challenging its conventions and limitations.

The transnational dimension of post-9/11documentaries is also important, as it establishes the films as assemblages of different geographies, actors, institutions, filmic styles and technologies, even if the films do not conspicuously adopt assemblistic (episodic, fragmented, or segmented) formal structures themselves. Most of the independent and television documentaries made about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan fit into the transnational film category as they are shot in multiple countries in different languages, usually around borderlines and zones of transit/transition, by multicultural crews (not to mention, with the support and involvement of multiple international media institutions). The films also represent a rich variety of cinematic styles, aesthetic devices, and point of views. To give a few examples, Alex Gibney's award winning *Taxi to the Dark Side* uses film noir style lighting and crime film editing techniques in critiquing America's policy of torture and interrogation in Abu Ghraib, Bagram, and Guantanamo; Spanish director Esteban Uyarra's television documentary *War Feels like War*, shown on BBC and PBS, conveys the story of the war from the point of view of embedded and independent (international) journalist-filmmakers; *BattleGround: 21 Days on the Empire's Edge* is produced by the Sundance-awarded Guerilla News Network and reveals the influence of music video aesthetics in its editing*; Occupation: Dreamland* and *The War Tapes* are filmed in the video-diary format; and lastly, *Control Room* reflects the Egyptian news channel Al-Jazeera's point of view on the Iraqi war by an Egyptian-American director. It is also significant to note that a great number of war documentaries

(including film about life under siege in the war-torn countries) are made by women directors, including the aforementioned *Control Room*, The *War Tapes*, the *Ground Truth, My Country, My Country,* as well as (the co-directed) *Gunner Palace*, *The Beauty Academy of Kabul*, *Iraq – The Women's Story*, *Enemies of Happiness*, *Iraq: the Lost Generation* (also co-directed), and *the Oath*.

Post-9/11 war documentaries can be analyzed further taking into consideration the assemblages involved in their production, meshing together of aesthetic styles & devices, and identity politics. In terms of the production contexts, the major conflict encountered by filmmakers and depicted in the films is between corporate media transnationals on one side and independent filmmakers, who rely on international funds / co-productions and independent producers, on the other. To be more clear, the term transnational refers to two opposing forces today: on one hand, the transnational networks of media reflecting the market dynamics of globalization, and on the other, the hybrid narratives of independent filmmakers representing counter-hegemonic responses (Hess & Zimmerman).[10] These two kinds of transnationalisms have their particular discourses and documentality. The transnational networks of media bound by the market forces foreground the importance of real-time reportage and transmission (in a corporate race to bring the news to masses as they happen anywhere in the world), pushing the content to the background. Philipp Seib states that "newspapers have joined television and radio news organizations as players in the real-time game," (12) which means that the CNN

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[10] In their manifesto, Hess and Zimmermann articulate the two forms of transnationalism dictinctly: the rapid corporate transnationalization of media within the last ten years and the emerging adversarial transnationalism in independent filmmaking.

approach is shared not only by conventional media sources today but also by formerly print-based sources like newspapers, which adopt documentaristic approaches by streaming video-stories on their websites. Conversely, independent documentaries search for "the ground truth" (as the title of one of the recent documentaries suggest), highlighting localized and embodied knowledge. As Zimmerman argues:

> ..official documentaries nearly always deny the ground and bodies (or fictionalize them) because they are too anchored in the aerial, disembodied fantasy of nationalism. Therefore, an insurgent documentary practice must retake the ground, reposition bodies, deploy multiple technological formats, and engage in reconnaissance in order to devise new offensive positions (87).

In other words, different production contexts lead to different truths, although the independent documentaries sometimes incorporate or are inscribed by the discourses of both sides. For example, the tagline for the multiple award-winner documentary *Control Room* suggests: *"Different channels, different truths"* as the film deals with the Qatar based news channel Al-Jazeera's coverage of the Operation Iraqi Freedom and aims to show that there is a bigger battle going on over information among world's news networks in the context of globally mediated wars. A Harvard graduate, the Egyptian-American director Jehane Noujaim has reportedly started her career as a segment producer in MTV's Documentary and News Division, and that is partly evident in her directorial style. The montage sequences in the documentary recalls the fragmented, cut-up aesthetics of music videos, while the rest of the film is edited in an more traditional way. It can be said that the film is a strange meeting ground for Al-Jazeera, Fox News (as its antagonist), and MTV through Noujaim's own multicultural background, and although the control room (the editing room of a television station) is presented as the

one place that produces the parallelisms and dichotomies between two different cultural contexts, the hidden link behind the assemblage of seemingly disparate worlds depicted in the documentary is Noujaim, transgressing the boundaries and synthesizing the realities of three media institutions in one film. To put it differently, instead of merely projecting the perspective of Al-Jazeera, *Control Room* creates a zone of confrontation for different channels and different truths, transgressing the boundaries of each.

The documentary *War Feels Like War* made by the Spanish filmmaker Esteban Uyarra deals with another problem inherent in the two versions of transnationalism: following five war photographers and filmmakers from Denmark, Norway, Poland, and the United States in Iraq, Uyarra portrays the difficulties that "unilateral" reporters face, when they refuse to be "embedded," or in other words, when they refuse to report to the Pentagon from hotel lobbies and work with major Western news organizations. What the film tries to convey is, first and foremost, the psycho-geography of the war zone. As the synopsis of the film indicates, the reporters' "conflicting feelings of attraction and repulsion to combat" in the film mirror the ambivalence of their audiences' over modern-day "war as spectacle".

In terms of the aesthetic styles and devices employed, post-9/11 war documentaries manifest diversity and hybridity, constantly seeking alliance with new technologies and adopting experimental or genre defying approaches. *The Control Room* and *Battleground: 21 Days on the Empire's Edge* both use cut-up /music video aesthetics, making use of long, poetic montage sequences accompanied by emotive music score. With its title and references hinting at the imperialist dimensions of the war,

BattleGround: 21 Days on the Empire's Edge resembles a revisionist city symphony film as it follows Iraqis on-the-ground in their daily struggle for survival in an almost poetic fashion. The rock music score by Soulsavers and the intermittent montage sequences, showing rush hour traffic, smiles of locals in their daily routine or soldiers patrolling in their tanks, etc., reinforce this connection and make it easier for the viewer to get an affectively charged sense of place.

Although not a film about Iraq or Afghanistan, the Swiss filmmaker Christian Frei's documentary *The War Photographer*, which follows American photojournalist James Nachtwey into the world's ongoing combat zones including Rammallah on West Bank, alternatively experiments with micro-camera vision. More specifically, the micro-camera in the documentary shows in motion the context of what the still camera captures in frozen frames. Nachtwey suggests in his interview in the film that the main question in war photography is the distance or proximity to the decisive moment in combat: how close the photographer is to the actual event or the people on the ground. Consequently, the filmic space becomes a battleground for the most intimate depiction of the war zone, as the still camera of Nachtwey and the film camera of Frei capture and replay the images of identical moments, creating an assemblage of haunting loops.

On the other hand, *Occupation: Dreamland* uses imagery from night vision cameras, POV shots of soldiers (from the infantry squad of the 82nd Airborne in Us Army) and interviews made in the video-diary format, shot by the soldiers themselves. In the absence of a cameraman, self-filmed interviews of the soldiers appear like monologues and bring the documentary closer to reality TV in terms of narrative style.

Here, the filmmaker is not invisible for the sake of a *cinéma-vérité* style objective depiction of reality. Instead, it restores the sense of intimacy and localized knowledge lacking in corporate network media's coverage of war, using the same technological equipment and war game aesthetics that dominate mainstream media. *The War Tapes* takes the personal video-diary format even further, as the film is shot almost entirely by members of the New Hampshire National Guard. As they turn on the camera, the soldiers take on two different identities simultaneously, military guards and civil photo-journalists, encountering a foreign territory from two different perspectives. They have to capture and reflect on the war zone with the film camera by detaching themselves from outside reality, while actively taking part in it (and transforming it to a certain extent) as soldier videographers. In this sense, the film blurs the distinctions between military/embedded reportage and civil photo-journalism. The outcome is at times traumatic for the soldiers and equally provoking for the viewer.

Last but not the least, the post 9/11 war documentaries point to changing identity politics as they reveal a complex assemblage of transnational subjectivities. In her review of nine recent films on Operation Iraqi Freedom, Susan L. Carruthers claims that the films fall into two discrete categories: those that align their sights with the US military and a smaller subset (*Iraq in Fragments, The Blood of My Brother, and My Country, My Country*) that strives to convey the texture of everyday life under occupation for ordinary, and extraordinary, Iraqis:

> Iraqis and Americans appear to inhabit radically incommensurable worlds, resisting compression into the same narrative. In *Gunner Palace*, *Occupation Dreamland*, *War Tapes*, and *the Ground Truth*, occupation is an American drama (variously construed as tragedy or farce) in which the subaltern hardly speaks. Conversely in James

> Longley's *Iraq in Fragments* US military personnel flit into focus in just two shots. In other films, Americans appear in minor roles than the chief point of identification. (30)

This bipolar reading of the identity politics is limiting in terms of describing the wide range of subjectivities represented in these films. The problem here lies in looking for the clash of identities in the Iraqi war between the occupier and the occupied, and their respective national commitments. Mary Kaldor suggests that the new identity clashes in the global era are not linked to traditional nationalisms, since the future of the modern state is in territorially based sovereignty (as seen in war zones). Instead, the real conflict occurs between members of the global class, which Kaldor refers to as the globalists - those who can speak English, who have access to internet and satellite communication and those who can travel freely, and those who are excluded from global processes while their movement is restricted by roadblocks, visas, and the cost of travel. In this sense, the globalists in war zones include an assemblage of people not identified with a specific nationality: international reporters, journalists, war correspondents, military advisers, diaspora volunteers, peacekeepers, humanitarian agencies, NGO representatives, people who can speak English (employed as assistants, interpreters and drivers), as well as a veritable "army" of international agencies. On the other hand, the non-globalists are the territorially tied inhabitants of the specific zone, perhaps also including a transnational group of actors such as guerillas, insurgents, and terrorists. According to this logic, the transnational actors and subjectivities are present in both subset of films that convey the perspective of the US military and Iraqis. In *Gunner Palace*, for example, war zone translators are significant characters, represented as figures of fun with the names

"Elvis", "Supercop", or Mike Tyson. They are native informants to the US military, at times suspected to be double-crossing as informants to the insurgents. Even a film like *Iraq in Fragments,* which is exclusively based on local perspectives, tells the story of modern day Iraq from the subjective stands of three different ethnic and religious identities. The assemblistic logic of glocalism and multiculturalism becomes evident and decisive here.

More commonly, however, the stock figures of the globalist class in war documentaries are those who mediatize the war, including the reporters and filmmakers themselves. In *War Photographer*, Frei interviews a group of globalists in the film such as the Chief International Correspondent CNN, the Foreign Editor of Stern Magazine, Editor in Chief Geo Saison Magazine, and a Reuters Cameraman to account for the photographer James Nachtwey's work. The selection is significant in that the transnational media representatives are an integral part of the political economy and culture of war zones today. They have become the stock figures of authority and sources of credibility, granting war documentaries a certain truth-value.

In retrospect, *Iraq in Fragments* has a privileged status among war films in exemplifying the assemblistic nature of documentaries in the age of global network media, as it formally adopts a fragmented and non-linear narrative structure. However, the current media environment with its rapidly evolving and intermedial modes of reality-based audio and video production / sharing as well as diverse range of emerging technologies and actors also calls for a theoretical framework that can address how documentaries respond to our networked (suggesting, simultaneously dispersed and

connected) reality in a post-9/11 world, taking into account the complexity of their distinct materialities. The post-9/11 war documentaries surveyed in the last section of this chapter indicate that assemblage theory, with its attentiveness to the materialities that make up the fabric of social, technological, aesthetic, and biological relations, provides such an interpretive framework and offers new perspectives for tracing the transformations in the field of non-fiction media.

CHAPTER 2 "PARABLES FOR DOCUMENTARY: LESSONS, LEMMATA, AND THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION"

This chapter will move from the idea of film "fragments" to another evocative compositional concept, "lessons," and take on episodic documentaries, the assemblistic structure, audiovisual aesthetics, and epistemological discourse of which are defined by different incarnations of the term (as well as meanings attributed to it) in the fields of both documentary media history and philosophy. The revival of interest in the post WWII tradition of French "object lesson" films, which had been, to a great extent, left to oblivion until the recent DVD releases of early short "science films" collections pertaining to unconventional filmmakers like Jean Painlevé, has put the category of object lessons under the radar of scholars; however, there hasn't been any study on the possible connections between this early cinema tradition and recent episodic films and media, such as German director Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness*, which use the idea of "lessons" as an organizing principle. To remedy this gap, I will provide an assemblistic reading of Herzog's eco-disaster documentary, taking its titular concept as an entry point in the chapter, and put it in productive dialogue with the early object lesson films as well as the episodic documentality of a found-footage compilation video, Hungarian filmmaker Peter Forgács's *Wittgenstein Tractatus*, which shares a similar compositional logic. In so doing, I will establish a link between non-holistic documentary works that go against the tradition that approaches documentary sounds and images as objective representations of reality based on a positivist epistemology.

Object Lessons and Their Counter-Archive

The notion of object lessons, or leçons de choses, emerged in the period of state-governed modernization of the educational system and scientific popularization in the Third Republic, following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. Pierre Laszlo traces the origins of the term to the educationalist Marie-Pape Carpantier and the French Government's decision to introduce scientific training in primary schools as a result of the findings of a high-level commission, which was sent to Prussia to investigate the causes of defeat after the war (277). According to Laszlo's account, the commission reported that the technological and scientific superiority of German education system vis-à-vis Catholic Church's parochial, classics based pedagogy in France was one of the major contributing factors. Starting from 1881, the government initiated a series of reforms that sought to create a positivist curriculum oriented towards a realist education, encouraging methods like education by appearance (l'éducation par l'aspect) and object lessons (leçons de choses), which included practices grounded in sensory-based description and hands-on observation of material objects. The idea underlying the reforms was the primacy of careful observation as the foundation of knowledge, very much in congruence with the broader popularization of positivist thinking and discourses (including those that were related to conceptions of time, memory, and history) around the world at the turn of the century.

In her study of Albert Kahn's Archives de la Planète, Paula Amad suggests that a "thirst for evidence of an incorruptible objectivity" (11) and a fascination for the observation of everyday life were already present in the late nineteenth century. Objectivity and the method of observation were perceived as common interests within the

representational framework and artistic scope of the movements of Realism and Naturalism, which were already in the process of becoming aesthetically mainstream if not obsolete. The more radical promises of Realism and Naturalism had been left far behind except within the occasional critical and aesthetic interventions of Gustave Courbet's realism, Edgar Degas' impressionism, and Charles Baudelaire's modernity. Conversely, rationalist study of objective reality was a topic of not only artistic but also critical concern. Amad explains:

> This intensified scrutiny of daily life, especially from "above" but also from "below," was associated with multiple mid- to late-nineteenth-century developments, from the aesthetic legitimacy of ordinary people with the realist and naturalist movements in art and literature, and the Marxist demystification of the mysterious obviousness of the commodity to the Freudian reclamation of trivial slips of the tongue as the language of the unconscious, the anthropological retrieval of once undervalued regional, rural, or "primitive cultures," and the scientific visualization of life's unseen complexity (10).

Cinema, then, was born into a positivist intellectual and artistic climate, and soon after its birth, the realist education in Third Republic France set film as a valuable tool for the classroom. Film provided a platform for the aesthetic expansion of the illustrated lecture concept, adding new tools and methods of sensuous description to its inventory. Such an environment consequently led to the public funding and proliferation of object lesson films, comprising mostly of short observational documentary works on biological and botanical subjects. Through this process, the trope of nature entered the documentary realm in a scientific context early on, together with scientific discourse in general, and established a tradition of scientific nature or wildlife films, contrary to the claims of historians like Brian Winston, who argued that scientific inscription was suppressed in documentary films and film movements (especially during the period of Griersonian

realism) up until Direct Cinema. In his analysis of the status of documentary film as scientific inscription, which is one of the most well known texts dealing with the topic, Winston states:

> Throughout the period of reconstructional practice, Realist artistic legitimations were given full reign. Now, with the new phase, scientific rationales came to the fore and traditional reconstructed Realist documentary was opposed to observational work – Direct Cinema. It is, therefore, inevitable that the scientific legitimation for the documentary enterprise came to be most strenuously expressed at the outset of the Direct Cinema phase (42).

Winston's dismissal of the role of the object lessons' scientific discourse on the viability of documentary film production in France in the 20s and 30s (as well as his coverage of documentary realism merely in relation to the artistic practices of the Griersonian school) is understandable, considering that the date of his study barely overlaps with the post-1980s renaissance in early film studies, which has carried the scientific object lesson films to daylight. The emergence of early documentary as a vibrant field of study is even more recent. With the availability of research on previously unearthed (and still hardly accessible) documentary archives, such as the Albert Kahn archive, and the release of a significant number of early science films on DVD, it is easier today to trace the connection between scientific discourses and the documentary tradition (not to mention, the counter-traditions).

Conversely, the object lesson films found their counter-current, or "counter archive" (to use Amad's term, referring to the tendencies and body of films that challenged positivist archive's utopian ideals of order, exhaustiveness, empirical realism, and objective neutrality) on the surrealist front almost as swiftly as they gained popularity in educational circles. Filmmakers like Jean Comandon and Jean Painlevé borrowed

object lesson films' fascination with the material world and scientific observation, and emancipated it from the sober rational discourses of realist education by making popular science films that were evocative of the surreal, dreamlike qualities of Nature. Films like Comandon's microcinematic flower-studies and Painlevé's *Sea Urchins* were hybrids, not anti-science but counter-science, in their marriage of object lessons' interest in Natural phenomena with the cinema of attractions' aesthetic mastery of exhibition and spectacle. It was this hybrid quality that drew the attention of surrealist film critics like Delluc, Dulac, Collette, and Epstein and compelled them to write extensively on the works of Comandon and Painlevé in this period, offering a rich non-representational framework for interpreting their films. Their writings underscored the films' potency in captivating audiences through affect rather than rational or sober depiction. In reference to Comandon's films, Collette even argued, "cinema's superiority in the field of education resided more in its nonintellectual or prelogical sensory and affective appeal, in the camera's ability to transport audiences to unforgettable experiences rather than memorizable object lessons" (Amad, "These Spectacles" 129). Collette's choice of the word "memorizable" to express her disdain for the sober discourses of the realist (as opposed to surrealist) object lessons, in addition to her privileging of affect in documentary criticism, is striking here, since it very much reflects the influence of the Bergsonian anti-mechanistic climate, which was prevalent in French intellectual circles at the time and had generated a shared skepticism against science and rationalism due to the positivist discourses' devaluation of immediate experience and subordination of memory to predictable, rational processes.

In his influential study on matter and memory, Henri Bergson had distinguished between two forms of memory, namely the memory of the *lesson* and the memory of the *reading*. The memory of the lesson, he argued, was the type commonly discussed by rational thinkers, referring to memory acquired by repetition (*learnt by heart* or memorization) almost in the form of a habit. Recollections pertaining to similar events or actions were juxtaposed in one's mind to form a single composite memory-image, which could be retrieved voluntarily and repeated in order to help the nervous system to adapt to new situations by creating a sense of recognition based on the new situation's resemblance to this standardized or automated image. The memory of the reading, on the other hand, had nothing to do with habit or mechanistic processes, and was impossible to repeat. This was the memory par excellence for Bergson, as it pointed to the spontaneous recollection of moments yet unlearned: unique memories nested in intuition and duration, appearing and disappearing independently of one's conscious efforts. What the memory of each reading formed was an affectively charged *dream-image*; a fugitive image, which, on its own, was unable to form a useful relationship with present perception but could be integrated into a closed system of voluntary recall by contributing to the *memory-image*:

> …The images stored up in the spontaneous memory have yet another use. No doubt they are dream-images; no doubt the usually appear and disappear independently of our will; and this is why, when we really wish to *know* a thing, we are obliged to learn it by heart, that is to say, to substitute for the spontaneous image a motor mechanism which can serve in its stead (98).

Although the point was never made directly by French film critics of the 1920s avant-garde, it can be argued that Bergson's choice of language for establishing a dichotomy

between the positivist and non-representational models of mnemonic recall was influential on their thinking, since the philosopher pitted spontaneous memory against rationalized or learned memory (the *lesson*), as the quote above demonstrates, in the form of an opposition or tension between dream and reality, validating the significance of surrealist experimentations in film. Bergson also wrote:

> Of what use are these memory-images? Preserved in memory, reproduced in consciousness, do they not distort the practical character of life, mingling dream with reality (96)?

The Bergsonian formulation of the word "lesson" as a concept that relates to memory oscillating between dream and reality, as well as between learning and forgetting, is relevant to the way the popularization of object lesson films in France created a lively debate regarding whether documentary's role was to produce sober discourses / rational knowledge on reality or activate the imagination through dream-like evocations of subjective experience and affect.

In his recent study of the pedagogical dimensions of Jean Painlevé's cinematic oeuvre, James Cahill takes the French filmmaker's subversive object lesson films and theoretical writings on the subject as an entry point to trace the three competing approaches to documentary realism present at the time:

> His [Painlevé's] œuvre negotiates fault lines between differing iterations and uses of realism. These included the "educational realism" that emerged from the pedagogical reforms sponsored by the state during France's Third Republic (1870-1939), the "scientific" positivist-inflected realism based upon the cinematograph's status as a tool for precision observation and inscription, and the "super" or "surplus" realism produced by the uncanny prowess and unexpected excesses of the cinematograph's mechanical eye (4).

In this account, the machine-driven aesthetic, surrealism, or the surplus realism of subversive science films simply appear as three different articulations of the realist impulse in early cinema (in addition to the educational and positivist-inflected realisms) despite the common dismissal of non-Griersonian models of documentary realism prior to the recent rediscovery of Painlevé and Comandon's works. Cahill also highlights how important the concept "lesson" was for Painlevé, pointing out that the filmmaker often mentioned the necessity of "unlearning" in cinema during his talks, which was also the main focus of his 1935 lectures titled "Forgotten Lessons."

Interestingly enough, Painlevé made frequent allusions to the "Gay Science" of Nietzsche in order to explain how he viewed his own documentary practices as anti-dogmatic, life affirming experimentation (that went against documentary's epistephilia, claims of representation and realist education). The first lesson, he stated once, was *to teach people how to forget*, so that they could relearn by heart, and his method of teaching this counter-lesson was making short science films that evoked spectacular dreamscapes of defamiliarized everyday objects and natural phenomena in the manner of audio-visual aphorisms. Comandon and Painlevé's films were aphoristic in the sense that they made a similar epistemological claim about the limits of representation as the philosophical tradition led by aphorists like Nietszche. As the philosopher suggested: "He who writes in blood and aphorisms does not want to be read, he wants to be learned by heart" (Ansell-Pearson 26). Along the same spirit, Comandon and Painlevé's dreamlike short science films appealed to the heart and turned documentary's goals of scientific objectivity into a parable instead of a(n object) lesson.

From Dreams to Darkness

Similarly enigmatic as Comandon and Painlevé, German director Werner Herzog's and the Hungarian filmmaker Péter Forgács's are both acknowledged for their experimental approaches to documentary. Their films *Lessons of Darkness* and *Wittgenstein Tractatus,* both dated 1992 and fragmented, confound easy categorizations. Even the ambiguous term "essay film," which is frequently if inattentively used for documentaries that display a certain resistance to the laws of genre and composition, fails to describe these two films, both of which lack the one element that is deemed common of all essayistic works: the motor force of the/an author's voice (Bensmaia ix). The essay film, favoring "digression, fragmentation, repetition, and dispersion" (Renov, "The Subject" 70) in lieu of generic conventions, often features a discernable author's voice, through which the filmic connection with reality is established rather than through the signature style of a particular director or filmmaker[11]. The author's voice, in this context, is expected to be enigmatic yet unsettled or nebulous, often pointing to a subjectivity that is in constant flux while still being distinctive. Herzog and Forgács's documentaries are at times evocative of essay films, a claim occasionally put forth by critics, since both filmmakers commonly use their own voices as expressive devices in their works, heard not only in the highly stylized voice-over narrations but also in processed form as sound effects within the soundtrack. However, in *Lessons of Darkness* and *Wittgenstein Tractatus*, these voices do not represent a self-reflexive or introspective authorial identity or serve an autobiographical function. Although the two films do not fit comfortably into

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[11] The author's voice in essay film scholarship is different from what the phrase might suggest in auteur theory and criticism.

any non-fiction genre with regard to their distinct individual styles and subject matters, they share a peculiar structural affinity from an organizational point of view. I propose to call this their "assemblistic strategy," since it has to do with the way the films are pieced together or assembled: the overall design in which the semi-autonomous parts of the films are integrated with each other and related to the whole.

On the surface level, both films are "episodic" -- understood as a film that is composed of loosely related and clearly demarcated segments or sections -- perhaps much more directly than any of the other fragmented or segmented documentaries taken up in this project. However, what allows a connection to be established between the episodic logics of the two documentaries is their rootedness in a complex philosophical tradition, the influence of which, at least at in terms of its implications for the formal aesthetics and epistemological claims of documentary, has remained somewhat obscure up until recent years. *Lessons of Darkness* and *Wittgenstein Tractatus* are both fundamentally influenced by the organizational strategies of aphoristic philosophical writing (as well as stylistic choices of distinct philosophers, which is made much more obvious in the title of Forgács's film), broken into enumerated, yet loosely connected chapters that are based on ethical "lessons" or axioms about the world that they portray. Interestingly, the anti-positivist, non-representational thinking underlying aphoristic philosophy also overlaps with the epistemological claims of the two films in question as well as the counter-current of the much older "lesson" tradition in documentary media history.

Although he does not acknowledge the works of filmmakers like Comandon and Painlevé, Herzog revisits the controversial lesson concept and applies it to the enigmatic

and hallucinatory chapters of his eco-disaster documentary. Forgács's film, on the other hand, follows the axiomatic lemmata structure of Ludwig Wittgenstein's treatise *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. In what follows, I will provide an assemblistic reading of these two films, focusing mainly on *Lessons of Darkness,* in order to establish a link between a cluster of documentaries that use lessons or philosophical propositions as organizational concepts. My aim is to suggest that we think of the "lesson film" as a distinct style of documentary filmmaking with its own methods of assembly, genealogy, traditions, and counter-traditions[12].

Lessons as Revelations: The Eschatology of the Future

Hailed as a crossover documentary between science-fiction and non-fiction film[13], *Lessons of Darkness* uses the imagery of the burning oil fields ignited by the retreating Iraqi armies during the Persian Gulf War as the backdrop for a cinematic contemplation of a future environmental catastrophe, in which the world is set ablaze and civilizations are destroyed. Interestingly, the documentary has garnered renewed attention in the media recently, due to the uncanny resemblance between its devastating footage of burning oil fields and the widely circulated aerial imagery from the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill. *Lessons of Darkness* is episodic, like Herzog's earlier documentary *Fata*

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[12] One could think of Errol Morris's award-winning *The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons From the Life of Robert S. McNamara* within this group of films as well.

[13] Crossovers between science-fiction and non-fiction are not unprecedented, although they are not very common. As examples of other relatively recent (found-footage based) documentary works that employ elements or tropes of science-fiction, Roger Luckhurst lists films like Craig Baldwin's *Tribulation 99: Alien Anomalies under America* and *Spectres of the Spectrum,* Jonathan Weiss's *The Atrocity Exhibition*, Werner Herzog's *The Wild Blue Yonder: A Science Fiction Fantasy* and Patrick Keiller's interactive, multi-screen installation project *The City of the Future*. Although Keiller's project is more of a conceptual piece, presenting a modernist urban critique (recalling Le Corbusier's vision of "the city of tomorrow") through the juxtaposition of actuality films showing vignettes from the turn of the century London, Luckhurst's inclusion of the piece in the list is fitting as it was initially developed as a science-fiction story.

Morgana, divided into a prologue and thirteen chapters (excluding the main titles and end credits) with on-screen chapter headings; this time the chapters are conceptualized as "lessons," however, without any explicit definition of what the term suggests. The chronologically numbered chapters (which might, presumably, contain lessons of some kind) are[14]:

I. Eine Haupstadt / A Capital City (Pre-war footage of Kuwait City cloaked in the ominous dark grey shades of an early morning and used as a setting for an anonymous capital city in the apocalyptic future, biding its time before an impending doom)

II. Der Krieg / The War (Grainy, monochromatic, and unidentifiable televisual imagery of the bombing of Baghdad representing what is possibly a global war that will bring the end of humanity)

III. Nach der Schlacht / After the Battle (surveying, traveling, and aerial shots of vast stretches of barren landscape featuring scattered bones and rotting hulls of bombed-out industrial machinery, terrain, installations, and vehicles)

IV. Fundstucke aus Folterkammern / [Finds from] Torture Chambers (hand-held imagery of primitive torture devices displayed in what is identified as a torture chamber and a "speechless" interview with a war witness, a mother whose sons have been tortured to death and who appears to be suffering from a severe speech impediment due to post-traumatic stress)

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[14] The Roman numerals are used in accordance with the film's original intertitles.

V. Satans Nationalpark / Satan's National Park (aerial imagery of burning oil fields suggesting the arrival of the apocalypse or humanity's end)

VI. Kindheit / Childhood (Interview with a young mother whose little son hasn't spoken a word since Iraqi soldiers raided their house and brutalized the child)

VII. Es stieg ein Rauch auf, wie ein Rauch vom Ofen / And a Smoke Arose Like the Smoke from a Furnace (Further aerial imagery of burning oil fields and camera diving into billows of smoke)

VIII. Eine Wallfahrt / A Pilgrimage (Footage of an American oil crew in the process of the seeming impossible task of putting out colossal fires on the ground)

IX. Saurier unterwegs / A Dinosaur's feast (Shots of heavy machinery in the midst of an erupting field, making the men at work look small and insignificant)

X. Protuberanzen / Protuberances (Geysers of erupting, boiling, burning oil)

XI. Das Versiegen der Quellen / The Drying up of the Wells (Imagery of fires eventually being put out by workers and dark clouds of smoke taking over the horizon)

XII. Leben Ohne Feuer / Life without Fire (The workers are shown paradoxically reigniting the fires that have been put out, in what the narrator speculates to be a state of delirium)

XIII. Ich bin so müde vom Seufzen; Herr, laß es Abend werden. / I Am So Weary of Sighing, O Lord, Grant That the Night Cometh (Final shots of fires, workers, and machinery as the night descends)

The idea of "lessons of darkness" evokes, first, an authoritative or didactic, and second, an ominous, pseudo-biblical tone. As the aerial camera dives into the abysmal depths of smoke rising from the Kuwaiti inferno in the fifth chapter on "Satan's National Park," Herzog recites a passage from *Revelations,* which transforms the camera's silent gaze into an apocalyptic vision of humanity's afterlife and suggests that the term lesson in the title should be taken in a theological sense: lessons as revelations about humanity's future.

> Voiceover: *And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such was not since men were upon the earth. So mighty an earthquake, so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell.*

Of course, the reference to the description of the biblical apocalypse from the book of *Revelations* is allegorical in the film, although an apocalyptic narrative is not unusual for Herzog, whose films are often marked with cataclysmic visions and end-of-the-world scenarios. Furthermore, the word "apocalypse" in Ancient Greek is etymologically associated with revelation, which is once again tied to the theological, or in this context, eschatological sense of the word "lesson," as the lessons in the film appear to be succinct and elliptical "premeditations" (Grusin) of a dark future.

Objective Versus Ecstatic Truth

Conversely, Herzog is less interested in religious didacticism than the intensity of feelings that this passage evokes by means of metaphor. The passage's "poetic or ecstatic truth" (which he often emphasizes in his interviews as the type of truth that he is

after) takes precedence over its indexical reference. Here, it might be relevant to note that Herzog used the titular phrase "lessons of darkness" twice in his "Minnesota declaration: truth and fact in documentary cinema," a document (issued on the occasion of the Walker Art Center's month-long tribute to fourteen of his films in 1999) in which he explained his theory of ecstatic truth for the first time and denounced the objectivity of cinema verité style. The reference to the phrase, which appears both in the subtitle of the declaration and in its final statement, suggests that the documentary was integral to the director's formulation of an ecstatic mode of filmmaking, highlighting fabrication, imagination, stylization and affect rather than placing the emphasis on observation and fact-based representation[15] (Cronin 301). The twelfth principle of the declaration states:

> Life in the oceans must be sheer hell. A vast, merciless hell of permanent and immediate danger. So much of a hell that during evolution some species -- including man -- crawled, fled onto some small continents of solid land, where the *Lessons of Darkness* continue.

This somewhat cryptic final statement from the Minnesota manifesto implies that lessons of darkness is perhaps a broader metaphor in Herzog's work, which presents dark musings on the human condition revealed in its most naked and terrifying state in humankind's alienated relationship with nature. Found in diverse locales (within

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[15] In an interview with A.G. Basoli, Herzog commented on the connection between the film and the manifesto: "*Lessons of Darkness* fits in very well with my manifesto, in what I define as ecstatic truth. We have seen fifteen-second film clips of fires in Kuwait hundreds of times on CNN and that is the accountants' truth. But in this film, more visibly than in others, I was searching for something different, for something beyond that, for an epic, ecstatic truth. *Lessons of Darkness* is a fine example for me to use in order to clarify what I mean by the terms in my manifesto – of what distinguishes the accountant's truth, what constitutes fact, and what constitutes the inherent truth of images in cinema and, of course, in poetry" (34-35).

Herzog's oeuvre) stretching from the depths of unwieldy jungles, prehistoric caves, and unchartered oceans to destroyed human habitations, deserted landscapes, and environmental disaster sites, lessons of darkness are the subjective truths drawn by Herzog from humanity's experience of the horrors of a world viewed as a Dantean inferno in which mankind is forever lost and the everlasting struggle for the survival of the fittest prevails. Establishing an allegory between the apocalypses described in *Revelations* and the one depicted by the infernal imagery of the burning Kuwaiti oil fields, Herzog channels this bleak yet forceful vision perhaps most directly in his eponymous documentary. However, the aesthetic and discursive strategies of *Lessons of Darkness* leave the truth or meaning of the film intentionally ambiguous and inconclusive. The assemblage of the audiovisual materials foregrounds the affective response that the environmental catastrophe solicits from the viewer, rather than claiming that the documentary can fully or objectively represent an utterly devastating event like the Persian Gulf War, which denies representation by its very traumatic nature.

Visions of the Sublime

Herzog's use of allegory is not limited to moments where he incorporates passages like this in the film; allegory is the operative method underlying his broader assemblistic strategies. In disjunctive chapters, he juxtaposes a wide array of audio-visual materials ranging from a highly fictional voiceover narration, enigmatic quotations and chapter headings projected on black screen with intertitles, and interviews with mute war witnesses to thematically distinct opera pieces and classical music. By establishing allegorical links between these audio-visual elements and the imagery, Herzog

undermines the Gulf War footage's spatio-temporal specificity and draws attention to its affective import instead. Of course, attributing affective or non-representational modes of inquiry to Herzog's films does not go against common wisdom in the field, since his work is often associated with the German romantic tradition[16] and its projections of turbulent psychological states such as terror and awe onto sublime visions of nature in the realms of art and literature. More specifically, the Sublime appears to be, as Eric Ames argues, a standard theme of Herzog scholarship (53), established early on by scholars like Brigitte Peucker and Alan Singer, and still commonly used as an interpretive framework for analyzing the director's films. In terms of how affect comes into play within this framework, the studies on the Herzogian sublime usually follow two major and at times oppositional lines of argument. On one hand, critics and theorists like Lotte Eisner and Gilles Deleuze locate the foregrounding of affect in Herzog's work in the tension he stages between Nature, portrayed as vast and impenetrable through recurring excursions into its hallucinatory landscapes, and film characters / documentary subjects, who run up against their own limits in the heroic attempt to counter Nature's infinity with thought, imagination, and action. In Deleuze's words, hallucinatory landscapes in Herzog activate the imagination by "summon[ing the viewer] to the search for the great abyss of the Universe" ("Cinema 1" 184). This vision is precisely what allows Eisner to describe Herzog's approach in terms of the way German Romantic art appealed to the senses by

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[16] Kent Casper and Susan Linville state that critics persist in using the label "romantic" for Herzog, despite the director's repeated disclaimers, due to his frequent exploration of certain romantic tropes such as his "fetishizing of danger and adventure, his predilection for bizarre fringe characters and mysterious landscapes, [and] his search for the auratically unique image" (17). Lotte Eisner's championing of Herzog as the most conspicuous modern heir to expressionism, which represents a reformulation of German literary romanticism according to her writings, lends credence to such a lineage.

evoking the sublime. On the other hand, scholars like Eric Ames argue that Herzog's depictions of nature undermine Romantic aspirations to the sublime as the mediation of film steers the attention away from the encounter between landscape and human perception / reason, highlighting instead the encounter between visceral dimensions of cinema and the inner world of affect.

Scott MacDonald brings up the Herzogian sublime in his analysis of the *Lessons of Darkness*'s haunting introductory sequence of the burning Kuwaiti oil fields. MacDonald, who finds the documentary both "politically troubling" (in its lack of reference to the political realities behind the Iraqi invasion) and "visually sublime," suggests that the sublimity of the sequence arises from both the immensity of the disaster and its mythical implications. The immensity is conveyed through aerial shots "of the size of the fires, and the towering billows of black smoke" (325) filmed from a helicopter whose shadow enters the frame at times. Here, MacDonald's emphasis on the immensity of the disaster coupled with his attention to the details of filmic presentation suggests an amalgamation between the two alternative lines of argument regarding the Herzogian sublime summarized above. In its mention of the size of the fires, MacDonald's reading recalls the Kantian framework that the critics of the German Romantic version of Herzog employ in their interpretations of the director's oeuvre. Kant's analytic of the category *mathematical sublime,* which has to do with the aesthetic experience of nature's excess or overwhelming magnitudes, is especially relevant here, as it constitutes the inspiration for a significant number of romantic poems and prose, while resonating with some of the

more well-known commentaries on Herzog's films, such as Deleuze's analysis of the "Figures of the Large and the Small in Herzog" in *The Movement-Image*.

The description of the documentary's visually sublime qualities being evoked by the immensity of the size of the fires and the towering billows of black smoke, then, is telling. As Kant describes, "If a thing is excessive for the imagination […], then the thing is, as it were, an abyss in which the imagination is afraid to lose itself" (115). *Lessons of Darkness* is rich with abysmal imagery, setting the ground for MacDonald's seemingly Kantian formulation with long, surveying shots of clouds of smoke, which resemble vortexes, or the bird's eye view shots of geysers of fire that look like they are pulling the camera into their nuclear core. One can easily take this reading further and argue that these images agitate the viewer and test the boundaries of one's power of imagination, while the gaze strives to overcome its aesthetic confines and moves on slowly to go the lengths of where only the mind can take it in a primal fascination. In other words, the camera emulates "the subjective movement of the imagination" in Kantian terms, and provides the vision of a sublime that is agitating yet at the same time perplexingly pleasurable, since there is the sense of a constant mental search, a constant visual motion and an oscillation between different affects (such as repulsion and attraction).

At the risk of delving too much into a Kantian interpretive framework, I would like to add that it is also possible to read the sequence according to the analytic of the *dynamically sublime*, especially taking into account the voice-over narration. As opposed to the mathematical sublime, which has to do with magnitude, the dynamical sublime is

an aesthetic experience of phenomena in nature that cause fear and a fear-ridden mental agitation -- a *might* that surpasses the imagination and yet is not superior to its resistance. Kant's own examples of mights in nature recall the passage Herzog recites from Revelations in the voice-over narration: thunderclouds piling up in the sky, lightnings, volcanoes, hurricanes, and earthquakes with their destructive power (120). All these forces arouse fear, however, in a way that elevates the imagination. The fear that Kant attributes to the experience of the dynamically sublime is not actual fear; it is a "vigorous affect" that once again has a bipolar nature: it contains both terror and amazement / admiration towards its object, a horror and a sacred thrill. In Kant's formulation, fear "is merely our attempt to incur it [the Sublime] with our imagination, in order that we may feel that very power's might and connect the mental agitation this arouses with the mind's state of rest" (129). In this sense, the dynamical sublime is experienced first and foremost through a mental attunement, rather than by virtue of the intrinsic qualities of an immanently sublime object. It is possible that the intertextual reference to the passage from *Revelations* in *Lessons of Darkness* helps the viewer establish a connection between the mental attunement she would have towards a natural disaster of great intensity and what she sees / hears, evoking the sense of the Sublime internally regardless of the environmental disaster's own subliminal qualities. This way, the man-made disaster is made to coincide with the biblical apocalypse, the ultimate disaster deus-ex-machina, and reinforces the terror inflicted by the war.

Of course, the problem with the Kantian framework is that it does not account for the role of mediation or the film's aesthetic and assemblistic strategies (such as the choice

of camerawork or the incorporation of intertextual as well as intermedial elements) in conveying as well as constructing affective modes of truth, whether that should be understood in terms of the Sublime or some other structure of feeling. Applying especially the Kantian sublime to film leads to an interpretive gap, since in the philosopher's formulation, the mathematically sublime takes its power from the intrinsic qualities of profilmic reality and the dynamically sublime from the profilmic mental attunement of the viewer, leaving little room for analyzing the style, aesthetics, or assembled materiality of documentary. In this sense, MacDonald's analysis of the film differs from the conventional Kantian readings, as it acknowledges some of the aesthetic strategies employed in the fifth chapter, especially related to camerawork. However, MacDonald's description of the camerawork does not directly address the question of whether the machinic vision of the camera has any bearing on the status of the sublime or not, despite the fact that his study focuses on the depictions of place, landscape, and nature within the Machine of cinema and modern society.

An assemblistic reading of the film's technical details provides better insights into the role of mediation in it, although interpretation ultimately remains inconclusive. Herzog makes extensive use of aerial shots -- a technique often criticized by contemporary documentary filmmakers for effacing the ground truth especially in the context of war films (Zimmermann) -- partly out of necessity (the difficulty of filming on the ground amidst soaring fires, smoke, and heat) and partly as a critical aesthetic strategy

to indicate the overwhelming compass of the catastrophe.[17] In a cataclysmic event of

such dimensions, the film frame loses its points of reference and it becomes difficult to

determine where the image begins and ends. The limitations of the filmic frame's

rectangular field demand closure, but Herzog intentionally allows the camera to wander

and draw circles over the landscape (circular camera movement is a signature shot in the

director's films, often used in exploration of natural phenomena) denying the viewer the

stability of a fixed viewpoint. What the circular camera movement suggests in terms of

film's capacity to depict the sublime is ambiguous. It is unclear whether Herzog's

strategy here is to circle around the possibility of capturing / evoking the sublime through

mechanical means or to underscore the difficulty of demarcating the (not only spatio-

temporal but also affective) boundaries of the catastrophic event. This ambiguity of

meaning derives from the fact that the role of mediation in determining the filmmaker's

or the viewers' relationship to filmic reality is never resolved in Herzog and the Kantian

readings of the sublime regarding his work offer little reflection in this regard. As Paul

Coates contends, when talking about the cinematic sublime, it is easy to overlook what

happens in the leap between the naked eye that fails to ingest the totality of an event and

the eye / I of the machine or the camera that alters human vision or extends the self as a

prosthetic supplement:

> The machine's capacity, however, is not transferred automatically to humanity…
> The machine sparks no necessary human capacity to absorb the newly available

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[17] According to Alkan Chipperfield, filming from a distance is also a stylistic feature of Herzog cinema. Commenting on the extreme long shots surveying the desolate mountainous vista in *Signs of Life*, he states: "From such a vantage point everything appears flattened out, wide, and perhaps infinite. The first principle of Herzog's filmic approach to space is never to zoom in or out. In contrast to Antonioni or Tarkovsky, Herzog's camera never attempts to penetrate and probe the space it sees. Rather, in a sovereign stylistic gesture it witnesses the world impassively and from a distance, without accent or remark" ("Murmurs").

image of the hitherto ungraspably multiform world… Perhaps this why Alan Singer attaches the adjective "ironic" to the sublime of the films of the neo-Romantic Werner Herzog (works in which Buchner is a key presence), the irony being perceived to reside in the technical mediation of a nature posited as awesomely overwhelming (30).

While I do not agree with Coates's view of Herzog's films as positing a vision of nature that is *awesomely* overwhelming (this judgment seems to resonate with the negative criticisms that *Lessons of Darkness* received after its release, accusing the film of aestheticizing the catastrophe; according to the criticisms, the footage of the documentary appeared visually breathtaking and entrancing in the absence of political commentary), his comment about the peculiar status of the machine's capacity within the cinematic imaginary of the filmmaker is relevant. Herzog, of course, does not shy away from drawing attention to the complicity of cameras and sound recording devices in his documentaries. Hhere one can think of the anti-climactic use of the footage showing Herzog listening to the audio recording of Timothy Treadwell's gruesome death in *Grizzly Man*, the content of which is withheld from the audience, and the director's similar refusal to show the video from inside a sacred cave in *White Diamond*, although the film itself builds up the expectation by including captivating imagery of the expedition team doctor being lowered on a rope with the camera over the vertigo-inducing Kaieteur Falls to enter the cave. Nonetheless, his strategy of making filming and recording devices center stage at times never takes the form of a more direct engagement with the issues of technicity, machinic vision / audition, or the manifestations of what

Mario Costa defines as "the technological sublime."[18] In other words, cinematic

technologies are never quite elevated to the status of self-operating mnemonic agents,

whose capacity might supplement or transcend humans, but they are keenly displayed as

elements of the filmic assemblage to underscore the significance of filmic technology and

style as rhetorical devices.

It is therefore fitting that while accepting the manifestation of the tropes of the

Sublime in *Lessons of Darkness*, Herzog mentions the rhetorical model of a different

philosopher, Longinus rather than Kant, in responding to questions regarding how he

understands the concept:

> I should treat Kant with the necessary caution, because his explanations concerning
> the sublime are so very abstract that they have always remained alien to me in my
> practical work. However, Dionysus Longinus, whom I first came to know while
> exploring these subjects, is much closer to my heart, because he always speaks in
> practical terms and uses examples ("On the Absolute").

In addition to the fact that it is unusual for a documentary filmmaker to acknowledge the

direct influence of philosophy on his or her work, what is interesting here is that Herzog

grounds his privileging of Longinus on a distinction he makes between abstraction and

practicality in the language of the two thinkers. In other words, Longinus, in his use of

practical examples, is more interested in the types of "lessons" that Herzog is invested in

-- short, parabolic, and evocative -- than Kant is in his abstractions. His following

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[18] Costa uses the term to refer to two different senses of the sublime related to technology. On one hand,
the technological sublime marks the way the experience of new media technologies overwhelm the subjects
of modern societies by operating as self-determining systems that lead to a de-subjectivization of art and
culture. On the other hand, it also points to the new modes of artistic production and aesthetics that
facilitate the evocations of the sublime through technology. As Costa contends: "The technologies not only
act by setting off a process corrosive to the essence of art, but also both prepare and set in motion the
surpassing of art and a movement towards a socialized production and fruition of the sublime" (Bolognini,
"The SMSMS"). I am using the term here in this second sense.

elaboration on Longinus's model, on the other hand, suggests that the choice is based on a much more radical distinction, more specifically, on the applicability of the rhetorical framework of the 1st century Greek philosopher to filmic evocations of affective truth and perhaps, although indirectly, to the broader question of mediation:

> What's fascinating is that, right at the beginning of his text, [Longinus] invokes the concept of Ecstasy, even if he does so in a different context than what I have identified as "ecstatic truth." With reference to rhetoric, Longinus says: Whatever is sublime does not lead the listeners to persuasion but to a state of ecstasy; at every time and in every way imposing speech, with the spell it throws over us, prevails over that which aims at persuasion and gratification. Our persuasions we can usually control, but the influences of the sublime bring power and irresistible might to bear, and reign supreme over every hearer . . . Here he uses the concept of ekstasis, a person's stepping out of himself into an elevated state—where we can raise ourselves over our own nature— which the sublime reveals "at once, like a thunder bolt." No one before Longinus had spoken so clearly of the experience of illumination; here, I am taking the liberty to apply that notion to rare and fleeting moments in film ("On the Absolute").

This detailed commentary on Longinus not only makes it clear that the philosopher is the inspiration behind Herzog's own theory of ecstatic truth or affective mode of filmmaking, which I talked about earlier, but also suggests that he understands the sublime as a trope or cinematic effect / affect, which can be evoked, mediated, or established by film through style, aesthetics, or compositional / assemblistic strategies that elevate the viewer to a heightened state of perception, instead of an experience that originates merely from profilmic reality or subjectivity. After all, what distinguishes Longinus' model from the natural sublime of Kant, the modern / industrial sublime of the 20th century, and partly from the technological sublime of new media, is its focus on artistic expression, style,

and, more importantly, composition,[19] which sheds significant light on the aesthetic framework behind the complex architecture of *Lessons of Darkness* and makes it a suitable text for *assemblistic reading*. So far, by assemblistic reading, I meant the interpretive framework I propose for the analysis of episodic and multi-part documentaries in general in this project: the framework that attends to the way the assembled audiovisual parts of a film relate to the fragmented whole, without approaching the film as a holistic text that demands a particular meaning to be applied to the entire composition. However, lesson films demonstrate that certain documentary texts with non-holistic, non-representational organizational logics lend themselves more easily and appropriately to such an inquiry, since other interpretive frameworks, like that of the essay film and the Sublime, fail to account for their broader epistemological claims by ignoring the significance of the documentaries' multi-part structure (and their intentional undoing of the "whole") to its meaning. What's at stake in thinking of lessons as an assemblage rather than as a unified curriculum is an acknowledgment of the anti-positivist modes of thinking or imagining reality that underscore a great number of documentary works, which have been missing from non-fiction media scholarship and mostly omitted from canonical histories.

The Lesson Plan

Elevated style and compositional complexity do not function merely as formal attractions in *Lessons of Darkness,* in the sense that the formalist experimentations of the

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[19] There are alternative interpretations of Longinus that read the philosopher's famous work "On the Sublime" from the perspective of a rhetoric of enunciation instead of expression, placing the focus on the aesthetic subject; however; as Suzanne Guerlac, who is among the scholars that make similar claims, indicates, it is more common to associate Longinus with the a theory of "elevated style" (275).

avant-garde documentary movements appealed to the modernist aesthetic sensibilities in the 20s and 30s, but they are integral to the film's aesthetic and discursive vision, which is non-holistic and non-representational. As I mentioned earlier, LOD is not only an episodic documentary broken into clearly demarcated chapters conceptualized as lessons, but it also presents a heterogeneous assemblage of multimedia materials (including voice-over narration including recited passages from biblical texts, quotations, Gothic chapter titles and numbers projected onto black screen with intertitles, interviews with war witnesses, and thematically distinct opera pieces and classical music). This assemblistic construction contributes to the film's fractal vision (expanding conceptually in folds), which offers multiple layers of meaning with its high degree of intermediality and intertextuality. An assemblistic reading of the film's audio-visual fragments (moving from the audio-visual parts to the assembled whole) reveals how disjunctive and intertextual the documentary's content is, making it difficult to contain within a holistic narrative.

Take, for example, the film's soundtrack. Attending to sound, which is one of the common goals of the chapters in this project, helps to highlight the assemblistic nature of the film, particularly the non-unified, non-organic, assemblistic quality both of the soundtrack itself and of its linkage to or connection with the visual. The soundtrack of *Lessons of Darkness* is curated, in the sense that it is composed entirely of preexisting music, featuring well-known operatic and classical pieces, including excerpts from Wagner's *Parsifal*, *Das Rheingold*, and *Gotterdämmerung*; Prokofiev's *Sonata No. 2* Op. 56; Verdi's *Messa de Requiem*; Schubert's *Notturno* Op. 148; Arvo Pärt's *Stabat Mater*;

and Edward Grieg's *Peer Gynt* Suite No. 1, Op. 46 ("Death of Aase"). All of these

pieces are strikingly elegiac in tone, evoking a sense of timeless mourning, and get

frequently featured in documentary films, immediately establishing links not only

between the affects aroused in LOD and the narrative content of the music but also with

other well and lesser-known fiction and non-fiction works. Here one can think of the use

of Grieg's "Death of Aase" in Dutch Parliamentarian Geert Wilders's controversial anti-

islam propaganda film *Fitna* and the funeral march from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* in

Dziga Vertov's famous sound documentary *Three Songs about Lenin*. The parallelism

between the scenes in Herzog and Vertov's films, for example, employing the same

musical piece, is especially interesting in that it gives the apocalyptic elegy in *Lessons of*

Darkness a hallucinatory quality. In his article about funeral marches in Post-Wagnerian

orchestra, Christopher Morris suggests:

> As Friedrich Kittler has pointed out, it is above all the 'acoustic hallucination' that
>
> comes to the fore in Wagner, a world, as Nietzsche puts it, in which all things
>
> animate and inanimate desire an 'existence in sound' and listening becomes
>
> paramount (89).

Morris evokes Kittler's account of accoustic hallucination to refer to the way Wagner's

orchestral interludes often subordinate the drama and absorb the verbal and visual

discourses of the stage into sound, as in the case of "Siegfried's Funeral March"

(*Trauermarsch*) from *Götterdämmerung* (the last opera of *The Ring of Niebelungen*).

This march anchors the images in the climactic scenes of both *Lessons of Darkness* and

Three Songs About Lenin (which is coincidentally another episodic documentary film,

broken into three chapters conceptualized as "songs" or "song documents"). The occurrence of the same music piece in two works creates a hallucinatory sensorium in which images are transposed by the music into spectral impressions of reality. At the same time, it inadvertently establishes another type of spectral connection between Herzog's film and Vertov's in which the latter haunts the former through the music.

Herzog lays *Trauermarsch* under the voiceover track during his narration of the aforementioned passage from *Revelations*, while the camera mounted on a helicopter surveys the vast oil fields in tedious long takes, plunging into clouds of all-consuming smoke and advancing wearily as if in a celestial funeral march, caught up in the magnetic pull of the fires' infernal heat and dizzying depths. Conversely, Vertov uses the elegiac piece when introducing Lenin's funeral in the second chapter of his documentary, in which the coupling of Wagner's music and frequent shots of the revolutionary leader's corpse evoke an uncanny and symbolic resurrection. Ironically, as the intertitles announce, "Lenin… but he is silent," the music's entrance subverts the text, beckoning the viewer instead to *listen*. Now, death is animated by the instrumentation and, following the music's structure, transformed into an ever-blossoming *spirit* of revolution. In this way, as Michel Chion proposes, "Sound has an influence on perception… [and] makes us see in the image what we would not otherwise see, or would see differently" (34). Ultimately, in both films, the music is used in a non-representational way and suggests a hallucinatory aurality, a quality that is only reinforced by the intertextual association established through the juxtaposition of the two scenes, which are interpellated with the same operatic piece.

In addition to the music, other seemingly straightforward elements of the sound assemblage of LOD also offer multiple layers of meaning when their intertextual, mythical references are taken into account. For example, each of Herzog's two interviews with local people in the film features mute characters rendered speechless by the atrocities of war. Their silence is fitting within the non-representational approach of the film, as it subverts the logic of interviews, which are often used to validate documentary films' claims to objectivity by providing testimonial accounts of history relayed by documentary subjects or witnesses. In the absence of a voice authenticating the witness account or an easily decipherable narrative presented by a speaking subject, the interview's function is obscured, the mute subjects' vocalizations pointing to a mere excess of affect. On the other hand, there is also a mythical reference suggested in these interviews, in terms of recalling Kuwait's geographical ties with what used to be the ancient city of Babylon, the symbol of civilization that falls at the dawn of the apocalypse. The trauma of the two interviewees, an elderly woman and a young child, brings to mind the fall of Babylon, which points to the total collapse of language and the eclipse of reason. This non-representational, affective logic behind the film's assemblage of different audio-visual fragments becomes more pronounced as one moves from such details to the film's broader formal fragmentation into succinct, self-contained chapters. The episodic architecture of the film based on the lesson concept is significant in that it brings to mind a different, less common connotation of the word "lesson." This connotation pertains to the philosophical tradition of parabolic writing: expressing

thought in short, subjective or allegorical stories, parables, maxims, and aphorisms, in order to challenge analytical or deductive methods of inquiry.

Parables for Documentary

> *Not every end is the goal. The end of a melody is not the goal; and yet: as long as the melody has not reached its end, it also hasn't reached its goal. A parable.[20]*

Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*

The epigram Herzog uses at the beginning of the film, deceptively attributed to the 17th century French philosopher Blaise Pascal while it is made up by the director, especially lends itself to an interpretation of the word "lesson" in the title, in the parabolic or aphoristic sense. In the quote, Herzog (emulating Pascal) states: "The collapse of the stellar universe will occur -- like creation -- in grandiose splendor." This feigned statement from a thinker, who according to Chris Lawn (following Lucien Goldmann's reading of Pascal) constitutes the precursor of "tragic aphorists," (138) whom philosophers like Wittgenstein follows, immediately sets the tone for the fragmented style as well as the tragic / apocalyptic tone of the documentary. In the aforementioned interview about the film, Herzog commented on his citation of Pascal:

> In the fine arts, in music, literature, and cinema, it is possible to reach a deeper stratum of truth—a poetic, ecstatic truth, which is mysterious and can only be grasped with effort; one attains it through vision, style, and craft. In this context I see the quotation from Blaise Pascal about the collapse of the stellar universe not as a fake ["counterfeit"; Fälschung], but as a means of making possible an ecstatic experience of inner, deeper truth. Just as it's not fakery when Michelangelo's Pietà portrays Jesus as a 33-year-old man, and his mother, the mother of God, as a 17-year-old ("On the Absolute").

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[20] I thank Antoine Traisnel for bringing this quote to my attention.

Here, Herzog's striking reference to a truth attained through "vision, style, and craft" is articulated in the context of forging Pascal, and therefore suggests that the director might be imitating more than simply the philosopher's thoughts on the stellar universe. Perhaps, what gets simulated is the vision, style and craft of a philosopher (the way Herzog takes Longinus as a model due to his attention to style), who has left an indelible mark on Western philosophy as an aphorist. Regarding the function of aphoristic writing in Pascal's philosophical masterpiece *Pensées* (*Thoughts*), Lawn states:

> In the hands of Pascal, a literary and philosophical genre to be self-consciously taken up and developed later by Schlegel, German romanticism and beyond, reveals through its form aspects of a vision of human life, more specifically, a vision of human limitations. Pascalian fragments bear witness to the frailty of human understanding (140).

In *Pensées*, Pascal adopts the aphoristic writing style as a philosophical method: Through succinct enumerated passages and individual fragments, he constantly poses paradoxical statements to confront the reader with the opposing tendencies of human nature ("wretchedness" on one hand and nobility or greatness on the other), in order to lead them to faith in a manner of confused despair. A similar vision of human limitations and frailty of understanding, conveyed through a fragmented style, underlies *Lessons of Darkness*. The aphoristic, pseudo-biblical chapters lead to a certain ontological crisis at the end of the film. It is implied that the real tragedy of the environmental catastrophe lies in the irreconcilable tendencies of human nature, as the eventually extinguished oil wells are shown being reignited by firefighters, who, according the voiceover, find a life without fire unbearable and restart fires in order to have something to fight against in their state of delirium. Therefore, Herzogian lessons can be said to follow the tradition of

Pascalian fragments in more ways than one ("vision, style, and craft"): in their dualistic v*ision* of humanity, fragmented and affective *style*, and *craft* or mastery of expression, presenting parables (or ethical "lessons") that are themselves an assemblage of quotations, stories, biblical allusions, and forms of expression that go against the grain of objective representation. At this point, it is important to note that the Pascalian and the Longinian elements or visions come together in a complementary manner, and further intertwine in LOD. While the influence of Longinus draws attention to the underlying problematic of "objective representation" in the documentary, the Pascalian reference raises the question of how to read the film, of wholeness and unity of composition or of non-holistic assemblage, which has bearings on representational issues.

Lemmata and the Limits of Representation

The Hungarian filmmaker Peter Forgács's documentary *Wittgenstein Tractatus*, which re-works black and white home movies and found footage from the early twentieth century, is associated with the "lesson film" in a much more indirect way. Instead of lessons, the film, (depicting vignettes of daily life, mostly in Hungary, before and after WWII), is composed of seven short video essays that replicate seven "lemmas / lemmata," or in other words, propositions, from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, a treatise that lays out Wittgenstein's early philosophical framework and his widely acknowledged "picture theory of meaning." In addition to being a compilation video, *Wittgenstein Tractatus* is also a hallucinatory assemblage of voice-overs (including narration, sound clips that feature both voices and sound effects, and humming), interleaved and overlaid titles (including text and an intricate system of

enumeration), graphics, hand-drawn visual effects, and an original score. Like *Lessons of Darkness*, the film is not only conceptually but also formally episodic, with each section clearly separated from each other with black screen fading in to a uniform background of graphics that display the name Ludwig Wittgenstein in capital letters and the titles of the chapters underneath. In addition to the chapter titles, every short segment also includes additional interleaved and superimposed text, similarly excerpted from Wittgenstein's study.   Oddly enough, Forgács partially stays loyal to the original system of Wittgensteinian enumeration when quoting the propositions within the segments, while he removes the numbers in the chapter titles. Therefore, the titles and text used in the seven video essays appear as follows (the first indented line indicates the title of each chapter and the sentences below are transcriptions of the text cited within the chapters):

> The world is everything that is the case.
>> 1.1 The world is the totality of facts, not of things. / No cry of torment can be greater than the cry of one man. / How hard I find it to see what is right in front of my eyes!
>
> The object is simple.
>> Only a very unhappy man has the right to pity someone else. / 2.221 What the picture represents is its sense. / 2.12 The picture is a model of reality / 2.224 It cannot be discovered from the picture alone whether it is true or false.
>
> What is thinkable is also possible.
>> 3.1 The totality of true thoughts is a picture of the world. / The thinkable is also possible.
>
> That which mirrors itself in language, language cannot represent.
>> What can be shown cannot be said. / 4.002 Language disguises the thought; …/ The light work shed is a beautiful light, which, however, only shines, with real beauty if it is illuminated by yet another light.
>
> The limits of my language …
>> 5.621 The world and life are one. / 5.634 Everything we see could also be otherwise. Everything we can describe at all could also be otherwise. / 5.63 I am my world. / The Microcosm. / The spring which flows gently and limpidly in the Gospels seems to have froth on it in Paul's epistles … / 5.6 *The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world.
>
> The riddle does not exist.

6. The general form of truth-function is [p, ξ, N(ξ)] / 6.44 Not how the world is, is the mystical, but *that* it is. / 6.3611 That the sun will rise to-morrow, is an hypothesis; … / 6.373 The world is independent of my will. / 6.4311 Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through.
    Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.
    A confession has to be a part of your new life* / What you are regarding as a gift is a problem for you to solve. / 7. Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent[21].

Wittgenstein's lemmata, which are taken up by Forgács, are not moral lessons or parables per se but ethical propositions about the "limits of expressibility," the ethical problem that lies at the core of Wittgenstein's early work (Monk). This brings the film close to *Lessons of Darkness* and the way it foregrounds the limits of representation, which haunts documentary film in its attempt to capture an incommunicable event like war or a cataclysmic environmental disaster.

There is also a link between the two films in terms of their philosophical influences. In recent years, several critics have drawn close parallels between Pascal and Wittgenstein, who each seems to have followed a similar path in moving away from a general commitment to the rational method and logical precision in philosophy "to suspicion of its aims, resulting the adoption of a more personal, […] even confessional wrestling with […] certainty, and skepticism." Although the later Wittgenstein (of *Philosophical Investigations*) is closer in philosophical method and style to Pascal as he is known in *Pensées*, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* still presents an aphoristic (albeit deductive) structure, which is very much indebted to the tradition of the French philosopher.

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[21] The lemma is displayed once again at the end of the chapter, this time superimposed on images and including its number.

Much like its textual counterpart, Forgács's documentary deals with representation more than anything else, pointing to the gap between what the audience can see in salvaged home videos (an eerie absence of clues about the impending Holocaust) and what they can know or claim about it. The Wittgensteinian aphorisms cited in the film draw attention to the limits of human understanding and representation, as exemplified in statements like: "How hard I find it to see what is right in front of my eyes," "What can be shown cannot be said," "Everything we see (or describe at all) could also be otherwise," "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world," and perhaps, most famously, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent."

Of course, when applied to found-footage of impending catastrophe that awaits the innocent Jewish subjects viewed in the film, Wittgenstein's lemmata gain a much different, allegorical meaning (the insufficiency of language in expressing the unspeakable in Wittgenstein stands as an allegory for the insufficiency of documentary film in meaningfully representing catastrophic events like the Holocaust). For Davis Whitney, however, Forgács's use of the lemmata is not allegorical; rather, it is complementary to Wittgenstein's own philosophy:

> To be specific, *Wittgenstein Tractatus* conducts philosophy in the way the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* suggests philosophy might be possible (…) but cannot itself show us or do for us (200).

Whitney's take on the film's complementary aspects makes sense, especially when the more recent and controversial interpretations of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* are taken into account, those which highlight the ambiguity and mysticism of his work as a text that

negates its own propositions in the end, by declaring most of them as nonsensical and claiming that they should only be used as stepping stones to reveal the truth about things that are not expressible. When interpreted in this somewhat subversive manner, the *mystical* version of Wittgenstein's and Forgács's aphoristic visions overlap, and seem to offer a non-representational method of inquiry regarding the relationship between the world and its expression through language and film.

In conclusion, it is useful to read *Lessons of Darkness* and *Wittgenstein Tractatus*'s intervention in documentary's representational claims in the context of the history of the tension between the "object lesson" tradition and the works of subversive filmmakers like Jean Comandon and Jean Painlevé, who challenged the presumed objective scientific vision of the "popular illustrated lectures," in the turn of the century France. In straying away from documentary films' usually taken-for-granted discursive and structural unity, the works of the filmmakers discussed in this chapter go against the epistemological tradition that approaches documentary sound-image as "object lessons." Instead, they playfully return to fragments to dissemble their logic. It is true that filmmakers like Herzog, Forgács, Comandon, and Painlevé are highly unique in their individual approaches to documentary, choice of subject matters, and assemblistic or formal strategies (not to mention the gap between the time periods and cultures that they lived in). Their common non-representational approach, however, inspired by the aphoristic or parabolic philosophy tradition, establishes a link between them; therefore, situating their works within a genealogy of "lesson films" might help us illuminate some of the ways they enter into dialogue with each other. From within such a framework,

works like *Lessons of Darkness* and *Wittgenstein Tractatus* appear to offer lessons of a different kind: parables, aphorisms, or allegorical audio-visual propositions that seek to establish the meaning of what they show and make audible in documentary film's resistance to objectively represent the world.

CHAPTER 3 "THE SONIC SUMMONS: MEDITATIONS ON NATURE IN THE MULTI-PART DOCUMENTARIES OF ALEKSANDR SOKUROV AND ABBAS KIAROSTAMI"

Reality is, in the final analysis, nothing more than cinema in nature.

Pier Paolo Pasolini

Over the last two decades, documentary has benefited to a significant extent from the offerings that digital technologies laid at the altar of cinema and post-cinematic media. While digital culture might have gradually moved documentary away from analog film's much discussed indexical relationship with the real, it has also increased the popularity and cultural relevance of non-fiction media forms. The emergence of new amateur and professional technological devices, interfaces, and platforms made documentary filmmaking more accessible, vernacular, and center stage amongst mainstream media practices by granting it further mobility, ubiquity, and connectivity. Conversely, despite all the interest and energy invested in fulfilling digital documentary's new promises, such as enabling user participation, database and feedback integration, expanded means of archiving and transmission, or broader forms of inter-medial and re-mixable storytelling, some of the most compelling and formally challenging works have been produced by directors like Abbas Kiarostami, Aleksandr Sokurov, Johan van der Keuken, and Raúl Ruiz, who seem to have carried their persistent interest in a time and process-oriented cinema into the realm of the digital. Inverting audience expectations, the works of these filmmakers seek to channel digital documentary's energies elsewhere, precisely in a particular coupling / reworking of the aesthetic strategies of analog long-take cinema with abstract meditations on nature through video and digital technologies.

The framing of nature through static camera shots, meditative long takes, and minimally edited image tracks find its most formal display in Kiarostami's *Five: Dedicated to Ozu*, which is composed of five handheld single-take shots, extended over seventy-four minutes with chapter breaks, and to a certain extent, the third installment of Sokurov's five-part mini-series *Confession: From the Commander's Diary*, a fifty two-minute abstract contemplation about the harsh life of Russian sailors serving around the Arctic Circle[22]. One also finds long-take digital meditations on nature marking key moments in Kiarostami's *ABC Africa*, Dutch filmmaker Johan van der Keuken's *The Long Journey*, and in the first segment of Raúl Ruiz's seven-part mini-series *Cofralandes*. Apart from their use of long-take cinematography in nature sequences (almost exclusively in the case of Kiarostami, frequently in Sokurov and occasionally in van der Keuken and Ruiz), what allows a certain clustering among such stylistically and geographically diverse works is their foregrounding of highly structured and assemblistic soundtracks, composed of dense, layered, and amplified sounds. Interestingly, the assemblistic soundtracks and digitally enhanced sound composition / re-mastering of these documentaries make the films operate in a subtle yet currently highly relevant post-human ethical register, which goes against the often taken-for-granted humanism of analog long take cinema.

In both the fifth segment of *Five*, which captures the nightly vision of a pond along the Caspian Sea, barely discernable through the occasional reflection of moonlight,

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[22] Sokurov's film is shot on video, yet features a digitally re-mastered soundtrack in its DVD version, which has a significant impact on its reception and makes it relevant for an analysis of the aesthetics of digital documentary, as I will argue later.

and the third installment of *Confession*, the image tracks offer little visual or narrative information to the audience. On the other hand, the vibrant and hyper-amplified soundtracks, presenting carefully layered and inflated nature sounds such as the rhythmic ebb and flow of water, howling wind, crickets, frogs, rain, thunderstorm, or blizzard, evoke a sense of hyper or sentient nature. Such uncanny soundtracks are unsettling in their non-visual sensory overload and indifferent ("anempathetic," to use Michel Chion's term) to the viewers' efforts to produce meaning.

Significantly enough, digital documentaries' return to tropes of nature as indifferent to human medi(t)ation through a disenchantment of the visual and amplification of the sonic comes at a critical moment. In the 21st century, various disciplines within the fields of Humanities and Nature Sciences have increasingly turned their attention to revisiting the outdated and no longer supportable binaries established around human-nature relationships, such as the human / non-human, organic / inorganic distinctions. This rethinking is evident in the metaphysical turn taken in recent years in the fields of nature philosophy and phenomenology of perception, and the rekindled interest in the theories of vitalism, panpsychism, hylozoism, speculative materialism, and agential realism, as well as process and object-oriented philosophies. Such theories seek to formulate a philosophy of nature that can respond to contemporary ecological sensibilities and posit nature as an entity capable of acting upon itself without the intervention of human or organic actors. Within this framework, attributing agential status to nature, matter, and non-human assemblages bears urgency in light of the dominant humanistic paradigms' failure to produce an ethics or political action oriented

toward ameliorating the strained ecological balance between humans and nature. "New materialism" is also gaining momentum as an umbrella term, allowing burgeoning media-related fields like media archaeology, which focuses on issues of media sustainability and ethics among its key concerns, to partake in the ongoing ecocritical dialogue among the aforementioned disciplines with a similar post-humanist bent. In this context, analyzing digital documentaries' meditations on nature gives us an opportunity to enter documentary in the contemporary phenomenological debates and explore new formations of subjectivity that have emerged in the recent shift of attention to more sustainable notions of agency and media(ted) citizenship.

The Vibrant Night and the Sonic Summons

In the introductory chapter of his influential book, *The Imperative*, enigmatic philosopher Alphonso Lingis ruminates:

When the night itself is there, there is no longer anything to see. The cries, murmurs, rumbles no longer locate separate beings signaling one another or colliding with one another on observable coordinates. Shouts or distant lights do not mark locations in the night but make the whole of the night vibrant (9).

Lingis's passage on the power of sound in highlighting the sensory aspects of perception presents an evocative application of the two major theoretical moves he makes in his book. In the first of these moves, Lingis takes Kant's theory of ethics, or more specifically, the Kantian account of the categorical imperative, which sums up morality as the commandment of one universal directive (established by reason) over all human actions, and revises it to acknowledge the way perception responds to imperatives, or in

his words, "summons," that come from outside human agency, from the siren-like forces of nature. His second important move lies in a rejection of all forms of holism in phenomenological description and proposing, as an alternative, to describe things, spaces, and elements in nature separately, putting in relief or embossing their sensual qualities. It is within this framework that the night becomes a crucial setting; it allows the philosopher to surrender himself to the command of the universe by closing his eyes to the obvious (the logo-centric call of the visual field) and shifting his attention to the distinct elements of nature such as the cries, murmurs, and rumbles of the night. Interestingly, a sensual, vibrant night scene seems to extend an equally commanding call to the Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, who diverts his attention to the nighttime vision of a pond along the shore of the Caspian Sea in the last segment of *Five*.

The back cover of the film's DVD summarizes the segment (which Kiarostami defines as the *episode* "Moon and Swamp" in the extras, although the segments are not titled within the film) in the following words: "A pond. Nighttime. Frogs. A chorus of sounds. Then, a storm, and finally, dawn." This elliptical and fragmented description of the Caspian night, featured in a work that is itself an assemblage of the depictions of five elliptical scenes from nature loosely connected through the theme of water, inevitably brings to mind an affinity between the approaches of Lingis and Kiarostami. More specifically, Lingis and Kiarostami seem to be staging similar interventions to the representational traditions of their fields, using meditations on a vibrant night as an entry point to undo phenomenology and documentary's holistic and logo-centric depictions of nature.

It is important to note that by the term "representational" I am referring to the human-consciousness-centered theoretical framework that has been critiqued by scholars like Nigel Thrift and Karen Barad in their recent writings. Thrift and Barad argue that a greater part of our contemporary history of thought has been defined by *representational thinking*, which is the type of thinking that draws an agential distinction between humans and non-human matter in explaining human-nature relations, mostly indebted to the anthropocentric traditions of Kantian rationalism and Humean models of empiricism. Proposing to move away from human-consciousness based approaches to politics, affect, and nature towards revitalized seventeenth-century notions of agency and selfhood, Thrift underscores the necessity of articulating alternative, *non-representational* models of subjectivity in the contemporary age of warfare, imperialism, capitalism, and global warming. What he finds compelling in the seventeenth-century notions of agency is a formulation of subjectivity and human action based on *apathy*, or more specifically, "a passivity that is demanding, that is called forth by another" (vii). Here, the idea of human action put into motion by the *calling forth by another* resonates with Lingis's invocation of the cosmic *summons,* referring to a commanding call or ethical imperative extended by nature. In directly addressing the topic of nature, Thrift indicates that his work is set out:

> To escape the traps of representational thinking of the kind that wants, for example, to understand nature as simply a project of cultural inscription (as in many writings on 'landscape') in favor of the kind of thinking that understands nature as a complex virtuality (57).

Although Thrift does not elaborate on what he means by the term virtuality, one can argue that it suggests, in this context, the vast field of emergence nature provides for human and non-human action.

Barad similarly talks about a *representationalist trap* in liberal social theories and theories of scientific knowledge, which put the epistemological emphasis on a correspondence between social or scientific descriptions of phenomena and reality, based on the assumption that the world is divided into representing subjects and passive matter awaiting representation (803). While acknowledging the more widely recognized legacy of the Cartesian subject-object divide, Barad traces the emergence of the dichotomy between representations and the represented (as well as the related problem of realism in philosophy) back to an earlier formulation, namely Democritus's atomic theory, and proposes, in its place, a posthumanist framework that "calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of 'human' and 'nonhuman,' examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized" (808). Barad's "agential realism" and Thrift's non-representational theory are, of course, only two of the increasing number of alternative frameworks, which point to significant shifts in our contemporary understanding of human-nature relationships.

By reading Lingis, Thrift, and Barad together, I do not wish to suggest that these three scholars are doing identical forms of theoretical work, considering the fact that they come from distinct disciplinary backgrounds and propose methodologies that undermine each other's key arguments at times; however, their shared critical stance against representationalism as well as highlighting of nature as a dynamic field of action are

relevant for contextualizing the posthumanist ethical undertones of long take nature sequences in digital documentaries. Additionally, Lingis, Thrift, and Barad all partake in the same project of expanding the question of agency beyond the confines of human intentionality, which have bearings on issues like documentary subjectivity. This is especially the case in the digital era, in which the distribution of affect and memory over diverse networks and technological devices has destabilized the status of the human observer (the documentary gaze) as the sole agent behind mediality.

Although the viewer is presented with a single-take sequence in the fifth segment of *Five*, both the image and soundtracks are, in fact, assemblistic or heavily edited. Information about the film in various sources, including "the making of" documentary in the extra features of the DVD featuring Kiarostami's commentary, indicate that the twenty-eight minute pond sequence is constructed from around twenty takes filmed over several months and superimposed onto each other with invisible cuts. Kiarostami explains that the filming required detailed scheduling, with the film crew travelling four hundred kilometers every month to capture the reflection of the full moon over the pond and seeking the best conditions for the interplay between the moon and the clouds to exist. The conditions were not always favorable; reportedly, there were only two days of full moon each month and two hours, during which the reflection could be observed most clearly, each day. These constraints and the unforeseeable changes in weather, which prevented filming on some of the already scarcely available days, limited the opportunities for the film crew to easily come up with desired footage for the final version.

Similarly, the soundtrack of the sequence is also carefully crafted, juxtaposing amplified diegetic sounds from different takes during a four-month mixing process. Despite appearances, there is no necessary overlap between image and sound based on analog long take cinema's common aspirations for realistic representation. Rather, the audience is presented with intertwining visual and sonic temporalities created by the superimpositions. What gives the semblance of an uninterrupted duration, in the folding of the sound assemblage over the visual assemblage here, is precisely fragmentation and the layering of multi-temporal fragments to reveal or establish audiovisual patterns of a Caspian night abstracted from its various takes.

Duration in Digital Aesthetics

Digital filmmaking helps a lot with the kind of cinema that is more about performance and related to hidden patterns.

Abbas Kiarostami, on *Five*

Five's foregrounding of audiovisual patterns through layered temporalities, rather than continuity in duration, is significant with regard to the fact that it disrupts a few common conceptions regarding the function and ontological status of long takes in analog cinema. Among the most persistent of these conceptions is the assumption that long take cinematography is essentially oriented towards aesthetic realism or preserving events in their physical unity, established early on by French film theorist André Bazin's interpretation of long takes in Italian neo-realist cinema and French poetic realism as establishing temporal and spatial verisimilitude (in his widely cited study on the evolution of the language of cinema between the 1920s and 1950s). As Benjamin

Halligan states, "The long take was, for French film theorist André Bazin, a way of presenting a segment of life, of laying life bare before the camera" ("The Long Take"). The artistic endorsement of long takes by canonized directors like Andrei Tarkovsky and Ingmar Bergman after the 50s, and their coupling of the style with increased shot lengths, metaphysical themes, and contemplative dialogues, helped reinforce this view. In a certain sense, it is mostly through the enduring influence of Tarkovsky and Bergman's artful elevation of the style (in the context of an equally anti-Hollywood and anti-Soviet montage cinematic approach) that long takes gained a privileged status in shaping a significant number of non-commercial neo-realist world cinemas over the past couple of decades. These highly stylized cinemas, which are currently at the centre of "slow cinema[23] versus fast films" debates, further made the technique synonymous with a particular formulation of time-oriented filmmaking: one that associates a Bergsonian model of duration, which pictures time and consciousness in a continuous and uninterrupted flow, with heightened realism. In an interview from 1969, Tarkovsky explained his understanding of how analog long-take cinema was ontologically tied with realism:

> The specific character of cinema consists in pinning down time. Cinema operates with time that has been seized, like a unit of aesthetic measure, which can be repeated indefinitely. […] The more realistic the image, the nearer it is to life, the more time becomes authentic – meaning, not fabricated, not recreated… of course it is fabricated and recreated, but it approaches reality to such a point that it merges with it (Gianvito 19).

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[23] Also referred to as "contemporary contemplative cinema" by Harry Turtle and "austere minimalist cinema" by Jonathan Romney.

In this formulation, what allowed the time to *become authentic* or the image to get *nearer to life* was reality assumed to have been captured in its uninterrupted, real-time flow by means of long takes, as opposed to the way Eisensteinian montage fractured it through cuts and dialectical editing.

Of course, camera in Tarkovsky was never meant to be unobtrusive; it did not necessarily seek to capture *life as it is,* the way observational style documentary filmmaking did through similar techniques (the long take was initially introduced by documentary filmmakers as a fly-in-the-wall observational device; one can think of Bazin's crediting of Robert Flaherty for the birth of aesthetic realism in this context). Tarkovsky's camera was deliberate and probing, while the discontinuous, assemblistic use of sound in his films went against the type of authentic realism suggested in the continuity of their imagery. Nonetheless, Tarkovsky's writings and stylistic approach, at least at the level of cinematography and the editing of the image track, pointed towards an understanding of duration based on continuity, which has come to be commonly associated with Bergsonian temporality in the field of film studies (especially following Gilles Deleuze's Bergsonian reading of Tarkovsky's work in *The Time-Image*).

Although the Soviet director's idea that cinema can seize and "pin down" time in units goes against Henri Bergson's anti-mechanistic thought system, his filmmaking can, indeed, be said to follow a Bergsonian streak in its oppositional stance against fragmenting time through excessive editing.[24] Duration in Tarkovsky, as well as in the

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[24] This connection is likely to be coincidental, since scholars like Donato Totaro suggests that there is no evidence indicating that Tarkovsky read Bergson first hand, despite the obvious similarity in thinking between the two figures ("Art for All").

works of numerous contemporary "slow cinema" directors influenced by his work, is often (visually) projected as the continuous, unfragmented, intuitive time of the body. In this context, the layered visual and sonic temporality of the pond sequence in Kiarostami's *Five* goes against the dominant framework of Bergsonian duration in analog long-take cinema, while also refusing to conform to Eisensteinian montage or contemporary Hollywood style *intensified continuity*.

I would contend that duration in *Five* is assemblistic rather than unedited and continuous or montage-like. The uninterrupted temporal flow that the viewer is presented with while watching the segments is carefully concocted through serializing and reassembling time through superimpositions. The temporality evoked by the layering of audiovisual impressions from multiple Caspian nights in order to create a single, seemingly seamless nighttime sequence is more Bachelardian in its compositional logic than it is Bergsonian, if one seeks a pre-existing theoretical framework for the model. Kiarostami focuses on the rhythms, textures, and patterns of documentary reality rather than continuity. In his provocative treatise on duration, Gaston Bachelard critiques Bergson for setting continuity as an absolute term in defining the term, since the latter philosopher arrives at this formulation by mapping the inner workings (or what he observes as the incessant stream of activity) of the psyche and the body onto the perception and fabric of time. More specifically, Bachelard finds it problematic that Bergson explains duration by recourse to the field of psychology and its human-consciousness centered view on nature -- a view that imagines life, matter, and thought unfolding in a linear temporal progression, parallel to the linear activities of the brain and

the body. Within this framework, duration is experienced and intuitively grasped as composed of a uniform rhythm without any pauses, rests, gaps, repetitions or superimpositions. The resulting formula of continuity is inevitably deceptive since it is only through a circular logic that the irregularities, breaks, or intervals in the vast extension of matter outside the human body get ironed out and represented as part of a unified, seamless reality. In a passage meditating on the seeming discontinuity of sounds, objects, and images in nature, Bergson declares the division of matter into independent bodies with clear boundaries (and consequently, the discontinuities in duration) as artificial and states:

> There are intervals of silence, between sounds, for the sense of hearing is not always occupied; between odors, between tastes, there are gaps, as though the senses of smell and taste only functioned accidentally: as soon as we open our eyes, on the contrary, the whole field of vision takes on color; and since solids are necessarily in contact with each other, our touch must follow the surface or edges of the objects without ever encountering a true interruption. How do we parcel out the continuity of material extensity […] No doubt the aspect of this continuity changes from moment to moment; but why do we not purely and simply realize that the whole has changed, as with the turning of a kaleidoscope (259-260).

What the passage conveys is the priority, in Bergsonian thought, of human perception over discontinuous pre-cognitive matter and the (kaleidoscopic yet) unified whole over independent parts. It is this conviction that opens his work to criticisms regarding its anthropocentric and holistic phenomenological approach. Bachelard rejects the Bergsonian notion of continuity on similar ethical grounds and sees in it a re-working of the Cartesian subject-object divide. Suggesting that Bergson's world consists of a strict division between active subjects and passive objects, he argues that this is a world in

which objects are ultimately knowable by subjects, without having any agency or reality

of their own:

> In this way is the unending dialogue of mind and things prepared, and the
> continuous fabric woven that lets us feel substance within us, at the level of our
> innermost intuition, despite the contradictions of external experience. When I do
> not recognize reality it is because I am absorbed by memories that reality itself
> has imprinted in me, because I have returned to myself. For Bergson, there is no
> wavering, no interplay, no interruption in the alternative we have between
> knowledge of our innermost self and of the external world. I act or I think; I am a
> thing or a philosopher. And through this very contradiction, I am continuous (25-
> 26).

What Bachelard proposes, instead of this human consciousness-based model, is shifting

the attention from psychology to the realm of nature sciences, such as botany and

quantum physics, and thinking of temporality in relative terms according to their finds.

His alternative to the human-consciousness and continuity-based theory of duration is a

theory of *repose*, one that takes into account inactivity and rest, absences as well as

presence, and individual instances as well as flow, following observations of diverse

temporal phenomena in nature. The choice of the word repose and attention to inactivity

is interesting here, as it brings to mind Thrift's invocation of apathy (in his call for

returning to seventeenth-century models of subjectivity based of passivity or inaction).

Bachelard further suggests that discontinuity, repetition, and rest, as well as temporal

superimpositions and rhythms, are integral to thinking about matter and duration beyond

the confines of human interiority. That is why, in his formulation, duration lends itself

better to an analysis of rhythms (rhythmanalysis) and patterns instead of uninterrupted

flow.

Bachelard borrows the term rhythmanalysis from the Brazilian philosopher Pinheiro dos Santos, who suggests that non-human matter operates through vibrations on the molecular and quantum levels, and that these vibrations constitute their abstract movement, which might be insensible to and not intuitively knowable to humans. Thinking about the vibrations and temporality of matter in terms of rhythms through the Bachelardian return to the quantum gives philosophy a "sonic inflection, becoming infected by musical metaphors in an attempt to approach something that eludes it" (Goodman 85). As Henri Lefebvre, who also takes up the term rhythmanalysis, explains:

> [The rhythmanalyst] will listen to the world, and above all to what are disdainfully called noises, which are said without meaning, and to murmurs, full of meaning – and finally he will listen to silences. […] For him nothing is immobile. He hears the wind, the rain, storms; but if he considers a stone, a wall, a trunk, he understands their slowness, their interminable rhythm. This object is not inert; time is not set aside for the subject. […] The sensible? It is neither the apparent, nor the phenomenal, but the present (19-21).

The striking similarity of Lefebvre's language with that of Lingis in interpreting Bachelardian modes of temporal analysis (his call for listening to murmurs, silences, the wind, etc. in order to understand matter) points to the ethical dimension inscribed into the topic of duration, which is often ignored in the field of film and media analysis, which tends to take Bergsonian duration as a given. Conversely, Kiarostami's sound and image editing in *Five* sets duration as a relative, nature/object-oriented (instead of subject-oriented) term, deflating assumptions about continuity and giving the impression of a rhythmanalytical exercise. His long-take night is a rhythmic assemblage, which takes into account the temporal patterns, superimpositions, and cadences that might be observable among various nights on the Caspian shore, without privileging the linear

logic of human perception. In the making-of documentary of the film, the director comments: "I think we should extract the values that are hidden in objects and expose them, by looking at objects, plants, animals, and humans, everything. In my opinion *Five* is the result of this way of looking at things." By the values hidden in objects, what Kiarostami hints at is the audiovisual patterns that crystallize in the encounter between objects (understood as plants, animals, humans and inorganic matter) and cinema, and consequently filmic technology, especially in the digital age. Digital technology's ability to reveal hidden patterns is an idea that he repeats in various interviews regarding his work using the medium; therefore, the act of *looking at things,* suggested in the statement, belongs to cameras and recording technology as well as Kiarostami himself: the aesthetics of the digital is an aesthetics of objects looking at and listening to objects.

In his brief yet insightful commentary on the use of time-lapse technology for the last segment of the film, Kiarostami downplays the agency of the filmmaker further and underscores the diminished role of the observer in digital meditations on nature. Disclosing that the long-take nighttime pond sequence involves time-lapse cinematography as well as superimposed imagery, he points not only to the no-longer-required presence of the filmmaker during filming in digital technology (as he sets the camera up and leaves the scene, while the sound is recorded separately) but also to the relativity of human-consciousness based time. The time-lapse technology used in acquiring the long take shots interrupts the duration of the image, giving it a relative continuity, which is based on machinic rhythms rather than human-based ones. Consequently, the effect of slowness achieved through the process points to a temporal

rhythm that is interminable: slowness becomes an affectively charged, virtual mode of reality established by an assemblage of lapsed and superimposed temporalities rather than an effect of uninterrupted linear flow of time. The question in the editing process, then, turns into one of understanding the inter-relations among the distinct materialities of image, sound, and profilmic reality: the patterns and rhythms that emerge in their interaction, facilitated yet not fully determined by the filmmaker. "How can I explain this role of having no role?" asks Kiarostami self-effacingly in his commentary, speculating:

> Maybe this whole symphony of silence, and then the duet, the trio, and the improvisation of the frogs, or toads, is an interaction of both observation and non-observation, presence and absence. […] Really, in my opinion, if we imagine life without this parameter [chance], we have lost some of our sense of realism.

Although it can be argued that chance also factors as an important element in analog long take cinema, with directors like Tarkovsky valuing the discontinuities and false continuities within and between takes, most analog as well as digital documentaries do not foreground nature and filmic technology as agents, which independently interact with each other through chance encounters, while remaining indifferent to human meditation or presence in the process. Histories of documentary media also rarely mention the significance of the element of chance or non-human agency for different schools of realism when they deal with the topic. Due to lack of scholarship regarding materialist approaches in documentary, implications of Kiarostami's digital long take realism, which is object-oriented and more posthumanist than humanist, unlike most of its analog

counterparts, get lost in the vacuum. By ignoring of the question of agency posed by various incarnations of long take cinema and post-cinematic media, documentary scholars waste the opportunity to trace the emergence of a posthuman turn in documentary realism, made more pronounced in the digital era.

Of course, in a strange, somewhat paradoxical sense, there's something very postmodern about the subtly post-humanist, object-oriented realism behind Kiarostami's remarkable collage of superimposed imagery and sounds, as if it is both a pastiche and an appeal to the sonic singularity of cyclical nature-time that folds the past, present, and future onto each other. The paradox, here, lies in the fact that postmodern aesthetics itself suggests artificiality and cultural inscription, drawing attention to the deliberate, the unnatural, and the decontextualized, whereas the "natural sounds" that are used in the sound track have lives and sited, locative realities of their own. As masterful a composer as he might be, Kiarostami can't control or produce the sounds of the Caspian night; rather, he can celebrate them and act as a temporary conductor of an orchestra of sound or a diligent curator, in the manner of environmental artists who sculpt nature in order for the "real art," that of decay, transformation or erosion, to flourish. On the other hand, one can also argue that what Kiarostami strives to establish through this collage might precisely be a new reality, re-assembling and amplifying diegetic sounds in order to evoke a virtual, previously non-existing audiovisual space, in which natural sounds are heard and juxtaposed in ways that would not have been possible without the intervention of digital technology. The logic behind this latter argument can be traced back to the ideas that led to the ambient music movement in the 80s, inspired by the technological

developments in recording. In his chronicle of the birth of ambient music, a compositional style that he introduced in an eponymous 1978 album, Brian Eno mentions two factors that paved the way for the new movement to come into existence: "the development of the texture of sound itself as a focus for compositional attention [in the 70s], and the ability to create with electronics virtual acoustic spaces (acoustic spaces that don't exist in nature)" (95). Immersion, he suggests, was the point; ambient music aimed at creating carefully textured acoustic environments to be lost in. The chorus of sounds in the acoustic nighttime pond sequence in *Five* can similarly be interpreted as emanating from or resonating in a virtual space, with its layered, multi-temporal assemblage no longer locating a specific place in time. Where else might superimposed diegetic sounds be encountered if not in a virtual, affective dimension? In their arrhythmic crescendos and decrescendos, cries and murmurs, or soars and dips, the sounds suggest that they belong to no one and not to the image, while the image itself vaguely marks their source location by projecting a kaleidoscopic reflection of it, stitching together impressions of the pond captured in different times.

Acoustics of a Perpetual Night: The Caspian, the Arctic, and the Anempathetic

Differently from Kiarostami's five-part installation film, Sokurov's *Confession* features analog video (shot on Betacam SP as in the case of most Sokurov documentaries) yet can also be read within the parameters of a digital audio aesthetics in that it takes on a different life when viewed with its alternative soundtrack, which consists of stereo sound re-mastered in Dolby Digital 2.0 for its DVD release. In *Confession*, Sokurov exploits the low visual quality of analog video intentionally to

create a bleak and prosaic vision of military life around the Arctic Circle, the image of which becomes even further removed from any sensual qualities when the digital re-mastering process amplifies the soundtrack, making the wall of already amplified ambient sound surrounding the bland images more distinct and vibrant. As William Brian Whittington argues, the Dolby digital format foregrounds sound quality and design, so there is a double amplification of sound at stake in the film's DVD version. Here, I take the documentary's DVD version not as a mere diversion from or supplement to the original but as an independent text on its own, following Mark Kerins's call for considering the proliferation of different versions of the same movie in the DVD era as an integral feature of digital culture, requiring media scholars' attention to the differences between theatrical and home mixes in talking about soundtracks. In the context of proliferation, Sokurov's films constitute rich texts for analysis in general as they translate to DVD based digital mixes exceptionally well with their muted imagery, minimal dialogue, and ample use of ambient sounds. More so than Kiarostami, Sokurov is known for his techniques of image and sound manipulation, especially optical distortions, in contrast with the slow, minimally edited look of his cinema. Additionally, Sokurov is also relevant for digital cinema in relation to his later experimentations with digital single-take films like *Russian Ark*, and Dolby digital sequences in video docudramas like *Taurus*. Toru Soma indicates that immediately after *Confession*, Sokurov and his sound director / long time collaborator Sergey Moshkov started experimenting with shooting Dolby Digital, which resulted in the peasants (khodoki) sequence of the ensuing film *Taurus* ("How the Ark"). Although the sequence was cut from the final version of the

film, it was nevertheless "a blueprint of the aesthetic achievement in Sokurov's next film, *Russian Ark* (2002)." In this sense, *Confession* is a transitional film, preceding, and, in a certain sense, pre-mediating the arrival of a digital aesthetics in Sokurov's work.

In the two films, *Five* and *Confession*, one a five-part installation piece later turned into a single documentary and the other an episode of a five-part mini-series made for television (more specifically, Russia's Kultura Channel), the image tracks offer minimal sensory appeal, with visible details eclipsed by stretches of darkness. Although a nighttime scene obscuring the image and privileging the soundtrack, such as the one in *Five*, is not central to *Confession,* the entire third episode of the documentary mini-series can be said to take place in the shadow of a seemingly perpetual Arctic night with regard to the fact that the monochromatic looking daytime scenes are filmed at military outposts, which are exposed to only ten minutes of sunlight per day. Further, the episode concludes with a desaturated nighttime sequence, in which sailors are shown pulling a small boat carrying the bosun and a seaman to the naval ship under a heavy snowstorm right before dawn. The human figures appear like silhouettes in the scene, made indistinct behind a thick veil of snow and fog and dimmed imagery. The commands and shouts of the sailors reverberate on the deck but are heavily cloaked by the sounds of the wind, the raging sea beating the ship's hull, clanks of metal, echoes, and non-diegetic classical music. Following the image of a young man, smoking by himself and lulled by the cradling motion of the battleship to hallucinatory dreams (which Sokurov simulates by superimposing on the dark, stormy waters the ghostly image of the sailor swimming in the sea), the voiceover narrates:

The sea was big. The Commander smiled, remembering this phrase of Chekhov's. Towards the evening, the bosun and a seaman returned to the ship. They had taken medical officers to the shore. All the crew was on board. We will stay the night here anchored by the shore, till the storm is over and in the morning, God willing, we will move on, wrote the Commander. He added a full stop and went to bed.

Here, the voiceover, representing the third-person narrative of the battleship's unnamed commander (played by the only actor in the film, Sergei Bakai), whom Sokurov introduces as a fictional character to frame the sailors' experiences of isolation and mental destitution in the documentary, underscores the sense of existential solitude common to most Sokurov films. The amplified ambient sounds accompanying the voiceover accentuate the powerlessness of the documentary's subjects against the long, turbulent night of the Barents Sea and nature's indifference to their desperate search for purpose. In both of the night scenes in *Five* and *Confession*, the hyper-amplified, yet anempathetic soundtracks project a view of nature, fundamentally indifferent to the human condition; yet in *Confession*, this indifference or lack of empathy takes on an almost cruel face.

In *Audio-Vision*, Michel Chion defines anempathetic sound as "sound – usually diegetic music – that seems to exhibit conspicuous indifference to what is going on the in the film's plot" (221). The sound of the running water in the shower scene of Hitchcock's *Psycho,* which continues uninterrupted throughout and after the brutal murder of one of the film's main characters, Marion, presents a paradigmatic example of this type of sound, as it exhibits an unsettling indifference to the violence that takes place. Although Chion does not discuss the application of the term to documentary film and its assemblage of diegetic yet highly structured and layered soundtracks, his elaboration of

anempathetic sound as creating an *effect of cosmic indifference*, "not of freezing emotion but rather of intensifying it, by inscribing it on a cosmic background" (8), provides an ideal framework for explaining the function of assemblistic ambient soundtracks in the works of experimental filmmakers like Kiarostami and Sokurov.

On a philosophical level, there is much more to the idea of cosmic indifference than what Chion's original formulation discloses, especially in terms of its broader implications on phenomenology and affect in film. In terms of affect, for example, it is interesting that anempathetic sound is "indifferent," as Chion describes it. Indifference usually suggests an entirely neutral stance. However, in humans, there is no such thing as absolute neutrality; as Heidegger would argue, all our perceptions are filtered through moods ("Stimmung," in Heideggerian terms). In this sense, anempathetic sound's blocking of emotions seems intentional in that its very refusal to participate in the evocation of mood has a sort of sinister air, a cruelty. Such a reading is representative Sokurov's general view on nature running across both his fiction and nonfiction films, often featuring anempathetic soundtracks. As the director suggests:

> This is a moral issue: landscape as a witness of death, landscape as an absolute category. In itself, it carries an artistic image or idea. Not every human face contains some artistic essence, but every landscape does. Each one is the indifferent countenance of nature looking at human beings, some lofty art that doesn't care whether humanity exists or not ("Plane Songs").

Conversely, one could also think of nature's indifference to human agency via sound in film as benevolence, in the sense that anempathetic sounds give us something else. They penetrate us and move through our bodies, inducing precognitive affect rather than

conscious thoughts or emotions. In any case, anempathetic sound is, itself, a sort of sensual, sentient thing if it is thought of in terms of intentionality[25].

In both *Five* and *Confession,* the subjects behind and in front of the camera seem absorbed or swallowed by the acoustic, super-sentient matter. The highly structured soundtracks evoke a particular notion of nature as unwieldy, exorbitant, self-contained, and indifferent to the human condition, in tandem with the formal and technological abstraction of the image. To reiterate some of the audiovisual details I mentioned earlier, the image of the pond in *Five* is almost completely veiled by the night, barely discernable through the occasional reflection of moonlight, and in *Confession*, one sees indistinct figures of sailors blurred through snow, nightly shadows, and constant fog throughout the film. On the other hand, the soundtracks presenting carefully layered and inflated nature sounds create an ambi-diegetic wall of sound, suggesting nature's indifference to human intervention or agency[26]. There is notably a similar nighttime nature scene in Kiarostami's first digital documentary *ABC Africa*, which features a seven-minute black screen sequence filmed during a thunderstorm and government-enforced power outage in Uganda, and makes an inter-textual reference to the penultimate scene of the director's internationally acclaimed fiction film *Taste of Cherry*. Before fading out to self-reflexive footage of cherry blossom trees and Kiarostami's film crew at work, *Taste of Cherry* ends with the image of the protagonist, Badii, who is on a quest to kill himself by taking

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[25] I thank Carole Piechota for encouraging me to think about the question of intentionality in relation to anempathetic sound and her invaluable comments on the cruelty and benevolence of sound, which helped formulate some of the thoughts here.

[26] I am using the phrase "wall of sound" in reference to the music production and recording technique developed by Phil Spector in the 60s, and its introduction of dense, layered, and reverberant sound in the pop and rock scene.

sleeping pills, lying in a grave that he dug for himself on a hill as a thunderstorm slowly approaches and turns the screen pitch black. Except for instantaneous flashes of lightning illuminating the screen sporadically, the viewer is left to share Badii's eclipsed sight during the ensuing blackout, accompanied by ambient sounds of rain, thunderstorm, lightning, wild animals, and wind. In the manner of life imitating art, Kiarostami stumbles upon a similar scene in Uganda, while filming *ABC Africa*. Towards the end of the documentary, he lets the camera run during a nighttime thunderstorm, filming from a window what seems to be the impenetrable dark reserve of the night, which is occasionally breached by lightning that reveals a few trees outside and underscores the life of voiceless destitution the power outages confine the Ugandan people to. This scene, together with the last segment of *Five* and the ending of *Taste of Cherry,* indicate that the independent agency of nature and its indifference towards human tribulations are common themes in Kiarostami's work.

As I pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, one also finds digital meditations on the human-nature relationships marking key moments in the Dutch filmmaker Johan Van der Keuken's *The Long Journey*, during the final river sequence, and in the third segment of Raúl Ruiz's ten-part mini-series *Cofralandes: Chilean Rhapsody*, both featuring carefully constructed soundtracks laid over daytime sequences. The role of human agency is more center-stage in these two essayistic films, not necessarily because the visibility of daytime scenes eclipse the sound tracks but rather, because of the foregrounding of a subject's voice in the essay film tradition. *The Long Journey*, which chronicles Van der Keuken's travels in several continents following the director's

discovery that he has terminal cancer, is a celebratory contemplation on life and, inevitably, impending death. With regard to its content, the digital documentary is equally evocative of video diaries and travelogues as well as city symphony and essay films. After taking the viewer on a globetrotting tour through France, the Netherlands, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Brazil and the US, Van der Keuken's "long journey" concludes with his digital camera pointed towards images of boats and objects indifferently drifting on the cool waters of Holland's river Rio. The images get gradually blurred through the diminishing depth of field as the lens zooms closer and closer in on details and the music in the background leaves its place first to isolated ship whistles and then to absolute, suffocating silence. It can be argued that the director's return to the audiovisual trope of the river's rhythms as a final rest point in the film is done as a tribute or final salutation to the oeuvre of the legendary Dutch filmmaker Joris Ivens, for whom rivers presented a recurring motif, and its influence on the Dutch documentary film tradition. Conversely, the river is also a symbol of life, converted into an enduring metaphor for the inevitability of change in nature through the writings of the pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, and death, which is represented by the River Styx in Greek mythology (Bakker, "A Camera Without"). The silence at the end of the sequence points, then, to the ambiguity or duality of meaning nested in the image of the river. It is a silence that does not put the image at rest, but instead, fixes the viewer's attention on its resistance to provide an answer to the question regarding the fate awaiting the filmmaker. Is it life or death? Although van der Keuken mentions his discovery of a new treatment that might change the course of his illness towards the end of the film, the closing

imagery and sound assemblage deny closure. The transition to all arresting silence as an unappealable statement in the end is poignant and can be interpreted as the director's relinquishing of power and agency to nature, as the source of decision at last. By pointing to an ultimate submission to nature's summons, one could even suggest that the silence framing van der Keuken's gesture becomes musical, "by an effect of resonance" as Robert Bresson once described; silence ends up functioning as "The last syllable of the last word, of the last noise, like a held note" (98).

Ruiz's *Cofralandes*, on the other hand, which is a digital documentary series made for the Chilean television and takes the viewer on a dreamlike journey through the country (or the imaginary Chile of the director) in independent episodes, couples frequent surveying shots (usually ranging between thirty seconds and a minute in length) with assemblages of highly eclectic and disjunctive diegetic and non-diegetic sounds as well as music. In a certain sense, *Cofralandes* showcases the director's signature surrealist aesthetic at its most radical, with the digital technology allowing him to film across the country extensively and capturing dreamlike as well as absurd impressions of the landscape through a skillfully edited, frenzied mix of fictional and non-fictional footage. The first episode of the series, *Chilean Rhapsody* (winner of the Glauber Rocha prize for the Best Latin American film in Montreal), especially provides audiovisual meditations on the Chilean landscape and nature, with and without humans occupying the frame. In a sequence that opens with a quote from the philosopher G. E. Moore, or more specifically, the famous statement that came to be known as *the Moore paradox*, "It's raining but I don't believe so," Ruiz shows an English journalist (Malcolm Coad) approaching a

German artist (Rainer Krause) who draws a sketch of what appears to be the silhouette of a city hidden behind a lush landscape. A minute-long stationary shot of the landscape blocked by Rause's black-and-white sketch, which gets in and out of the frame a few times, follows, as if confirming the two men's comments about how Chile is full of contradictions. What reinforces the sense of contradiction in the image, however, is the sound track, which mixes diegetic sounds from the scenery with absurd sound effects such as a baby crying, a goal announcement from the radio transmission of a soccer match, the siren of an ambulance, and distorted percussive music. This almost radiophonic composition is representative of Ruiz's style of sound editing throughout the series and displays his essayistic imprint on the documentary at the level of sound. Once again, the function of the abstract digital long-take imagery and assemblistic editing of sound is ambiguous in terms of what such a meditative sequence suggests about the relationship between Chilean subjects and nature. Although the essayistic style foregrounds human subjectivity, the specific medley of chaotic sounds laid over the idyllic image seems to suggest an unsettling disconnection between nature and culture. Here, the sound is not necessarily anempathetic, pointing to a vision of nature as indifferent to culture, as it is the case in the other documentary works mentioned; yet, it does create an auditory depth of field, in which digitally layered sounds disturb the image's continuity and suggest that the audiovisual signs of civilization (the buildings behind the lush field and urban noise) appear incongruous, fragmented, and almost nonsensical, when imprinted on the vast and timeless expanse of the Chilean landscape. It is during such brief moments of ambiguity and suspension of final judgment that *The*

Long Holiday and *Cofralandes: Chilean Rhapsody* reveal a similar ethical engagement with films like *Five* and *Confession,* pointing to a destabilization of the status of the subject.

Object-oriented Documentality

In light of the unconventional audiovisual approaches to nature in the aforementioned documentaries, can we talk about a posthumanist, materialist, or object-oriented turn in documentality in the digital era? Undoubtedly, it is difficult to establish a direct connection or dialogue between the recent metaphysical turn in the fields of Humanities and Natural Sciences, and the documentary filmmaking of directors like Kiarostami, Sokurov, van der Keuken, and Ruiz. Despite the fact that these filmmakers are all uncommonly well versed in philosophy and often mention literary as well as philosophical figures in their films or interviews, it would go against the nature of documentary as an audiovisual art form to associate their works or aesthetic with a theoretical or philosophical turn (not to mention that I have not come upon a direct acknowledgement of the contemporary ethical debates revolving around human-nature relationships by any of them). However, the type of ecocritical ethics that lie at the heart of the contemporary nature debates can be traced in the way these filmmakers' video and digital films configure documentary subjectivity in relation to nature, especially in the context of abstract multi-part documentaries like *Five* and *Confession*.

What I would like to propose instead, then, is to think about the ways in which films like *Five* and *Confession* gesture towards an object-oriented, posthumanist documentality, in order to provide an entry point to discussing shifting notions of

subjectivity, ethics, and media citizenship in the digital era, instead of asserting that such an interpretation is the only possible reading for these texts. A self-proclaimed "vital materialist" (inspired by Nietzsche and Spinoza's ethics), Jane Bennett argues that the starting point of ethics and citizenship should be the recognition of human participation in a shared "vital materiality" (14), understood as a type of vibrant biopower and resistance inherent in all matter, human and non-human alike. Similarly, Graham Harman promotes the idea of object-oriented philosophies, for which he sees Alphonso Lingis's work as inspirational, and calls for rejecting human-centered holisms. Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, drawing attention to the agency of non-human actors and assemblages, and Quentin Meillasoux's speculative materialism, arguing that we can imagine a universe of objects-in-themselves without depending on correlationist models that look for a representational relationship between Thought and Being, are also relevant for an articulation of citizenship based on an ecologically-motivated ethics. Despite their differences, what these theorists share in common is a resistance against Kantian idealism, which sets forth the rational agent as the exemplary citizen of the universe, commanding the environment with her faculty of thought alone. They also commonly manifest a non-representational, non-holistic vigor in pursuing detailed phenomenological description. In other words, they share a love for things; *the cries, rumbles, and murmurs of the night* as Lingis would have put it.

Kiarostami's "pond, nighttime, frogs, a chorus of sounds, then, a storm, and finally, dawn" and Sokurov's evocation of the acoustic Arctic take on a new meaning when put into dialogue with these ideas. In his extensive study on evocations of place and

landscape in independent film and video, Scott MacDonald talks about how nature has been so central to the representational and narrative strategies of fiction and documentary film, throughout the history of cinema. However, most of the films he looks at are humanistic in their orientations, using film technology's power in the service of filmmakers or artists' ocular-centric mastery of nature. Conversely, the images and sounds of nature presented in Kiarostami and Sokurov's documentaries point to a different conception of the relationship between the subjects and material reality. It is a relationship in which affect and sound obscure the logo-centric field of vision and "exploiting the hidden patterns of nature," in Kiarostami's words, take the place of representing or capturing reality as it is. The camera as well as the recording and editing devices become equally powerful agents in forging relationships between human and non-human actors. In Kiarostami and Sokurov's *takes*, or perhaps one should say, *long takes* on nature, humans share citizenship with a diverse population of objects in the universe, which cry out, murmur and rumble their summons for those who are willing to listen.

CHAPTER 4 "A DELAY IN ADVANCE: ANTICIPATION AND VIRTUALITY IN *VIDEOGRAMS OF A REVOLUTION*"

> *Now although we may be comfortable with the reality of the formal logic of traditional pictorial representation and, to a lesser degree, the actuality of the dialectical logic governing photographic and cinematic representation, we still cannot seem to get a grip on the virtualities of the paradoxical logic of the videogram, the hologram or digital imagery.*

Paul Virilio, *The Vision Machine*

After a seemingly displaced clip (which shows a wounded young woman from a co-op announcing her solidarity with the youth rebellion in Timisoara, Romania, against the Ceauşescu regime) and ensuing title credits, *Videograms of a Revolution* opens with a dreary, handheld image of what seems at first to be a relatively empty lot between uniform looking residential buildings. The washed out, blue tinted colors and the low resolution picture, as well as the visible time code indicating both the date and time on the bottom right corner of the frame, aesthetically underwhelm the viewer, yet call for an immediate recognition of the imagery in terms of the familiarity of its medium: amateur video. In a dry, academic tone, typical of Farocki films, the voice-over explains that the video is shot by an amateur camera from the window of a student dormitory for the purpose of documenting the march of demonstrators moving to the center of the city on December 20, 1989, which is barely discernable in the background. The viewer is informed that because of the danger involved in filming a popular demonstration under the communist regime, the camera cannot leave its location and move to a better vantage point. Suddenly diverting the attention to the composition (the camera and the framing), the narrator observes, "*The image is divided*," her voice resonating with the same certainty as her previous statements about the cause of the demonstration (the militia and

army opening fire on civilians two days earlier). She continues: "*The wall in the foreground and the action in the background pertain to different temporal frames. The image is unequally divided.*" Although the voice-over does not elaborate further on the various implications of this self-reflexive commentary for the film and how a single frame can accommodate different temporalities simultaneously, the note about the divided image immediately establishes an ambiguous entry point to the more or less chronological timeline of the documentary, which seems (on the surface) to be hinting at the possibility of a real-time reconstruction of a historical event as medially forbidding as the Ceauşescu regime's fall in its entirety, by stitching together amateur found media footage (the logic behind which can also be found in 9/11 films, as I will discuss later).

The image appears divided because the foreground of the image, which is the center of attention and covers 2/3rds of the frame, offers nothing but an empty wall -- a static present, which is archived by the time code superimposed on the image. The time code itself belongs neither to the reality being filmed nor to the foreground since it is not a part of the composition. It only stands for itself, transmitting the presence of an invisible, viral witness behind the camera for whom the time code becomes a (peculiar) mode of self-inscription, marking one's presence in time as time. However, the action in the image lies in the grainy background, in the barely discernible movement of the masses (and perhaps more so in their noise), indicating the occurrence of an event. While an undifferentiated present, such as that of the wall in the foreground, points only to itself, the temporality of the event suggests a trajectory: a beginning and an imagined result or end. Looking at the silhouette of the marching crowds, the viewer is invited to

actively think about what's happening in and beyond the image, which calls for evaluating the cause, the purpose, and the possible outcome of the demonstration -- its past, present, and future. Already, there is a switch between two temporal frames, a kind of de-centering that shifts the focus from the actual to the latent: an imagined reality, which is not fully captured in the image, yet is suggested in the background. But how can we understand the temporality of an imagined, emerging, or not fully present reality?

Mary Ann Doane argues that: "The implicit thesis of the Lumière catalogs and the plethora of actualities produced in the earliest years was the indexical guarantee that anything and everything is filmable" ("Object of Theory" 87). Such a thesis suggests that cinema was conceived as a technology of anticipation even at its birth, pointing to a latent virtuality in early forms of cinema such as actualities. Here, I use the word virtual in accordance with Brian Massumi's formulation, not as a substitute for "artificial" or "simulation" and an antonym for "reality," as the prevailing conceptions of the term often stipulate, but as "the mode of reality implicated in the emergence of new potentials" ("Sensing the Virtual" 16). Massumi himself arrives at this formulation following Deleuze and Guattari's reading of Bergson and suggests that the potential of a situation exceeds its actuality, making the actual and the virtual two sides of the same coin[27]: reality. While the actual is easily accessible through immediate experience, the virtual requires imagination and an anticipating subject, her stretching of perception in the direction of the only-thought ("Parables" 92). However, Massumi ties virtuality and anticipation not only to thought but also to affect, stating that anticipation is the reality of

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[27] The coin metaphor appears in Deleuze and Guattari's writings as well as in Massumi's.

an excess over the actual, since it "in a real and palpable way, extends the actual moment beyond itself, superposing one moment upon the next, in a way that is not just thought but also bodily felt as a *yearning, tending,* or *tropism* [emphasis mine]" ("Parables" 91). This formulation becomes useful when thinking about documentary film, which is often conceived as a field of contestation between the actual (what is filmed) and the virtual (that which resists being captured, yet exists in potential). Considering virtuality as a mode of reality (in other words, recognizing the virtuality in actuality) helps us rethink the limits of filmic experience and of the dual temporalities of modernity that Doane associates with cinematic time in her work ("The Emergence"): contingency (fleeting present) and the archive (the just-have-come-to-pass of the past). Virtuality requires going beyond this duality and taking into account a third temporality, an anticipated future embedded in the present and the past.

In dealing with virtuality in the context of video and digital technologies, however, we are presented with a paradox. On one hand, the proliferation of media technologies seems to expand the field of emergence / potential for documentary reality; in the age of real-time, not only anything and everything is filmable, but also, anything and everything is continuously being filmed and simultaneously transmitted[28] through various surveillance and archival mechanisms. Furthermore, the accessibility of new media provides grounds for commonplace exhibitions of mediality, such as the amateur documentation of random events through various devices, which Richard Grusin calls *anticipatory gestures* (126). In his recent work, Grusin defines such gestures as medial

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[28] This is not to deny the small margin of delay that occurs between real-time recording and transmission under the current technologies.

practices that do not have any specific purpose other than participating in a new type of anticipatory historicity. This new type of historicity reflects the contemporary desires for connectivity and affectivity, which are commonly associated with social media, and the desire to (pre)mediate events, especially those that are traumatic and have a shock value like 9/11, before they happen. Therefore, the contemporary horizon of media seems to be open for stretching the boundaries of the actual towards the virtual -- towards that trope of *thought, yearning, and affect*. What *Videograms of a Revolution* shows, of course, is that the anticipatory gestures that Grusin finds pervasive in post-9/11 media had its beginnings in the age of video, when affordable consumer-type recording devices became available on a large scale even in a communist economy like that of Romania.

On the other hand, the proliferation of media technologies also intensify what Bernard Stiegler calls *the industrialization of memory:* the exteriorization and objectification of memory through technology ("Technics and Time 2" 97). In its intensified form, such industrialization leads not only to a wider distribution of memory and affect across various social media and networks as well as human and non-human actors, but also, negatively, to a *programming* or preconditioning of affect and perception. New interfaces are introduced everyday to record time and regulate the rhythms of life, following the mandates of standardized technological mechanisms instead of subjective experience. This preconditioning of affect becomes especially troubling under the real-time regime of video and digital media, since subjective experience gets further removed from the processes of archival and recall when the simultaneity of an event, its recording, transmission and reception leave no time for

individual reflection on the archived event. According to Stiegler, a *delay* or idiosyncratic, reflexive, and artistic redoubling of the present is the only necessary condition for historicity; and therefore, it is this very condition that real-time technologies largely eliminate through synchronizing mnemonic processes. In other words, "the program" or a highly standardized actual takes precedence over the virtual, putting the new anticipatory history of medial gestures at crisis. In *Videograms of a Revolution*, German directors Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica open this contradictory logic of real-time up for questioning by reconstructing the 1989 Romanian revolution through assembling diverse found-footage from amateur as well as state television's video and film sources that recorded the event.

What makes the film special in its engagement with the modes of historicization pertaining to real-time technologies is the fact that it does this in relation to video instead of digital media, thus pointing to the emergence of real-time based shifts in anticipatory structures and filmic temporality in a much earlier moment than the so-called *digital turn*, which many scholars like to ascribe the shifts to. Further, the documentary highlights these issues through the genre of compilation film, the historical and historicizing genre par excellence. As a compilation, VOR reconstructs two different histories at once: the first pertaining to the Romanian revolution and the second related to documentary media's transition from analog to video and digital technologies. Because of the latter, the film has a historical status itself, drawing attention to the important transitional place of video in understanding the relationship and flux between cinema and networked digital media. In order to explain how the documentary crystallizes the anticipatory and

temporal changes brought about by the transition to real-time technologies, it might be useful to contextualize it in the broader tradition of *compilation films* first.

The Chronetics of a Revolution

Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica's *Videograms of a Revolution*, reconstructing the ten days in which the Ceauşescu Regime in Romania tumbled and fell, and Soviet filmmaker/editor Esfir (Esther) Shub's historical documentary *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty*, depicting the events that led to the Soviet revolution between 1913 and 1917, form an interesting coupling in documentary film history. With regard to their content, the documentaries provide, in remarkable medial detail, historical accounts of two revolutions that bracket what Ray Privett calls "the twentieth century in Eastern Europe," or more specifically, the period marked by the emergence and dissolution of the Soviet Bloc ("The Revolution"). The dramatic executions of two resented yet iconic political leaders with similar names that mark the beginning of the two revolutions (one inaugurating and the other toppling Communism in Eastern Europe) make this bracketing further pronounced. Although Shub's documentary does not extend its chronology to the 1918 execution of Tsar Nikolai II and his family, the knowledge of the ominous fate awaiting the imperial subjects give the footage of the tricentennial celebration of the House of Romanov, which is salvaged from the private "home movies" shot by the Tsar's own court cameraman Alexander Iagelski and featured at the beginning of the film, a foreboding quality that haunts the rest of the archival footage. The images from the Christmas-day execution of Nikolae Ceauşescu and his wife included at the end of VOR

have a similarly haunting quality, establishing a common affective thrust between the documentaries.

In terms of their editorial structure, the two films also provide an interesting coupling, which simultaneously underscores the historical parallelism and continuity suggested in their content and hints at a rupture or break from them. Categorically, both documentaries come from the tradition and long lineage of "compilation films," a documentary genre[29] referring to films that rely primarily on remediating and re-arranging pre-existing materials. My interest in the genre comes from the fact that it is arguably the most established and persistent mode of assembly in documentary film history, much more familiar to historians, critics, and audiences than the assemblistic styles discussed in the first three chapters of the dissertation. The genre also offers a rich platform and an incredibly wide range of films through which one can explore the issues arising from the relationship of the independent parts of a film to the whole in documentary media. Credited by most documentary historians as the first historical compilation film (in feature length format[30]), *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* innovatively pieces together restored newsreels, private home movies, and extra-filmic material such as documents, newspapers, and various items related to the fall of the tsarist

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[29] Here, as well as in the project in general, I use the term "genre" loosely, not to impose a constraining typology that effaces individual films' distinctive features and oppositional discourses but to refer to filmic clusters that, at times, share similar aesthetic, conceptual, or editorial strategies, which might allow us to put them into dialogue. Although I am aware of the limitations of and arguments against genre studies, I do not have a strong conviction against using the term, as long as it is not understood as a reductive label, suggesting an unsustainable unity among distinct films.

[30] The practice of compiling and rearranging pre-existing footage in shorter lengths for exhibition and propaganda purposes as well as in narrative films is much older. Patrik Sjöberg states that "as early as 1898 Francis Doublier made a film on the controversy surrounding the Dreyfuss trial," compiling footage from unrelated events and places (23).

regime in Russia. While less easily recognizable at first glance as a compilation film[31],

Videograms of a Revolution reconstructs the 1989 Romanian revolution also through

compiling pre-existing material, in this case comprising of mostly video-based found-

footage from amateur as well as state television's video and film sources that recorded

the event real-time. However, beyond the surface of their common assemblistic strategy,

the two documentaries offer distinct approaches when it comes to how they historicize

their subject, shaped by the specific temporal logics of the source and end media that

make up their composition.

Distinguishing between the temporal logics or chronetics[32] of source and end

media is revealing (although rarely undertaken in the field) in this context, as two

different types of shifts occur while moving from the parts to the whole (or from the

independent archival footage to the edited film) in compilations. An initial temporal

reframing takes place at the horizontal level, during the contextual alignment of the

source material. Every sound or image fragment presents a self-subsisting document

distinguished by the specific time of its filming (its relative present) as well as its content

and medium, which then gets transformed through the historicizing temporality of the

compilation process. Once the fragment becomes a part of a larger assemblage of

compiled media, its present and past is re-contextualized according to the historical

narrative of the film. To a certain extent, this initial oscillation of the source media

between two temporal realities (which is exemplified in the way the footage of Tsar

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[31] In fact, an inquiry about the film on the Visible Evidence list-serve led to a vigorous discussion in 2009 regarding whether the documentary could be classified as a compilation film at all or not.
[32] In one of the early volumes of *Radical Software*, the popular journal of video art and activism in the 70s, Vic Gioscia suggests chronetics as a term to designate the comprehension of the time laws of any process or technology (7).

Nikolai's private home videos appears timeless and dreamlike in its source media, while it takes on an authoritative quality, indexically arresting a specific moment in the past as an immutable document of history when compiled with newsreels from the same period in Shub's film) mirrors the dialectical movement between the two aforementioned temporalities that define cinema and modernity in Mary Ann Doane's account: the ephemeral present of the *contingent* event and the monumental past of *the archive*.

A second type of (vertical) temporal shift occurs in the process of remediation within compilations (refashioning of one medium by means of another). During this process, the logic of the end medium penetrates the monadic reserve of the remediated material or source medium, disrupts its trajectory, and gives it a recursive temporality. The "present" of the remediated sound-image becomes the crease between two temporalities folding onto each other or a hallucinatory passage, which haunts the present with dreamlike impressions from an indeterminable time frame. Here, my understanding of the temporality of remediation is close to Tim Murray's formulation of the "two-fold" operation of time in the age of digital media. According to Murray, new media present us with "enfolded juxtapositions rather than dialectical oppositions" (29) in their accumulation, transformation, and rendering simultaneous of older forms of media; or in other words, new media make us rethink simultaneity and the co-presence of multiple temporalities within a single work in terms of a *fold* instead of in a dialectical manner. Borrowing Derrida and Deleuze's use of the term fold, in relation to Heidegger's notion of the *zweifalt* -- not a fold-in-two but a fold-of-two, an *entre-deux* --, Murray suggests that what we are talking about in remedial assemblages is a machinic state of time (since

re-presentation implies setting up the machine more so than setting forth the image), which confronts us with the thought of an interval, an in-between as "the recombinant turning of time" (11). In this sense, remediation leads to much more profound, at times paradigmatic, transformations in temporality, not only within mixed-media documentaries or films that rework material from a different medium (as in the case of Péter Forgács's films, which use celluloid-based found footage in compilation videos) but also between films made in different historical periods, since every new medium introduces a previously unforeseen logic of temporality, prompting a radical break from the historicizing potential of earlier works. *Videograms of a Revolution* lays bare the complicated nature of both of these temporal shifts, as it remediates mostly video-based source material in the medium of 16 mm film, while putting the emphasis on the video fragments or "videograms," and uses the assemblistic structure of newsreel-based analog compilations, while suggesting that the real-time temporal logic of video offers a different mode of historicizing from them.

As mentioned earlier, it is hard to locate VOR within the compilation tradition, since its low-resolution video-based imagery does not quite fit comfortably with the voice-of-authority / look-of-history quality of newsreel-based found footage film that is commonly associated with the genre. Additionally, there is also the problem of what to do with the term "compilation film" when it comes to understanding it as an overarching category delineating documentary works assembled from a wide range of media that might or not necessarily involve the use of "film" per se. Based on the source media that the documentary assembles, *Videograms of a Revolution* can be categorized as a *video*

compilation, immediately linking it with the rather short-lived period of video, under-

theorized in terms of its medium specificity due to the lack of a pure formal aesthetics

characterizing the medium (Takahashi) as well as the high degree of intermediality

shared by a great number of the works produced in this era. Conversely, the

documentary itself is transferred from video to 16 mm film for the purposes of theatrical

screening, making it a somewhat hybrid film (rather than a *compilation video,* despite the

title's foregrounding of the medium), further complicating its status. Here, it might also

be relevant to note that if we accept media scholar's claim in the 70s that one of video's

distinctive qualities as a medium was its liveness (recorded and transmitted real-time)[33],

especially as it came to be associated with television news and video art, beginning in the

1960s, then VOR presents an interesting assemblage in this regard too. As a compilation

documentary, it is not live while some of its assembled parts were imbricated in the logic

of live television broadcasting—suggesting that one cannot ascribe a linear temporality,

which is simply nested in the present, to the quality of liveness in relation to its

association with certain media. Live video anticipates a future recall as real-time archival

footage in its potential to enter into an assemblistic relationship with other media

technologies and temporalities, destabilizing the unity of its presumably uninterrupted

"present".

Analyzing a film like VOR poses an interpretive challenge for documentary

media scholarship as little work has been done in the field in providing adequate

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[33] This is an argument that is somewhat outdated according to Thomas Elsaesser, as he states that the arrival or the video recorder, with its ability to store time, eroded the faith in liveness, while also undermining a distinctive feature of television, the "schedule," which suggested that real-time transmission was always a pre-programmed transmission and the disruption of its temporality allowed audiences to break TV networks' monopoly on manipulating time ("The New Film History" 95).

theoretical frameworks for understanding the issues arising from the assemblage of different media in compilation films. This is especially the case for video, digital, and database compilations, despite the genre's unfailing popularity throughout all technological stages of cinema. Jay Leyda's much dated, yet still widely cited study *Films Beget Films* and Patrik Sjöberg's *The World in Pieces* remain the only book-length studies dedicated to the category proper, with film theorists such as William Wees discussing compilations within the context of found-footage or "appropriation films." Although Patrik Sjöberg provides a detailed account of compilation films, he indicates that his aim is to "investigate certain compilatory strategies" (rather than treating compilation film as a consistent genre), which intentionally leaves analysis of inter-media dynamics between compiled media outside his inquiry (26). Conversely, article-length studies on the topic often deal with issues related to representation, indexicality, and fidelity while relegating questions related the use of different media, technics, or temporality to the background.

Accounting for the distinct historicizing potential of a video compilation like *Videograms of a Revolution* as opposed to a classical newsreel-based film like *The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty* requires moving away from representational approaches, shifting the attention from a vision of compilation film / media as a discursive or conceptual unity to issues that spring from different aspects of mediation: media materiality, temporality and affectivity brought about in each technological period by the introduction of new technologies. Such a shift of focus gives us the opportunity to revisit the compilation genre extending from actuality and video to virtuality, or from newsreel based

compilations to network-based media by way of video, in order to map out the moments of discontinuity and transformation in its evolution. Doing so might allow us to create a new framework in which compilation documentary can be understood as a dynamic genre: a site of multiplicity, offering complex and altering modes of historicizing.

A Medial Metamorphosis: From the Cocoon to the Cathode Ray Tube

In *Films Beget Films*, Jay Leyda defines compilation film as a work that "begins on the cutting table, with already existing film shots" (9). His study traces the lineage of compilations from the first examples of theatrical (second-hand) presentation of actualities, to feature length newsreel-based films that were pioneered by Esfir Shub in the late 20s; the television compilations that widely appropriated archival footage in the 50s; and the avant-garde / essayist experimentations, which became the staple of film festivals in the 60s. However, although the book discusses the (mostly positive) impact of the advent of television (a different medium altogether, sharing the same electronic base as video) on the genre, Leyda focuses his attention mainly on the use and re-use of celluloid film without specifying whether the changes in filmic technology, already in effect by the time the book was published, called for any reconfiguration of the compilation film's traditional structure or modes of assembly. In Leyda's formulation, compilation film remains, throughout its first couple of decades and various technological rites of passage, an everlasting love affair between the cutting board and celluloid-based newsreels, while the process of compiling is conceived as a "mysterious process that transformed *mere newsreels* [emphasis mine] into documentaries." This formulation, echoed by several historians that came after Leyda, downplays the high degree of

intermediality that characterized even the early, so-called newsreel-based films and the wide range of materials (text, graphics, music, played/fictional film, home movies, etc.) as well as technologies (print, photography, phonograph, radio, etc,) that they re-mediated. The dismissal of this essential aspect of compilations in Leyda's work is interesting, considering that *Films Beget Films* is contemporaneous with Marshall McLuhan's highly influential book *Understanding Media,* dealing with the interplay and hybrid unions among media, brought upon by the popularization of television. In his iconic study, McLuhan states that the hybridizing or compounding of the different agents of media in the age of television "offers an especially favorable opportunity to notice their structural components and properties" (49); it is this opportunity that Leyda misses by overlooking the diverse structural components and properties of a genre, which epitomizes hybridity / intermediality by compiling different media and source materials in order to make historical claims on the world, in his otherwise meticulously detailed review of compilation films.

Nevertheless, one can find subtle pointers to a more complex formulation of the logic of compilations in *Films Beget Films*. In a memorable statement that reflects his passionate investment in newsreel-based films, Leyda describes the transformation from the source material to the edited film in compilations as a metamorphosis in naturalistic terms, in striking contrast with the engineering-inspired mechanical terminology of the Soviet filmmakers that he had studied under:

The squirming, seemingly formless larvae of Newsreels, after a season on the

cutting table, would suddenly spring into public notice (even demanding proper

reviews) on the gorgeous wings of a respectable term, Documentary (9).

What the metaphor of the butterfly here hints at is an understanding of the compilation

form not as a simple suturing together of audio-visual documents but as remediation,

which in its "re-presentation of material that has already been represented in another

medium" (Hayles 781) brings about a profound transformation in the historical status,

materiality, and temporality of the compiled media. In this sense, Leyda's formulation

comes close to what Gene Youngblood describes a few years later as the *metamorphosis*

of technologies when discussing the way Scott Bartlett's experimental video *OFFON*,

"the first videographic film whose existence was equally the result of cinema and video

disciplines," (318) transformed the medium it remediated by crossbreeding the

technologies of film and television / video (instead of simply producing the effect of

"filmed TV"[34]). Farocki and Ujica's documentary VOR also points to such a (re)medial

metamorphosis in its compilation and remediation of mostly video-based source material

in the medium of 16 mm film, since it problematizes the historicizing potential of video

under the real-time regime of the electronic signal by crossbreeding both technologies.

Compilation Love in the Time of Video

When put into words, everything appears a bit too neat, don't you think?

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[34] Youngblood himself takes the idea from Bartlett, who suggests that metamorphosis of technologies is becoming a kind of aesthetic common denominator in the electronic age, stating that it means, in Bartlett's own words: "Marrying techniques so the techniques don't show up separately from the whole. It's crossbreeding information. That's what a computer does, too. Having several aesthetics force each other into their separate molds and then sort of seeing what happens" (318).

Shūji Terayama, *Video Letter*

If compilation film remains under-theorized in the world of academia and documentary film criticism, the category of video compilation or compilation video remains almost entirely obscure, although the technological coupling of television and video led the genre into new formulations and a renewed popularity, especially after the arrival of the half-inch, reel-to-reel CV Portapak. One of the reasons behind the lack of scholarship in the topic comes from the fact that it is difficult to define video compilation as a distinct period within the compilation tradition since the term immediately raises a few questions as to what basis the definition is built upon. As I mentioned earlier, Leyda's traditional formulation only specifies the necessity of compilations to be based on pre-existing material, which does not include an investigation of the question of source and end media or intermediality. Sjöberg, on the other hand, suggests that the term compilation film can itself only be understood as a compilation of several definitions given to films with similar compilatory strategies: such as "montage of found footage" by William Wees, "collage cinema" by P. Adams Sitney, "assemblage film" by James Peterson, "the essay film" by Vlada Petric, and "collage of material" by Bill Nichols. He adds language specific terms such as the French "film de montage" and the Swedish "klippfilm" (literally cut-film) to this list. From within these frameworks, it becomes difficult to map the different directions the compilation film genre took during the transition to video (and other media) as every film compiled from some sort of pre-existing material gets either pushed under the same big generic category, while non-newsreel-based films are viewed as deviations, or the idea of compilation film as a genre

is rejected altogether in favor of individual interpretations and definitions of the person undertaking the study. This explains the common exclusion from the anthologies of compilations the following forms of films:

[1] Video documentaries and essays that exclusively compile videos (from amateur, professional, or televisual/state archival sources, as in Zsigmond Gábor Papp's nostalgia films compiled from televisual footage, including *Budapest Retro* and *Balaton Retro*[35], as well as from experimental video art or found videos including surveillance tapes and home videos, as in Shūji Terayama and Shuntarō Tanikawa's 1983 compilation *Video Letter*);

[2] Celluloid-based films that compile video-based material (suggesting the term *video compilation,* as in *Videograms of a Revolution*);

[3] Documentaries that use film archives but rework/remediate them in video (hence suggesting the term *compilation video*, as exemplified by the films of Péter Forgács and Gábor Papp's documentaries, which are compiled from the instructional and propaganda films found in communist state and secret police archives, such as *The Life of an Agent*);

[4] Hybrids compiling an intermedial mix of materials including remix documentaries incorporating commercial and copyrighted footage (such as Johan Grimonprez's 1998 video *dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, blending televisual news footage of passenger plane hijackings with clips from science fiction films, newsreels, instructional videos, found footage, commercial electronic and digital imagery, and his own home movies with 70s disco

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[35] These two films are, fittingly, uploaded on youtube in their entirety by the director himself.

themed musical soundtrack), and the British counterpart of remix documentaries -- *scratch videos*.

One can add to this list kinescope compilations as a subgroup predating video, based on the fact that although it is a forerunner to the videotape recorder, kinescope involves the process of filming live television broadcasts from a television monitor (in 16 mm film), therefore remediating real-time based material like video. Emile de Antonio's kinescope compilation *Point of Order*, compiled entirely from the kinescope recordings of the Army-McCarthy Hearings that were broadcasted live on television, makes the connection between kinescope and video clear since it points to an early discovery of real-time image and sound's archival value. Further, it also provides a precursor to video and digital documentaries that aim to reconstruct a past event in its entirety, like VOR and 9/11 films.

At the same time, video itself constitutes an interstitial medium, linked to both analog and digital technologies, difficult to define in terms of its aesthetics, formal qualities (ontological specificity), and historical cadre (where it begins and ends). In terms of aesthetics, video is often associated with impurity, its lesser quality imagery acquired by cheap, easy to use, and portable devices providing intimacy, immediacy, transparency, and accessibility at the expense of beauty, artistry, and mastery. Although it is not applicable to all stages of video's technological development, the low-resolution image of the Portapak video, which leaves traces (of technological stain) when edited, epitomizes the mental image of the medium in the social imaginary of the post-television generation as well as many filmmakers of the era. In the voice-over narration of the

compilation doc *Video Letter*, Japanese poet and filmmaker Shūji Terayama poignantly

compares the visual precision of pictorial Japanese script (which, in the film,

metaphorically stands for the precision of celluloid as well[36]) with the nebulous

appearance of his video letters to Shuntarō Tanikawa, underscoring the overarching anti-

mastery aesthetics of video shared by many artists of his time: "When put into words,

everything appears a bit too neat, don't you think?" However, what Terayama cherishes

here in the inherent intimacy of the "not so neat" is precisely what causes the aesthetics

of video (which can be described as an aesthetics of the messy) to be a problematic

terrain for criticism, as the intimacy and transparency provided by lesser quality imagery

or sound is historically recognized as an aesthetic effect that belongs to the realm of a

certain type of documentary filmmaking (especially activist videos or *Verité* films),

which also devalues it as a medium for artistic consideration. For this reason, video has

only been theorized under a few alternative aesthetic frameworks, most memorably by

Rosalind Krauss, who associated video with an "aesthetics of narcissism" (reflecting a

psychoanalytic bent), based on "the tendency of artists to set the camera up and perform

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[36] Conversely, in his analysis of *Video Letter*, Raymound Bellour couples video and writing together, while leaving out film as the third term. He states that "video is more deeply rooted in writing than is cinema" (421), conveyed through the presence of video in real-time, which puts it at the disposal of anyone at any time much like writing, and the possibility of transforming the image in video. That said, Terayama and Tanikawa pit video and script against each other at times, suggesting a coupling between script and film, as the voice-over implies. A Bellourian coupling between video and writing is perhaps more emphasized in the digital video letters or "cartas," which are exchanged between the Spanish director Victor Erice and the Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami in the museum installation work *Erice Kiarostami: Correspondances* curated by Alain Bergala and Jordi Balló (which points to a new direction that the video letter form has taken in the age of the digital and cinema's return to museums as a multi-platform venue). Filmed with small mini-dv digital cameras, the *cartas* open with a director's hand and a fountain pen (Ehrlich, 2006), highlighting the connection between the authorial quality of video and writing. At this point, it's also relevant to note that *Video Letter* is not commonly recognized as a compilation video (Bellour himself never uses the term), due to the fact that the videographers themselves had produced the letters in the film. However, the pieces used in the film do constitute pre-existing documents (unlike the Erice Kiarostami letters), which Terayama and Tanikawa recontextualize for the purpose of the documentary.

in the space before it and to use the monitor as a mirror" (Sturken 117), and by media gurus like Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, and Gene Youngblood, who called for an understanding of video's technological properties as its aesthetics.

In terms of its formal qualities, video's introduction of techniques such as instant replay, embedding images within images, looping, and image feedback[37] as well as its status as a real-time based medium together with television are overshadowed by the fact that most of these qualities are commonly attributed to the larger categories of electronic and (its later variation of) digital media. Especially in the field of film studies, there is almost a total dismissal of video's influence on the aesthetics and formal qualities of digital cinema, due to the fact that video in its analog stage[38] never reached the aesthetic standard required for narrative cinema. Consequently, the lack of narrative videos (as opposed to narrative film) hindered the study of the medium as a defining stage in the development of cinema in general.

As for video documentaries, most of the work written on the short-lived period of video deals with experimental video art (including 1960s and 70s' structural film), essay films, and documentaries that used video as a catalyst for grassroots movements, guerilla filmmaking, and activism, without acknowledging the vast range of documentary styles that were developed, explored, and transformed in this era. In the American tradition, documentary video is even more specifically associated with a particular type of activist

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[37] In his documentary *The Making of OFFON*, Scott Bartlett provides a list of additional techniques that were introduced by video/television and construed the vocabulary of video art in the late 60s, including video colorization, debeaming, mirror multiplication, negative polarization, offset registration, frequency or amplitude modulated wipes, vector scan display, chroma and hue sweep, luminance keying, and the use of rephotographing tools.

[38] Maureen Turim defines this stage as *the first-stage video*: video before digital editing, image processing, and computer control (335).

filmmaking, evident in the titles, as Deirdre Boyle indicates, that are used to designate the videos produced by experimental video artists like Nam June Paik, underground video groups such as the Videofreex, People's Video Theater, Global Village, and Raindance Corporation, or independent television production teams such as TVTV and DCTV: "street video, community or grassroots video, guerilla television, alternative tv, and video essay" (51). This emphasis on the political aspirations of documentary and the revolutionary potential of video in shifting the power of communication from filmmakers and institutions to the masses pushed the investigation of the new forms that some of the older documentary traditions, such as compilation film, took in this period to the background.

However, compilations continued to thrive in the time of video and further became a significant site of transformation for documentary filmmakers' understanding of mediality, time, and history. In addition to theatrical documentaries that came out with individual distribution, like *Videograms of a Revolution,* one finds examples of video-based compilations in the School of the Art Institute of Chicago's non-profit art archive and video distribution service, Video Data Bank, and the Fund for Innovative TV (FITV)'s video database Media Burn Independent Video Archive. In recent decades, these archives have made significant efforts in collecting and making accessible online video documentaries, which include a suggestive number of compilation videos (broadcasted on television and produced independently) that constitute a rich platform for future research into the area. A quick glance at the made-for-television compilation videos in the Media Burn Independent Video Archive reveals that most of the

documentaries produced after the 70s highlight their status as an assemblage between not only compiled filmic documents but also between institutions (such as television networks and funding institutions like Rockefeller Foundation and NYSCA), agents (such as video collectives), media, and technologies (kinescope, Portapak, betacam SP, etc.), indicating a shift towards a more complex reconfiguration of not only the genre but also the concept of medium itself. Video understood as an agent or site of mediality/governmentality draws attention to media as techno-cultural-institutional assemblages rather than mere communication tools with specific audiovisual, textual, and aesthetic properties. In other words, this aspect of video transforms the meaning of media and brings them closer to heterogeneous systems of power, knowledge, and affectivity, (thus anticipating the arrival and specific conceptualization of "social" media) in the same way that Bruno Latour and Manuel Delanda have approached society as an assemblage of smaller and interacting social networks in their recent interventions to social theory.

Documentary-style staging of videos like Ant Farm's *Media Burn*[39] had a dramatic impact on the cultural or social concept of reality altogether in this era, blurring the boundaries between documentary reality and media events (reality constructed for and by media) as well as putting the historical status of the audio-visual archive in crisis, while television and video simultaneously expanded the scope of archiving by suggesting the possibility of an uninterrupted recording of reality all around the world real-time.

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[39] This is the original video that lent its name to the Independent Video Archive.

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The real-time transmission of the Army-McCarthy Hearings[40] in its entirety constituted a paradigmatic example of this expansion. One could attribute a revolutionary quality to such changes brought upon the media landscape by video technologies; in fact, the *anti-television*, *anti-institutional truth* founding myth of video evoked an emancipatory discourse, which gave artists a collective spirit of revolution and dominated the criticism of the documentary works from this period for a long time. However, if a technological revolution did indeed take place in this period, then it can be better located in the emergence of new forms of historicization, related to the temporal shifts, connectivity and affectivity that came to be associated with mediality, rather than in a technologically determinist form of emancipation that never ran its course. It is this other, temporal and affective revolution that is depicted in *Videograms of a Revolution* (without foregoing the institutional critique), which follows the example of de Antonio's kinescope compilation *Point of Order* in its real-time re-construction of a media event, yet crystallizes its logic through an intensification of video techniques.

The Videograms in Replay

What *Videograms of a Revolution* makes clear right from the outset is that the revolution depicted in the film is one that is fought in the trenches of media, as the viewer is constantly reminded of the presence and the mobilizing role of cameras - amateur, independent, or televisual -, through the highly detailed background information provided by the voice-over about the source material of each video (or videogram, if that's what is

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[40] The Army-McCarthy Hearings was one of the first fully mediated events in television history, constituting a precursor to more famous and widely acknowledged world media events such as the Romanian Revolution and 9/11. Therefore, Emile de Antonio and Daniel Talbot's documentary *Point of Order* is an important documentary that needs to be evaluated in relation to films like VOR and 9/11 documentaries, all filmed through different media yet operating under the real-time regime.

implied in the titular term). Furthermore, intertitles frequently reference *and* personify cameras (for example, one of the intertitles suggests: "a camera investigates the situation"), and split-screen editing shows real-time televisual transmission and unofficial video recording of events side by side, such as that of the disturbance, which occurred during Ceauşescu's public speech at the University Square in Bucharest. On the surface, what is suggested by this interweaving of various real-time media and the implied antagonism between amateur cameras and the state television is that the real revolution, which in many ways sealed the dissolution of the Eastern bloc in 1989, took place in the exchange of power between media ideologies. Videograms act like pamphlets for political programs (video-pro-grams): a video-based civil journalism movement overthrows a televisually supported state ideology, reversing, perhaps, the logic behind the Kinoks revolution, which Vertov's worker cameramen once equally fervently vouched for. Such a conflict between video and television is, in fact, not an unfamiliar theme; on the contrary, it lies at the core of the most common founding myths of video history, as I mentioned earlier (the notion of video as being anti-television in its discourse). Marita Sturken argues that, up until the 90s, video history had been construed around the narrative that the birth of video corresponded to a utopian moment, in which the advent of the portable video camera was seen as sparking a revolutionary movement against the institutional shrine of television (an antagonism which only got reconciled in the late 70s when artists started producing creative works for television).[41] Within this

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[41] As she suggests, "Video's inception is seen through the rosy light of nostalgia. According to the myth, it was an era when freedom of the spirit abounded, when artists and activists discovered a new medium and took to the streets with it, assured that their 'guerilla' tactics would ultimately change television." (106)

framework, video techniques such as the improvised realignment of camera were interpreted as artistic strategies subverting the fixed point of view provided by television cameras. *Videograms of a Revolution* features a similar pas de deux between the handheld-video and stationary-television cameras to suggest a confrontation between the two. The short clip (shot by a volatile handheld camera) preceding the credits, which shows a wounded young woman from a co-op in Timisoara announcing her solidarity with the rebellion against Ceauşescu, immediately sets the improvised realignment of the camera as a motif for the documentary, repeated when a studio camera operator about to film the revolutionary team taking over the television station makes a few readjustments to free up the tripod much later. What is suggested in this seemingly random gesture is television's switching sides to support the revolutionaries by taking on the conventions of video.

However, at a closer inspection, the film indicates to the viewer that this take-over is not as clear-cut as it seems, as what seems to be idiosynchratic and authentic medial gestures in Romanian subjects' insistent placement of their bodies in front of and behind cameras takes on a peculiar form towards the end of the film. The videograms and the televisual programming become increasingly entangled, once the discursive power behind the latter is removed and the public finds itself in the middle of a transmission that, once resumed, asserts its own regime, that of real-time, which both the videos and television operate under. Thomas Elsaesser contends that while the documentary reveals the revolution beyond televisual images, it appears as though the revolution itself gradually takes on the conventions of television ("Sightlines" 167).

In his study on real-time based media, Bernard Stiegler talks about a social condition of disorientation caused by the lack of a delay, deferral or redoubling of time, which prevents people from being able to reflect on and historicize the present, as the conditions of memorization -- retention, protention (extending memory through technology), and anticipation -- are reduced to a premediated form of anticipation ("Technics and Time 2"). This premediation leaves no room for the actors to anticipate anything other than "the conditions of their acts' recordability;" and therefore, it compels them to "act according to the constraints of this industrial façade of time" (116). This is perhaps the type of disorientation that Romanian subjects in the documentary find themselves in, when their authentic anticipatory gestures of mediality (random and individual acts of filming) preceding the revolution take on a form of preconditioned televisuality once their immediate experiences (retention) of the revolution, acts of recording (protension), transmission, and reception are synchronized, following the state television's joining their ranks. The random faces that the cameras accidentally capture at the beginning of the revolution quickly form a group of televisual elite, making highly orchestrated announcements (complying with the conventions of television), which are broadcasted live. Here, what is anticipated is no longer the cameras' potential of capturing something about the revolution, as it exists in an unmediated state; instead, the revolution becomes its mediation. The event is lived and recorded as if it has already happened, which is to say that what is filmed / transmitted is constituted in the very act of filming.

Does this mean that a real struggle, involving masses, the state, security forces

opening fire on civilians, and protesters shot on the streets of Bucharest, never took place? Does the film ultimately suggest that the videograms were always just a part of an all effacing "program" that remained uninterrupted despite the exchange of power between the state and the people? From a theoretical standpoint, arguing so would be a radical, somewhat Baudrillardian move, declaring that all real-time mediated events are non-realities or mere simulations, not unlike "the Gulf War [that] did not take place." At this point, the documentary's strategy of reconstructing history through not only archival and televisual but also amateur found footage offers certain answers. In fact, it is precisely at the level of the program, the problematic real-time regime of video, that Farocki and Ujica want to re-visit the Romanian Revolution, not to reduce the event to its televisual incarnation but to draw attention to its pre-medial presence in the videograms in virtuality, which is made imaginable by underscoring what the images and the transmission miss. What the film really wants to document is a mode of anticipation present in the videograms that gets lost in the transition to televisuality, especially with regard to its demands for fixing reality (at the expense of the virtual) at the time.

In a short essay about the documentary, Harun Farocki comments about the possible motivations of the man behind the amateur camera in the opening scene and states:

> The man behind the camera does not shoot the picture in the hope of being able to distribute it and thereby also the idea of the revolution. Perhaps he has a couple of friends in mind to whom he could show it to, thus preserving the factual character of the event. Were the demonstrations to be suppressed and the Ceausescu regime to emerge victorious, it would be difficult to hold on to the memory of the uprising. With his picture, the man behind the camera proves that he did not just look away. In addition, his film looks forward to times in which one can show such pictures; it serves to *summon up the dawn of such an era* [emphasis mine] ("Substandard").

Here, Farocki's understanding of the amateur camera's (the camera pertaining to the man on the student dorm balcony) act of filming resonates with Richard Grusin's description of anticipatory gestures. The authenticity of the mode of anticipation involved in this type of mediality lies in the lack of a preprogrammed purpose or structure behind the act, its sole raison d'etre being the amateur subject's desire or yearning to project himself into the future, "looking forward to times in which one can show such pictures," by filming the present. In this sense, the video serves *to summon up the dawn of such an era* (to reiterate Farocki's words), because it foresees in the present the possibility of a future recall: a possibility to historicize in the future that which is filmed in the present in advance of its own truth (in the case of the documentary, this is the possibility of the march's future revolutionary status that only exists in potential during the act of filming).

Stiegler earlier defines anticipation inherent in the use of unprogrammatic media as an advance, whose truth lies in the return after the event -- the delay ("Technics and Time 1" 202). It is in such delay in advance that a third temporality of the divided image (mentioned at the beginning of the chapter) emerges, as the temporalities of both the foreground and the background fail to capture the full trajectory of the event, which is only completed in the point of the film's return to the video's present three years after the revolution.[42] In a broader sense, the documentary assembles -- or compiles, to use the historically accepted term -- by a delay video fragments of a revolution filmed in advance of the event's revolutionary status, motivated by an anticipation for the return of history.

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[42] Of course, the concept of the event itself can be re-imagined as enveloped in an affective temporality of delay and advance, as in the writings of Deleuze. Steven Shaviro poignantly suggests, "We are never equal to the event, Deleuze says, but always too early or too late, too frenzied or too passive, too forward or too withdrawn" (82).

Lastly, the film not only hints at the necessity of delay in understanding and historicizing real-time footage, but it also uses deferral and return as a creative strategy in subverting the Romanian Television's programmed real-time transmission. The film constantly doubles up on itself, by replaying important moments of the revolution. For example, Farocki and Ujica let the viewer watch events like the disturbance of Ceauşescu's speech at University Square in Bucharest unfold, through chronologically serializing anonymous videograms; yet they intentionally disrupt their continuity by presenting what could be considered "an instant replay" of selected portions from the same sequence. The replays are executed either through showing the same clip with occasional freeze frames that orient the viewer's attention to specific details in the image and the soundtrack, or by presenting the same action from multiple angles (not merely intercutting between different angles as in continuity editing but repeating the same event by showing imagery shot from multiple vantage points, creating a looping effect or recalling cubist editing approaches). Replays facilitate a kind of "performative maintenance of the instant of action" (Crogan, "Thinking Cinematically") and virtualize the image by hinting at what might have been happening that could have been filmed, which the videogram fails to capture or what the center of attention in the image / sound fails to correctly identify. Instant replays invite the viewer to take a second look at what has just transpired on the screen and "supplement the moment of significance with its extended, processed" (Crogan) thought-trail that makes them aware of the programmed nature of the transmission as well as what is missing in actuality, yet present in virtuality.

Christa Blümlinger states that in most Farocki films and videos "a compositional

structure typical of Farocki becomes instantly recognizable, one that functions via anticipation and repetition. An image is introduced […] which is later taken up again and explained […], to elucidate the aesthetic process of distanciation" ("Imagecircumvolution"). This compositional structure together with the complex layering of videos, text (intertitles), voice-over, and split-screen editing allow the documentary to deconstruct and subvert the logic of the real-time mediation of the Romanian Revolution, only so that in the unprogrammed, idiosyncratic moments of its found footage, its historicizing potential opens itself up to thought.

Archival Return As a Doubling of Delay

If Farocki and Ujica's use of deferral, repetition and replay as aesthetic strategies to disrupt and subvert the Romanian Television's programmed real-time transmission helps create the necessary conditions for the viewer to question and reflect upon the status of the archive, then one can argue that compilation film's return to archival[43] and found footage, with the purpose of locating in it a historical moment or meaning virtually present in advance of its own truth, is a form of delay that gives the genre its critical or historicizing potential too. From such perspective, it becomes clear that VOR performs two different forms of reflexive doubling: one facilitated by Farocki and Ujica's introduction of video editing techniques (such as instant replay, split screen editing, and looping) to the documentary and the other by the internal logic of compilation film as a reflexive genre. The aesthetics of video and compilation film complement each other in

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[43] I am using the word "archive" in the broadest sense here, as the collection of a wide range of audiovisual material rather than the depository of institutional footage.

VOR in producing a formal strategy of delay and return, which help the viewer detect an anticipatory form of historicity emerging in the barely visible or audible details of the videograms. This is not to suggest that the compilation technique automatically lends itself to a crystallization of anticipation and virtuality in all of its incarnations. In fact, the function of delay in Farocki and Ujica's documentary is quite different from that of analog compilation films like TFOTRD. While analog compilations (in their traditional set up) return to the archive in order to fix its meaning as the index of an immutable past, VOR's archival return only serves to highlight the presence of a reality the meaning of which cannot be fixed, as its potential exceeds its actuality (captured in a state of emergence by the videograms). Esfir Shub's style of compilation elevates the status of actuality and gives it a certain degree of sanctity, whereas Farocki and Ujica's destabilizes it in order to suggest the possibility of rethinking mediated history in a new light. Accordingly, history in its mediated form emerges as something that cannot be easily entrenched, its meaning always put into the feedback loop of renegotiation by a form of anticipation inscribed into the logic of real-time based technologies as an advance, whose truth lies in the return after the event --the delay.

The Anticipatory Logic of Video

> *Rather being the tomb of the trace, the archive is more frequently the product of the anticipation of collective memory. Thus the archive is itself an aspiration rather than a collection. This deep function of the archive has been obscured by that officializing mentality, closely connected to the governmentalities of the nation-state, which rests on seeing the archive as the tomb of the accidental trace, rather than as the material site of the collective will to remember.*

> Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration"

I am aware that just like it would be deceptive to ascribe an anticipatory logic to all compilation films and strategies, without taking their historical conjecture into account, arguing for an anticipatory logic inscribed into the real-time technologies or video might lead to a technologically determinist view, which locates in the arrival of new technologies a radical rupture or break from previous media. The writings of scholars like Thomas Elsaesser, Siegfried Zielinski, Anne Friedberg, and Jonathan Crary in the fields of media archaeology and the history of visual arts have underscored the problematic aspects of such linear and shortsighted frameworks in recent years, suggesting that not only "the chronological stories of successive technologies or devices but also the genealogical charts quickly come to a conceptual dead-end" (Elsaesser, "The New Film History" 87). In congruence with their call for resisting teleological approaches, the aim of this chapter is not to elevate video to a privileged status in terms of its potential to generate an unprecedented audio-visual archive of anticipatory gestures, since artifacts of such an archive can be found in earlier forms of media as well. Rather, the chapter seeks to highlight the ways our understanding of historicity, collective memory, and the archive have been challenged and expanded in the age of real-time media. Here, one could establish a link between the destabilization of the status of the archive brought about by the advent of television and video in the 60s and the radical theoretical shifts taking place in the field of historiography, under the influence of Michel Foucault, Hayden White, and Jacques Derrida, especially following Foucault's essay "The Historical A Priori and the Archive" and White's *Metahistory*. Both dated 1969, these two texts radically redefined the meaning of the archive and its functions,

challenging the assumption that archive was simply a reservoir of information, a mere container that preserved traces of past events without human intervention. Instead, they argued, the archive was bound up with the relations of power, sociality, and authority; it did not safeguard the event but lied at the root of it, embodying the event and defining the system of its enunciability (in Foucaldian terms), while being implicated in its mode of occurrence and inscription. As Derrida later pointed out, archive in its classical sense (based on its formulation within the Greek city-state), had two meanings associated with it: commencement and commandment. It was understood as a *there* not only "where things *commence* but also…, *there* where authority, social order are exercised" (1). In other words, archive suggested a domain, where things *take place* as well as where things or arkhe *have a place,* an arkheion, protected under certain laws and guardians or archons to establish and reinforce a specific order. The question of the archive, deriving from this classical view, is not a question of the accidental trace and its preservation, but a question of mediation as well as the structures of power and affect that bring the event and its conditions of archivability into existence. The archivization, as Derrida argued, produces as much as it records the event (16-17).

It is difficult to determine whether the arrival of real-time technologies and new archival media had any direct impact on this sudden shift of attention to the social function of the archive and the collective will behind resisting its disciplinary aspects in the writings of Foucault, White, and Derrida; however, the rapid proliferation in the consumer scale sound and image recording technologies since then seem to have made it easier to perceive *the archive as the product of the anticipation of collective memory,*

rather than a tomb of the trace. During a period in which anything and everything is continuously documented and turned into industrial objects of memory, the archive is no longer viewed as a neutral site, collecting accidental traces of a containable, past reality. Instead it is a site of contestation between opposing forces: governmentalities of media institutions and affectivity of anticipatory gestures, past and future, actuality and virtuality.

Perhaps, then, the anticipatory logic of video can be better located elsewhere, in video's transitional status among real-time technologies, anticipating the digital and computational media. This is implied in VOR's anticipation of the future forms the compilations were to take in the digital era, especially in the form of database and open source documentaries. Database and open source documentaries have been a subject of much debate in the field in the past couple of years, especially in terms of their relation to the "digital turn" and their status as new media products signaling the destabilization of the archive in the age of real-time technologies. However, these debates rarely locate the early symptoms of an archival destabilization in the kinescope or video era, tracing the emergence of a historical shift back in films like *VOR*'s anticipatory modes of archivization.

To give an example, digital compilations presenting footage of the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers from multiple vantage points, shot by professional and amateur videographers from New York, received a great deal of media attention in the aftermath of 9/11. One of these documentaries, History Channel's *102 Minutes That*

Changed America[44], which assembles raw video footage and sound from multiple (mostly digital video) sources shot by more than a hundred amateur and professional cameras, significantly shares a similar historicizing logic with VOR. However, the opening commentary of the documentary fails to acknowledge this connection and suggests that the film is special, in that "for the first time," it joins footage from more than a hundred "eye witnesses" into a "seamless historical record, preserving the basic source material from which the future generations will draw their conclusions." Here, it is not so clear whether the film's novelty, or its "first-time" status as suggested by the commentary, comes from the documentary's real-time reconstruction of a past event through found footage, its use of a strikingly high number of audiovisual sources, noninvasive editing to preserve the unity of the source material, or lack of voice-over narration to provide continuity among distinct segments.

In terms of the real-time construction of a past event, the logic that underlies *102 Minutes* can also be traced in VOR, which reconstructs a revolution that was filmed uninterruptedly by amateur and professional cameras as well as recorded and transmitted simultaneously on television by stitching together its found footage. Of course, unlike the 9/11 documentary, which literally reconstructs the 102 minutes that followed the attacks on Twin Towers, VOR compresses the ten-day revolution into an approximately two-hour essay, ignoring the actual duration of the event, as that goes well beyond the scope of accepted lengths for theatrical documentary films. Emile de Antonio's kinescope compilation *Point of Order* is closer to *102 Minutes* in this sense, with regard

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[44] In 2009, *102 Minutes* won four Primetime Emmy Awards, including the award for Outstanding Nonfiction Special.

to fact that it reconstructs the Senate Army-McCarthy Hearings of 1954, which was broadcasted in its entirety on TV, in 93 minutes out of 187 hours. Lack of a voice-over narration is not unique to *102 Minutes* either; *Point of Order* as well as theatrical and art-house compilation documentaries, like Zsigmund Gabor Papp's films, similarly do not feature commentary.

Perhaps the one thing that makes *102 Minutes* exceptional is the range of audio-visual sources featured in the film: the History Channel indicates that the documentary compiles material from mostly "non-traditional sources, including amateur photography and video; FDNY, NYPD, Port Authority and emergency dispatch radio recordings; recorded voicemails; audio/video diaries; footage and stills broadcast or published outside the United States; electronic messages; surveillance camera footage; and "outtakes" culled from raw network footage." These sources point to the highly mediated nature of our contemporary everyday reality, the increasingly embodied form that our technoculture has taken in the age of mobile media and PDAs, and the ubiquity of the processes of surveillance and archivization undertaken by various assemblages of social networks (extending from the state to media networks and social media. Some of these media are definitely exclusive products of the digital era; however, their historicizing potential comes from the fact that they make the distribution of memory and affect to a larger scale of human and non-human agents in the age of real-time technologies than their novelty or virtuality understood merely as an extension of their digitality. What VOR demonstrates is that the promise of digital media in offering new potentials for archiving the present is only an advance that comes as a delay, anticipated by video, in

advance of the digital's own materiality.

CONCLUSION

To reverse an old cliché, there is a sense in which the sum of parts is always

greater than the whole. The whole is always an oversimplification of its parts.

Graham Harman

One of the ways in which I like to think of this project is that the chapters and

analyses presented in it are themselves products of an assemblistic mode of thinking,

which suggests that the work itself can never be complete, in the sense of presenting a

unity and order in argumentative structure or discourse. While that makes the idea of

writing conclusive statements somewhat unsettling and reductive, I would like to offer a

few afterthoughts regarding the broader implications of a new media inflected

assemblistic documentary media theory here, hoping that the reader will take them as

springboards to think about relevant threads of research instead of an exit point to a work

that has set out to avoid clear entries and exits, just like the works it promotes. Of course,

I should add that theoretical inconsistency is not my only concern in resisting the urge to

lay out a clear conclusion. The engaged reader will notice, after perusing the loosely

connected chapters, that the concept of "documentary assemblages" remains relatively

raw throughout the study, especially in terms of how such an organizational framework

might apply to a great number of hybrid, multi-part, and multi-platform documentaries

that have emerged in the rapidly expanding media landscape in recent years and are not

covered in the project. Admittedly, my own subjective interest in experimental, non-

representational, and affective modes of filmmaking limited the scope of the study and

led me to narrow my research to a small group of films that mirrored akin perspectives,

beyond the façade of their stylistic diversity. Such a narrow focus was fitting at the outset, as my initial motivation behind exploring assemblistic (fragmented, multi-part, and episodic, etc.) documentaries was to precisely trace the strong presence of a non-fiction tradition that went against discursive and stylistic unity throughout the history of cinematic and post-cinematic media. In other words, the audiovisual texts I selected for the study did not randomly reveal common non-positivist and non-representational discursive orientations or aspirations; instead, an affinity in assemblistic vision was the criterion behind their selection. That said, my research introduced me to a wide range of assemblistic documentary media that did not share the same vision, yet opened up a set of new questions along the way.

One particular assemblistic media form that I wrote about briefly while researching compilation documentaries but decided not to include in the final draft of the dissertation is the multi or cross-platform documentary, which is gaining prominence as screens and interfaces for media rapidly proliferate. It also constitutes an indispensable topic for a more comprehensive study on documentary assemblages, especially in the digital era. The reason behind my decision of omitting a chapter on multi-platform documentary was that the particular text that interested me in this category, United Nations Television's cross-platform digital compilation series *21st Century,* called for broadening the scope of the project to cover documentaries that impose unifying discourses on fragmented / modular films. Such a shift would have required me to talk about a dialectic tension between two oppositional assemblistic discourses cutting across different periods of documentary media history, which deserves more time and research

than the dissertation process could have allowed me. I hope to keep on thinking about that tension in an expanded version of this manuscript, after the completion of the degree; nevertheless, here are a few initial thoughts on what kind of questions cross-platform documentaries like *21st Century* raises for research.

With the rapidly evolving and widely accessible media technologies, the increasing number of video sharing websites, and the growing integration among global communication networks, documentary is undergoing significant transformations. As a new sense of documentality or documentarism push conventional media formats towards new configurations, documentary media, and especially those with social, activist, and global news related content, are becoming more like nomadic assemblages; that is, polymorphous and cross-platform media forms with migrant and modifiable structures. The humanitarian compilation documentary is one of the most paradigmatic products of this new media landscape. Shot in multiple locations, formats, languages, and often by different crews, humanitarian documentaries are composed of co-functioning micro-narratives or independent audio-visual material that are assembled in a flexible manner. The segmented and mobile structure of digital humanitarian documentaries, which present compiled human-interest stories, represents the world as a multiplicity of fragmented audio-visual information, a filmic mosaic seen through numerous anonymous lenses. Conversely, these documentaries often connect the diffuse realities and messages presented by their distinct audio-visual material through a unifying discourse, especially that of a single, universal world or connected network of global relations. United Nations Television's compilation documentary series *21st Century* constitutes an interesting

example in this regard, with regard to the fact that it operates under two somewhat oppositional discursive frameworks, or more specifically, one that presents documentary reality as a pluralistic assemblage and the other erasing the difference that composes its texts in the name of a universal humanism.

UNTV's documentary series *21st Century* is composed of two to four-part episodes featuring underreported human-interest stories from around the world, shot in the "news-magazine" format. Speaking in front of a blue screen, the series' narrator (Daljit Dhaliwal, who works as a journalist for both the BBC and CNN) compresses independent stories, shot across the globe by mostly freelance producers, into a single timeline, giving the viewer a sense of a spatio-temporal unity that fails to underscore the differences composing the individual segments. The (language-adaptable) format allows each segment to be shown independently by major international broadcasters or online (on United Nations' multimedia website). One of the most significant venues where the segments are also shown independently is the *CNN World Report*, which is a global news documentary forum in itself. The *CNN World Report* is also an assemblistic construct in the sense that the program reportedly features (as of April 2011) short documentary stories by journalists from more than 350 broadcasters in over 150 countries and territories.

21st Century defies genre conventions and documentary protocols not only because it is situated in the interstitial terrain between non-fiction film series, humanitarian organizational (and promotional) video, and television news journalism, but also because it provides an example to the emerging media formats that migrate across

different technologies, institutions, channels, and platforms. The ambitious title of the series refers more fittingly to the progressive approach of its structural design than its somewhat conventional humanitarian content, covering character-driven stories that involve uncritical takes on U.N. activities around the world. Since UNTV's mandate is to promote issues that are U.N. priority issues, all of the episodes of *21st Century* involve the U.N., either through interviews with the U.N. experts or footage from U.N. projects (videographers dispatched across the globe illustrate the U.N. and its agencies' ongoing work for human rights, development, environmental and peace issues without challenging the organization's stance on issues or failures), which has led the series to be occasionally perceived as promotional or propaganda films for the U.N. The producers promote the series innovatively as "a fully packaged programme, and also available by feature segment (approximately 8' each)," highlighting the modifiability of the episodes, while they summarize the content more traditionally as "narrative storytelling with balanced, accurate reporting," without indicating how 21st century stories might differ from their 20th century counterparts. In terms of the prosaic content of the series, the title only gains a particular cultural significance when one thinks of the logic behind the U.N.'s issuing of "Millenium Development Goals" (the MDGs); in a certain sense, both projects represent the U.N. 's effort to popularize and add an epochal dimension -- in perhaps a hyperbolic fashion -- to the organization's projects within the last decade.

However, even the structural design of the series is neither "new" nor entirely specific to the 21st Century. The "news-magazine" format that the series is structured around dates back to the newsreel tradition. The newsreel in weekly form was initially

invented by Pathé Frères of France in 1910 and consisted of segmented news stories from around the world shot by independent cameramen (thirty seven in North America, working for the company's sixty offices in Europe and America). This periodical form of assemblage soon led to the birth of internationally acknowledged and well-received news documentary series. One of the most famous among these, *The March of Time*, has a strikingly similar structural design with *21st Century*; as a monthly newsreel, the series was distinguished for its trademark "pictorial journalism," mixing long-form and high quality documentary-style stories in four or five segmented episodes. Each episode recorded global events and connected them by the unifying voice-over of a single narrator (in 35 mm format), and brought them to big screens around the world. This stylistic resemblance points to the way UNTV's digital documentary series adhere to and remediate analog newsreel-based compilation conventions regarding its formatting while also acknowledging the transformations in technology and migrations of media across platforms.

Notably, *The March of Time* is not the only traditional model for *21st Century*. Much like the way American newsreels took their inspiration from extra-filmic media, or more specifically the newspaper (assembling news from independent news sources), Soviet newsreel-based documentaries, such as Dziga Vertov's *Kino-Pravda* series, were also inspired by the idea of a "live" newspaper. Although *Kino-Pravda* did not have a global scope like the American newsreels, its structure was still segmented and based on, what Vertov called, "cinematic journalism". In *Defining Documentary Film*, Jeremy Hicks quotes a passage from the comments of Soviet filmmaker on the shortcomings of

Kino-Pravda, which not only points to the global aspirations of the series but also premediates the way contemporary major news networks such as CNN or BBC and humanitarian organizations like the U.N. produce televisual or multi-platform documentaries today:

> *Cine-Pravda* needs and does not have: a permanent establishment of contributors, on the spot correspondents, and the means to maintain them and move them about, an adequate supply of film stock, and the opportunity for practical links with foreign countries. The absence of even one of these factors is enough to kill a cinema newspaper (16).

One can be argue that it was with the advent of television that Vertov's dream for "cinematic journalism" was first fulfilled (the video-based compilation series *The 90's* and the *20th Century Project* present interesting examples to the televisual incarnations of analog news documentary series in this context, in terms of the continuity suggested between their epochal titles and the title of UNTV's *21st Century* as well as in their remediation of newsreel-based assemblistic structures through television and video); however, this was done at the expense of a diverse range of non-televisual news documentary formats (such as the shorter newsreels, actualities, and diverse compilation media), since most earlier forms left their place to the conventional hour-long television news documentary. Only after the CNN coverage of the Iraqi Gulf war and the adoption of the 24/7 news concept by major news networks such as the CNN, BBC World (or Al Jazeera, Globo News, Sky News, and ITV News), the need for more flexible and segmented formatting for audio-visual news re-emerged. Today, several technologies -- computers, internet, satellites, television, and mobile media -- converge to produce a global communications network, which once again calls for rethinking the possible

modes of documentary media assemblages, composed of not only audio-visual but also multi-modal (visual, audible, textual, locative, and computational) materialities.

The current stage of new media and global communications networks allow new channels, venues, platforms, actors and institutions to emerge as agents in the modular flow of news or documentary stories. As I mentioned earlier, *21ˢᵗ Century* lies at the center of these transformations. In terms of its structure, the series constitutes a paradigmatic example of hybrid media formats, being produced by a supranational organization and adopting styles and conventions of diverse audiovisual media practices such as serial as well as episodic non-fiction filmmaking, narrative story-telling, televisual news reportage, and multimedia archiving and news feed / data transmission (accordingly, the series is streamed as a monthly magazine in the satellite feed within the UN Headquarters' intra-net, providing yet another venue and modifiable format through which the series is distributed). Each segment within individual episodes is edited flexibly in a way that makes it easy for detachable parts to be pulled out of the episode and plugged into the assemblage of a different media product as B-roll.

In terms of its target channels, platforms, and exhibition venues, the series is designed for multi-channel and multi-platform screening, including televisual, satellite, and intra-net broadcasting as well as live webcasting and online viewing. At this point, it might be relevant to note that UNTV produces two television series throughout the year: *21st Century*, the monthly newsmagazine; and *UN in Action*, the series of short features on the work of the United Nations in the field. U.N. Video also produces *Year in Review*, the fifteen-minute documentary produced annually in December that captures the major

highlights of the organization's activities and initiatives during the year and provides an overview of the events that affected the world. Since the department does not have the budget to hire permanent crews and producers to produce all of its content, UNTV gathers and reassembles material from different U.N. agencies (that operate independently), which means that parts of the footage featured in these programs come from diverse institutional archives and are recycled / re-contextualized every time they are used as stock footage. While UNTV promotes *21st Century* as a packaged documentary series, it allows segments or footage from the series to be not only used but also edited by individual broadcasters, implying that the same footage also gets reassembled and re-contextualized by multiple non-humanitarian institutions.

All these facts help demonstrate the complex network of relations that a cross-platform humanitarian documentary series like *21st Century* is imbricated in and how this complex network makes it difficult to contain the meaning of its content, which keeps migrating from one format or interface to the other. However, the assemblistic, modifiable structure does not guarantee an openness or fluidity in discourse. The questions that the series raises, differently from the documentary works analyzed in this project, relate to a tension or conflict between two discourses (unifying versus assemblistic), as I mentioned at the beginning, as well as archival instability and erasure of difference (which occurs in each segment when the authorship of individual videographers and their cultural backgrounds are kept anonymous). Such questions make the analysis of polymorphous, cross-platform texts essential for a more comprehensive study on documentary assemblages.

Related to the question of archival instability, an expanded version of this project will also have to elaborate further on the issue of archival dislocations, relocations, and movements in the age of digital media. Here, what I mean by movement is the migration of audiovisual archives from one regime to another: regimes such as politico-economic and ideological ones (as in from communist archives to capitalist archives), technological regimes (from analog and video to digital, computational, and mobile), and archontic regimes (from state-owned to open source). One can add post-colonial archives, post-disciplinary archives (Spanish archives after Franco, for example), and leaked archives (Wikileaks) to the list of archives on the move as relevant documentary media objects of interest to be disassembled and reassembled in this context.

APPENDIX – FILMOGRAPHY

102 Minutes That Changed America. A&E Television Networks, USA, 2008. Documentary.

21st Century. United Nations Television and Video, 2007-Ongoing. Documentary series.

ABC Africa. Dir. Abbas Kiarostami. IFAD, Iran, 2001. Documentary.

Apocalypse Now. Dir. Francis Ford Coppola, Zoetrope Studios, USA, 1979. Feature film.

Balaton Retro. Dir: Zsigmond Gábor Papp. Hungary, 2007. Documentary.

BattleGround: 21 Days on the Empire's Edge. Dir. Stephen Marshall. Guerilla News Network and Artists/Media Cooperation, USA, 2004. Documentary.

Battleship Potemkin. Dir. Sergei M. Eisenstein. Goskino, USSR, 1925. Feature film.

Bicycle Thieves. Dir. Vittorio de Sica. Produzoni de Sica, Italy, 1948. Feature film.

Budapest Retro. Dir. Zsigmond Gábor Papp. Hungary, 1998. Documentary.

Cofralandes: *Chilean Rhapsody*. Dir. Raúl Ruiz. RR Producciones, Chile, France, 2002. Documentary.

Confession. Dir. Aleksandr Sokurov. Lenfilm Studio, Roskomkino, Studio Nadezhda, Russia, 1998. Documentary series.

Control Room. Dir. Jehane Noujaim. Noujaim Films, USA, 2004. Documentary.

Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y. Dir. Johan Grimonprez. Belgium and France, 1998. Documentary.

Enemies of Happiness. Dir. Eva Mulvad. Bastard Film, Denmark, 2006. Documentary.

Five: Dedicated to Ozu. Dir. Abbas Kiarostami. Behnegar*,* NHK*,* MK2 Productions*,* Iran, Japan, France, 2003. Documentary.

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Gunner Palace. Dir. Petra Epperlein and Michael Tucker. Nomados, USA, 2004. Documentary.

Iraq – The Women's Story. Dir. Zeena Ahmed, Channel 4, UK, 2006. Documentary.

Iraq in Fragments. Dir. James Longley. Daylight Factory, USA, 2006. Documentary.

Iraq: the Lost Generation. Dir. Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy and Ed Robbins. Channel 4, UK, Jordan, Syria, 2008. Documentary.

Lessons of Darkness. Dir. Werner Herzog. Canal+, Werner Herzog Filmproduktion, and Première, France, UK, Germany, 1992. Documentary.

Media Burn. Dir. Ant Farm, Chip Lord, Doug Michels, Curtis Schreier, Uncle Buddie, Tom Weinberg, USA, 1975. Documentary.

My Country, My Country. Dir. Laura Poitras. PBS, USA, 2006. Documentary.

Occupation Dreamland. Dir. Ian Olds and Garrett Scott. GreenHouse Pictures and Subdivision Productions, USA, 2005. Documentary.

Po-lin: Slivers of Memory. Dir. Jolanta Dylewska. A Jour Film, Germany/Poland, 2008. Documentary.

Point of Order. Dir. Emile de Antonio. USA, 1964. Documentary.

Private Hungary. Dir. Péter Forgács, Hungary, 1988-Ongoing. Documentary series.

Psycho. Dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Shamley Productions, US, 1960. Feature film.

Reporting America at War. Dir. Stephen Ives. PBS, USA, 2003. Documentary series.

Rome, Open City. Dir. Roberto Rosselini. Excelsa Film, Italy, 1945. Feature film.

Russian Ark. Dir. Aleksandr Sokurov. State Hermitage Museum, The Hermitage Bridge Studio, The Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation et al, Russia, Germany, 2002. Feature film.

Taste of Cherry. Dir. Abbas Kiarostami. Abbas Kiarostami Productions, CiBy 2000, Kanoon, Iran, France, 1997. Feature film.

Taurus. Dir. Aleksandr Sokurov. Goskino, Lenfilm Studio, Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Russia, 2001. Docudrama.

Taxi to the Dark Side. Dir. Alex Gibney. Discovery Channel, Jigsaw Productions, Tall Woods, Wider Film Projects, and Xray Productions, USA, 2007. Documentary.

The Beauty Academy of Kabul. Dir. Liz Mermin. Magic Lantern Media Inc., USA, 2004. Documentary.

The City. Dir. Ralph Steiner, Willard van Dyke, Angel Gil-Ordonez, and Joseph Horowitz. American Documentary Films Inc., American Institute of Planners, USA, 1939. Documentary.

The Fall of the Romanov Dynasty. Dir. Esfir Shub. USSR, 1927. Documentary.

The Ground Truth. Dir. Patricia Foulkrod. Plum Pictures and Radioaktive Film, USA, 2006. Documentary.

The Life of an Agent. Dir. Zsigmond Gábor Papp. Hungary, 2005. Documentary.

The March of Time. Time Inc, USA, 1935-1951. Television Documentary series.

The Making of OFFON. Dir. Scott Bartlett. USA, 1980. Documentary.

The Oath. Dir. Laura Poitras. ITVS, P.O.V., and Praxis Films, USA, 2010. Documentary.

The War Tapes. Dir. Deborah Scranton. SenArt Films and Scranton/Lay Films, USA, 2006. Documentary.

Un Chien Andalou. Dir. Luis Buñuel, France, 1929. Experimental film.

Video Letter. Dir. Shūji Terayama and Shuntarō Tanikawa. Japan, 1983. Documentary.

Videograms of a Revolution. Dir. Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujica. Bremer Institut Film & Fernsehen, Harun Farocki Filmproduktion, Germany, 1992. Documentary.

War Feels Like War. Dir. Esteban Uyarra. In Focus Productions, BBC, and TV2 Denmark, UK, 2004. Documentary.

When I Came Home. Dir. Dan Lohaus. Lohaus Films, USA, 2006. Documentary.

Wittgenstein Tractatus. Dir. Péter Forgács. Hungary, 1992. Documentary.

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ABSTRACT

REASSEMBLING DOCUMENTARY: FROM ACTUALITY TO VIRTUALITY

by

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August 2011

Advisor: Dr. Richard Grusin

Major: English (Film and Media Studies)

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

At a period of intense technological change, which has led to an increasing degree of modularity in documentary media, "Reassembling Documentary: From Actuality to Virtuality" takes up episodic documentaries and non-fiction films broken into distinctly conceptualized parts, in order to examine how the evolution of technologies transform documentary film and media's relationship to the audiovisual archive across different historical periods. More specifically, the dissertation challenges the assumption that documentary film is essentially holistic in its discursive orientation and audiovisual aesthetics, by studying the fragmented works of a highly unique and international group of filmmakers, such as Harun Farocki, Werner Herzog, Péter Forgács, Aleksandr Sokurov, and James Longley in relation to the large number of modular, episodic, and mix-media films belonging to the documentary canon. To map the technological and theoretical transformations suggested in these films especially in the digital era, I propose the deployment of what I call "assemblistic reading," a type of textual analysis that moves from the distinct parts of a film to the whole, shifting the attention from the

hierarchy between the micro and macro elements to their mutual reconfiguration. The project is organized into four chapters, each of which examines a different form of assembly (with individual parts conceptualized as fragments, lessons, installments, and compilations respectively) in documentary media.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Selmin Kara received her BA and MA in Istanbul, Turkey, where she worked as an assistant producer in an independent documentary film production agency for four years. Among her critical interests are technics (modes of assembly), temporality, and sound, especially in episodic documentary film and media. She has presented papers and chaired panels in several international conferences, including the Society for Cinema and Media Studies Annual Conference in Chicago and New Orleans, Screen Conference in Glasgow, and Visible Evidence Conference in Los Angeles and Istanbul. Her work has appeared in *Studies in Documentary Film* and *Poiesis*. Alongside her academic activities, Selmin has been invited to present films at the Detroit Film Theatre, which is affiliated with the Detroit Institute of Arts, as a guest speaker for two consecutive years; taught a two-week seminar on "Globalism and the urban experience" at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, through WSU's global teaching fellowship program; and completed a summer internship at the Disarmament and Peace Affairs Branch at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in 2007.